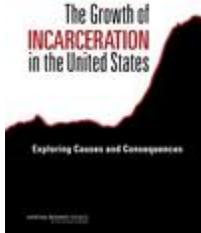


Criminalizing Our Community



A Review of

The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences

by National Research Council, Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration and Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn, Eds.)
Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2014. 444 pp. ISBN 978-0-309-29801-8. \$74.95, paperback

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0039437>

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The growth of incarceration rates in the United States is historically unprecedented and internationally unique. At the very least this trend indicates the need for dissemination of relevant information to legal and mental health professionals, policy makers, and the general public. *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences* is an excellent review of the research related to the increase in incarceration and consequences for the imprisoned, their families, their communities, and society as a whole. The authors represent an experienced, competent, interdisciplinary team of experts in their respective fields. They provide an in-depth review of population statistics and base rates of incarceration, incarcerated populations, changes in laws and policies, and the contributing factors to rates of incarceration, using a thorough and systematic approach to data collection and interpretation.

The authors present an interesting review of the political and social/cultural history influencing sentencing and incarceration. The inclusion of a review of established principles of jurisprudence and governance that have historically guided society's use of incarceration was an appreciated discussion, as one's values guide decision making but are rarely explicitly discussed. Although targeted primarily toward policy makers and legal professionals, this book furnishes valuable information to anyone interested in this area.

Although the authors' discussion of the high prevalence of substance use disorders within the inmate population was thorough, a sufficient discussion of other mental health disorders was lacking. Mental illness (beyond substance use) is a key component to the discussion. There is a large body of research to indicate that, in addition to substance use disorders, the majority of both male and female offenders also have comorbid diagnoses that are not being adequately treated (e.g., Derkzen, Booth, Taylor, & McConnell, 2013). Although substance use disorders are the most common, about 75% of prison inmates have a comorbid mental

illness, such as depression (23%), mania (43%), and psychotic disorders (15%; U.S. Department of Justice, 2006). In a recent research study with medium security federal prisoners, Walters and Crawford (2014) found that inmates with mental illness and violence history were at increased risk of institutional misconduct. By not adequately treating mental illness, inmates are at risk of extended sentences and other restrictions that increase stress and can exacerbate psychopathology.

Given the extensive body of literature indicating a high rate of mental illness in American prisoners and its relationship with increased risk for dysfunction in multiple areas, it is surprising that more funding is not devoted to mental health care for those who have committed crimes and those who are at risk. There are numerous studies that support the effectiveness of brief interventions with inmates (e.g., Pardini et al., 2014), that court systems that include a mental health component reduce recidivism (e.g., Hiday, Wales, & Ray, 2013), and that probation systems that emphasize mental health care are more effective (Manchak, Skeem, Kennealy, & Loudon, 2014). Clearly, mental health treatment efforts before individuals commit a crime (primary prevention) and after a crime is committed (tertiary prevention) are crucial components in reducing incarceration rates. Lack of funding for these interventions, as well as outcome research, only serves to maintain the trend of incarcerating large numbers of community members.

Although the authors discussed the consequences for families and children of the incarcerated, this is a topic that deserves more attention by the general public and researchers. Incarceration affects everyone in our community. It disrupts employment and creates financial stress for families, as well as emotional stress for those close to inmates. It is important to begin thinking about not only the impact of incarceration on those incarcerated but also its impact on the larger family and community systems in which they live. Incarceration trends affect all of us but are often ignored by the general public because their impact is not recognized.

Although the authors make a recommendation for policy makers to re-examine sentencing policy, prison policy, and social policy, they, for the most part, do not go the next step and offer concrete and practical means to create change in these areas. Although they do provide some specific suggestions, including re-examining mandatory minimums and long sentences, the majority of the suggested changes lack a specific implementable action plan for how goals can be obtained. Although their arguments lead logically to the conclusion of the need for additional services, they do not offer solutions to make this happen.

Overall, the book was well written and organized. Interpretation and analysis flowed smoothly from the review of research. This work represents a significant, needed contribution to the field and will be important in encouraging policy makers to re-examine sentencing, prison, social, and mental health funding policies that are contributing to the criminalization of our community.

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