

Andrew Barone

ENG 100

Assignment #2: Research Paper

Due by April 16, 2018

The Era of Prison Reform

Since 1980 the U.S. federal prison population has soared by 800% while the countries' population has only grown a third of that (Mortimer, Zuckerman,). In the U.S. within a span of three years about two thirds of released prisoners are rearrested with a recidivism rate of 67.8% (Mortimer, Zuckerman). What is the purpose of imprisonment? It's a four-prong approach that focuses on retribution, rehabilitation, deterrence, and incapacitation. Those four principles are the foundation of modern prison systems today; but one major component has consistently been neglected for decades and that is rehabilitation. With the amount of money, the U.S. government makes of each inmate it's a disgrace that their prison resources are so poor. No wonder the recidivism rate is so high because barely any inmates are getting the proper treatment they need to get better while behind bars. Instead they treat you like an animal, serve you food that you wouldn't dare give to your pet dog, lock you into confinement for majority of the day, and barely offer any substantial education programs. Who cares how inmates are treated their all no-good murderers right? wrong 90% of inmates on the federal prison level are all non-violent offenders

(Mortimer, Zuckerman). Almost half of inmates in federal prisons are serving time on drug charges; one of the reasons prisoners are rearrested at such a high rate is because they are drug addicts being thrown back into society without the proper tools to survive. Its funny how doctors are susceptible to medical malpractice through a misdiagnosis that causes harm to a patient but prison officials aren't held to the same standard. An inmate with a substance abuse problem receiving the same treatment plan as a 3rd degree murderer serving a double life sentence is an egregious miss diagnosis that happens all too often. So I believe the American government should reform their prison conditions to lower the recidivism rate, aftercare for released prisoners, and lower the cost in the long run that tax payers shell out to fund prisoners.

Improving on prison conditions will dramatically alter the prison recidivism rate; by putting a bigger emphasis on rehabilitaion instead of punishment. Research shows that recidivism risk can be effectively reduced through evidence-based programming that targets criminogenic needs, such as courses in cognitive behavioral therapy and other topics (The United States of Justice Archives). By obtaining information on a specific inmate you can discover what their criminogenic needs are; such as education level, criminal, and substance abuse history to devise what is called an individuated reentry plan. This evaluation was concluded last fall and will ensure that the right services are delivered to the respected inmate. Research shows that inmates who participate in correctional education programs have 43 percent lower odds of returning to prison than those who do not, and that every dollar spent on prison education saves four to five dollars on the costs of re-incarceration (The United States of Justice Archives). The Federal Bauru of Prisons (BOP) is launching a school district within prisons offering programs for adult literacy, GED, post-secondary education, and expanded opportunities for inmates with

learning disabilities. Research shows that inmates who worked in prison industries were 24 percent less likely to recidivate and 14 percent more likely to be gainfully employed after release from custody than other inmates (The United States of Justice Archives). The BOP is revitalizing UNICOR; a job training program that helps inmates develop the skills they need to be in a better position to find work once released from prison.

The BOP has established mental health step down units which provides the proper treatment and housing to an individual with a diagnosed mental illness; also a pilot program was introduced with a full-fledged staff dedicated to assist the mentally ill within the housing units. One of the major issues in prison is the improper diagnosis of its inmates especially those who have a drug addiction. In April 2016, BOP announced a series of family-friendly initiatives aimed at strengthening the bonds between inmates and their children and families. These programs included expanded video-conferencing visitation; the launch of a pilot program that engages children of incarcerated parents in positive youth development activities; new guidance and training for BOP staff on how to make visitation spaces more child friendly and interact with children in a developmentally appropriate way; educating inmates on how to keep in contact with children who may be in foster care; tip sheets for parents, correctional staff and mentors to support children of incarcerated parents; and a new interagency partnership to develop model policies that can be used by state and local prison facilities to help strengthen family ties (The United States of Justice Archives). These are just a couple of examples of how the BOP is working toward lowering the recidivism rate; and if all of these programs are allowed time to get

off the ground significant changes will be made and more prisoners will be able to find their niche into society and never return to prison again.

Rehabilitating inmates inside of the prison is only half the battle; the real work begins when they are reentered into society. Within three years of release, 67.8 percent of ex-offenders are rearrested, and within five years, 76.6 percent are rearrested. (Simmons School of Social Work). What makes the transition so difficult is that majority of inmates are high school drop outs; many also have a history with substance abuse. With that companies are wary of hiring convicts for the fear of being sued due to negligent hiring. In 72 percent of negligent hiring cases, employers have lost and faced an average settlement of \$1.6 million — powerful disincentive to hire potentially “risky” individuals (Simmons School of Social Work). But by providing more enhanced educational and work force based programs you’re giving the inmate a better chance of establishing themselves as a positive member of society. Both Louisiana and Texas offer certificates of rehabilitation, so that future employers can be more certain that when they hire people with felony convictions, they are hiring people who sincerely want a second chance and who are willing to prove themselves (Davis, Pettus-Carrie, 2018). Another obstacle that prisoners face after being released is housing; everyone needs a place to sleep. Two months after their release, a strong majority of released prisoners in Maryland (80 percent) and Illinois (88 percent) were living with a family member. Released prisoners are also heavily reliant on their families for financial support (The Urban Institute). For the prisoners that don’t have this safety net their only realistic choice is a homeless shelter. If you’re in a homeless shelter you may not have the resources necessary to even afford bus fare; so making it to a probation appointment or court date can be challenging. This is why UNIRCOR is so important because it

allows inmates to learn a trade and network to make connections; so when their released they have to tools necessary to adapt to whatever situation they are thrown into.

Rehabilitation is two-fold in not only benefiting the inmate, but it will also benefit the civilians in the community that the inmate is being released back into. Policy restrictions harm families and public safety by limiting the ability of people to be tax-paying, positive contributors To their communities and, in turn, increasing the likelihood they will return to crime and, subsequently, to incarceration (Davis, Pettus-Carrie, 2018). Instituting reforms that help ease the prisoners transition back into society will make it for a better community; because through achieving accomplishments people will find comfort in the fact is inmate is actual capable of change and actually has a lot to offer as a neighbor. Keeping criminals who are a threat to others in jail is a necessary cause; but a lot of money is being spent on inmates who are non-violent offenders as well. It shouldn't be on the tax payer to help fund the amenities needed for a guy who has a drug problem. Make the people pay for the inmates who shouldn't see the light of day, because they are the real threats to our society.

Everyone has as a varying opinion on this topic which their entitled to have; but I believe if the person warrants it that they should be given a chance to prove that they can change and I think we all can agree on that. But to accomplish this U.S. prison system has to make some changes too, and that begins with a reforms with the primary focus of rehabilitation. By improving conditions within these facilities through expanded resources there is a chance to finally stop the vicious cycle that is prison. Generations of families will be able to prosper; fewer children will grow up without parents and will have a brighter outlook into their own futures.

Communities can unify to see the good in one another and alter how we treat one another. In the grand scheme of it all there's a bigger significance to prison reform than just improving the recidivism rate; I believe the U.S. government should reform their prison conditions because it will give hope to all of humanity who believe change is impossible.

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