



Physical Anthropology Section - 2013

I1 Incarcerated Foreign Minors in Italy: How to Treat Them?

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the challenges associated with tending to the needs of foreign minors by staff in Italian prisons. This presentation also looks at various alternatives to detention with the aim of reducing recidivism.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting the challenges that various juvenile detention centers throughout Italy face when confronting the treatment of foreign juvenile delinquents. In addition, this presentation highlights the importance making the most of limited funding through the formulation of innovative treatment plans aimed at this population.

Foreign minors often have problems integrating into Italian society. The two primary reasons for this are their young age and their different cultural backgrounds. The goal of this study is to provide data regarding the treatment of foreign juveniles in the Italian justice system. It is important to create secondary and tertiary prevention services in order to decrease the likelihood of recidivism, and to promote the minor's integration into the social fabric of their adopted country.

The principal motive for which minors leave their homeland is the search for a new way of life. Persichella wrote of "advance socialization," a term that refers to the expectations of well-being that a foreigner might associate with a particular place. These mental images are often generated by the mass media, as well as by relatives and friends who have already emigrated there. These youngsters are often disappointed upon their arrival in the new country, leaving them in a state of relative deprivation, frustration, and tension, which are significant risk factors for the commission of crimes.

The percentage of foreigners convicted of crimes in Italy has increased over the last decade with respect to the number of convicted Italians. This is true for all crime categories. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. Among them are the conditions in which these immigrants find themselves when they arrive in Italy (e.g., how their previous expectations measure up to the reality of their new existence, how successfully they reintegrate with their families, their ability to enter into the work force, and the influence of both Italian and foreign organized crime groups).

Foreign minors are more frequently placed in jail than their Italian counterparts. This is because it is less likely that they would have access to resources that might allow them to be spared detention (e.g., having a nuclear family, a home, steady employment, etc.). In theory, these foreign juveniles are supposed to have access to detention alternatives, but in reality, they must overcome serious obstacles in order to take advantage of them.

Cultural mediation acts to facilitate relationships between individuals from ethnic minority groups and the associated social services that are in place to serve them. The cultural mediator aids the foreigner in understanding how to behave appropriately, and attempts to sensitize him to the customs and way of life in Italy. The cultural mediator also actively participates at various phases of institutional life, for example, in helping the minor to communicate with juvenile justice officials, and with relatives. In addition, the mediator also aids the family in navigating the Italian legal system.

Some juvenile detention centers (IPMs) report a lack of resources and funding necessary to create appropriate treatment plans. They cite, for example, the under-utilization of cultural mediators who are often marginalized and relegated to the singular role of interpreter. Cultural mediators are typically only available on an hourly basis, and are not considered to be an integral part of the treatment team. Short stays in IPMs are also reported to be problematic: repeated transfers make it impossible for staff to get to know the minor in order to create an individualized education program.

When considering the usefulness of detention alternatives, the study and development of sharable management models that address the real needs of minors in the juvenile justice system are of fundamental importance. Facilitating the social integration process, appointment of a legal guardian when necessary, and providing qualified legal representation are high on the list of priorities. Only through the development of a united partnership can a welcoming network be created: one that is able to pick up on the first signs of trouble that often confront foreign minors.

Foreign Minors, Juvenile Delinquency, Incarceration