



Research Review

Structured offender day: A review of the existing literature

KEY WORDS: *structured routine, prison management, inmate control*

What we looked at

The goal of imprisonment is to confine and control convicted offenders. It has been thought that this can be effectively done by implementing strict routines for inmates to follow. Also, this structure provides a basis for the prevention of further criminal activity.

The goal of the present literature review was to assess if previous research has established (a) the optimal balance of free time and structured routine that should be provided for an offender's daily living or (b) the ideal length of a structured day in prison.

What we found

In order to examine this issue, we examined literature from other jurisdictions and from previous research. Literature was limited, and most of what we found was from the United States.

Past literature argues that prison management systems can be categorized according to the levels of control that are imposed on daily prison activities. This determines whether inmates are mandated to strict routines and how much free time they are allotted.

In most jurisdictions, inmates' days are typically filled with institutional work, programs and activities rather than allowing them to have excessive spare time. Studies show that involvement in such routine activities provides inmates with a structured regime and decreases the amount of prison violence and disorder. In addition, this routine can provide inmates with skills and training that can be of benefit upon release.

Although structure can have positive outcomes for the individual and the institution, over-controlling inmates may also result in negative consequences. Researchers have found that excessive control can

lead to increased personal stress, poor inmate behaviour and elevated levels of prison disorder.

Evidence supports that providing inmates with a structured routine is beneficial. However, it is essential that inmates also be provided with the ability to maintain some choice and self-governance in order to fully gain from the benefits of structure.

What it means

Ultimately, research has primarily focussed on effective management to control behaviour and reduce violence. Further research is necessary to identify the ideal balance between the inmates' daily structured routine and the provision of free time. In addition, most research was American therefore a Canadian perspective is needed.

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