

EXAMEN IDIOMA PSICÓLOGOS 2009

II. The Psychological Effects of Incarceration: On the Nature of Institutionalization

The adaptation to imprisonment is almost always difficult and, at times, creates habits of thinking and acting that can be dysfunctional in periods of post-prison adjustment. Yet, the psychological effects of incarceration vary from individual to individual and are often reversible. To be sure, then, not everyone who is incarcerated is disabled or psychologically harmed by it. But few people are completely unchanged or unscathed by the experience. At the very least, prison is painful, and incarcerated persons often suffer long-term consequences from having been subjected to pain, deprivation, and extremely atypical patterns and norms of living and interacting with others.

The empirical consensus on the most negative effects of incarceration is that most people who have done time in the best-run prisons return to the freeworld with little or no permanent, clinically-diagnosable psychological disorders as a result. Prisons do not, in general, make people "crazy." However, even researchers who are openly skeptical about whether the pains of imprisonment generally translate into psychological harm concede that, for at least some people, prison can produce negative, long-lasting change. And most people agree that the more extreme, harsh, dangerous, or otherwise psychologically-taxing the nature of the confinement, the greater the number of people who will suffer and the deeper the damage that they will incur.

Rather than concentrate on the most extreme or clinically-diagnosable effects of imprisonment, however, I prefer to focus on the broader and more subtle psychological changes that occur in the routine course of adapting to prison life.