

Incarceration Difficulties of Prisoners With Substance Abuse



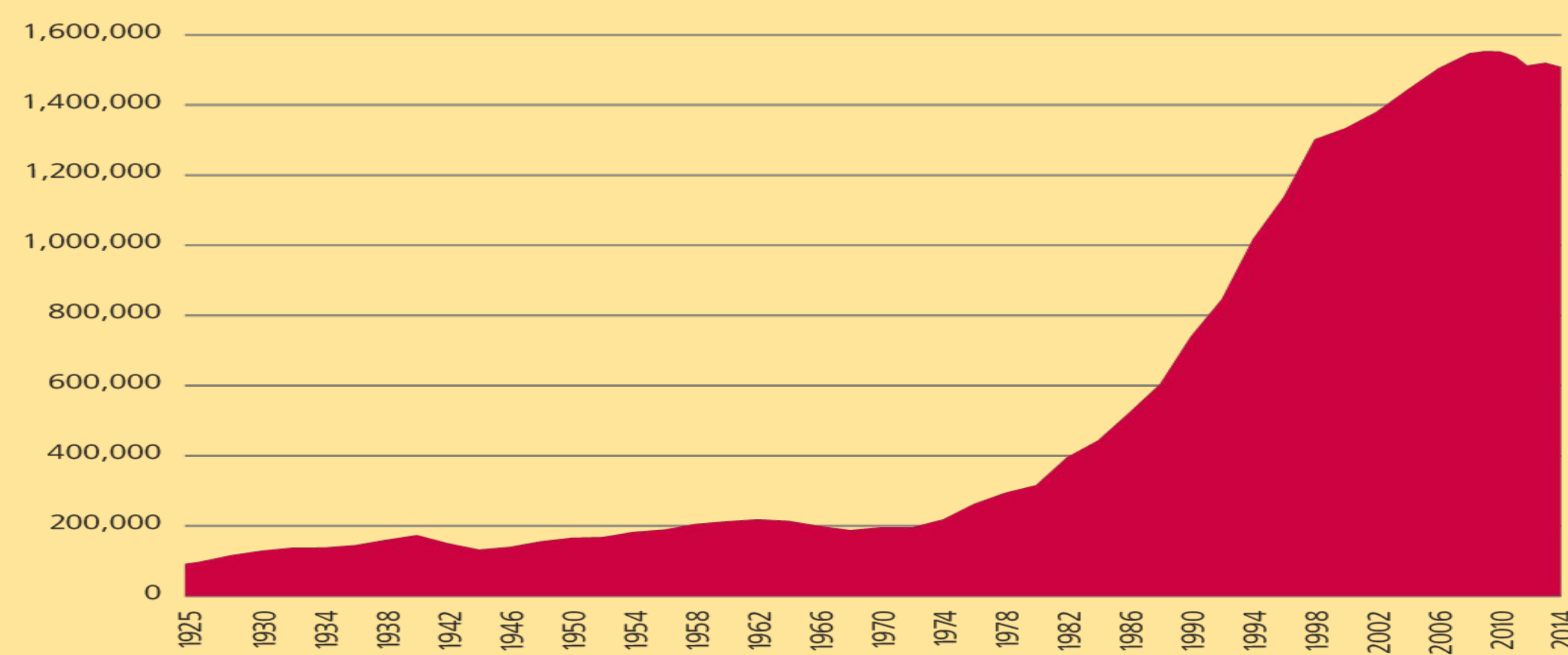
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Abstract

The incarceration of those who have been criminalized offers challenges that are within the realm of ignorance for the average citizen. There is a good amount of literature that delves into the realm of the U.S. prison system but there is difficulty in understanding these experiences from only statistical research. The purpose of this investigation is to examine difficulties via incarceration that prisoners dealing with substance abuse may experience and to find which difficulties are most common among this group; furthermore, these difficulties/experiences are coded using a program named NVIVO, which uses parent nodes and sub-nodes to properly showcase commonalities between prisoners. Through interviews organized with a model focusing on experiences of pre-incarceration, current incarceration, and plans of re-entry into civilian life, we assessed the described experiences of 88 prisoners incarcerated due to drug-related crimes who participated in the research. Overall, this study aims to identify relevant difficulties faced by prisoners dealing with substance abuse and find correlations between said experiences and the prison system.

U.S. State and Federal Prison Population, 1925-2014



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Prisoners Series.



Background & Introduction

Enforcement, punishment, and recidivism. These three words are part of the foundation that makes up American policies toward criminal activities, especially crimes that deal with substance abuse. The American criminal justice system is unique in its ability to imprison at such high rates and raw numbers while incapable of promoting preservation, prevention, and rehabilitation. The challenges of incarceration are those that stem from this inability and the American desire to stay true to the foundational workings of a system that does not promote peace; instead, it encourages and breeds not only violence but also the disturbance of the mind. Many of these difficulties that stem from incarceration can be divided into three subjects, all of which are noticeable complaints made by many prisoners: physical, mental, and environmental/systematic issues. The physical and mental attributes of incarceration difficulties, while concerning on their own, are both products of an environment that limits and disrupts humanity, creating an ecosystem that forces its inhabitants to delve further into abusive psychology; which, in itself, creates extreme difficulty for proper reentry.

Methods

The participants in this study were all male prisoners who were criminalized while having a substance abuse disorder. These prisoners come from diverse backgrounds and different prisons; furthermore, their identities are not allowed public view. During voluntary qualitative interviews with the prisoners, questions were asked regarding life before, currently within, and after the prison system. Following the transcription of the interviews, they would be examined and scrutinized in order to locate common aspects and beliefs concerning their situation. With the use of NVIVO, commonalities between the prisoners would be coded for an adequate organization; furthermore, open coding was completed in NVIVO by multiple independent coders to determine emergent themes present with the portion of the transcripts related to prison-based experiences. After the independent open coding, all coders contributed to the development of a comprehensive final codebook that encompasses the prison experience narratives. These commonalities included qualitative data such as hygiene, prisoner relationships, loneliness, familial relation, and more with them being divided into the subsets of physical, mental, and systematic issues.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics		TCR Wave 1 (n = 88)	
		Mean (SD)	
Age		35.93	(9.96)
Race (%)			
	White	56.82%	
	Black	34.09%	
	Hispanic	9.09%	
Grade Completed		11.32	(1.27)
Offense Gravity Score (OGS)		6.83	(3.26)
Recidivism		61.36%	
Duration		545.83	(411.82)
Treatment Engagement		3.89	(0.52)
TCU Score		6.80	(1.18)
Drug of Choice (%)			
	Alcohol	13.64%	
	Opioids	34.09%	
	Other stimulants	10.23%	
	Hallucinogens	2.27%	
	Cocaine or crack	12.50%	
	Tranqs or sedatives	3.41%	
	Marijuana	7.95%	
	None specified	14.77%	

“Relationship. It’s hard to speak to my daughter whenever I want to. And I found out just two weeks ago that she’s moving to [City 4] any day now.”- 27 years old, Black Male

“What frustrates me the most is that just being in here period. That’s what frustrates me the most, just being in here.”- 58 years old, Black Male

“Like I should’ve been enjoying those moments versus being in here with all these guys, you know what I mean? Because I can’t act right, I missed out on all these things, it’s sickening, it really is.”- 27 years old, White Male

Preliminary Results

The codebook that has been created provides a multitude of representations that provide insight into prisoners’ incarceration difficulties. The following codes are examples of what most likely carry the most impact in the formation of these prisoners’ experiences.

- Parent Code: **Incarceration challenges**
 - Sub Code: Violence or Safety Concerns
 - Sub Code: Adjustment to Prison
 - Sub Code: Staff Issues
 - Sub Code: Poor Quality Programs
 - Sub Code: Loss of Freedom
 - Sub Code: Loneliness
- Parent Code: **Daily Life In Prison**
 - Sub Code: Approach to Prison Life
 - Sub Code: How Time is Spent
 - Sub Code: Prison Programming (Non-TC)
 - Sub Code: Drugs in Prison
 - Sub Code: Social Hierarchy

Preliminary Discussion

The difficulties prisoners face while incarcerated must be understood as being subjective. Although these codes allow us to gain a deeper realization of their situation, this investigation model is still incapable of showing the complete reality that prisoners face. Many explain conflicting ideas about their state of mind, health, and overall ability to function. With this in mind, the codes provided have been found to be common among prisoners. As we continue on, the investigation with the application of the codes might provide better insight into the relative suffering that prisoners may experience.

References

Neils, A. (2023, January 25). *Mass incarceration trends*. The Sentencing Project. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/mass-incarceration-trends/>