

Thesis Portfolio

Effects of Access to Mental Health Services Following Release from Custody
(Technical Report)

The Continuation of Slavery Through the Prison System in the United States
(STS Research Paper)

An Undergraduate Thesis

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Bachelor of Science, School of Engineering

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Sociotechnical Synthesis

The Justice System in the United States has always disproportionately affected people of color. Racial disparities in the prison system are not a new topic. 1 in 3 black men will spend time behind bars during their lifetime compared to 1 in 17 white men. Jails and Prisons rarely focus on rehabilitation due to the focus on punishment. Many needs of these inmates are not met such as medical and mental health services. The technical topic of this portfolio focuses on access to mental health services following an inmates' release from jail. Region 10 jails in Virginia and Albemarle county jails have focused on being able to successfully link inmates to mental health services. A study shows that nearly two-thirds of incarcerated people suffer from a mental illness. When a person is booked at the jail, they complete a screening program aimed at identifying a mental illness. If the screener indicates a need for services, the jails provide them with the appropriate services. Being able to successfully link inmates to the services they need is a necessity because these illnesses are a leading factor of reincarceration. According to the analysis provided by the team, individuals who were linked to Region 10 services returned to custody at higher rates than individuals that were not linked to services (Boland et al., 2021). At first glance, this suggests that these services are not reducing the percentage of individuals linked to services that return to custody. The project was focused on calculating the optimal dosage of services a recently released inmate needs to prevent them from being reincarcerated. Through the analysis of data provided by the jails in Charlottesville, the population of people that were administered services and returned to prison was calculated. This was used to understand how and if the services were working and if they are in any way a factor in reincarceration. The research conducted highlighted the need for the implementation of mental health services in the

jail and prison system. The team ultimately focused on answering three main questions. First, have mental health programs yielded a reduced number of people returning to jail. Second, how effective are the local jails in linking mentally ill inmates to treatment programs. Lastly, what is the 'optimal dosage' of mental health services?

The issue of the prison industrial complex is discussed in the research paper. This paper argues that the prison and justice system is flawed exploits non-white people through overcrowding and the use of prison labor. The paper makes a connection of practices during slavery to the current state of the prison system. The legal and prison system is analyzed through Actor-Network Theory by identifying all of the actors that make up the sociotechnical system. The paper finds that mass incarceration is a result of 'tough on crime' laws enacted in the late 1900s, the privatization of prisons, and a shift in climate about drugs in the United States. This analysis stresses the need for rehabilitation rather than discipline in prisons. It also calls for prison labor to be banned in all prisons, both public and private.

Both of these issues relate to the justice system in the United States and the importance of reform. Both of these issues are important because the current system targets people of color and restricts them from some of the liberties that many of us take for granted. Mental health is an issue that is not covered by the media and is not a common household topic such as cancer. Just as with cancer, some mental illnesses cannot be cured: they can be treated. With the proper treatment while incarcerated, inmates will have a chance at being rehabilitated rather than falling into a deeper cycle of reincarceration. Because data has shown that many policies have disproportionately affected non-white people, measures need to be taken to change policies, stop over-policing of black people, and reform the justice and prison system. The goal of these

papers is to show that each of these sociotechnical systems (the jail system and the prison system) is a product of slavery and what this country has been built on.