

Why Mass Incarceration Is Ineffective And Inefficient

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By now, human beings on each side of the divide, whether proposing or opposing, have realized that mass incarceration is not a valid system. Most people have understood that something is fundamentally wrong with the system where people are handed heavy sentences for picayune crimes. Consequently, people have had their lives ruined after serving time in prison during their prime years. This project aims to explore why mass incarceration is ineffective and inefficient.

One of the significant concerns with mass incarceration, which is regarded as the most reliable explanation that the measure is a warped idea, is that it does not give enough room for individuals who should be in prison. There are a limited number of cells available in both private and public prisons despite their explosion. It is odd when the cells are filled with people whose transgressions are nonviolent offences or minor drug crimes. Consequently, there are serious concerns about our priorities regarding the emphasis on locking people up in jail for small mistakes. The primary objective of the criminal justice system is to formulate minimum behaviour standards for dwelling in a community. In other words, the sentencing structure should reflect what is considered acceptable behaviour by society (Kilgore, 2015).

Research studies have been conducted to assess and measure the reduction of crime by incapacitation. In the study, the researchers went through the court records, and it was notable that people with similar offences were handed down different rulings according to the judge assigned to the case. The research was extended to what befell the prisoners, and it was concluded that each year spent behind bars raised the odds of reoffending significantly. Similarly, individuals sent to prisons for minor offences end up committing critical crimes subsequently, as they spend more time in jail. The research concluded that any significance linked to removing criminals from society was more of offsetting crimes by turning minor offenders into hardcore criminals. Notably, a significant number of prisoners have been arrested again after release due to more offences. This, therefore, results in high recidivism. This takes us to a more intriguing question: Why do prisons turn individuals into career criminals (Clear, 2009)?

A person's wages, salary or earning potential is obliterated by prisons. One is disqualified from various jobs, voting, and housing when they become convicted felons. In the recent studies conducted regarding imprisonments, it was observed that post-release employment rates are significantly reduced with each year spent behind bars. This results in a person living up and depending on public help. Incarceration also decreases the chances of a marriage surviving or getting married. While one is in prison, one gets exposed to criminal networks and skills, and one's legal powers are degraded as a result of spending time away from the labour force. Upon release, this kind of exposure becomes

the most preferred alternative (Pager, 2008).

In instances where long sentences would discourage or deter people from committing offences, it would render prisons an active system. Most critics of the incarceration system argue that a year spent in jail ought to decrease rape cases, assaults, burglaries, and violent robberies and deter a significant number of citizens from getting hooked on systematic drug abuse. This argument took into consideration the foregone economic potentials and the prison costs. However, it is observed that the resultant deterrent impact is not as robust as it should be. Instead, it is far from being achieved.

Another argument regarding the ineffectiveness of prisons is that juveniles would refrain from committing offences upon turning the age of 18, where they are likely to suffer more time in jail. The long sentences in prison would be a useful deterrent if this made the juveniles stop making transgressions. However, the system does not meet this criterion. There are a variety of reasons as to why the idea fails to condone crimes. One is that the criminals tend to be young; thus, they become impulsive and discount the future. Therefore, the possibility of being sentenced to longer prison time is not sufficient to pose as a deterrent. The other explanation offered is that despite turning 18 years of age, there are a lot of uncertainties regarding the length of their incarceration (Kilgore, 2015). From previous studies, most people have realized that the amount of time sentenced depends on the jury overhearing the case, the prosecutor, the evidence presented and how busy the courts are. These factors determine the chances of the convict ending up with a plea bargain. While spending time in prison is not much of a deterrent, the system of mass incarceration holds a lot of uncertainties in the possibilities of actually getting locked up in prisons and extends to the future regarding meaningfully impacting the behaviour of a person (Wagner, 2016).

However, there is an exception which occurs in instances where there is a critical degree of certainty regarding the punishment. For example, the Californian 3-strikes regulation, which levies draconian rulings in 3-time transgressors, has near assurances despite the crimes in question being reasonably minor. It has been concluded, after evidence-backed research studies, that a person is less likely to commit a third crime after committing two strikes already.

So, what system or moves can work if mass incarceration has failed to deter crimes?

Just like anyone, potential criminals are responsive to incentives. Such individuals are bound to obey the rules and law in instances where they feel the risks and costs associated with offences have significantly increased in a meaningful way. This explains the increase in the perceived probability of being caught due to the active deterrent. Researchers have noted that an increase in detentions has a significant role in the decrease in criminal activities. Therefore, the most natural initiative to raise the perceived probability is by placing more cops on the streets. Increased alerts on terror activities result in an increase in the number of cops on the roads (Wagner, 2016). While it is not clear whether this move reduces terrorism, there is a significant reduction in cases of burglary and auto theft.

Conclusively, while longer and heavier sentences are not effective in reducing crimes, more police officers will deter crimes due to the perceived risks that criminals get. Most individuals commit offences with the idea that they will not get arrested. However, seeing more cops changes their perspective and raises the perceived risks of committing a crime.

References

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