
Issue Brief
(Special Committee)

Healthcare in Prisons

Every Crime has its punishment- this is a law applicable to nature and human legalities alike. If you commit a crime, you are bound to be tried for it, and maybe even sentenced if found guilty, landing you in jail. However, the purpose of imprisonment shouldn't just be 'punishment', but should also be focused on rehabilitation. Unfortunately, we lack a lot with regards to the latter aspect, globally.

In several nations, prison conditions are pitiable, and the basic living standard for an adult human being is not met. Apart from food and clothing, another issue that prisons face is the availability of adequate healthcare for prisoners, in terms of both physical and mental aspects. Counsellors and psychiatrists are often not available, which leads to lack of efficient redressal of mental health related issues. Unavailability of medicines, surgical equipment, and other healthcare equipment is another challenge faced by prisons especially in LEDCs. Doctors and other staff often need to be called from outside, which results in significant inconvenience to the patient-cum-prisoner and the Prison staff alike. There is hence a serious need to understand the importance of such services even in Prisons, as health and education are basic fundamental rights that cannot be encroached on, barring the rarest of the rare case scenarios.

Some important measures have been taken at the global level over the past few years to identify and rectify the issue in Question. In the WHO International meeting on Prisons and Health, Lisbon 2017, experts recognised prisoners as a disadvantaged group in terms of health, owing to the exponentially high use of drugs and other toxic substances by prisoners. Prisons were recognised as important settings to check health inequality in this meeting. 'The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners' (also called the 'Nelson Mandela Rules') were also acknowledged and in accordance to the same, the meeting produced a list of 6 Conclusions, of which 'the whole of government approach' towards prison healthcare and the establishment of a healthcare framework equivalent for prisons and the wider community were the key highlights. The establishment of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations in this regard, such as 'The Centre of Prisoner Health and Human Rights' in the United States have also played a crucial role in highlighting this issue in the wider public domain. Yet, more has to be done, especially in LEDCs, where conditions are getting worse by the day. MEDCs and International Bodies must play a positive role in supporting smaller nations affected by the problem in question, and through mutual cooperation and understanding, the issue can definitely be resolved to a great extent.

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