

THE BIOARCHAEOLOGY OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE  
AT THE ERIE COUNTY POORHOUSE FROM 1851-1913

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**Abstract**

Bioarchaeological research emphasizes the fragmentary, individual body and the idea that social existence or significance is not based on a whole body. Only recently have bioarcheologists begun to contribute to the knowledge surrounding social identity theory. This study seeks to contribute to that vein of thinking, by considering how skeletal evidence from the remains of the Erie County Poorhouse cemetery (New York) may reflect evidence of structural violence. More specifically, I consider how the structural violence embedded in public policy, in turn negatively influenced the care received by inmates at the Erie County Poorhouse (ECP) from 1851-1913. I utilized data on traumatic and pathological conditions from 109 individuals from the ECP, in an effort to categorize the frequency of injury and disease among the poorhouse inmates. The frequency at which traumatic injury and pathological conditions occurred at the ECP was found to differ significantly between skeletal elements, as well as in type of trauma. After assessing several policies enacted in Erie county, New York during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century it was found that negative bias likely existed within the laws being passed. The policies were based on antiquated laws from England, were supported by a system of morality established in the mid-nineteenth century, and were enacted by the native-born upper-class Protestants. Therefore, policy and evidence of trauma indicated that the care promised to the impoverished was not the care received.

*Key Terms: health policy, policy reform, trauma analysis, social welfare, welfare reform, intersectionality, anthropology of care*