



Snake River Study Shows Nature Scenes Help Calm Prison Inmates

October 26, 2017 Rachel Leber Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, Nalini Nadkarni, Snake River Correctional Institute, Sustainability in Prisons, University of Utah

SALT LAKE CITY — A study was published in “Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment” on Sept. 1 with findings that showed that prison inmates who watched video scenes of nature felt calmer and were less violent than those who don’t.

The study was conducted by Nalini Nadkarni, a University of Utah professor who guided the Sustainability in Prisons Project for the state of Washington’s corrections facilities, in conjunction with a research team. While Nadkarni first proposed the study in 2010, there was a long delay between the proposal itself and the study actually taking place. The research team met with many challenges in finding a prison that would allow the study to be conducted on its prison grounds.

In 2013, the Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario, Ore., agreed to permit the study in its facility after a sergeant at Snake River saw a TED Talk by Nadkarni and reached out to Nadkarni after finding consensus with his superiors. The project was called the Nature Imagery in Prisons Project and was created as a collaboration between Nadkarni’s team and the Snake River prison staff.

Nadkarni’s team divided inmates (specifically those in solitary confinement) into two groups of 24, and placed them in an indoor fitness room that inmates visited four to five times a week for about an hour. One group was given the option to exercise or watch 45-minute videos of natural scenes that included mountains, forests and oceans, while the second group only had the option of exercise and no nature videos. This study took place over a period of a year, with researchers and prison staff measuring inmates’ moods, stress levels and violent incidents.

The study concluded that inmates who had access to the videos reported feeling calmer and were involved in 26 percent fewer violent incidents. The results suggest that nature imagery can help any and all nature-deprived populations.

In addition to calming inmates and reducing violence in the prison, the use of nature videos at Snake River showed dramatically improved results in terms of saving thousands of dollars in medical costs resulting from what are often common altercations and self harm, according to Renee Smith, behavioral health systems manager at Snake River in a [recent interview](#) with Scientific American. As a result of these findings, the program is already being put to use in prisons in three other states.

<http://correctionalnews.com/2017/10/26/study-snake-river-correctional-institution-shows-nature-scenes-help-calm-prison-inmates/>