

ATLAS SAFETY & SECURITY DESIGN, INC.

Violence in Prisons: Architectural Determinism

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between architectural and environmental factors and incidence of inmate violence within four correctional institutions in the Southeastern United States: Dade and Union Correctional Institutions, Florida State Prison, and Tallahassee Federal Correctional Institution. The study investigated overcrowding, types of housing, amount of living space available, location of assaults, and seasonal influences in relation to the propensity for and frequency of noncollective (inmate-to-inmate or inmate-to-staff) violent incidents. The prisons differ structurally and architecturally - two are medium and two are close custody (maximum) security prisons - and the study examined differences, if any, in the inmates' propensity toward violence at the two types of institutions.

The study's data included official disciplinary reports of violence. A violent environment questionnaire (VEQ) was administered to a sample of inmates and was designed to elicit their perceptions of the degree of violence, privacy, and safety within the prison. Staff interviews were also conducted which provided familiarization with the prison's administration and physical plant during initial site visits.

The results of the study determined that there was no association between the increase in prison population and the number and rate (per 100 inmates per prison) of

violent incidents. It was found that there was no intraprison association between the total number of square feet of living space and the number and rate of violent incidents. The type of housing did influence the frequency and rate of violence; dorms had a consistently higher rate of assault than other housing types. Air-conditioned housing units also had a lower rate of assault than non air-conditioned housing units. While the study reflected a trend for assaults to occur in areas of little to no supervision, highly supervised areas were also frequent sites of violence. The effects of rainfall, temperature, and moonphase apparently had no relationship with the rate of violent incidents. The results of this study should be accepted with caution since they represent only four prisons in Florida. Further research is needed to determine if these results are unique or universal.