

Reducing the Use of Segregation and Maintaining Institutional Safety: How Using a Risk Assessment May Help

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Restrictive Housing

- Involves the *housing of an inmate in conditions by substantial isolation from other inmates* (ABA, 2011)
- Proponents believe it makes facilities and communities safer (see Mears, 2013)
- Critics argue it is overused and causes many damaging effects on inmates and staff (Haney, 2012)

Summary of Research

- Majority is qualitative and focuses on psychological outcomes
- Two recent meta-analyses conclude the effect of segregation is *modest* and *imprecise* (see Morgan et al., in press)
- The empirical behavioral literature suggests segregation:
 - ***DOES NOT*** reduce institutional levels of violence (Briggs et al., 2003)
 - ***DOES NOT*** reduce recidivism (Butler et al., 2015; Lovell et al., 2007; Mears & Bales, 2009)
 - ***DOES NOT*** reduce individual misconduct (Labrecque, 2015; Morris, 2016)

Rethinking the Use of Segregation

- The use of segregation also moral, ethical, and legal concerns
- Increase in media attention and scrutiny from critics
- Strong consensus segregation produces devastating effects
- Helped make this an issue of national attention
- Corrections officials face increased pressure to reduce its use

Segregation Reform

- Institutions rely on segregation to manage inmates
- Corrections officials need to be confident changes will not increase violence and disorder
- Recently, Terri McDonald expressed concern about the lack of evidence on which inmates in segregation may be managed in less restrictive environments
- This means justice officials must make these decisions based on their personal opinions and past experiences

Proposed Study

- The purpose of this study is to develop and validate a risk assessment that can be used to make more informed decisions about which inmates to place in segregation settings, and which ones to manage in less secure environments

Segregation Risk Assessments

- Helmus (2015)—Risk of Administrative Segregation Tool
- RAST predicts placement in segregation in Canadian system
- Includes six static items (age, prior convictions, prior AS, sentence length, criminal versatility, and prior violence)
- Found to have a high predictive accuracy on a validation sample
- A certain amount of caution should be exercised before adopting tools such as the RAST

Segregation Risk Assessments

- The RAST represents an important first step in this area
- It could be beneficial in diverting inmates from segregation
- It might also lead to an increase in the segregation population
- Static items do not afford an ability for one to reduce risk
- The tool predicts placement in segregation, but it does not inform if such placement influences institutional order

Purpose of Segregation

- Segregation is a concentrated approach (Shalev, 2009)
 - Target “worst of the worst”
- Critics argue these settings include many “nuisance” inmates (Shames et al., 2015)
- To the extent that segregation settings include “nuisance” inmates rather than those who are truly violent and dangerous, it is unlikely its use will improve the well order of the facility

Tentative Research Plan

- **Phase I—Collection of data**
 - Sample of inmates booked into LASD
 - Use information collected during intake
- **Phase II—Construction and validation of risk tool**
 - Designed to predict serious/violent institutional misconduct
- **Phase III—Prediction of segregation**
 - Examine how well risk tool also predicts segregation placements
- **Phase IV—Examination of reasons for segregating inmates**
 - Examine justifications for segregating inmates
 - Assess if reasons differ by risk for engaging in serious/violent misconduct

Implications and Potential Impact

- This study is important because it provides a strategic approach to reducing the segregated population while maintaining institutional safety and security
- This tool will help in deciding which inmates in segregation pose the safest bet to release to less restrictive settings
- This work may also uncover additional risk/needs factors that could be added to the current segregation classification tool

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