

A Longitudinal Study of Administrative Segregation

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Abstract

The use of administrative segregation for inmates with and without mental illness has generated considerable criticism. Segregated inmates are locked in single cells for 23 hours per day, are subjected to rigorous security procedures, and have restricted access to programs. In this study, we examined whether inmates in segregation would show greater deterioration over time on psychological symptoms than would comparison offenders. The subjects were male inmates, with and without mental illness, in administrative segregation, general population, or special-needs prison. Subjects completed the Brief Symptom Inventory at regular intervals for one year. Results showed differentiation between groups at the outset and statistically significant but small positive change over time across all groups. All groups showed the same change pattern such that there was not the hypothesized differential change of inmates within administrative segregation. This study advances the empirical research, but replication research is needed to make a better determination of whether and under what conditions harm may or may not occur to inmates in solitary confinement.