

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT



Solitary confinement is a prison within a prison, the effects of which have been studied and shown to be one of the cruelest forms of torture that one human being can do to another.

For many, imprisonment means being held for months and years in conditions the federal court of Canada described in 1975 as "cruel and unusual." The six-by-ten concrete cells of the solitary areas usually have solid steel doors with peepholes that can only be opened from outside. Occasionally there is a steel clad opening through which a metal tray can be inserted. There are no windows and a light burns day and night in these cells. Exercise is often no more than a thirty-minute daily walk in a corridor. These places are known to prisoners as 'the hole.' Some visitors might call them 'solitary confinement.' But in the Canadian penitentiary service, they have been increasingly been disguised behind a variety of names. At Millhaven, a maximum security penitentiary in Ontario, the hole is known officially as "the environmental control area." In these places, men (and women) often die. They commit suicide. They have heart attacks or strokes at unusually young ages. Many survive, but with scars visible and invisible.

Cruel and Unusual: the shocking reality of life behind bars in Canada by Gerard McNeil with Sharon Vance. McNeil and Vance toured the prison system in 1976 and 1977 with the Commons Subcommittee on the Penitentiary System in Canada.

Correctional Service of Canada utilizes two forms of solitary confinement; 'punitive dissociation' and 'administrative dissociation' in its prisons.....while there is little difference between the physical conditions of punitive and non-punitive dissociation, there are substantial differences between the process by which prisoners enter the two regimes and the duration of their stay. The prisoner can only be placed in punitive dissociation when s/he has been sentenced at a disciplinary hearing. S/he has the right to cross examine and present evidence at the hearing; and the decision is required to be based on evidence that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. There is no similar procedural opportunity available to a prisoner prior to being placed in administrative dissociation. Even more fundamental is the difference in the extent of confinement. A prisoner can not be sentenced to more than 30 days in punitive dissociation, however administrative dissociation is subject to no such limitation. It is potentially infinite in its duration up to the expiry of the prisoner's sentence.

'Prisoners of Isolation: solitary confinement in Canada' by Michael Jackson. In 1975, Michael Jackson helped launch proceedings on behalf of a group of prisoners being held in the British Columbia Penitentiary to have the imposition of solitary confinement in B.C. Pen declared cruel and unusual punishment.

In that 1975 court decision judge D.V. Heald ruled that solitary confinement as practiced at the BC Pen was 'cruel and unusual punishment' and that it contravened the Canadian bill of rights. The BC Pen is no more but the atrocity of solitary confinement continues. Prisoners are being held in isolation, locked in cells up to 23 1/2 hours a day for what is called 'the good order of the institution', the length of time a prisoner spends in solitary confinement is arbitrary, and the reason that s/he is sent there is determined at the discretion of the keepers.



DOUBLE BUNKING

Double bunking, putting two prisoners in a cell that was designed for one was introduced as a temporary measure in 1984. At that time the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) promised that the overcrowding problem would be solved in a year.



Today, 25% of prisoners are double bunked and that number is projected to raise to 30%. The practice of double bunking is in violation of United Nations standards for the minimum treatment of prisoners, which Canada as a

member of the UN has endorsed. The auditor general reported in 1994 that some of the double bunked cells were only 60 square feet, with the smallest being 48 square feet.

“Given the apparent ignoring of the issue at the national level, I feel it is necessary to once again restate the obvious: the housing of two individuals in a secure cell, designed for one individual, for up to twenty-three hours a day, for months on end is inhumane. This practice which continues unmonitored defies not only any reasonable standard of decency but also the standards of international convention.”

1995/96 report: Office of the Correctional Investigator

**ABOLISH DOUBLE BUNKING
ABOLISH SOLITARY CONFINEMENT
ABOLISH INVOLUNTARY TRANSFERS
ABOLISH PRISONS**

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PRISON CONDITIONS

*Involuntary Transfers
Solitary Confinement
Double Bunking*

INVOLUNTARY TRANSFERS

That prisoners have lost their liberty is punishment enough, especially with longer and longer sentences being handed out. But transfers are part of the double jeopardy of Canadian prisons. Prisoners are transferred across thousands of miles away from family and friends, who often cannot afford to visit them. The only contact they will have is through censored mail. The prison system wants to make sure its prisoners are isolated and incommunicado. Isolated prisoners are in a weaker position to fight back. Legal defenses are difficult to prepare when lawyers and community support are cut off because of transfer.

