

Study: prison inmate intelligence influences misconduct

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(Medical Xpress) -- A prison inmate's IQ, as well as the average IQ of a prison unit, can play a role in predicting violent prison misconduct, according to a recently published UT Dallas study.

The study, featured in the latest issue of the academic journal *Intelligence*, is a rare examination of the relationship between intelligence and violent misconduct in [prison](#). Previous research has shown the link between IQ and crime in society. UT Dallas doctoral student, Brie Diamond, led the study, which is co-authored by UT Dallas criminologists Dr. Robert Morris and Dr. J.C. Barnes, who teach in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences.

Using a multi-level modeling approach, the researchers analyzed three years of incarceration from a random sample of 2,500 male inmates across 30 prison units who entered prison between August 2004 and June 2006. The researchers looked at whether an inmate was reported for violent behavior against another inmate or against a prison staff member, resulting in at least a minor injury.

The findings show that inmates with above average IQs were at a reduced risk of being involved in a violent incident and individuals assigned to units with a higher average IQ score were significantly less likely to commit violent behavior.

Diamond, who is earning a Ph.D. in criminology, said an individual's IQ captures the ability to navigate a social environment in addition to

assessing academic capabilities.

“It’s not too surprising then that people who are deficient in these regards would be more prone to respond physically and lack an advanced repertoire for handling situations,” she said.

Diamond said the findings could help prison officials better understand how the average IQ of a prison unit has an effect on prison violence. It is a factor that officials could take into account when classifying inmates.

“What’s important about these findings from a research perspective is that we’ve isolated yet another piece of the puzzle as far as what leads to misconduct. So in the future, researchers looking into violence should control for cognitive ability,” she said.

Morris said the findings regarding the collective IQ of a prison unit was perhaps the most interesting part of the study.

“We definitely don’t understand the entire package as far as how IQ explains the process leading to an inmate engaging in misbehavior,” Morris said. “It’s more about IQ playing a role, and that it’s not only about a particular person’s IQ, but it’s about collective IQ in an environment of confinement.”

Morris said it’s a tremendous accomplishment for a graduate student such as Diamond to get her work published in a prestigious journal.

“It is rare,” he said. “It’s pretty exciting for a criminologist to get a publication in Intelligence. It’s a big deal.”

Diamond said she was shocked and excited when she learned that Intelligence had accepted the paper.

“I honestly danced around my kitchen,” she said. “The impact factor for the journal is above any others in our field of criminology.”

More information: [doi: 10.1016/j.intell.2012.01.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intell.2012.01.010)

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