

Rethinking Crime and Punishment is a strategic initiative designed to increase the level of public debate about the use of prison and alternative forms of punishment in New Zealand



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Developing a Positive Prison Culture (Part One)



USA Budget woes prompt nations to rethink prison policy

Their budgets in crisis, governors, legislators and prison officials across the nation are making or considering policy changes that will likely remove tens of thousands of offenders from prisons and parole supervision. [Read more here](#)

Double Bunking may be Cost Efficient – But is it Cost Effective?

The government's move to double bunk prisoners would add an extra 950 beds to the system, covering expected growth in prisoner numbers in the next 18 months. The extra beds would be added in the four new jails opened in the past four years. The Corrections Department had previously ruled out the idea as cells were small and it could lead to tensions between inmates.

Opinions vary on the impact of double bunking. The government is justifying the measure as a cost saving. ACT MP David Garrett goes further by implying that assaults and rapes in prisons might discourage people from committing offences. The evidence against double

No one truly knows a nation until he has been inside its jails. A nation should be judged not by how it treats its highest citizens, but how it treats its lowest ones”

Nelson Mandela

How should we treat prisoners?

The New Zealand public's attitude to the treatment of prisoners, conditions for prisoners, and the way prisons should be run varies widely. The apparent suicide of Antonie Dixon in Paremoremo Prison, led to two well known columnists responding quite differently.

“Burn in Hell, Antonie Dixon. And how can we convince the Curtis brothers to similarly depart this mortal existence”?

Michael Laws Sunday Star Times February 8

I hope authorities look again, hard, at how we manage violent psychopaths. They may not be humane, but we must be”.

Rosemary McLeod, Sunday Star Times February 8

The Culture and Dynamics of Prisons

Internationally, prisons have more or less the same culture – and it takes very little to put the culture out of balance. Over the last twenty years, a succession of senior public servants have resigned as the head of Corrections or prisons, either under duress, or through stress or frustration, because of the difficulty of managing and /or changing the prison culture. The dynamics of the prison culture can change quickly, evidenced by a sudden increase in assaults on prisoners and staff, allegations of corruption, and inhumane treatment. The 'Prisons as Paradise' scenario goes out the window ([see Newsletter #1](#)).

Prison as Hell

For those incarcerated, prison becomes a variant of Hell, evidenced by a high level of violence, standover tactics, drug use, and unpredictable behaviour from both staff and prisoners. Over the past month, that has been evidenced by a number serious assaults and violent episodes within prisons.

Deadly bash for prison 'enforcer

The dangerous inmate bashed to death in his cell, was an 'enforcer' who was given the ultimate payback.

NZ Truth 5 March 2009

Inmate blinded with fork attacked again

John Waara, 34, of Palmerston North, lost his sight in both eyes after another prisoner grabbed him from behind and stabbed him in the eyes with a fork in Linton Prison, Palmerston North, last year. Waara, was attacked again last week, he believes by the same prisoner.

NZ Herald – 10 March 2009

bunking is that it is dehumanizing and that the human cost is too high - i.e. the measure does not represent value for money. Greg Newbold refers to double bunking as "a cheap and nasty solution. The beginning of the decline of Corrections in this country".

What do you think? Here are some of the quotes for and against.

The Prime Minister – Reduces demand on the taxpayer

Mr Key said in general he was comfortable with the idea. "In my opinion, where double bunking will work and where there is satisfaction that it can be appropriately be carried out, we should do that, because it reduces the demand on the New Zealand taxpayer," he told reporters.

The Department of Corrections – Issues of inmate Compatibility and Tension

Putting two prisoners in each cell has previously been rejected by the Corrections Department as it believed the standard 6.5sq m cell was not suitable for two people. Such close-quarter living had the potential to cause "issues of inmate compatibility and tensions", the department has said. NZ Herald - Patrick Gower - 10 March

Bevan Hanlon, Prison Officers Union - Let's gauge staff reaction

Mr Hanlon said Corrections had told the union three weeks ago that it needed an extra 950 beds through double bunking all cells in the four new jails, apart from at-risk cells and drug and alcohol treatment units. "We are very close to full," he said. Mr Hanlon is visiting prisons to gauge staff reaction to the proposal. NZ Herald 10 March.

Greg Newbold, Ex-prisoner and criminologist – it dehumanises the inmate

The proposal has horrified criminologist Greg Newbold,

Gang President stabbed in prison attack

The president of the Dunedin Mongrel Mob, currently in custody at Otago prison, was stabbed on Saturday in what was believed to be an attack by members of a rival gang.

NZ Herald – 10 March 2009

Prison Staff front up to Managers

Corrections Department executives will front up to a meeting with disgruntled Auckland prison staff next week, a prison officers union says. Disgruntled prison staff at Auckland Prison on Tuesday passed a vote of no confidence in management over staff health and safety. One issue worrying union members was a practice of not adequately filling in shifts when workers called in sick. This saved money, but because prisons were already staffed at the minimum safe levels, increased the risk of things going wrong – such as assaults on staff or prisoners.

NZ Herald – 10 March

The Organisational Dynamics of Prison

Once the prisoner goes inside the prison, the prison people take over - and the deprivations begin. Rules and processes are designed to control and contain prisoners. In many instances the importance of maintaining strong and positive contact with family members is not fully appreciated. The prisoner is isolated from their loved ones and the outside world.

The prison is a complex community- it involves health and medical workers, custodial staff, support staff, prisoners, and their families. Communication between these groups can be very limited, inconsistent, disruptive and sometimes even hostile.

There are people within the system, staff members and prisoners, who try to make it work the way it should. Over time, they become worn down by the destructive force of prison culture, and the ugliness of it eats away at their abilities to cope. Through lack of interest by the public and lack of proactive government voices to encourage and promote culture change, the prison system is left to its own devices.

The Roles People Play in Prison

The Prisoner: Acting out the role as bad – macho behaviour, to intimidate, manipulate, threaten, standover, break rules and regulations. Informing on others is unacceptable and often brings retribution.

The Prison Officer: To catch them, to control, to punish, to degrade, to humiliate, to break their spirit, to intimidate, to turn a blind eye – seeing prisoners as very different from ordinary people.

The Prisoner and the Prison Officer both wear their own uniform. With that uniform comes sets of behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and loyalties. Both sides are distrusting and suspicious of the other.

Staff in General: Connected to both sides - they are often caught in the cross fire with their loyalties and values challenged. They are guided, intimidated and threatened by the culture, so are therefore unable to perform their work duties to the best of their abilities and to their own moral standards. They become silenced by the prison culture.

Families: Doing time – The invisible victims, treated as guilty by their association with a criminal. Once the sentence is imposed on their loved one, the shared sentence begins. They too learn how to keep the secret, not to complain or inform. They live with the fear of what may happen to their loved ones if they do not comply with the prison culture.

Families are a valuable asset to the rehabilitation and reintegration of the prisoner. This is over looked and most families are treated with indifference by prison officials.

Drugs: Many inmates have been convicted of drug related offences and therefore at the time of entering prison they do so with drug problems. Family members become pressured to either smuggle the drugs into the prison or to supply the money to pay a drug debt. There are some staff members who themselves become drug dealers to prisoners. Tobacco, phone cards and canteen items become currency; these items allow for prisoners to actively participate in dealing. The perceived weaker prisoners are stood over and intimidated into giving up what is theirs. They do not speak out, instead they go without, and live with the fear of prison life.

who himself spent time in prison. He said the plan would be "disastrous", and lead to increased violence towards inmates and staff. "When you're locked up with someone you can't get away from [or] with someone you may detest, people will explode in that type of environment," Dr Newbold said.

"It's the worst thing they can possibly do. It leads to homosexual rape and bullying in cells, and dehumanises the inmate. "Any inmate doing a long term knows the hour you look forward to is lock-up time - time on your own without hindrance from another inmate."

Dr Newbold has researched prisons in the US and Australia, where cell-sharing is common. In Louisiana, he observed five-bunk stacking, as well as dormitory-style rooms with 100 to 200 people inside. As well as rapes, stabbings were also common in such environments, he said. "It is a cheap and nasty solution. The beginning of the decline of Corrections in this country."
NZ Herald 10 March 12, 2009

David Garrett, ACT MP - Its Cost effective - Rape is a crime wherever it occurs

"Who cares if inmates don't want to be 'cooped up' together for long periods of time? These criminals have lost the right to have their comforts considered," Mr Garrett said. "Such options should be based on cost-effectiveness and the safety of Kiwi families - not the creature comforts inmates have been treated to over the past nine years," Mr Garrett said.

"Rape is a crime wherever it occurs, and can be dealt with in the same way as any other offence committed in prison."
ACT Press Release - 10 March

Drug controllers: They are a dangerous threat to the inmates who just want to do their time quietly and not get involved in anything that could jeopardise their release or parole chances. Inmates are more frightened of the drug controllers than they are of others in authority. The prison environment, the boredom, the fear, pressures of coping with prison life and the prison culture, separation from family and the overall emotional degradation make drug use an attractive option for a temporary escape. Some prisoners enter prison having not ever used drugs and leave as drug users. Prisoners who are able to obtain and supply drugs have a huge amount of power and control over other inmates.

Conclusion: Many inmates released from prison are far more damaged than when first entering the prison system, which in no doubt leads to re-offending behaviour, and more and more victims of crime. The reality is that society pays the ultimate price.

Prisons Breed Violence

Loss of liberty is a profoundly stressful experience, compounded by the brutal culture of most prisons and inadequate measures to protect prisoners from becoming the victim of violence while in prison. All of this is accompanied by demeaning practices and the limited availability of mental and physical health care.

Factors that Influence Prison Violence

- Prison management and accountability
- Crowding and size of prison
- Double bunking
- Architectural design
- Staff inexperience and training
- Vulnerability to violence
- Inmate background (ie. experiences of domestic violence and street violence)

A range of factors contribute to prison violence, including inmate characteristics, prison culture, boredom, structural factors associated with the prison environment, and management practices such as staffing models, staff skills and training, and management regime. Failure to provide access to work and other programs is a major cause of unrest in prisons.

Victimisation

Victims are victimised in many ways; assault, rape, threats, thefts, abuse and being ostracised by other prisoners. Those who victimise others are often likely to have been victims themselves.

Victimisation is rarely reported. Poor prison management resulting in dysfunctional forms of control are suggested as major causes of interpersonal violence. A range of factors is cited including: security lapses, lack of prison officer discipline and morale, officers' inability or unwillingness to intervene in instances of victimisation and violence, poor grievance and dispute resolution mechanisms, the formation of gangs and cliques, inmates relying on self-protection, staff violence for control of inmates, deterrence and payback (especially where officers feel justified in taking matters into their own hands). It is important that there be appropriate accountability and dispute resolution mechanisms, including mediation and ombudsmen, for defusing violence.

We balk at hearing horrific stories of what actually happens to offenders. They are in prison to serve their time. Yet they are assaulted and raped, and are harmed immeasurably, which leads to despair, lack of hope and sadly in some cases, suicide. This is not part of the punishment society decreed.

Experiences of Incarceration

The state has a duty of care with respect to the health and well-being of those it incarcerates. How this duty of care is exercised shapes the inmate's experience of imprisonment.

Next Issue: What Can Be Done to Develop a Positive Prison Culture?