

HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION: PRISONERS



The low social status of prisoners means that they are marginalised and excluded from the mainstream of society. They experience stigma and discrimination behind bars and are often regarded as "unworthy" in the general community.

Prisoners face discrimination because of their status as "prisoners" (i.e. criminal record and incarceration), because of what being in prison is associated with (drug use, same-sex activities and violence), and what it might lead to (HIV infection). The race or sexuality of a prisoner also amplifies HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

The main factors which increase the risk of HIV transmission in prison, are:

- Overcrowding.
- Sexual violence.
- Sexual activities without condoms.
- Drug injecting with infected needles.
- Tattooing with infected needles.

PRISON, HIV INFECTION AND DISCRIMINATION

In prison, HIV discrimination takes place when the HIV status of a prisoner is known. The lack of confidentiality, which is common in prisons, makes it difficult for an inmate to keep their HIV status secret, and will often lead to a campaign of discrimination against the prisoner who is HIV positive. Discrimination is also likely to occur because of the sexual orientation, nor ethnicity of a prisoner.

Prisoners with HIV can experience discrimination from fellow inmates and prison staff, or because of discriminatory rules applied to prisoners with HIV (e.g. segregation, mandatory HIV testing of inmates with HIV or those suspected of being HIV positive). One of the main types of discrimination in prison relates to access to health care and treatment, with HIV positive prisoners being denied HIV treatment and adequate medical care.

HIV discrimination in prisons has dramatic consequences on the physical and psychological health of prisoners, and can hamper effective HIV prevention methods:

- Prisoners who do not know their HIV status but who think they may be infected with HIV, might not come forward for HIV testing for fear of discrimination.
- Prisoners with HIV who are denied HIV treatment, or who are not treated properly, experience deterioration in their physical health, or, in the worst cases, death. In Canada for example, a prisoner died of an AIDS-related disease because he was not given appropriate medical care.
- Segregation policies or isolation have detrimental effects on the physical and psychological health of prisoners with HIV.
- The lack of adequate access to condoms and clean needles increases the risks of HIV transmission. In 1999, a British judge found that "actively homosexual" prisoners should be prescribed condoms to reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

ORGANISATIONS:

Prison Reform Trust

Tel: 020 7251 5070

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

The Howard League for Penal Reform

The Howard League works for humane and rational reform of the penal system.

Tel: 020 7249 7373

www.howardleague.org/

Penal Reform International

Tel.: 44 (0) 20 7924 95 75

www.penalreform.org

The National AIDS & Prisons Forum

www.napf.org.uk/home.html

ARE YOU HIV PREJUDICED?

For more information visit the campaign website at www.areyouhivprejudiced.org

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