

REVIEW

## Humanized care in patients deprived of liberty, ethical dilemmas, impact and intervention strategies

### Cuidado humanizado en pacientes privados de la libertad, dilemas éticos, impacto y estrategias de intervención

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#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** prison health care faces several challenges, such as insufficient resources, inadequate infrastructure and social stigmatization, which negatively affect the treatment of persons deprived of liberty, these factors limit prisoners' access to basic services and impair their physical and mental health in this context, humane and ethical care is essential, which requires inclusive policies and adequate professional training.

**Method:** a qualitative and descriptive study was conducted based on a literature review of the last five years, and 30 articles in English, Spanish and Portuguese were selected from 65 initial studies repositories such as SCOPUS, SCIELO and PUBMED were used, and keywords and Boolean operators were employed the data were analyzed using inductive methods to identify relevant trends.

**Results:** ethical dilemmas regarding dignity and medical care in prisons were identified these problems are aggravated by factors such as overcrowding, discrimination and poor training of health professionals. The implementation of promotion, prevention and empathy training programs has shown improvements in the wellbeing of inmates, emphasizing the importance of the interdisciplinary approach and the strengthening of family relationships.

**Conclusions:** humane care is essential to meet the needs of all inmates and ensure that they are treated with dignity. Creating a more just and humane prison system requires inclusive public policies, ongoing staff training and educational programs that promote social reintegration.

**Keywords:** Dilemmas; Strategies; Humanization of Services; Inmates.

#### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** la atención en salud en las penitenciarías representa un desafío importante dentro del sistema de salud pública, el cual es crucial para garantizar que las personas privadas de libertad reciban un cuidado constante y de calidad, por lo que se buscó determinar el cuidado humanizado que se brinda a los pacientes privados de libertad en los servicios de atención sanitaria

**Método:** fue un estudio con enfoque cualitativo, diseño descriptivo y de tipo de revisión de la literatura; mediante la búsqueda realizada con palabras y operadores booleanos en bases de datos indexados SCOPUS, SCIELO y PUBMED; se obtuvo una muestra de 30 artículos en inglés, español y portugués; que fueron analizados a través de la lectura crítica y el método inductivo.

**Resultados:** se identificaron dilemas éticos respecto a la dignidad y la atención médica en las cárceles, estos problemas se ven agravados por factores como el hacinamiento, la discriminación y carencia en la formación de los profesionales sanitarios sobre la atención a este grupo poblacional. Esto hizo necesario la

implementación de programas de promoción, prevención y capacitación que han mostrado mejoras en el bienestar de los reclusos, enfatizando la importancia del enfoque interdisciplinario y el fortalecimiento de las relaciones familiares.

**Conclusiones:** la atención humana es esencial para satisfacer las necesidades de todos los reclusos, así como el fomento del respeto y trato digno. Crear un sistema penitenciario más justo y humano requiere políticas públicas inclusivas, capacitación continua del personal y programas educativos que promuevan la reintegración social.

**Palabras clave:** Dilemas; Estrategias; Humanización De Los Servicios; Reclusos.

## INTRODUCTION

Health care in prisons represents a significant challenge within the public health system, which is crucial to ensuring that prisoners receive consistent, quality care despite the difficulties that may arise, such as building trusting relationships between healthcare personnel and patients in this environment.<sup>(1)</sup>

In this context,<sup>(2)</sup> medical care in prisons is often reduced due to a lack of infrastructure, inadequate hygiene, and a lack of knowledge among most people in detention centers due to poor living conditions.

These deficiencies, therefore, limit access to essential services and affect the implementation of public health policies, compromising the health of inmates and consequently affecting their physical and emotional well-being.<sup>(3)</sup> In addition, it is necessary for professionals, entities, or health systems under a universal human rights framework to guarantee access to care services for this population group, which, due to its characteristics, in some places, lives in overcrowded conditions that lead to an increased risk of infectious diseases.<sup>(2)</sup>

On the other hand,<sup>(4)</sup> in the specific nursing field, humanized and ethical care is essential, especially in patients deprived of liberty. Consequently, nurses and ethics committees face the challenge of balancing decisions that respect patient autonomy with requests for medical interventions that may denigrate the person due to stigma and prejudice based on their criminal record.

Likewise,<sup>(5)</sup> it is crucial to develop sensitive care methods for prisoners in situations that affect their mental health and well-being; therefore, nursing care in these contexts must consider each person's specificities, fostering a perspective that honors their independence and dignity.

On the other hand, nursing care in this hospital setting is mainly focused on technical procedures and faces difficulties in meeting the standards established by public entities. This presents a barrier to training professionals, which hinders a positive response to the needs of people in detention centers.<sup>(6)</sup>

That is why self-care, social support, and the environment play a key role, as they encompass access to medication, support from medical staff, healthy lifestyles, and support from family members and fellow prisoners. Health professionals can use these resources to improve disease management and promote health among prisoners.<sup>(7)</sup>

Finally, funding and resources are essential to address the mental health needs of prisoners, who often face inadequate treatment conditions and stigmatization. The lack of investment in rehabilitation programs within the prison system limits opportunities for recovery and social reintegration, perpetuating a cycle of violence and exclusion.<sup>(8)</sup> the objective was to analyze the literature addressing humanized care for prisoners in health care services.

## METHOD

The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology, which allowed for a detailed analysis based on the compilation of various scientific articles related to the research topic, providing a broader view of the phenomenon. Similarly, it was descriptive in design, given that the data collected were not manipulated.<sup>(9)</sup> Descriptive research provides researchers with a method for naturally presenting phenomena as they occur naturally, facilitating the definition of predominant situations, attitudes, and customs and detailing the characteristics of activities, objects, and processes in a particular population group.

Similarly, it is a literature review of the field of analysis.<sup>(10)</sup> A literature review is a type of article that provides an analysis of the existing literature on a specific topic. Still, inclusion and exclusion criteria are required for the selection of research.

On the other hand, the study population included 65 research studies, from which a sample of 30 articles was obtained through convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were met by selecting original articles related to the study topic published in the last five years and in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Review articles, theses, gray literature, incomplete articles, and articles published after 2020 were excluded.

The literature search was conducted in databases such as SCOPUS, SCIELO, LILASC, SCIENS DIRECT, DIALNET, REDIB, LATINDEX, GOOGLE ACADEMIC, SEER/IBICT, BDENF, DOAJ, and PUBMED. Keywords such as "humanized care," "prived of liberty," "nurse-patient bond," "ethical dilemmas," "impact," and "intervention strategies"

were used, as well as Boolean operators: AND, OR, “humanized care AND deprived of liberty,” “dilemmas AND ethical,” “impact AND strategies AND interventions.”

Finally, the information from the articles was stored in an Excel matrix to organize the valid documents with data such as author(s), year, publication title, Spanish translation, objective, results, relevant data, link, reference, and study database.

In this sense, the inductive method was used to analyze the data, which, through a reflective reading of the information, generated new points of view on the research topic.<sup>(11)</sup> This inductive method is a type of reasoning that consists of obtaining generalizable knowledge from specific knowledge.

## RESULTS

### *Ethical conflicts presented in medical care for persons deprived of liberty*

Persons deprived of liberty often display below-average social skills and coping strategies, with significant difficulties expressing emotions such as anger and defending their rights.<sup>(12)</sup> These limitations are related to deprivation of liberty and restriction of expression, which fosters power dynamics and informal norms in the prison environment. Furthermore,<sup>(13)</sup> recognizes that there is a considerable impact on their mental health, with high levels of anxiety and depression, the latter being more prevalent. Although the effect size is small, these conditions are aggravated by high consumption of psychoactive substances, which deteriorates the quality of life of inmates, affecting their sleep patterns and increasing the incidence of suicide.

On the other hand, the importance of health care in prisons for persons deprived of their liberty as a right to adequate medical care regardless of their legal status; however, the experience of professionals working in prisons is minimal in terms of improving education, access to care, and the importance of understanding the context in which nursing practice takes place in prisons.<sup>(14)</sup>

Along the same lines, healthcare for prisoners represents a serious public health problem due to challenges such as gaps in health policies, lack of coordination between health services and the justice system, and insufficient training of the professionals in charge, added to the fact that most prisoners are young people with low levels of education and income. Many of them are repeat offenders, which exacerbates the difficulties in ensuring comprehensive and effective care for this vulnerable population.<sup>(15)</sup>

In this regard,<sup>(16)</sup> adolescents, due to biological, psychological, cultural, and even economic factors, may commit crimes that expose them to imprisonment, where they face various challenges that affect their development and well-being, aggravated by limited access to health services and the lack of comprehensive care policies that prioritize relationships with the family, school, and community.

In another context, prisoners have a poor quality of life due to the lack of policies on access to different healthcare services because of social prejudices and stigmas about those who enter these centers, forgetting that different cases involve the application of legal norms, as well as inadequate infrastructure in prisons to ensure the safety of health care personnel when providing care.<sup>(17)</sup>

That is why<sup>(18)</sup> governments have a responsibility to guarantee the right to health, regardless of a person's legal status, and to establish prevention policies that take into account the overcrowding of these detention centers, which increases the risk of contagious diseases such as hepatitis, tuberculosis, and human immunodeficiency virus. Similarly, this is due to the lack of training of health professionals to provide care to prisoners in a safe and quality care setting.

In this regard,<sup>(19)</sup> there is a need to treat prisoners with dignity and humanity in prisons, considering their psychological and physical vulnerability. However, penal and health reforms do not guarantee prisoners these rights due to discrimination against their rights, as well as abuses that can cause some to distrust the health care system, obstructing interpersonal relationships with health professionals, which affects therapeutic decision-making and the recovery process. In addition, there is a lack of resources to guarantee quality care due to social stigma and the neglect of prisoners by care groups.<sup>(20)</sup>

Therefore, the specific needs they face and how the prison environment influences these affect the humanized care provided in this environment. Furthermore, there is a clear and urgent need to implement public policies that investigate these inequalities and guarantee access to adequate health services for all types of prisoners, whether male or female, considering that these situations create exclusion and vulnerability, particularly for women in prison.<sup>(21)</sup>

For this reason, the ethical dilemmas in the care of persons deprived of liberty focus on the tension between protecting their dignity and addressing the structural weaknesses of the prison system, such as discrimination, lack of access to adequate health care, and gender inequality. However, this contradicts the principles of justice and equality that should be promoted in inclusive policies, such as guaranteeing humane treatment within a framework of respect and equity, as well as training professionals to ethically meet the needs of this vulnerable and forgotten group in society.

*Impact of humanized care on health care and promotion for prisoners*

Humanized care in the health care and promotion of prisoners is essential to address their physical and emotional needs in a highly vulnerable environment. An approach based on dignity and respect improves access to quality medical services. It strengthens trust between patients and health professionals, enabling effective management of chronic diseases and ensuring emotional well-being, which are fundamental factors for this population's physical and psychological balance.<sup>(22)</sup>

Therefore, health care within prison systems can become a key tool for ensuring a dignified life for persons deprived of liberty,<sup>(23)</sup> the importance of implementing public policies that improve access to medical services and promote healthy habits, such as physical exercise, to prevent respiratory, gastrointestinal, and mental illnesses. These measures not only benefit their physical health but also contribute to creating safer and more respectful environments.

Similarly,<sup>(24)</sup> educational and occupational programs can be an effective solution to combat hopelessness and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in women deprived of liberty. These initiatives will promote their emotional well-being and strengthen their self-esteem, thus facilitating their rehabilitation and social integration with an approach based on respect and empathy.

On the other hand, to address psychoactive substance use, they propose personalized interventions that include psychological support, strengthening family ties, and education programs. These actions would allow inmates to develop skills to overcome their addictions, build a more stable life, and support their social reintegration process humanely and respectfully.<sup>(25)</sup>

In turn, strengthening family ties can be an essential strategy for improving the emotional health of inmates.<sup>(26)</sup> Family contact through visits and phone calls not only reduces the use of substances such as cannabis and cocaine but also contributes to the overall well-being of inmates. This, in turn, involves implementing comprehensive programs that remove existing barriers and ensure quality care, with a special emphasis on mental health.

On the other hand,<sup>(27)</sup> humane care guarantees equitable access to medical services within prisons, primarily to address problems such as depression, anxiety, and high blood pressure. These measures would not only allow for the treatment of diseases but also prevent them, improving the quality of life and respecting the fundamental rights of this vulnerable population.

Likewise, promoting work and educational activities in prisons can be key to reducing homelessness and improving the mental health of women deprived of liberty, especially those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged; this strengthens emotional well-being and facilitates the social reintegration of this vulnerable population.<sup>(28)</sup>

On the other hand,<sup>(29)</sup> in Brazilian prisons, the positive influence of family support, regular visits, and access to meaningful occupational activities has been highlighted. These initiatives can mitigate the effects of isolation and poverty, promoting an environment that fosters the recovery of dignity and facilitates resocialization. These programs offer a real opportunity to transform lives and build a path toward a more inclusive society.

Similarly,<sup>(30)</sup> using humanized care indicators in hospital care evaluates the empathy and respect shown by nursing staff and institutional strengthening to ensure an environment of dignity and safety for patients. Along the same lines, including the voice of prisoners in the design of public policies is essential to improve prison conditions and promote social reintegration. Participatory processes that respect human rights not only generate more effective interventions tailored to the needs of this population but also strengthen their dignity and contribute to a more just and humane prison system management.<sup>(31)</sup>

Therefore, humane care for persons deprived of liberty is key to improving their physical, emotional, and mental health, guaranteeing dignified and respectful treatment, strengthening trust between health professionals and inmates, facilitating effective disease management, and promoting a safer environment. In addition, the implementation of educational and occupational programs reduces hopelessness. It encourages social reintegration, addressing their immediate needs and overall well-being, respecting human rights, and contributing to transforming the prison system into a more just and humane one.

*Health intervention strategies are implemented to ensure humane care for prisoners*

In the prison setting, ensuring the humane treatment of persons deprived of liberty is a significant challenge due to the specific conditions of this environment. To address these difficulties, it is necessary to employ various health intervention strategies to promote inmates' dignity and overall well-being. These actions range from training health personnel to creating disease prevention and promotion programs with a human rights-based approach.<sup>(32)</sup>

In this regard,<sup>(33)</sup> the health intervention strategies implemented to ensure humane care for prisoners are diverse and focus on improving the quality of medical care in prison settings. On the other hand,<sup>(34)</sup> mentions the importance of training health personnel to enable professionals to understand the specific needs of this population and, therefore, offer more empathetic and respectful treatment.



Therefore,<sup>(32)</sup> ongoing training for healthcare personnel is fundamental to humane care. Specialized workshops and courses allow professionals to develop skills in effective communication, empathy, and respect for inmates. This training improves the quality of care and strengthens the bond between staff and patients, facilitating an environment of trust.

It should be noted that<sup>(35)</sup> implementing care protocols adapted to the prison environment is essential to ensure comprehensive care. These protocols prioritize mental health, a critical area given the high level of stress and adverse psychological conditions faced by many people deprived of their liberty.<sup>(36)</sup> highlight the development of educational programs and prevention campaigns that address self-care, healthy habits, and the prevention of communicable diseases, including HIV and hepatitis C.

Similarly, strengthening family ties emerges as an essential strategy for improving the emotional health of inmates. Regular family contact not only reduces substance use but also contributes significantly to the overall well-being of inmates. At the same time, humane care ensures equitable access to medical services to address mental and physical health problems.<sup>(37)</sup>

Likewise,<sup>(38)</sup> implementing public policies that improve access to medical services and promote healthy habits is crucial. Educational and occupational programs have proven effective in combating hopelessness and reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, especially among women in prison. In addition, personalized interventions employed by a multidisciplinary team that includes psychological support and strengthening family ties are essential for addressing psychoactive substance use.

On the other hand,<sup>(39)</sup> care protocols tailored to the specific needs of the prison population have been implemented. These protocols are linked to mental health through psychological assistance and intervention programs to manage stress and trauma, which are common problems in this context.<sup>(40)</sup> These protocols highlight the development of good practice guidelines that guide health professionals in their interaction with inmates, ensuring dignified and equitable treatment.

In addition,<sup>(41)</sup> an interdisciplinary approach is encouraged, involving collaboration between doctors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers. This optimizes care and promotes communication between the medical team and security personnel.

That is why ensuring the humane treatment of individuals in prison requires holistic strategies prioritizing dignity, well-being, and human rights. For this reason, it is essential to train healthcare personnel in empathy and communication, in addition to protocols that value mental health and prevention programs, to meet the particular demands of this group of people. In addition, strengthening family ties and interdisciplinary cooperation improves care and promotes social reintegration so that these measures not only raise the standard of living of prisoners but also strengthen a more just and humane health system in the prison context.

## CONCLUSIONS

Humanized care in the prison context is essential to guarantee the comprehensive well-being of persons deprived of liberty, addressing their physical and emotional needs through an approach that promotes dignity and respect. Therefore, implementing public policies and training health personnel are fundamental to improving the quality of care and facilitating the social reintegration of this vulnerable population. It should be noted that this requires strengthening family ties and creating care protocols adapted to the prison environment, which are key measures for humanizing care. These actions enhance human rights and build a society prioritizing the dignity and well-being of all its members, including those in the most vulnerable situations.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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