

Exploring the Need for Prisoner Legal Aid: A Case Study of Prisoners' Legal Services in B.C.

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Presentation Description:

This study explores the experiences and perceptions of Prisoners' Legal Services (PLS) employees in British Columbia, Canada. The study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of PLS' functions, the dynamics and challenges that characterize the agency's work, and its contributions to promoting the rights and dignity of prisoners.

Abstract:

Prisoners' Legal Services (PLS) is the only legal clinic in Canada of its kind, dedicated to administering all prisoner legal aid for both federal and provincial prisoners, other than appeals, in British Columbia (BC). The availability of prisoner-specific legal aid varies across other provinces and territories in Canada, with some provinces offering few resources while others and the territories do not offer any prisoner-specific legal aid. Accordingly, literature on prisoner legal aid in Canada is scarce. The experiences and perceptions of PLS employees thus provide valuable insights about the role of PLS and the need for consistent, mandated prisoner legal aid across Canada. This study involved six semi-structured, in-depth interviews with legal advocates and lawyers from PLS to explore their perceptions of the role of PLS and its perceived value for prisoners. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data from which three key themes emerged. The findings suggest that PLS and the existence of prisoner-specific legal aid in BC are invaluable to prisoners and are integral to affirming prisoner rights and needs, which denotes a need for similar organizations to be implemented across other provinces and territories in Canada.