

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/mapping-us-jails-use-of-restrictive-housing>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

The use of restrictive housing (solitary confinement) in U.S. prisons and the rationales for or against it have been the subject of widespread research and debate. Much less is known, however, about restrictive housing in U.S. jails, due to lack of standardized policies, limited data, and the rapid turnover of people detained. Furthermore, many jails keep the general population in de facto restrictive housing conditions such as 22 hours or more per day in a cell because of space limitations without classifying this as solitary confinement.

This study provides new, unique insights on the prevalence of restrictive housing in U.S. jails, the disparities in its use, and the conditions of confinement in specific types of housing units, with a focus on restrictive housing units. This data was gathered through a mail-based survey sent to administrators at all jails in the United States.

Approximately 6 percent of the jail population was in restrictive housing on a given day, with the highest proportions in jails located in small and mid-sized counties and in mid-sized jails.

Approximately 23 percent of jails reported that they hold at least some people in the general population area in their cells for 22 hours or more per day.

Approximately 58 percent of people housed in official restrictive housing units had been there for more than 15 days.

Black people and people with a designation for a mental health condition were present in higher percentages of the restrictive housing population than the general population.

PUBLICATION

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