

The Plight of older prisoners: A campaign for a Policy Agenda for Older Prisoner Health Care

(The project runs by the Uganda Prisoners' Aid Foundation)

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ABSTRACT

Our campaign project sets out a proposed agenda for change in the focus of the Uganda's criminal justice system, with a "loud" call for providing special medical care for those geriatric prisoners or even have them get early release, to enable them get the adequate medical care which their families and volunteers can provide. It is also one way of helping to decongest the overcrowded prisons.

The researched information indicates that over 28,000 of inmates in Uganda spend their nights standing in jails as there is not enough space for them to lie down. The lucky ones sleep in about the space of one-quarter of a twin bed. In all those harsh conditions the most vulnerable are the elderly prisoners who can hardly endure. Yet they constitute 30% of the total number of both male and female inmates.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to propose and push for a policy agenda to improve the care of older prisoners within the prison system and to the communities to which they return

BACKGROUND

Research informs that prison overcrowding is one of the core contributing factors to the pitiable prison conditions around the world. Uganda is ranked 9th among the top 10 countries with most overcrowded prisons in the world. (International Centre for Prison Studies, as at August 2015). The position makes Uganda prisons, which has more than 45, 092 inmates instead of the recommended 15,000 the most congested in the East African region. This is attributed to the slowness of the judicial system. It is shown that 80 to 90 % of those incarcerated keep waiting for their trials for long periods, since court bail is not an option.

METHODS

We convened a meeting in 2014 at our offices (Uganda Prisoners' Aid Foundation) to identify special considerations for the care of older prisoners and to propose a set of priority areas that need to be addressed in our proposed policy agenda. We also, identified important gaps in knowledge that should be addressed to better inform policy makers. selected participants were individuals invited for their experience with and knowledge about prison health care, geriatrics medicine. A total of 24 national experts (13 men and 11 women) participated, that is 4 chief medical officers employed by public or private health care providers, 3 independent medical or psychology-psychiatry experts, 3 academic physicians, 2 prisoner advocates, and 2 foundation officers. The group had 6 physicians, 2 psychologists, 1 nurse, and 3 lawyers The goal of the meeting was to produce a list of action items that can be pursued to advance a policy agenda to optimize older prisoner health care. Participants, sharing their unique perspective on aging and correctional health care, deliberated until a consensus developed on 7 priority areas and related key considerations. Participants then discussed the state of knowledge in each of the 9 priority areas and formulated a list of action items for each one.

RESULTS

As a result the participants identified 7 priority areas for a policy agenda related to older prisoners, discussed the current knowledge stand in each one, and identified important gaps in knowledge that should be addressed to push the policy forward. So far our project has received some positive results from both the government and the civil society. NGOs and religious groups have joined our campaign too attracted



- Define the older prisoner
- Screen for dementia
- Identify needs of older women prisoners
- Create uniform policies for geriatric housing facilities
- Improve medical release policies
- Enhance prison palliative care programs
- Identify release and reentry challenges for older adults

CONCLUSION

- This project has identified the gaps in the Uganda Prisons medical care systems in general, and the gaps in nursing knowledge as it relates to Geriatric care management.
- The findings of our project can be used to address the lack of existing information on the inclusion of geriatric care within the Baccalaureate nursing education in the country.
- This pilot project has provided the authors with a baseline data that will be used to generate additional studies to further evaluate the need to integrate geriatric education to prisons' medical staff and the setting up of geriatric care management units within the Uganda prison system,

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A prisoner guard forces some inmates in already full packed room.



Some of the inmates hardly know when they will get their judgment.



Torture and other human rights abuses in the Uganda prisons have no age boundaries

The Chart shows the population of persons living in the Uganda Prison system

- 70% - prisoners below 55 yrs old
- 30% - prisoners above 55 yrs old
- 22% - Male Prisoners above 55 yrs old
- 8% - Female prisoners above 55 yrs old
- 87 % of the older prisoners have serious medical cases

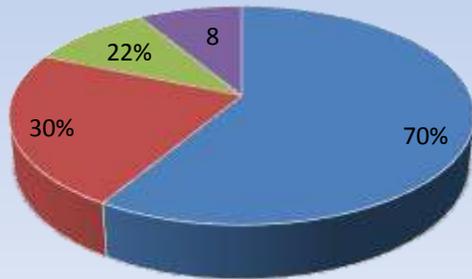


Figure showing age by gender of inmates in Uganda

| Age group | MALE | FEMALE | TOTAL |
|-----------|------|--------|-------|
| 15-17 | 91% | 9% | 1% |
| 18 – 20 | 97% | 3% | 21.4% |
| 21 – 30 | 97% | 41% | 48.3% |
| 31 -40 | 95% | 5% | 19% |
| 41 – 50 | 93% | 7% | 6.5% |
| 51+ | 92% | 8% | 3.4% |
| Unknown | 87% | 13% | 0.3% |
| Total | 96% | 4% | 100% |

Source: Uganda Prison Service.