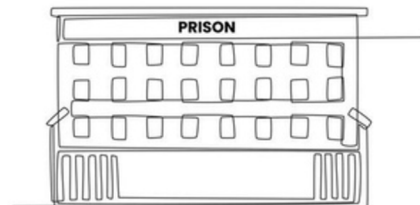


“Prison and Jail Staff”

Episode Overview

In this episode, I talk about prison and jail staffs’ roles, responsibilities, and reactions to overdose. From 2001 to 2018, overdose deaths in state prisons rose by more than 600% and overdose deaths in county jails increased by more than 200%. I talk about the various harm-reduction strategies that have been implemented in prisons and jails, including how staff feel about these strategies. I also discuss the emotional toll overdose deaths take on staff.



- 15% of Canadian correctional staff reported encountering fentanyl or carfentanil at least once a month, and 7% responded to an overdose monthly.
- Naloxone vending machines have been implemented in some Michigan jails, which has led to a 63.5% increase in naloxone distribution.

TAKEAWAYS

- Harm-reduction strategies like naloxone distribution, overdose prevention sites, and needle exchange programs save lives, but often face resistance from staff.
- Staff attitudes towards harm reduction can shift with increased education and training. Understanding how these tools can improve safety, for both incarcerated individuals and staff, is key to acceptance and implementation.

References & Future Reading

- Barry, C. (2017). ‘You just get on with the job’: Prison officers’ experiences of deaths in custody in the Irish Prison Service. *Prison Service Journal*, 230, 53–60. <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/21409/7/Barry-YouJustGetOnWithIt.pdf>
- Johnston, M. S., Ricciardelli, R., & Whitten, C. (2024). “That’s not rehabilitation, that’s enabling”: correctional officer perspectives on the prison needle exchange program. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 51(1), 66–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548231207065>
- Oser, C. B., McGladrey, M., Booty, M., Surratt, H., Knudsen, H. K., Freeman, P. R., ... & Walsh, S. L. (2024). Rapid jail-based implementation of overdose education and naloxone distribution in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Health & Justice*, 12(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-024-00283-8>
- Ricciardelli, R. R., Johnston, M. S., & Maier, K. (2023). “We don’t even know where it’s kept”: Exploring perspectives on naloxone administration by provincial correctional workers in Manitoba, Canada. *International Journal of Prison Health*, 20(1), 30–46. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOPH-01-2023-0008>
- Ricciardelli, R., Whitten, C., & Johnston, M. (2024). “How are we gonna get them off the drugs if they’re allowed to stay on it?”: Correctional officer perspectives on overdose prevention sites in prisons. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 37(1), 39–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2023.2275795>
- Schwartzapfel, B. & Jenkins, J. (2021, July 14). Overdose deaths in state prisons have jumped dramatically since 2001. National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/15/1015447281/overdose-deaths-state-prisons-increase>
- Victor, G., Hedden-Clayton, B., Lenz, D., Attaway, P. R., & Ray, B. (2024). Naloxone vending machines in county jail. *Journal of Substance Use and Addiction Treatment*, 167, 209521. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.josat.2024.209521>
- Wenger, L. D., Showalter, D., Lambdin, B., Leiva, D., Wheeler, E., Davidson, P. J., ... & Kral, A. H. (2019). Overdose education and naloxone distribution in the San Francisco County jail. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 25(4), 394–404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078345819882771>