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Epidemiology and models of care for mentally disordered prisoners in Europe – the EUPRIS study

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More than 9.25 million people are held in penal institutions throughout the world at the moment, with rapidly increasing numbers. Strengthening the competence of mental health care services for prison inmates is an issue of major concern. However, this field is widely neglected by health services research internationally. Research activities are scarce even for the most basic indicators (psychiatric prevalence, care offers, services, number of professionals). Evidence is much too poor to identify care approaches which may serve as models of good practice. This EU funded study aimed at assessing available administrative data on prison mental health care and psychiatric prevalence of prisoners from 25 European countries. Results show that mostly non-standardized data that is available allows for describing responsibilities, assessment procedures or general concepts of prison mental health care. However, identifying actual bed capacities, the size of treatment programs or the number of professionals available for mentally disordered prisoners is prevented by a most common but seldom quantified involvement of general psychiatry into prison mental health care. For the same reason, prevalence rates of mental disorders in prison are available only from a small minority of countries. As a conclusion, efforts should be directed to define standardized indicators for prison mental health and prison mental health care that should be agreed upon by all European countries and implemented into national health or juridical reporting systems.