

ENG 100: Second Place

U.S. Criminal Justice System: Are Prisoners Getting the Proper Care?

By Gisselle Salgado

As LEJA majors, I believe that it's important to be aware of how inmates are treated in prison because we're part of the reason they're there. Most importantly, we can help initiate the change that's needed to reform prisons. The U.S.A. has more inmates per capita than any other country in the world, and this leads to the country wasting millions to billions of dollars each year (Fagin and Bratina 220). Having the largest number of prisoners causes the U.S. to face many issues within the prisons. One issue is the overcrowding of facilities, which results in some inmates getting released with parole in order to fit other incoming inmates. Less than half of prisoners released on parole can maintain their freedom after 5 years (259). As cops, we are responsible for bringing ex-convicts into society as better individuals. Although the criminal justice system is always evolving to better serve the nation, we need to reform physical and mental health care in U.S. prisons.

Prisons should increase the amount of money that is used for health care to better care for sick inmates. Prison life for many inmates is very poor because prisons don't have enough funds to support the physical health of their inmates. A growing problem that prisons face is their lack of funding for health care. On average, prisons spend \$65,000 a year on a single inmate that receives health care (Fagin and Bratina 238). This is a bigger burden with an inmate that is past their 50s and needs constant checkups. Many would argue that if an inmate is old, then shouldn't they be allowed to be released? The answer will be *no* because there are people that have been convicted when they are past their 50s. Jerry Sandusky, for example, was convicted at the age of 68 for sexual assault. A different health problem is the spread of diseases like HIV/AIDS and

other STDs in prisons is high because inmates will deliberately infect other prisoners (240). This could be preventable if the prison staff would give the infected inmates the proper treatment they need. The issue of health care doesn't stop in prison as many ex-convicts are faced with the issues of not having money or resources to get health care, and they face the possibility of returning to prison if they turn to illegal methods to obtain the money. Also, due to the fact of not being able to get proper medical attention, they are susceptible to spread their disease to others in the community.

The government should hold private prisons more accountable for having to provide for their prisoners' health care. Private prisons focus on putting their inmates to work instead of any type of rehabilitation. This proves that the private prisons' priority is to make money, and they won't give inmates the medical treatment they need. The usage of private prisons has become popular because of the profit that they earn putting inmates to work. Many prisons have been privatized for that same reason. Even with the money that is being made by the inmates' labor, the inmate will not be provided with any medical help if they get hurt while working for the company. As *Time* author Shane Bauer states, the company does not want to pay for the expenses of the hospital visit because they want to minimize their costs (par. 10). The lack of medical treatment has led many inmates to die from infection or commit suicide.

Lastly, increasing funds for mental health care in federal and state prisons will drastically change the number of prisoners that get released and those that will return. Many of the inmates that have been convicted for having a record of mental illness are said to get worse during their time in prison (Herman par. 13). Isolated confinement is one of the worst thing you could do to a mentally ill prisoner, and yet while serving their sentence prisoners spend most of their time alone (par. 9). Mentally ill inmates become more aggressive toward other prisoners or staff

members after being isolated for long periods of time (par. 44). As a result, many of them will get an extended sentence because of those outbreaks, like Ashoor Rasho. Rasho having been convicted for burglary and robbery had an extended sentence and had to serve most of it in isolation (par. 3). Even after prison, Rasho and other mentally ill inmates will face a lot of trouble joining society after they are released. Much of this is the result of trauma caused by the poor conditions in prison. Those who also received no treatment in prison are more likely to return because they have committed a new crime that could have been prevented if they had received the proper treatment (par. 16). The Joliet Treatment Center in Chicago has shown that those inmates under their care, who entered their system after trying self-harm, can now interact within their community much better (par. 32). Therefore, giving the prisoners proper treatment will help prisons have less violent outbreaks and reduce the chances of having their sentences extended.

While learning about how the criminal justice system works for my major, I have learned that there are good and bad things about the system. The lack of health care that is provided to the inmates in many facilities is one of the biggest issues that the criminal justice system faces. As a society that advocates for the improvement and treatment of mental health, having government-run facilities that lack the treatment their inmates need is wrong. Some of the inmates that end up in prisons are those who get addicted to an illegal substance. These inmates should automatically be entered into a rehabilitation facility to help them get better, but that is not the case. As someone that has relatives that have struggled with addiction, I can say that I wouldn't want my relatives to go to prison simply because they are mentally ill. Rather people with these issues should receive proper treatment and not be neglected.

In short, the criminal justice system has many changes that it must face to improve conditions within correctional facilities. Prisons should improve their physical health care for inmates in order to protect them from diseases and care for them as they age. Also, we should move away from private prisons since companies care more for profit than prisoners' health. Finally, in order to improve conditions, there must also be an increase in correctional facilities mental health care funds. Doing so will help facilities have the resources to rehabilitate their inmates. Once these inmates are rehabilitated and then released, they will be able to have an easier time rejoining society. As LEJA majors, we can make a bigger impact in the way prisons are reformed because some of us will work within those prisons and can start treating the inmates differently. Although things will take a while to improve because the government won't increase the prison's budget for health care right away, the change will be important.

Works Cited

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