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Solitary Confinement: Cruel and Unusual Punishment

Harper Sanders

Binghamton University--SUNY

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Psychiatric Conditions That Commonly Arise From Solitary Confinement:

- Hyperresponsivity to External Stimuli

"Someone in the tier above me pushes the button on the faucet.. It's too loud, gets on your nerves. I can't stand it. I start to holler."

- Hallucinations

"I hear noises, can't identify them--starts to sound like sticks beating men, but I'm pretty sure no one is being beaten . . . I'm not sure."

- Panic Attacks (severe)
- Short-term Memory Loss
- Difficulty Thinking and Concentrating
- Emergence of Primitive Aggressive Ruminations

"Think of torturing and killing the guards; lasts a couple of hours. I can't stop it. Bothers me. Have to keep control. This makes me think I'm flipping my mind."

- Paranoia
- Impulse Control

"I cut my wrists many times in isolation. Now it seems crazy. But every time I did it, I wasn't thinking--lost control--cut myself without knowing what I was doing."

- Complete Delirium

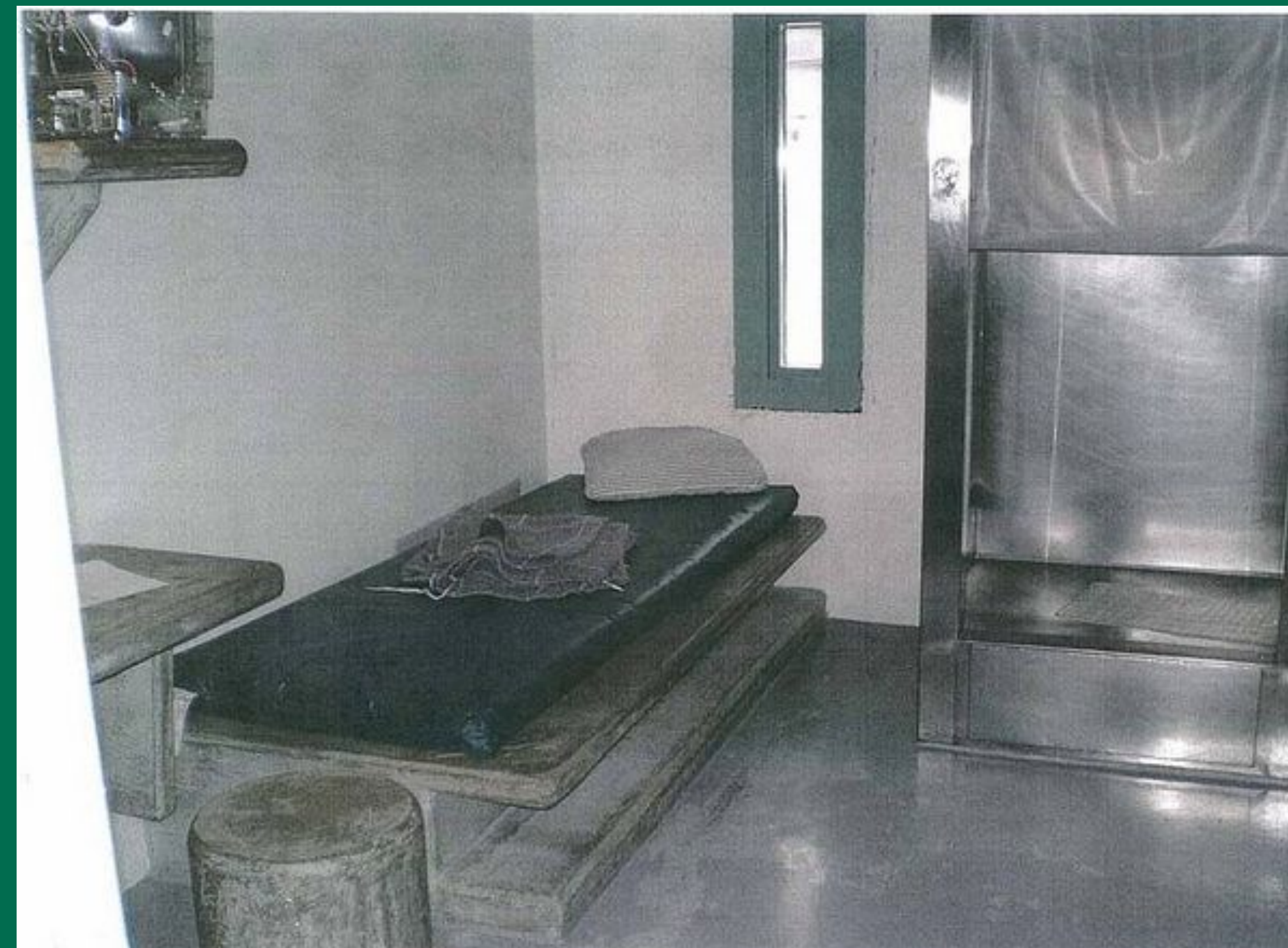
Methodology

- Literary Research
- Weekly Visits to the Broome County Jail (BCJ)

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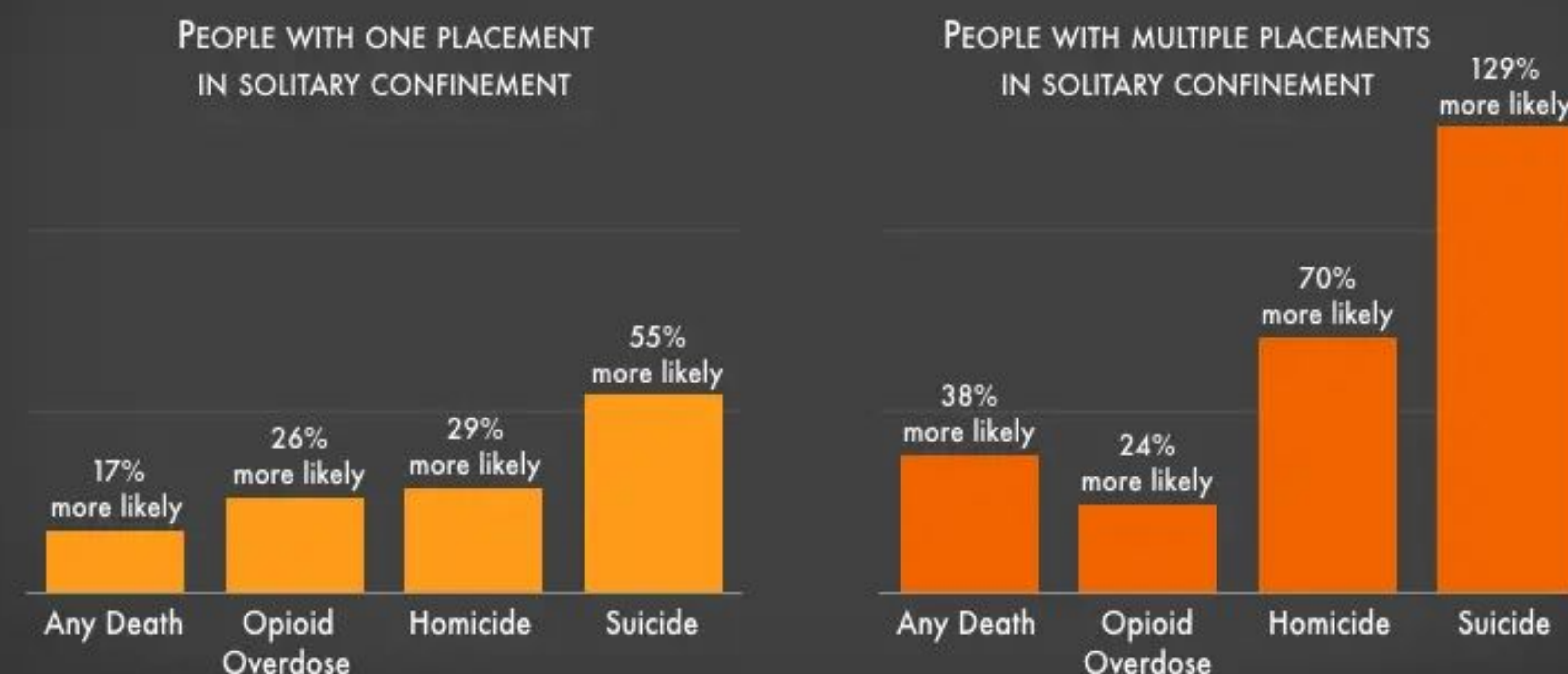
"There was no end and no beginning; there's only one's own mind, which can begin to play tricks."- Nelson Mandela



Solitary Confinement cell at ADX, a federal supermax prison in Colorado

"Sitting in a small box in a walking distance of eight feet, this little hole becomes my world, my dining room, reading and writing area, sleeping, walking, urinating, and defecating. I am virtually living in a bathroom, and this concept has never left my mind in ten years."

Increased risk of death after release from prison for people who experienced solitary confinement compared to those who did not



Created by the Prison Policy Initiative using data from "Association of Restrictive Housing During Incarceration with Mortality After Release" by Lauren Brinkley-Rubinstein, Josie Sivaraman, David Rosen, et. al. (2019)

PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE

https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/10/13/solitary_mortality_risk/

Facts and Numbers

- In 2015, the Mandela Rules defined prolonged confinement as isolation for at least 22 hrs a day for 15 consecutive days- anything longer is deemed torture
- Despite a bill introduced in House, the US has taken no measure to enforce the 15 day rule
- In 2019, 75,505 people were held in solitary confinement in state and federal prisons
- People are placed in solitary for as little as having a pack of cigarettes

Related Laws

Mandela Rules- calls for restricting the practice worldwide

18 U.S. Code § 5043- restricts isolation for juveniles

HALT Act- NY bill restricting and improving conditions of solitary for all populations, prohibiting the practice for special populations

Why Should You Care?

"After years of this torture, will I survive on the outside? Will I be able to be held by my loved ones, after all these years of no human contact? Will I even be myself again?"

Solitary confinement is severely affecting the health of thousands each each year, increasing rates of death, recidivism, and mental illness. The practice perpetuates crime.

Research Limitations

None of the incarcerated people at the BCJ spoke about their time in solitary, if they had experienced any.

