

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Mass Incarceration

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Issue:

The United States currently has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, with large numbers of individuals with mental disorders, including substance use disorders, now confined in jails and prisons. Mass Incarceration refers to the high rate of incarceration in the United States, particularly compared to other countries. Mass incarceration contributes to adverse mental health outcomes among a range of affected individuals, including current and formerly incarcerated people, the friends and families of those incarcerated, and the staff who work in carceral environments. Mass incarceration disproportionately affects marginalized populations, particularly Black and Latinx communities, leading to a disproportionate onset and persistence of mental health challenges, including psychological trauma, self-harm, substance use, and lack of adequate community care.

APA Position:

Mass incarceration has profound and frequently traumatic impacts on incarcerated individuals, diminishes family and community well-being, and harms public mental health. The APA supports psychiatric efforts to reduce and/or eliminate mass incarceration and its effects should include, but are not limited to, advocacy for alternatives to incarceration and expanding access to mental disorders including substance disorders treatment in community settings.

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