

Should Elderly Criminals Be Punished for Being Prisoners of the Mind? An Analysis of Criminals with Alzheimer's Disease

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Yelena Yukhvid Levine

The rising life expectancy in the United States has resulted in social, economic, and health problems in our society. For instance, Alzheimer's, among other diseases, has become increasingly prevalent among many individuals. It is becoming more and more difficult to find an American who does not personally know someone afflicted with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. In 2012, for example, one out of every eight elderly Americans had Alzheimer's. The total number of Americans living with the disease in that year alone was calculated to be five million. Statistics show that one person in the United States develops Alzheimer's every sixty-eight seconds. Furthermore, Alzheimer's is cited as the sixth leading cause of death in America. As a testament to the serious nature of the increase of Alzheimer's disease in our society, President Barack Obama signed the National Alzheimer's Project Act in 2011 and has invested \$50-\$80 million into researching the disease during the fiscal years of 2012 and 2013.

Alzheimer's puts an enormous amount of stress on both the American health care system and on the caregivers of the individuals afflicted with it. However, few people think about the effect that Alzheimer's has on our country's criminal system. The elderly prison population in the United States has substantially increased in recent years, leading to further overcrowding and to an increased lack of resources in prisons. As Alzheimer's continues to afflict more and more Americans, it is important to consider this problem in the context of our elderly prison population.

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