

# Challenges for protecting sex offenders inside us prisons



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## Sex Offenders are the Most Difficult to Protect Inside Americans Many Prisons

## Abstract

This paper explores published articles that report on the issues that sex offenders and their care takers face inside America's prisons. Both of the articles used for research and support are published by professors in the criminal justice field. The first one is from the University of Cambridge, and is about helping imprisoned sex offenders. While the second one is from the University of California, and deals with the challenges faced by the families of convicted sex offenders. Other resources come from government websites that have been published by FBOP. This paper will examine their thoughts about the challenges the Department of Corrections has forced them to face, and will propose possible solutions to fix the problem at hand.

In my medium-security prison, and prisons across America, the inmate subpopulation that poses the most significant threat and issues to the Department of Corrections is the convicted sex offender population. Due to the inmate's need, and the prison population's need, the sex offender population is forced to be held in solitary confinement; which poses serious financial burdens on the prison. Secondly, because of their offenses, they are stigmatized by society inside and outside the prison. This causes security threats for both the inmate, and the correctional officer that is involved in transporting them when they are let out of their cell. Finally, due to the lack of programs in place to help these individuals when they are imprisoned, there is no way to change their ways of thinking. Therefore, since we do not impose new notions of what is "right" and what is "wrong," the recidivism

rate among the sex offender population is higher than it is among other Security Threat Groups. While we do have Sex Offender Prison Management groups in some prisons, they are very few and far between, and the risks of the sex offender being targeted is still high. Therefore, other options include: cognitive behavioral therapy, psychotherapy or counseling, and medical treatment. This paper will focus on sex offenders as the most dangerous prison subpopulation because their social isolation, constant targets on their back, high financial burden, which all leads to a recidivism rate that is higher than others; however I have also listed several options to help reduce their classification as dangerous to the prison population.

In January 2017, the Federal Bureau of Prisons reported that it housed 14,500 sex offenders in its roughly two hundred facilities; which equates to about 8% of the total prison population, all of which are held in solitary confinement. The Department of Corrections in California defines *solitary confinement* as the isolation of a prisoner in a separate cell as punishment (West, 1985). Even though, these inmates are indeed in prison to be punished for the crimes they committed when they were members of society, solitary confinement was created for the purpose of punishment within the prison. Solitary confinement was not meant to be used for permanent housing of an inmate. This not only puts tremendous stress and harm on the inmate, it puts a financial burden on the prison. The average cost of housing an inmate in solitary confinement is estimated at \$75,000 (West, 1985); which is about three times the amount as housing an inmate in general population (2017). This is due to the fact that it takes more people to care to their every needs, rather than letting them do it on their own; for

instance someone has to bring them their food, escort them to and from the showers and the rec yard, and their medications have to be brought to them (West, 1985). Most inmates, when they are out of their cells, have access to the showers, can walk in a group with a guard to get their medications, and they all eat together. To keep the costs down, a small number of guards are able to watch a large number of inmates. When a sex offender needs transport, correctional officers have to keep them away from other inmates, make sure the inmate is in restraints, and that often takes two or more officers for one inmate. The financial burden is something wardens have to deal with because of the stigmatizations, and targets that sex offenders bare.

In most cases, sex offenders are not the average criminal. On the facts that they do not commit other kinds of crimes like drug offenses, murders, and other offenses that the majority of prisoners are incarcerated for (West, 1985). Therefore, sex offenders do not share the same characteristics as other inmates, and they do not mix well with other inmates who fall into the subculture of lower class criminals. Sex offenders are often older than the average inmate, well educated, and they are in one of the smallest populations of inmates inside the prison system (West, 1985). The fact that they are in the minority, and that they are so unpopular opens them up to a world of social isolation and stigmatization. Especially those prisoners who have committed sexual crimes against children, experience abuse and physical violence (West, 1985). This cause a large number of law suits to be brought against the prison due to the lack of protection for sex offenders. Even though prisoners have an image of a hard, cruel person, some still have

religious beliefs, and much of the hatred for sex offenders, but particularly pedophiles, ties back to religion. West says, (1985) “ traditional religion, seems to regard sexual crime with a revulsion and fear out of all proportion to the extent and seriousness of the problem (p. 928).” The background of God, and faith is what drives prisoners to hate sex offenders and seek out to hurt them while they are inside.

Even professional workers inside the prison are too affected by the title of sex offender to properly help these inmates. Mental nurses and hostel wardens, who are prepared to admit to their facilities all kinds of disturbed people, draw the line at anyone labelled a sex offender (West, 1985).

Although the employees that are paid by the state do not hurt the sex offenders themselves, their actions, or their lack of actions do. Complaints are heard of correctional officers deliberately leaking information about sex offenders' crimes and turning, “ a blind eye to the bullying that follows (West, 1985, p. 929).” Yes, we have put rules in place, like Prison Rule 43-to attempt to keep their food safe-but if the correctional officers that are watching this, are not enforcing the rules, then the safety of the sex offenders is still a concern.

Inside the prisons, sex offenders are at the very bottom of a very disgusting, disturbing, and repulsive pecking order, and this all plays into their isolation. These inmates who face sex offender charges are often denied the rights of family visitation (West, 1985). This plays part in their position in solitary confinement, because as an inmate in solitary confinement. Even though they are there for their own protection, they do not receive family visitation rights like most inmates do. As a recap, their position in solitary  
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confinement, other prisoners religious beliefs, their label as a sex offender, and correctional officers and other prison employees lack of effort leads to the isolation and stigmatization of these sex offenders. Which often turns to violent physical abuse.

Sex offenders have one of the highest recidivism rates among the civilians that have been incarcerated in the United States (West, 1985). This occurs primarily because of the lack of mental health opportunities that is offered for sex offenders in prison (West, 1985). Not only is the spectrum of options that is offered very small, but many mental health nurses refuse to help sex offenders. So, after the inmate has served their time, and we, as the Department of Corrections, has done nothing to change their ways of thinking, they are released back into the civilization and they commit the same crime. It also does not help the fact that primarily all these inmates are left to is their own thoughts, so sometimes they might realize what they did was wrong. However, being attracted to children as a grown man has been proven to be a mental illness, and if we do not treat it, then the problem has not been fixed(West, 1985). Farkas and Miller (2007) said that family support and attention can decrease the possibility of reoffending. But, we keep sex offenders from seeing their families. Therefore, we need to take a look at the support systems we have in place for the sex offender population inside of prisons to decrease their risk to themselves, and those around them.

As mentioned above, one of the most basic, and cost effective things we can do to help prevent the possibility of a sex offender reoffending is giving them the support of their family. The maintenance of family relationships during imprisonment preserves the stability of the family unit, enhances the well-  
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being of family members, and facilitates the prisoner's post release success (Farkas, Miller, 2007). Not only does this not cost the state anything to allow the family to come visit the inmate while in prison. Also, it will keep the family in good connection, so when the prisoner gets out, they have a place to go. Instead of living on the street where their chances of committing more crimes are very high. However, there are medical options we can and need to look at as treatment options for sex offenders.

Another option we could implement into our prison system is Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy sessions. CBT is defined as a type of psychotherapy in which negative patterns of thought about the self and the world are challenged in order to alter unwanted behavior patterns or treat mood disorders such as depression (2018, Practice: Adult Sex Offender Treatment). It is usually conducted in group settings and involves addressing the irrational thoughts and beliefs the offenders have about their behaviors that lead them to partake in what they think is acceptable (2018, Practice: Adult Sex Offender Treatment). These events involve role playing activities that allow them to practice their newly learned skills. It allows them to correct their deviant thoughts and practices by engaging their new problem-solving skills. Another bright side to this method, since it is conducted in a group, is it allows the inmates to interact with other people instead of being held in single man cells for twenty-three hours a day.

Third is Psychotherapy or Counseling which is the treatment of mental disorder by psychological rather than medical means (2018, Practice: Adult Sex Offender Treatment). Programs in this category can be done individually or in a group setting. These practices usually take the form of what we <https://assignbuster.com/challenges-for-protecting-sex-offenders-inside-us-prisons/>

usually think of when we think of counseling-i. e. talk therapy that addresses the underlying causes and thoughts that the inmates have that leads them to make their choices (2018, Practice: Adult Sex Offender Treatment).

Lastly, and the most extreme, is Medical Treatment. There are two approaches: surgical castration or hormonal therapy to treat the sex offenders urges to offend (2018, Practice: Adult Sex Offender Treatment). Surgical castration is the act in which the inmate would physically lose the use of his testicles. This can be done surgically or chemically. Of course this would be done entirely on a volunteer basis, and with the intervention of psychological treatment. Hormonal treatment would include lowering of testosterone, to decrease the inmates sex drive. Of course if the inmate decided to stop taking their hormones they would be placed under supervision if they were no longer in prison.

In conclusion, the most dangerous subpopulation within the prison is the sex offender population due to the stigmatizations that are placed on them by their offenses. They also pose a financial burden on the state due to their need to be housed in solitary confinement. However, for their safety, and for the safety of those around them it is the only place that we have found right now to house them. Finally, due to the lack of mental health options for sex offender inside of prisons, the recidivism rate among them is one of the highest among all of the subpopulations. I have offered some options to decrease the threat of sex offenders, ranging from inexpensive to costly. Please review these, as they are only some of the options that we could impose to make it safer inside of prison for them and for everyone else inside of them.

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