

# Arguments against the use of solitary confinement



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In the United States, roughly around 80, 000 prisoners are placed in solitary confinement each year and is often used to prevent risky inmates from escaping, to keep them from injuring other inmates or to punish for other misconduct (Corcoran 1). The conditions of solitary confinement depend on the prison, but sensory stimulation and social connection is awfully limited. Despite the use of solitary confinement, there have been several debates over the effectiveness and ethical principle of this experience. Social confinement is important to identify and understand the effects of on prisoners given that practically 22% of prisoners are already experiencing psychological damage upon being incarcerated (Corcoran 2). The United States Prison System should limit the use of solitary confinement on inmates by implementing less traumatic approaches of separation from prisoners.

At least, 44 states in the U. S. and the U. S. federal prison system now have supermax prisons, which are generally composed solely of solitary confinement cells (Gaille 1). Sometimes, a prisoner is placed into solitary confinement for punishment. At other times, the confinement is done for administrative or protective purposes. A common sentiment is that if people don't want to experience these conditions they shouldn't break the law but prisoners are still human. Prisoners who are exposed to the long confinement hours are developing mental illnesses and physical brain damage. Confined inmates are having symptoms similar to "hypertension, such as chronic headaches, trembling, sweaty hands, extreme dizziness and heart palpitations" with sleep deprivation, irregular digestion, insomnia, feeling of panic and rage (Corcoran 2). With all those symptoms comes even more life-threatening ones. Prisoners also account the feelings of chronic lethargy.

With the long periods of no activity people experience neck and back pain, and have an increased oversensitivity to normal stimulations, such as a closing door, and something that can contribute to their sleeping difficulties. Then when they are out of solitary confinement they have a higher chance of returning because of them overreacting to the surrounding stimuli (Corcoran 3).

Inmate's cognitive processes are also diminishing while they are in social isolation. When people are in solitary confinement, they are not in there shortly. Being in solitary confinement means living in there from 22 to 24 hours a day in just a small jail cell (Gaille 4). According to the American Friends Service Committee, the average time for inmates served in the supermax units in the Arizona prison system was 5 years. California has an average of 6. 8 years, Virginia ranges from 2 weeks to 7 years, and several prisoners in New York prisons have been being isolated from other for more than 20 years (Gaille 6).

Sometimes prisoners are wrongfully put into solitary confinement even when they are just trying to do a good act. An Oregon prisoner admitted to being placed into the hole and said " 23-plus hours a day with a blanket and a book because I violated a prison rule by helping a neighbor compose a legal brief" (Flows 2). Craig Haney, a social psychologist at the University of California spoke with the Knowable Magazine and believes that the practice of social confinement is not effective (Skibba 1). Nevertheless, there is still many believe that the harsh punishment will allow for the prisoner to repent for the crime they committed but prison alone is doing that. Social confinement also

allows for prisons to easier manage the high-risk prisoners, but having them in complete confinement is inhumane.

There are current practices that are being made to solve the issue.

According to the *Washington Post*, in Chicago at the Cook County Department of Correction, was created a new place in the prison called The Special Management Unit, that only houses prisoners who resort to use violence and always break the rules. They still have open rooms and time outside but are under very direct supervision by staff who are trained to deal with them (Dart 3). This alternative hasn't just benefited the inmates but also the working conditions. The number of assaults has dropped significantly and attacks on staff members have drastically declined (Dart 3). Shorter amounts of solitary confinement have been beneficial to workers and inmates. This is relevant to everyone because those who have family or friends in supermax prisons, long isolation periods cause may cause them to go mentally unstable. Plus, in New York, California, and Texas, evidence has been found that the suicide rate is higher among those who have been held in solitary confinement compared to those in the general jail population (Gaille 7). Prisoners are still human and are social creatures, prison already puts a huge limit on social freedoms.

The American Conservative Union Foundation Center for Criminal Justice Reform has a variety of good solutions to solve the issue of solitary confinement. Prisons should carefully review the cases received for mental illness before they restrict an inmate to social isolation. Also, staff members at prisons should evaluate the inmates mentally at periodic intervals with a psychiatrist not employed by the corrections department (" Solitary

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Confinement” 1). Also, the solution to never just free an inmate when directly from solitary confinement should be an obvious act. Staff workers in solitary confinement units need more resources to deal with the prisoners assumed as dangerous or troubled. Expert help is needed with the efforts and mental health management.

Disbanding solitary confinement completely is an option but isn't likely. The prison units themselves need more reconfiguration so that prisoners have access to natural light and sensory input other than the prison cell wall and bars. More federal laws need to be passed for limitations on solitary confinement. For example, in 2016, New Jersey proposed a bill preventing the usage of solitary confinement on pregnant women, particularly for those under 21, women who are over 65 years old and those with mental illnesses, developmental disabilities and other serious impairments (Flows 3). Honestly prisoners just want to have as many freedoms as possible so rewarding their good behavior will encourage them not to act out and change for the better. If they don't behave instead of social confinement prisons can go with more loss of privileges for longer periods of time. Inmates can have delayed parole dates and have to do more extra work or required duties.

All of these solutions would be very beneficial to the inmates and the staff. With solitary confinement being only for the shortest amount of time, changing it will be less damaging to prisoner's health. Inmates don't want to lose what they have left so they are going to behave if people really try what's best for them. Many organizations have come to an agreement that use of isolation should only be used as the last resort, short periods of time that is absolutely needed and never for vulnerable populations (Skibba 10).

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The less harsh punishments are more ideal and are momentary for whoever needs them. There is less risk for prisoners to develop mental damage and plus its paid via tax dollars so how about using the money for more humane solutions. Plus, there will be less stress for the workers who work within the confinement unit.

Ways to starting implementing less solitary confinement would to start off with shorter hours and not having people in there for 24 hours with no break. Prisons can bring in psychiatrist and therapy sessions for those who need them. Prisoners would be offered the chance to participate in more education, treatment and religious programs (“ Solitary Confinement” 1). There can be mandatory sit downs to talk things out with other prisoner if staff members sense tension. Also, prisoners can go on strikes and protest from the inside while have help from people outside, protesting with them to get the system changed.

The number of inmates exposed to the horrible effects of social confinement is very high. In prisons, the condition would be easier for inmates and staff for there to be easier and more manageable substitutions. Every prison isn't the same and many already are changing their inhumane system but there are still a high number of supermax prisons that believe it's the most effective. There are many psychological and physical health risk to the prisoners and staff workers dealing with these units. There are many alternatives that will be just as effective and good for the working conditions of the facilities. Many prisons don't limit solitary confinement to those who are violent, so they are even causing brain damage to those they are trying to protect and keep safe. A sentence or consequence of bad behavior

shouldn't be harsher than the original bad act. That's why there are many organizations trying to push less confinement and more open punishment such work and mandatory checks on the well-being of inmates before and after if isolation is the only option. If a prisoner is already mentally ill or disabled or prone to be then solitary confinement shouldn't be an option for them. Prisoners are still human and that's why The United States Prison System should limit the use of solitary confinement on inmates by implementing less traumatic approaches of punishment or protection.

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