

In this article you will get a better and deeper understanding of the immediate sources of stress inmates face daily. Many inmates struggle to survive as they try to better themselves and rebuild ~~themselves~~ their lives. I will try to explain the unique ways inmates cope with stress, their urgent need for better access to mental and medical services and ways to successfully curb the rate of people who re-offend.

### Surviving Behind Closed Doors

Being a survivor behind closed doors is very difficult. Once an inmate is behind closed doors, there are many horrors they may face. For many vulnerable and weak inmates they are in serious and immediate danger when the doors "slam" closed and the lights go dark. These inmates are at risk of being sexually, mentally, physically and verbally abused by predator offenders and guards who abuse their authority. One of the biggest threats to an inmates survival behind is sexual abuse and harassment. Many prison guards use voyeurism to sexually abuse and harass inmates. Direct supervision staff when completing security rounds may routinely peek into offenders cells while offenders are washing themselves, urinating or sleeping. Offenders are faced with repeated and unwelcomed sexual advances, request for sexual favors, or verbal comments

gestures, or actions directed at them by staff and by other inmates. When an inmate is housed or celled with a predator they are more likely to be abused sexually and ~~psychic~~ physically. Living in such an environment causes an offender a tremendous amount of physical and psychological trauma. It's a stressful way to live, knowing that you are at ~~an~~ immediate risk of being raped, beaten, robbed of your belongings and humiliated.

### Who can they run to?

No One! there is a culture of no snitching in the U's prison system. If you donot wish to be retaliated against by staff and other offenders, you have to keep silent or check-in. Once you check-in or seek protective custody, you are usually taken straight to an Admin-Segregation housing unit, for your safety (if your institution believes you are in danger). In Admin-Segregation under trained staff and predators await them. For vulnerable offenders there is a lack of autonomy and safety. This lack of autonomy and safety usually feeds an inmates general distrust of staff, the reporting process, the investigation and other offenders. When faced with these stressors many people become disoriented, have mood-swings, anxiety, and depression. Some of these offenders may have previously had no disciplinary problems, but will suddenly find themselves unable to follow DOC rules and unable to cope.

## Mental Health Providers

Mental health programs and services are non-existent or inadequate. In many state facilities Corizon Health Services is the main provider of mental health care. Corizon Health Services has a proven track record of failing to provide adequate medical/mental health services to offenders. Service providers and staff lack the proper training and understanding needed to effectively assist offenders in crisis. In most facilities mental health providers operate in areas and ways that directly violate federal HIPAA laws and expose offenders to multiple traumas that exacerbate their physical and psychological symptoms. Sharing or talking about one's feelings may cause or put inmate to live in a dangerous environment. The risk of being sexually, mentally or physically abused or assaulted, causes an offender to self-isolate. While isolation may be needed, it may also cause an offender to have additional problems, such as increased anger and depression. Isolation in some settings may make an offender more vulnerable to predator guards and offenders. Many trans, inter-sex, young elderly, LGBTQ, disabled or weaker offenders may become sexually abused by others when they self-isolate themselves from others. Abusive guards and stronger offenders may offer them friendship and protection in return for sexual favors. Many offenders for their own safety will accept the help and become victims.

## Turning the Tide

Many inmates who survive prison and their abusers use religion as a way to cope. In prison, religious services/programming plays a vital role in the rehabilitation and lives of many offenders. In my institution the religious make up of offenders is 33.8% Christian, 29.6% Muslim, 5% Jewish or Messianic, 3% other and 28% practice no religion at all. When joining religious groups, inmates are also looking to make a connection. To join sub-groups within these religious groups that provide immediate protection. These groups are much capable of aiding a weaker offender than institutional policies and staff. Religion also helps inmates cope with the daily stress of being incarcerated.

## Re-Offending

Local, state and federal authorities must immediately create and better fund programming that halts the rate of formerly incarcerated people from re-offending. Incarcerated individuals in facilities across the US have limited access to programming that will allow them to be successful when they re-enter society. Prisons should be forced to provide offenders with the proper training and skills that allow them to be successful when they return to society. The lack of higher education

employment, housing and mental health services for formerly incarcerated people allows them the chance to re-offend. Poverty, un-employment, homelessness, lack of education and social skills are direct links between re-imprisonment and successful re-entry back into society.

### Conclusion

After reading this essay you should have a deeper understanding of the immediate sources of stress inmates face daily. The struggles they have behind closed doors, to better themselves for their return trip to society. It is important ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> people ~~behind bars~~ behind bars receive the proper services needed to rehabilitate themselves and to correct their bad behaviors for a safe and fair healthy ~~return~~ return to society. It is your duty as an American citizen to advocate on the behalf of incarcerated people. Advocate ~~to~~ on their behalf to your elected officials for better funding for mental health services, re-entry programs and ~~to~~ ~~advocate~~ policies within every institution to protect vulnerable offenders from abuse.