

# Futures in corrections



America's combined prison and local jail population topped two million inmates for the first time in history on June 30, 2002, according to a new report from the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics. With approximately one in 100 American adults incarcerated, decisions by policy makers and corrections officials may directly affect the future in regard to the best way to handle this nation's prison system. In society, the philosophy of sending an individual to prison has evolved.

The criminal justice system has put much prominence in regard to how it views people who commit criminal acts against other people. In association with an increasing correctional population, the future correctional philosophies are deterrence, incapacitation, rehabilitation, restoration, and retribution. Some means of punishment must prevail for the victim's sense of justice as well as to appease the public's sense of justice. There exists a "get tough on crime" perspective in today's criminal justice system.

This perspective is good, but if this perspective on crime and sentencing is not carefully applied, jails and prisons in the future may struggle with even bigger issues. These issues would encompass more overcrowding, more violence, more health issues, more facility maintenance, more rehabilitation programs, more employees, and so forth. The United States federal prison population increased 790% from 1980 to 2012, according to a Congressional Research Service report. This increase, in theory may be a direct result from mandatory sentencing laws.

The three strikes law mandates a sentence of 25 years to life for repeat criminal offenders. The theory behind the three strikes law suggests that tougher sentences would slow the recidivism rate; however, in reality these

tougher sentences hold more offenders for a longer period in prisons creating havoc on the population levels. Although the “ three strikes and you are out” is an effective form of motivation theoretically to stay out of trouble, many argue the law is too tough on crimes that otherwise would not land a person in prison for 25 years to life.

The prisons are running out of room because these sentences do not waiver and are keeping prisoners behind bars longer while adding more prisoners to the mix causing overpopulation in the entire correctional system. The three strike law is not the only reason for the overpopulation issue in this country’s prison system there exist many other factors. A main factor is that the United States has too many laws. The United States is not the most criminal culture though; however, it does have the most people in prisons.

There are currently more prisoners serving time for drug related crimes than there are violent criminals. Gregory (2013), “ It used to be perfectly legal for anyone to walk into a store and buy heroin or cocaine. Then the progressives took over in the early 20th century and began waging a war on drugs, which blossomed under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, when marijuana became nationally illegal” . If the criminal is not a danger to society there is no need to keep him or her incarcerated.

Instead of using the prison system as a place to house criminals dangerous to society, the prison system becomes a place to teach lessons. If current issues such as overcrowding prison populations, budget cuts, strict sentencing laws, and safety concerns (for correctional staff and communities) are not addressed, current issues may create more issues and compound already existing issues in the future. The future issues facing

correctional administrators include increased prison populations, safety concerns, loss of specialized programs, and lawsuits.

Prison populations are growing considerably across the United States because of strict determinate, mandatory, and three strike sentencing laws. Some prisons must expand its facilities to keep up with the growing populations, but budget cuts often make it difficult for many prisons to expand adequately expand. Prison administrators may face the challenge of effectively managing and organizing prison populations' in the future on strict budgets. The increasing prison populations and budget cuts may create an increase in regard to safety concerns for prison administrators in the future.

The increasing populations will continue to cause safety concerns for correctional staff and offenders as prison gangs' increase and offenders greatly outnumber staff. Budget cuts may force prisons to downsize staff, lower wages, and increase benefit costs. Prisons may lose the ability to hire staff to keep up with the prison populations and may even lose staff because of unsafe working conditions and decreased benefits (Ramos, 2012). Budget cuts for prisons may mean that administrators may cut programming and services for offenders in the future.

Administrators may also decide which programs are cut or how to consolidate necessary programs and services in regard to effectively rehabilitating offenders. The loss of rehabilitation programs and services may increase offender mental health issues and worsen the moral and living conditions for offenders. Offenders may bring lawsuits against correctional institutions as in the past during the prison reform era when inmates

initiated lawsuits because of poor prison conditions and a lack of programming and mental health treatment.

Conclusion The prison system is becoming overcrowded for many reasons; however, some of these reasons fail to explain the reasoning behind it. Budget cuts may force prison administrations to layoff staff and safety issues begin to surface in regard to staff and inmates alike. The inmates' may also develop concerns as to where he or she may go and whether or not he or she will continue to receive the needed treatment required to stay well.

When a new law comes in to existence, it increases the number of people charged with crimes, which adds more to the prison system. The "three strikes you are out rule" attempted to grant second chances but added to the overcrowding of the prisons. The future of prisons is unknown and this causes a concern for the community, which entrusts the system to put away offenders to ensure society's safety. The prisons are like a safety net for the communities. Thus, if the prisons become less able to help serve and protect the community, the prison system has failed.

The future is unknown as to what it will hold for the prison system, the staff, the administration, programs for inmates, and the inmates in regard to how he or she will continue to serve his or her sentence. As a society the question needs asked, "Will the offenders get off free if there is not a prison system?" The prisons will make it; however, it will take the community to keep everything running so an offender can pay his or her debt to society and rehabilitate to return to society.