

The Experiences of New England-Based Correctional Registered Nurses During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study

Anne Reeder, BSN, MPH, RN

Louise Reagan, PhD, APRN, ANP-BC, FAANP, FAAN



Background

- Environmental and social factors make correctional nursing unique
- Primary purpose of correctional facilities is to incarcerate
- Division between health care professionals and custody staff
- Therapeutic relationships
- **Purpose:** To describe New England-based correctional registered nurses' work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

Method

- **Purposive Sample:** RNs who worked in one or more New England correctional facility for at least 2,000 hours during the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Philosophical underpinning:** Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology
- **Design:** Descriptive phenomenology
- **Data Analysis:** Colaizzi's seven-step approach; included member checking

Procedures

- Recruitment via multiple mechanisms
- Interviews conducted on Webex
- Bracketing conducted throughout data collection and analysis processes
- Data analyzed in ATLAS.ti

Results

Data saturation reached after 12 interviews

Participant Characteristics

- Women n=9 Men n= 3
- Mean length of pandemic employment = 34 months
- Most worked in adult jails and prisons and worked for state government or contracted healthcare companies
- 6 of 12 worked as correctional RNs at the time of the interview

Overarching Themes	Significant Statements
1. Chaos: Flying by the Seat of Our Pants	"It was a nightmare...just like a never-ending nightmare."
2. Correctional Health Care + COVID-19: Layers of Struggle	"And while all this [COVID-19] is going on you still have the rest of the prison, jail to deal with."
3. The COVID-19 Vaccine: A Thorny Issue	"I would come in on a lot of shifts and I would vaccinate a lot of inmates and educate them. Um, there was one, I remember two shifts that I worked, and I must have vaccinated, I don't know 3...350 inmates."
4. Difficult Experience	"We did the best we could, and I think we did pretty good, but it was challenging."
5. Preexisting Gaps, New Scarcities: There Were Just No Resources	"The hours were very, very long. I mean, I would work 15 hours a day. Most shifts."
6. Quarantine = Solitary Confinement: The Experiences of People Who Were Incarcerated	"There was a lot of tension. A lot of tension about that, being, [...] locked in and being that and having minimal movement and then on, the other, on top of it, no visits. We had no visits for a long time. And that was very stressful for, for inmates, like, I can tell you for sure."

Conclusions/Implications

- Study findings align with those of previous studies and add the perspectives of correctional RNs to the literature
- Additional study is needed on correctional RNs' experiences with vaccines
- Correctional RNs experienced a profound sense of abandonment from multiple sources during the pandemic

Recommendations

- Include correctional systems in public health emergency planning
- Provide mental health support for correctional RNs
- Examine secondary trauma among correctional RNs
- Prioritize correctional healthcare - e.g., quality, access to resources

Limitations

- Response bias
- Most participants lived in CT
- Employer type not explored fully
- Member checking: No feedback

Please scan QR code for references

