

# What Harm?

## (Lockdowns At USP Tucson)

You ever think of the psychological effects a lockdown has on an inmate? In general, no human being should ever be so completely isolated from other people. But in prisons, there are times you need to lockdown a person, dorm or institution, based off safety and security.

In this essay, I'm not talking about that. Let's use a real situation to propose what psychological harm is done by locking inmates continually in a cell for long periods of time.

Real-life scenario: On October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, we at USP Tucson went on a lockdown, because the first inmate case of COVID-19 was discovered. So, it stands to reason, you need to lock everybody down, to determine a course of action.

What action? Even though we're talking inmates in a pen, there are still guidelines for inmates to get some movement, if the prison can come up with a reasonable plan.

But, USP Tucson chose not to implement any such plan, and resolved to simply let them sit in the cells - much like a dog kennel. What harm could it do?

Well, let's think about that. Now, any reader would agree in general that extended lockdowns can have a psychological effect on a person. Even in society, during the COVID-19 pandemic, citizens who've been isolated at home are growing discouraged, stressed, and for some, suicidal. It's simply not natural to be isolated for too long.

With that in mind, let's examine the lockdown at USP Tucson. As I said, it started October 21<sup>st</sup>, and I'm writing this as of January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021. That's about 80 days... and counting. During that time, inmates were only allowed out the cells for showers on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, for roughly 15 minutes each. That's about 45 minutes a week.

Usually (but not always) there were nose swabs, to test to see who may have caught the COVID-19 virus. On those days, we had to walk outside the dorm, into fresh air, for the swab, then come back in. That takes like 2 minutes. So, in the course of an average week, inmates spend 47 minutes out of the cell.

Over 80 days, that's 1,920 total hours. Inmates like myself spent roughly 457 minutes, or about 7.6 hours outside the cell the last 80 days. That's about 0.4% of 80 days inside a cell... and counting.

What harm could it do? Factor these criteria as well:

- No contact with family or loved ones,
- Loss of holidays (Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day),
- All canteen prohibited (no stamps, hygiene, medicine, coffee, batteries, ect)
- Difficulty to keep up with current events (no batteries for radio)
- Less than adequate prison-issued hygiene.
- The list goes on...

We cannot argue the need for a lockdown, since the argument is valid. But to take away privileges and even constitutional rights, simply to make the job easier, creates a troubling effect on the mind of an inmate, such as the simple need for a man to call his family to let them know he's ok.

Every inmate deserves that - especially during a pandemic.

Or, for others, to get out of the same walls they've been trapped in for too long. A 6x12 cell shouldn't have to hold a human being for 99.6% of a lockdown. There's bound to be psychological effects.

Yet USP Tucson did not, or would not consider this. In effect, they've reduced the inmates to pure punitive status, even though the COVID-19 pandemic is not of their creation. But under the very thinly veiled "safety and security", USP Tucson validates stuffing human beings in a cell, with no movement to call loved ones, get exercise or anything to help alleviate the building stress of being in a cell during the holidays, with no venue to celebrate.

What might the effects be of prohibiting inmates from even calling loved ones on Christmas?

We may find out, for good or ill... what harm could it possibly do?

To USP Tucson, we're only inmates - so it doesn't really matter.