

Causes of mental health and bullying in prison criminology essay



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Prisons as places of deprivation of liberty have existed since time immemorial, yet prisons as we know them today – places where offenders are sent by the Criminal Justice System as a punishment for their behaviour – are a product of the industrial age (Maguire et al, 2005). “ Ideally” the reason behind the imprisonment is according to Section 142 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (cited in Elliott and Quinn) to punish , deter and rehabilitate the offender . The main aims of these three areas is concerned with the recognition that the criminal has done something wrong. It then locates them in an institution which by taking away their freedom, is designed to deter them from further offences upon release, punish them for the offence already committed, and then tries to rehabilitate them, so that they are less likely to commit further offences upon release, either because they learn to see the harm they have caused, or because, through education and training, they find other ways to spend their time. The process of rehabilitation would ‘ change ‘ them into law abiding citizens. What is more it is believed that it would persuade other ‘ potential ‘ criminals that such activates are not ‘ beneficial’ – in other words it would deter people from committing further crime (Elliott and Quinn, 2008). While in theory such an idea seems to perfectly fit the purpose of punishment, in practice significant amounts of negative experience such as intensive growth of bullying and mental health problems, are present within the prison’s environment, together with overcrowding and poor living conditions, failing to deliver the successful processing of such a plan (Elliot and Quinn, 2008). The aim of this essay is to compare and contrast causes of mental health and bullying in prison, as well as detect any, if possible, links between bullying and mental health among prisoners

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Farrington defined bullying as the 'repeated oppression of a less powerful person by a more powerful one'. He claimed that it usually includes three different elements. The first element includes physical, verbal or psychological attack with intent to cause harm, fear or distress. The second is an imbalance of power, where a more powerful person is oppressing the less powerful one, and thirdly it includes a continuous series of incidents between these same people over some period of time. Mental health is defined in Section 1(2) of the Mental Health Act 1983 as 'Mental illness, arrested or in completed development of mind, psychopathic disorder and another disorder or disabilities of mind'. Although as shown above there is a huge difference in what constitutes bullying and mental health, there is no doubt that both of them can be caused by similar factors such as social and environmental causes (for example overcrowding), physical causes and psychological causes (Ireland, 2002; WHO, 1998).

The physical environment in prisons such as overcrowding, quality of accommodation, availability of contact with friends and family, lack of stimulation in the form of activities, may have an impact on the prisoner's mental health as well as contributing to the development of bullying in prison. According to Maguire et al. (...) the imprisonment rate in England and Wales is the highest in Western Europe, and according to the official prison statistics for England and Wales the total prison population has increased from around fifty-one thousand in 1995 to over eighty-four thousand in 2009. What is more overcrowding in prisons may lead to increased depression, stress, boredom and nervous breakdown, leading to serious breaches of prison discipline, violence and riots. The cause of prison overcrowding and an

increase in the prison population is a result of a greater number of convictions and the absence of the availability of prisons places. Further equally important factors are change in criminal justice policy, tightening of sanctions, resulting in longer prison sentences. Reducing funds for the prison also indirectly cause aggression among prisoners.(though less staff, causing tension among overworked staff, which then affects the inmates). Prisons have a limited capacity, and the prisoners have certain rights that should not be violated. Factors such as lack of liberty, as in many of the prisons where prisoners are locked-up for twenty three hours a day, lack of, or limited, communication with friends and family , usually without any privacy, all contribute to the problem. What is more, prisons take away the prisoners' free will. They can no longer freely decided where to live, with whom to associate and how to fill their free time and must follow the discipline imposed by prison rules and prison officers.

Physical causes such as their individual characteristics or biological make-up may have some influence on the causes of bullying and mental health in prisons. According to Ireland (2002) prisoners mostly come from social environments where emphasis is placed on toughness and the ability to protect oneself and when entering prison these characteristics are magnified. However such behaviour while being in prison may be linked with bullying other usually weaker and disturbed inmates (Ireland, 2002) According to Farrington (...) the people who tend to bully are more likely to have children who will be bullies, and people who tend to be the victims of bullying tend to have children who will become the victim of bullying. The same may apply to prison inmates who tend to be weak, with low self-

esteem and with a low capacity for coping with the prison environment and they are more likely to become victims of bullying than people who are characterized as strong, confident and aggressive. Also individual genetic make-up might put some prisoners more at risk than others to suffer from mental illness or become victims of bullying because they are less able to adapt or cope with certain environments or they become one of the bullies as they possess the physical skills which give prisoners the ability to bully others physically, verbally or indirectly. Moreover those suffering from any injuries while being in prison, which may have been caused by being involved in a fight with another prisoner, can also experience changes to their personality and in some cases may cause the beginning of schizophrenia, psychosis or self harm.

Psychological factors such as a prisoner's emotional and mental state of mind, especially when the prisoner has experienced any form of physical or sexual abuse or there have been any other potentially traumatic events in the past can affect his behaviour in prison. While there is a huge proportion of prisoners suffering from such trauma prior to imprisonment, many will experience such trauma as an effect of imprisonment (Crighton and Towl, 2008). Generally prisons are harsh places, where discipline and routine are the essence of daily life causing being in prison to be a stressful experience. Additionally according to (Crighton and Towl, 2008) prisoners appear to be at a high level of risk with factors associated with poor traumatic responses from childhood onwards. Psychological factors especially emotional responses (Irleand, 2002) in terms of bullying will probably be heightened for the victims. Prisons can be aggressive and threatening environments

especially for the first time prisoners . They may be fearful of what may happen to them. Undeniably fear is seen as a necessary component in definitions of bullying in the prison environment. Moreover fear may impact prisoners' other emotions such as anxiety, nervousness and feelings of unimportance which may display behaviourally through self harm or social avoidance.

Despite the similarities in causes for mental health and bullying in prison we can also see differences . One of them is unquestionable the difference between the definition of mental health and the definition of bullying.

Likewise once in prison , prisoners enter a highly structured social environment that negotiates for power and dominance, where dominance over other weaker inmates is one way of gaining acceptance , satisfaction , status and respect among other prisoners. Hence bullying is often seen as a normal part of prison life that helps to gain this dominance over other inmates. Furthermore bullies who remain at the top of the hierarchy among other inmates, through their dominance will often get other prisoners to run errands and do jobs for them which are against prison regime, and so they can remain unidentified and hence will not be punished . While the condition of an individual's mental health consists of a number of different factors and elements. mental health is primarily our resistance to all of our difficult situations , events, phenomena and our emotional and psychological survival partly depends upon an individual's ability to tolerate the deprivations of prison. Additionally according to Viggiani (2007) most prisoners come from the poorest or most socially excluded tiers of society and often have the greatest health needs. Prison may therefore be the worst place to send them

given that, in the main, they are likely to be highly vulnerable or susceptible to poor health, hence mental disorders. Mental disorder may also be the cause of committing the offence, and hence imprisonment. As Rubin (1972: 398 cited in...) says ' certain mental disorders are characterized by some kind of confused , bizarre, agitated, threatening, frightened, panicked, paranoid or impulsive behaviours and as a consequence they may lead to inappropriate , anti-social or dangerous acts. Individual mental health may be managed and treated either by medication or different treatment programs (handbook), while in order to prevent bullying prisons should focus on making changes to the prison's environment which would include changing the supervision of the prisoners area, increased security for controlling and monitoring, educating staff and prisoners about bullying, improving communication between prison staff, or even increasing the stimuli for prisoners. This include raising the number and qualities of activities and programs available for prisoners.

Undoubtedly, despite the similarities and differences between bullying and mental health, one may lead to the other (Ireland, 2002; Farrington,....) . As mentioned above bullying constitutes aggressive behaviour in which an individual manipulates and dominates others in order to obtain a goal, whether it is social or material. In order to classify the behaviour as bullying it must represent repeated and unprovoked acts of aggression , which include physical , verbal or psychological attack (Irleand, 2002; Farrington,). Indeed bulling can cause immediate harm and distress to victims and have negative consequences on their mental health. Victims may feel psychologically or physically distressed and experience pain, and prisoners <https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-mental-health-and-bullying-in-prison-criminology-essay/>

who have been the victims of bullying may experience a range of feelings such as anger, fear, anxiety, paranoia, distress, hopelessness or depression (Ireland, 2002) which can lead to avoidance, social isolation and therefore mental illness in prisoners.

In conclusion despite the 'idea' that prisons should rehabilitate and change offenders into law abiding citizens, we can see that prison is a modern form of slavery no matter what its ideological justification is. Prisoners' mental health and bullying is a growing problem in prisons. Instead of rehabilitating and changing prisoners into well managed and well behaved citizens, in many cases it changes them into more aggressive and troublesome inhabitants very often with physical and mental problems, which makes it harder for them to reintegrate with the society and with present times.