

# Impact of solitary confinement



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## Entrapment

Imagine being in an 8×10 foot cell, alone with every detail being minimized like social interaction, physical contact only when moved to another cell and a maximum of 15-minute timed shower and only one hour to exercise alone. Who wouldn't go insane? Solitary confinement was created in 1829 when there was an idea that isolation was good for the inmate to take time and think about what they have done. An estimate of eighty thousand prisoners are locked into confinement a year. Their use of solitary confinement may be used as disciplinary punishment for convicted prisoners, and to protect other inmates and guards (solitary confinement, 2). That system needs to be banned because of its effects that it has on the prisoner's physical and mental health, social health, and actions after released.

While the history of solitary confinement is extensive, surprisingly it was created as a type of religious practice and not punishment. " There was a belief that you could put a prisoner in his solitary cell, freed from the evil influences of modern society," stated a psychiatrist. (Taddonio, 2017, 2). How does a practice that was formed over a century ago continue into today's more modernized society? As a society, scientists are still discovering more but the knowledge of what complete isolation does over extended periods of time is still there. While solitary could be considered somewhat humane, it is not at the same time. People are horrified when some lock animals in cages for their entire lives, so why do that to someone of your own species? Especially when there is common knowledge stating the detriment that is caused when a sociable and impressionable creature is locked into an empty room with only himself to converse with. In 1890, a

landmark supreme court case was tried about a prisoner who was already sentenced to hanging, but also endured 45 days in solitary confinement. His lawyer tried on the judgement that it was inhumane to put him in solitary when he was already going to pay the greatest price for his crimes.

(Taddonio, 2017). This trial was the beginning of changing the format of prison systems, however they still lack a complete makeover in the way prisoners are treated.

Solitary confinement is a ruthless punishment used in many prison systems today in order to teach corrupt prisoners a lesson about whatever crime they have committed.

Many of prison inmates at Virginias Red Onion super max prison resorted to hunger striking in order to call attention to the inhumane confinement conditions. The prisoners are protesting the use of prolonged entrapment, which the strikers describe as the ultimate form of torture. Prisoners at Red Onion spend 23 hours a day in a cell alone, some including those with mental illness, have been kept in isolation for years. Solitary confinement has been going on for 200 years and the main reason for super max cells is to help the inmate by giving them time alone to really think about the bad that they have done and reunite with god. (Cloud, D. H, Drunker, E., Browne, A., Parsons, J. n. d. 1). Logically one can understand where the prison system is coming from, however being along in a room for weeks can bring someone to the edge of their insanity and push them over that metaphorical cliff.

Solitary confinement has a negative effect on someone's physical health which can harm them mentally by causing them to become violently insane;

and others committing suicide. “ Dr. Craig Haney, social psychologist and psychology professor found extraordinary high rates of symptoms of psychological trauma among the inmates held in long term solitary confinement.” Most of the inmates suffered from feelings of anxiety and nervousness, headaches, troubled sleep, and lethargy or chronic tiredness, and over half complained of nightmares, heart palpitations, and fear of impending nervous breakdowns. Nearly half suffered from hallucinations and perceptual distortions, and a quarter experienced suicidal ideation. (Heather R. 2012). This onset of negative thinking can affect the prisoner for the rest of their life, in or out of prison, causing a lifelong trauma in a sense to deal with. Prison systems tend to neglect this by saying, “ well it is needed as time alone,” but do they consider the lifelong detriment they are causing? This system is essentially putting adults in a long drawn out time out.

Many people are unknowledgeable about the true effects of PTSD, but inmates who are already serving penance for a crime are facing that lifelong mental health condition.

Research has shown that prisoners with any length of time within confinement are more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than an inmate with no time in solitary confinement. (Hagan, 2017). This research defines the extent of symptoms that the prisoner is showing while also listing how long the prisoner was held in confinement. With lack of exercise and socialization, the prisoner is quite literally going insane. While most think, “ do the crime, do the time,” how fair is it really to truly lock someone away from everything else? Even other prisoners. It is a negative

environment as is and the prison system is making it even worse by treating prisoners like animals essentially.

In regard to socialization, humans are normally socialized as young children. In this case scenario prisoners are having to be re-socialized. To re-learn things they used to know with a certain familiarity. Doctors will tell you how important it is to socialize a child, but what about staying socialized? As an adult, it is slightly less important due to neurological function developing as a child. (The Lancet, 2018). Even with this thought kept in mind, it still has to be considered that adults can and will also face neurological deficits as well as deficits to their ability to interact with other human beings. Not every prisoner is serving a life sentence for a heinous crime, some are there for more minor things such as possession or fighting back. Why keep punishing when prisoners are in prison to be punished for crimes they have committed.

Negative effects that it has on an inmate's physical health has to do with them being in a closed isolated place. Some of the physical health that an inmate might encounter while being in solitary confinement is abdominal pains, as well as muscle pains in the neck and back, which can be caused by the lack of inactivity and some researchers say that some consequences of solitary confinement can be a direct result of sensory deprivation. Inmates can start to experience and increase to normal stimuli causing them to become overly sensitive. (Smith, 2006). Due to this it makes the prison population much more difficult to return to. The physical detriments are major to someone who has never been completely alone, everyone has a society they reside within and all of a sudden that is taken away from them.

Emotional and behavioral effects in inmates being in solitary confinement are causing inmates to experience adverse effects that can go from acute to chronic depending on how long they stay in isolation (Shalev, 2008.). They have also had feelings of panic and rage, and poor impulse control. With these side effects, they lack the ability to provide proper impulse control, impulse control they were taught as children or develop later in life. Even after leaving solitary confinement most of the inmate's experience aggression and causing them to have difficulty adjusting to social contact.

A big part of prison is to rehabilitate offenders, so they will no longer be breaking the law. However, with minimal programs to ensure this rehabilitation, how is it ensured that the offender will not end up right back where they were? In prison systems, the prisoners are sent to solitary confinement to punish the criminal. In those terms it makes sense, right? In one case a prisoner who was sentenced to two years in prison was sent into solitary confinement for starting a riot for four months. (Tsui, 2017). In this case it seems reasonable that he was put in isolation from everyone else because he was encouraging the bad behavior everyone is in prison to alter. However, even though it seemed valid, this impacted him for the rest of his life. " It leaves a scar on you that you won't forget and can't heal...you get flashbacks and anxiety," he stated, not only did this " teach him a lesson" but it impacted the rest of his life. (Tsui, 2017). This effect impacts not only his mental health but his ability to integrate back into a somewhat normal lifestyle. Which then impacts the " rehabilitation" he just completed by going to prison as penance for his crimes. This dilemma is setting back prisoners even further than their crimes could have set them back. It is hard to

reintegrate into society regardless after being in prison, but this set back makes people pay their penance for the rest of their life. This prisoner paid his ultimate price by eventually reoffending and landing himself right back where he began. Does this system truly rehabilitate prisoners or keep them prisoners?

Solitary confinement is not something that can just completely dissipate from the prison system, but it is good to keep in mind the negative effects it has on inmates. At the end of the day, humans are social creatures that should not be treated like animals. It is time to look at the big picture and find other solutions for punishment because afflicting lifelong mental illness is not acceptable to put onto others.

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