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Life in Prison

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Life in Prison

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Abstract

For my research topic, the focus will be life in prisons. it will look into not only the prisoner's way of life, but also the guards or anyone who works within a prison and look at how it effects their lives. It will be broken up into 13 categories/ sub-topics, which are: Incarceration rates, Recidivism, Prisoner abuse, Rehabilitation, Prison conditions, Jailhouse lawyers/ legal help, Prison rebellions, Healthcare, Mental Health, Guards and staff, Education, Psychological effects, And Families.

the research topic was broken down like this because talking about prisons and life there is much more complicated than the average American can see. This way, it is clearer to the facts and details and hopefully put a light on the issues of our prison system in America. This topic was a great one to research to shed light on because "prison" effects more Americans than people think, because most people either have a family member or loved one that is incarcerated or has been at some point in their lives.

Waterfield Library will be the main source of information for research, as well as their online sources. McCracken County public library will also be used for its information and books when I cannot get to Murray. I will also be using different documentaries to gather information about specific sub-topics.

As Martin Luther King once said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”, this is what we need to remember as a society.

For most Americans, prisons affect them more than one would think. The biggest way it affects us is if you pay taxes, which everyone does, then your money has been used at a prison at some point. In fact, it costs the taxpayers about \$29,000 to house just one inmate. Taxpayers dish out almost \$70 billion annually for jails and prisons. Another way it effects many Americans is that most people either have a friend or family member in jail or know someone that has been before, since over 2 million people are currently in jail or prison in America, which is the highest prison population in the entire world. This topic is important to talk about and have open conversations about, so we can try to fix the flaws in the incarceration system in America. With over 2.7 million children having at least one parent in the system, it is taking away from our future generations, leaving them abandoned and neglected, creating a cycle, which we need to break. It is important to point out these issues, so they aren’t just ignored and pushed under the rug. This does not mean that everything is wrong about the incarceration system, there are good aspects as well. The easiest way to break down and pinpoint these issues are to break down “prison life” into parts. I have broken it up into 13 parts, which are: Incarceration rates, Recidivism, Prisoner Abuse, Rehabilitation, Prison conditions, Jailhouse lawyers, Prison Rebellions, Healthcare, Mental Health, Guards and staff, Education, Psychological Effects, and Families.

Incarceration Rates

To start off, Incarceration rates are great to look at when thinking about how many people are actually in prisons. For America, the incarceration rates have not declined since the 70’s, in fact, they have skyrocketed. In “Mass Incarceration and the Paradox of Prison Conditions

Litigation”, by Heather Schoenfeld, she explains that rates have grown in the US by 700 percent. She explains how this started in the 70’s with the Nixon Administration when they started the “War on Drugs” movement. Their goal for that was to deter people from doing drugs by scaring them with jail time, instead putting a lot of people in prison for years at a time. Fortunately, for the Nixon Administration and the states, this was making them money. (Schoenfeld, 2010). Since the government and our states were profiting off of the amount of people in jails and prisons, they didn’t really see a reason to stop the issue or slow it down. The best way to break apart and analyze the incarceration rates in the USA is to categorize them as ratios, which are male to female ratio, race ratio, and age ratio.

The male to female ratio is probably pretty predictable to see because we know that there are usually bigger prisons to house men since there are more men in prison than women. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, there are 162,329 males in our prisons and only 12,379 women, making it 92.9% male and 7.1% female. With 45% of inmates in jail because of drug offenses, it shows just how far the Nixon Administration went to put people behind bars for the “War on Drugs”. The next two highest offenses for people behind bars is “Weapons, Explosives, Arson” making it 19%, and “Sex Offenses” at 10%. With these stats, we know that primarily men are more aggressive than women, they usually use weapons more and are linked to arson more often. There is also a huge amount of men versus women who commit sex offenses. (Statistics, 2020)

A very important topic of discussion for America is cycles. We tend to follow cycles and follow the cycle of our parents. For example, more children go to college if their parents went to college, more children grow up to smoke cigarettes if one or more of their parents or family member smoked. And one of the biggest cycles we see are young men that find themselves in

jail, assuming that if a young boy's father is in jail or absent for the majority of his life, then that boy will more than likely find himself in the same situation, getting caught up in the corrections system. This issue could be fixed by having more role models for young boys, which could be offered at schools or after school clubs. This issue would also be helped if we stopped taking everyone to prison for petty drug violations and allow the ones that are already in for drug offenses to be released and put in a program that might actually be helpful to the individual, and systematically, whole families.

Although there are fewer women in jail, it still effects their children, since it is usually the mother that has custody of the children. When the mother goes to jail, if there isn't a family member to step up and take the child, they have to go into the foster care system. Once this happens, it is quite hard for the family to gain custody back of that child. This creates a cycle for that woman because the process of gaining custody might traumatize her and make her want to give up and do something she regrets and find herself back in jail. This process might get this woman started on drugs, making the cycle more frequent and harder to get back on the right track. One issue that happens less often, but still an issue, is when women have babies in jails, the jail often sends the child into foster care, making it almost impossible for the mother or family to keep in contact with the baby. And usually takes years to gain custody back, which is hard on the child since they spent their most important years bonding with a different family.

To add onto the fathers being absent from their children, most inmates are between the ages of 31 and 41, making their kids the ages of pre-teens and young adults. This is the time of their lives that they need guidance the most.

The biggest rate I want to talk about is the incarceration rate between race. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, there are 2,673 Asians, 4,074 Native Americans, 65,441 Blacks,

and 102,481 Whites in federal prisons within America. This makes the prisons made up of 58% white inmates, 37% black inmates, 2% Native American, and 1% Asians (Statistics, 2020). When I first read this, it surprised me because I was under the impression that more black people were arrested more. Upon further research, this is explained by the types of crimes in which white and black people are being arrested for. There are more white men in prison because they get arrested for more aggressive and dangerous crimes, making their sentences longer. Whereas, black people are more often arrested for petty drug offenses, and while they do get sentenced very long and unnecessary time to spend, they are often left in the jails to serve their time instead of the federal prisons. This is often looked over because local and county jails do not keep research and file statistics as frequent as prisons.

To look at income inequality and imprisonment rates, you can clearly see a correlation. According to Janie Jeffers in “Justice Is Not Blind: Disproportionate Incarceration Rate of People of Color”, we might be seeing more black people in jails because of the inequity resulted in unequal access to critical services such as housing, education, health and mental health, and employment opportunities. She states, “Sustained denial of these critical life-sustaining services plays a major role in determining who are vulnerable to interface with law enforcement and subsequently the criminal justice system” (Jeffers, 2019). This all plays into effecting the children and family as a whole. Jeffers goes on to explaining how the use of over-imprisonment in communities of color being affected by collateral effects of incarceration. Some things that are affected include family stress, neighborhoods experiencing high mobility of residents cycling in and out of prison, and a growing number of people with limited employment opportunities. The American Bar Association explains that “When the Commission viewed the criminal justice system as a whole- all crime categories and all communities- we could only conclude that both

disproportionate offending (and the various causes thereof) and discretionary law enforcement decisions contribute to racial disparities in our criminal justice system” (Jeffers, 2019).

The last issue we can see that is handed down, when it comes to specific rates, is the mandatory sentencing for certain crimes when they are committed. When the “War on Drugs” started, the Nixon administration decided to put harsh and mandatory amounts of time to serve for specific drug crimes, called mandatory sentences, because they thought it would deter people from doing drugs. In fact, it did not keep people from doing drugs, but just kept people addicted to drugs in jails longer and not actually getting the help they need to stay away from drugs. These mandatory sentences took the power away from the Judge and gave it to the prosecutor, because the prosecutor gets to choose what that person is being charged with; for example, being charged with manslaughter versus capital murder holds two different mandatory sentences, therefore giving the prosecutor the choice of how long to imprison that individual.

These incarceration rates within America have been rising and will continue to rise until we review the old laws that were set during the “War on Drugs” movement in which we do not need today. These are different times, that need new and improved laws.

Rehabilitation

The next topic of Life in Prison to discuss is rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is the most important part of prison because that is the whole point of prison in the first place. When you are convicted of a crime you are put into jail to be rehabilitated so that when you get out you will not make that mistake again, hence being rehabilitated. Now, it doesn't always work that way because there are obvious issues with recidivism. We will discuss what classes and programs that are offered at prisons as well as the different approaches for rehabilitation and the rates on it specifically from race to age to gender.

For rehabilitation to actually work, the first step is for the inmate to commit to the process of changing. If the individual doesn't want the help or put the work into what is being offered, then they will not be rehabilitated. The main programs that are offered at most prisons and jails is GED programs. It is common for inmates to have never graduated high school and because of that they cannot get a decent job to stay off the streets where they find themselves in trouble and back in jail, it is just a vicious cycle. So, they offer GED classes to get inmates to use the time they have in jail to get something accomplished so that they have a better chance to be a functioning member of society and won't find themselves back in there. The other big programs offered are drug and rehab classes. All of these issues go hand in hand, so in order to fix the problem you have to acknowledge every issue of it. Most of the people in jail are there for a drug charge, often live in poverty because they did not graduate high school and then can't get out of poverty and away from the drugs. With drug classes offered they then can learn about what drugs do to one's body, how it effects their mind and life, and can get tips on how to stay away from drugs. According to Etienne Benson in "Rehabilitate or punish?" she explains:

“Until the mid-1970s, rehabilitation was a key part of U.S. prison policy. Prisoners were encouraged to develop occupational skills and to resolve psychological problems—such as substance abuse or aggression—that might interfere with their reintegration into society. Indeed, many inmates received court sentences that mandated treatment for such problems. Since then, however, rehabilitation has taken a back seat to a ‘get tough on crime’ approach that sees punishment as prison’s main function. The approach has created explosive growth in the prison population, while having at most a modest effect on crime rates” (Benson, 2003).

Previously, I talked a bit about the “war on crime” era in the 70’s with Nixon when the government changed policy to make drug charges harsher to “deter” criminals, which did not work. This is when our prisons went from being more about rehabilitative to more of just a storage area to house the criminals. They didn’t care much about the inmate’s rehabilitation rather than just wanting them to sit and do the time they were served. As a result of this there are more than 2 million people incarcerated. That is equivalent to 1 in every 142 American residents. There are also 5 million people on either probation or parole, which I will talk more about later. Benson continues to explain how in the 70’s when the U.S. prison system was changing, there wasn’t much psychological data to contribute, but now we have a massive amount in which we can use to change the way prison is seen and actually get people to change and rehabilitate. The data that has been collected over the past 25 years shows the importance of child abuse, poverty, early exposure to substance abuse for criminal behavior. These findings suggest that individual based approaches to crime prevention should be complimented by community- based approaches to actually work. This is why more and more classes are being offered in prisons to inmates so that they can learn about this and actually get them the help they need. It has taken so long for the prison system to adapt and start to change to this because in the 70’s most people had this pessimistic “nothing works” attitude towards criminals, or subjects that found themselves caught up in the “system”. For a long time, society thought it was just best to lock them up and throw the key away. Now seeing that we have so many people in prison, the conversation has changed from “people who go to jail are bad and cannot be changed” to “I have a family member or friend in jail, and they are good people, we should help them”.

A website called “UNODC” explains that if we set up programs that will actually help that offender to their specific needs and allow them to take classes to fix the issues they have; it

would greatly prevent them from reoffending. In the long term, this effectively saves the country lots of money by keeping those citizens on the right track and out of the jails, in which tax payers have to pay a ton of money to keep in inmate in. (The Doha Declaration: PROMOTING A CULTURE OF LAWFULNESS, n.d.). A website called ConnectNetwork gives us a list of rehabilitation that is very helpful to inmates in prison. The first one is education rehabilitation, which we've discussed a bit about. Education programs help so much that inmates who participated in some type of education classes while in jail, 43% were less likely to commit a crime and return to jail within three years. It is usually easier for an inmate to join society and feel welcomed when they continued education in prison. One very interesting program that is new to the prison population is computer programs. These classes are vital for inmates because since they haven't had access to internet or a computer, they are at a disadvantage when returning to the workforce. Education programs are helping give power to inmates, giving them options for their future, and also helping them let go of the past and look forward to new opportunities.

This continues to employment rehabilitation for inmates. These are often called prison work programs; this is more common around the country because it provides free labor as well as teach inmates a skill they can use in the workforce when they are released. Being able to support oneself is beneficial financially and mentally, which breaks the cycle and allows that inmate to become a productive member of society. When inmates participate in work programs teach punctuality, responsibility, deadlines, accountability, and time productivity, which indicates how prison work programs are much more important than just for job training. (ConnectNetwork, 2016). A lot of work programs include welding, sewing, car services, and a variety of assembly jobs.

Counseling rehabilitation for inmates plays a significant role in rehabilitation. Prison counselors provide guidance to inmates throughout their sentences about things pertaining to vocational, academics, social, and personal issues. Inmates can get help for depression or stress, which is important to not let these things go without getting help to fix it. This is often in group form since there are a lot more inmates than there are counselors. There are lots of different programs for these issues that prisons use. Connect website states, "For example, The Lionheart Foundation program offers prison inmates 'encouragement and the necessary support to take stock of the life experiences that have propelled them into criminal activity, take responsibility for their criminal behavior, change lifelong patterns of violence and addiction, and build productive lives'" (ConnectNetwork, 2016).

Wellness rehabilitation for inmates is also important. Clarity is formed from physical and mental wellness. Some prisons offer programs such as yoga, tai chi, or meditation for their physical and mental wellness. This also promotes peace among the inmates, helping anger management and keeping violence down. Other programs that prisons offer are dog training, culinary classes, and gardening which offer individuals opportunities to practice fulfilling skills that make a determinate difference. Another thing that would help wellness rehabilitation in prisons, but is often too hard to maintain, is a healthy diet. There isn't much offered at prisons for meals because of the lack of money being put towards it. (ConnectNetwork, 2016). I think if there were a few programs to help with that, it might help inmate feel more relaxed and able to focus on rehabilitating themselves.

The last helpful rehabilitative tip is Community rehabilitation for inmates. This continues throughout an inmate's lifetime even after prison. Some would say the hardest part of prison is leaving it and reentering society and taking steps to join the community. Connectnetwork states

that “Having a support system within the community helps an ex- offender stay and ex-offender”. (ConnectNetwork, 2016). It helps an inmate get involved with the community because it creates a communal obligation, giving the individual a sense of belonging. A few good community groups for inmates to get involved in are churches, volunteering, and social groups, but not social groups that may have gotten the individual in trouble to begin with. These lead to more positive interactions and less time for criminal behavior. In addition, these community relationships can lead to job opportunities.

Mental Health & Healthcare

The next topic of discussion is mental health in prisons. This topic is as important as rehabilitation yet talked about even less. These two go hand in hand with each other because in order to truly rehabilitate yourself from something, your mental health has to be in order. Making sure you are mentally healthy is ten times harder in prison since you usually never have to resources to get help for it or the prison system does not care enough since they see you only as just another criminal. The fact of the matter is prisons weren't built to deal with mentally ill people, they were meant to deal with criminals. So, how do we fix this? The government needs to reopen more mental hospitals, so these people have somewhere to go to get help, that way they aren't just stuck in the prison system. In “More Mentally Ill Persons Are in Jail and Prisons Than Hospitals: A Survey of the States” the authors say that in 2005 there was one psychiatric bed for every 3,000 Americans (Eslinger, Kennard, Lamb, Pavle, & Torrey, 2010). In the 1960's, they came out with new drugs to help the mentally ill which reduced the number of people in the mental hospitals. Unfortunately, those drugs did not help very many people, this is where we first start to see entering the criminal justice system. The number of people that are in prison and has some kind of mental illness within the U.S. is between 15 and 20 percent. Luckily, in the last

decade more prisons have recognized that providing mental health services is a necessity and have hired more counselors and psychologists. These psychologists provide counseling such as providing group therapy and crisis counseling as well as being able to screen new inmates for any mental illnesses. In fact, the psychologists can help inmates that don't necessarily have a mental illness but is going through something while being in prison and is able to help them through it. They will create programs to help these individuals such as substance abuse group therapy. The fall back to this is that there is too much work and not enough psychologists that are hired. The prisons have been heading in the right direction when it comes to this, they just need to go further in order for the issue at hand to be resolved adequately. Another issue that has been discussed more lately is that since prisons in general are more punitive and punishment oriented that it's hard to set up rehabilitative programs that will work. In "Rehabilitate or punish?" by Etienna Benson, she explains how psychologists are currently doing research on the causes of crime and the psychological effects of incarceration so they can create better programs to help in an environment that doesn't care about rehabilitation at all. (Benson, 2003). In "More Mentally Ill Persons Are in Jails and Prisons Than Hospitals: A Survey of the States", they say

"Any state can solve this problem if it has the political will by using assisted outpatient treatment and mental health courts and by holding mental health officials responsible for outcomes. The federal government can solve this problem by conducting surveys to compare the states; attaching the existing federal block grants to better results; and fixing the federal funding system by abolishing the "institutions for mental diseases" (IMD) Medicaid restriction" (Eslinger, Kennard, Lamb, Pavle, & Torrey, 2010).

Many inmates that are in jails do take prescription medications previously to being incarcerated, and often do not have the resources to receive their medicines in jail. Often,

this is because jails have protocols to receiving medications which can take over a month to finish. A lot of the times each inmate has to be reviewed by a doctor or psychiatrist at the jail before getting ahold of that inmates' doctor to get their prescribed medicine sent over to them. The first issue with this is that depending on how many new inmates that are coming in, it isn't going to be easy for the one doctor that the jail has hired to see all of these new cases and get them evaluated, in fact, it would probably take days to even do a check-up on every inmate. The next issue with this protocol is the amount of time it would take for them to get ahold of the inmates' doctor or whoever prescribes the medicine to confirm the medicines. Depending on what kind of medications a person takes, it is very dangerous for them to miss even one dose. Throwing someone in jail without their medicine makes them dangerously more ill, not to include the stress of the environment that it puts on one's mental status. For example, if someone goes to jail and has a serious illness such as AIDS or Bipolar Disorder, it would be devastating for them to miss any of their medications even for one day, and usually the jail is not stocked with the right medications needed for these people.

Sometimes, a person can get themselves in a situation where they cannot pay for the medication at the jail. What happens then, is the jail will start a bill for the inmate in which they have to pay when they get out. Or, if someone adds money to their books for the inmate to buy things like shampoo, the jail will confiscate it to go towards the medical bill. The reason Medicaid does not cover things while incarcerated is because Medicaid terminates coverage completely when a person goes to jail, leaving that person without insurance until they reapply when they get released; yet another thing they have to worry about when they are done with their time, creating more stress. (Vasan, 2019). This contributes to the never-ending cycle we keep talking about; If a person gets arrested and gets their medical insurance taken away then they

can't immediately go see their doctor when they are released, meaning they are off of their regulated medication, meaning they aren't in their right head space to be making rational decisions, leaving them to more than likely make a decision to get them arrested again, hence the cycle of incarceration. But she explains that Medicaid services aren't covered because "correctional health services are not federally reimbursable, they are also not obligated to meet clinical standards set by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services, which set basic quality standards for any medical care paid by the federal government". Vasan goes on to tell us how incarcerated people have up to 12 times the risk of death within the first two weeks of release and up to four times within the year. Vasan gives us a real-world example of what happened to one of her patients; a patient in his mid-40's under her care for several years had difficult-to-treat high blood pressure and suffered a stroke within weeks from being released. When asked, he told the staff at the ER that while incarcerated he had only received two of the four medications he needed to control his blood pressure, and then had difficulty filling his prescriptions and reconnecting into care after release because his insurance was inactive. She says it is because of the lack of continuity of care, and I would add on to that and say it is the prison systems responsibility because they were the ones to first withhold the proper medications that person needed for their mental stability. There was no effort to rehabilitate that person in the first place, which is what a prison should be basing its goals off of anyways. Untreated health problems are the biggest reason why people go in and out of prison repeatedly.

All of this healthcare that happens within the walls of the prison is paid by the corrections funding, with the states spending well over \$8 billion in one year. But, if incarcerated inmates were included in the Medicare for All Act and the federal government reimbursed the state/local authorities, that would free up funds for other priorities. They could use that money to work on

the mental health ward that is practically inexistent, such as hire another psychologist or more councilors. Or, they could create more programs to help with that altogether.

The basic thought on mental health for this subject of “Life in Prison” is that we need to invest in building and making more mental hospitals for the inmates and people that need them rather than just throwing them in jail. This issue started decades ago in our country when our government decided they were too costly, and those people would just be better off on the street with no help. If we took the time and put in the effort to help these people, we would see a significant drop in numbers in the jails and prisons, and we would actually be helping people and possibly rehabilitating them enough to have them join society once again and be a productive member of their community. In the “Handbook of Prison” Yvonne Jewkes gives us some stats originating in the UK. According to Jewkes, prisoners experience chronic physical health problems regularly, except the pattern of disease is different from the general public. 46% of adult male prisoners had some type of longstanding illness or disability, 10% reported having asthma or some other respiratory problems, and 15% reported having heart and circulatory illnesses, also that 84% of male prisoners were smokers, compared to the general public at only 26%. Looking at these stats, and assuming that the US isn’t far off from our sister country, I would say that it would be needed that we have a good and reliable working system of healthcare for the inmates that are in the custody of the state, seeing that it is the state’s responsibility to keep each inmate healthy and they are entitled to decent healthcare while they are being detained. Prisoners use the healthcare services a lot, specifically with medication. 53% of women and 34% of men reported being prescribed some type of medication. Research shows that prisoners consult doctors three times as much as an individual in the community, which just shows the amount of stress and mental instability your mind goes through in an environment like

that. What is often looked over, but not as commonly an issue with adequate healthcare, is the juvenile system. Pregnant women in prisons are somewhat common and a huge risk for the state who has custody of that pregnant woman. To be in prison is hard enough on your mind and body, let alone to be pregnant too. It is often hard for women to take their vitamins and get enough food when they are pregnant. It is especially difficult and very traumatic to go through labor in prison because you don't have your regular doctor to deliver your baby, you don't have your family there with you, and you often are looked over by the staff and don't get the updates you should. You also don't get to spend enough time to bond with your newborn baby. In my opinion, women who are pregnant should not be in prison, or they shouldn't be held with the general population and have to follow general population rules. Pregnant women could be put on house arrest for the duration of the pregnancy and given time to bond with the baby, and then transferred to prison after. This would also take the responsibility of making sure that inmate gets the check-ups and vitamins needed as well as enough food off the hands of the state. According to Carolyn Sufrin in "Jailcare: Finding the Safety Net for Women Behind Bars", between 1977 and 2007, there was an 832% increase in the number of women in prison, a rate twice that of men (Sufrin). This tells us that more children are being left without their mother to raise them more and more in our society, creating that cycle that we have been discovering. Children in custody often have mental issues and are coming off drugs which they need help with. They also have to have their immunization shots to keep up with.

Since we are on the topic of mental health in prisons, we have to talk about the physical health as well, and what healthcare is offered at prisons and jails.

Let's start discussing prison privatization. This is the first mistake we have as prisons, making the state have less control and responsibility on prisons. Privatization, or contracting out,

includes areas like escort services, prison programs, financing of prison construction, and electronic monitoring. When private investors are in charge of these things, certain rules can be looked over and inmates can get hurt. This privatization isn't a new concept according to Yvonne Jewkes in "Handbook on Prisons". It has been around since at least 1877. For example, "in the Middle Ages, prisons were technically owned by the Crown, but were largely unfunded and usually run by entrepreneurs" (Jewkes, 2007). In the beginning of America privatization, there were two main systems: contracting and leasing. The contracting system would drop off raw materials and pick up their completed product, giving them free labor and the prison would just label the act as a "learning opportunity program". The leasing program actually started in Kentucky in 1825, and it would differ from contracting by making it responsible for the care of prisoners as well as the management of the workers. If you try to look at the numbers of private prisons, it gets a little confusing. Technically, the US has the largest number of private prisons in the world, but since the US penal estate is so large, it is only 3 percent of the total number of prisons. Compare that to England and Wales and Scotland with a whopping 8 percent. While private prisons do have their downsides, as does everything, it also has upsides. The two biggest reasons that prison privatizations are so popular is because it lifts the state out of financial instability, and it keep the state prisons from being so crowded with too many inmates. Another benefit to the private sector is that they can build the facilities much faster than the state could, and they can also save money when it comes to staffing and purchasing. However, researchers have found no general pattern of cost savings in private prisons compared to the public sector prisons. When evaluating the quality in private sector prisons it is difficult because it is hard to create criteria for evaluation. Also, there is a lack of conclusion of evidence because the

evaluations tend to focus questions of economic efficiency. How the private sector works in accordance to the state is that:

“Accountability structures in private prisons are built on the contract agreed between the provider and the government. The provider is contracted to appoint a director who is the equivalent of a governor in the public sector. The director manages the prison and works to comply with all the contractual obligations including those of accountability. The director is not permitted to make decisions on disciplinary issues within the prison, that role being reserved for a civil servant appointed to the prison known as a ‘controller’. Again, this is the technical separation of determination and administration of punishment” (Jewkes, 2007).

One issue that is brought up about the privately-owned prisons is that the contractors or the companies that owns them usually has long lasting contracts with the state, usually 25 years or more, making it nearly impossible for the state to get out of that contract if something goes south. They also create issues with the state when it comes to rehabilitation. The state feels obligated to keep the prisons filled instead of releasing inmates so that the system can profit. This also ties in the judges, handing down longer and drawn out sentences.

Recently, Prisons have been taken under state control due to the abuses by poorly regulated private sector operators. The drive to re-privatize in the US began to fix the problems of inadequacy in the public prison system combined with serious funding problems (Jewkes, 2007). What is good for society and criminal justice may not be what is good for prison shareholders.

Prison Conditions & Abuse

A very popular subject people like to discuss when talking about prisons is the conditions in which people live in and how sanitary it isn't. This is important to take a look at because bad sanitations and conditions can be deadly, and it definitely isn't humane. There is a fine line between having to punish the inmate and not give them special treatment and providing basic human rights and needs. The prison conditions should not be an additional punishment, they have to be away from their family and the community for a specific amount of time, they shouldn't be punished more in an inhumane way. It ties into the fact that inmates will be more willing to make an effort to change and better themselves if their living conditions are decent. Most of the time, prisons are very overcrowded since imprisonment is America's main way of punishment. This means that there are often not enough beds for the prisoners. It is common that inmates will sleep on the ground with just a rubber pad and a small blanket. It is dangerous and hard to move around, interfering with the basic needs of space, when there are 30 or 40 people crammed into a 20-man cell. This also makes it difficult to take showers and stay sanitary with all the extra people. It also becomes a safety issue because with all those people so close to each other, there is bound to be fights. This creates a physical safety issue in which the state is responsible for keeping the inmates safe. It is the state's responsibility to "ensure hygiene and adequate healthcare in prisons. Poor sanitary conditions, inadequate lighting and ventilation, extremes of temperature, insect and rodent infestation and insufficient or non-existent personal hygiene supplies all have a negative impact on prisoners' health (Penal Reform International, n.d.). These issues haven't always been so big, prisons started getting way too overcrowded in the 1990s when the war on drugs started catching up with how many people the system was putting away. With it being overcrowded, it is common for inmates to be beaten, stabbed, raped,

and killed. If you ask me, that isn't very safe conditions. I'm not saying that prison is supposed to be fun or relaxing, people shouldn't be worrying about their lives, though. According to the website "eji", "Alabama's prisons are the most violent in the nation.



This picture shows an overcrowded prison in Alabama

The U.S. Department of Justice found in a statewide investigation that Alabama routinely violates the constitutional rights of people in its prisons, where homicide and sexual abuse is common, knives and dangerous drugs are rampant, and incarcerated people are extorted, threatened, stabbed, raped, and even tied up for days without guards noticing" (Prison Conditions, n.d.). eji gives us an example of just how scary and horrifyingly stressful it can get in prison. In 2010, an inmate named Rocrast Mack Jr. was in his cell in an Alabama prison. The prison staff was conducting a head count when one of the officers claims that Rocrast looked at her the wrong way and hit him with her baton. He then ran to the corner of his cell to get away from the officer beating him. He then swung back to get her off of him and at that time backup came because he was being combative. Another officer approached and ordered him to get on the ground, which he did. Then, five officers' drug him out of his cell and continued to beat him

because he wasn't being "compliant". One guard tried to intervene and was heard saying that if they did not stop, they were going to kill him. Rocrast was beaten by guards until his body became limp while dozens of inmates witnessed. They then drug his body to the shift office, smashed his head into the wall, and closed the door. Witnesses say a golf cart showed up awhile later and left the shift office with Rocrast's body hanging off the back with his neck appeared to be twisted. The inmates seeing this then started to protest and attempt to make phone calls for help. The prison staff disconnected the phones so nobody could make calls out. Rocrast sustained fractures to his ribs, arms, legs, and skull. When he was taken to the local hospital, he was already brain dead. The autopsy concluded that he died of multiple severe blunt force trauma. To have witnessed that action as a prisoner would be so much stress to scar someone for the rest of their life. This is a prime example of what prisoners need to be protected from. For this to happen as often as it does, nothing is being done about it. Those kind of prison conditions are unbearable. How is anyone supposed to be rehabilitating when they are even too scared to go to sleep at night without a guard or an unguarded prisoner attacking them.

There are a lot of violence between the inmates as well, except a lot of those fights could be avoided by simple changes. It makes people crazy when you are surrounded by people all day and you can't get away or have your own space. People get aggravated and annoyed, when that happens people usually snap. If we were able to make the prisons a little bigger, since they are holding more people, I think it would bring the aggressiveness down and the moral up. But, if we're talking about how to get the prisons less crowded, we can start by releasing the non-violent criminals out and into a program that would actually benefit them as well as the taxpayers. According to the Human Rights Watch Prison Project, "Fifty-three percent of all state inmates were incarcerated for nonviolent crimes, while criminal justice policies increased the

length of prison sentences and diminished the availability of parole.” (Prisons in the United States of America, n.d.). They add onto the fact that many of these jails are understaffed, like we mentioned previously. Without enough staff, it is very hard to control the inmates you have locked up in a cell that’s too small in the first place. “Severe overcrowding coupled with inadequate staffing in many jails created dangerous conditions reflected in the numbers of inmates injured in fights, who experienced seizures and other medical emergencies without proper attention, and who managed to escape.” (Prisons in the United States of America, n.d.).

another issue that is overlooked because these are criminals we are talking about and society just looks the other way when it comes to how we should punish people. I would call it cruel conditions to lock someone in a cell alone, without any windows or light, for 23 hours of the day. Prisons will isolate inmates they believe to be too dangerous for the general population. They leave them in there often for a month or longer. Sometimes they won’t let the inmate back into general population until that inmate is not aggressive and will comply to commands. But, how is someone supposed to act normal and civilized when they are being treated like a wild animal that has rabies. You could put someone in that cell that is completely normal and isn’t dangerous or aggressive at all and would be crazy within a few days of isolation. You can’t expect someone to get better mentally or physically in conditions like that. They will often throw the mentally ill inmates in these isolated cells for being “disruptive”, when really, they are acting disruptive because they haven’t received their medication they need. The isolation doesn’t help that inmate but makes their situation worse.

The conditions of the food that the inmates get to eat are unbelievable. Most jails and prisons serve the inmates two meals a day but is usually isn’t enough. The national standards at state and local facilities are governed by a cluster of state laws, local policies, and court

decisions. So, each state has different little laws about what inmates need to eat. Some states require inmates to be fed three times within 24 hours, some require low-fat or sodium diets, some require a certain number of calories for each meal. But, all jails and prisons must have a licensed dietician look over their menu in order for that facility to be accredited by the American Correctional Association. From many investigators, there have been accusations that the food that is served and bought from private sources (because outsourcing and private sanctions are becoming more popular), is often moldy or even has maggots in it. I think you could ask anyone, and they would tell you that does not meet basic human rights and the needs for sustainable nutrition. A popular outsource food company named Aramark is used all over the country. There have been tons of allegations brought up against Aramark. In fact, they were reported 240 times in 2014 in Ohio for shorting inmates' food. In Michigan, the same issues adding to tainted food, unsanitary conditions, and health violations (Katz, 2016).

Being locked up in a prison for a long time, there are a few delicacies that would keep the violence down and the moral of the inmate up. I don't think anyone would disagree when I say that the inmate's meals should be decent enough to keep them from losing weight. No one is saying inmates should get a four-course meal or a five-star buffet, but it definitely should not have maggots in it or be rotten with food poisoning.



On the left you see what a prison tray should look like. On the right you see what a prison tray usually looks like

If the food didn't seem like abuse, let's talk about actual mental and physical abuse that prisoners receive often while in prison. Once again, of course you are supposed to be punished for the crime that you have been convicted of, which is why anyone is in prison. But, there is a fine line between punishment for your crimes and abuse. We touched on this briefly on just how fast things can get out of hand and an inmate is killed. Most of the time the line is stepped over by the guards who let their power get to their heads a little too much. When you are put into a position of power, you either take that responsibility and do what you are supposed to, or it changes you and you start making decisions you wouldn't normally make. Most of us has heard of the Zimbardo experiment, where a professor took a group of volunteers, his students, and placed them inside a simulated prison to see how the roles change the individual. The experiment was shortly shut down because of how aggressive the simulated guards became.

The reason it is so easy for some guards to let that power go to their head is because prison feels like a totally different world. All the rules are different in there versus the outside world. In prison you are treated like an animal, the worst of the worst. Just imagine being addressed by a number instead of your name, like some cattle. It's just dehumanizing, it doesn't help anyone get closer to rehabilitation, which is what prison is supposed to do. You are often stripped down in front of everyone and searched, which is also very embarrassing and humiliating. What is being seen more often now is cases where inmates are beaten and abused while strapped down or restrained by officers. There is a lot of hatred seen in prison from the corrections officers. People often justify the officers' actions by saying situations wouldn't

happen if inmates would just do what they are told or if they would just behave. That's not always the situation though, a lot of the times certain guards will pick on an inmate because they don't like the way he looked at him or even just because the inmate was standing in the wrong place. The reason situations start to get worse and go downhill is because one guard will start picking on an inmate and then tell the other guards that the inmate did so and so to deserve it, so the guards will believe the officer and back him up, even begin to help beat and torture that inmate, even though they have no proof that inmate did anything wrong, assuming the inmate deserves the beating he is enduring (which is illegal anyways). Once things get too out of hand and the inmate gets seriously injured or ends up dead, the guards will start trying to cover their tracks and hide what happened, which, surprisingly enough, they often get away with it because the prison doesn't want to get reprimanded for it. You can see an example of this with the case of John McMillon. According to the "New York Times", McMillon, who had been in prison for many years, suffered from mental illnesses and had some disciplinary problems over the years. He was 67 when he was involved in a struggle with the guards at the Great Meadow Correctional Facility in New York. He was attacking and resisting with the guards when he suddenly had a heart attack, according to the autopsy. The inmates who witnessed it told a different story. They explained that McMillon was leaving from dinner and asked to go back to his cell, he was behaving erratically but not violently. In response to this, a female guard went up to him and punched him in the face. Other guards jumped in and started to beat him and choke him as well. (Ransom, 2019).

Abuse gets even worse if you are a transgender inmate or part of the LGBT community. Transgender inmates are abused by both the staff and other inmates. When the transgender inmates are moved for their protection, it is usually in a solitary confinement cell, which is more

torture than being with the general population. If you are transgender in a prison, chances are you are going to be beaten into submission to be part of the gangs in prisons.

Abuse for women in prison occurs so often that people don't even talk about it anymore. It is usually sexual abuse more than physical abuse or mental abuse, but it all still happens. The women in prison gets raped and sexually abused by guards often, the reason it isn't reported much is because the guards threaten the inmates to beat them if they talk or they will throw them in solitary confinement. The guards will also take their phone privileges away so they cannot tell their family or anyone what happened. Sometimes the guards will bribe the inmates to do sexual favors in return for special privileges. Sometimes, not very often, an inmate will become pregnant from a rape they endured while in prison. In the "Miami Herald" they tell us a story about this happening. In a Florida prison, Anquanette Woodall was cleaning a bathroom in the kitchen, she says this is a popular place for the guards to force the inmates to because there were no cameras then. As she was cleaning the bathroom, officer Travis Hinson comes in, he told her to pull down her pants, at which point she froze there in fear. He then shoved her against the wall and raped her. He told her she better not say anything because he knew where her parents lived. Knowing that he could hurt her family, she kept quiet. She figured she wouldn't be believed anyways since she was an inmate. When it came out that she was pregnant, he started a rumor that she had been sleeping with many officers for money, which was not the truth. Once she told the truth, they transferred her for her safety. She gave birth to a baby girl in 2017. Hinson is serving a 5-year sentence for raping Woodall and for a separate aggravated battery charge. (Penney, 2019).

One of the biggest reasons there is so much violence in prisons isn't only because of the guards, I will say that. It is the enormous amounts of gang activity in prison. The issue with this

is that most inmates join a gang for the protection from the other gangs and guards. Maybe if gangs were eliminated from prison, everyone in there would be a lot safer? But that is almost impossible to do, considering anyone can just make a new gang and gain following from the inmates around them. According to the Department of Justice,

“Prison gangs are criminal organizations that originated within the penal system and they have continued to operate within correctional facilities throughout the United States. Prison gangs are also self-perpetuating criminal entities that can continue their operations outside the confines of the penal system. Typically, a prison gang consists of a select group of inmates who have an organized hierarchy and who are governed by an established code of conduct. Prison gangs vary in both organization and composition, from highly structured gangs such as the Aryan Brotherhood and Nuestra Familia to gangs with a less formalized structure such as the Mexican Mafia (La Eme). Prison gangs generally have fewer members than street gangs and Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs (OMGs) and are structured along racial or ethnic lines. Nationally, prison gangs pose a threat because of their role in the transportation and distribution of narcotics. Prison gangs are also an important link between drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs), street gangs and OMGs, often brokering the transfer of drugs from DTOs to gangs in many regions. Prison gangs typically are more powerful within state correctional facilities rather than within the federal penal system.” (Jaffe, 2015).

What will often happen when you are arrested is the staff will ask you a series of questions to see where you need to be placed. They will place you in the cell with more aggressive inmates if they find out you are affiliated with a certain gang. If you make it to prison,

they will place you with specific groups of aggressive inmates so that there isn't as much fighting. For example, if you are black, you will be with black inmates, same if you are white, because gangs often are represented by what race you are.

Often times, the gangs have more power in the prison than the guards do because they have so much influence on the outside with their gangs. They will hire guards to work for them and the guards get paid doing it, or they are threatened into doing it. The gang on the outside will give that officer contraband to bring into the prison to be distributed and sold. What the guards will also be ordered to do is place certain inmates in the cells they want to be in. or if a gang has an issue with an individual, they'll tell the guard to make sure that inmate is where the gang on the inside can take him out and kill him without being caught. A lot of the inmates that are killed by a gang is because that inmate had belonged to their gang at one time, but you aren't allowed to leave your gang. So, if you decide you want to leave your gang, the odds are they will kill you for it. This is why inmates choose their affiliation wisely, because that decision is for life, even when you leave prison. Once you choose the gang, they will make sure everyone knows who you belong to by forcing you to get tattooed somewhere visible.

Prison abuse happens every day in the US and isn't getting the attention it needs to stop it. Some things that would help keep the violence down in prisons would be to be stricter on the hiring aspect of guards. Prisons will hire anyone who hasn't been involved with the law in any serious way, that doesn't mean just anyone should do the job. They are hired to watch over the prisoners as well as keeping them safe. We should watch out for the individuals who aren't great at holding power. We should also start treating inmates like they are humans instead of animals. We have to stop dehumanizing people and listen to what they have to say regardless of their background.

Guards and Staff

People often forget about the prison guards and staff and what they go through because it isn't as bad as what the prisoners go through. Society likes to look over the guards and staff because we often only hear of the corrupt guards that every prison has. People often have no sympathy for the guards and staff because they did choose to take that job and they can choose to leave when they want. But, nevertheless, let's discuss what they go through mentally and physically, and the safety and training they learn.

The main job of a prison guard is to enforce the rules, prevent fights and escapes, and maintain order. They respond to emergencies like riots, fires, and physical fights. They search for drugs and weapons, control and transport inmates, and inspect the mail and visitors coming in. It isn't hard to become a prison guard, in fact almost anyone could get hired, which is quite scary. That is one of the issues in the correction system. You only need a high school diploma; some college experience may be needed to go up in ranks. Once you are interviewed, you have to pass a background check, take a physical exam, and then you are hired, and you get trained on the job. Prison guards learn self-defense, firearms, first aid, and how to restrain someone. They also learn the legal restrictions, institutional policies and procedures. They can also learn specific training if they are on a specific team such as a tactical response team. It is also important for guards to have professional experience, good judgement, self-discipline, negotiation skills, and have physical strength. (Criminal Justice Degree Schools, n.d.).

Working in a prison is very mentally draining, as it is for the inmates who live there for a time of their lives. In "Working Behind the Wall: Mental Health of Correctional- Based Staff" by Bonnie Sultan, she explains to us how the prison environment takes a toll on everyone who passes through there. You can't help but to notice the odor of bodies being held together and the

noises of people yelling and screaming. The feeling of violence and unhappiness lures all around you. You have to be on guard at all times in a place like that. In recent research that was conducted after talking to many correctional staff, there are high rates of depression, feelings of hopelessness, and thoughts of suicide. Sultan states “Twenty-five percent of correctional officers reported feeling a lack of emotional responsiveness, 20 percent reported an inability to find pleasure in anything, and 13 percent report hopelessness and/or worthlessness. It was found that approximately 50 percent of participants reported having no energy or being excessively tired; 44 percent reported frequent headaches, with 12 percent having monthly migraines. “Almost 20% of the [respondents] reported that they felt blue or depressed at least once to a few times a month.”. In terms of suicidal thoughts, “3% reported thoughts of ending their lives at least once a month, and an additional 6% report such thoughts 1-2 times in the past six months”. The research conducted shows that working in a violent environment has serious repercussions on the minds and bodies of the staff. A lot of the issues that prison staff has is because of the circadian rhythm, or the internal clock that controls sleep and arousal. Some research shows that shift work impacts the lives of correctional staff and their families because they aren’t home at a regular time. The parents are going to sleep when their kids are waking up and going to school. Families miss dinners together and time together at home. If the circadian rhythm is off, it will affect your tiredness, irritability, and nausea. Sultan states “As the research shows, for those working in corrections, family life can become difficult to manage, and the general population can come to seem further away. The prison world becomes your world, if you let it. Without intentional balance and creating time for self-care, we see that correctional workers become prisoners to the system, too”.

When you are a prison guard, you have to create a balance between being a correctional officer and being an average citizen when you are not working. As an officer, they have to set the tone, schedule, and movement of inmates. On the inside, they are the eyes, ears, and muscles of the structure. On the other side of the wall, they are just another person in society that can't control the environment around them.

Some correctional facilities use rotations to keep the staff from being burnt out, which is very effective. When people show signs of burnout or disinterest, they'll be moved to a different assignment. This keeps fatigue away as well as laziness or carelessness which can be dangerous in a place like that.

According to the "American Addiction Centers", the one opinion that everyone assumes is that correctional officers can never be weak. This creates tension between the staff and the guards feel like they can't speak up if they do have an issue or is feeling down. Because of this, guards are exhausted, traumatized, and often ignored or shunned if they express any weariness of the work they are required to do. Because of this, correctional officers have higher rates of PTSD than even military veterans at times. This affects the prisoners because guards will often take their frustrations and anxieties out on them since they aren't expressing their issues in a healthy way. (Corrections Officer, 2019).



American Addiction Centers explains how every day is like going into battle for a corrections officer. Because there are more inmates than there are officers, the inmates could take over at any time, and the officers have to be ready for that no matter what. With that thought in the back of your head for the whole 8-hour shift, it makes you think differently, see situations differently, and even react to things differently, usually not in a good way. With an environment like that, officers are expected to just swallow that stress and not allow it to strain your health in the process. The guards will often have a hard time sleeping because of nightmares from what they see. They'll often have to put themselves in between two people trying to kill each other, or stop suicide attempts, and if the attempts were successful, they'd have to clean up the mess from that. (Corrections Officer, 2019).

Another group of staff of the corrections system that is looked over is the healthcare providers. A lot of these healthcare providers are volunteers, if they are paid it is not much. They are often not very liked though, the prisoners often feel like they aren't heard enough and that they are not getting the treatment they deserve, creating resentment. The correctional guards often resent the health workers and the prisoners for a few different reasons. Kenneth

Appelbaum, James Hickey, and Ira Packer explains this more in “The Role of Correctional Officers in Multidisciplinary Mental Health Care in Prisons”,

“Many commentators have described how the disparity in ideologies between security staff and mental health staff often results in conflict between the two groups. For example, some correctional staff view mental health providers as excessively soft, gullible, and coddling of inmates. They perceive mental health problems as character flaws. Some officers resent the fact that inmates have access to free services that many citizens in the community lack, or view mental health care as an undeserved—if not unneeded—service for inmates. They also may perceive treatment as protecting inmates from the consequences of their behavior” (Appelbaum, Hickey, & Packer, 2001).

There is truth to both sides however, because health care providers can be naïve and don’t know what to look for in inappropriate behaviors by the inmates. Correctional officers can be too harsh because they are used to seeing the bad and are numb to the inmates. Nevertheless, both health staff workers and correctional officers have common goals. Appelbaum, Hickey, and Packer states. “When correctional officers share appropriate information with clinicians and assist in the management of inmates who have mental disorders, both the quality of treatment and the safety of the correctional environment improve. Mutual respect, proper orientation and training, and ongoing communication and cooperation provide the foundation for meaningful contributions to mental health care by correctional officers” (Appelbaum, Hickey, & Packer, 2001). It is often easy to forget about what the correctional staff goes through on a daily basis as well as the prisoners. If we are trying to understand the concepts and issues of the correctional system, we must not forget any working piece of the clock. We

have to keep in mind of the staff and their hardships so we can make the system a better working piece of equipment and use the system to help people rather than keep a society down.

Psychological Effects

We've touched on how being in a prison psychologically effects your brain, but it is a huge part of being in a prison. We are going to touch up on it more, talk about the long-term effects, short term effects, who it effects specifically, suicide, and what is offered to help.

Long term prison confinement creates traumatic and stressful amounts of anxiety that often stays with the individual when they are released. According to Peter Suedfeld and others in "The effects of prison confinement", the feelings of hostility and self-esteem are increased as well. What they have found in studying the long-term psychological effects on prisoners is that feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression goes up when they arrive at the prison. Their blood pressure things of this nature go up with those feelings. They found that after a year and a half of being in prison, those feelings level out for a while, until the individual is about to be released, in which levels rise again. (Paulus, 1992). The way long-term psychological effects happen is because when inmates arrive at a prison, they are to throw everything they know about society and step into a new society with different rules and ways of living. You have to institutionalize your brain in order to survive prison. In doing this, your brain is changed, from the way to perceive situations to the way you react to them. When you leave the prison institution you are expected to pick up where you left off and not allow the time away from the real society effect you. The hardest part for many ex-convicts is going back to their families and trying to be the normal person they remember you as. A big issue ex-cons have is sleeping at night. They are used to loud noises and people acting crazy dangerous at night. A lot of people say that the quietness keeps them up when they get back home, it makes them weary and scared to fall

asleep. It is hard for ex-cons to form back to society even with the little things like walking, being in a crowd, and understanding freedom again. For an ex-con, you can see them often walking with their hands behind them and they will often stand near the wall as if in a line as if they are still in prison. Crowds are difficult too because they can get loud which creates anxiety, it also creates anxiety for people to be behind an ex-con where they cannot see them. The freedom part is probably the most noticeable difference. Ex-cons have to relearn themselves that you don't have to ask permission to do things anymore such as going to the bathroom, being able to eat, or when to stand up or sit down.

Short-term psychological effects all happen when you are incarcerated and not after you leave the facility. Some short-term effects even disappear when you have been there long enough. In "The effects of prison confinement", the authors explain that prison confinement itself doesn't act as a major stressor, that the "elevated indications of stress in the beginning of the prison term may reflect emotional reactions to the disruption of a prior lifestyle, family separation, and the uncertainties involved in being a resident in a new environment". (Paulus, 1992). The bulk of short-term psychological effects include increased elevation in anxiety, fear, anger, and depression. Anxiety is the biggest change because it changes so often in a prison. Things that raise your anxiety level is when you switch cells because you don't know anyone in there or what they are capable of, walking into any new room, such as the cafeteria or recreational areas, for the same reasons. A big reason inmates' anxiety and depression does not go down while incarcerated is because it is difficult for them to think about the future beyond prison. It is hard for them to pull their heads up out of their current situation because it is such a change in their previous living style. Anger is elevated and becomes an issue for some because boredom kicks in and the isolation they are in becomes too much to handle. Anger also appears

when inmates do not have enough personal space or alone time. Studies have shown that anxiety and anger is decreased when someone has their own cell. Another interesting find that they made in “ The effects of prison confinement” is people that come from a better background with more money, better jobs, and a better education find it harder to cope with prison life, and since they come from a better background, it makes them the minority in prison populations, making anxiety and stress levels rise. People who come from lower income backgrounds, less education, and poorer jobs, find it easier to cope with prison life, making them the majority. (Paulus, 1992).

When inmates experience too much anxiety and stress, it often turns to depression. When an inmate experiences too much depression they turn to suicide. Suicide rates are quite high in prison populations and has been increasing. According to Daniel Anasseril in “Preventing Suicide in Prison: A collaborative Responsibility of Administrative, Custodial, and Clinical Staff”, more than half of all inmates that commit suicide in prison are between 25 and 34 years old. They often have no family support or spouse support. The young prisoners under 21 are at risk 8 times more than the average inmate because their brains have a hard time getting past the situation at hand and seeing the future to come. Anasseril gives an excellent explanation on preventative measures.

“As a suicide-prevention measure, suicidal inmates should not be placed in segregation units, because such placement does not promote improved mental health. The National Commission of Correctional Health Care Prison Standards stipulate that suicidal inmates should not be housed or left alone unless constant supervision can be maintained. If it is necessary to house an inmate alone, provision should be made for uninterrupted supervision and human contact.”

He also explains that suicide rates are higher in prison because 8-15 percent of inmates have a serious mental illness. And, like we have mentioned earlier, it is often difficult for inmates to get the medicine they need. (Anasseril, 2006). Over 80 percent of suicides in prison are by hanging because it is the easiest to accomplish. The only thing an inmate needs is their bed sheet and something to tie it to. Death occurs within five to seven minutes, making it difficult for prison staff to prevent. (Anasseril, 2006).

Suicide prevention needs to be increased in prisons. The first step to accomplish this is to train the staff on how to prevent it better and what to look for in an inmate who might be considering suicide. Prevention programs are great to implement in prisons. Anasseril states, "A well-designed suicide- prevention program incorporates all aspects of identification, assessment, evaluation, treatment, preventive intervention, and training of all medical, mental health, and correctional staff. (Anasseril, 2006). The biggest restraint from implementing this in all prisons is the lack of qualified professionals.

Some administrative steps need to be taken to prevent more suicides as well. We need to change our policies from defending and protecting the prison and its staff when a suicide occurs to policies that ensure good clinical care and prevention. We need to add more suicide assessment and observation, provide medication and counseling, and make sure those individuals go to a mental facility if needed.

Unfortunately, the inmate's family can have psychological effects, especially children. When a child's mother or father is taken from them and placed in a prison, it affects that child for the rest of their lives, even if it can't be seen with the naked eye. A child will start to have sleeping issues, they will be in constant fear that the rest of their loved ones will be taken away any second. The child will develop anxiety because they are now worrying about the future,

when they never used to worry about those kinds of things. They can start worrying about food and bills at a very young age if their family is struggling since their family member is incarcerated. This can make a child mentally grow up faster than normal, creating long-term psychological effects. It also scars a child when they are taken to the prison facility to visit their loved one. It is very challenging for someone to explain to a child that they cannot touch or hug their mom or dad behind the glass. The child can get very overwhelmed with the emotions they are feeling as well as the environment. The environment alone looks scary enough. The child can end up growing up to resent that parent, or even the justice system as a whole, and sending them to a path of illegal activities because they are acting out.

Fortunately, there are programs and counseling to help with an individual's long-term psychological effects once they are released. They also have therapy and group treatments for the whole family. When an inmate is released, they can seek further treatment if they need it with therapy. They can seek more treatment if they need help with drugs or anger issues as well. It is recommended for a newly released inmate to get some counseling and attend AA/NA meetings to stay on track. These also help create a support group around you to stay on track and also talk to people who might be experiencing the same long-term psychological effects as you.

However, we need to create more programs for people who are released from jails and prisons because there aren't enough. A lot of the time, what happens when someone is released is, they don't have a support system and they are trying to juggle everything on top of trying to form back into a society that they were snatched from. More programs would keep ex-cons from reentering jails. It would keep them from committing suicide after release as well.

Recidivism

One of the biggest parts of the prison system that is mentioned often is Recidivism. Recidivism simplistically is the tendency for a convicted criminal to reoffend. The goal, idealistically, for all prisons and their rules they set in place, is to keep recidivism down. A good way to look at data from recidivism is to break it into categories such as rates focused on drug offenders, youth, sex offenders, or women.

In my personal opinion, the rates that research has given us for drug offenders is inaccurate. This is because research will show that the percentage of federal offenders that are in for drugs increased from 25% in the 80's to 60% in 1996. This may be true, but the reason there were more convicted drug offenses is because the "War on Drugs" was going on at this time, and the government thought that if they send a drug offender to prison for a longer sentence then it would deter them from doing it again, to keep recidivism down. However, research shows that increasing the severity of a punishment for a crime will do little to nothing for recidivism. The reason the government puts such a harsh punishment on a drug crime is because they think it will scare people from doing the same thing. Cassia Spohn and David Holleran explain how we measure recidivism in "The Effect of Imprisonment on Recidivism Rates of Felony Offenders: A Focus on Drug Offenders" very well:

"As numerous commentators have pointed out, an inherent problem in measuring recidivism is the lack of complete information on "every crime committed and who committed it" (Maltz, 1984:22). Recidivism data are based on crimes that are reported to the police and that, depending on the operational definition used, lead to arrest, conviction, or imprisonment. Because not all

crimes are reported to the police and not all reported crimes result in an arrest, recidivism data are necessarily incomplete. Studies that measure recidivism, then, actually are measuring officially recorded recidivism. Because official data reflect the policies and practices of local law enforcement agencies and are sensitive to changes in these policies and practices.” (Holleran & Spohn, 2002).

The main issue with the way they gather this information doesn't take in consideration the arrests that are used that does not have sufficient cause and are not charged and convicted of a new offense. These are still included in the research information when they shouldn't be.

I think that recidivism is so high because we aren't using the right punishment or deterrence for drug crimes. When someone has a drug addiction, they need help getting off that drug. They need to go to a rehabilitation facility and not a prison facility. Other than huge drug cartels and distributioners, these drug offenders aren't hurting anyone but themselves, so why would we put them in prison with violent offenders? If they aren't a threat to the public, then they should be able to go to a facility that will actually help them get away from the problem they have. That will keep recidivism down, not long and harsh sentences.

A great program that our county and many others in the country have established is a different set of rules and court for drug offenses called “drug court”. Drug court has a whole different building and workers for it that volunteer their time. Drug court acts as a recovery program in which teaches individuals how to get a job, budget money, earn their GED, eat healthy, get on the medications needed, how to be responsible and reliable. The “Drug Court team” will also help the addicts get into their own apartment. The program is very structural and intense which is why so many drug offenders like it. Most drug offenders never have had a

structured life, this gives them the beginning of that and helps them get on their feet without drugs for the first time. Some rules that Drug Court sets in place is mandatory drug testing several times a week, mandatory NA meetings, random house inspections, reports to case managers and councilors. The court sets up phases from 1 to 4. Phase 1 goes to court every week to monitor progress. People in phase 1 reports to their case manager every week as well as start a job and work at least 30 hours a week. They attended four self-help meetings a week and one education group meeting a week. They attend a group meeting with treatment specialists. They are drug tested 3-4 times a week. You have to be in phase 1 for at least two months before you can go up. People in phase 2 is in this phase for eight months. You report to your case manager and go to court once every two weeks. Drug tests are permitted two times a week. Phase three lasts eight months as well. When you get to phase three you start working on your GED. You see your case manager and go to court once every three weeks. It goes down to one therapy group a week but still has to go to four self-help meetings a week. People in phase 3 get drug tested once a week at random. People in phase four is a four-month program and is called "after care". You only have to do two self-help meetings a week. Report to case manager and court once a month. Drug tests are permitted only once a month. After you graduate from drug court their felonies can be expunged, this is called diversion.

Recidivism rates for the youth are quite high as you would expect because they are young and wild. Most kids who find themselves in trouble like the attention, both the good and bad, and want more of it. It is often for a kid to find themselves in trouble with the law if their homelife is bad or if their parents are also incarcerated or often get in trouble with the law themselves. According to Jeff Latimer in "A meta-analytic examination of youth and delinquency, family treatment, and recidivism", he states that "Negative parent-child relationships in general and

poor parenting skills in particular have been identified as significant risk factors for criminal behavior in youth. More serious family dysfunction, such as parental criminality and family violence, has also been associated with subsequent delinquency and adult criminality” (Latimer, 2001). Many youths that end up in a detention center often do not have the structure they should at home. They don’t have anyone in their life to look up to and follow their footsteps. If their parents are in the picture, their parents are usually in and out of the prison system, in which their children will follow in their footsteps. The delinquent youths usually don’t have anyone in their lives to show them structure and how to control life. With programs put in place, this helps many of these kids. After school programs, Oscar Cross, and the YMCA were created to give less fortunate children a safe place to go and it gives the children adults in their lives that actually care about their well-being. The staff at these places often step into the parental roles for these kids. You can see recidivism rates stay low in children who go to these programs.



These programs also offer counselors and therapists to talk to if the youth feel like they need to. This is especially helpful because many kids don’t have the money or insurance to get their own therapist. For many children, this is the only resource they have available to them. This is the only place that adults can find out important things about their homelife such as if the kid’s

parents are in trouble with the law, if the kids are getting into trouble themselves, or even if there is sexual abuse happening. These programs save lives and keeps recidivism down.

Another big group that researchers like to keep an eye on and learn how to keep recidivism down is in sex offenders. Research shows that recidivism in sex offenders is high. This is because we haven't found a great way to help deter these people. We only have a handful of ways to help these people from committing violent sex offenses. Most of these ways include some type of surgery or medicine, which is difficult to force upon a person with laws set in place. It is difficult to force an offender to go to a clinical treatment program considering there are very few in our country. It is also difficult to monitor that offender when they are released. Unlike a drug offender on probation, there isn't a test we can give to a sex offender to tell us if he has committed a crime recently or not. We can only place a monitor bracelet on him so it will beep if he gets too close to a public park or school, but eventually that bracelet will be taken off, so there is nothing stopping that convict of committing that crime again. The only other thing we can do is put his name on the sex offender registry, but the public has to take it upon themselves to look it up and be aware as to where these sex offenders live. this doesn't protect the public of random attacks from these offenders. (Furby, Weinritt, & Blackshaw).

Female offenders' recidivism is slightly lower than males. This is because many females have children to take care of. This gives them a reason to do good and stay out of trouble for someone other than themselves. The three main reasons women find themselves in trouble is because of the drugs they are addicted to, sexual abuse they have endured, or the financial instability they are often in. According to Michael Reisig, Kristy Holtfreter, and Merry Morash:

“physical and sexual abuse during and after childhood affects a greater proportion of women offenders and abuse is linked to subsequent offending. Substance abuse is another key factor in many women offenders' lives. About one-half of all women offenders describe themselves as "a daily user of drugs". Economic disadvantage is also common. When compared to male offenders, women are less likely to be employed on a full-time basis prior to incarceration, and far more likely to depend on public assistance for survival. The financial difficulties faced by many women offenders are complicated by their role as primary caregiver to dependent children. Overall, the evidence supports the contention that a large portion of female criminality is connected to victimization (both as a child and during adulthood), abuse and addiction to alcohol and other drugs, and poverty.” (Holtfreter, Morash, & Reisig, 2006).

Recidivism can be lowered if we change the way we look at prisons and stop putting long sentences on drug offenders. Recidivism will be lowered when we put in place certain programs to help specific problems for people.

Education

Luckily, education classes are offered in most prisons and jails. This gives the inmates a healthy escape from their reality while improving their footing when they get out. Since many of the inmates have never graduated high school, prisons and jails offer GED programs. They have programs to where the inmates can work at their own pace and not have to stress about deadlines as much. Inmates can also earn certifications for a variety of things while imprisoned. Some prisons offer programs to earn certifications in HVAC, skilled trades, culinary arts, IT coding and

programming, heavy equipment operation, custodial engineering, car repairs, and many more. (Frolander-Ulf & Yates, 2001).

The reason these education programs are one of the most important working pieces in a prison is because it is there to actually help the inmates and improve their lives and help them make better choices. The point of a prison sentence is to punish and rehabilitate that person. The rehabilitation part often gets looked over. But, with these programs, it shines a light on that very important part of the whole point of prison. Offering programs to inmates keep the inmates busy and out of other activities they might be doing otherwise like fighting or gang activity. It also reminds them every day that they will get out eventually and this program will help them on the outside make better choices this time around so they don't end up back in prison, hopefully. (Harlow, 2003).

Families

The families of the inmates have been mentioned briefly, but they are impacted more than people like to admit. It scars children for life when one of their parents are taken from them and they can't see their parent for weeks or months. And if they do get taken to visit them, all they remember is a cold, scary place with strangers and they had to see their parent incarcerated behind a glass wall. George Kiser explains why it is important to look at the families of incarcerated inmates: "First, without understanding family influence, it is impossible to understand why some prisoners committed their crimes. Second, if the Nation is as concerned about the victims of crimes as it professes, we must recognize that those victims include many families of inmates. Third, there is considerable evidence that inmates' family relationships affect their potential for rehabilitation. And fourth, prisoners' attitudes may influence the law-abiding

attitudes of other family members, particularly young children”. (Kiser, 1991). FWD.us, a criminal justice and immigration reform advocacy group surveyed more than 4000 people with staggering results about families of inmates. What it showed is more Americans are impacted by the justice system than thought previously. “One in four American adults has had a sibling incarcerated. One in five has had a parent sent to jail or prison. One in eight has had a child incarcerated. Today, 6.5 million adults have an immediate family member currently in jail or prison”. (Half of Americans Have Family Members Who Have Been Incarcerated, 2018). Their research also shows that black people are 50 percent more likely to have a family member in jail than white people. This is because of that cycle the American people just can’t get away from. Because black people have been the victims of injustice and poverty since this country has been around, the start of that cycle for them has been around longer than white peoples as well. We have seen results and evidence that when a young black man’s father has been incarcerated for most of his life and has grown up watching that, not having a father figure in his life, he will, more than likely, follow those footsteps. So will his son, and his son after that and so on.

This cycle is also prominent in poor communities. Eji states “Adults with household incomes of less than \$25,000 per year are 61 percent more likely than adults with household incomes of more than \$100,000 to have had a family member incarcerated, and three times more likely to have had a family member incarcerated for one year or longer. The seven states with the highest incarceration rates are all in the South. Forty-nine percent of adults living in the South and West have had an immediate family member incarcerated for at least one night in jail or prison, compared to the national average of 45 percent. The report says people living in the South or West are almost 60 percent more likely to experience family incarceration than those

living in the Northeast”. (Half of Americans Have Family Members Who Have Been Incarcerated, 2018).

Incarcerated families aren't only affected mentally, but financially too. It costs the family of the incarcerated inmate bail, court fees, and fines. It also costs to talk to the inmate and to go visit them. The family has to replace the lost income that the inmates was bringing home for the family, in other ways. Losing the primary source of income can be devastating for a family.

Luckily, there are some organizations that help families with loved ones incarcerated with a variety of things like Assisting Families of Inmates (AFOI). AFOI is a provides opportunities for regular meaningful visitation, referrals to community resources, and vital services that help families cope with incarceration and prepare for release. (Assisting Families of Inmates (AFOI), 2020). It is important not to forget about the inmate's families when thinking about rehabilitation. To get ahead of the cycle, we have to work with the inmate's family as well as the inmates.

Probation and Parole

The last, and most important, part to discuss and understand about life in prison is probation and parole. In my opinion, this is the most important because this is the part in prison where the inmates are released into society to see if they are able to be functioning, rehabilitated citizens of society. Parole is the release of an offender from prison earlier than the regular release date, usually for good behavior. Probation is similar; however, it usually occurs instead of going to prison. The goal is to rehabilitate an offender and guide them back into society while minimizing the likelihood of committing another crime. Once an inmate does a certain percentage of their sentence, they are eligible for parole. So, the inmate will go before the parole

board and confess their case as to why they would be a good pick for parole. The board will look at what the inmate has done with his time while incarcerated. They'll see what classes they have attended, see if they have worked on earning their GED, and see if they have gotten in trouble or into any fights. If accepted, the board will release the inmate on parole for different amounts of time between one year to ten years. Some rules are set in place to make sure the former inmate stays on the right path. Those include random drug tests, mandatory education classes, anger management, parenting classes, must have a safe home environment, no guns in the home, must have at least a part time job, and in some cases, such as sex offenders, they can't go within 200 ft of schools or parks. If a parolee fails to live up to these conditions, they are sent back into prison to finish their sentence.

Probation and parole are a very important part of rehabilitation from prison because it gives the inmate a chance to prove themselves as a good, functioning member of society.



From reading this paper, you can see that there are many working pieces to this machine we call the prison system. There aren't enough workers to make the system function properly and our society has ignored it so long that it is almost unbelievable when so many of us are affected by it every day; if you pay taxes, this affects you too. The biggest issue with our system is that we throw people in jail and prison for minor charges for things like drugs and give them long sentences when prison isn't where that they need, instead we need to make rehabilitation centers and more mental health facilities for these individuals. Putting them in prison just overpopulates the prisons and creates an unsafe environment for all of the inmates. We need better policies in place to protect the people in the prison system and treat them like decent human beings instead of animals. Most people in prison are good people, they just went down a dark path and needs some help finding the right path. Don't give up on these people, treat them as if they are your own family. Treat everyone with respect and dignity, because everyone deserves a second chance.

“We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies”

- Martin Luther King Jr.

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