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An examination on the effectiveness of solitary confinement, as a form of punishment, on incarcerated individuals and the unintended consequences associated with the policy

Joseph Shaffer
Longwood University

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Abstract

- The objective of this research is to examine the effectiveness of solitary confinement, as a form of punishment and protection in prisons, and the unintended effects of its application. A systematic review of the research conducted on the policy of solitary confinement determines that it is an ineffective method of punishment and behavioral modification. Research also suggests that the unintended consequences associated with solitary confinement such as; mental illness, self harm and suicide, and post traumatic stress disorder have a greater impact on inmates than the policy has on improving their behavior while incarcerated.

Introduction

- **-Originally implemented in 1787 in Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia, PA**
- **-Abandoned and reinstated in the 1900's for in-prison punishment**
- **-Cells are 9x9 feet and have limited furniture**
- **-inmates spend 23 hours a day in the cell**
- **-Extremely limited access to human contact except with corrections officers**
- **-Average time spent in solitary confinement is 1-3 months consecutively**
- **-No access to rehabilitative programs**

Studies Demonstrating Effectiveness

- No studies that demonstrated significant effectiveness of the policy
- One study did suggest that it could be effective on a person-to-person basis rather than an overall policy (Morris, 2015)

Summative Analysis

- Most studies found that solitary confinement caused more mental health issues than it improved behavior in inmates
- Self harm and suicide are significantly higher in inmates who are sentenced to solitary confinement (Wildeman and Andersen, 2020)
- Mild to severe mental illness symptoms were demonstrated in inmates who faced both long-term and short-term sentences of solitary confinement (Grassian and Friedmen, 1986)

Studies Demonstrating Ineffectiveness

- A study showed that capital inmates showed no change in violent behavior after sentences in short term solitary confinement (Medrano, Ozkan, Morris, 2017)
- The same study showed an increase in violence from capital inmates after sentences of long-term solitary confinement (Medrano et. Al., 2017)
- A similar study also showed no significant changes in behavior after solitary confinement in non-capital inmates (Morris, 2015)

Conclusions

- **Overall the research towards this policy has been unsupportive in nature**
- **Solitary Confinement should be abandoned as a criminal justice policy and be replaced with better forms of punishment**

Contact

Joseph Shaffer
Longwood University
Joseph.shaffer1@live.longwood.edu

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