



Serve, subvert or emancipate? Promoting mental health in immigration detention

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Abstract

In recent years, Immigration Detention Centres (IDC) have become sites of increasing concern in Australia, due to their notoriously negative impact on the mental health of detained asylum seekers. In this paper, I question whether it is possible and beneficial to promote mental health in what might be thought of as an inherently 'unhealthy' setting. Drawing upon health promotion theory and a Foucauldian approach to power, I critique the effectiveness of two major forms of health promoting work carried out in the immigration detention setting: internally-organised services and externally-organised support and advocacy. Given the problematic nature of the detention setting, I argue that the 'effectiveness' of these efforts is bound up in their capacity for subverting or positively reforming the IDC system itself as a barrier to mental health.

Keywords

mental health promotion, mental health, asylum seekers, immigration detention, Foucault, multicultural mental health

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