

Ulla Pape | Heino Stöver | Ingo Ilja Michels [Eds.]

Social Work and Health in Prisons

Studies from Central Asia and China



Nomos

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Drug Use in History and Society

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Prof. Dr. Heino Stöver
Dr. Ingo Ilja Michels

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Foreword

Worldwide, over 11 million people are held in prisons and other closed settings on any given day. Due to substandard prison conditions and healthcare in many parts of the world, the health of incarcerated people is often worse upon release than upon entry.

Being deprived of liberty does not mean being deprived of fundamental human rights including freedom from torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, and the right to health and healthcare of the same standard as available in the community.

An ongoing challenge in treating all people in prison with respect for their inherent dignity and value as human beings, as enshrined in the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), is prison overcrowding.

High occupancy levels within prison facilities are conducive to misconduct, infractions and violence, and contribute to higher transmission rates of infection including HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis – and recently, COVID-19 – than in the community. Overcrowding also means that the often already limited human, financial and medical resources are too thinly spread to be able to ensure prisoners' physical and mental health and integrity, let alone support rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Establishing a sustainable health strategy in prison starts with political commitment to implement criminal justice and penal reform such as non-custodial measures and reducing prison overcrowding. It includes integrating prison health into public health to expand the pool of healthcare resources and expertise and improve prison health standards.

Such a strategy also involves upscaling data collection and analysis of infection rates, gender-specific needs, mental health and drug use disorders, education levels, vocational skills, and the availability and accessibility of responsive services. And last but not least, it requires the meaningful engagement of civil society organizations as essential partners in addressing the health and rehabilitation prospects of people in prison.

This work details how regions in Central Asia have been addressing challenges and making progress in implementing global prison standards, with instructive country examples.

Foreword

We hope that this publication will help relevant authorities to improve living conditions and access to treatment and care for people in prison, in line with international standards to promote and protect the health and rights of this vulnerable population.

Ehab Salah, MD

Advisor for Prisons and HIV

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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