



Research at a glance

Offender Behaviour: The Influence of Institutional Design

KEY WORDS: *institutional design, offender behaviour, multi-level modeling*

What it means

This study confirms that, as has been found in other countries, the physical design of Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) correctional institutions is associated with offenders' behaviour. The fact that this pattern remained, even after accounting for differences among inmates housed at different institutions, indicates that features of the environment could likely be manipulated to support and encourage positive and prosocial behaviour.

Future design-related decisions could be informed by the identification of the specific design features that exert the most influence on behaviour.

What we found

Even after accounting for individuals' demographic, offence, sentence, and risk-related characteristics, institutional designation (i.e., physical design features associated with security and supervision) was associated with offender behaviour.

Offenders housed at more highly-designated institutions (those using greater static security measures) were more likely to be found guilty of an institutional charge or to be placed in administrative segregation, and were less likely to be transferred to minimum security institutions in the follow-up period. This pattern generally aligned with results from previous research conducted in the U.S.

Why we did this study

Given that approaches to penitentiary design have changed over time, CSC's institutions differ in terms of their physical design characteristics. The possible association of these physical design differences with offender behaviour was examined because research in a variety of contexts has found that physical and social features of an environment influence the behaviour of those within it.

Previous American research has shown that offenders in institutions that rely more heavily on static security features and which are more traditional

in their design (e.g., include cells instead of living unit accommodations) tend to demonstrate poorer institutional adjustment. No equivalent research had previously been conducted in Canada.

What we did

Multi-level regressions were calculated to understand the relationship of institutional- and individual-level factors on offenders' institutional adjustment. Analyses included 5,336 men offenders in 20 medium-security institutions nationally.

Data were drawn from the Offender Management System, CSC's automated data management system, and included demographic, sentence, and risk-related information, as well as institutional population information and institutional designation. The institutional adjustment outcomes examined were being found guilty of an institutional charge, being placed in administrative segregation, and being transferred to minimum security.

For more information

Gobeil, R. (2014). *Offender Behaviour: The Influence of Institutional Design* (Research Report R-331). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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