

# Imprisonment

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Imprisonment is used as a tool in order to incapacitate offenders, reduce crime without ever having to change offenders. There are two types of incapacitation: collective and selective incapacitation. Collective incapacitation, as defined by Christy Visher, is “crime reduction accomplished through traditional offense-based sentencing and imprisonment policies or changes in those policies or changes in those policies, such as imposing mandatory minimum sentences.” This is a kind of incapacitation which embraces everybody who falls into a certain category.

One advantage of employing collective incapacitation is it does not care if low-rate offenders are kept in prison for lengthy periods of time. The incapacitation is worthwhile even if low-rate offenders imprisoned as well because all high-rate offenders in the group are put in behind bars as well. However, the benefit of collective incapacitation also becomes a disadvantage since it does not care if low-rate offenders are kept in prison for lengthy periods of time; it thus becomes an inefficient crime-control strategy.

The issue of injustice also becomes a concern because imprisoning offenders for what they might do in the future even though they would never have committed these offenses. While collective incapacitation imprisons everybody who falls within the same category, selective incapacitation on the other hand, attempts to improve the efficiency of imprisonment as a crime control strategy by tailoring the sentencing decisions to individual offenders. (Visher). Thus, this system tends to “select out” only the chronic offenders for imprisonment and not the less serious offenders in the community.

Unlike collective incapacitation, which may be an inefficient crime-control strategy, selective incapacitation is cost effective because the system will be using just a little prison space to save a bunch of crime. There have been varying conclusions as to the effects of incapacitation because incapacitation involves very complex methodological issues. Accordingly, the incapacitation effect is pretty extensive. Because we make assumptions, we have the tendency to make correctional policies based on the incapacitation effects.

However, because of these assumptions like for example, an offender stays in prison for one whole year thereby making an offender's rate of offending constant, the incapacitation effect therefore becomes inflated. But there are also other factors that need to be considered as well. For instance, the aging, replacement and labelling effects contribute to the variation of incapacitation effects. While the primary aims of imprisonment are to deter offenders from committing crimes and rehabilitate offenders, it is very hard to determine the specific effects of incapacitation on crime rates.

Does prison experiment work? There are varying arguments as to whether the prison experiment has been a success or a failure. Some commentators claim that the prison experiment is a failure and does not do much to enhance public safety. (Currie) As evidenced by the rising of the population of inmates in the United States, crime has continued to rise for over the past 30 years. The “prison experiment” may then be considered more of a failure instead of a success.

But despite being a failure, incapacitation and imprisonment are still important in the criminal justice system as they nevertheless place enough offenders off the streets of America. Without these prisons, the United States

would have been in much worse shape if not for the policies that place offenders behind bars. Moreover, if we base our conclusion on cost-benefit analysis, it would only result in confusing instead of illuminating us as to whether the “ prison experiment” is a failure or a success because computing the benefits compared to the costs of prison varies differently.