

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/the-impacts-of-solitary-confinement>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

Advocacy and human rights groups, policymakers, health care professionals, faith-based organizations, and leaders in the field of corrections have condemned the widespread use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails, and immigration detention centers. Research shows the serious detrimental effects of spending 22 to 24 hours per day alone and idle in a cell, and numerous studies have found that solitary has a disproportionate impact on Black and brown people, youth, and people with mental illnesses. Vera has worked to end the use of solitary confinement by partnering with state and local corrections agencies to implement safe and effective alternative strategies. This brief provides an overview of the vast body of research on the harmful impacts of solitary confinement on incarcerated people, corrections staff, and the community. This evidence underscores the urgent need for corrections and government leaders to end the use of solitary confinement in prisons, jails, and immigration detention centers across the country.

Research reveals the extensive scope of solitary confinements harmful impacts on incarcerated people, corrections staff, families, and communities. It can cause or exacerbate mental illness, negatively impact families, and be physically and mentally taxing for staff who work there. Research also indicates that it does not significantly reduce misconduct, violence, or recidivism and may actually decrease institutional and public safety.

Solitary confinement can lead to serious and lasting psychological damage. Physical and social isolation, coupled with sensory deprivation and forced idleness, create a toxic combination.

Solitary confinement is a public health issue. People placed in solitary can develop serious, long-lasting health problems, which may increase their risk for further health complications and even premature death.

Staff often report experiencing lower stress levels and increased feelings of safety after leaving solitary to work in less restrictive units, or when working in solitary units that have implemented reforms.

SPECIAL REPORT (CHAPTERED)

PUBLICATION

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