Prison Atmosphere and Violence

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Abstract

A prison refers to a place where individuals are incarcerated after committing different offenses. The incarceration deprives criminals of their rights and is always aimed at ensuring that they undergo the process of change to become better members of the society. Notably, the atmosphere in most of the prisons is characterized by punishments tailored toward correcting individuals, using the chosen mode. The prison atmosphere is made up of individuals with different psychopathological, psychological, and social psychological factors that have an extreme influence on their behavior. Therefore, this paper will emphasize the view that most of the violent acts in prisons emanate from such factors as mental illnesses, cultural factors, and the thoughts and perceptions of individuals concerning life. Again, prison life is always characterized by the deprivation of the liberty of individuals and this affects their emotions, mental nature, and physical nature. Thus, violence is always enhanced by these feelings.

Overcrowding is another significant thing that makes prison atmosphere extremely bad for most inmates. Racism is also a key cause of the most violent acts experienced in prisons in different parts of the globe. In some instances, prison officers are always the masterminds of the violent acts in prison as they pursue self-interests. Therefore, effective prison reforms have to be adopted in order to ensure that the prison atmosphere is improved, hence, reducing instances of violence in prisons.
Prison Atmosphere and Violence

Introduction

The unbearable prison atmosphere and increased levels of violence have raised concerns among different individuals in society. It is worth noting that most prisons are always overcrowded and all individuals, including those with mental illnesses, are combined, hence, precipitating violence in prisons. The prison staff also plays a key role in increasing the levels of such violent acts as sexual violence. Some of the most common forms of violence in prison include sexual violence, wars among prisoners, and the manhandling of prisoners. The high level of violence in prisons has raised concerns over the effectiveness of prisons to rehabilitate individuals and make them better members of the society after the completion of their prison term.

The most affected individuals are blacks and women because of the common understanding that they are the minority members of society. Women are mostly affected by the rape and sexual violence, especially emanating from members of the prison staff, who keep harassing them. Britton (2003) affirms that over 20% of women incarcerated in different correctional facilities experience sexual harassments caused by the prison staff. Male inmates also face high incidences of sexual violence brought about by staff perpetrators. The overall male population that face sexual violence is estimated to be 3% of the males incarcerated in these correctional facilities. Racism is another key issue to consider, when evaluating the levels of violence, as African-Americans are the most affected. According to Edgar, O'Donnell, & Martin (2003), over 30% of African-Americans face violent acts from both their fellow inmates and the prison staff that uses excessive force against them.
The focus of this research is to highlight the view that the prison atmosphere is extremely unbearable and there are high levels of violence in prisons. Effective analysis of the prison atmosphere and other research conducted on the nature of the atmosphere and the occurrence of the violent acts are going to be highlighted in this paper, especially pointing out the most affected populations.

It is worth noting that the unbearable prison atmosphere brought about by overcrowding and the increased cases of violence affects criminal justice as individuals continue raising concerns about the effectiveness of prisons to correct the individuals. Most individuals in society tend to lose confidence in criminal justice because of the torturous life that most inmates undergo, hence, becoming even worse members of society after the completion of their respective sentences. Most of the homeless individuals arrested in the street are always mishandled by police officers without the understanding that most of them have mental and socio-demographic problems, and are drug abusers. Therefore, these individuals become more frustrated and could increase the levels of violent acts in prisons. The overall effect of the mistreatment of homeless individuals is the decline in the confidence of the public pertaining to the effectiveness of the criminal practice and policy to rehabilitate individuals as it states.

A vital and new approach that can be used in handling homeless inmates is to give them a hope in life. This can be achieved through providing them with skills and techniques and facilitating motivational talks for them in order to improve their approach toward life. Mental treatments would also play a key role in helping such individuals. This new approach is extremely effective, as it would ensure that the homeless inmates acquire a new attitude toward their lives, using the acquired skills. Different communities and the overall society would benefit as the homeless inmates complete their sentences and start serving their societies instead of being
burdens. Therefore, the improvement of the prison atmosphere and the alleviation of violent acts would immensely boost the realization of the goal of rehabilitation; otherwise, individuals cannot be rehabilitated when they are abused in the poor prison atmosphere.

**Variables**

The variables for this study include the nature of inmates, overcrowding, prison officers, and the overall living conditions of the prisons. These constitute the independent variables in the research. The dependent variables include the prison atmosphere and violence in prisons.

**Review of Literature**

**Brief History**

The key problem under question is the undesirable prison atmosphere and increased violence against inmates, especially women and African-Americans. Some of the solution that have been attempted by authorities include providing these individuals with effective job skills, improving nitration, improving medical care, reducing populations, and the sacking and prosecution of any member of prison staff deemed to be perpetrating violence in prisons. The problem of undesirable prison atmosphere and increased violence among prisoners has been there from immemorial time and has persisted into the current years. One of the most common examples of an unbearable prison atmosphere and violence can be witnessed from the on goings at ADX Florence SuperMax Facility in Colorado where individuals are denied almost every right. The denial of the rights of inmates and the extreme levels of punishments against inmates attracted the attention of the public toward the ineffectiveness of this facility to rehabilitate individuals.
Review

Several researchers have conducted studies, relating to the prison atmosphere and the rates of violence in prisons. Notably, they have come up with diverse studies in line with their research on prisons and the overall nature of treatment of individuals. This part explicates some of the studies that have been conducted previously in the field of the prison atmosphere and violence among individuals.

Knowles (1999) conducted an interview on a total of 3,304 criminals, asking them about the common forms of violence that they encounter while locked up in prisons. Knowles affirms that at least 4.7% of the men pointed out the main violence as being attached to forced sexual acts and rape, emanating from fellow prisoners and prison officers. The cases of prison violence and poor atmosphere were significantly brought out during the interviews with most criminals, pointing out the view that prison life is more of a torture and not a reform center. Again, most inmates pointed out that the prison atmosphere, in which they were living, is extremely demeaning and does not fit for human existence. They were not happy with their prisons, indicating the view that prison facilities are not satisfactory. Those who were interviewed also blamed the prison officers for perpetuating violence in the prisons instead of helping alleviate these cases. Therefore, Knowles came up with such interventions as facilitating maximum security for all inmates, promoting nutrition, selecting prison officers based on integrity, and the reduction of any instance of overcrowding in prisons. The article is effective because it utilizes the views presented by inmates to explicate the prison environment and the forms of violence in prisons. However, the article does not bring out wider ideas on the nature of the prison atmosphere.
According to the studies conducted by Pritikin (2009) it was determined that the substandard prison atmosphere and the increased cases of violence against prisoners did not help in alleviating crime as inmates were not rehabilitated as required. The studies by Pritikin covered many US prisons and found out that most of the criminals in detention were repeat offenders, who had not been corrected adequately. They had not been given effective access to facilities such as educational facilities, proper medical care, and officers, guarding these prisons, had treated them badly. The studies also revealed that incarceration is an inadequate practice as it pushes up the rates of crimes among individuals, who had initially been released. The bad treatment and cases of violence could be blamed for the increased cases of crimes among these individuals. Therefore, Pritikin has the view that the human behavior approach has to be used in understanding all inmates and ensuring that significant measures are put in place to rehabilitate them. He points out such interventions as guidance and counseling among prisoners and the continuous education of criminals in order to provide them with relevant skills that would make them better societal members as they complete their sentences. This article is advantageous because of its direct skepticism about the effectiveness of prisons to alleviate crimes with their existing substandard atmosphere and high levels of violence against inmates. On the other hand, this article is not exhaustive in the presentation of solutions toward making prisons a better place.

Vigne, Debus-Sherrill, Brazzell, & Downey (2011) also conducted studies on the prevention of violence and sexual assault in jail. They emphasized the situational approach to the matter of dealing with inmates and ensuring that they come out as changed individuals ready to fit in the society. In their study, Vigne, Debus-Sherrill, Brazel, and Downey pointed out the view that most prisons are faced with cases of violence, including sexual violence and mistreatment of inmates by the prison staff. This is frustrating and negates the role of prison facilities of making
inmates better members of the society. The authors hold that the situational approach should be embraced in the prison departments to ensure that inmates are studied at all times and given proper directions to suit their situation at that particular time. This would help them to realize that they are still valued in the society and would play a leading role in reforming these individuals, hence, making them better and helpful to the society. The authors point to such interventions as the improvement of nutrition in prisons, enabling prisoners to enjoy some leisure time, and the improvement of prisoner relationships. These interventions would help to alleviate cases of violence and sexual violence, especially against minority groups such as women and African-Americans. Reforms in the prison department would play a critical role in ensuring that prisons remain the main areas of correction. This article is vital because it brings out some of the clear forms of violence such as sexual abuse and gives out solutions that would ensure such abuses to reduce significantly. However, the article does not give the relevant examples of jails where these violence can be traced to.

Another research in this area was conducted by Austin, Fabelo, Gunter, & McGinnis (2006) and they point out that sexual violence is one of the most significant forms of violence against criminals. The authors also embrace the behavioral model where they cite the behavior of most prison officers in promoting most of the sexual offenses in prisons. They take advantage of the inferiority of prisoners, especially female prisoners, and intentionally harass them sexually. This is done without any regret or remorse from these officers. Additionally, the authors point to the view that most prisons are overcrowded, hence, increasing the rate at which these violent crimes occur amongst inmates themselves. Some inmates also tend to take advantage of the poor living conditions and overcrowding to beat others and ask for forceful sexual favors. Thus, the authors highlight significant interventions that would help alleviate the cases of sexual violence and
other forms of violence in prisoners. One of the key interventions they point out is that prison officers have to be sacked for participation in any form of violence against inmates. The authors also point out interventions such as the reduction in the population of inmates across all prisons to ensure that the number is manageable, and the improvement of medical standards in prisons.

This article is advantageous because of its vast educative points on the sexual offense, especially those drawn from the Texas Prison System. On the other hand, the article only focuses on sexual violence against inmates, leaving out other forms of violence such as the use of excessive force by prison officers.

Lastly, Dewdney & Miner (1975) also conducted studies on the social atmosphere of prisons, focusing mainly on the women prisons. The study utilized a sample of 100 women offenders and wanted to find out their attitudes, concerning prison life and the prison atmosphere. It is noted that about 90% of these women were not happy about the nature of lives that prisons had subjected them to. They were not happy living in prisons that did not care about sanitation and other important aspects such as the improvement of the education progress of individuals. They were of the opinion that prisons are similar to hell because of the manner in which individuals are treated in were extremely demeaning. Again, women face sexual violences from other prisoners and the prison staff. Most of the women interviewed were extremely dissatisfied with the services provided by their prisons such as nutrition, social interactions and the freedom to lead a violence-free life. The interventions offered in regard to this is that prisons have to embrace events that promote social relationships such as sports. Additionally, prisoners should not be harrased but should be given effective directions to ensure that they derive maximum rehabilitation from their life in prison. This article is effective because it presents the different types of violences and also the nature of the prison atmosphere is brought out.
However, it mainly focuses on women prisons leaving out the juvenile and male correctional facilities.

This study aims at addressing new interventions that would help to improve the quality of the prison atmosphere and eliminate all the forms of violence prevalent in prisons. The atmosphere of prisons such as the Idaho Correctional Center would be highlighted and new interventions articulated through this research. The key points that would be explicated by the study include the vetting of prison officers, the improvement of the nutrition, the introduction of leisure facilities and the improvement of educational facilities in prisons, and the enlargement of prisons in order to eliminate the high levels of overcrowding. Therefore, the research question to be addressed is what can the federal government do to improve the atmosphere of prisons and alleviate the high levels of violence against inmates.

**Method**

**Purpose**

Most of the researchers, studying the nature of prisons and violence in prisons, utilized interviews to gather the data from different inmates in different prisons. For instance, a sample of inmates was interviewed on different matters, including the living conditions in prisons and the causes of violence in prisons through interviews. Similarly, this study intends to utilize interviews in the collection of data, relating to prisons and the nature of life in prisons. The purpose of the study is to find out why the atmosphere of most prisons is undesirable and the sources of violence in prisons.

**Study Design**

The study would utilize a mixed method, involving both qualitative and quantitative methods of research. It is worth noting that the qualitative method of study entails the collection
of data but does not produce discrete numerical data. On the other hand, the quantitative method of study entails the production of discrete numerical data. The research would utilize the mixed methods because both methods can supplement each other effectively in the course of conducting the study on inmates i.e. the qualitative method would provide with deep explanations as the quantitative method provides data that needs to be analyzed to help in making the appropriate decisions. These methods would be used to explain the nature of the prison atmosphere and factors that make up the atmosphere in these prisons. Additionally, the mixed methods of study would be used to explain the existence of violence in prisons and their possible sources. This implies that the study would explain whether these cases of violence are mainly reported among prisoners or the prison staff. The levels of the different types of violence such as sexual harassment would also be explained effectively through this mixed method of research that would involve the collection of statistical data and the analysis of this data on the reported cases of violence in prisons.

The research would employ the use of interviews as the type of the study. This implies that a sample of prisoners would be interviewed on the topic, hence, offering vital information, relating to the nature of the prison atmosphere. Additionally, these prisoners would be required to shed some light on the cases of violence in prisons and the classes of individuals that are responsible for the cases of violence. Interviews are selected as the type of study as they present numerous advantages. Notably, interviews would be utilized because they entail proper cooperation from respondents, they can be used for both literate and illiterate respondents, and can be effectively used in gathering information through observation. These advantages would ensure that the required data is collected and analyzed for use by the required agencies that are in charge of prisons across the country. The advantages associated with the use of interviews
explain why most researchers utilized them in collecting information, pertaining to prisons, and the nature of life in these prisons.

Population

This research will entail a study of 500 prisoners of the Idaho Correctional Center. The stratified sampling plan would be used as it makes its simpler to get both male inmates and female inmates into the ultimate sample. The arrangement of these populations in the strata would ensure that there is control of the strata and the selection of individuals with the required characteristics, hence, promoting the effectiveness of the research. In the literature review, it can be noted that most researchers wanted to collect information from both male inmates and female inmates and the stratified sampling plan would be the most effective in ensuring that both the target populations are interviewed. It is significant to note that inmates at the Idaho Correctional Facility would constitute the population to be used for this study. These inmates are perceived to be affected by most cases of poor prison atmosphere and immense cases of violence, emanating from the prison staff and other prisoners. Most of these prisoners are adults aged 20 years and above and are in custody for committing different offenses. The population is made up of both men and women with large numbers coming from the African-Americans. More so, most of these inmates are literate as they can effectively read and write. This implies that they need more support in matters of acquiring skills in order to come out as reformed members of the society.

Investigative Techniques

As noted earlier, interviews would be utilized in the investigation of the prison atmosphere and the cases of rampant violence. In the literature review, it can be seen that most researchers embraced the use of open-ended questions in asking their respondents about what they feel about prison life and the significant challenges that they face, while serving their terms
in prison. This research would also maintain this approach in investigating different matters, concerning the nature of prisons and cases of violence. The rationale for the use of open-ended questions is that they enable the respondent to give as much information as possible. Some of the independent variables include nutrition, punishments, sanitary conditions, type of inmate, and the race of the inmate. Dependent variables include the prison environment and violence in prisons. The literature review utilized the ordinal level of measurement to measure each of these variables as the view of the ordinal level allows the ranking of these variables, hence, facilitating the understanding of their relationships.

**Instrumentation**

The study would utilize a standard instrument of measurement. A standardized instrument would be utilized because of its ability to boost the reliability and the validity of the study. In terms of reliability, a standard instrument of measurement would ensure that the same results are attained on different trials. In relation to reliability, a standard instrument would boost the accuracy of the results collected in the study, hence, facilitating in deep understanding of the results to be presented. The significant bias likely to affect the standardized interviews is the interviewer’s bias where some relevant information is likely to be left out of the research. Again, the independent variables here are the prison staff, the inmates, and the living conditions. The dependent variables include violence in prisons and the prison environment. The instrument would be scored by putting into consideration the true value and an error component that could be occurred in the process of measuring.

**Data Collection**

The instrument would be distributed at different places of the correctional facility, including the offices, where the prison officers carry out their operations. The timetable in the
literature involved the collection of data over the whole day from at least 8am to 5pm in the evening every day until the completion of the study. This implies that the respondents were supposed to submit their last responses by at least 5pm in the evening.

Limitations

The key limitation that can be noted is the biasness, emanating from the interviewer. This implies that the interviewer could make conclusions and record information in a distorted manner. Additionally, some populations that could have played a key role in the delivery of the information were apparently sidelined from the study. The control for this was the allowance for the reiteration of some points that did not come out clearly. The reiteration of these points is vital in ensuring that the correct details are presented for analysis.

Discussion and Implications

Discussion

The study findings indicate the prison officers in charge of monitoring inmates cause the high cases of violence in prisons. It is vital to note that prisoners are always mishandled in every aspect by prison officers who tag them criminals that do not have access to any form of freedom. The harassment and the beatings that inmates receive always come at the time when they are supposed to undertake particular duties within their prisons as part of their punishment. It is noted that prison officers mostly push the inmates to do act in the manner they wish in order to express their superiority, while monitoring them. This is emphasized by the fact that most prisoners could show some of the bruises, emanating from the harsh treatment and the beatings they receive from the officers. Additionally, most female inmates face sexual violence as most members of the prison staff force them to engage in sexual acts. They are always helpless and do not have any place to report to because of the broken channels of communication. Notably, this
result agrees with most of the results highlighted in the literature review because of the common understanding that prison officers always want their authority to be felt and they do it using violent acts.

Another significant finding is that most prisoners are always subjected to poor economic, sanitary and nutritional conditions while being in prison. The interviewed inmates were of the view that prisoners are not cared even a little but for their affairs. They are made to leave in undesirable conditions that do not fit for human existence. They also asserted that they are subjected to poor diets that discourage them from eating. At times, the food is usually not well-cooked making it difficult for a normal person to it. All these unfavorable conditions translate to a poor prison atmosphere that does not provide motivation to individuals. Motivation is important because it helps in changing the attitude of individuals toward life and ensuring they change accordingly. The unfavorable prison atmosphere is also blamed for negating the key role of prisons, which entails the rectification of individuals, hence, making them better members in society. This finding also agrees with the literature review as most studies found out that prisoners leave in extremely demeaning conditions. This affects their attitudes and overall behavior, making it difficult for them to change into productive members of society.

**Implications**

These findings would have extreme implications on criminal justice, policy, practice, and future research. On criminal justice, policy, and practice, these findings would call for a wide range of reforms. The entire system of criminal justice would have to be reformed in order to take a humanely approach to the management of inmates while in prison. The criminal policies, relating to the management of criminals and the recruitment of the prison staff, would have to be changed in order to achieve the required standards. The practice of using punishments and
difficult tasks in the management of prisoners would have to be changed in order to ensure that inmates gain more from guiding and counseling and education that would change their lives. Therefore, criminal justice would have to undergo numerous reforms in order to built fresh confidence among members of the public, concerning the effectiveness of the courts to correct individual instead of subjecting them to undesirable living conditions and punishments. The reforms would stretch to the recruitment of the prison staff where members would have to be vetted in order to ensure that only the members who uphold high levels of integrity are selected for the job of managing the prisoners. Additionally, reforms would have to be done in terms of enlarging the prisons and ensuring that each inmate has enough space for leading a normal life. This will help to address the issue of overcrowding in prisons, which is notable for increasing the level of violence in prisons.

The findings would also have implications on future research. It would allow the future researchers to investigate the issue of the prison atmosphere further and gather other relevant information that was not covered in this research. The findings open up more avenues on which future research would be based, hence, making it more reliable and effective in explaining the changes that would have taken place in the prison atmosphere. Additionally, future research would have a guide in reaching conclusions, concerning then the nature of prison life and the steps that have to be undertaken to boost the conditions of living in prisons. Notably, the future research on the topic would rely on these findings to come up with alternatives to solving the common problems that inmates face while locked up in prisons. Thus, the relevant institutions would get more information that would guide them in responding to the required changes. Future research would be conducted, utilizing these findings as the background for the conduction of these studies and the achievement of the desired objectives.
References


