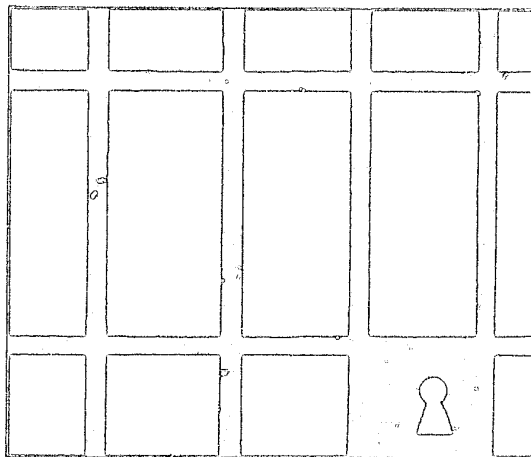


## PROCEEDINGS

# 2nd National Conference on Medical Care and Health Services in Correctional Institutions



Palmer House Hotel  
Chicago, Illinois  
October 27-28, 1978

Sponsored by  
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SEPARATION, DEPRIVATION AND LONELINESS  
AMONG JAIL INMATES\*

The effects of separation and deprivation, including loneliness, among institutionalized persons are obvious to the most casual observer of populations in mental hospitals, prisons, army camps, nursing homes, general hospitals and often boarding schools. The behavioral manifestations of institutionalized persons as evidenced by posture, gait, facial expression, and affect often betray the inner feelings of loneliness, despair, hopelessness, sadness, and purposeless existence. In recent years much attention has been given by concerned health professionals to the concept and the process of institutionalization in an attempt to understand the impact this process has on the individual in terms of the adaptive process. As a result there has been a nationwide attempt in the area of mental illness to de-institutionalize the large state hospitals through the community mental health programs. Custodial care, recently referred to as "warehousing" of large numbers of people has been recognized as demoralizing, dehumanizing and non-therapeutic (Brocking and Young, 1973).

This is a hopeful trend for a large segment of our population whose behavior earns for them the label of mentally ill or emotionally disturbed. But what of that other large population whose behavior brings them into conflict with society and earns for them the labels of criminals or inmates in our ever growing penal institutions?

A jail or prison is a total institution that imposes complete separation and deprivation on its inmates. The process of institutionalization begins as a person enters the system and is locked away from the outside world. One could certainly hypothesize that the emotional impact is overwhelming. The feelings of anger, fear, frustration and despair come quickly to mind as one imagines himself in the position of being confined in a jail or prison. While working with children adjudged delinquent and committed to institutions under the State Department of Corrections, and with inmates in a large city jail over a period of time, the predominant emotional response that was apparent through both verbal and non-verbal behavior was that of profound and persistent loneliness.

The purpose of this study was to measure the social phenomenon of loneliness, an effect of separation and deprivation, experienced by inmates in a large city jail.

The Richmond City Jail, Richmond, Virginia is a total institution that imposes complete separation and deprivation on its inmates. No contact visits with anyone outside of the jail, with the exception of lawyers and clergymen, are permitted. An inmate may have a twenty minute non-contact visit with a friend or family member once a week. During this visit a wall with a window

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in it stands between him and his visitor. Conversation is carried on by way of a telephone. Phone calls outside of the institution are infrequent. The inmate is separated from his home, his family, friends, job, pets, familiar surroundings, possessions and his lifestyle. His losses include his freedom, mobility, decision making, self-direction and self-esteem. He is objectively separated or alienated from all that had been significant to him.

Studies of separated populations have been conducted which suggest that theoretically there is a relationship between separation and secondary loneliness. Secondary loneliness is defined as a "vague and dysphoric reactive response to the separation from social and physical cathectic objects." These objects include persons. The separation referred to must be from those persons or things in which the individual has some cathectic investment. The term cathectic investment is defined as "the endowment of social and physical objects with meaning, import and energy" (Francis, 1976).

Francis, in her studies, describes loneliness as an "abstraction" and a "universal." "It is always a part of a human being when it exists at all. It cannot exist by itself; it needs a host...(it) always will be whatever its host perceives it to be. To identify the lonely one simply asks who is lonely. Respondents place themselves in or out of the loneliness category." However, her studies and this study made loneliness an observer category. Indicator items were asked of the respondents and based on their response the investigator was able to measure the degree of loneliness.

Francis (in press) also refers to the concept of alienation which is frequently used interchangeably with loneliness. She differentiates between the concepts of alienation and loneliness. She defines alienation as an objective state of being separated from something. She describes loneliness as "not a state of separation but the human response to it."

Sommer and Hill (1958) in their study, "Alienation and Mental Illness," noted that the length of time individuals are separated from meaningful persons and things is a significant variable. They found a difference between patients on admission wards and those on other wards. They reported a difference in values between those newly admitted and those longer-stay patients. This suggested a relationship between social isolation and subjective response. In other words, length of separation would affect psychological response of the individual.

In the present study, a replication of previous works on loneliness was accomplished through use of the same research design and method. Theoretical framework was consistent with the loneliness studies. The hypothesis was that within the population at the Richmond City Jail there is extreme loneliness. This hypothesis does not support the myth one often hears about inmates of penal institutions "they never had it so good."

The assumptions were that the jail population is capable of cathectic investment, contrary to another myth "those people don't care about anything"; that there is a positive association between loneliness and cathectic investment; and that knowledge of date of parole or release influences loneliness.

### Methodology

Data were collected through personal interviews lasting approximately twenty minutes each using the highly reliable tool designed and tested in previous loneliness studies.

### Sample

A stratified probability sample of 144 inmates was drawn from a total population of 671 inmates on the first day of data collection. Of the total, 618 were men and 53 were women. The sample consisted of 129 men and 15 women. The inmates are housed in dormitory type tiers and in individual cells. Informed consent was obtained and inmates were escorted to and from the testing center at the jail by off-duty deputies.

### Analysis of Data

Data analysis revealed an age range of 16-62 years with a mean age of 26. Of the sample, 91% were male, 65% black, and 58% were single. The largest group, 33% held jobs prior to incarceration described as "skilled" by the United States Department of Labor; 28% were unskilled. The remainder were unemployed. The mean number of years of education was 10 years. No religious preference was stated by 36%, Protestantism was preferred by 36%, Roman Catholicism by 11%, "other" by 16%, and none were Jewish. Profile summary revealed young, black, single males with a 10th grade education with Protestant or no religious preference.

### Findings

Loneliness score and cathectic investment score were determined and based on a scale range of 5-25.

The loneliness score for the inmates was 18 which bordered on the upper one-third of the range identifying them as high moderate to severe loneliness. The mean cathectic investment score for the inmates was 19, close to the loneliness score of 18, and in the upper one-third of the range. This validates the theory that the greater the investment in people and things the greater the loneliness upon separation from these people and things.

This present study was a replication of two studies of hospital patients which showed a loneliness score of 13. A third study of residents in a home for the aged revealed a loneliness score of 11. The inmates' score of 18 is the highest and identifies them as the group experiencing the greatest loneliness of all separated groups studied. The assumption that the jail population is capable of cathectic investment was validated by the cathectic investment score of 19. The positive correlation between loneliness and cathectic investment is substantiated by the closeness of the two scores (loneliness score 18, cathectic investment score 19).

### Conclusion

Moderate to severe loneliness is present among the inmates of the Richmond City Jail. The significance is obvious in view of the fact that suicide is the leading cause of death in jails and prisons. The psychological pain and suffer-

ing accompanying loneliness is recognized at least to some degree by even the most indifferent. Recent research by Lynch (1977) revealing evidence of a relationship between loneliness and the incidence of heart disease suggests actual physical pathology resulting from loneliness.

In summary, this "side effect" of incarceration is neither intended nor desired. Increased knowledge and recognition of its existence and its effects on both the emotional and physical health of individuals, hopefully, will result in increased efforts on the part of correction authorities to identify and implement measures to alleviate it.

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