

Social Determinants: Incarceration

The United States has the highest incarceration rate than any other country and most of the inmates are people of color. These high rates are due to social determinants that affect those who live in poverty and health inequalities among minorities. These social determinants take a toll are an issue with public health and with the well-being of inmates. Advance practice nurses must use their influence to make change and improve the outcomes of those affected by these social determinants.

Social determinants consist of a broad range of health risks that occur from an environment where people live, work, and play. A person's community and social connection is an environment that can cause health risks and negative outcomes for someone (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021). Higher rates of incarceration are often seen among racial/ethnic minorities and people with lower levels of education. For example, black and Hispanic people are disproportionality arrested and convicted of offenses. One study found that, among men ages 18—64, 1 in 87 white men were incarcerated, versus 1 in 36 Hispanic men and 1 in 12 black men (HealthyPeople.gov, n.d.).

A higher percentage of incarceration occurs in communities with larger proportions of low-income populations and higher proportions of Black residents. Only eight percent of the lowest-income communities have access to behavioral specialists, physicians, and psychiatrists, compared to 25.3 percent of higher income communities. Health inequities are caused by the uneven distribution of social determinants of health (SDOH). Social determinants include education, housing, and the neighborhood environment (e.g., sidewalks, parks), access to transportation, employment opportunities, the law and the justice systems, and health care and public health systems (The Community Guide, 2020).

Populations that represent a specific demographic feature (e.g., a particular racial or ethnic group) do not have equal access to quality education, housing, and other resources which can lead to greater sickness, and increased injuries, deaths, crime, and imprisonment. People who are incarcerated are more likely than the general population to experience a chronic condition or acquire an infectious disease. In the past year, people who were incarcerated were about five times more likely than the general population to test positive for COVID-19 (Peterson & Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2021).

Compared with the general population, prison inmates have a higher burden of mental and neurological disorders, have high levels of stress, anxiety, sleep deprivation, and depression. Rates of many chronic diseases in US jails and prisons are more than double of those in the general population. Diabetes (5.0% vs 2.4%), chronic respiratory conditions (e.g., chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, 34.1% vs 19.2%), and liver disease (10% vs 0.6%). Similarly, the rates of communicable diseases, such as hepatitis C, HIV, and tuberculosis, are higher in incarcerated populations (e.g., 3.5% vs 0.4% for HIV among 25-34-year old's) ethnic minorities are considered particularly at-risk for poor health outcomes in the jail system. (Trotter II et al., 2018).

Nurses with advanced degrees can contribute to reduce health equities by being allies, to advocate, and to speak up against racism, discrimination, and injustice. Advanced practice nurses can learn to identify the health inequalities that exist and set individuals up to fail, potentially lead them to crime and violence, and incarceration. Advanced practice nurses can help educate judges, caseworks, correctional officers, and administrators on the importance of providing quality healthcare to inmates; moreover, these nurses can facilitate health equity within prisons

by teach all staff about cultural competency (American Association of Nurse Practitioners [AANP], 2020).

Advance practice nurses can reduce social determinants by influencing policy changes within local communities. These nurses can recommend guidelines for community-wide schools, living conditions, and educational programs that affect health for low-socioeconomic children. Advanced practice nurses can make changes by being involved in advisory boards for the city and county and play a key role in advocating for the public and keeping the community safe; therefore, decreasing risk of violence and incarceration among the minority population (AANP, 2020).

Reference

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