

# Com 220 prison overcrowding harms everyone

[Law](#), [Common Law](#)



Prison Overcrowding Harms Everyone March 18, 2009 Com 220 Axia College of University of Phoenix Did you know that the USA with 5% of the world's population has 25% of its prisoners, making it the world's no#1 jailer? The most recent statistics from the Department of Justice states that 1 out of every 30 men between the ages of 20 and 34 has been jailed. Most likely, every person in the USA has either been incarcerated or knows someone who was. At the start of 2008, 2, 319, 258 adults were being held in prison or jail and this number keeps growing.

Because of the immense population of inmates, most facilities are overcrowded. To make room for all these inmates, correction departments have resorted to housing prisoners in tents, hallways, and gymnasiums. Below is a picture from USA Today of inmates being housed in a gymnasium. Locking up so many people in these overcrowded conditions creates serious emotional, physical, and mental problems for inmates and causes prisons to be even more dangerous. Due to these conditions, the prisoner winds up worst upon release than when they came in. (Smolowe and Blackman 1994)

In addition to the overcrowding problem, there is a huge financial strain to keep these facilities operating. To incarcerate only California's prisoners, it costs more than \$7. 6 million dollars a day. While funding foreducationand public assistance decreases, the prison budget maintains growth. One would think that for all the important resources we takemoneyaway from to invest in prisons, we would see some positive results, but unfortunately the USA has the highest crime rate in the world. Locking up so many people causes serious overcrowding problems making rehabilitation next to impossible.

Overcrowded prisons harm the rest of the population by breaking apart families, spreading diseases, and wasting valuable resources on a system that is not reducing the crime rate. (Clark 1994) The overcrowded prisons have a negative and dangerous impact on its residents' physical well-being. Deadly and infectious diseases like HIV, hepatitis, and tuberculosis commonly exist in America's prisons. With very few doctors available, many prisoners are not even aware that they are infected and go untreated. Every year, more than 1.5 million inmates are released back into the society, infected.

Once released, they spread these deadly diseases to their families and communities. As long as prisons remain understaffed, inmates and the rest of society will suffer. (USA Today) Insufficient staffing makes it impossible for prisoners to go through a detailed screening process. The monitoring, screening, and managing of vulnerable or problematic inmates are rarely maintained. Many times dangerous and mentally ill prisoners, untreated and undiagnosed, are put into the main population where they have a negative effect on other inmates as well as themselves.

Prisoners are no longer put into facilities that best match their needs; instead they are squeezed into whichever facility has room. This environment is conducive to violence. Many times prisoners are assaulted and even raped by others because staff is not readily available to control the situation. Besides an increased chance of being victimized, research has shown that understaffed jails have more suicides than ones that are properly proportioned. (Haney 3-4) Overcrowding has created a dangerous

atmosphere that has forced staff to focus on keeping order rather than worrying about meeting prisoners' basic needs.

Overcrowding has caused many staff members to fear for their personal safety and to look at prisoners with disdain. They are equipped with many lethal and non-lethal weapons to keep them safe and in some jurisdictions rifles and shotguns are carried inside cell blocks. In California, armed guards are kept inside housing units and authorized to respond to inmate disturbances with lethal force. Even while these inmates sleep, they are kept under gun surveillance. (Haney 11) Education and work programs conducive to rehabilitation are being done away with to pay for room for more prisoners.

These programs are necessary because the majority of prisoners are illiterate. A study conducted back in 1992 concluded that about 70% of prisoners were functionally illiterate or illiterate. The Bureau of Justice reported that in the 1990's, 40% of the prisoners had no job assignments at all, that 40% had menial prison duties like laundry, and only 7% were involved in some type of industry program. This means that little is being done to help prisoners make a smooth transition back into society. Once released, prisoners will have a record that any future job prospects will frown upon.

Without any kind of job training it is unlikely that ex-convicts will ever get hired. Many times, released prisoners who are faced with this dilemma, go right back to prison because they resort back to the same illegal practices of receiving money that got them arrested in the first place. When programs

are taken away, it tends to increase the violence and frustration amongst inmates. (Haney 5, 7-8) Many people find it hard to sympathize for inmates who are victims of violence, bad healthcare, or rape because the victims are criminals and many people believe they deserve to be punished.

I have heard many people make light of the current prison conditions by telling jokes about Bubba violating men in the shower that drop the soap. What many people do not realize is that it is not just hard core rapists and murderers populating the prisons, in fact, about half of the prison population is serving time for non-violent crimes. Now-a-days one can be incarcerated for certain motor-vehicle infractions and there have been numerous occasions of innocent people being incarcerated. The following chart depicts the types of crimes prisoners were serving time for, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics for 2005. USA Today NID) (Haney 4) Mandatory sentencing is a major contributing factor to the prison overcrowding problem and should be eliminated. Aaron Clarence is a perfect example of why mandatory sentencing should be done away with. Aaron was a 22 year-old college student when he was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a first-time nonviolent drug conviction. The local U. S. attorney charged Aaron with dealing crack cocaine, drugs that he never even touched. What did he do? He accepted \$1, 500 to introduce a couple of drug dealers and one of the dealers robbed the other.

Aaron was pulled out of class months later and charged because one of the dealers claimed Aaron was a big-time drug dealer. No other evidence besides the testimony of the dealer, who benefitted by getting a reduced

sentence for his testimony was given. Aaron is spending the rest of his life in prison. (Saunders 2004) The conservative approach to crime, investing in new prisons and jailing our way to a lower crime rate is not working. Now is the time that we realize that this approach is unaffordable and does not decrease the crime rate. Now is the time that different strategies to reduce over crowdedness are looked into.

Barbara Flicker argues that a more thorough screening process to determine who to incarcerate or not, needs to be implemented at each stage. The prosecutor, judges, jail administrators, and probation officers should use other resources besides prisons like: unconditional release, third-party custody, a treatment center, bail, probation supervision, electronic surveillance, or work-release programs for non-violent and lesser crimes. Now is time that we stopped punishing all the different types of crimes that are out there by the same method.

Many times drug offenders are locked up in the same facilities as pedophiles and are serving more time than them. (1990) (Smolowe and Blackman 1994) The current prison system is in desperate need of change. Prisons are supposed to be a deterrent to crime but this not the outcome. Now is the time that people realize that what goes on in prison affects everyone in society. About 95% of prisoners will be released back into society at one point. We need to ask ourselves, " Do we want these people released back into our communities without any kind of rehabilitation or worse off than they started out?

Are people being sentenced to life for committing a misdemeanor fair? Is it right to deprive money from schools and the community to finance a system that does not work? " If your answer to these questions is no, then now is the time for action. Discussing the situation is the first step. Many people openly discuss the school system and other facilities that our tax dollars contribute to, and overlook the prison system which takes much more money to run. Many people are unaware of the overcrowded conditions or mandatory sentencing until someone they care about is affected. People need to be made aware in order for change to happen.

Read about outrageous prison sentences like Aaron Clarence's that have been handed out. Write to a local politician explaining concerns about the problems in our current prison system. If nothing is done, and this lock-them-up trend continues, half the adult population will experience the inside of a prison or jail. (Will 1998) Reference Page Clark, C. S. (1994, February 4). Prison Overcrowding. CQ Researcher, 4, 97-120. Retrieved March 6, 2009 From CQ Researcher Online Flicker, B. (1990 February). To Jail or Not to Jail. ABA Journal. Retrieved February 13, 2009. From Business Source Campus Database.

Haney, Craig. Prison Overcrowding: Harmful Consequences and Dysfunctional Reactions. Retrieved February 13, 2009. From <http://prisoncommission.org/statement/haney.craig.pdf>. Rising prison problems begin to trickle into society. (nid) USA Today. Retrieved February 13, 2009. From Master FILE Premier Database Smolowe, J. , & Blackman, A. (1994 February 7)...and throw away the key. (cover story). Time. 143(6). 54.

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Retrieved February 13, 2009. From Master FILE Premier Database. Saunders, D. (2004 November 28) Free Clarence Aaron. The San Francisco Chronicle (CA) retrieved March 5, 2008 from <http://www.ovation.org/Blakely/Saunders11-28-04.html>.

Will G. (1998 July 20) A jail break for geriatrics. Newsweek p. 70. Retrieved February 13, 2009. From Master FILE Premier Database. Peer Review Checklist\* What is the main point of this paper? | The main point of the paper is the overcrowding of the prison system. | What is the greatest strength of this paper? | The greatest strength of this paper is all the information provided. The statistics give the reader a chance to actually absorb numbers. | What material does not seem to fit the main point of the paper or does not seem to be appropriate for the audience? I think that all the information fit well into the paper. The statistics were there to represent the prisoners; you provided detailed information on what all the overcrowding did to the staff and others in the prison. You showed cause and affect of what the overcrowding did to the prison system. | Has the author sufficiently addressed counterarguments? Explain your answer. | I think the author sufficiently addressed the counterarguments represented in the paper. I would of like to of seen if there was any suggestions to fixing the problem though. | Where should the author add more details or examples?

Explain your answer. | Suggestions on what they could do to fix the problem. Also a few updated statistics. The statistic from 1992 is little old. I would of liked to know if the prisoners are more alliterate now or then. | Where is the writing unclear or vague? | I found the writing to be clear. I did not find it unclear or vague. | What is your favorite part of this piece of writing? | I

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enjoyed the whole paper. I did not find myself liking one part better than the other. I enjoyed the whole paper. | What other comments can you provide for the author? I found the paper extremely informative. There was a large amount of information that I was not aware of. I would have to suggest that some of the paragraphs like the opener seem to be really long and there is a lot of information in them. I think if you broke them into smaller paragraphs it would make the information stronger for the reader. | \*Adapted from Reinking, J. A. , Hart, A. W. , & Von der Osten, R. (2003). *Strategies for successful writing: A rhetoric, research guide, reader, and handbook* (6th ed. ). Boston: Prentice-Hall/Pearson Custom Publishing.