

Behind prisons walls

[Government](#), [Corruption](#)



Prisons represent correction facilities in which individuals who have violated the law of the land in one way or another are physically confined and deprived of certain freedoms especially that of movement and free association. The institution of prison is conventional and forms an integral part of the judicial system of any given country, incarceration or imprisonment is a penalty which is legal and is imposed by the state through its judicial arm, to persons who have violated the laws.

Historically, imprisonment was not considered as a punishment but as a way of confining criminals until such a time when the state or the governing authorities would be in a position to administer capital or corporal punishment. Biblically there were prisons in Jerusalem used for detention purposes in the Old Testament (Flynn & Hurd, 1998). History purpose and types of prisons Prisons have been in existence for very many centuries, history of imprisoning individuals started way beyond the eighteenth century.

The holding of individuals before trial, although not necessarily in building or other structures built specifically as prisons may be in castles is as old as history and have been exercised for several centuries. Private jails were in existence and their history dates back in the year 1166 and their existence continued into the eighteenth century; they were mainly run privately as commercial undertakings and the prisoners were expected to pay for the food and other services that they enjoyed while in custody.

For the past two centuries the history of prisons can be classified into three main periods which were all characterized by conflicting rationales for both imprisonment and prisons. In the early nineteenth and late eighteenth

centuries, much emphasis was put on reforming both the prisons and the prisoners. It is during this period that the institution of modern prisons were established, a more oppressive approach was adopted in the nineteenth century.

As a result of this approach new notions about rehabilitation and reforms emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century. Prison conditions throughout the century, continued to be terrible. There was no segregation of women, children or men, offenders were not classified and they were all held together regardless of the crime committed. These are some of the factors that were calling for reforms and rehabilitation within the prison administration (Federal Bureau of Prisons, n. d.).

In prisons nowadays, deterrence, retribution of rehabilitation, are the main elements that are used by the state through its judicial arm to provide society with justice. Prison is a very important institution to the society. The members of the society who are found guilty for violating the rules and regulations governing the members of the society are confined in prisons and thus are denied the opportunity of committing more crime to the society. While in prison the offenders are usually reformed so that they can be better members of the society once they are out of prison.

They are rehabilitated so that in future they can be better members of the society and contribute positively to its growth and development. In most prisons the imprisoned individuals usually undergo some technical training to enable them acquire some skills which will enable them to make a living once they are out of prison instead of engaging in criminal activities. Such

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skills will deter them in future from committing crimes in future in an attempt to make a living, and hence prisons receive criminals from the society and gives back responsible people to the society.

By imprisoning people who have committed certain crimes to other people justice is seen to be done, it is perceived to be equitable especially by the aggrieved party who could not take law on their own hands as this would lead to a chaotic society. Thus prisons provide an orderly way of dealing with offenders and making them become better people (Jachimowicz & Jose, n. d.). The medium security prisons are used to jail those people who have committed petty offences and are to be imprisoned for relatively a short period.

The inmates in medium security prisons are usually held up in cells that accommodates several prisoners. These inmates are deprived of freedom of movement, access to education, privileges such as participating in sporting activities, vocational and therapeutic programs. In these facilities the prison officials restrict the number of times an inmate can be visited and communication between the visitors and the inmates is carefully monitored by the officials, while communicating the inmate and the visitor have to face each other through a transparent partition made of glass and they have to communicate via telephone.

In some medium security prisons the inmates are given opportunities to work furloughs, release and other modes programs which are transitional in nature, but only a small population of the inmates is given an opportunity to take part in such programs (Marsh, 2004). The offenders who are most dangerous and have committed major offences like rape, robbery

with violence, terrorism and murder are imprisoned in maximum security prisons; these facilities usually have very many strict restrictions and rules, the inmates in maximum security prisons are in most cases isolated from each other and they usually spend a lot of time in solitary cells.

Very few amenities are usually found in maximum security prisons and the cells are usually sparsely furnished. In most of the developed countries such prisons are usually fitted with video cameras which are used by the prison officials to monitor prisoners in their work areas or in their cells. In most maximum security prisons the inmates are required to remain in their cells for as many as twenty three hours a day leaving them with only one hour for showering and relaxing.

The third category of prisons is the super maximum security facilities, which are located within the maximum security prison, they are highly restricted and there is minimal human contact. Inmates in these facilities are confined in small solitary cells for most of the day. They normally live alone with no single chance of meeting and socializing with anyone (Marsh, 2004). For individuals who have committed certain offences which attract imprisonment, but cannot be jailed because they have not attained legal adulthood, the minors are housed in special types of prisons commonly referred to as juvenile correctional facilities.

These institutions are similar to dormitories in boarding schools, but more restriction is imposed on the minors in these facilities. Recent Research on Prisons Research shows that in many cases, prisons achieve their main objectives, imprisoning criminals enhances public safety, since they are held in confined places from which it is not possible to threaten the safety of the

public. The prisons have also achieved significantly as far as rehabilitating criminals is concerned as they are deterred from committing similar offences in future.

They have also played a significant role in reinforcing about right and wrong which are basic social values and norms (Tonry & Petersilia, n. d.). Despite all these achievements some researches indicate that prisons have consistently been used by the prison officials and the state to continue to abuse the human rights of the prisoners. Various researches show that the prisoners are denied basic necessities such as good clothing and enough food.

Studies have also revealed that imprisonment has a negative effect on the spouses and the dependants of the person imprisoned. Imprisonment affects the financial stability of the prisoners and their families, during the imprisonment period and after. Such families also suffer from the society as they are perceived by the members of the community as questionable families and in most cases people avoid to associate with them. This affects the ex prisoners, their spouses and children psychologically making it difficult to socialize with other members of the society.

Such negative attitudes usually affects the ex prisoners even financially as they are unable to secure any form of employment as members of the society do not trust them, this is likely to increase their chances of involving themselves in criminal activities in future so as to be able to maintain themselves financially (Jacobson, 2005). In most countries the cost of running prisons is fully met by the state through the revenues it collects in form of taxes from its citizens. The governments are responsible for the

management and the running of prisons; they support their judiciary arms financially to administer justice.

The judges, prison officials and other workers in the judicial system are remunerated from the government coffers, since they are civil servants. In some cases the prison departments are expected to raise some money by the government, through running some commercial enterprises from where they are in a position to partly fund them and the government meets the remaining part of their budget (Krause, n. d.) Such enterprises are usually in the form of farming activities where the prisoners are the main source of labor. The cost of running prisons for any given country runs into millions of dollars each year.

Thus there is need to minimize the expenditure of the prison departments so as save on these costs but at the same time meeting the goals of imprisoning individuals. Some of the proposed methods of reducing the burden on prison cost on the government are through the privatization process. Another method of reducing prison costs is by placing the petty offenders on probation instead of confining them, such offenders can be required to offer some services to the community under the supervision of some court officials or community leaders.

By dealing with such offenders in this manner a lot of cost will be saved and the offenders will be given an opportunity to serve the community which they might have wronged in one way or another (Brown, 2009). Privatization of Prisons Studies have shown that governments can save substantially on costs through privatization and thereby tame the rising costs of running prisons. The officials of the state should consider taking advantage of the

benefits that are likely to be realized by once they outsource their prisons to private enterprises, this will enable them improve prisons and also save on the tax payers' money.

However, the state should ensure that the quality of the prisons and their intended objectives are not compromised by such a move, hence they should conduct privatization carefully and include all the required stakeholders so as to seal off any loop hole that might be used to compromise the standards of prisons in their states (Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 2004). A study that was done in the year 2003 in New Mexico showed that the state saved up to \$9600 per prisoner in 2001 as a result of effective privatization. Through privatization the state officials alter the fundamental structure in future government funding of the prisons.

A study in Michigan indicated that it was very difficult in coming up with a balanced budget on its prisons since much of its expenditures are law mandated. This therefore, means that it does not matter how much well the economy might be performing, or the amount of money treasury is receiving, the state is under obligation to meet certain expenses (Nguyen, 2008). Conclusion Prisons are very important and form an integral part of the society, they should therefore, be accorded as much support as possible so as to enable them meet their objectives effectively.

Prisons should not be perceived as places where law breakers are punished but as rehabilitation center where criminals are given a chance to reflect on their lives so as to be better members of the society once they are through with their prison life. The authorities managing the prisons should under take a reform process which should be aimed at deterring the offenders from

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committing similar offences or other related offences in future. Their efforts should be aimed at ensuring that the prisoners leave the prison facilities as better people than they were when they joined them.

The prison departments should equip the inmates with certain technical skills that will enable them to contribute positively in the society after the imprisonment term is over. It is also very important for the prison officials to educate the public on the need to assist criminals and ex prisoners so that they can be more responsible. Reference: Brown, J. (2009): Cost of running prisons sky high, Retrieved on 2nd May from, <http://www.timesrecordnews.com/news/2009/apr/18/cost-of-running-prisons-sky-high/>. Federal Bureau of Prisons (n. d.): Prison Types & General Information, Retrieved on 2nd May from,

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