

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO ACCESSING HARM REDUCTION SERVICES IN PRISONS: A GLOBAL SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF

Authors:

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Background:

Drug use within prison is prevalent in incarcerated settings globally. Although a comprehensive harm reduction package for individuals experiencing incarceration (IEIs) is recommended by international agencies, its implementation is limited globally. The aim of this systematic review was to explore barriers and facilitators to accessing harm reduction services (HRS) in prisons.

Methods:

We searched MEDLINE, PsycINFO, SCOPUS, and CINAHL for English and French language articles published before August 7, 2023. Studies evaluating any HRS (e.g., opioid agonist therapy, prison needle and syringe programs, etc.) were included. Two independent reviewers evaluated articles selected for full text review. Disagreements were resolved by consensus. We performed a qualitative content analysis using the social-ecological model, utilizing constant comparative methods to generate themes and subthemes.

Results:

A total of 7,131 unique articles were identified, 343 were eligible for full text review, and 80 were included; 62 (78%) were conducted in high-income countries. Included studies were qualitative (32; 40%), cross-sectional (24; 30%), and mixed methods (12; 15%). Individual-level barriers included negative past experiences, inaccurate risk perception, and male gender. Community-level barriers included social dynamics experienced by IEIs, including interactions with peers and family, and negative staff perceptions of HRS. Societal-level barriers included limited resource allocation, rigid administrative policies, and restricted space. Stigma was a barrier at all levels. Facilitators included education about risk prevention, positive previous experiences with HRS, and support from prison leadership.

Conclusion:

We identified multiple barriers to improving access to HRS in prison. To address barriers according to the socio-ecological model, it will be essential to implement holistic education for IEIs, to enhance awareness through peer-led initiatives and to ensure buy-in and support from prison leadership. This could ultimately promote the well-being of IEIs, reduce overdoses, and contribute to the elimination of blood-borne and sexually transmitted diseases in prisons globally.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Nil