

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/07/01/women-in-california-prison-isolation-units-face-overcrowding-and-despair/>

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close

Search

close

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | July 1, 2013

Women in Central California Womens Facility (CCWF) are reporting being held in Administrative Segregation (Ad Seg) for over three months, following the closure of Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW) for use as a male facility. CCWF, which is located just down the road from the former VSPW, is now one of three female facilities in California. Due in part to the closure of VSPW, CCWF is currently at 174.9 percent capacity, housing approximately [1,500 more](#) people than it was designed for.

N., who has been at CCWF for many years, has reported adverse effects the closure of VSPW had had at CCWF: It is so crowded here at CCWF now that VSPW is here. I am currently being housed in Ad-Seg, have been here since Jan. I was jumped by a group of gang members trying to make a name for themselves in the prison. I was supposed to go to CIW but I guess they didn't have room for me. It is so hard to change and to try when you're crowded in with so many women who do not care about anything. I was blessed to not be hurt worse than I was. There is a lot of fighting now that both prisons live together. I am serving 25-life and just want to get back to general population so I can start my programs. I am extremely distressed over my situation in this institution.

Among the newly arrived individuals from VSPW are an unknown number of women who have been held in Ad Seg upon the closure of VSPW in January. M. reports: We were all programming inmates at VSPW. We were told we would be housed in Ad Seg for a period of 10 days pending proper placement due to the re-purposing of VSPW to a male facility.

That was six months ago.

M., like many of the approximately one hundred women in segregated housing, is being held in segregation not for disciplinary infractions, but because of enemy concerns. Nevertheless, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) policy dictates that these women must be treated the same as those placed in Ad Seg for rules violations (e.g. fighting, drug dealing).

Inmates that are disruptive to other inmates or victimized by other inmates are temporarily segregated from the inmate population by being placed in housing areas known as Administrative Segregation Units (ASU) while employees investigate the level of threat to the prison or inmate, reports the California [Office of the Inspector General](#).

While the Office of the Inspector General found that, in 2009, the average length of stay in Ad Seg at CCWF is approximately two months, several women have written to Solitary Watch reporting that they've been held in isolation for over three months.

As temporary housing, the outlets for women in Ad Seg are few. Captain Travis Wright told Solitary Watch by email that at this time the programs we offer in the Ad-Seg unit are yard, library, medical/dental/mental health, and showers. For 22-24 hours a day, women are held in segregation, many in solitary confinement in small cells.

T. has been incarcerated for 30 years, with a parole date in late 2014, and was among the women transferred from VSPW after 25 years of violation-free programming. She was initially held at CCWF during the 1980s but after a fellow inmate wished to kill her, T. was transferred to VSPW. T. cannot be placed in general population at CCWF due to the presence of the still incarcerated enemy at CCWF, and it appears that T. might be forced to spend her final year in prison in segregation, alongside inmates there for disciplinary issues.

T. wrote Solitary Watch that it's disheartening to be in Ad Seg as I am locked up in a cell 24 hours a day. I only receive six hours of exercise a week, which consists of a small fenced-in cement yard that has no place to sit except on the cement floor. I just go out for the fresh air.

She must be stripped naked before being allowed out to the cement yard and, although she goes to the yard by herself, she is strip-searched again upon returning from the cement yard.

I cannot come out of my cell unless I am handcuffed behind my back even just to shower. It is difficult to carry stuff while I am handcuffed. I get a shower three times a week. I can only buy things from the canteen as much as someone here for disciplinary reasons. In fact, SHU inmates are entitled to more stuff on their canteen list as ASU inmates. I am here for non-disciplinary reasons and receiving less, T. reports.

Presently, the prison officials are considering placing T. in the Security Housing Unit at California Institution for Women (CIW), or, isolated housing generally reserved for gang members and individuals who threaten the safety of others.

Most of these women are lifers/long-termers, and we are being told that if they can't clear up their enemy concerns that they will be referred for a possible SHU term which will be indeterminate. Now I can maybe understand that being the case for disciplinary factors but most of these people have been write up free for years, writes M., who recently was cleared for a transfer to general population housing at CIW. My case barely got cleared up and now I'm just awaiting transfer, which can take 3-6 weeks. I find that unbearable but hey, one can only do so much.

Other women in Ad Seg at CCWF have reported despair at their condition. L., who was placed in Ad Seg in January pending transfer to CIW, spent at least four months in isolation. Already really depressed over losing her children, the isolation, coupled with the pressures of frequent transfers, has contributed to her suffering.

Hundreds of women experience these conditions at CCWF. In January 2013, the court-appointed monitor of California prisons to assure compliance with *Coleman v. Brown* (which resulted in federal oversight of mental health service delivery in CA prisons), reviewed conditions in CCWF between May and August 2012. The Special Master, as the monitor is referred to, [found](#) that in that period of time:

In phone and email correspondence with Solitary Watch, Public Information Officer for CCWF, Captain Travis Wright made a point of writing that CDCR does not have solitary confinement policies. Captain Wright wrote that CCWF strictly adheres to the state law, and cited CCR Title 15 section 3335 which lays out the purposes of segregation: the inmates presence in an institutions general inmate population presents an immediate threat to the safety of the inmate or others, endangers institution security or jeopardizes the integrity of an investigation of an alleged serious misconduct or criminal activity.

R. was placed in Ad Seg after being seriously assaulted by three inmates. Serving a life sentence, she is afraid of being assaulted if [she is] released to the general population again. R., like other women with safety concerns, raised the fact that there are no Protective Housing Units (PHUs) for women, as there are for men. The PHU for men is located at California State Prison, Corcoran, and unlike Ad Seg units, men in the PHU are able to (according to the LA Times) rub elbows, play board games and devise elaborate legal strategies they hope can one day set them free.

However, because women don't have this option, they must either accept an indeterminate term in isolation or risk assault in the general population. R. writes that the option of an indeterminate SHU term would limit her ability to earn good time credits and because of the absence of meaningful programming in SHUs (even for individuals there for their own protection) distresses her. I don't even want to consider an indeterminate SHU term, she writes. Their suggestion to me is to go back to general population and to not run away and that once I got through the bad parts I'll be fine.

So the easy way out for this facility is to ignore my concerns and place me back in general population, putting my life in danger knowing I am a further target to violence, according to R.

T., voicing concerns raised by many of the other women who wrote to Solitary Watch, concludes: CDCR has Protective Housing Units for the men, yet have none for the women. They are forcing the women into general population from Ad Seg, who have already been physically harmed more than once all because they don't have the means to house them. By their own doing.

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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My name is Molly. I am a cultural anthropologist and public services librarian with graduate training in a Master of Social Work program. In 2008, I survived 10 days in Ad Seg in El Dorado County Jail for a peaceable, advocacy-related misdemeanor contempt of court. I did not know what Ad Seg was until my door did not open at dinnertime. I was terrified. I did not know if I would ever get out of jail. I've certainly spent long hours alone studying, but this was hell and it was only county jail! I cannot imagine what women in prison endure. Being released straight out of Ad Seg was a second torture. My life's work is with people, and yet 6 years later, I am still struggling to reintegrate into society. My heart is still in that cage. I don't know if I will ever be free.

My daughter is at chowchilla adseg

She was wrongfully accused of sexual assault on another inmate at folsom women facility on june 14 2014 on july 31 she was cleared of this charge in its entirety but the warden ordered her to remain in adseg untill she can be transferred to a private prison in mcfarland ca ..declared innocent of the charge found not guilty. Still in solitary confinement locked down 22-23 hours a day no phone privileges. no contact visits with her children who havent hugged thier mama in well over a year ..my daughter was not sentenced to a prison inside a prison or to cruel and unusual punishment when i asked her counselor ms torrez why my daughter was still in adseg she said well its a long story that the warden ordered her to stay in ADSEG..i asked for the short version of this long story the answer was..in efforts to uncrowd c.c.w.f women are being sent to private prison runned by the G. E.O. corp. Lord help my daughter & other women who are basically being sold by our governor as well as by other sworn individuals who are supposed to uphold the law not break it please .help that warden, please give my daughter and the other women strength to get through please show me who can help?

I feel for your Daughter and the rest of the women being held in solitary confinement facilities such as your daughter, for no reason at all. It is degrading, inhumane and simply a lack proper leadership on the federal governments and the state of Californias behave. This needs to end, I wish I didnt feel so helpless, or knew of something or someone who would help. I will pray for them, and continue on my educational path so one day hopefully soon I can stop the injustices in our criminal justice system.

Where is the hope for these women? May God help them.

Prisons house humans, and human beings have rights. has society molded the way people think so badly that we must resort to treating the most superior species on this earth like animals. Although people have committed crimes who are in person there is still a level of human treatment that must be met, due to the fact that they are citizens of this nation. Doing time does not mean one must give up their humanity, they owe the system retribution not their lives and sanity. Remember these people will go home one day, and hopefully not worse than what they went in.

This is a prison. Its suppose to be awful and unfair and unsanitary and no body cares..You have no rights but the ones they let you have.. You also have a lot of time to think and get pissed at the way they treat YOU How about that maybe this is part of your punishment! I know how it is, I did six yrs. half in CIW and half at Chowchilla, I hated Chowchilla, a lot of animals so I know! But we fuck up and then want people to have some kind of compassion that we didnt even have for ourselves once we are caught Suck it up like every one else has to do..You know there is nothing you all can do about the over population, safety overrides everything and they will use the word safety a lot when they want something done..They will do what they need to do when they are ready to do it and nothing you say or do can change that. They go home in their nice cars to their nice house and why shouldnt they, they didnt commit the crime we did. So stop stressing so much, I know you are going to stress but also remember they will do it but in their time to make a point

CCWF needs to immediately lower the amount of prisoners there to 137 percent or lower from 175 percent. To do less is a tragedy.

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