



Gender-affirmative housing in jails and prisons

Ayden Scheim and colleagues' study¹ describing the association between possessing gender-concordant identity documents and mental health highlighted the profound importance of affirmed identity for transgender people. We want to further highlight how crucial gender affirmation is for transgender health, with a particular focus on the criminal justice system.

Sexual and gender minority populations are incarcerated at a rate two to three times higher than the general population.^{2,3} Once in prison, transgender people are especially vulnerable. The latest national estimates show that around 40% of incarcerated transgender people have been sexually victimised over the past year, compared with only 4% of the general prison population.⁴ In jails, these estimates are around 27% and 3%, respectively.

Sex-based housing determination is key to explaining such painfully widespread victimisation. Despite guidelines from the Prison Rape Elimination Act, the continuing practice of assigning transgender people to housing facilities on the basis of genitalia or sex assigned at birth can have devastating effects. A California study found that the prevalence of sexual assault among transgender women in men's prisons was 13 times greater than the rate for cisgender men.⁵

Protecting the health and safety of transgender people requires policies and practices that ensure that people can serve their sentences in facilities and units consistent with their gender identity. A formerly incarcerated LGBTQ person in the New York metropolitan area told us that receiving her hard-fought identity document with the correct gender made "a world of difference". As others have begun to note, dignified and

gender-affirming correctional housing assignment can make a world of difference too.⁶

We declare no competing interests.

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