

The Purposes of CCTV in Prison

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ABSTRACT

Research was conducted to determine the purposes of closed circuit television (“CCTV”) surveillance in prison. Despite the significant financial investments in CCTV and apparent satisfaction with performance, few studies have explored why CCTV is in prison. Research conducted in community settings suggests that the purposes of CCTV are prevention, detection, improving safety, gathering evidence, and acting as a general site management tool. Content analysis of legislation and procedure, physical audits of prisons ($n=4$), and interviews with managers ($n=4$) were conducted to determine why CCTV was in prison. Overall, the findings suggested that CCTV was in prison as a means of detecting and/or preventing highly specific behaviours (such as contraband entering prison, self-harm or suicide, and escape), as a means of identification for remote access control, and to facilitate the co-ordination of responses to incidents, gather evidence, and improve safety.

Keywords: CCTV; Prison Technology

INTRODUCTION

TECHNOLOGY IN PRISON

The use of technology in prison environments has undoubtedly changed the way that correctional officers undertake their duties. Technology has been incorporated into prison design to improve security, the level of control that officers have over the environment, and the level of supervision that officers have over prisoners. The use of X-ray and drug detection devices enables visitors and personnel entering prison to be screened and reduces the opportunities for contraband to enter the prison environment. Technology has also made it possible for officers to remotely open cell doors either individually or in unison and to remotely control the flushing of toilets. Additionally, correctional departments have made significant financial investments in CCTV technology to make it possible for locations in prison to be remotely viewed.

CCTV IN SECLUDED SPACES

Most new prisons have CCTV surveillance² and most prison administrators are satisfied with performance.³ Despite the considerable financial investment in CCTV technology and apparent satisfaction with performance, the role that CCTV fulfils in the prison environment has not been adequately explored in the literature. Articles that have examined CCTV in prison have focused on the technical aspects of video selection and application,⁴ the practical implications that should be considered when implementing CCTV systems,⁵ or the role of CCTV in perimeter security.⁶ Few studies have explored why CCTV surveillance is in prison. One study by Bradshaw⁷ indicated that possible purposes that may be associated with CCTV in prison were improving feelings of safety and reducing offending behaviour such as prisoner assaults. This study compared feelings of safety and self-reported victimisation and

offending behaviour in units that had camera surveillance with units that did not have camera surveillance. Findings indicated that cameras had no effect on feelings of safety but that CCTV may reduce assaults.

Another study, known as the Kilburn Experiment, investigated the effect of CCTV in a police custody station and involved adding fifteen cameras in cell areas, two monitoring screens, and three video cassette recorders to provide 24 hour surveillance of all detainees and custody officers.⁸ Interviews were conducted with custody officers and detainees to determine their perceptions regarding the changes that resulted from the installation of the cameras. Officers generally supported the presence of CCTV because they believed that the tapes would provide evidence against false allegations. Officers also tended to believe that the system would provide a defence should they miss something occurring on the monitors, as it would show how busy they were at the relevant time. However, officers believed that the CCTV system did not improve their physical safety and believed that the system had a negative impact on detainee and their own privacy. Detainees also generally supported the presence of CCTV in the police custody station. While individual detainees did not believe the cameras altered their own behaviour, they did believe that the cameras had a positive impact on the behaviour of other detainees and the police. Detainees believed that CCTV provided valuable evidence and offered protection to officers and detainees. One criticism of the CCTV setup raised by detainees related to concerns about privacy, with many indicating that toilets should not be monitored or recorded.

PURPOSES OF CCTV

While most research that has investigated CCTV has been conducted in community settings, CCTV schemes have been criticised as they are frequently implemented based on the presumed benefits that result from camera surveillance rather than being based on any clearly articulated objectives.⁹ One theoretically derived purpose of CCTV surveillance is the prevention of crime and disorder.¹⁰ Two environmental criminology approaches may be used to explain the role of CCTV in preventing crime. From a situational crime prevention viewpoint, it is proposed that CCTV increases the perceived risks associated with offending in locations under camera surveillance as it increases the likelihood of detection. The increased risk associated with offending is viewed as impacting on the decision to offend.¹¹ From a routine activities viewpoint, it is proposed that camera surveillance acts as a capable guardian. Given the presence of a capable guardian, offending behaviour will not occur even if a likely offender and suitable target converge in space and time.¹²

Given that prisons are violent places and a wide range of aberrant behaviour occurs in this environment, it is possible that the prevention of prison disorder is a purpose of CCTV. This behaviour is usually engaged in by prisoners and results in physical victimisation (prisoner-on-prisoner assault, prisoner-on-officer assault, sexual aggression, and murder), psychological victimisation (verbal abuse and threats), or economic victimisation (theft, extortion, and robbery).¹³ Additionally, there are several forms of aberrant behaviour that do not result in the victimisation of an identifiable victim (vandalism, riots, escape, self-harm/suicide, and drug-use). Most of these types of behaviour occur at a higher rate in the prison environment than comparable behaviour in community settings.¹⁴ The consequences of this behaviour

are widespread and potentially has a negative impact on prisoners, correctional staff, correctional organisations, and ultimately on public safety.¹⁵

Other purposes of CCTV surveillance in community settings include the detection of crime and disorder, improving safety or reducing fear of crime, gathering evidence, and facilitating access control or acting as a general site management tool.¹⁶ While the detection of crime may be viewed as contributing towards the goal of crime prevention through increasing deterrence, it has been suggested that detection enables the early identification of incidents and enables responses to be co-ordinated to reduce the level of harm. CCTV may improve safety or reduce fear of crime as these perceptions are based on aspects of the physical environment such as prison design (for example, long unsafe corridors) and the level of supervision provided in particular locations. Prison design and the level of supervision are viewed as providing opportunities for disorder and may affect direct experience of victimisation, behaviours which are personally upsetting, or the extent that such behaviours are witnessed.¹⁷ While one study found that CCTV had no effect on feelings of safety in prison,¹⁸ feelings of safety are generally considered to be situational within the prison environment as few prisoners report that they worry about their personal safety at all locations or times.¹⁹ CCTV may facilitate the gathering of evidence of crime and disorder that has taken place as the images captured on video are a form of real evidence which, with appropriate authentication by a control room operator or supervisor, is admissible in court.²⁰ Finally, CCTV may provide a means of remote identification to aid access control and can be used as a general site management tool to provide guidance regarding what is occurring in locations under camera surveillance.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Given the growing body of research that has explored the purposes of CCTV in community settings, the present research aimed to determine whether CCTV had similar purposes in prison. Three methods were used to achieve this aim. First, content analysis of the legislation, regulation, and procedure that the Queensland Department of Corrective Services (QDCS) operates under was performed to explore possible purposes of CCTV in prison. Second, physical audits of prisons ($n=4$) were conducted to determine the locations that were and were not under camera surveillance and whether CCTV systems were integrated with additional hardware to determine why CCTV is in prison. Third, interviews were conducted with managers ($n=4$) to explore their attitudes about why CCTV was in prison and whether there was a rationale behind why some locations were and other locations were not under camera surveillance.

METHOD

FOUR PRISONS INCLUDED IN THE RESEARCH

The research took place at four prisons located in Queensland (Australia). Four prisons were purposively selected from the 12 correctional facilities that were operational during 2002. Two of the prisons were older (built late 1980's and early 1990's) and two were newer (built late 1990's and early 2000's). The four prisons were secure facilities that housed prisoners with maximum, high, or medium security-ratings. Two prisons housed a smaller number of prisoners (246 and 324) and two prisons housed a larger number of prisoners (700 and 710). Two of the prisons housed secure and residential prisoners, one housed remand and reception prisoners, and the

remaining prison housed mainstream and protection prisoners. Three of the prisons housed male prisoners and one housed female prisoners.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The architectural design of the four prisons was primarily third generation, although second generational design principles were apparent.²¹ In line with third generation design, the prisons housed small numbers of prisoners in pod shaped units that were fully self-contained living areas, containing a kitchen, dining room, television room, and exercise yard. Other buildings in each prison served specific purposes such as facilitating entry/exit to prison (gatehouse/reception), providing prisoners with medical care (medical, health, and observation units), and areas where prisoners could meet visitors (visits), undertake education or participate in programs (education/programs), work (industries/workshops), and engage in recreational activities (oval and gym/hall). Second generation design principles that had been adopted at the four prisons included unit supervising officers undertaking their duties from offices attached to units where they remained separate from prisoners and the widespread use of modern technologies such as CCTV, security glazing, and electronically controlled doors were widely used.²²

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The first method that was used to explore the purposes of CCTV in prison involved performing content analysis on the legislation and regulation that the QDCS operates under²³ and publicly available procedures relating to offender management (44 procedures, 69 appendices) and safety and security (11 procedures, 16 appendices).

Content analysis was limited to publicly available documents as no internal procedures or protocols had been developed by the QDCS that related to CCTV surveillance. Each document was searched electronically for words that could be associated with CCTV including CCTV, camera, video, tape, record, monitor, observe, and audiovisual.

PHYSICAL AUDITS

The second method that was used to give an understanding of why CCTV was in prison involved physical audits of the four prisons to determine the locations that were and were not under camera surveillance and whether CCTV systems had been integrated with additional hardware. Physical audits involved the researcher attending each prison and being escorted around the various locations in each prison. During these audits, the researcher recorded building numbers, building purposes, the locations within each building that were and were not under camera surveillance, and additional hardware that CCTV systems were integrated with. Given that most cameras in prison were pan-tilt-zoom, locations were considered under camera surveillance if the camera could view all of a specific area. Locations were considered not under CCTV surveillance if there were no cameras in a particular area.

INTERVIEWS WITH GENERAL MANAGERS

The final method that was used to explore the purposes attributed to CCTV in prison involved interviews that were conducted with General Managers or their appointees ($n=4$) at the four prisons. General Managers had responsibility for the day-to-day functioning and operation of each prison and the relatively small purposive sample was considered adequate given that there are few General Managers ($n=12$) in

Queensland. The interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions focusing on attitudes and perceptions of CCTV in prison. Managers were asked why they believed CCTV was in prison, the purposes of CCTV in specific locations in prison, and why they believed cameras were not installed in some locations. Interviews were conducted in offices within each prison and notes were made of participant responses to questions throughout the course of the interviews. The interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes to complete.

RESULTS

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The first method involved content analysis of the legislation, regulation, and procedure that the QDCS operates under. Legislatively, the QDCS was provided with the authority to use CCTV to monitor and record personal visits in prison.²⁴ Offender management procedures relating to “Suicide Prevention”²⁵ indicated that the observation of prisoners identified as being at-risk of self-harm or suicide should be expressed in terms of frequency (for example, 5 minutes) and that these observations may be physical or visual whereby the prisoner is monitored using CCTV.

The safety and security procedures that were related to CCTV included “Detention Units”²⁶ and “The Storage and Disposal of Audio and Video Recordings used for Monitoring Purposes”.²⁷ The procedure relating to detention units provided that all tapes must be accounted for through the use of a register and that tapes depicting a criminal offence should be “treated as evidence and removed from circulation, secured and signed for by the person in charge or delegate”.²⁸ The procedure relating to “The Storage and Disposal of Audio and Video Recordings used for Monitoring

Purposes” also provided guidelines on how tapes should be stored and isolated in the event of an incident.²⁹ Specifically, it was provided that tapes containing incidents should be “isolated and stored in a secure place”.³⁰ Additionally, the procedure instructed that all tape recordings should be kept for at least one month or for 12 months after the expiration of any proceedings where the tape was required. Therefore, the content analysis indicated that possible purposes of CCTV in prison were to monitor visitors, detect or prevent self-harm/attempted suicide of prisoners on suicide watch (observation), and gather evidence.

PHYSICAL AUDITS

Physical audits of the four prisons were then conducted to determine the locations that were and were not under camera surveillance and to determine whether CCTV systems had been integrated with additional hardware. Locations were considered under CCTV surveillance if there was a camera that could view the location and were considered not under camera surveillance if no camera could view the location. Additionally, some locations in each prison were and were not under surveillance. For example, the newer secure unit common areas at Prison Three were under camera surveillance but the older secure unit common areas were not under CCTV surveillance. Considerable consistency was found between the four prisons in the locations that were and were not under surveillance (Table 2).

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Locations that were under camera surveillance included the perimeter fence, gatehouse/reception, detention unit, the oval, visits, and maximum security units.

Most medical, health, and observation units and locations in secure units (including living areas such as the kitchen, dining room, and television room) were under camera surveillance. Locations that were not under camera surveillance included unit laundry areas, unit exercise yards, reception stores/bulk stores, the main kitchen, officers' mess, education/program rooms, industries/workshops, the gym/hall, and residential units. The reasons why particular locations were and were not under camera surveillance were explored in the interviews with managers to explore possible reasons why CCTV was in prison.

During physical audits, CCTV systems were found to be integrated with call buttons and speakers at gates, video motion detection equipment on fences, and personal distress monitors. When buttons at gates located at various locations around the prison were activated, cameras provided the means of identifying who required the gate to be opened. Cameras were thus one crucial element in remote access control. Additionally, speakers at the gates enabled the person undertaking observation from the control room to communicate with the person requiring the gate to be opened, such as by seeking information about why the person required the gate to be opened or where they were going. When a fence alarm was activated, the control room operator was automatically presented with video images of the location where the alarm had been activated by the appropriate pan-tilt-zoom camera and cameras on the fence. The footage was automatically recorded in real-time. Likewise, the CCTV systems were integrated with personal distress monitors that identify where a person is located within the facility. When these distress monitors are activated, the operator can immediately assess the situation if the particular location is under camera surveillance. Therefore, the integration of CCTV systems with additional hardware

suggests that access control, detecting/preventing escape, and improving the safety of personnel wearing personal distress monitors were purposes of CCTV.

INTERVIEWS WITH GENERAL MANAGERS

Interviews with General Managers or their appointees at the four prisons were then conducted to determine why they believed CCTV was in prison and the rationale behind camera placement. When asked about why CCTV was in prison, all managers reported that CCTV was one aspect of the overall “safety and security” strategy. They referred to the camera system as being an “aid to static security”, being part of a package that provided a “combined approach to safety”, or as a “tool that enhances the ability of officers to do their job”. Managers then made reference to more specific purposes of CCTV surveillance in prison. Three managers acknowledged the role of camera surveillance in providing perimeter security. The role of camera surveillance in ensuring the safety of staff, visitors, and prisoners was also emphasised. Three managers reported that the camera system enabled the monitoring of movement throughout the prison. One manager emphasised the role of the CCTV system in ensuring that prisoners did not self-harm. This manager also emphasised the role of the camera system in enabling situations to be assessed and the gathering of evidence of major incidents.

Managers were then asked to provide reasons why a range of locations were under camera surveillance (Table 3). The perimeter fence, gatehouse/reception, and visits were all viewed as vulnerable locations and the presence of CCTV in these locations was considered necessary to ensure “the security of the centre”. Managers reported that cameras were used in the gatehouse/reception area to assess the authenticity of

people/vehicles and determine whether some individuals required additional monitoring while in prison. CCTV was reported as being used in visits for detecting the passing of contraband and inappropriate behaviour. Within crisis support units and observation units, camera surveillance was viewed as improving the ability of staff to observe “at-risk” prisoners to enable the early detection of self-injurious behaviour and ensure prisoner safety, health, and well-being. Managers believed that CCTV was in detention units and maximum security units where prisoners spent time as a “period of consequence” to ensure the security of the prison, improve staff and prisoner safety, and limit or minimise the opportunities for misbehaviour to occur by alerting officers to such behaviour. Within units, CCTV was viewed as enabling prisoner behaviour to be monitored, back-up for staff to be obtained when necessary and thus improving staff safety, responses to incidents to be co-ordinated, and the gathering of evidence when incidents occur. Managers reported that CCTV surveillance was used in block spines, pathways, and on the oval to facilitate the movement of prisoners in a safe manner by ensuring that “prisoners who don’t get along aren’t allowed to get together”. Additionally, one manager reported that the cameras on the oval might be able to “pick up things that people on the ground don’t”.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

One final issue that was explored to determine why CCTV was in prison was why managers believed certain locations (identified during physical audits) were not under camera surveillance. The locations that were not under surveillance and managers were asked about included education/programs, industries/workshops, the gym/hall, and exercise yards. Managers provided a range of reasons why cameras were not in

these locations. With reference to education/programs, industries/workshops, and the gymnasium/hall, managers tended to acknowledge that: (i) prisoners went to these areas for the right reasons or were occupied because they engaged in structured activity, (ii) incidents were not likely to occur in these locations, or that (iii) there was a sufficient level of staffing to monitor prisoners in these locations. With reference to education/programs, one manager also pointed out that a “conductive environment was needed for educational and therapeutic programs”. Additionally, with reference to industries/workshops, one manager argued that there should probably be camera surveillance in this area given prisoners “access to tools”.

Only two managers commented on why there were no cameras in exercise yards. One manager reported that on-the-ground staff had good surveillance opportunities. The other manager acknowledged that there were “some issues in exercise yards” but that the absence of cameras in this location enabled prisoners to “get out and have a bit of a chat” and afforded prisoners “a degree of privacy”.

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted as CCTV has been widely installed in many prisons but the role of this technology in this environment had not been adequately explored. Findings suggested that there was no clearly defined role for CCTV in prison and that camera surveillance was installed without an adequate empirical basis in this environment. Nevertheless, it was apparent that CCTV had similar broad purposes in prison and community settings. These included preventing and detecting particular kinds of behaviour, improving safety, gathering evidence, and acting as a general site management tool or enabling remote access control. However, a closer examination

indicated that there may be differences between the purposes of CCTV in prison and community settings.

In prison, the role of CCTV in preventing/detecting behaviour was found to be targeted at specific behaviours that occur in specific settings including contraband entering prison (visits), self-harm/attempted suicide (medical, health, and observation units), and escape (fence-line). These types of behaviour are generally not targeted by CCTV in community settings. While CCTV aims to improve safety in prison and community settings, the integration of CCTV systems with personal distress monitors worn by personnel highlights the primacy of this goal in prison. The nature of the prison environment and integration of CCTV systems with call buttons and speakers on gates underscores the significant role that CCTV has in monitoring the movement of prisoners and enabling remote access control.

Surprisingly, there were few procedures surrounding the use of CCTV in prison and prevention did not appear to be a primary goal of CCTV in prison. Procedures did not specify the aims or purposes of CCTV in prison nor did they adequately describe how CCTV was used. While prevention is a theoretically derived purpose of CCTV that is frequently attached to CCTV surveillance in community settings, managers tended not to acknowledge the potential that CCTV had to prevent aberrant behaviour. This is in stark contrast to arguments put forward in community settings where CCTV is frequently viewed as increasing the risks of offending or acting as a capable guardian. Perhaps there is a need to more clearly articulate the aims of CCTV in prison and explore the possibility of using the technology to provide deterrence and prevent the high rates of aberrant behaviour occurring in this environment.

Of course, consideration must be given to the limitations associated with the research. Given the lack of clearly defined objectives surrounding the purposes or use of CCTV in prison, these were inferred based on physical audits and manager's perceptions. Future research should consider adopting more evidence-based approaches to explore the purposes of CCTV in prison and how effective CCTV surveillance is at achieving these purposes. Such research could be survey based and explore the extent that CCTV is believed to fulfil each purpose³¹ or based on observation undertaken from the control room.³² Alternatively, research could explore the extent that CCTV prevents contraband entering prison, self-harm/attempted suicide, or escape by making comparisons of the rates of these types of behaviour before and after the installation of cameras³³ or based on interviews with prisoners.³⁴ The ability of CCTV to detect aberrant behaviour in prison could be assessed by determining how often CCTV is involved in the detection of particular types of behaviour.³⁵ The impact of CCTV on safety could be assessed by conducting surveys that assess feelings of safety before and after the installation of CCTV³⁶ or by conducting surveys that assess whether people believe that CCTV improves safety or reduces fear of crime.³⁷ Finally, the evidence gathering capabilities of CCTV could be assessed by conducting interviews with custodial correctional officers.³⁸

Table 1: Characteristics of the Four Prisons included in the Research

	Prison 1	Prison 2	Prison 3	Prison 4
Built	1992	1999	1989	1997
Rating	Secure	Secure	Secure	Secure
Capacity	710	246	324	700
Type of Prisoners	Remand and Reception	Secure and Residential	Mainstream and Protection	Secure and Residential
Sex of Prisoners	M	F	M	M

Table 2: Prison locations and whether under CCTV surveillance

Location	Prison One	Prison Two	Prison Three	Prison Four
Perimeter Fence	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gatehouse/Reception	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Detention Unit (cells)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oval	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Visits	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maximum Security Unit	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A
Secure Unit Common Areas	Yes	Yes	Some	Yes
Medical / Health / Observation Unit	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some
Walkways / Other outer locations	Some	Some	Some	Some
Residential Compound	N/A	Some	N/A	Some
Secure Unit Cell landing/stairs	No	Yes	Some	Yes
Cell	No	Some	No	Some
Secure Unit laundry	No	No	No	No
Exercise yards	No	No	No	No
Reception Stores/Bulk Stores	No	No	No	No
Main Kitchen	No	No	No	No
Officers' Mess	No	No	No	No
Education/Programs	No	No	No	No
Industries/Workshop	No	No	No	No
Gym/Hall	No	No	No	No
Residential Units	N/A	No	N/A	No

N/A – Location was not in particular prison.

Table 3: Why managers believed locations in prison were under camera surveillance

<i>Location</i>	<i>Why Under Camera Surveillance</i>
Perimeter Fence and Gatehouse/Reception	Vulnerable locations Ensure the security of prison Assess authenticity of people/vehicles Determine whether to subsequently monitor people entering prison
Visits	Vulnerable location Detect the passing of contraband Stop inappropriate behaviour
Crisis Support Units and Observation Units	Ensure prisoner health and well-being Detect self-harm/attempted suicide
Detention and Maximum Security Units	Ensure the security of prison Improve prisoner and officer safety Limit the opportunities for disorder
Units (including common areas)	Monitor prisoner misbehaviour Provide back-up for staff to improve their safety Enable the co-ordination of incident responses Gather evidence
Block Spines, Pathways, and the Oval	Facilitate the movement of prisoners (access control) Ensure that particular prisoners do not mix or socialise Detect incidents

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