

**THE PERCEPTION OF MEDICAL STUDENTS IN RELATION TO THE MENTAL HEALTH
OF THE POPULATION DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM: EXPERIENCE REPORT**

**A PERCEPÇÃO DOS ACADÊMICOS DE MEDICINA EM RELAÇÃO À SAÚDE MENTAL
DA POPULAÇÃO PRIVADA DE LIBERDADE: RELATO DE EXPERIÊNCIA**

**LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE MEDICINA EN RELACIÓN CON LA
SALUD MENTAL DE LA POBLACIÓN PRIVADA DE LIBERTAD: INFORME DE
EXPERIENCIA**

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2025.031-018>

**Mickaelly da Silva Machado¹, Rosane Pereira dos Reis², Renée Leão Calheiros³,
Thales José Macedo Figueiredo⁴, Otacylio Fernando Marinho Rodrigues Nicácio⁵,
Ana Raquel de Carvalho Mourão⁶, Daniela Martins Lessa Barreto⁷, Daniele Gonçalves
Bezerra⁸, Fernando Tenório Calvacante Apratto⁹, Kalleu Leonardo Antão¹⁰, Sabrina
Fernandes Silva Paz¹¹, João Marcelo de Oliveira e Silva¹²**

ABSTRACT

The mental health of the population deprived of liberty represents one of the greatest challenges of public health, considering the social vulnerability, stigma and institutional negligence that surround this population. This study aimed to describe and reflect on the perception of medical students in relation to the mental health of the population deprived of liberty, based on a practical experience carried out in a detention unit, highlighting the main challenges faced, the lessons learned and the implications for medical training and humanized professional practice. This is an experience report lived by medical students in the Comprehensive Prison Health Care and Socio-Educational Internment Project – PAISPIS. The students were able to observe the functioning of mental health care and dialogue with health professionals working on site. The activity made it possible to recognize

¹ Medical Student. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: micka.silvam@outlook.com

² Medical Student. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: rosane_pr@hotmail.com

³ Medical Student. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: reneecalheiros@gmail.com

⁴ Psychiatrist. Universidade Federal de Alagoas. Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: thales.macedo@hotmail.com

⁵ Medical Student. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: otacylio.nicacio@outlook.com

⁶ Dr. in Health Sciences. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: ana.mourao@unima.edu.br

⁷ Dr. in Health Sciences. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: daniela.barreto@unima.edu.com.br

⁸ Dr. in Human and Experimental Biology. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: danigbezerra@gmail.com

⁹ Alagoas, Brazil. E-mail: fernandoapratto1@gmail.com

¹⁰ Psychiatrist. Alagoas, Brazil. E-mail: kalleu_leonardo@hotmail.com

¹¹ Medical Student. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: fsabrinapaz@gmail.com

¹² Medical Student. Centro Universitário de Maceió (UNIMA). Alagoas, Brazil.
E-mail: joaomarcelosdi@gmail.com

the importance of active listening, empathy and respect for human dignity as fundamental principles in the care of people deprived of liberty. It is concluded that the experience contributed significantly to the critical education of the students, stimulating reflections on medical practice in contexts of social exclusion. The need to include themes such as mental health and the population deprived of liberty in medical education is emphasized, aiming at the construction of an ethical, sensitive and socially committed practice.

Keywords: Mental Health. Population Deprived of Liberty. Health Education. Experience Report.

RESUMO

A saúde mental da população privada de liberdade representa um dos maiores desafios da saúde pública, considerando a vulnerabilidade social, o estigma e a negligência institucional que cercam essa população. Esse estudo teve como objetivo descrever e refletir sobre a percepção dos acadêmicos de medicina em relação à saúde mental da população privada de liberdade, com base em uma experiência prática realizada em uma unidade de detenção, destacando os principais desafios enfrentados, os aprendizados adquiridos e as implicações para a formação médica e para o exercício profissional humanizado. Trata-se de um relato de experiência vivenciado por discentes do curso de Medicina no Projeto de Atenção Integral à Saúde Prisional e Internação Socioeducativa – PAISPIS. Os acadêmicos puderam observar o funcionamento dos atendimentos em saúde mental e dialogar com profissionais de saúde atuantes no local. A atividade permitiu reconhecer a importância da escuta ativa, da empatia e do respeito à dignidade humana como princípios fundamentais no cuidado às pessoas privadas de liberdade. Conclui-se que a vivência contribuiu significativamente para a formação crítica dos acadêmicos, estimulando reflexões sobre a atuação médica em contextos de exclusão social. Ressalta-se a necessidade da inclusão de temas como saúde mental e da população privada de liberdade na formação médica, visando a construção de uma prática ética, sensível e socialmente comprometida.

Palavras-chave: Saúde Mental. População Privada de Liberdade. Educação em Saúde. Relato de Experiência.

RESUMEN

La salud mental de la población penitenciaria representa uno de los mayores desafíos de salud pública, dada la vulnerabilidad social, el estigma y el abandono institucional que rodea a esta población. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo describir y reflexionar sobre las percepciones de los estudiantes de medicina sobre la salud mental de la población penitenciaria, con base en una experiencia práctica realizada en un centro de detención. Se destacan los principales desafíos enfrentados, las lecciones aprendidas y las implicaciones para la formación médica y el ejercicio profesional humanizado. Este es un relato de una experiencia vivida por estudiantes de medicina en el Proyecto de Atención Integral en Salud Penitenciaria e Internamiento Socioeducativo (PAISPIS). Los estudiantes pudieron observar el funcionamiento de los servicios de salud mental e interactuar con los profesionales de la salud que trabajan allí. La actividad les permitió reconocer la importancia de la escucha activa, la empatía y el respeto a la dignidad humana como principios fundamentales en la atención a las personas privadas de libertad. Se concluye que la experiencia contribuyó significativamente al desarrollo crítico de los estudiantes, estimulando reflexiones sobre la práctica médica en contextos de exclusión social. Se destaca la necesidad de incluir temas

como la salud mental y la población privada de libertad en la formación médica, buscando construir una práctica ética, sensible y socialmente comprometida.

Palabras clave: Salud Mental. Población Privada de Libertad. Educación para la Salud. Informe de Experiencia.

1 INTRODUCTION

Mental health has been consolidated as one of the main concerns in public health in recent decades, that is, the mental health of the population deprived of liberty is a subject of great social and health importance, particularly in contexts characterized by social vulnerability. People deprived of liberty face unfavorable conditions, such as overcrowding, violence, social isolation and lack of adequate support, elements that contribute significantly to the worsening of psychiatric conditions (WHO, 2014).

It is important to emphasize that among these contexts, the prison system is notable for the complexity of the circumstances that people deprived of liberty face, often linked to the fragility of institutional structures and the lack of attention to health care. This circumstance makes the prison environment a challenging place for the promotion of the health and dignity of the individual (MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, 2020).

Studies show that mental disorders significantly affect the prison population, being more frequent than in the general population. However, the structure of the prison system in Brazil still has deficiencies in the provision of specialized services, leading to the interruption of care and the violation of basic rights (BARRETO; SCHOEPS, 2020). In this scenario, medical education needs to incorporate experiences that make students aware of these disparities.

The prison context has several stressful elements that directly contribute to the worsening of mental disorders, such as social isolation, overcrowding, institutionalized violence, and the lack of prospects for reintegration into society. Add to this the stigmatization of inmates, which complicates access to continuous, high-quality mental health services (FIOCRUZ, 2015).

According to the Ministry of Health (2014), the prevalence of mental disorders in individuals deprived of liberty is considerably higher than that found in the general population. Disorders such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and substance use disorders are common, although they are often not properly diagnosed or treated.

The mental health work of the population deprived of liberty requires a multidisciplinary, humanized strategy based on the principles of equality and human rights. However, the day-to-day life of these institutions reveals a variety of structural and institutional obstacles that hinder the complete care and recovery of individuals deprived of liberty (REZENDE; FERREIRA, 2019).

In this scenario, the training of future health professionals, particularly doctors, is crucial to overcome these disparities. The incorporation of practical experiences in contexts of social vulnerability, such as the population deprived of liberty, can stimulate the formation of a critical conscience and an ethical conduct dedicated to humanized care (PAIVA; COUTO, 2018).

In view of this, guided academic experiences, such as technical visits to prisons, constitute valuable pedagogical resources for the formation of knowledge and empathy. These activities enable students to directly observe the obstacles that professionals in the health face in these environments and, simultaneously, to understand the complexity of mental health in unfavorable situations (FIUZA; SOUZA, 2021).

These experiences, in addition to the technical-scientific aspect, influence the personal and professional growth of students, promoting reflections on social justice, bioethics, human rights and the social function of the physician. By connecting theory and practice, the chances of change in medical training and public health policies for the population deprived of liberty increase (BRASIL, 2021).

By observing the prison reality and interacting with professionals and inmates, students can deepen their understanding of the structural conditions of mental health in this context. This encompasses not only the identification of care challenges, but also the

understanding of psychological suffering as a manifestation of broader structural violence (CUNHA, 2020).

In addition, the direct interaction with the prison population and health professionals highlighted the complexity of care in contexts of restriction. The fragility of individuals deprived of liberty requires a sensitive, humanized intervention based on the precepts of equality and human rights, which emphasizes the relevance of the debate on mental health in this scenario.

Thus, the objective of this experience report is to describe and reflect on the perception of medical students in relation to the mental health of the population deprived of liberty, based on a practical experience carried out in a detention unit, highlighting the main challenges faced, the lessons learned and the implications for medical training and humanized professional practice.

2 METHODOLOGY

This work is a descriptive experience report, with a qualitative approach, elaborated from a unit of the Prison System (Núcleo de Resocialização da Capital), located in the state of Alagoas, carried out by medical students.

Students from the first period of graduation who are part of the Comprehensive Prison Health Care and Socio-Educational Internment Project - PAISPIS, accompanied by the preceptor Dr. Kalleu - Psychiatrist, participated in the activity. The pedagogical proposal involved direct observation of the prison environment and clinical care aimed at the re-educated.

The data presented in this report were collected from participant observation, field notes and records of meetings held during the development of the activities. The analysis followed a reflective approach, highlighting the lessons learned, the challenges faced in clinical practice in this context, and the expansion of the understanding of the social role of the medical professional. The actions were carried out in accordance with the ethical principles of university extension, SUS and humanized care, respecting the confidentiality of information and the rights of the inmates served.

3 EXPERIENCE REPORT

The participation in the PAISPIS project in the Resocialization Center, as medical students, represented a significant experience of integration between theory and practice, especially with regard to mental health care for inmates in compliance with socio-educational measures. Inserted in an interdisciplinary and extension proposal, the project provided a deep immersion in the issues that cross the health of these people deprived of liberty, marked by social vulnerabilities, traumas and a history of exclusion.

The experience was developed in a rehabilitation unit located in Maceió-Alagoas, where male people comply with measures determined by the justice system. From the observation and performance in the daily life of the unit, it was possible to understand the impact of the deprivation of liberty on the psychic suffering of these inmates, as well as the challenges faced by health professionals who work in these contexts.

From the first moment, the impact of the deprivation of liberty on the psychic suffering of the inmates became evident. The emotional overload associated with incarceration, the absence of family ties, the constant fear of violence and the precariousness of living conditions within the unit contributed to frequent anxiety, depression, insomnia and existential suffering.

During the project, mental health actions were developed in two main axes: qualified clinical listening and promotion of mental health care through educational and therapeutic workshops. Clinical listening was guided by the preceptor, based on person-centered approaches and humanized welcoming, respecting the ethical and institutional limits of acting in contexts of deprivation of liberty.

The experience also awakened in the students a greater understanding of the role of the doctor as an agent of social transformation. It was evident that health care it goes beyond technique: it requires sensitivity, qualified listening, empathy and commitment to ethical principles and human rights. Among the main lessons learned, the recognition of mental health as a fundamental right and the need for medical practices that consider the sociocultural and historical context of individuals stand out. The students reported that the experience contributed to the construction of a more humanized and critical posture in relation to the inequalities that permeate the health system.

Thus, the project's action in the prison unit proved to be an essential formative experience for the construction of the professional profile of the students. We highlight the urgency of discussing mental health in prison and of preparing physicians who are more aware of the social, ethical and political realities that cross clinical practice in Brazil.

Medical students, when exposed to environments of social vulnerability, develop a more critical and empathetic look at the role of the health professional. Insertion in contexts such as the prison system allows the construction of ethical, technical, and human skills essential for medical practice, especially in the field of collective and mental health.

As future physicians, this experience taught us that mental health care should be based on listening, respect for the uniqueness of each subject and a broader understanding of mental illness. We learned that prison does not annul the subjectivity of the individual, and that mental health care for the population deprived of liberty is a fundamental tool for dignity and reparation.

The experience also led us to critically reflect on the role of medicine in relation to populations deprived of liberty. In a system that historically reproduces exclusion and punishment, the work of health professionals can and should represent a practice of ethical resistance and defense of life.

The present work describes an experience lived by medical students during a technical visit to a prison unit, promoted as part of the actions of PAISPIS. The activity focused on the observation and clinical care of the inmates. The experience provided a moment of critical reflection on the conditions of mental health care within the prison system and its impacts on medical training. The practical experience allowed the confrontation of the theoretical contents addressed in the classroom with the concrete reality, revealing gaps in the prison health policy and in the training process of future doctors.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The experience in a prison enabled medical students to expand their understanding of the social factors that influence health and the complexity of care in situations of extreme vulnerability. The urgent need to strengthen mental health in the prison system was clear, through investments in infrastructure, staff training and continuing education. The activity was a formative milestone for the students, reinforcing the commitment to equality, human rights and the humanization of medical practice.

The experience of medical students in the prison context enabled a deeper understanding of the obstacles encountered in mental health care for the population deprived of liberty. The experience highlighted the relevance of medical education focused on comprehensive care, professional ethics, and responsibility for health equality. It is crucial to

include practical experiences in contexts of social vulnerability in medical programs to train professionals who are more sensitive, critical, and able to deal with complex realities.

Therefore, this report demonstrates that the presence of students in prisons can have beneficial effects both in the education of these physicians in training and in encouraging more humane and inclusive practices. Thus, it is suggested that similar initiatives be expanded in undergraduate health courses, encouraging a more careful view of populations historically on the margins of society.

REFERENCES

- Arreto, M. F., & Schoeps, D. (2020). Saúde mental e sistema prisional: Uma análise crítica das práticas de cuidado. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 73(6), e20190544.
- Brasil, Ministério da Saúde. (2021). Manual de atenção à saúde no sistema prisional. Brasília: Ministério da Saúde.
- Cunha, L. R. (2020). Saúde mental no cárcere: Entre o sofrimento e o silenciamento. *Revista Saúde e Sociedade*, 29(3), 1–10.
- Fiocruz, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz. (2015). Saúde mental em prisões: Relatório técnico. Rio de Janeiro: FIOCRUZ.
- Fiuza, A. G., & Souza, E. M. (2021). Formação médica e privação **TRANSFORMAR A FORMATAÇÃO DE APA:**
- Arreto, M. F., & Schoeps, D. (2020). Saúde mental e sistema prisional: Uma análise crítica das práticas de cuidado. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 73(6), e20190544. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2019-0544>
- Brasil, Ministério da Saúde. (2021). Manual de atenção à saúde no sistema prisional. Brasília: Ministério da Saúde.
- Cunha, L. R. (2020). Saúde mental no cárcere: Entre o sofrimento e o silenciamento. **Revista Saúde e Sociedade*, 29, levied, from <https://www.revistas.usp.br/sausoc/article/view/174628>
- Fiocruz, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz. (2015). Saúde mental em prisões: Relatório técnico. Rio de Janeiro: FIOCRUZ.
- Fiuza, A. G., & Souza, E. M. (2021). Formação médica e privação de liberdade: Relatos de experiências em extensão universitária. *Revista Brasileira de Educação Médica*, 45(2), e057. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-5271v45.2-20200488>
- Brasil, Ministério da Justiça, Departamento Penitenciário Nacional. (2020). Relatório de inspeção dos serviços de saúde no sistema prisional brasileiro. Brasília: MJSP.

Brasil, Ministério da Saúde. (2014). Saúde mental em dados (12th ed.). Brasília: Ministério da Saúde.

Paiva, I. S., & Couto, L. S. (2018). Formação médica e vulnerabilidade: O ensino da saúde em ambientes prisionais. *Interface – Comunicação, Saúde, Educação*, 22(64), 907–918. <https://doi.org/10.1590/180spécialisée-5778>

Rezende, A. C., & Ferreira, A. S. (2019). Desafios do cuidado em saúde mental no cárcere: Uma análise sob a perspectiva da bioética. *Revista Bioética*, 27(4), 778–786. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1983-80422019274351>

World Health Organization. (2014). Prisons and health. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.