

Inmate Mental Health: The Impact of Prison Programs on Inmate Mental Well-Being

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The Problem

- The United States Correction System lacks the capabilities to handle the rising mental health issue in its institutions.

The Question

- Do prison work assignments impact inmates' mental health?

The Method

- Usage of a multivariate linear regression test, to compare the work assignments' impact on the mental health measure.
- A variety of work assignments used such as grounds and food work.
- Work assignments are compared to individual mental health issues.

The Method Continued

- The mental health variable was created using survey data regarding mental issues such as the frequency of depression, nervousness, and hopelessness in the prior 30 days to the survey.

The Sample

- "Survey of Prison Inmates, United States, 2016"
- 1,400,363 males
- 102,308 females

Table 1. Sample characteristics and percent missing data (N = 24559).

	Mean ^a	SD	Min	Max	Missing
Sex	1.25	.435	1	2	0
Age	39.09	11.908	18	86	0
Race/Ethnicity			1	5	312
White	33.8				
Black	30.0				
Hispanic	21.7				
Other	2.4				
2+ Races	10.9				
Education	11.23	2.557	1	18	296
Mental Health	12.28	5.39	6	30	0
Depression	1.79	1.13	1	5	
Nervousness	2.23	1.28	1	5	
Hopelessness	1.84	1.18	1	5	
Restlessness	2.52	1.34	1	5	
Effort	2.33	1.40	1	5	
Worthlessness	1.57	1.05	1	5	

The Outcome

- Work assignments such as the production of goods and construction showed a positive correlation to better overall mental health.

The Implication

- Providing insight into the mental well-being of our growing prison population, which could be used to further develop these programs and encourage rehabilitative practices within prisons.

Table 2. Work assignment and significant effect on overall mental health measure.

	Sig	Beta	Frequency
Forestry	.279	-.007	1.4%
Janitorial	.085	-.011	19.3%
Grounds	<.001	-.026	5.5%
Food Prep	.016	-0.15	12.7%
Laundry	.008	-0.17	2.9%
Hospital/Infirmary	.411	-.005	1.8%
Goods production	<.001	-.027	4.6%
Construction	<.001	-.044	4.3%
Other (Stockroom, Barber, Beauty)	<.001	-.042	9.0%

The Results

- Of the 9 work assignments studied, only 4 were significant in showing improvement in mental health.
- The 4 significant assignments were tested against each mental health issue, such as the frequency of depression within the past 30 days; however, the results were not significant in determining which category was impacted the most by the type of work assignment.

