



REACTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE INMATES TO PRISON CONFINEMENT: FURTHER EVIDENCE FOR A TWO-COMPONENT MODEL

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DESIGN ISSUE

The goal of the study was to address the limitations of previous studies on the Two-Component Model of inmates' reaction to prison confinement, and present the analysis of the impact of confinement on both male and female inmates in a federal co-correctional facility. The Two-Component Model proposes that the effects of prison confinement differ in response to two different types of prison conditions: (1) those that remain constant, and (2) those that vary over time. Violence, loss of freedom, limited facilities and competition for limited resources, among others, represent some of the constant conditions. Gradual increase in familiarity with procedures, norms and staff, among others, represent the changing conditions. Based on findings of previous studies, the authors hypothesized that:

- 1) Reactions to the prison environment would not change or become more negative over time.
- 2) Health and emotional outcomes would improve over time.
- 3) Self-reported social support within and outside the prison would decrease over time, and
- 4) No change would occur over time in coping behavior and tolerance for prison conditions.

BACKGROUND

Although much research has been done and reported on the effects of prison confinement on inmates, most previous studies had important shortcomings. Nevertheless, conclusions drawn in different studies were fairly consistent.

- 1) A decrease over time of general physiological and emotional reactions.
- 2) Reaction to the prison environment and hostility to it remaining the same or increasing in negativity over time.
- 3) Some evidence suggesting that over time, inmate coping mechanisms have included social withdrawal or withdrawal from activities.

RESEARCH METHOD



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The study was conducted in two phases at a federal co-correctional (housing 700 inmates, both male and female) facility in southwestern United States. The prison was a minimum security facility catering to end-of-sentence stage inmates or those with short-term confinements. Male and female inmates were housed in separate dormitories, but were allowed to interact in all other areas of the prison. Forty female and forty male inmates volunteered to participate in the study.

A longitudinal study design was adopted, with two data collection points – one soon after the inmate arrived and the second after four months of prison confinement. Each time, the participants were administered a questionnaire and had their blood pressure measured. The questionnaire included items on demographics, surroundings, mood, social support, coping styles, symptoms, problems, and tolerance. Medical records of the inmates were accessed to obtain information on the number of clinic visits between the two phases of data collection and the nature of complaints on these visits. Quantitative analyses were conducted to identify and examine differences over time.

FINDINGS

Data analyses confirmed previous study findings in most, but not all, areas:

- 1) Reactions to the prison and its social environment increased in negativity over time.
- 2) Blood pressure decreased over time.
- 3) Number of medical visits and frequency of health problems remained constant over time.
- 4) Housing evaluation and environmental problems remained constant between the two data collection phases.
- 5) Anger, depression, anxiety and degree of control did not change.
- 6) Availability of and satisfaction with social support decreased over time.
- 7) Mood did not change between the two data collection points.

Overall, the findings provide further evidence in support of the Two-Component Model, and that the effects of prison confinement are similar on both sexes in direction but at different levels of intensity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN PRACTICE

For design teams embarking on a new or renovation courthouse project, consider increasing access to social support or providing spaces that encouraged social support.



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LIMITATIONS

Limitations of the study as reported by authors include the small (single setting) sample, and the absence of higher-security confinement, where reactions could be different. Both these factors limit generalizability of the findings. Authors also report limitations in the tools used to measure feelings of control, uncertainty and familiarity.

ADAPTED FROM

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