



I5 Aging and Prison: A Study of a Large Number of Italian Penitentiaries

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to increase awareness of the condition of elderly prisoners in prison. With careful consideration of the complexities and difficulties that exist within the Italian prison system, and in full compliance with national and supranational frameworks, this study was conducted with the goal of surveying the conditions of elderly prisoners.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the importance of the awareness of the condition of elderly prisoners in prison.

It is well known that elderly people are more vulnerable when compared to younger adults within the same community because of their advanced age. A precise age limit is not implied here, although 65 years is considered the starting point of old age. Therefore, vulnerability is one of the characteristics of the elderly. Such individuals may need health care services, social assistance, and/or protection by the community due to any number of problematic situations and limitations, including illness. Such people may be unable to take care of themselves and are unable to protect themselves from significant harm, exploitation, abuse, violence, and other risks.

Vulnerability and fragility are distinct concepts. Fragility is an accumulation of deficits in the physical, social, and psychological spheres and manifests itself throughout the full continuum of life, regardless of age. Vulnerability is an accumulation of deficits in terms of relative risk and scarce resources. Individual, situational, health, behavioral, resource, biological, and environmental factors can influence fragility. Fragility domains form a triad: (1) physical, (2) psychological, and (3) social. The presence of all three renders a person fragile and puts them at risk for adverse events. Without a doubt, physical frailty can be influenced by psychological and social fragility. For these reasons, this research's hypothesis is that prisoners over 65 years of age manifest difficulties and hardships in adapting to the detention regime, which are, in many ways, both different and more numerous when compared to other adult prison inmates. Interventions aimed at relieving such problems must keep in mind both the obligation of the prisoners' incarceration and atoning for their crimes, while at the same time protecting the rights of these individuals, especially because they are older and therefore generally more vulnerable. One possible alternative could be granting probation and employing alternative measures of detention.

Methods: This study distributed a detailed questionnaire to over 100 prisoners who are currently serving prison sentences in both Northern and Southern Italy (the regions of Lombardy and Apulia). The questionnaire concerned personal data, characteristics of the crime committed, imprisonment, pre-existing psychophysical health conditions and subsequent incarceration, family news, and other information related to the execution of the sentence.

Results: As far as the crimes committed are concerned, the most frequent are offenses related to the participation in mafia-style organizations, white-collar crime, particularly heinous crimes, long criminal careers, financial and administrative offenses, and related offenses, as well as the trafficking and marketing of narcotic substances. Psychophysical health conditions and the adaptation to prison often turn out to be precarious.

Conclusions: The increased percentage of the elderly prison population is a worldwide phenomenon and is certainly linked to a complex causality. The main reasons for this phenomenon are: demographics, legal issues, state of health, inappropriate response to social changes, reduction of psychiatric and geriatric care, and lower capacity for reintegration of the senior prisoner

The basic question appears to be: Are Italy's prison facilities, which were originally designed to host and contain young, healthy prisoners who do not suffer from chronic diseases, suitable for receiving elderly prisoners who suffer from disabilities and chronic diseases? The extreme passivity of life during detention most likely has a negative effect on the psychic and cognitive state of the elderly prisoners. Furthermore, many of these inmates suffer from psychiatric pathologies and need treatment, re-education, and social/healthcare assistance, which are different from the needs of the rest of the adult prison population.

Elderly, Prison, Illnesses