Global Comparison of Incarceration: Punitive Versus Rehabilitative Frameworks

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**Punitive Frameworks**

The United States prison system's purpose is to punish those who break the law. However, because the US is focusing so much on punishing and dehumanizing their offenders, when people are no longer institutionalized, they are not prepared to transition back into society.

**Incarceration Rate**

- Last 40 years: Prison population has increased by 800% in the United States.
- The United States makes up 5% of the world’s population, but holds 25% of the world’s prisoners.
- 4 in 10 formerly incarcerated people in the United States become incarcerated again in 3 years.

**Sentencing Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspended prison sentence</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imprisonment</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures are based on data from 2013 and 2014.*

**U.S. Federal Policy**

- **Smart on Crime Initiative (2013):** Created to enforce reforms in the criminal justice system.
- **Obama administration:** Began phase out the use of privatized prisons.
- **Result:** Drop from 220,000 inmates in private prisons to 195,000 inmates, allowing states to invest in quality rehabilitation services.
- **Goal:** Decrease the use of private prisons by 50%.

**Abstract**

Mass incarceration in the United States is an outrageous issue that tends to be overlooked. One must wonder, why? Why is it that the United States has the highest prison population in the world? With the population of prisoners continuing to skyrocket throughout the nation, and a deadly opiate epidemic on the rise, one would think that the United States must be one of the most dangerous places in the world. However, this is not the case; yet we still hold almost a quarter of the world’s population in our prisons. Our government, nonetheless, our society as a whole has reinforced the idea of the stereotypical criminal. Punitive measures are used to prevent further criminal behavior, but they are continuing to fail us. Countries across the globe have not only decriminalized drugs, but have changed their entire concept of prisons. Instead of shaming and degrading people into not breaking the law, other countries are taking the funding they once used to enforce law and order, and instead, fund treatment programs to rehabilitate those who struggle with abusing substances. With such success, are we willing to try and change our approach to healing, or allow fear to continue to dehumanize a quarter of the world? Is it too late?

**Rehabilitative Frameworks**

- **The Netherlands** and Germany have a rehabilitative prison system which centralizes around treating their offenders, and preparing them for when they reintegrate into society. Their punishment is simply losing their freedom.
- **Normalization:** Making life in prison as similar as possible to life in the community.
- **Rely on fines and suspended sentences** (similar to probation).

**References**