

Pathways to psychiatric care in European prison systems. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*. Vol. 27. 2009. *(abstract only)*

The aims of this study were to describe and analyze the concepts of provision of mental health services for prison inmates in 24 countries in the European Union and the EFTA. Data were gathered by means of a structured questionnaire that was completed by national experts in the participating countries. This article stresses the different organizational models of mental health care for inmates, different legal standards for screening their mental health status and different pathways to psychiatric care and aftercare. The study revealed serious shortcomings. Even the most rudimentary health reporting standards for mental health care in prison are lacking almost everywhere in Europe. Psychiatric screening and assessment procedures at prison entry and during imprisonment differ substantially and do not fulfil recognized quality standards. In many countries, the appointment of inadequately trained staff to perform such screenings increases considerably the risk that mental disorders or psychiatric needs of the inmates will remain undetected. Furthermore, the pathways to care in the case of an acute psychotic episode differ significantly, since referral to prison hospitals, medical prison wards, forensic hospitals, or general psychiatric hospital are used in various combinations depending on different national legal regulations and on the availability of services or other regional circumstances. Therefore, the collaborating experts place the quality of European prison mental health care into serious question.