Conditions of Confinement: Private versus Public Prisons

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This Presentation

- Background
- Purpose of study
- National Inmate Survey
- Propensity score matching and regression
- Findings
- Implications
- Next steps

Background

- **Use of private prisons**

- **Punitive turn**

- **Debates about private prisons**

Background

- Okay, but do they work? Should we use them?

Background

- **Why should we expect different outcomes? What are the mechanisms?**

Background

- **What do we know about implementation?**

- **What happens inside private (or public) prisons?**

- **What about in-prison experiences?**

Background

- **Privatization quality**

- **Privatization effects**

Background

- **Why the inconsistencies?**

Purpose of Study

- **This study seeks to advance scholarship by comparing the self-reported perceptions and experiences of individuals housed in public versus private prisons across key domains of prison life.**

Data and Methods

- National Inmate Survey, 2011-2012

- Male sample

- Propensity score matching

- Regression of matched sample

National Inmate Survey

- Representative of prison facilities

- Representative of incarcerated people in prison facilities

- Approx. 7% were in private prisons at time of survey

Matching Variables

- Race/ethnicity

- Age

- Current offense

- Sentence length

- Prior arrests

- Time in current facility

- Heterosexual

- Mental illness

- High school diploma

- Prior sexual assault in correctional facility

Matching Variables: Select Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive statistics		
	Private (N=1,653)	Public (N=21,691)
	Mean	Mean
Matching variables		
Race (0/1)		
White	0.133	0.358
Black	0.281	0.370
Hispanic	0.529	0.157
Other	0.057	0.115
Age (0/1)		
18-19	0.048	0.029
20-24	0.210	0.128
25-29	0.165	0.150
30-34	0.155	0.159
35-39	0.130	0.131
40-44	0.096	0.126
45-54	0.150	0.189
55+	0.046	0.089

Matching Variables: Select Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive statistics		
	Private (N=1,653)	Public (N=21,691)
	Mean	Mean
Matching variables		
Current offense (0/1)		
Violent sexual	0.069	0.182
Violent	0.245	0.341
Property	0.164	0.185
Drug	0.335	0.188
Other	0.187	0.105
Prior arrests (0/1)		
First arrest	0.278	0.126
2-3	0.345	0.293
4-10	0.250	0.373
11+	0.128	0.208
Mental illness (0/1)	0.260	0.409

Dependent Variables

- Adequate staffing
- Gang presence
- Social bonds—prisoners
- Social bonds—staff
- Mental health symptoms
- Any disciplinary reports
- Violent disciplinary reports

- Institutional legitimacy
- Prisoners frequently assaulted
- Items stolen
- Physical fight—prisoner
- Physical fight—staff
- Restrictive housing

Dependent Variables: Select Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive statistics	Private (N=1,653)	Public (N=21,691)
	Mean	Mean
Dependent variables		
Infrastructure and clients served		
Adequate staffing (0/1)	0.414	0.591
Gang presence (0/1)	0.397	0.485
Client needs and programs		
In-prison social bonds—prisoners (0/1)	0.752	0.802
In-prison social bonds—staff (0/1)	0.541	0.608
Mental health symptoms (#)	0.180	0.007
Client behavior and attitudes		
Any disciplinary reports (0/1)	0.077	0.086
Violent disciplinary reports (0/1)	0.060	0.058
Institutional legitimacy (#)	0.040	-0.013
Prisoners frequently assaulted (0/1)	0.481	0.650
Items stolen (0/1)	0.125	0.148
Physical fight—prisoner (0/1)	0.160	0.146
Physical fight—staff (0/1)	0.039	0.043
Staff climate		
Experienced restrictive housing (0/1)	0.160	0.217

Methods

- **Propensity score matching**

- **Regression of matched sample**

Preliminary Results

Table 2. Regression analyses of matched samples: Privatization effects on dependent variables (N=2,520)

Dependent variable	Coef.	R.S.E.
Infrastructure and clients served		
Adequate staffing	-0.881***	0.185
Gang presence	n.s.	
Client needs and programs		
In-prison social bonds—prisoners	n.s.	
In-prison social bonds—staff	n.s.	
Mental health symptoms[†]	n.s.	
Client behavior and attitudes		
Any disciplinary reports	n.s.	
Violent disciplinary reports	n.s.	
Institutional legitimacy[†]	n.s.	
Prisoners frequently assaulted	n.s.	
Items stolen	n.s.	
Physical fight—prisoner	n.s.	
Physical fight—staff	n.s.	
Staff climate		
Experienced restrictive housing	n.s.	

***$p<0.001$

[†]Indicates use of ordinary least squares regression. All other dependent variables were assessed using logistic regression.

Note: All analyses used cluster option to adjust for facility.

Summary Findings

- Similar conditions of confinement across public and private prisons
- Except, men in private prisons believe there is not enough staff to maintain a safe environment
- Keep in mind . . . these are preliminary and only for males

Implications

- Findings do not align with common theoretical accounts or ideological policy arguments
- Need to study potential influence of each quality mechanism—how do they influence important outcomes?
- Highlights importance of ethical assessments and cost-efficiency analyses
- Suggests need to study other types of privatization

Next Steps

- **Examine additional conditions of confinement**

- **Examine additional in-prison experiences, including victimization**

- **Parallel set of analyses for women**

Thank you!

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