The Negative Impact Prison Culture Has on Recidivism

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Abstract

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According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics study, within three years of being released 67.5% of the male prisoners in its sample group were rearrested at least once and 46.9% were reconvicted. Based on those numbers, prisons are not accomplishing the task of rehabilitating prisoners. Are American correctional institutions punishing convicted criminals in ways that were never intended, ways that create new problems and fuel old ones? Rape, gang violence, abuse by officers, under staffed correction facilities, infectious diseases, excessive solitary confinement and inadequate services are a normal part of America prison culture. When prisons are filled with these kinds of problems and experiences, prisoners and prison staffs do not have enough time to focus on rehabilitation. Prisoners are released back into the community without the necessary changes and tools needed to prevent reoffending. Due to pressure to make a living for themselves ex-prisoners return to the only lifestyle they knew, for a means of survival in communities that are undereducated, poverty stricken, and violent, and have high unemployment rates. Without the proper rehabilitation having taken place prior to prisoners being released there is no hope of significantly lowering the recidivism rate. America has the talent and know-how to transform all of our correctional facilities in ways that lift prisoners, prison staff and communities.

Rehabilitation starts with competent staff doing the work required of them to rehabilitate inmates. According to the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons (2006) prison culture must change to promote a culture of mutual respect between staff and inmates, recruit and retain qualified corps of officers, support today's leaders and cultivate the next generation. How can inmates change if prisons are not equipped or capable of providing a culture that promotes change?

This paper focuses on the effects prison culture has on inmates, particularly Black inmates. Convicted criminals are sent to prison to protect society and rehabilitate inmates. However, prison culture suffers from leadership and staff issues ranging from sexual misconduct to race, ethnicity and cultural sensitivity issues. Inmates are overcrowded in prison to cut costs, without proper educational resources or mental and physical health services. They are unfairly segregated from the general population and society, live in below sanitary conditions and at times lack consistent family contact.

Black men, a segment of the population that is six times more likely to go to jail than White men, are especially affected by a negative prison environment (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). Having to return home with no advances made in education, with mental health issues that persist and worsen in prison, and facing high unemployment rates without transferrable job skills cause them to become increasingly vulnerable to recidivism. The following review of research literature offers framework for prison culture that helps men get the rehabilitation they need, rehabilitation all of America benefits from directly or indirectly.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics study, within three years of being released 67.5% of prisoners in its sample group were rearrested at least once and 46.9% were reconvicted (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994).

Men entering the prison system need their belief systems transformed in order to prevent them from returning to prison. This starts with a healthy prison environment that promotes and produces rehabilitated inmates with opportunities following their release from prison. For example, at a basic level, job training while in prison that leads to employment after prison provides former prisoners with a consistent source of income for food, shelter, clothing, transportation, and other basic needs. It also increases feelings of self-sufficiency and self-confidence that former prisoners can support themselves without having to resort back to criminal activities or rely on "handouts" from family. It provides them with a new life that supports positive behaviors and protects them from committing further crimes (La Vigne, Davies, Palmer & Halberstadt, 2008).

Too often prisons do not produce this type of desired change due to the counterproductive prison environments they create and foster. Instead of rehabilitation they feed the anti-social behaviors they are supposed to rehabilitate. As a result former inmates return to their communities in worse condition than they were in before they entered prison (Ristad, 2008). From the time an inmate enters prison until the time he leaves he should be working toward permanent change that helps keep him out of prison and positions him to lead a productive life. Addressing high recidivism rates by addressing the productiveness in prison cultures would lead to permanent change in inmates with positive ripple effects in the communities they return to. Releasing

incarcerated people uneducated and ill-equipped to assume a productive lifestyle does not help reduce high recidivism rates (Vacca, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

This paper examines the impact that prison cultures have on recidivism.

Definition of Terms

Recidivism: Is measured by criminal acts that resulted in the re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release (Reentry Trends in the U.S., 2012).

Rehabilitation: Many definitions of "rehabilitation" exist (Gibbons et al., 1999; Sechrest, White & Brown et al., 1979), but they tend to coalesce around three issues: (1) the intervention is planned or explicitly undertaken, not a chance or unwitting occurrence; (2) the intervention targets for change some aspect about the offender that is thought to cause the offender's criminality, such as his or her attitudes, cognitive processes, personality or mental health, social relationships to others, educational and vocational skills, and employment; and (3) the intervention is intended to make the offender less likely to break the law in the future—that is, it reduces "recidivism."

Mental Health: A state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life. A person's overall emotional and psychological condition. (American Heritage Dictionary, 2011)

Imprisonment: Refers to any form of custodial confinement, including local or training prisons (in the UK) or jail or prison (in the USA). It should be noted that imprisonment and incarceration will be used interchangeably (Murray & Farrington, 2005).

Isolation or Segregation: Refers to when inmates are isolated from the general

population.

Inmate: It should be noted the titles inmate and prisoner will be used interchangeably.

Delimitations of Research

The references used for the review of literature were collected over a period of 6 months

using resources of the Karrmann Library of the University of Wisconsin, Platteville.

Several search engines used were provided by EBSCOHOST and ERIC. Key search

terms were: Recidivism, prison, imprisonment, prison culture, rehabilitation and

prevention.

Method of Approach

A brief review of trends and contributing factors of recidivism was conducted. A review

of literature studying prison culture and the psychological and behavioral effects it has on

inmates was conducted. Psychology journals, books and reports discussing prisons'

current ability to provide inmates with ample support and tools for rehabilitation were

reviewed. A review discussing what works in efforts to rehabilitate inmates was

conducted.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics study, Black males are 6 times more likely to go to jail than White non-Hispanic males and have a 28.5% chance of being incarcerated at least once in their lifetime compared to 4% of Whites non-Hispanic males (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). When completion of a prison sentence should be the end of criminal activity for these men, too often it serves as a part of a process that gets worse, if they enter a prison culture unfit to rehabilitate them. Unproductive prison experiences leave them unchanged and at high risk for reoffending and returning to prison.

High recidivism rates cannot be completely understood without examining the role prisons play in allowing ineffective operating systems and negligent behavior to exist. Staff issues, poor living conditions, fleeting health care services, limited programing and harmful policies work together to create an environment that perpetuates anti-social thinking patterns and behaviors of inmates. When those areas are effectively addressed they contribute to successful rehabilitation. Prisons that allow prisoner needs to go unmet make it difficult for inmates to focus on rehabilitation. For example staff sexual misconduct, unwarranted assaults on inmates and inadequately trained staff will not produce success. When prisons fail to set the right examples inmates will not make the necessary changes (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006).

Dispelling Myths that Black Men are Inherent Criminals

According to Abramsky (1999) the myth that United States has become plagued by a pathological criminal class at a degree never before seen is simply not true. Black

men are not and never were inherent criminals. Any thought of these types of beliefs

need to be eliminated from the American psyche. Part of the problems that Black people

experience is rooted in the way they have been treated throughout American history,

which has helped to shaped current conditions. If one goes back to the origins of Blacks

time in America one finds they were the victims of crimes not the criminals committing

the crimes. As chattel slaves Blacks were subject to all kinds of cruelty by their White

counterparts. Slavery, rape, hunger, working in pain, beatings, dehumanization and

murder were unbearable cruelties Blacks were accustomed to as slaves. According to a

law during the time of American slavery, White men could not be charged with the rape

of Black female slaves because Black women were considered less than human. Rape

laws only applied to White women (Morris, 1996). This type of injustice shows the

horrific experiences Blacks had to endure that have left an indelible imprint on their

minds and set the course for how they would be treated by the American justice system.

Slaves were the victims of malicious lies printed about them in academic and

scholarly journals aimed at justifying slavery by dehumanizing Blacks (Leary, 2005).

White slave owners ripped Black families apart by selling members of families to

different slave owners. Many of the slaves never saw mothers, fathers, brothers and

sisters again. Slave owners sabotaged acts promoting Black unity, education and

economic progress while working to destroy the self-image and spirit of Blacks. In 1859,

the state of Oregon was among some states that adopted into law, an article (Article 1

Section 35 of the Oregon Constitution), prohibiting free Blacks from coming into the

state and owning land and facing criminal charges and removal from the land if they did

so (Oregon Constitution, 1859). The criminal acts of Whites justified by law went on for

centuries. If Blacks have inherent criminal traits because of the crimes they commit today what type of inherent traits do Whites have for centuries of crimes committed against Blacks?

Prison Administrations and Staff

The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons (2006) states that most of the change that needs to take place in prisons to improve prison cultures falls heavily in the lap of prison administrators and their staffs and has much less to do with the behaviors of inmates. Staff-related issues, including staff sexual misconduct, staff morale, staff assaults on prisoners, confrontational episodes between staff and prisoners, lack of ethnic diversity among staff, and difficulty recruiting and retaining quality staff rank among the top issues prisons need to address if they are going to function at respectable levels. Rehabilitation starts with competent staff doing the work required of them to rehabilitate inmates. According to The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, prison cultures must change to promote cultures of mutual respect between staff and inmates. Prisons must recruit and retain qualified corps of officers. They must support and cultivate leaders working inside the prison to be change agents. How can inmates change if prisons are not equipped or capable of providing them with cultures that promote change?

Inmate Living Conditions

Poor daily living conditions of inmates must be addressed. For example inmates are deprived of adequate heath care in prison, services that would help inmates lead more productive and positive lives while in prison (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006). Unfortunately, inmates' rehabilitation processes are

negatively impacted by poor living conditions. Many corrections leaders are struggling to provide quality care without adequate resources and often without frontline staff who understand and share their goals. Even though violence is the "usual suspect," poor health care causes more injuries and deaths inside jails and prisons across the country. Every year, more than 1.5 million people are released from jail and prison carrying a life-threatening infectious disease. Too many health care programs are shameful, not only in terms of what they do to inmates but shameful in terms of the risks they expose their staff to and the risks to the public health.

The need for mental health care in our country's prisons and jails is enormous. The most conservative estimate of prevalence, 16% means that there are at least 350,000 mentally ill people in jail and prison on any given day. Other estimates of prevalence have yielded rates as high as 54%. These prevalence rates are two to four times higher than rates among the general public. Detention facilities have, in fact, become the new asylums. The result is not only needless suffering by the individuals who are undertreated but safety problems those prisoners cause staff and other prisoners. By all accounts, corrections administrators are struggling to meet these needs, often with grossly insufficient resources. Without the resources, without the staff, without the professionalism that is needed to cope with these problems, we will not have safe environments in prison (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006).

Overcrowding, unnecessary segregation, and limited educational and vocational options are also part of daily living conditions that inmates have to contend with as they attempt to rebuild their lives. For instance, private companies are allowed to own

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prisons, incarcerate the maximum permitted number of prisoners and spend the least permitted amount of money to provide services to inmates. Since rehabilitation programs diminish their profits, private prisons often lack the resources needed to help inmates and foster hope. This makes for unhealthy living conditions for inmates and contributes to high recidivism rates. Several states that have the highest number of privatized beds (Hawaii, New Mexico, Alaska and Vermont) also have some of the highest rates of recidivism (Brickner & Diaz, 2011).

Does failing to provide inmates with the necessary services that foster productive and safe environments help or harm inmates, staff and the community? When prisons create and foster these types of environments it sends a stark message to inmates that no one cares about them or their well-being. This will most certainly cause inmates to try to undermine authority, gravitate towards anti-social behaviors and disregard their own well-being. Jails will be forced to use the limited resources they have to address preventable problems rather than address what is causing them.

Unfortunately prisons are at least in part guilty of the very things they are trying to get rid of. Inmates will not buy into rehabilitation when the message communicated to them is that prison staff and lawmakers do not care about prisoner living conditions. Despite agreement that health and sanitation are important, prisons readily cut costs by overcrowding prisons, which reduces the quality of living for inmates. These practices are unethical and immoral and work to create more problems for inmates. They also create problems between inmates and prison staff (Ristad, 2008).

Men needing to rebuild their lives so they can return home from prison have enormous obstacles to conquer outside of prison. The prospect of facing post-release

temptations of crime, the pressure of poverty, few if any male role models, pessimism regarding their ability to succeed at furthering their education, crime infested neighborhoods, self-image problems, feelings of disenfranchisement, and enormously high unemployment rates are overwhelming. Needless to say, these pressures are enough without prisoners having to contend with having prisons, federal and state governmental policies and practices working against them while in prison.

Prison Environments that Promote Violence

When inmates who have repeatedly experienced failure are placed in counterproductive prisons the chances they will reoffend are increased. The environment must promote the change that is needed. Prison practices that work against inmates jeopardize their basic human rights, dignity and desire to change. When this happens inmates act out and hurt their chances of being successful (Smith & Hattery, 2010). In some instances inmates suffer from victimization from staff and prisoners. For example, when fighting occurs, prison staff discipline all parties involved with no regard to how the fight originated. A disregard for inmate rights creates a hostile environment. If placed in segregation, once an inmate returns to general population they have bruised egos and pent up aggression leading to more violence (Toch & Kupers, 2007). When prisons practice unnecessary and unjustified acts of aggression it has adverse affects on the culture, which leads to otherwise preventable violence. Rehabilitation gets lost and unproductive environments ensue.

Psychological Effects of Counterproductive Prison Environments

Are there any psychological implications of a counter productive prison environment on inmates? According to Smith & Hattery (2010) prison environments that

are unproductive and present limited options of change for inmates cause inmates to develop emotional and mental health issues. These inmates must cope with the challenges of imprisonment while also facing the realities of limited mental health services to address the mental health issues they developed while in prison (Toch & Kupers, 2007). Gendreau and Keyes (2001) stated that while attempting to punish inmates and get them to repay their debt to society prisons are causing punishment to inmates long after they leave. The effects of prison on inmates produces long-term emotional and psychological disorders and cognitive discontinuity. Inmates leaving prison having developed mental health issues while incarcerated makes it that much more difficult for them to rebuild their lives. Also, housing inmates while neglecting the mental health issues they developed during their incarceration only adds to the counterproductive prison environment prison staff work in and inmates live in.

Few inmates can leave prison unchanged. At the very least, prison is painful and imposes long-term consequences of deprivation and extreme uncommon patterns and norms of living and interacting that persist far beyond the prison experience (Ristad, 2008). Not meeting the mental health needs of inmates which are caused by their prison experience cannot be the norm of a criminal justice system if it wants to reduce recidivism rates and make communities safer.

Preventing inmates from developing severe mental health issues while in prison can be rectified by making prisons more productive and providing inmates with more viable options to change since the lack of these realities in prison are primary contributors to inmates' development of mental health issues (Smith & Hattery 2010). If inmates come from unproductive environments and/or have led counterproductive lives what will

change about them once they enter an unproductive prison, with severe confinement guidelines, poor living conditions and the possibility of danger at the hands of other inmates? If the quality of services, living conditions and staff competence are improved, you will improve the results of imprisonment will improve.

Policies that Work Against Rehabilitation

Safety and rehabilitation cannot be promoted when inmates are confined in high security segregation units where they do not have opportunities to interact with others or learn to take responsibility for their lives. There are entire super-max prisons built on an isolation model. This type of environment is damaging to staff, prisoners and the public inmates are released to (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006). Research has shown a correlation between segregation or solitary confinement and sensory deprivation (Gendreau & Keyes, 2001). Though intended to punish and repay a debt to society, the effects of prison on inmates result in long-term emotional and psychological disorders.

Segregation creates a temporary fix with longer-term problems for inmates and staff. While in isolation inmates do not have access to rehabilitative services, participate in few social interactions and do not get the opportunity to address the original issues that caused them to be separated from the general population. When released these inmates come from segregation with added rage to go with already unaddressed problems (Toch & Kupers, 2007).

Questioning America's Willingness to Intervene

Does America believe inmates can be rehabilitated? Does it believe they are worthy of help? Does it believe the prison cultures can be transformed into an

environment of hope? Does it take into consideration the communities to which these young men return, rehabilitated or not? These are questions that must be raised if high recidivism rates are to be addressed. Another question that must be raised is what help looks like on the part of prison, and the federal, state and local government. According to Abramsky (1999) policy-makers, politically motivated by support from their populist base, continue to drive stories that lead to a call for longer sentences, the elimination of parole, and the increase of punitive treatment towards prisoners. The politics of opinion poll populism encourages elected and corrections officials to build more isolation units, put more prisons on lockdown status (in which prisoners are kept in their cells twenty three hours a day) and eliminate educational grants that allow prisoners to study toward diplomas or degrees. That is not the attitude of government officials who are interested in rehabilitation.

Smith and Hattery (2010) assert that prisons have become a huge financial industry rarely discussed in terms of economics and profits. The term "Prison Industrial Complex," refers to a complex interlocking web of institutions that extend outward beyond any one jail or prison into the larger political economy and loop back into the thousands of jails and prisons that house men and women for crimes they were convicted of (Ristad, 2008). The "Prison Industrial Complex" has been reported to match the military in terms of shameless problems of mismanagement, waste, theft and trickery. The Prison Industrial Complex is composed of the federal, state, county, city jails, and their architects. Is also includes contractors, vendors, construction planners, suppliers, politicians and the media who make billions of dollars a month from them. Private prisons also exist that few know about. A person can even invest money in these prisons

to make a profit (Ristad, 2008).

For governments or prisons to make a profit or remain within their respective budgets they do so at the expense of the inmates, through overcrowding, cheap construction and labor, substandard repairs, supplies, equipment, food, and medical care. Services for education, recreation, religious practice, psychological evaluation, and therapy are costly to provide with the threat of ongoing budget cuts. Vocational support, social services, custodial, and professional staffing create additional expenses for the prison budget. Omitting these programs is unethical and immoral, creating an ethos that permeates prison systems (Ristad, 2008). Removing and or limiting the quality of services needed to help inmates rebuild their lives is the same as taking away their humanity. The parties involved show little interest in rehabilitation with interest only to furthering their own agendas. The inmates, who are victims of these types of malpractices reenter society more damaged than before they entered prison. Such an important agenda item as financial profits connected to prisons must be discussed if cultural change is to happen in prisons, change that benefits inmates and society.

Resources Upon Re-entry

Nonviolent adult repeat offenders between the ages of 18 and 35 receive up to $600 in aid from the state Department of Corrections and Federal Bureau of Prisons to help with reintegration. This is a very small stipend, given the cost of housing and job-seeking. In searching for employment, they contend with the stigmas attached to having a criminal record. Ex-offenders face legally enforced employment restrictions barring them from gaining employment in certain occupations. They are also prohibited from

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receiving financial aid for school by the Federal government and most states (Harrison &

Schehr, 2004). What are their options?

In 2005, the state of Indiana conducted a study examining the unemployment rate

of ex-offenders, not including recidivist, released back into five counties. The study

found that in the years of 2008 and 2009, the unemployment rate for ex-offenders was

69.7%. That year, 2008, is considered to be the time the recession begun. Prior to the

recession the unemployment rate among offenders was also high: 48%, almost 10 times

as high as the unemployment rate in those five counties (Nally, Lockwood & Ho, 2011).

The recession made a bad problem even worse.

Men who have become accustomed to despair and desperation have a difficult

time facing challenges gaining employment once they reenter the community. With no

income, limited family support, education and vocational skills, establishing a sustainable

life is difficult for ex-offenders. The need to survive is heightened, and unlawful

opportunities become hard to resist.

Waning Family Connections

Strong and healthy family ties is one of the strongest determiners of a successful

transition back into the community. Recent research suggests that consistent tangible and

emotional family support leads to post-release successes, such as employment and

reduced AODA issues (La Vigne et al., 2004; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999; Sullivan,

Mino, Nelson, & Pope, 2002; Visher, Kacknowski, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004) and work

to lower recidivism rates (La Vigne, Visher & Castro, 2004; Sullivan et al., 2002).

Family support eases the transition from prison to the community and reduces stress and

depression (Ekland-Olson, Supancic, Campbell, & Lenihan, 1983). Time spent with

one's children and family after release from prison has also been correlated with lower rates of recidivism (Waller, 1974). Family ties also help with maintaining healthy prison environments. When inmates do not get a chance to have consistent contact with family due to segregation, unaffordable collect calls or being placed in a prison too far away from home to receive family visits, it causes detachment issues to develop in inmates. Not being able to maintain viable connections with family members eliminates an avenue that should be used by prisons to assist in the rehabilitation process.

In 2002, a study completed in the U.K. found that the prison population for the country had reached the highest level ever experienced but prisoners' contact with members of their families had decreased (Loucks, 2002). Why might this be? This seems very troubling since the official policy in the prison rules, states:

> Special attention should be paid to maintaining contacts between prisoners and their families, and that a prisoner should be 'encouraged' to develop contacts with the outside world which best promote the interests of his family and his own social rehabilitation, Prison Rule 4, (Loucks, 2002, p263).

The policy itself states that consistent family contact promotes rehabilitation, which in turn helps prisons. For there to be any sustained response to the issues of safety and abuse in prisons, there must be strong independent oversight of prisons and jails nationwide that make sure proper policies are put in place and implemented (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006). Too often prison staff are on the wrong side of the rehabilitation process which ultimately affect the prisoners.

Addressing Ethnic, Racial and Cultural Barriers

Are staffs properly trained to work with men of diverse backgrounds? Are institutions doing all they can to hire professionals from diverse backgrounds, who can be assets to inmates change because of their diversity? Staff issues regarding understanding race, ethnicity and culture must be addressed for positive change to happen in prisons. Consistently fair treatment in correctional institutions cannot be achieved without understanding how these factors influence staff perceptions of inmates. Where there are stark differences in race and culture between officers and inmates, it requires real effort on the part of prison administrators and staff to understand and effectively communicate with the prisoners they serve. Pre-service and ongoing training are critical. Training must delve deep into ingrained conceptions about inmates from different races, cultures, neighborhoods and backgrounds. Assessing the values, beliefs, and behavior of management, staff, and inmates in prisons and then developing a plan to address problems is essential to changing prison culture. Trainings must include a plan for staff and managers that calls attention to communication, cultural sensitivity, and constructive problem solving (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006).

Also, staff diversity in prisons is important. Staff diversity offers a broader understanding of the inmate population, which consists of inmates from diverse backgrounds. The prison's staff plan must also include strategies to address the challenges leaders face, from hiring a diverse and well-qualified staff to modeling the kind of behavior they want to see in their staff. Regular monitoring and evaluation of this process ensures the necessary changes happen and are sustained.

Conclusion

A prison culture should not include misperceptions of inmates' humanity, below standard living conditions, counterproductive segregation practices, overcrowding of prisoners, scarcity of resources and services, undertrained and limited staff and pessimistic attitudes towards inmate's ability to make significant gains in their lives. Prisons that foster this type of culture will not succeed in rehabilitating prisoners at a level that will significantly impact the national recidivism rate.

In order to promote change prisons must embody change for inmates to follow. Changing the environment will change the inmates. Prisons must believe that inmates are human beings capable of change and worthy of help.

Prisons must respect the living conditions of inmates and see that providing inmates with proper living conditions is a strategy toward rehabilitation. Prisons must provide adequate health care for inmates. Inmates who are in better physical and mental condition will be able to focus more on the rehabilitation process. Prisons must operate within prison population guidelines that reflect ethical population management, which promotes sanitation, reduces tension and protects the resources of inmates from scarcity due to overcrowding. Prisons must provide inmates with vocational and educational services that foster hope and create accessibility to opportunities for inmates once they are released from prison. Prisons must also become sophisticated in their use of segregation with practices based on substantiated research.

Lastly, prison must hire and train qualified workers who are competent, optimistic and cable of playing a major role in the rehabilitation process. If prisons don't reflect this

type of positive change, the same men will continue to show up at the doorsteps of prisons that were unsuccessful in rehabilitating them.

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, research has concluded that the experience of imprisonment for inmates directly and indirectly contributes to high recidivism rates when they leave prison. Due to counterproductive prison environments inmates re-enter society ill-equipped to address the very problems that landed them in prison. While the United States continues to incarcerate high numbers of its population in the interest of public safety using "tough on crime" punitive polices to do so, it sends men to prisons that, due to the prison culture, work to increase crime. This further puts public safety at harm and adds to the litany of problems incarcerated Black men face as they re-enter society.

The success of these men will save money and increase the greatness of America. Rehabilitated men become law-abiding citizens, taxpayers and community leaders, helping the world become a better place. Prison administrators have to find a way to be firm and effective yet caring and stern, maintain a low tolerance for defiant behavior and rehabilitate men. Being firm is part of the nature of the environment but it is no excuse for engendering policies that result in counterproductive prisons. Model prisons have proven they can be successful by adhering to policies that prevent violence, use segregation as a last resort, promote the physical and mental health of inmates and provide educational and vocational tools that help inmates succeed. These facilities have proven that the most dangerous prisoners can be controlled without taking away their human connections, neglecting their basic needs and robbing them of their dignity (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006). But how much does America care about the social and humanitarian issues inside prisons?

Rehabilitating men not only helps inmates but enriches society as a whole.

Developing the resources inherent in incarcerated men will ultimately save money and contribute to society. The nation could use money spent on the criminal justice system to accomplish other goals for America. America is too strong, too great and too wealthy to not effectively address this crisis plaguing our prison and justice systems. Existing literature concerning current prison cultures leads to the following conclusions.

Recommendation I

Staff-related issues including but not limited to staff sexual misconduct, staff morale, staff assaults on prisoners, confrontational episodes between staff and prisoners, lack of ethnic diversity among staff, and difficulty recruiting and retaining quality staff rank among the top issues prisons need to address to function at a level that truly works to rehabilitate inmates (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006).

Consistently fair treatment in correctional institutions cannot be achieved without prison institutions working to understand how race, ethnicity and culture influence staff perceptions of inmates. Due to considerable differences in race and culture between officers and inmates, real effort on the part of each prison and its staff has to be made to understand and effectively communicate with prisoners. Pre-service and ongoing training must be implemented. These trainings must dig deep into ingrained conceptions on the part of staff regarding inmates from different races, cultures, neighborhoods and backgrounds. Quantifiable assessments must be performed concerning the values, beliefs, and behavior of management, staff, and inmates in prisons, and efforts must be made to counteract problematic attitudes and behaviors among staff.

Plans must be developed to address problems hindering prison culture change.
Plans must include staff and manager training that call attention to communication, cultural sensitivity, and constructive problem solving skills necessary to work successfully in prison (The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006). Also, staff diversity in prisons is important because it offers broader viewpoints of inmates from different backgrounds. Plans must include strategies to address the challenges leaders face, to hire a diverse and well-qualified staff and to model the kind of behavior they want to see in staff. The process must be monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure the necessary changes happen and are sustained.

Recommendation II

Prison environments must reflect and promote the change required of inmates.
Doing away with overcrowding and misuse of segregation policies will lower tension and increase morale amongst staff and inmates creating the opportunity for financial resources and labor to be used for rehabilitation purposes. Appropriate housing and policies pave the way for effective programing to take place and promote mutual respect.
When mutual respect is intact amongst prison staff and inmates and inmates have acceptable daily living conditions, inmates can focus on rehabilitation. This fosters an environment all parties involved can benefit from.

Recommendation III

Prisons work best when they protect the public and equip the inmate for success.
Prisons have to create environments that present solutions and resources to inmates, help them develop plans of action to successfully reintegrate in society and hold them accountable for following through on their plans. Prisons must also hold prison staff

accountable for properly assisting inmates in successfully completing their plans of action. Not only do prisons have a responsibility to uphold public safety and correct the criminal activity of inmates, they also have a responsibility to educate, prepare, equip, and empower inmates in the change process. This type of plan effectively upholds public safety and addresses issues of crime. An initiative to prepare inmates to transition back into society must be accompanied by educational opportunities, medical and mental health treatment, social services, and supportive policies and family contact, not the absence of such vital resources. Policies and staff that do not support these types of services will continue to operate in an environment that contributes to high-recidivism rates.

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