

Maltreatment of the LGBTQ+ Community in Prisons

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The LGBTQ community is one of the most mistreated communities and that does not stop within prison. These individuals are overrepresented at every level in the criminal justice system; this is especially true for trans people (people transitioning from their birth to their chosen gender identity). Research shows that 20% of youth in the juvenile system is made up of lesbian, gay, transgender individuals compared to just 4 to 6% in general population. What about treatment of LGBTQ+ while incarcerated? It could be argued that being part of the LGBTQ+ community can make an already hard experience like prison even rougher. The National Inmate Survey (2011-2012) suggests that individuals who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to be housed in solitary confinement than straight women and men in custody. Is this because of punishment or protection? If it is done to protect LGBTQ+ members, shouldn't the effects of solitary confinement also be taken into consideration?

Solitary confinement may be argued to protect those in the LGBTQ+ community to prevent against sexual victimization since 59% of transgender women in men's prisons report being raped. An estimated 12.2% of LGBTQ+ members are victimized by another incarcerated person as compared to 2.1% of straight people. Thus, placement in more secured housing units can help against sexual violence, but this placement certainly does not help mental well-being. LGBTQ+ members already have poorer mental health than the general population, leading to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. In these situations, who can they go to for help? A first thought may be police officers, but the nearly half of individuals do not feel safe doing so. According to survey "1 in 5 trans people who have had police contact reported that they have been harassed by police, include 38% of Black trans individuals. Six percent reported that police have physically assaulted them and 2% reported that police have sexually assaulted them." (Jones, A. 2021). Alienation, discrimination, and victimization are only intensified in prison.

When determining where an individual will be housed in prison/jail, it is often done according to the gender one was born into rather than the gender the individual identifies with. If a person is in the middle of transitioning from one gender to another, and taking hormones, some facilities abruptly stop them, which yields a real physical and mental health danger. Several facilities leave medical needs in the hands of administrators instead of healthcare providers and won't provide hormone therapy. Staff and facilities are not properly trained to support LGBTQ+ in prisons. The maltreatment does not stop there, once a person is released there is a lack of reentry programs for LGBTQ+ members. Many are not aware of the maltreatment of those in prison especially those the LGBTQ+ population. It is our job as a society to stay informed and try to help those in need. We need to educate ourselves and reach out to our representatives, make our voices heard, and inform others around us, so there can be prison reform. There needs to be more awareness and protection for the LGBTQ+ community in prisons.

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