

Apathetic Place, Hostile Space: A Qualitative Study on the Ability of Immigration Detention in the UK to Promote the Health and Dignity of Detainees

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Abstract : Background: The UK has one of the largest immigration detention estates in Europe and is under increasing scrutiny, particularly regarding the lack of transparency over the use of detention and the conditions. Therefore, this research seeks to explore the professional perceptions of the ability of immigration detention in the UK to promote health and dignity. Methods: A phenomenological approach to qualitative methods were used, with social constructivist theorisations of health and dignity. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams. Participants included a range of immigration detention stakeholders who have visited closed immigration detention centres in the UK in a professional capacity. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and analysis was data-driven through inductive reflexive thematic analysis of the entire data set to account for the small sample size. This study received ethical approval from University College London Research Ethics Committee. Results: Two global themes were created through analysis: apathetic place and hostile space. Apathetic place discusses the lack of concern for detainees' daily living and healthcare needs within immigration detention in the UK. This is explored through participants' perceptions of the lack of ability of monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure detainees are able to live with dignity and understand the unfulfilled duty of care that exists in detention. Hostile space discusses immigration detention in the UK as a wider system of hostility. This is explored through the disempowering impact on detainees, the perception of a failing system as a result of inadequate safeguarding procedures, and a belief that the intention of immigration detention is misaligned with its described purpose. Conclusion: This research explains why the current immigration detention system in the UK is unable to promote health and dignity, offering a social justice and action-orientated approach to research in this sphere. The findings strengthen the discourse against the use of detention as an immigration control tool in the UK. Implications for further research include a stronger emphasis on investigating alternatives to detention and culturally considerate opportunities for patient-centred healthcare.

Keywords : access to healthcare, dignity, health, immigration detention, migrant, refugee, UK

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