

State, Public Policies and Health in the Penitentiary System

The Brazilian Penitentiary System has, for years, been the target of criticism by virtue of the undignified material, sanitary and mental conditions to which people deprived of freedom are subjected. This thematic issue presents 25 articles as part of the scientific efforts to define a complex social phenomenon of the present day, so often suppressed and ignored.

In Brazil, the incarceration rate in the last 15 years has increased by 7% per year, which is ten times faster than population growth, thereby placing Brazil on the world stage among the countries with the highest incarceration rates. The overall interdisciplinary picture of academic output reveals the precarious conditions of life in prison, security risks and problems, unsanitary facilities, overcrowding and insufficient physical and organizational infrastructure, all of which generate numerous problems for the entire prison community.

The dialogue surrounding these conditions with the National Policy of Comprehensive Health Care for Prisoners, and other public policies aimed at the social inclusion of this population, is a task that needs to gain critical momentum and be fully implemented. For this reason, this issue set out to conduct an in-depth study of ways of tackling health and psychosocial inequalities and vulnerabilities in prisons. It examines aspects related to the living conditions of the prison community, the provision of services and care, the work process in the penitentiary system and actions oriented to the post-prison phase and the creation of alternatives for a dignified life.

Initially, this issue presents an article that assesses the social aspects of incarceration in Rio de Janeiro in the light of core issues in the public policy process. In a similar vein, the second article presents a contribution from the social sciences in deep dialogue with the Brazilian government dimension. Focusing on the pandemic context, a systematic review assessed the national and international scenario and broadened the critical appraisal of the policies of governance of the health conditions of the prison community.

Corroborating the emergence of the gender agenda and issues related to intersectionality in contemporary research agendas, as well as the increase of the female population incarcerated since 2006, seven articles in this issue deal with this population profile.

With respect to the practices of care, attention and promotion of health and specific studies on health teams in the prison system, actions and services offered to people about the reality of care behind and beyond prison bars are portrayed in more than seven articles.

Traditionally, in the scientific field, studies of an epidemiological nature on infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, occupy a prominent place, as can be seen in the "Health in prisons: assessments, policies and practices" edition of 2016 and in the systematic review on penitentiary health by Góis et al.², while there are only three articles in this thematic issue.

Lastly, in the sphere of mental health, two articles point to the difficulties faced by the State in ensuring fundamental rights enshrined in legal instruments. In addition to this, one article deals with chronic illness and two others with the difficulty of access to medication.

It is highlighted that the problems related to imprisonment do not end in the institution and the consequences of prison overlap into subsequent life on the outside. We trust that this thematic issue raises relevant reflections to tackle the complex problem of incarceration in Brazil and supports us in the search for knowledge capable of consolidating social alternatives, such that our Public Policies may prove more effective and equitable.

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