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Solitary Confinement and Criminogenic Attitudes: Is Isolation Reinforcing Pro-Criminal Thoughts, Feelings, and Beliefs?

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Solitary Confinement and Criminogenic Attitudes: Is Isolation reinforcing Pro-Criminal Thoughts, Feelings, and Beliefs?

Stephen Benning, Ph.D., Demi Kourtesi, M.A., & Michal Newhouse-Van Vlerin

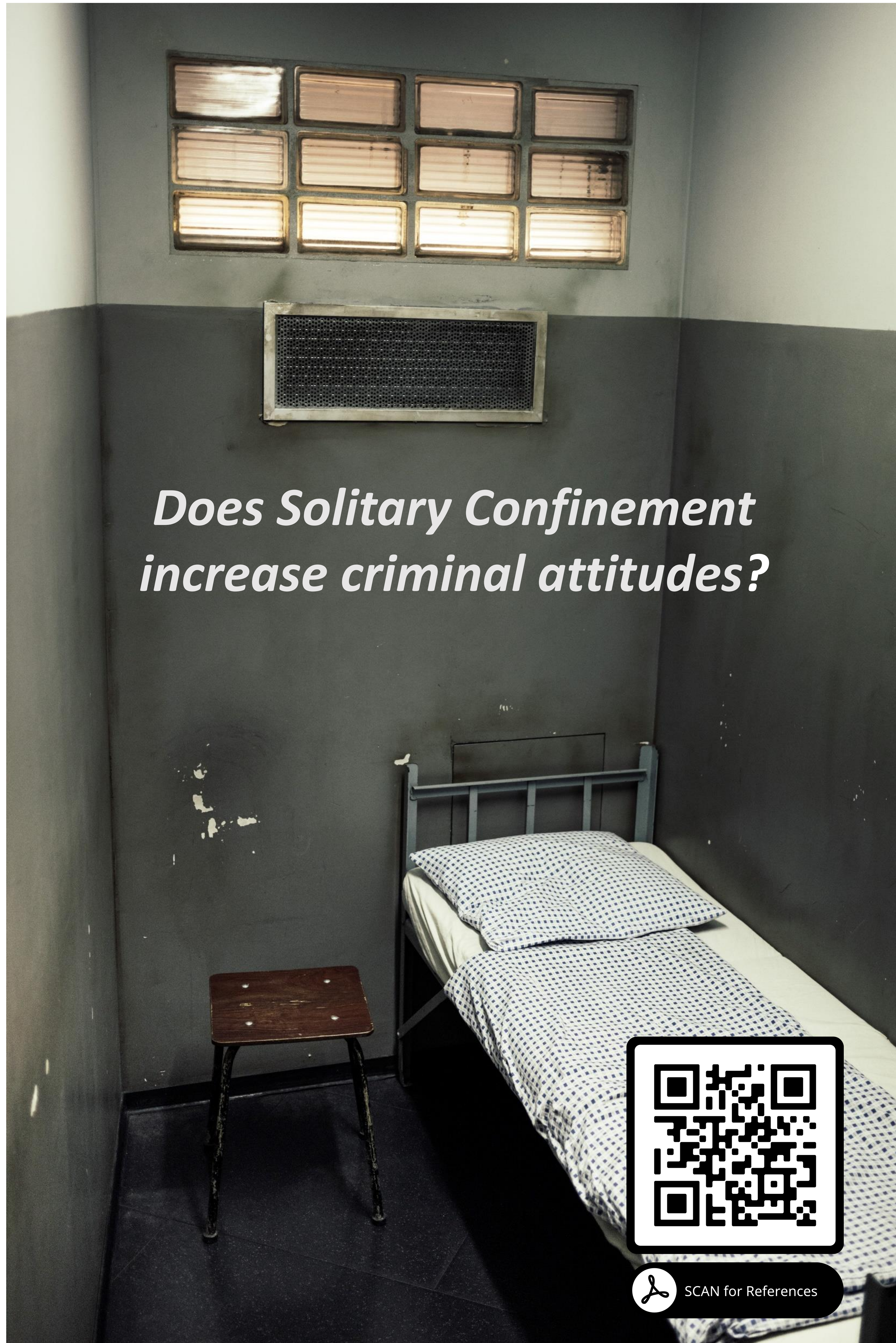
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Introduction

- Haney (2003) found that people who are incarcerated and placed in isolation and deprived of social interactions suffered extreme psychological and physical symptoms.
- Prisons in the US confine 80 to 100 thousand people per year (Casella & Rodriguez, 2016).
- In most SHUs, people who are imprisoned spend 23 hours of the day alone in a cell the size of a queen size mattress, deprived of natural light and social interaction.
- People are placed in solitary confinement from a few weeks to entire decades (Resnik et al., 2016).
- It is a common misconception that only violent individuals end up in solitary.
- Problematic mental symptoms following solitary confinement may be suggestive of an increase in antisocial cognition and pro-criminal attitudes among prisoners.
- An endorsement of pro-criminal attitudes is one of the greatest predictors of future criminal behavior (Bonta & Andrews, 2016).
- Pro-criminal attitudes are documented as predictors of officially documented recidivism (Skilling & Sorge, 2014; Witte et al., 2006) including general reoffending (Mills et al., 2004) and predictive of violent behavior in the correctional context (Shields & Simourd, 1991).
- An investigation of the effects of prison sentences in a mixed sample showed significant increases in pro-criminal attitudes even after a brief 6-month prison stay (Walters, 2003).

Anticipated Results

- Scores on a measure of pro-criminal attitudes will show an increase for participants placed in solitary confinement within the study's duration.
- Participants who have never been placed in solitary confinement will have lower pro-criminal scores than those who have been placed in solitary at least once.
- Participants who have been placed in solitary confinement at least once will have higher pro-criminal attitude scores than those who have never been placed in solitary.
- The frequency of exposure to solitary confinement will have a positive relationship with pro-criminal attitudes.
- Exposure to solitary confinement will result in an increase of scores on the subscales of dynamic risk including attitudes toward violence, entitlement, and antisocial intent, but not for the static subscale of associates.



Does Solitary Confinement increase criminal attitudes?



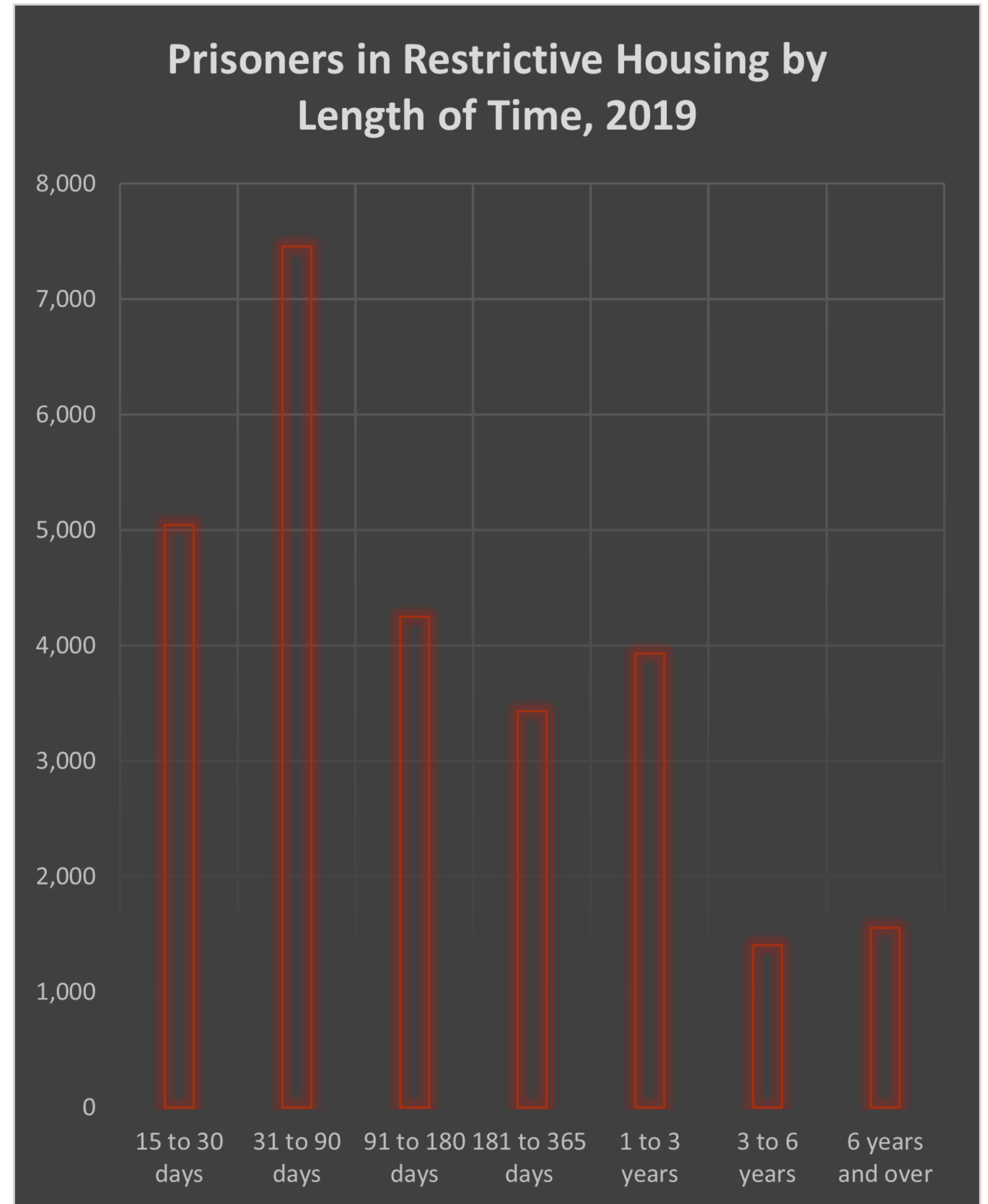
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Research Design & Methodology

- The study will recruit 400 randomly selected female adult inmates from Florence McClure Women's Correctional Facility of Las Vegas, Nevada.
- A hard copy of self-report survey will be given to the participants. Each survey is expected to take 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete.
- Upon signing an informed consent form, all participants will be asked to complete a survey containing questions regarding their demographics, confinement, and pro-criminal attitudes.
- Participants will be surveyed at the beginning of the study, and approximately 1 week after they are released from segregation.
- At least one participant from the initial sample who approximately matches the demographics of the participant who is exiting segregation will also be surveyed at the same time as part of a control group.

Goals

- The primary goal of this study is to demonstrate the negative effects of solitary confinement.
- The secondary goal of this study is to impact policy in correctional institutions.
- This study aims to understand whether being placed in extreme isolation such as that of solitary confinement can affect pro-criminal attitudes.



Correctional Leaders Association & The Arthur Liman Center for the Public Interest (2019).