

Reforming solitary confinement: The development, implementation, and processes of a restrictive housing step down reentry program in Oregon

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Ryan M. Labrecque, University of Central Florida
Jennifer J. Tostlebe, University of Colorado Boulder
Bert Useem, Purdue University
David C. Pyrooz, University of Colorado Boulder



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Background

- Numerous impassioned calls to reform the practice of solitary confinement
- Points of controversy
 - Conditions
 - Overuse
 - Potential for negative effects
- Mixed results
 - Call for stronger research designs



Reducing the Use of RH

1. “On-ramps” – whom or what qualifies for placement
2. “Off-ramps” – reduce the dosage

3. Alter the environment

- Elements of “better”
 - Time out-of-cell, higher quality interactions, amenities
 - Rehabilitative programming
 - Incentives

Getting Out: One “Step” at a Time

- Step down programs
- *Purpose:* Help prisoners transition from more to less restrictive conditions
- Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC)



Methodology

- Randomized controlled trial
 - 56 incarcerated participants
- Prisoner survey
 - $n=38$
 - Time use
 - Perceptions of SUP
- Staff interviews
 - $n=12$ prison officials

Characteristic	Analysis Sample			t or z score	p-value
	% Total (N = 38)	% IMU (n = 19)	% SUP (n = 19)		
Mean age (SD)	30.1 (6.7)	29.5 (7.0)	30.7 (6.6)	0.55	.587
Race/ethnicity					
<i>White</i>	52.6	57.9	47.4	-0.65	.516
<i>Black</i>	10.5	10.5	10.5	0.00	1.000
<i>Hispanic</i>	29.0	15.8	42.1	1.79	.074
<i>Asian</i>	2.6	5.3	0.0	-1.01	.311
<i>American Indian</i>	5.3	10.5	0.0	-1.45	.146
Gang affiliation	76.3	68.4	84.2	1.15	.252
Mental health					
<i>MH-0</i>	26.3	26.3	26.3	0.00	1.000
<i>MH-1</i>	23.7	10.5	36.8	1.91	.056
<i>MH-R</i>	36.8	63.2	10.5	-3.36	<.001
<i>MH-2</i>	13.2	0.0	26.3	2.40	.016
ACRS					
<i>Low-risk</i>	52.6	42.1	63.2	1.30	.194
<i>Moderate-risk</i>	44.7	52.6	36.8	-0.98	.328
<i>High-risk</i>	2.6	5.3	0.0	-1.01	.311
Prior IMU	44.7	36.8	52.6	0.98	.328

Note: IMU = Intensive Management Unit; SUP = Step Up Program; MH = Mental Health; ACRS = Automated Criminal Risk Score. p-value refers to IMU to SUP differences derived from two-tailed t-tests or equality of proportions tests

Origins of Reformation

• 2015:

Vera INSTITUTE
OF JUSTICE

- “**Vera made the recommendation [for the step down program].** They...recommended...that we do more and that we work on a step down program that [would] get folks ready for a general population.”
- 2018: Correctional staff exchange program with the Norwegian Correctional Service
 - “... that’s what Norway is about. They say it’s the recognition that **we’re all people who still have hopes and dreams.**”



Development & Implementation

	IMU (control)	SUP (treatment)
Confinement Location	Single cell	Single cell
Hours Out-Of-Cell	~ 1 hour per day	~ 5-6 hours per day*
Meaningful Interaction	Little to no interaction with staff or other prisoners	Interaction out-of-cell with other prisoners; based in a more humanistic approach toward CO-prisoner interactions
Length	7 months with compliant behavior	
Tier System	Five levels	Two levels
Programming	Packet-based programming	Enhanced treatment services and other activities
Counselor and Treatment Plan	Receive a behavior action plan from their assigned case counselor	A correctional case counselor was assigned to oversee the treatment plans of all the program participants

* An unfortunate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the temporary decreased ability to meet this 5–6 h goal. The prisoners in the SUP, however, still maintained more out-of-cell time than prisoners in the IMU.

The Lived Experience-Time Use (in min)

	Intent-to-Treat Sample					
	IMU (<i>n</i> = 19)		SUP (<i>n</i> = 19)		<i>p</i> -value	
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)		<i>d</i>
Time out of your cell	47.4	(68.2)	112.9	(75.6)	+ 0.91	.008
Participating in yard time	29.9	(41.6)	37.7	(23.3)	+ 0.23	.478
Watching TV or on a tablet	194.5	(143.8)	274.7	(148.4)	+ 0.55	.099
Reading books, magazines, or other non-religious material	199.9	(145.6)	138.3	(111.7)	-0.47	.152
Hanging around with other prisoners	33.9	(89.7)	136.8	(223.3)	+ 0.60	.071
Doing physical exercise	66.6	(35.2)	81.9	(49.6)	+ 0.35	.282
Participating in programs, education, counseling	11.1	(22.8)	23.1	(31.0)	+ 0.44	.181
Communicating/hanging out w/ correctional officers	4.1	(7.5)	2.4	(5.6)	-0.27	.414
Talking on the phone with friends and family	8.9	(12.7)	7.7	(9.7)	-0.10	.753

Note: *d* refers to standardized differences between individuals in the IMU (control group; m_1) and those in the SUP (experimental group; m_2). *p*-value refers to IMU to SUP differences derived from two-tailed t-tests

Perceptions of the Conditions of the SUP and IMU

- The living conditions in the SUP > the IMU
 - Well just **being in close contact with other prisoners**, that's the biggest difference ... **[I]n regular IMU, the only time you talk to somebody is through the crack of your door.** You're not talking to other prisoner's face to face ... So just that contact around other people is a big difference.
 - You get two more **phone calls** a week. Once you get your level three, you get two more phone calls. We **go to yard with somebody**... Well it's just more privileges ... Once you get to phase two, **you're not cuffed up no more to be moved around** from in the unit to come out to yard or to go to the day room. We get day room time, so we get to come out and **play video games or board games**, stuff like that. We go outside to rec with another person.

Perceptions of SUP Programming

- Mixed views on the value of the programming available
 - I'll be honest, I'm kind of a knucklehead. The classes that are in this program... **helped me sit myself down and really evaluate my life**, and **it's given me tools...** to deal with calming yourself down or what you're going to do in a heated moment...and it's helped me evaluate more things and **brought me closer with my family.**

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 - If a person truly wanted to change ... if they truly wanted to change and this program was supposed to help make that a success, then yeah, they would need more time in it. **I don't really see what the goal is as of yet...**yeah there would need more of it, **it's not sufficient.**

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 - If a person truly wanted to change ... if they truly wanted to change and this program was supposed to help make that a success, then yeah, they would need more time in it. **I don't really see what the goal is as of yet...**yeah there would need more of it, **it's not sufficient.**
 - They basically throw a book in your cell and you're just sitting there doing book work...Nobody does that in the real world. You don't just isolate in a box and write shit down in a notebook. That's crazy. ... **And mind you we're going through that Coronavirus, so I will say that there is a couple options that were presented that were in a classroom setting that are not applicable at the moment**, because they're trying to not let that spread or whatever, I guess.



Discussion and Conclusion

- Criminal justice reform is challenging
 - It is critical to understand the perceptions of correctional officials
- The SUP operates differently than the IMU
 - *The SUP was never fully implemented as intended due to COVID-19*
- Possible to create conditions in RH environments that may be perceived by prisoners as less harmful and fairer
- Open empirical question: Whether step down programs will improve behavior or if they will undermine the goals of institutional safety and security

An aerial photograph of the University of Colorado campus, showing various buildings, a large stadium, and surrounding green hills and mountains under a clear blue sky. A large, semi-transparent white circle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

Thank you!

Jennifer.Tostlebe@colorado.edu

@jenntostlebe

The Criminology Academy podcast

@thecrimacademy

Table 1 Demographic and Institutional Descriptive Statistics, Total and Analysis Samples

Characteristic	Total Sample					Analysis Sample				
	% Total (N = 56)	% IMU (n = 26)	% SUP (n = 30)	t or z score	p-value	% Total (N = 38)	% IMU (n = 19)	% SUP (n = 19)	t or z score	p-value
Mean age (SD)	29.8 (6.9)	29.0 (6.4)	30.6 (7.2)	0.89	.377	30.1 (6.7)	29.5 (7.0)	30.7 (6.6)	0.55	.587
Race/ethnicity										
<i>White</i>	57.1	50.0	63.3	1.01	.315	52.6	57.9	47.4	-0.65	.516
<i>Black</i>	8.9	11.5	6.7	-0.64	.524	10.5	10.5	10.5	0.00	1.000
<i>Hispanic</i>	26.8	23.1	30.0	0.58	.560	29.0	15.8	42.1	1.79	.074
<i>Asian</i>	1.8	3.9	0.0	-1.08	.278	2.6	5.3	0.0	-1.01	.311
<i>American Indian</i>	5.4	11.5	0.0	-1.91	.056	5.3	10.5	0.0	-1.45	.146
Gang affiliation	76.8	73.1	80.0	0.61	.541	76.3	68.4	84.2	1.15	.252
Mental health										
<i>MH-0</i>	28.6	23.1	33.3	0.85	.397	26.3	26.3	26.3	0.00	1.000
<i>MH-1</i>	28.6	19.2	36.7	1.44	.150	23.7	10.5	36.8	1.91	.056
<i>MH-R</i>	30.4	53.9	10.0	-3.56	<.001	36.8	63.2	10.5	-3.36	<.001
<i>MH-2</i>	12.5	3.9	20.0	1.82	.068	13.2	0.0	26.3	2.40	.016
ACRS										
<i>Low-risk</i>	48.2	42.3	53.3	0.82	.410	52.6	42.1	63.2	1.30	.194
<i>Moderate-risk</i>	50.0	53.9	46.7	-0.54	.592	44.7	52.6	36.8	-0.98	.328
<i>High-risk</i>	1.8	3.9	0.0	-1.08	.278	2.6	5.3	0.0	-1.01	.311
Prior IMU	44.6	38.5	50.0	0.87	.386	44.7	36.8	52.6	0.98	.328

Note: IMU = Intensive Management Unit; SUP = Step Up Program; MH = Mental Health; ACRS = Automated Criminal Risk Score. *p*-value refers to IMU to SUP differences derived from two-tailed t-tests or equality of proportions tests

Table 2 Group Differences in Average Daily Time Use (in Minutes) Over the Last Week, Intent-to-Treat and Housing-at-Interview Samples

	Analysis Sample		Intent-to-Treat Sample					Housing-at-Interview Sample						
	(N = 38)		IMU (n = 19)		SUP (n = 19)		p-value	IMU (n = 24)		SUP (n = 14)		p-value		
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)		d	Mean	(SD)	Mean		(SD)	d
Time out of your cell	80.1	(75.6)	47.4	(68.2)	112.9	(75.6)	+ 0.91	.008	44.4	(61.7)	141.4	(66.0)	+ 1.53	.000
Participating in yard time	33.8	(33.5)	29.9	(41.6)	37.7	(23.3)	+ 0.23	.478	30.5	(38.2)	39.4	(23.5)	+ 0.26	.438
Watching TV or on a tablet	234.6	(149.7)	194.5	(143.8)	274.7	(148.4)	+ 0.55	.099	209.0	(137.8)	278.6	(164.1)	+ 0.47	.170
Reading books, magazines, or other non-religious material	169.1	(131.7)	199.9	(145.6)	138.3	(111.7)	-0.47	.152	173.9	(139.5)	160.9	(121.8)	-0.10	.774
Hanging around with other prisoners	85.4	(175.7)	33.9	(89.7)	136.8	(223.3)	+ 0.60	.071	34.4	(81.0)	172.8	(251.5)	+ 0.84	.017
Doing physical exercise	74.2	(43.1)	66.6	(35.2)	81.9	(49.6)	+ 0.35	.282	65.2	(32.2)	89.7	(55.2)	+ 0.58	.092
Writing	86.9	(90.5)	71.2	(96.5)	102.6	(83.7)	+ 0.35	.291	77.6	(89.7)	102.7	(93.0)	+ 0.28	.416
Drawing/art	43.7	(72.9)	38.7	(66.5)	48.7	(80.2)	+ 0.14	.678	44.4	(73.1)	42.5	(75.2)	-0.03	.940
Participating in programs, education, counseling	17.1	(27.6)	11.1	(22.8)	23.1	(31.0)	+ 0.44	.181	11.3	(21.3)	27.1	(34.4)	+ 0.59	.088
Communicating/hanging out w/ correctional officers	3.2	(6.6)	4.1	(7.5)	2.4	(5.6)	-0.27	.414	3.3	(6.8)	3.1	(6.4)	- 0.03	.925
Showering, brushing your teeth, etc.	39.6	(33.0)	38.2	(28.9)	41.1	(37.4)	+ 0.08	.796	37.3	(26.5)	43.6	(42.7)	+ 0.19	.582
Talking on the phone with friends and family	8.3	(11.2)	8.9	(12.7)	7.7	(9.7)	-0.10	.753	8.9	(12.1)	7.3	(9.8)	- 0.14	.685

Note: IMU = Intensive Management Unit; SUP = Step Up Program. *d* refers to standardized differences between individuals in the IMU (control group; m_1) and those in the SUP (experimental group; m_2). *p*-value refers to IMU to SUP differences derived from two-tailed t-tests