



## Health promotion through music in a female penitentiary: an experience report

### *Promoção da saúde por meio da música em uma penitenciária feminina: relato de experiência*

### *Promoción de la salud a través de la música en una penitenciaría femenina: relato de experiencia*

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To share the experience of promoting the women deprived of liberty and penitentiary agents' health with music as a caring technology. **Data synthesis:** It is an experience report of a university extension action of the Musicagem program carried out in a female penitentiary in a municipality in the West of Santa Catarina, Brazil, in December 2019, to celebrate Christmas. After planning and rehearsing, the group carried out the action, singing to prisoners and employees along the penitentiary corridors. The music aroused hugs, cries, and gratitude for women deprived of their liberty and for the penitentiary agent, who sang the songs with the extension team, actively participating in the activity. For students and Professors, the experience provided an opportunity to reflect on health conditions in the prison environment, highlighting the relevance of other similar actions in this place. **Conclusion:** Experience has shown the relevance of inter-sectorality. It has repercussions in benefits for all those involved, demonstrating that music is a light, low-cost technology that can be used to promote health in the prison space, bringing emotions and moments of reflection and leisure in a humanized and integral way.

**Descriptors:** Health Promotion; Prisoners; Music; Women; Women's Health.

#### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Compartilhar a experiência de promover saúde nas mulheres privadas de liberdade e das agentes penitenciárias, tendo a música como tecnologia de cuidado. **Síntese dos dados:** Trata-se de um relato de experiência de uma ação extensionista universitária do programa Musicagem, que ocorreu em uma penitenciária feminina de um município do Oeste Catarinense, Brasil, em dezembro de 2019, com o intuito de celebrar o Natal. Após a realização de planejamento e ensaio, o grupo concretizou a atividade, cantando para as detentas e funcionárias ao longo dos corredores da penitenciária. A música despertou abraços, choros e gratidão, tanto para as mulheres privadas de liberdade como para as agentes penitenciárias, que cantaram as músicas com a equipe extensionista, participando ativamente da atividade. Para os discentes e docentes, a experiência oportunizou reflexão sobre as condições de saúde no ambiente prisional, evidenciando a importância de outras ações semelhantes nesse local. **Conclusão:** A experiência mostrou a relevância da intersetorialidade. Repercutiu em benefícios para todos os envolvidos, demonstrando que a música é uma tecnologia leve, de baixo custo, que pode ser empregada para promover a saúde no espaço penitenciário, trazendo emoções e momentos de reflexão e lazer de maneira humanizada e integral.

**Descritores:** Promoção da Saúde; Prisioneiros; Música; Mulheres; Saúde da Mulher.



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## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Compartir la experiencia de promocionar salud para mujeres privadas de libertad y de las agentes penitenciarias a través de la música como la tecnología del cuidado. **Síntesis de los datos:** Se trata de un relato de experiencia de una acción extensionista universitaria del programa "Musicagem" que se dio en una penitenciaría femenina de un municipio del Oeste del estado de Santa Catarina, Brasil, en diciembre de 2019 con el objetivo de celebrar na Navidad. Después del planeamiento y el ensayo, el grupo ha concretizado la actividad cantando para las detentas y las funcionarias a lo largo de los pasillos de la penitenciaría. La música ha despertado los abrazos, los llantos y la gratitud para las mujeres privadas de libertad y las agentes penitenciarias que cantaron las músicas con el equipo extensionista participando activamente de la actividad. Para los discentes y los docentes, la experiencia ha permitido una reflexión sobre las condiciones de salud del ambiente de la prisión evidenciando la importancia de otras acciones semejantes en ese local. **Conclusión:** La experiencia ha presentado la relevancia de la intersectorialidad. También ha repercutido los beneficios para todos los involucrados demostrando que la música es una tecnología leve y de bajo coste que puede ser usada para la promoción de la salud en el espacio penitenciario conduciendo las emociones y los momentos de reflexión y de ocio de manera integral y humanizada.

**Descriptor:** Promoción de la Salud; Prisioneros; Música; Mujeres; Salud de la Mujer.

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## INTRODUCTION

For long years, health was considered an absence of disease. However, the look on the concept of health was broadened, being understood as the physical, mental, and social well-being. To achieve this status of complete well-being, individuals and groups must know how to identify aspirations, satisfy needs and favorably modify the environment. In Brazil, health is guaranteed by the State through prevention, promotion, and recovery strategies, which contributes to the population's quality of life<sup>(1)</sup>. However, 30 years after the creation of the Brazil's Unified Health System (SUS), it is still necessary to overcome the disease-centered model to expressively transform the way of producing health and face the social determinants of the health-disease process<sup>(2)</sup>, that is, the social conditions in which people live and work.

Health promotion involves strategies to produce health that seeks to meet the needs and qualify the individuals and communities' lives. Brazil's National Health Promotion Policy (PNPS), created in 2006 and revised in 2014, recognizes the importance of social conditionings and determinants of health in the health-disease process and considers intersectoriality and the creation of co-responsibility networks to improve population life quality. In this context, the transversality of health promotion is evident, which must occur in all scenarios of the health care network and society, being able to use several action strategies<sup>(2,3)</sup>.

Music is among the actions taken to promote health, which is considered a light technology and has been present in human beings' life since its beginning, being a combination of sounds, lyrics, and harmonious rhythms that allow subjects to express their feelings and emotions, reducing feelings of stress, sadness and anger, increasing feelings of joy, peace, and relaxation. Because of its benefits, musical practice has been used constantly in the health area, providing positive results in the individuals mental health<sup>(4,5)</sup>.

Within the scope of nursing training, extension actions make it possible to promote individuals and communities' health, and also to bring professors and students closer to the social reality, evidencing in the practical experience the illness determinants to, from then on, develop activities in favor of the population well-being<sup>(6)</sup>. In this context, there are several possibilities and technologies to promote community health, one of which is the use of music.

In 2018, when considering music as a relevant care technology to promote health, professors and students of an undergraduate nursing course at a public university in southern Brazil organized an extension program. Since then, they started to develop weekly a musical intervention in two public hospitals in a municipality in Santa Catarina, singing reflective songs, accompanied by guitar, violin, and percussion, for hospitalized individuals, their families, and health professionals. However, the extension program's performance team began to receive invitations to perform music in other settings of society, beyond the hospital space, such as in the women's penitentiary.

In a survey, music was mentioned as one of five elements that collaborated to better live with the changes in the daily life of the imprisonment of women, namely: faith, work, music, prison companions, children, and the wait for freedom. The development of such resilience mechanisms is relevant in the pursuit to overcome the suffering of women in prison<sup>(7)</sup>.

The prison system has overcrowding and poor survival conditions, lacking human, physical and material resources for healthy living conditions. Besides, female incarceration lacks the implementation of social policies, because, although

there are public laws, there are still gaps in access to health services, which can make this public vulnerable and neglected in care and prevention and promotion actions<sup>(8)</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary that professionals, both in the prison unit and in health services, find intersectoral strategies to promote the health of women deprived of their liberty.

Because of the successful results of the extensionist action in a prison unit, this article emerged, intending to share the experience of promoting health in women deprived of liberty and prison officers, with music as a care technology.

## DATA SYNTHESIS

It is an experience report of a university extension action based on the theoretical frameworks of health promotion and the benefits of music to promote health in a prison unit. The concept of health promotion was presented as essential in health systems in the Declaration of Alma-Ata, in 1978. But in the Ottawa Charter, in 1986, an in-depth reflection on health promotion emerged, in the same year that the VIII National Health Conference in Brazil took place<sup>(9)</sup>.

Health promotion is considered a strategy to face the health problems that occur in the population. It is the process of enabling the individual to improve his quality of life and his physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being, in addition to providing healthy conditions, such as the environment in which he is involved, considering the social determinants of health. Thus, it seeks to empower individuals, acting in an intersectoral and transversal manner, to reduce inequities<sup>(10)</sup>.

Music is an instrument that helps to promote health, interferes direct and indirectly in the well-being of individuals, allowing anxiety and stress levels to be relieved, and sadness can turn into joy and tranquillity. Still, it provides moments of leisure and distraction, especially for prisoners, being a way to get out of the reality they live. Besides, the music makes it possible to wander through memories and good moments kept in memory<sup>(11)</sup>, since the prisoners are distant from their relatives, having, indirectly, to create a bond with the other women in the penitentiary, as it will be with them they will spend countless days, in a place where none wanted to be. In this scenario, it is urgent to find strength, motivation, and hope to follow the day by day<sup>(7,11)</sup>.

The experience was carried out by the extension program called Musicagem, which shows in its name the junction of nursing and music in favor of promoting the individuals' health, which is the biggest goal of its existence. This program consists of eight participants, five vocalists and three instrumentalists, among two professors and six students from an undergraduate nursing course at a federal university in southern Brazil.

To enter the extension program, academics volunteer and wait for the annual selection, according to the musical ability of each one. The program team operates weekly in two public hospitals, maintaining periodic rehearsals for the preparation of songs to integrate the musical repertoire, which is composed of melodies with reflective lyrics that address themes about love, peace, faith, hope, joy, and life.

The experience reported here took place in a female penitentiary in a municipality in Santa Catarina, Brazil, in December 2019, in which the corridors of the cell and yard corridors where women deprived of their freedom were sunbathing were visited.

During the journey to the prison unit, the prison officer who accompanied the extension program team reported that the prison was inaugurated in 2018, with 286 vacancies. It has specific areas for pregnant women, maternal and child, as well as the separation of the institution's galleries, which are organized by penalty regime, namely: provisional, closed and semi-open. It was found that nursing practices are active within the prison unit, in all these sectors, seeking to provide humanized and quality care.

For the development of the action, first, the direction of the female penitentiary contacted the extension program team, requested a musical activity in the place in order to organize a special activity in celebration of Christmas. Professors and students immediately accepted the invitation and appreciated the opportunity to promote health in the prison environment through music, as it was a space of difficult accessibility for carrying out extension actions.

To this end, the members of Musicagem gathered to rehearse and prepare a strategy to develop the musical activity, seeking to dialogue with the prison unit management to understand the physical layout of the place and the other orientations to avoid possible unforeseen circumstances. Based on that, thinking of promoting a reflective, welcoming, and safe moment, the group followed all the recommendations and selected songs with lyrics relevant to the moment, calm melodies, as well as Christmas songs that addressed the love and the true meaning of Christmas, to provide a pleasurable experience and, at the same time, that aroused curiosity, since the prisoners were unaware of the activity prepared for them.

Then, on the scheduled day, a morning in December 2019, the team went to the women's penitentiary. When entering the place, the atmosphere was cold, dark, and silent. The members of Musicagem were received by a

penitentiary agent, who led them throughout the activity, which lasted approximately three hours. With the authorization from the penitentiary agent, the team began to sing in the corridors in an improvised way while going to the location of each musical performance. This feat filled the silent corridors with the musical sound, which multiplied throughout the building, deeply awakening the attention of the prisoners, as well as the professional team, who began to follow the Professors and students through the corridors of the prison unit, showing support for the extension action.

Initially, the team sang to different groups of women sunbathing, promoting an exchange of hugs and emotions between them, and the team observed the expression of smiles and tears in the prisoners. During the songs, the women began to sing along with the members of the Musicagem and performed several collective hugs, thanking them through phrases of gratitude, and a round of applause at the end of each sung song.

Then the team went to the other side of the penitentiary, singing along the path until they reached the cell corridors. In this place, prisoners were organized in smaller cells, containing only a small window that gave access to the hall. Thus, the members of Musicagem sang different songs in the corridor while the prisoners, through the window of their respective cells, observed with attentive eyes. Some smiled, others cried, showing gratitude through words expressed by the moment they were living. There was also a musical activity for pregnant women and for those who were breastfeeding their children, in the specific wing for this audience, who also cried intensely, showing gratitude for the musical moments shared in the place. Meanwhile, behind the extension program team, a group of prison officers gathered, who also cried, applauded, sang the songs, thanking the opportunity.

At that moment, the Musicagem program team suggested that the penitentiary management should bring together, even if briefly, penitentiary agents who worked in the unit so that the team could sing specifically for them. The suggestion was accepted, and the members of Musicagem started to sing in the corridors, inviting the employees, who could be absent from their posts to quickly meet with them. In the room, the members of Musicagem were singing and holding hands for the professionals, inviting them to a great musical circle. The Professor coordinator of the extension program briefly pointed out the importance of their work for society, encouraging them to promote their self-care to take care of the people around them, and, thus, develop their work with quality, strengthening and empowering themselves. The women remained attentive to all the words spoken, were moved, and thanked intensely for the moment shared.

Finally, a Christmas song was sung, integrating all the penitentiary agents, who embraced themselves and sang with the extension program team. Musicagem members said goodbye to the employees and sang along the corridors until the exit door, with an invitation to return at Easter 2020. However, because of the situation imposed by the new coronavirus pandemic, it has not yet been possible to return to the site.

The Musicagem extension program integrates actions of a matrix study that was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, with Opinion No. 3,305,186, intending to seek scientific evidence on the use of music as a care technology to promote health. To enter the women's penitentiary, the performance team respected all the institution's rules, using appropriate clothing, following the recommendations of the management.

### **Practice in the light of theory...**

The experience carried out in the women's penitentiary has had benefits for women deprived of their liberty, as well as for the institution's professionals and members of the extension program, promoting the health of all those involved.

The concept of health promotion resulted from the Ottawa Charter of 1986<sup>(12)</sup>, a transformative process in search of better living conditions for individuals and communities, which lacks critical professionals and capable of adapting to the countless scenarios, considering health as a positive concept. According to the PNPS, health care must be comprehensive, with promoting actions that contribute to health care, through innovative tools that are inclusive and contributory<sup>(2)</sup>, such as the use of music, resulting in the population life quality.

Health promotion is not of the health sector exclusive responsibility and goes beyond a healthy lifestyle, moving towards global well-being, going beyond the scope of Primary Health Care (PHC) to effectuate individuals and communities' quality of life, with the support of other public policies that carry out the inclusion and reduction of health inequalities in an intersectoral way<sup>(13)</sup>.

The prison unit has a reality unlike any other sector, maintaining itself as a space that isolates individuals deprived of liberty, both from society and from some health actions<sup>(9)</sup>. It is known that the prison environment is not a welcoming space, with physical structures that are less than ideal, with poor hygiene and health care for qualified

living conditions<sup>(14)</sup>. In this sense, the lack of health-promoting actions is revealed, and the awakening of nurses and other professionals in the area to work in this location is relevant.

The health of women deprived of their liberty is guaranteed in the Federal Constitution of 1988, which states that health is a right for all and the State duty. However, it was only in 2003 that this public began to be recognized in a specific way, with the institutionalization of the National Health Plan in the Penitentiary System (PNSSP), which aims to promote comprehensive health care, controlling diseases and conditions. In 2014, the National Policy for Comprehensive Health Care for Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Prison System (PNAISP) emerged, with objectives aimed at respect for human rights and social justice; comprehensive health care; and equity in the face of the differences and singularities of these individuals<sup>(9)</sup>.

According to PNSSP and PNAISP, health teams that work in the penitentiary system are part of Primary Care (PC) and have the competence to carry out health promotion, prevention, and recovery, guaranteed by the Brazil's Unified Health System (SUS). Thus, as in any sector of PC, it is also relevant to promote health in the prison unit, contributing to the prisoners and prison staff quality of life and well-being, facilitating daily relationships<sup>(9)</sup>.

A research has revealed that music promotes health by providing moments of joy, peace, hope, and distraction<sup>(15)</sup>. Music has been used as a health promotion tool in several sectors, as it allows the expression of feelings and emotions, which reduces tension, anxiety, and stress<sup>(5,16)</sup>, corroborating the findings of this experience, in which, from the musical activity, it was observed that the women prisoners expressed their feelings, showing moments of crying, joy, and thanking. In addition to the expression of emotions, it is believed that the musical lyrics allowed women to wander between their memoirs and experiences outside the prison, as music allows individuals to connect with their life stories, finding and reliving memories in memory that, even so, they were forgotten<sup>(17,18)</sup>.

The Musicagem team entered the women's penitentiary with the only and main purpose of promoting the health of women prisoners. However, the experience also provided the same opportunity for prison officers who also missed this care. In this sense, the experience was also a moment of reflection for the prison staff, who renewed and strengthened themselves to continue the service provided, as it is known that the work carried out within the prison units is of high risk, involving numerous dreads and fears, and utmost importance for maintaining the security of society and prisoners<sup>(19)</sup>.

Women who work as prison officers carry innumerable stigmas concerning their duties and image within the prison unit, being linked to the masculine, strong, and violent appearance. In addition to the stigma, they also suffer due to physical and mental strain with a large number of prisoners; with the unhealthiness of the prison space, with no adequate places for rest and refreshment; the short time to satisfy basic needs, such as going to the bathroom; among several other factors that can trigger stress<sup>(20)</sup>, insomnia, nervousness and depression<sup>(20)</sup>.

When implementing the music in the prison unit, metaphorically, it was like lighting up that environment, in which all the individuals who were inside that space were changing their attitudes, transforming their faces and embracing, being benefited and involved by the feeling of welcome and hope. Through music, it was possible to smile, remember, cry, hope for a different future, and renew the feelings for the Christmas season, sensations highlighted by the use of music. Therefore, the relevance of choosing the appropriate songs for each situation is pointed out, as it is an alternative health practice, which promotes unique sensations in each individual when well used<sup>(16,21)</sup>.

In addition to the repercussions that the musical action provided for women deprived of their liberty and for prison officers, the experience also affected the students who applied it, as they had the opportunity to be in contact with a new reality. Learning and experience led students to believe that this light technology of nursing care can be used in various sectors of society, such as in the prison unit, making it evident, in a practical way, that every Brazilian citizen has the right to health, including the incarcerated population. Besides, when entering the prison unit, one can critically reflect on health care in that place, which until then had no visibility in academic training and the lives of academics.

In this way, the experience touched the Professors involved in the extension program as well, who were surprised by the successful results of the musical acts in the penitentiary, awakening to the need to continue and develop other activities in this space and in so many others that need assistance. health-promoting actions. For the professors, it was evident that it is time to expand discussions on health in the prison system, seeking to improve the development of skills and competencies in the training of nurses, to guarantee the principles of SUS to all Brazilians.

As limitations of the experience, the penitentiary structure itself is cited since, as it is an environment that involves several bureaucratic processes, it makes it difficult to carry out extension actions continuously in the place. Besides, there were difficulties in reconciling time between the members of the extension program team with the availability of the prison unit, which made it possible to carry out the activity only in the morning and/or afternoon,

excluding weekends, which is just the moment that professors and students were in university classes. Therefore, it was necessary to wait for their classes to end so that the members of the extension program could carry out the musical activity.

## CONCLUSION

Experience has shown that music is a relevant instrument for promoting health in the prison unit in an comprehensive and humanized way. Benefits have emerged not only for women deprived of their liberty but also for penitentiary agents, enabling moments of reflection, expression of feelings, and awakening the spirit to continue on the journey of life. Therefore, music can be used in professional nursing practice, being a low-cost care technology capable of promoting the individuals and communities' health in several performance scenarios, including in the penitentiary system.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest, both in the execution of the extension action and in the writing of this manuscript.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

**Jeane Barros de Souza, Odila Migliorini Rosa, Simone dos Santos Pereira Barbosa, Kelly Cristina de Prado Pilger, Tainá de Miranda Marquesini and Emanuely Luize Martins** contributed to the preparation and design of the study; the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data; and the writing and / or revision of the manuscript. All authors approved the final version sent for publication and are responsible for all aspects of the work.

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