

Can nature videos help improve prisoner behavior?

August 5 2016

Researchers have identified a simple intervention that may help reduce levels of violence in maximum security prisons. Inmates who viewed nature videos showed reduced levels of aggression and were less likely to be disciplined than those in similar cellblocks, according to research presented at the American Psychological Association's 124th Annual Convention.

"We need nature for our physical and psychological well-being," said clinical psychotherapist Patricia H. Hasbach, PhD, who presented the research. "Although direct contact with real nature is most effective, studies have shown that even indirect nature exposure can provide temporary relief from psychological stress in daily life."

Hasbach and her colleagues wanted to see if this effect carried over to maximum security prisons. They studied a cellblock at The Snake River Correctional Institution in Oregon that housed 48 [inmates](#). Half were provided nature videos to view during their scheduled indoor recreation time (three to four times per week over the course of a year). Content included images of diverse biomes (e.g., ocean, forest, rivers), aquarium scenes, a fireplace with burning logs, Earth viewed from space and cloud fly-throughs. The other half were not offered the chance to view the videos.

"Inmate surveys and case study interviews with inmates suggested that negative emotions and behaviors such as aggression, distress, irritability and nervousness were reduced following the viewing of videos and lasted

for several hours post-viewing," said Hasbach.

Prison staff also reported through case study interviews and written surveys that viewing the videos appeared to be a positive way to reduce violent behavior.

Over the course of the year studied, prisoners who viewed the videos had fewer disciplinary referrals than those who did not. The intervention has been considered so successful that it is now being used in other areas of the prison. Prison staff are also using the videos as a targeted intervention when they see warning signs that an inmate may be about to act out.

"We found that inmates who watched the nature videos committed 26 percent fewer violent infractions," said Hasbach. "This is equivalent to 13 fewer violent incidents over the year, a substantial reduction in real world conditions, since nearly all such events result in injuries to inmates or officers."

This experiment may act as a model for other correctional facilities to help limit stress, mental fatigue, violence and other negative behaviors among their populations, according to Hasbach.

More information: Session 2075: "[Nature Imagery in Prisons Project: The Impact on Staff and Inmates in Solitary Confinement](#)," Paper Session, Friday, Aug. 5, 9 - 9:50 a.m. MDT, Room 711, Level 2, Meeting Room Level, Colorado Convention Center, 700 14th Street, Denver.

Provided by American Psychological Association

Citation: Can nature videos help improve prisoner behavior? (2016, August 5) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-08-nature-videos-prisoner-behavior.html>

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