

Criminal justice overview paper essay sample

[Health & Medicine](#), [Addiction](#)



Select one of the following issues:

- Racial profiling
- Prison overcrowding
- The war on drugs
- Increased use of technology
- Cultural diversity

Write a 1, 050- to 1, 705-word paper addressing how your selected issue affects the criminal justice system as a whole. • Describe some of the change(s) the criminal justice system as a whole has made in response to the issue you selected. • Include your opinion on whether the changes are sufficient. Should more changes be made, and if so, what changes? Format your paper consistent with APA guidelines.

Prison Overcrowding

One of the greatest challenges currently facing the American criminal justice system is overcrowding. America has the largest prison population in the world with over two million inmates which have led to major challenges in housing the many inmates. The many challenges being faced by the correctional system include insufficient prison beds for inmates and lack of prison space as well as inadequate funding, and resources. The causes for the extreme overcrowding have been blamed on retributive sentencing policies, new legislation, the War on Drugs, and the criminalization of the juvenile offender. The rise in the sentenced population in the United States shows that the number of persons sentenced to probation, parole, prison, and jail has risen to record levels, although there has been slowing prison growth since 2006. This leveling-off still results in record prison populations, <https://assignbuster.com/criminal-justice-overview-paper-essay-sample/>

but the rate at which offenders are sentenced to prison is declining slightly, primarily due to the state budget problems and also severe prison overcrowding in many locations (Albanese, 2013).

The increase in prison populations is a direct result of an increase in the likelihood of offenders' being sent to prison; also, new incarcerations are occurring faster than releases from prison. The rate of admissions into state prisons (per one hundred prisoners) was 55 percent; the release rate was 31 percent. This difference of nearly 25 percent has been a major cause of prison overcrowding, although recent trends show that states are working to lessen this gap between new incarcerations and releases from prison. Prison crowding also reflects the decline of indeterminate sentencing and the shrinking power of parole boards in setting actual sentence lengths, the corresponding rise in determinate sentencing and truth-in-sentencing laws which limit early release from prison (Albanese, 2013).

Prison overcrowding in American began to increase during the 1960's after the new crime policy known as the " War on Drugs" policy was initiated by the federal government (Richardson, 2004). The war on drugs policy was created after the large increase of drug flooding into the country after prohibition. This new get tough on crime policy required prison offenders to serve harsher sentences if they are caught dealing in drugs. This included minor drug offenders and individuals believed to be involved in a conspiracy to sell or distribute drugs. As a result prison became overcrowded with drug offenders while violent offenders served lighter sentences than the drug offender. Instead of providing the drug offender with substance abuse

treatment that would aid the offender in overcoming their addiction to drugs the offender is eventually released from prison only to commit another drug offense which lands them back into the already overcrowded penal system.

The ready availability of drugs in prison only expounds the problem because offenders that are not addicted to drugs when they arrive at prison and then they leave prison with a drug addiction and no resources to overcome this addiction. The War on Drugs or new get tough on crime policy also changed the rehabilitative policy that was created when the prison system was reformed during the Progressive Era. The original intent of the correctional department was to change the attitude, behavior, and perception of the criminal offender through providing them with the necessary rehabilitative programs. This included offering the inmate educational and job opportunities in order to better assist their successful reintegration back into society.

Another major issue confronting the criminal justice system and has resulted in further prison overcrowding is the three Strikes crime policy which has been adopted by the majority of states in the nation. The three Strikes policy is designed to create a mandatory sentencing policy for the third time felony offender. Criminal offenders that are subject to their third strike risk a prison sentence of twenty five years to life. Since the enactment of the Three Strikes policies prison overcrowding is at an extreme level. A good example of the result of the new three strikes policy is the current state of California's correctional system. The California prison system is experiencing a major crisis with the overcrowding of the state's prisons. Due to the extreme

overcrowding the state is 40 percent over capacity and inmates are being put wherever there is room to house the inmate including common areas and gymnasiums. Prison inmates are living in conditions that are not considered humane and prison inmates are not being provided with necessary medical and mental health care.

As a result of the poor living conditions being faced by the California inmate, the Supreme Court had ruled that the state will have to release 46, 000 inmates in order to reduce the extreme overcrowding issues (Savage, 2011). While the original goal of the three strikes policy has been to increase public safety and reduce the crime rate with this new ruling by the higher court the result will be just the opposite. The public will be flooded with criminal offenders suddenly released back into society which will only increase the crime rate and reduce public safety. I personally do not think that any changes that have been made to reduce prison overcrowding are sufficient and more changes need to be made. First I would propose that the first step that is required in order to reduce the overcrowding of Americas prisons is to change the way the criminal justice system approaches the criminal offender.

Instead of the focus being on retribution and making the criminal pay the focus needs to be on changing the perceptions, attitudes, and criminal behaviors through the offering of alternative sentencing practices and offering inmates comprehensive programs that will enable their successful reintegration into society. While victims need justice there also needs to be better response to criminal behavior other than the eye for an eye approach.

Because the current policies on crime in society obviously do not work and fail to deter the criminal offender from committing further offenses but instead of automatically sentencing the drug offender to long prison sentences that does not serve the inmate, society, or the taxpayer.

Instead the focus should be on requiring the drug addicted offender to attend mandatory substance abuse treatment as well as other rehabilitative processes that would enable the drug offender to successfully reintegrate back into society as well as conqueror their addiction. Because the majority of inmates in the prison system are in jail for drug offenses or crimes that involve drug offenses it is essential to take measures to stop drug addiction instead of just focusing on stopping drugs from coming into the country. This would also include creating better measures for stopping drugs from being readily available to inmates in the correctional system and will result in lower numbers of drug offenders leaving prison addicted to drugs. The next change that needs to occur is to the Three Strikes policy. One urgent change that needs to occur, especially in the state of California, is to the types of offenses that result in the criminal offender being sentenced to twenty five years to life.

Currently in states such as California the third strike offenses that results in the harsh prison sentence includes any felony no matter how minor. In order to relieve some of the overcrowding being experienced by the criminal justice system the third strike should only include offenses that are considered violent or more serious. Lastly the new policy would include changing the nation's current policy of trying juvenile offenders as adult

unless the juvenile is seventeen years old and the crime is extremely violent or excessive. While gang members commit violent adult like crimes they are still only children. Children should be treated differently from adults no matter the extent of their crimes. If juvenile offenders are not offered an opportunity by society to change they will only become worse criminals when they become adults. It is essential that society recognize that juveniles do not have the same culpability as adult criminal offenders and instead be offered the opportunity to change their criminal behavior and become more productive members of society.

In conclusion, America has the largest prison population in the world and that population increase every day. With the new Three Strikes policy more offenders are going to jail but fewer offenders are being released. Drug offenders make up the majority of the prison population when there is a simple fix. By providing drug offenders that commit crimes due to their addictions they require treatment. Without this substance abuse treatment they will never overcome their addiction or their criminal ways. Retributive policies have failed to deter the criminal offender and has instead resulted in a higher rate of recidivism and a larger prison populations. Alternative sentencing practices and reforming three strikes laws as well as changing the criminal justice systems approach to the juvenile offender are just a few of the changes that need to be made to ensure that the problem of prison overcrowding begins to see some relief. If measures are not taken to change the causes of prison overcrowding no effective changes will occur.

References

<https://assignbuster.com/criminal-justice-overview-paper-essay-sample/>

Albanese, J. S. (2013). *Criminal Justice* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Richardson, H. (2004). *What Causes Overcrowding in Jails and Prisons?* Retrieved October 28, 2011 from [www. ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/.../whatiscausingprisonovercrowding. pdf](http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/.../whatiscausingprisonovercrowding.pdf)

Savage, D. (2011). *U. S. Supreme Court Orders Massive Inmate Release to Relieve California's Crowded Prisons.* Retrieved October 28, 2011 from [http://articles. latimes. com/2011/may/24/local/la-me-court-prisons-20110524](http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/24/local/la-me-court-prisons-20110524)