Incarceration Of Men, Women And Juveniles Essay, Research Paper

Prison populations have been on the raise since the early 1970s. Today we incarcerate over 2 million men, women and juveniles in the various correctional facilities around the country. These facilities can range from local jails or detention facilities to the new so called “Supermax” prisons. Conditions can also vary across the spectrum for these different correctional institutions. Each type of inmate has his or her own challenges when faced with incarceration. Many factors play into determining “the experience” they have. Age and sex are one of the things that determine what type of institution you are committed to. Adult male prisoners are committed to adult male prisons. Adult female prisoners are committed to adult female prisons. Juvenile offenders however, both male and female are sometimes unique in this aspect. There is a growing tendency to sentence juvenile offenders to adult prisons for their crimes. Perhaps because society has grown weary of the constant assault by these same juveniles on our sense of fairness and justice. Each day we see more and more juveniles committing violent crimes on our streets and in our schools. If this trend continues we will begin to see more issues dealing with how juveniles are treated in these adult prisons. Most of our juvenile offenders end up in State run systems as they are rarely prosecuted in the federal courts. Sentencing these youths to adult correction facilities opens them up for a broad range of abuse. The most compelling issue here would be that these adult institutions simply were never designed to handle juveniles or youthful offenders. The very treatment they receive from their “adult” fellow inmates will likely lead them back to the institution rather them giving the encouragement not to be a repeat offender. It is basically like throwing the sheep to the lions. There is just no way that this is a good use of our criminal justice system. Juveniles should be kept in their own facilities to the maximum extent possible where they can receive the treatment that just may lead them back to being productive members of society. Even though there are some of the same issues in juvenile facilities as there are in adult facilities, such as overcrowding, prisoner assaults, and custodial abuse. There are systems in place to monitor them and deal with the problems. When these things go on in adult prisons there most often is the attitude of callousness, whereby problems are looked at as part of the system, a kind of “who cares about the inmate” attitude.

Adult male prisoners are subjected to harsh conditions across the country. The physical conditions that you would see on the old prison movies like “Alcatraz” are not so prevalent any more. For the most part all of these old prisons have been replaced or modernized. There still remain some issues of decaying facilities but predominantly the harsh conditions suffered by inmates today largely come from their treatment. Treatment by their fellow inmates and guards is where the abuses occur. The underlying issue to some of these abuses is the overcrowding we are experiencing in prisons across the United States. These overcrowded prisons and the tight budgets of corrections agencies force more and more prisoners together creating an environment for this abuse to thrive in. Most inmates have to find their own ways to survive in this concrete and steel jungle without the assistance from their keepers. In fact, the abuse from guards can be some of the worst conditions these prisoners are subjected to. Although excessive use of physical force has diminished in recent years, there are still many instances of excessive isolation, control, and restrictions used by guards with impunity. Many inmates have complained about racial taunting, lack of mental and medical care as well as other mistreatments. Now authorities are relying more and more on administrative segregation were inmates are kept physically separated in small and most often windowless cells. This ads to the mental anguish that the prisoners will suffer. Personally, I believe that criminals should be made to pay for their crimes. If that means being locked away from society for a period of time, so be it! I don’t expect them to be coddled or catered to while they are paying their debts to society! What we have to realize though is that by not addressing these issues we only turn a blind eye to a problem that will come back to bite us again. Meaning that if we don’t do something to improve these conditions we are only re-enforcing a negative behavior on these men many of whom will once again be returned to our society.

Women face an especially difficult set of circumstances when they are imprisoned. First, women are mothers. In fact over 78 percent of all women incarcerated have children. This can be especially difficult for not only the women but the children they leave behind. Second, women tend to be more emotional and therefore will have a more difficult time dealing with their incarceration. This can leave them very vulnerable to abuses at the hands of other inmates and guards. These abuses can range from physical sexual assaults to verbal harassment. Sexual abuse is probably the most common and most serious problem faced by women inmates. Prisoner-on-prisoner sexual assault is fairly common. Especially on the younger inmates who are basically helpless until they gain more experience in the institution. In the United States we allow male custodians to watch over female prisoners. At times there is not adequate training for these guards to refrain from sexually abusing prisoners. Thereby we have numerous cases of misconduct by male prison guards against their female inmates. There are actually states that offer no legal protection for rape and molestation while behind bars. If guards are caught they are usually subjected to administrative punishment rather than criminal prosecution. Once again I return to my point that this type of treatment while there are those that will say “let them get what they deserve”, I believe that a more pragmatic approach to the problem will better serve all of society in the end. If we don’t do something to stop these negative re-enforcement’s while behind bars, then we are setting ourselves up for a revolving door of career criminals which will only make matters worse by keeping the pressure up on our justice and corrections systems.