

Study examines disciplinary segregation across state prisons

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Nearly one-third of offenders who violated institutional rules and regulations across state prisons received a sanction of disciplinary segregation, which prison officials based on legal and extralegal factors, according to a recent study.

Disciplinary [segregation](#), a type of restrictive housing often referred to as a [prison](#) within prison, is a punishment reserved for inmates found guilty of violating institutional rules. In "Examining the Use of Disciplinary Segregation within and across Prisons," authors H. Daniel Butler of Sam Houston State University and Benjamin Steiner of the University of Nebraska, Omaha examined how legal factors, such as the type of rule violation, and extralegal factors, such as race, age, and gender, influence prison officials' decision making process. The article was published in *Justice Quarterly*.

The study, based on self-report data from the 2004 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, included more than 6,000 offenders from 242 state prisons who were found guilty of institutional rule violations. The authors found that the [decision-making process](#) by prison officials is based not on the rule violation, but rather on a history of misconduct and other factors, such as age, gender, criminal history, prison work, visitations, and time served.

Among the inmates more likely to receive a sanction of disciplinary segregation were those who were young, male, previously incarcerated, and serving longer sentences. Among the factors less likely to lead to

sanctions of disciplinary segregation were being female, serving time as a sex offender, receiving visits, and working more hours at a prison job. The study also examined the use of disciplinary segregation as a punishment across state prisons. Although the use of the practice varies from state to state and facility to facility, some common elements were found. Those prisons with a greater density of low risk inmates or those that that relied more heavily on prison work by inmates were less like to use disciplinary segregation.

"Our findings revealed that both legal and extralegal factors influence whether inmates are placed in disciplinary segregation," said Butler, an assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology. "Regarding extralegal factors, however, prison officials appear to make decisions based on factors that are linked to an inmate's prospects for reform (e.g. criminal history, involvement in conventional activities). Additionally, our findings suggest that a greater use of remunerative controls may reduce the need for disciplinary segregation because inmates are participating in work, programing, and other prosocial activities."

More information: H. Daniel Butler et al, Examining the Use of Disciplinary Segregation within and across Prisons, *Justice Quarterly* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/07418825.2016.1162319](https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2016.1162319)

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