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The Life of Convicts in Prisons

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4/22/2019

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**Introduction**

For years prisons have been around to detain the individuals within society that choose to commit crimes. Without knowledge of prison life, there could be two different views that society has on what life in prison is like. For lower class individuals, they might see prison as a decent way of life because meals and shelter are provided. In contrast, upper class individuals may feel that prison life is terrible because of the lack of freedom. Prisons and their way of detaining criminals has evolved through new laws and the way the justice system has seen fit to treat criminals.

**Literature Review**

Over time, much research has been done on what life is realistically like for prisoners. The discussion and research of prison life is important because without it, individuals outside of prisons would have no idea of what goes on inside of them and how prisoners who are sentenced to these institutions are treated. Through much research of prison life many theories have been proven to allow the understanding of what is good and bad for those incarcerated. From research we have realized that prisoners endure many forms of abuse and are sustained to many terrible conditions. This has helped the criminal justice system begin to try and make changes to the prisons within the country, but due to lack of funding in many parts of the country for certain departments these changes have been hard to make.

Agnew’s general strain theory suggest that the experience of negative treatment or experiences leads to the development of criminal or delinquent behavior. Research of this theory has proven Agnew’s theory correct in certain situations. Only some people will turn to crime and

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delinquency depending on their response to the strain (Brezina, Cardwell, Copes, Leban, 2016). During multiple interviews with 40 incarcerated men, it was found that several of the inmates had different coping mechanisms to prison strains (Brezina, Cardwell, Copes, Leban, 2016). They use coping strategies such as: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. Only some strategies resulted in criminal behavior (Brezina, Cardwell, Copes, Leban, 2016).

The male inmates were chosen at random from a maximum-security prison. The opinions of inmates on disrespect from other inmates was examined in the study. Most prisoners felt the most stress in cases of theft, physical and verbal assaults (Brezina, Cardwell, Copes, Leban, 2016). A prisoner named Bruce, along with a couple others used cognitive coping during strain by focusing on future goals and their families outside of prison (Brezina, Cardwell, Copes, Leban, 2016). Another way some of them used the cognitive approach was simply by ignoring the strain because they did not want to raise negative stimuli. Whether the prisoners used mechanisms like empathy, where they sought to understand their attackers or just to simply accept responsibility of the negative act towards them proves the conclusion of the research that there is still a problem with strain theorists. Since as we have seen through this research only some individuals turn to crime (Brezina, Cardwell, Copes, Leban, 2016).

Furthermore, there is a problem with prisoners committing suicide due to deprivation, overcrowding and certain situations of disrespect from others as introduced from the previous source discussed in this paper. National data was collected to make the correlation that these circumstances could enhance a prisoner to commit suicide. Through research on this, it was found that with lower levels of overcrowding at maximum security prisons, suicide is less likely to occur and where there are high levels of overcrowding in maximum security prisons, suicide is

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more likely to occur (Huey, 2005). This proves that the issues of overcrowding in prisons is important to begin to fix due to the risk of prisoners committing suicide.

In addition to the struggle’s men face while incarcerated, women also face their own set of grievances within prisons. Women’s health needs are often neglected due to them constituting as minorities within almost all prison systems (Bergh B, Gatherer A, Moller L. F, 2009). Most of the time imprisoned women’s needs fall short of what is required by humans’ rights and international recommendations due to lack of gender sensitivity in the polices and practices of the prison systems (Bergh, Fraser, Gatherer, Moller, 2011). Women require different health care needs than those of man and this is often not accepted within prisons (Bergh, Fraser, Gatherer, Moller, 2011). The differing health care needs of women can be multiple things such as: histories of violence and abuse, mental health problems, reproductive issues and many more (Bergh, Fraser, Gatherer, Moller, 2011). There is a desperate need for improvement concerning women’s health care needs being met within prisons. These demanding changes will need to allow for gender-sensitivity training of all staff within prison systems, political awareness and support, and most importantly commitment to the equality of women’s health needs and social justice (Bergh B, Gatherer A, Moller L. F, 2009).

It is important to have peer interventions that involve prisoners delivering peer education and support because it can bring attention to heath need and give the health providers a chance to better their care within the prison system that they are working at (Bagnall A. M, Kinsella K, South J, Woodall J, 2016). A study was done on the qualitative synthesis of positive and negative impacts related to delivery of peer-based health interventions in prison systems, and the study concluded that health providers need to work in unity with prison systems to produce peer

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interventions because they cannot be independent from prison life (Bagnall A. M, Kinsella K, South J, Woodall, 2016). Besides health care issues, another big issue that prisoners face is sexual abuse. Over time the justice system has become better about setting standards in place that allow for the detecting, reporting, and what to look for if a prison worker believes one of the inmates is being sexually abused by another inmate. It is also common for a prison worker to sexually assault an inmate as well. The National Prison Rape Elimination Commission has released a detailed book on the prevention, detection, response, and monitoring of sexual abuse within prison in hopes to provide the government with national standards on how to do all the things mentioned above, as well as how to punish prison rape (United States. National Prison Rape Elimination Commission, 2009). The book was submitted to the attorney general for review and approval and written because the rape of incarcerated individuals remains a constant problem (United States. National Prison Rape Elimination Commission, 2009). Many individuals contributed to the development of the guidelines. Even incarcerated sexual abuse survivors gave testimonies and advice to expert committees (United States. National Prison Rape Elimination Commission, 2009). The testimony and advice from survivors are of utmost importance because the committee was able to set guidelines in place to prevent the abuse that incarcerated prisoners had already undergone.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, there are many changes that need to be made to prison systems in order to reduce stress, and issues that could lead to mental health problems or suicide for some prisoners. Better health care services for women, and stricter regulations on how inmates treat other inmates, and prevention techniques for sexual abuse could all help better prison life. There are

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many societal implications when it comes to prison life. If a prisoner does not have adequate punishment in prison that also stays within the guidelines of one’s rights, then they will most likely commit another crime after being released back into society. Proper education programs for prisoners while they are incarcerated will help better the chances that they will not commit another crime. Also, many prisoners have kids and while they are incarcerated, their kids may be going through foster homes or neglect from whoever is responsible for them while their parent or parents are in prison. This affects are society because child abuse can lead to mental problems, and this also affects future generations because one who has grown up being abused as a child, may have a kid and abuse them as well, sort of like a ripple effect of abuse within society. The research on prison systems is important because most prisoners will be released at some point, and they must have received adequate education on why the crime they committed was wrong, as well as programs that may help them to understand how to be a proper citizen of society. As society changes, new problems will arise within prison life. It is important that future researchers consider this concept when studying prison life in the future.

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