



Healthcare Disparities Among Incarcerated Populations: A Quality Improvement Project

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“More than 800,000 inmates report having 1 or more chronic medical conditions...” (Wilper et al. 2009).

Background

- A population that has been consistently subject to unequal treatment when receiving medical attention is the population of prisoners or jail inmates. It is essential to explore the discrepancies prisoners face and the effects it has on their health.
- The objective of this research was to bring to light the disparities incarcerated patients experience, and how to eliminate these. In order to develop a better understanding of the prejudiced actions incarcerated patients face in the healthcare spectrum, numerous studies have been analyzed.
- Topics included:
 - General health of incarcerated patients
 - Barriers/challenges related to prison healthcare
 - Inequities in treatments as a hospitalized patient
 - Financial impacts
 - Nutritious impact
 - Most common diseases seen and diagnosed
 - Poor health outcomes related to incarceration

Protocol for Improved Outcomes

- **A mandatory education seminar the employees must attend:**
 - An education seminar aimed to provide information regarding care for incarcerated patients would potentially improve the care provided and patient outcomes. In addition, not researching the prisoners' convictions and charges would be strongly encouraged. This will help prevent biased care.
- **A sign posted on the doors of patients' rooms:**
 - A sign stating that, “All patients are to be treated the same regardless of socio-economic status,” would act as a reminder to all employees that every patient should be treated equally. This will help ensure that incarcerated patients would not be treated differently simply because they are inmates.
- **A clinical experience for nursing students within correctional facilities:**
 - Clinical experience within correctional facilities would allow nursing students to become more comfortable in the correctional environment. Not only would the students become more comfortable in that specific setting, but they would also become more comfortable working with incarcerated patients.

Definition

Incarceration: the state of being confined in prison; imprisonment (Oxford Languages, 2023).

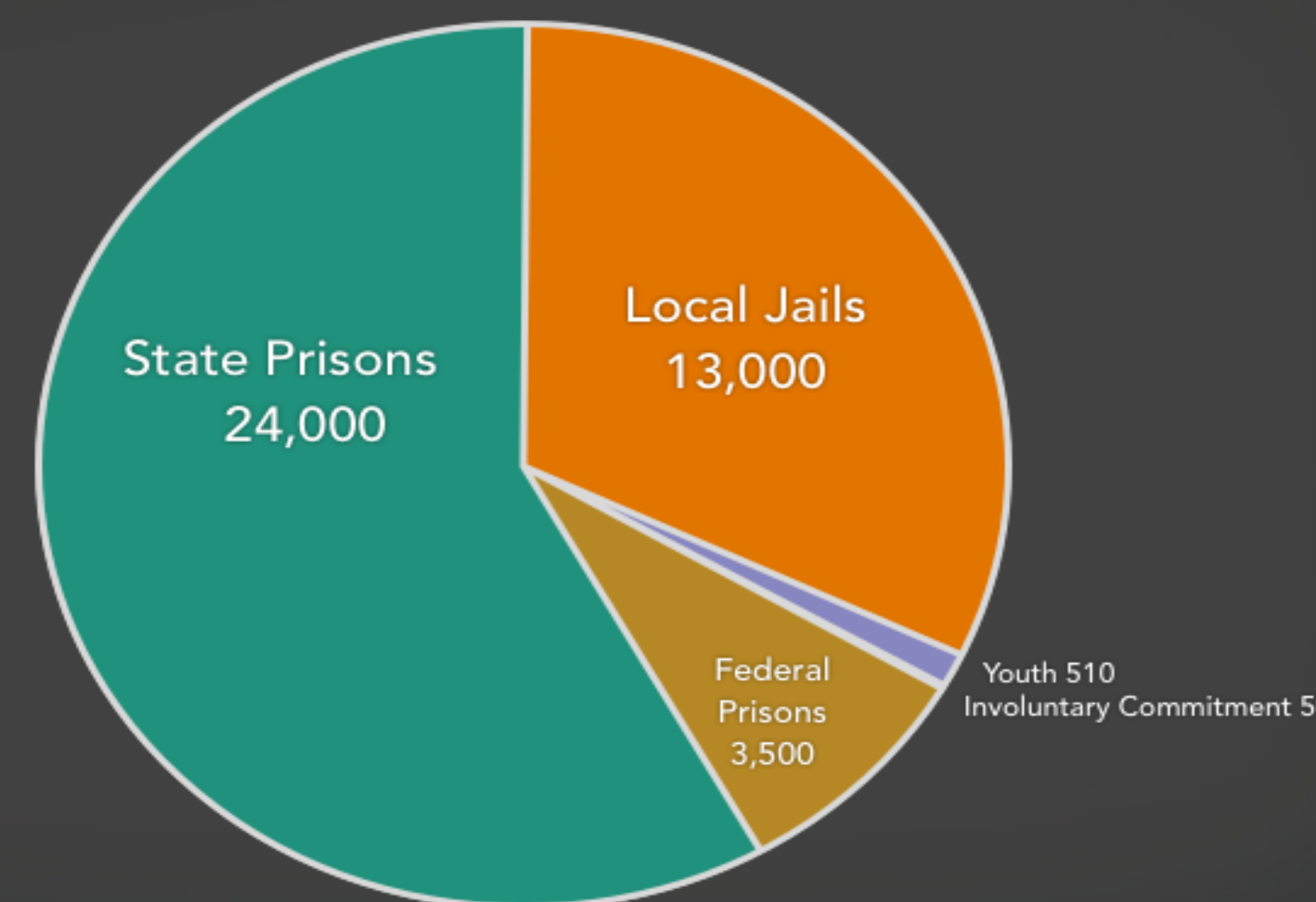
Health Disparity: preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or in opportunities to achieve optimal health experience by socially disadvantaged racial, ethnic, and other population groups, and communities (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017).



Jan. 12, 2012 file photo, an inmate is examined at the medical unit of the Deuel Vocational Institution near Tracy, Calif. (Rich Pedroncelli/AP Photo, file)

How many Kentucky residents are locked up and where?

41,000 of Kentucky's residents are locked up in various kinds of facilities



PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE Sources and data notes: See <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/correctionalcontrol2018.html>

Clinical Implications

With the implementation of these three tools, nurses will have an increased awareness of incarcerated populations experience in the health care system. Health care staff will have access to new resources that will encourage them to treat all patients with the same respect and avoid biased care.

After implementing this tool, the results observed included a decrease in delayed care and improvement in stigma associated with incarcerated patients.

Review of Literature

In the review of literature, there were four major recurring themes. These four themes were the following: 1) Delayed Care for the Incarcerated Population, 2) Lack of Resources for the Incarcerated, 3) Poor Mental Health Among the Incarcerated Population, and 4) Negative Stigma Associated with the Incarcerated Population.

Delayed Care for the Incarcerated:

In the pieces of reviewed literature, incarcerated patients receiving delayed care was a commonly discussed issue. It was found that many patients were denied medical attention when needed. A piece of literature that was reviewed discussed instances where care was delayed for weeks, several months, and even hours in life-threatening situations (Lamberton, 2020).

Lack of Resources for the Incarcerated:

Throughout the literature review, lack of resources for prisoner healthcare was noted several times. For example, there is a lack of finances in correctional facilities to properly treat conditions within the facilities (Vandergrift & Christopher, 2021). Additionally, transportation was restricted due to a limited number of staff to escort prisoners to their medical appointments (Edge, et al., 2020). Therefore, incarcerated populations are not receiving the adequate medical services needed.

Poor Mental Health Among the Incarcerated:

A study in the literature review examined the prevalence of mental health disorders among jail and prison inmates in the United States. The authors used data from the National Survey of American Life and found that over one-third of jail inmates and nearly one-quarter of prison inmates reported experiencing a mental health disorder in the past year. The study also found that certain demographic and social factors, such as age, gender, and educational attainment, were associated with a higher risk of mental health disorders among inmates. The authors concluded that addressing mental health issues among inmates is essential for improving their overall health. (Yi, Y., Turney, K., & Wildeman, C., 2017)

Negative Stigma Associated with Incarcerated:

The review of literature brought to light a strong stigma associated with incarcerated patients. Incarcerated patients are feared in the hospital setting due to the negative stigma associated with them (Edge, et al., 2020). A current inmate explained that the stigma associated with prisoners prevents the inmates from being viewed as human and prevents them from being listened to (Norris, et al., 2022).

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