

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2019/09/17/louisiana-on-lockdown-voices-from-louisianas-solitary-confinement-cells/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | September 17, 2019

For the recent report [Louisiana on Lockdown](#), a collaboration between Solitary Watch, the ACLU of Louisiana, and the Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola University New Orleans, more than 700 people held in solitary confinement in Louisiana state prisons completed a 12-page survey, the largest single survey conducted of people in solitary. The respondents provided vivid and deeply disturbing descriptions of their experiences of solitary confinement. Many were angry or frustrated about the injustice of their placement in solitary or the lack of any means of earning their way back out. Others were appalled by the filthy, dangerous physical conditions in which they were forced to live. A majority said they had been physically, verbally, or sexually abused by prison staff while in solitary confinement, and many said racism or homophobia played a role in the abuse.

Many people described how their isolation and hopelessness led them to lose their grip on reality, or engage in self-harm or suicide attempts. Others talked about how their desperate requests for medical and mental health care had gone unanswered. A number of the survey respondents expressed fear that the damage caused by their isolation could never fully be repaired. Throughout the hundreds of returned surveys runs a clear sense of the respondents' devastation at what prolonged solitary confinement was doing to their bodies, minds, and souls.

What follows is a brief selection of quotations from the survey responses. Many more quotations, along with data compiled from the surveys, can be found in the report.

Andrew: At first things were okay, but after about a year things started taking a toll on me. I went from being talkative to being barely able to hold a conversation. There's not really one day that I can think clearly. Sometimes I don't even want to get out of bed. I can't sleep without this anti-psychotic medicine they give me.

Michael: I've lost the desire to do the things I enjoyed doing when I first came here. It's difficult to concentrate so I don't read as much as I used to. I don't exercise as much as I once did because my energy level is not the same. I no longer write any prison officials for assistance because I no longer get responses. I've requested mental health counseling for these symptoms, but no one from mental health has come to see me. I asked [the warden] for some anger management material over four months ago, and she has yet to respond. I find myself sitting on the bottom bunk and staring at the wall. When I do realize what I'm doing, I force myself to do something. There is no T.V. to watch and we are not allowed to have radios. I'm beginning to lose the desire to socialize with others.

Clark: It can be very depressing. It can really deteriorate the mind. It makes you feel like the walls are closing in at times. You become real frustrated and agitated, prone to lash out at others. It alters your sleeping pattern. It makes you think your mind is playing tricks on you. You really have to be a strong minded person to refrain from going totally crazy.

Carlos: On and off, I start to cry when thinking of my family or simple things. At times I snap at family members for no reason at all. My family have told me they notice a big difference in me. I don't see it. I find myself counting ants and tracking them so I can seal their exit.

Sean: Well some days I can think clearly, some days my thinking is foggy and confusing, and some days I am more depressed than I can stand, almost to the point where I feel like I'm just going through a meaningless grey tunnel and nothing can clear away the sadness of it all.

Marissa: It has affected me psychologically. My verbal communication skills have diminished tremendously. I have a difficult time being around others. My physical health has suffered. I am unable to properly exercise (which is preventative medicine in itself). My muscles and immune system are deteriorating. I have become hyper-paranoid. I often wake from my sleep experiencing anxiety attacks. Sometimes my mind cannot stay focused and attentive when someone is talking to me.

Oliver: Confinement has changed me. As a human mind, body and soul I've lost things I'll never get back. My family distanced themselves cause of restricted phone calls and visits. I've lost all emotion except for anger. It is a place to either make or break you. I got two little girls 6 and 9 who can't see me cause of my housing unit. A handicapped uncle who can't make it as far as Angola. I do believe that solitary confinement has affected me in a way that God can't fix.

Carl: These cells drive men mad. I have personally witnessed one man take his life, another tried to by running the length of the tier and smashing his head into the front bars, sadly for him he still lives, if you can really call it that Point is the cells are killing men and they know it These same good men including me will not be good after too much confinement, say over 2 years. Any man thats spent 5 to 10 or more years in these tiny cells should be killed, that includes me, we are no longer in any way shape or form civilized. Our morals have left us Too much hurt, too much pain, too much confusion, we are lost, lost from God, lost from reality.

Sophie: I went to an observation cell on suicide watch. Once we get there, we are thrown in the shower to be searched by bending over and spread both of our buttocks open Then, we are placed in a cell with a very thin paper robe and placed in a very unclean cell with no hot water and in some cells the cold water is broken. At night, the mattress [that] is given to us is very thin, unclean, and we break out with sores.

Martin: I requested to see the psychiatrist earlier this year for PTSD due to being a veteran of 3 wars and a police officer whod seen a lot of bad stuff. Saw the doctor in a room that had 3 other people in it and he talked to me for exactly 7 minutes. Never saw him again.

Stephanie: All they do when they make rounds is ask questions of a paper. Do you feel suicidal?, Are you eating?, Family contact?, Do you want to harm yourself or others?

Nelson: Medical, dental, and mental staffs are so grossly understaffed that if youre not dying, medical is not happening. If your face is not reflecting an abscess, youre not getting dental care. If youre not hanging or bouncing off the walls, youre mentally competent. In other words, hang on in there, youll be alright.

Rodney: They dont take anything serious until people die. I have a re-opened hernia I been complaining about for 6 months and havent seen a doctor yet.

Jordan: Before I went blind in my left eye I complain to medical and they tell me that Im faking to get out of work call. I make another sick call and get wrote up. Then 4 months later I lose my sight.

Kevin: Point blank we do not have a doctor at the moment. He is out and when he is here its like we dont have one. There is 1,300 inmates at this prison with one doctor.

Bobby: There are roaches and ants everywhere I cant tell you how often ants have bitten me during sleep and such. They normally only clean heavily when there is important visitors (like attorneys) They provide us nothing to clean the inside our toilets so were forced to clean them by hand or live with a stinking toilet where we eat, sleep and live.

Jude: When it rains, water comes through a rear door and often floods the hall and occasionally enters a couple of the cells. Raw sewage has also come up through the plumbing system and drainage plug located on the tier since Ive been here.

Steven: Its so hot in the summer that your cell doesnt cool off till about 1-2 am and thats just to get to 85-90 degrees. You have to sleep and lay on the floor just to cool off. This summer I laid and slept on the floor all summer long. Ants, spiders, roaches coming in your cell.

Ross: I cannot get a phone call out. You have to have money on the phone. Ive none (poor). My love ones dont know if Im alive or not.

Clarence: Most of my lockdown came from refusing to be a slave working in fields of corn, etc. Free people riding horses with guns telling you to pick this, do that, and/or write you up for disciplinary just because he or she can.

Caleb: Solitary confinement in reality is like being a dog in a concrete kennel/cage covered by a roof. Modern day slavery if you look at all that goes on here Death threats, threats of being beaten or maced. By EMTs, doctors, ranking officers, mental health and classification all working together to always hide stuff from people on the outside, like everything cool when in actuality were being harmed physically, sexually, mentally, and emotionally everyday. Treated like what the constitution label us men of color as three fifths of a man/less than a human being Ive been scarred by solitary confinement. Its had a major impact on me.

Trevon: They talk crazy to me. They have frisked my cell (shakedown) and tore up my pictures and throw everything around. Racial harassment, theyve call me boy multiple times. Theyve told me theyll beat the fuck out of me, told me theyll come in here on me. They have came and shook my cell down after Ive filed grievances and tore [up] my property (mail or paperwork).. Theyve denied my services for medical emergency sick calls. They have all type of abuse and mistreating going on up here.

Hank: Ive been physically assaulted while in full restraints, sprayed with chemical agents while in full restraints for requesting to see shift supervisor concerning a problem I was having with the unit sgt. Ive had a major squeeze my testicles for filing a complaint. I can go on forever listing the wrong done to me by security. Ive been in prison for 24 summers.

Vincent: [I am targeted for being gay.] One of the sergeants opened my cell for an offender to run in there to stab me up. Another opened my cell for an offender to rape me and another opened my cell for 2 offenders to steal my personal property.

Tyrone: They had pork chops for lunch and they gave me one. I told them I was Muslim but they had told me I had to eat the pork chop or nothing at all. I screamed and screamed until a ranking officer came. When he did, I told him my problem. He responded by spraying me with mace and throwing me around for the noise.

Trevor: They force us to bark like dogs for our food. And they make us strip and show them our rectums. I feel less of a man and less of a human being.

Justin: Ive been sprayed with chemical agents in full restraints, busted in the head with a radio by officers, physically beat up in between units, sexually harassed by officers, forced in the cell with a potential enemy to be assaulted (i.e. a hit on me) by prison officials intentionally and deliberately, and tampered with my food.

Ralph: Being in these cells like this is meant to break the mind down which it does so to speak. Being around inmates who are mentally unstable takes a toll on the mind, as well as being treated like animals by staff and the spraying of gas (mace) on others being threatened or harmed by inmates who have mental health records takes a toll on the body and mind. So being released to general population would be very difficult and I would probably be affected by what I've been through in the cells and always feel like someone is out to get me.

Nathan: I feel lost and afraid to do the rest of my time in segregation. Because your mind is all you have when you're in a cell, so in order to stay sane you have to become a little insane to cope. This is not the mindframe that I want to enter back into society with. And no kind of job training skills or social skills. For me, being incarcerated since 18, now 34 with no kids and a heart full of positive ambition, I CRAVE to at least have decent thinking, social, and job skills.

Malik: Before I came to prison I was smart and intelligent. And willing to get my education at any cost. Because you know black people lived in a rough life because our ancestors before us were forced to live a rough lifestyle. So I tried to keep myself humble and educated. Even trying to go to welding school to work offshore. But when I came to prison and was placed in solitary confinement, it created a monster inside me, and it had got to the point I had started stabbing people up. Solitary confinement turns people into killers. I will never be the same again.

Jeremiah: The impact of this segregation is weighing heavy on my mental, emotions, personality, body, sight and hearing. I'm not going to be around people when I get back in society cause this segregation here got me paranoid schizophrenic. Dealing with the officers and inmates, it's really devastating.

Marvin: Have you ever seen how a dog becomes after being locked up for a while? When you let that dog out on society what usually happens? Trouble, right? Well being in segregation for long periods of time have the same effect on a man. When let out, anxiety is high, fear is through the roof. This leads to antisocial behavior, substance abuse to self-medicate the new mental anguish acquired from being caged like an animal. This in turn leads to destructive sometimes criminal behavior, which in turn can lead back to the same cage the man just left. Isn't this the definition of insanity? If so then it begs to differ that the system is INSANE! This produces men of insane minds, not productive citizens, who have been rehabilitated for society. I pray to God I will do good after being segregated for so long.

The Voices from Solitary series publishes dispatches from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement.

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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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Need to get rid of it dat Drive People insane

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