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Forget me not: Elder abuse and dementia in prison

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Purpose: Older adults in prison present a significant health and human rights challenge for the criminal justice system. To date, there is no known study that provides a comprehensive examination or portrait of older persons in prison. The current study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by providing a holistic analysis of a U.S. statewide prison system of adults aged 50 and older in prison. The objectives of this study are to: (1) examine the biopsychosocial, spiritual, and legal factors associated with these prisoners, (2) explore the influence of these personal and social structural factors on recidivism, and (3) examine the role of family and sentence length in bridging older adults to their families and communities while in prison and post prison release.

Methods: This study provides a cross-sectional, descriptive analysis of biopsychosocial, spiritual, and prison use characteristics associated with a sample of 677 older prisoners, aged 50+, in a state-wide prison system in the United States. The current study is a cross-sectional analysis of a sample of 677 older adult prisoners aged 50 and older (40% response rate) housed in the New Jersey Department of Corrections in September 2010 who completed an anonymous, self-administered mail survey. Data were collected using a modified version of the Dillman, et al. (2009) four-step mail methods strategy. Participants completed a battery of survey instruments, including the personal and professional contact scale.

Biography

Tina Maschi, PhD, LCSW, ACSW is an associate professor of Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service and recipient of the 2010 Geriatric Social Work Faculty Scholars Award funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation and the Gerontological Society of America. She has over 25 years of experience work with diverse age groups of survivors of trauma in correctional and community health and social care. She is the President of the National Organization of Forensic Social Work and the Executive Director of the Be the Evidence Project which brings light to pressing human rights and social justice issue of our times, such as Aging, Trauma, and Elder and Intergenerational Family Justice. She has over 75 publications and local, national and international presentations and workshops in the areas of life course and mental health cumulative trauma, with a specialized focus on abuse and neglect of marginalized older adults in prison in the context of their families and communities.

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