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Dr. Nitesh Saraswat

E.MBA, LL.M, Ph.D, PGDSAPM

Currently working as Assistant Professor at Law Centre II, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Dr. Nitesh have 14 years of Teaching, Administrative and research experience in Renowned Institutions like Amity University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Jai Narain Vyas University Jodhpur, Jagannath University and Nirma University.

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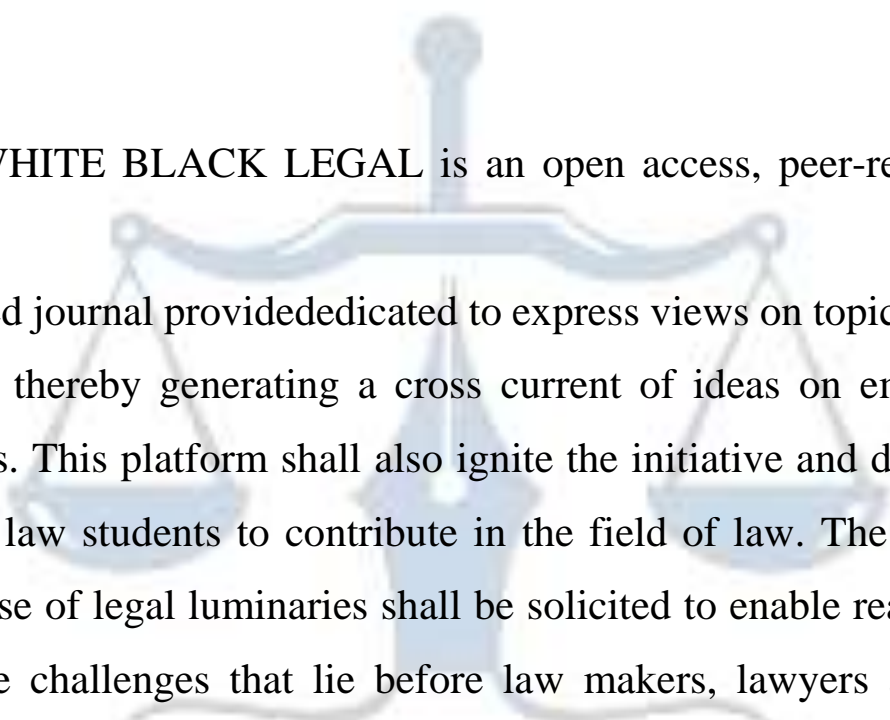


Subhrajit Chanda

BBA. LL.B. (Hons.) (Amity University, Rajasthan); LL. M. (UPES, Dehradun) (Nottingham Trent University, UK); Ph.D. Candidate (G.D. Goenka University)

Subhrajit did his LL.M. in Sports Law, from Nottingham Trent University of United Kingdoms, with international scholarship provided by university; he has also completed another LL.M. in Energy Law from University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, India. He did his B.B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) focussing on International Trade Law.

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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

ISOLATION, JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS: AN OVERVIEW OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

AUTHORED BY - ANTHARA N

Abstract

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of solitary confinement within the context of rigorous imprisonment, with a focus on its implications for mental health and its status in India and globally. Beginning with a historical overview, it traces the origins and evolution of solitary confinement practices. The conceptual framework of solitary confinement is explored, shedding light on its psychological ramifications for prisoners.

Drawing on a range of legal precedents, including landmark case laws, the paper examines the intersection of solitary confinement with constitutional principles and human rights laws. Through this exploration, it underscores the legal and ethical challenges posed by solitary confinement and its compatibility with international standards of justice and human dignity. Furthermore, the paper evaluates the current status of solitary confinement, both in India and other jurisdictions, and identifies persisting challenges in its application and oversight. It emphasizes the necessity of a robust criminal justice system that upholds the fundamental rights of prisoners while ensuring public safety and rehabilitation.

Keywords: *solitary, confinement, isolation, inmates, prison system, mental health, legal, laws, psychological, rehabilitation, incarceration, reformation*

Research objectives:

- i) To critically analyze the psychological and legal limitations of solitary confinement as a correctional tool.
- ii) To understand the international setting surrounding the use of solitary confinement
- iii) To examine the current legal framework governing solitary confinement in India, with a specific focus on relevant judicial decisions

Introduction

The term 'solitary' is defined as '*being the only one, or not being with other similar things*'¹. Solitary confinement in the legal context, is the practice of physical isolation of prisoners within their cells, for an extended period, typically for 22-23 hours or more per day. It is considered to be a harsh punishment, confining inmates to isolated cells with constant monitoring and minimal human interaction. This differential treatment from the general prison population often leads to intense psychological stress, raising significant ethical and human rights issues. Due to this, the psychological impact of solitary confinement on prisoners is a critical factor to consider when examining this type of imprisonment. It is not generally given to most prisoners owing to its harsh and severe nature. It is generally reserved for prisoners having a history of committing serious or heinous crimes, as well as those who pose a significant threat to other prisoners or prison staff. This type of punishment is not commonly applied to the general prison population due to its harshness and severity. The decision to use solitary confinement is typically driven by the need to maintain security and discipline within the prison, acknowledging that it is one of the most rigorous forms of punishment available.

Modern research reinforces the findings of earlier studies that the impact of solitary confinement on a person is influenced by multiple factors. One of the key factors to consider is the duration of isolation; prolonged periods and longer stretches in confinement are more likely to cause harm. Additionally, the specific conditions within solitary confinement, such as environmental elements like access to natural light, human contact, or any form of mental stimulation, play a crucial role in determining the effects on an inmate's well-being. Moreover, individual characteristics and personality traits also affect how people respond to isolation. Some individuals may have a higher tolerance for solitude, while others, especially those with pre-existing mental health issues, might be more susceptible to its detrimental effects. Despite these differences, solitary confinement generally has lasting consequences, even for those who appear to be coping during their time in isolation.

History of Solitary Confinement

Solitary Confinement is not a recent concept; its origins can be traced back to the idea that isolating prisoners would give them the time and space to reflect on their actions, leading to

¹ SOLITARY | English meaning, Cambridge Dictionary, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/solitary>.

moral and spiritual reform. This practice was rooted in the belief that by being separated from others, inmates would ponder their misdeeds and ultimately become reformed individuals. However, this notion was short-lived as it was quickly observed that solitary confinement often caused more harm than good. It became evident that prolonged isolation led to significant negative outcomes. Inmates subjected to solitary confinement began to exhibit various behavioral changes and showed signs of mental disorders, including depression, anxiety, agitation, and delusions. Some even engaged in the act of self-harm, highlighting the adverse psychological impact of extended isolation and the absence of meaningful social interaction.

In the 1700s, religious groups in parts of the USA and Europe believed that isolating wrongdoers in small cells with only a Bible in their hands would lead to "repentance and rehabilitation." The reasoning was based on the idea that with no distractions or influences, prisoners would have only one access; to god, and they would reflect on their actions, understand its consequences and by the end of their confinement, they would accept their guilt by seeking redemption. This approach quickly escalated, leading to the expansion of solitary confinement practices.

A pivotal moment came when the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia, known for pioneering the use of solitary confinement, expanded its solitary cells within a few decades. By 1829, the Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania became the first prison designed entirely around the idea of keeping inmates in solitary confinement, signaling the institutionalization of this approach to punishment. A pivotal moment came when the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia, well-known for the use of solitary confinement, expanded its solitary cells within a few decades. By 1829, the Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania became the first prison designed entirely around the idea of keeping inmates in solitary confinement, signaling the institutionalization of this approach to punishment².

The treatment of those in solitary cells was summarized by La-Rochefoucauld-Liancourt as *'The person sentenced to solitary confinement is shut up in a kind of cell, whose floor is eight ft by six, and its height nine ft Every precaution is taken to preserve health.... The prisoner sleeps upon a mattress, and is allowed a sufficient quantity of clothing... He sees the turnkey*

² Roumita Dey, Should Federal Prisons Restrict the Use of Solitary Confinement?.., International Journal of Law Management & Humanities, 2021, <https://www.ijlmh.com/wp-content/uploads/Examining-Solitary-Confinement-in-the-United-States.pdf>.

*but once a day, to receive a small pudding made of Indian corn, together with some molasses; nor is it till after a given time that he obtains, upon his petition, the leave to read. During his whole confinement he is never allowed to walk out of his cell, even into the passage*³.

Furthermore, religion was inculcated in the everyday lives of prisoners through the introduction of books and 'divine services' to all convicts 'except those in the solitary cells'.⁴

Solitary confinement fell out of practice and was abandoned by many countries, including the USA since it was seen to be expensive and ineffective. However, the practice experienced a resurgence in the late 20th century amid rising crime rates and increasing racism. This revival disproportionately affected people of colour, and many of them were confined to solitary cells. This led to the construction of "supermax" prisons which were high-security facilities designed to hold hundreds of inmates in isolation as opposed to around eight to ten cells before it made its comeback.

The notion of reforming and rehabilitating prisoners through isolation methods gained traction with the advent of the so-called Auburn and Pennsylvania prison systems. These systems used isolation as one of the primary methods of rehabilitation, influencing prison design and management across the Western part of the world. In the Auburn system, inmates were allowed to work together but were not permitted to communicate, ensuring a strict environment of silence. In contrast, the Pennsylvania system did not compromise with the idea of isolation, as it maintained a complete isolation policy, with prisoners spending all their time in their cells, even when working.⁵ *Although the routines and extent of rules followed might have varied from country to country, they all shared common traits often to a remarkable degree.*

Psychological Implications

The psychological impact of Solitary confinement is a critical consideration in any discussion of the practice, as this is one of the major points that is often criticized. Isolated prisoners endure a range of psychological changes, including emotional disturbances, cognitive impairments, and symptoms related to psychosis. Human beings, inherently are social beings

³ Rex A. Skidmore, Penological Pioneering in the Walnut Street Jail, 1789-1799, *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 1948, <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3569&context=jclc#:~:text=This%20famous%20Pennsylvania%20institution%20was,reforms%20and%20innova%2D%20tions%20which.>

⁴ *supra*

⁵ Peter Scharff Smith, Solitary Confinement – History, Practice, and Human Rights Standards [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324248577_Solitary_Confinement_-_History_Practice_and_Human_Rights_Standards.](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324248577_Solitary_Confinement_-_History_Practice_and_Human_Rights_Standards)

and they rely on meaningful social interaction to maintain mental and emotional stability. Depriving prisoners of this fundamental human need leads to significant negative effects, disrupting their ability to function effectively and contributing to a decline in their overall mental health. *‘Contact with family or visitors is often restricted or denied altogether, despite the fact that contact with family in particular, has been shown to be an important factor in successful rehabilitation’*⁶.

These negative effects of solitary confinement are particularly acute for individuals with serious mental illness, which encompasses major mental disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder. These conditions often involve psychotic symptoms and considerable functional impairments. The harsh conditions of solitary confinement, including high stress, lack of meaningful social interaction, and unstructured daily routines, can worsen existing symptoms or trigger their re-emergence. Another alarming psychological effect is that suicide rates are disproportionately higher in isolating units compared to other parts of the prison system⁷. The lack of adequate mental health support in such settings makes it unlikely for these prisoners to improve, defeating the entire purpose of the punishment i.e. to reform them.

A psychologist, Craig Haney stated *‘There’s very little doubt in psychology that enforced isolation is psychologically harmful and for some people will be very damaging’*⁸. He conducted a study in 2003 where he selected 100 people at random and detained them in supermax prisons and he found that all of them showed signs of heightened anxiety, irrational anger, sensitivity to external stimuli, irritability, a confused thought process, etc.⁹ Considerable and severe effects were found with very high prevalence rates. For example, 91% suffered from anxiety and nervousness, and 70% “felt themselves on the verge of an emotional breakdown”. 77% were in a state of chronic depression and two-thirds of the inmates suffered from many different symptoms at once. An isolation regimen was found to produce anxiety, depression, illusory experiences, visual hallucinations, and in some cases psychosis.¹⁰

⁶ The issue- Penal Reform International, <https://www.penalreform.org/issues/prison-conditions/key-facts/solitary-confinement/>.

⁷ Patterson RF & Hughes K, Review of completed suicides in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 1999 to 2004, National Library of Medicine, 2008.

⁸ The Psychological Effects of Incarceration, American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/education-career/guide/paths/craig-haney>.

⁹ Testimony of Professor Craig Haney, House Judiciary Committee, 2024, https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/TR/Transcripts/2024_0547_0007_TSTMNY.pdf

¹⁰ Smith, Peter Scharff. “The Effects of Solitary Confinement on Prison Inmates: A Brief History and Review of the Literature.” *Crime and Justice*, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1086/500626>.

In 2016, Albert Woodfox, who held the record for being the longest-serving solitary prisoner in the US, was released after about 43 years in isolation. His return to society came with significant challenges, as he was in a mentally and physically frail condition. During his extended solitary confinement, Woodfox had been denied access to rehabilitation programs and deprived of meaningful social interaction, leading to severe impacts on his overall health and well-being. His case highlights the long-term damage that prolonged solitary confinement can inflict on individuals.¹¹

Legal Framework Governing Solitary Confinement in India

The term "Solitary Confinement" is not defined in any code or legislation, but the provisions related to it can be located in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) 1860 and the Prisoners Act 1894.

- **The Indian Penal Code 1860**

Section 73 of the Indian Penal Code¹² grants the Court the authority to impose solitary confinement as part of a rigorous punishment. However, this section establishes clear limits to prevent excessive use of solitary confinement, specifying that it should not exceed three months in total. It delineates the permissible duration of solitary confinement based on the length of the imprisonment term. If the imprisonment term is six months or less, the maximum period of solitary confinement is one month. For terms exceeding six months but not exceeding one year, the maximum solitary confinement allowed is two months. If the imprisonment term is longer than one year, the maximum period for solitary confinement is three months.

Section 74 places limits on solitary confinement by imposing restrictions on the duration and intervals between periods of solitary confinement. According to this section, the total duration of solitary confinement should not exceed 14 days at a time, with intervals between the period of confinement, being of equal duration. For imprisonment terms exceeding three months, solitary confinement should not exceed seven days in any given month throughout the entire duration of the sentence. Again, intervals between periods of solitary confinement must be of equal duration to the periods themselves.

Although these constraints are designed to ensure that solitary confinement is used judiciously

¹¹ Ed Pilkington, Albert Woodfox, held in solitary confinement for 43 years, dies aged 75, The Guardian, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/04/albert-woodfox-solitary-confinement-prison-angola-three>

¹² The Indian Penal Code, 1860, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

and not excessively, it's important to recognize that even one to three months of solitary confinement, as permitted by Section 73 of the IPC, can be severe and harsh for an individual. Prisoners subjected to solitary confinement often endure inhumane treatment, and extended isolation can exacerbate the existing psychological toll of imprisonment.

- **The Prisoners Act 1894**

Sec 29¹³ prescribes specific rules that prison officials need to follow in case of a person in solitary Confinement, stating that the solitary confinement cell must include the means for *the prisoner to communicate at any time with an officer of the prison*. Additionally, any prisoner held in solitary confinement for over twenty-four hours, whether as a punishment or for other reasons, must be visited daily by a Medical Officer or Medical Subordinate to ensure their health and safety. These requirements aim to mitigate the risks associated with solitary confinement and provide regular medical oversight for inmates in isolation.

The provision in this section stipulates that any harsh isolation from society, characterized by long and lengthy confinement, is punitive and should be implemented with strict adherence to fair procedures. In such cases, written consent and immediate reporting to a higher authority are required to prevent misuse or abuse. This principle was established in the landmark case of *Sunil Barta v. Delhi Administration*¹⁴, which underscored various rights of prisoners, established the 'hands-off doctrine', upheld various fundamental rights of the prisoners, etc.

Section 30(2) addresses solitary confinement in the context of sentence to death. According to this section, a prisoner who has received a final death sentence, with no further legal options for appeal, must be placed in a separate cell with a guard providing 24-hour surveillance. It's crucial to note that the term "sentenced to death" is understood to mean that a person has received a definitive and executable death sentence. However, a prisoner should not be subjected to solitary confinement until their mercy plea has been denied, to avoid violating Article 21, which protects the right to life and personal liberty. This condition aims to ensure that even those on death row are granted their full legal rights and are not unjustly subjected to severe conditions before all legal avenues have been exhausted.

¹³ The Prisons Act, 1894, No. 9, Acts of Parliament, 1894 (India).

¹⁴ (1980) 3 SCC 488

From section 28 which allows for the confinement of convicted offenders in either group or individual cells and from the section mentioned earlier, it is observed that 'This is a highly distinct kind of segregation used to preserve discipline'. While the act permits separating prisoners, it does not explicitly authorize isolation as a disciplinary measure. This distinction suggests that the Prisons Act focuses on managing prisoner behaviour and maintaining order through segregation without resorting to solitary confinement for punishment¹⁵. Solitary confinement, though permissible, should be applied by criminal courts only in the *rarest* of cases, typically involving unprecedented depravity or brutality. Courts are urged to use this form of punishment *sparingly* and only in *extraordinary circumstances*, underscoring its potentially harmful effects and emphasizing the need for careful consideration.¹⁶

- **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023**

The BNSS also incorporates Solitary Confinement as a form of punishment since it retains many of the same provisions as offences as outlined in the Indian Penal Code, including those allowing for solitary confinement. These offences are generally serious in nature such as murder, criminal conspiracy, rape, or other forms of sexual harassment and kidnapping. The IPC permits solitary confinement for offences that carry rigorous imprisonment. Additionally, the Prisons Act, 1894, which also allows for solitary confinement, has been adopted into the legal framework of many Indian states. However, these provisions for solitary confinement are often inconsistent with court rulings and expert recommendations¹⁷. Courts and experts have frequently highlighted the harsh and inhumane nature of solitary confinement, pointing out its adverse psychological effects and the potential for abuse.

Judicial Interpretations and Perspectives

India's judiciary has made multiple rulings addressing the use of solitary confinement, focusing on human rights and inmate welfare. The case of *Sunil Batra v. Delhi Administration*¹⁸ stands as a pivotal moment in discussions about solitary confinement as it tackled the issue of torturing prisoners subjected to this severe form of punishment. The court's ruling not only highlighted the problem but also set a clear standard against mistreatment and abuse in the prison system,

¹⁵ Kamlesh Vishnoi, Keeping Solitary Confinement Beyond the Powers..., SCC Online, 2022, <https://www.sconline.com/blog/post/2022/07/05/keeping-solitary-confinement-beyond-the-powers-of-prison-authorities-analysis-of-various-kinds-of-punishment-under-prison-rules/#fn6>

¹⁶ Kishore Singh v. State of Rajasthan (1981) 1 SCC 503

¹⁷ Legislative Brief, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, PRSIndia Legislative Research, https://prsindia.org/billtrack/prs-products/bharatiya-nyaya-sanhita-2023-1701767043#_edn28.

¹⁸ (1980) 3 SCC 488

emphasizing the necessity for humane treatment even under strict confinement conditions. The transcending judicial decision taken in this case has become a reference point in the broader discourse on prisoner rights. A death row convict wrote to the Supreme Court, alleging that jail authorities had subjected him to torture in an attempt to extort money. The letter was revised into a habeas corpus proceeding, appointing *amicus curiae* to investigate the claims by reviewing documents and interviewing witnesses. Their investigation revealed that the prisoner had suffered severe injuries to his private organ, leading to continuous bleeding. The injuries, caused by the jail warden's actions, eventually necessitated his transfer to a hospital for further treatment.

The Supreme Court ruled that solitary confinement and other harsh forms of labour cannot be imposed without a Sessions Judge's approval, affirming that convicts are entitled to rights under Article 21, which ensures their right to life and personal liberty. In reviewing the constitutionality of solitary confinement, the '*prisoners are entitled to all fundamental rights consistent with their incarceration*'. Solitary confinement under Section 29 of The Prisons Act must follow a fair procedure, and its imposition without such procedure would be a violation of Article 21. Section 30(2) of the Prison Act, addressing solitary confinement, does not sanction torture or mistreatment of prisoners, and that this section is not in violation of Article 14, which concerns equality. The decision underscored the need for a balanced approach, ensuring that solitary confinement is applied only under appropriate circumstances and with strict adherence to legal procedures.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court made a significant ruling emphasizing the importance of humane treatment and due process for all prisoners, in the *State Of Haryana vs. Arun And Ors*¹⁹, abolishing the use of solitary confinement for death row inmates in Punjab and Haryana. The court determined that there is '*no scientific or logical basis*' for segregating death row inmates from other prisoners immediately after the pronouncement of their death sentence. This practice causes substantial *mental trauma to the convict* and violates Articles 20(2) and 21 of the Indian Constitution²⁰, which protects against double jeopardy and guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, respectively.

¹⁹ Apoorva Mandhani, Punjab & Haryana HC Abolishes Solitary Confinement Of Murder Convicts, LiveLaw, 2018, <https://www.livelaw.in/punjab-haryana-hc-abolishes-solitary-confinement-of-murder-convicts-read-judgment/>.

²⁰ INDIA CONST. art. 21 & art. 20, cl. 2.

In *Ranbir Singh Sehgal v. State of Punjab*²¹, the Court emphasized that there must be a reasonable connection between a statute's purpose and the specific provision in question. The goal here was to maintain discipline among prison inmates, and the authority to enforce this was entrusted to the jail's senior officer who must act rationally, objectively, and impartially. The Court further emphasized that only the Court had the authority to impose the penalty of solitary confinement. Because of its severe impact and potential for abuse, the Court mandated strict limitations on the use of solitary confinement.

The constitutional validity of Solitary Confinement came into question in the case *State of Uttarakhand Vs. Mehtab*²², where various advocates had contended that it was a form of punishment that was inhumane, brutal, and barbaric. The High Court of Uttarakhand also ruled along these lines stating that it is unconstitutional to place a prisoner or accused person in Solitary Confinement before all their constitutional, legal, and basic rights are exhausted. According to the Court, solitary confinement is not part of the sentence but an additional deterrent imposed by the prison administration. Furthermore, the Court determined that Solitary Confinement must be used for the shortest duration possible due to its severity.

The respondent in *Union of India Vs. Dharam Pal*,²³ spent 18 out of 25 years of his incarceration in solitary confinement. This was during the period in which his mercy petition was pending with the President, he was kept in solitary confinement across various jails. This practice, particularly before the mercy petition is decided, is inherently illegal and constitutes an additional, unauthorized punishment. According to Section 30 of the Prison Act of 1894, prisoners under a death sentence must be confined in a separate cell and kept under constant guard. However, this solitary confinement should only occur after the final rejection of a mercy petition. Due to the respondent's extended period of solitary confinement, before the rejection of his mercy petition, the High Court decided to commute his death sentence to life imprisonment.

²¹ AIR 1962 SC 510.

²² 2018 SCC OnLine Utt 391.

²³ (2019) 15 SCC 388.

Global Views on Solitary Confinement and its Practices in Different Countries

Solitary Confinement or in some countries, 'Isolation', is commonly used worldwide as a punishment for violations of prison discipline. However, many jurisdictions deploy solitary confinement more extensively and for longer durations extending 22 to 23 hours. Many countries justify the practice of Solitary Confinement as a disciplinary measure, for the protection of other vulnerable prisoners or isolating individuals during the pre-trial investigations, often for engaging in coercive interrogation.

In the U.S., an estimated 122,840 individuals are held in some form of isolation, in U.S.²⁴ However, since solitary confinement has a brand of being inhumane and degrading to an individual, many advocates argue that it must be prohibited by the Eighth Amendment.²⁵ Courts have generally agreed that solitary confinement is, indeed, a violation of the Eighth Amendment for inmates with pre-existing mental illness or juveniles.²⁶ In *Farmer v. Brennan*²⁷, the Supreme Court established two criteria for challenging solitary confinement on the grounds of "cruel and unusual punishment." First, prisoners must demonstrate that there is a "substantial risk of serious harm to inmates." Second, they must prove that prison officials were "deliberately indifferent" to this risk. Meeting these requirements allows prisoners to contest the use of solitary confinement under the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment.

Many states across the US have significantly reduced the use of Solitary Confinement, mainly due to voluntary reforms by prison administrators and Legislations enacted at the State and local levels. A total of 24 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws that limit or ban solitary confinement, while other states have curbed its use through administrative codes, policies, or court rules²⁸.

²⁴ Erik Ortiz, New report reveals over 122K are held in solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and jails, NBC News, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-report-reveals-122k-are-held-solitary-confinement-us-prisons-jails-rcna84840>

²⁵ The Eighth Amendment in the US Constitution often protects citizens against imposing excessive and cruel punishments.

²⁶ Jules Lobel, Prolonged Solitary Confinement and the Constitution, Penn Carey Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, <https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1145&context=jcl>

²⁷ *Farmer v. Brennan* 511 U.S. 825 (1994)

²⁸ Anne Teigen, States that Limit or Prohibit Juvenile Shackling and Solitary Confinement, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/states-that-limit-or-prohibit-juvenile-shackling-and-solitary-confinement-~:text=Twenty-four%20states%20and%20the,code%2C%20policy%20or%20court%20rules.>

A coalition of House Democrats introduced a bill that would broadly ban the use of solitary confinement in federal prisons, jails, and detention centers. This measure, known as the End Solitary Confinement Act, aims to legally establish strict limitations on when and how long someone can be isolated in a cell. The proposed legislation would restrict solitary confinement to a maximum of four hours, and only in cases where it is necessary to de-escalate an emergency situation. During this time, prison staff must meet with isolated inmates at least once every hour to ensure their well-being. Additionally, incarcerated individuals would be guaranteed at least 14 hours of daily time outside their cells, including seven hours dedicated to programming that addresses issues like mental health, substance abuse, and violence prevention.²⁹

Solitary confinement in French prisons has come under severe criticism from the International Prison Observatory (OIP), which released a report urging its abolition due to severe infractions against prisoners' dignity and fundamental rights. According to the report, in 2022, half of the punishments decided in France resulted in solitary confinement, leading to over 1,00,000 days spent in isolation. The OIP highlighted that solitary confinement in France contradicts the Council of Europe recommendations that it should be used only in exceptional cases and for the shortest time possible. The report described the conditions in solitary cells as "inhuman," with furniture bolted to the floor, minimal natural light, and only one hour per day outside in a "walking courtyard" with limited views and no exercise equipment. The OIP also noted frequent reports of violence and bullying by prison guards in solitary confinement areas. Furthermore, suicide attempts in solitary were found to be 15 times more common compared to regular detention, according to a 2018 academic study. The OIP's findings underscore the urgent need for reforms in the use of solitary confinement in France³⁰.

Norway's criminal justice system is based on restorative justice and rehabilitation, aiming to reintegrate offenders into society. Norway's correctional facilities focus on humane treatment, offering conditions that meet international standards, with a transparent system allowing human rights observers and prisoner representation by an ombudsman. Their laws strictly prohibit torture and degrading treatment, and the country is known for having one of the lowest

²⁹ Erik Ortiz, Bill to ban solitary confinement in federal prisons introduced in House, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/bill-ban-solitary-confinement-federal-prisons-introduced-house-lawmake-rcna96016>

³⁰ French Prison Rights Group Urges End To Solitary Cells, Barron's, 2024, <https://www.barrons.com/news/french-prison-rights-group-urges-end-to-solitary-cells-08412c66>

recidivism rates, with an 18% reconviction rate within two years of release and a 25% recidivism rate after five years³¹. In spite of this, the overuse of solitary confinement is a significant issue, especially for mentally ill inmates. It is used as a reaction to rule violations or as a preventive measure and is often applied to pre-trial inmates to protect ongoing investigations. This practice has drawn criticism from international and national NGOs, which advocate for systematic individual assessments to justify solitary confinement and avoid excessive isolation³².

Solitary confinement remains a widespread issue across the globe, with varying levels of prevalence in different countries. This practice should be applied with caution and reserved solely for exceptional cases to prevent unnecessary harm to inmates.

Critical Analysis and Recommendations

Solitary confinement in India has faced critical scrutiny, with judicial decisions often addressing its potential for Fundamental rights violations. This form of rigorous punishment, involving the isolation of prisoners for extended periods, is seen as contrary to the principles of humane treatment and rehabilitation. Indian courts have frequently intervened to limit the use of solitary confinement, emphasizing that it should be an exceptional measure rather than a standard practice. While solitary confinement is recognized as having significant negative psychological and mental impacts on prisoners, it can be reserved for a few cases that require careful consideration. This approach is echoed by many legal frameworks and judicial rulings not just in India, but across the globe. However, despite these regulations and guidelines, the consistent and appropriate application of solitary confinement remains uncertain. The challenge is ensuring that this extreme measure is used only when necessary and in a manner that respects human rights and prioritizes rehabilitation.

It is also considered to be a major Human Rights violation and The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has declared that solitary confinement infringes on the right to life and liberty. Principle 7 of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners

³¹ Orange, Richard, EXPLAINED: How different is the Norwegian prison system really?, The Local Norway. Retrieved, 2024, <https://www.thelocal.no/20231213/explained-how-different-is-the-norwegian-prison-system-really>

³² Norway: prisons in 2019, <https://www.prison-insider.com/countryprofile/prisons-norway2019#:~:text=Yet%2C%20the%20overuse%20of%20solitary,or%20as%20a%20preventive%20measure.>

advocates for the abolition of solitary confinement, emphasizing the need for humane treatment within the correctional system. *'Efforts addressed to the abolition of solitary confinement as a punishment, or to the restriction of its use, should be undertaken and encouraged.'*³³

Additionally, the Istanbul Statement on the Use and Effects of Solitary Confinement has concluded that the practice violates Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, which prohibits cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. These international frameworks and resolutions outline the global movement towards limiting or abolishing solitary confinement as a punitive measure.

Recommendations

The primary goal of solitary confinement, like any form of punishment in India's prison system, is to reform prisoners and make them aware of the consequences of their actions. However, the continued use of solitary confinement in its current form has proven to be counterproductive, as crime rates continue to rise. This suggests that the intended objective of rehabilitation and behavior correction is not being achieved. To improve its effectiveness, solitary confinement should be limited to very short durations, similar to the 4-hour limits practiced in some U.S. prisons as opposed to 14 days in India. This shorter time frame may reduce the adverse psychological impacts and offer a more balanced approach that aligns with the goal of prisoner reform while mitigating the risks of long-term solitary confinement.

Additionally, a prisoner's mental stability is a significant factor influencing their ability to endure solitary confinement. To ensure this punishment does not cause undue harm, prisoners should be thoroughly evaluated using psychological tests designed to assess their mental resilience. These assessments, developed by psychologists, can help determine the required level of mental stability for a prisoner to undergo solitary confinement without severe negative effects. While these tests might not always yield precise results, they can establish a benchmark or cut-off rate for assessing prisoners' suitability for isolation. If a prisoner's results fall below this threshold, they should not be subjected to solitary confinement, ensuring their mental well-being is prioritized. This approach could reduce the potential for long-term psychological damage and contribute to more humane and effective correctional practices.

³³ Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-treatment-prisoners#:~:text=All%20prisoners%20shall%20be%20treated,property%2C%20birth%20or%20other%20statu>.

Even when a prisoner poses a risk to others, resorting to solitary confinement should not be the first response. Instead, alternative methods like counseling or separation with maintained human contact can be explored. These approaches aim to address disruptive behavior while preserving the prisoner's psychological well-being and social connections. By prioritizing less extreme measures, prisons can better balance security concerns with rehabilitation and humane treatment principles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of solitary confinement across a spectrum of studies reveals profound implications for the treatment and rehabilitation of prisoners. Isolation has been shown to significantly impact the psychological well-being of inmates, often exacerbating mental health issues and hindering post-release reintegration. Despite its intention as a necessary means of controlling unruly behavior and ensuring prison safety, the use of solitary confinement raises critical ethical concerns regarding human rights and prisoner welfare. Alternatives to this practice—restorative justice models and behavioral interventions—present promising avenues for reform, offering the prospect of a more humane correctional system that better aligns with modern societal values and rehabilitative ideals.

As awareness grows about the severe impacts of extended isolation, there's a pressing need for more compassionate correctional strategies. Balance must be struck between awarding punishment and also not infringing on prisoner's human rights. Shifting from punitive solitary confinement to rehabilitation-focused approaches can transform the criminal justice system, promoting safer, more integrated communities' post-incarceration.

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