

**Prison Overcrowding:  
A Penological Perspective**

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**PRISON OVERCROWDING: A PENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**by**

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**SUMMARY**

The World Prison Brief *Walmsley (2001:2)* reveals that there are 8,7 million people held in penal institutions throughout the world, either as pre-trial

detainees or having been convicted and sentenced. Although the rising prison population in South Africa is of great concern, it is certainly not just a South African problem, but an international phenomenon. Prison overcrowding and the resultant financial and human rights problems related to this phenomenon, remain one of the paramount concerns of both developed and developing countries.

Overcrowding of prisons negates the rehabilitation of offenders, undermines human dignity in correctional facilities and renders the safety and security of offenders and the community vulnerable. Another problem facing the Department of Correctional Services is the control of communicable diseases and viruses, particularly HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis. The problem of overcrowding facilitates the easy spread of communicable diseases among inmates.

Imprisonment as a sanction remains a reality. Providing alternatives to imprisonment, for example, community based-sanctions, does however ensure that a significant number of offenders can be dealt with in a more balanced manner.

Alternative sanctions to incarceration can be more successful, less costly to the state, have fewer negative implications and will lighten the load for the criminal justice system, hence reducing overcrowding. In order to reduce the overcrowding in prisons there has to be a reduction in the number of both awaiting-trial and sentenced prisoners. Reducing the inflow of offenders from

the courts to the prisons and trying to get minor offenders in prison to be released should accomplish this. Courts and magistrates must break away from centuries of reliance on imprisonment as punishment.

If more people show interest in the human rights of incarcerated prisoners, then further effort will be placed on resolving the overpopulation problem facing the Department of Correctional Services.

**KEY TERMS:** Overcrowding, Imprisonment, Prison Conditions, Punishment, Alternatives, Incarceration, HIV/AIDS, Human Rights, Community-based, Correctional Services.



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**“I declare that Prison Overcrowding: A Penological Perspective is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references”.**

**(i) Prison Overcrowding: A Penological Perspective**

**(ii) by S. Singh**

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