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Norway's Prison System: Investigating Recidivism and Reintegration

Abstract

Recidivism rates are high in most Western countries and, as prisons in these countries become overcrowded, the resources meant to enhance reintegration of inmates into society can be inadequate or nonexistent. On the other hand, Norway has one of the lowest recidivism rates among Western nations, at approximately 20 percent. Norway also has, along with other Scandinavian countries, a unique approach to its prison system. This paper discusses the exceptionalism associated with Norway's prison system and explores the reasons behind its low recidivism rates, with a focus on the encouragement of reintegration of inmates into society. With the educational opportunities and normalization techniques found in Norway's open prisons, this country's prison system has rehabilitation at its core, a feature that has largely been embraced by a majority of the Norwegian population. Discussions in this research draw on open-ended survey responses from Norwegian respondents. The arguments connect opportunities created in the Norwegian prison system through education and normalization programs to the low recidivism rates found in Norway.

Introduction

In 2011, Norway's most notorious terrorist in recent history, Anders Breivik, killed eight people in Oslo by setting off a van bomb and then went on to kill sixty-nine people at a summer camp in Utoya, claiming a total of seventy-seven lives. In spite of this savagery, Breivik received a prison sentence of twenty-one years in one of Norway's most secure prisons under its Regime of Particularly High Security; he was recently transferred to a prison at Skien.¹ Although he committed one of the most heinous crimes in Norwegian history, many Norwegians, including the families of the people he killed, approved of his twenty-one-year sentence.² A year into his sentence, Breivik complained of inhumane treatment in jail, which included not having access to his light and television switches.³

This case brings four pertinent issues to light about the Norwegian prison system, which is known to be relatively progressive and humane: recidivism, rehabilitation, normalization, and reintegration. In this research, recidivism can be understood as a

¹ "Anders Breivik Accepted at Norway's University of Oslo," *BBC News Europe*. 2015. Accessed 30 October 2015. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33571929>>.

² *Ibid.*

³ "Anders Behring Breivik's Prison: Ila Near Oslo," *BBC News Europe*. 2012. Accessed 30 October 2015. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-19354906>>.

person's relapse into criminal behavior, most often after some form of intervention for a previous crime, typically within three to five years.⁴ Rehabilitation includes different techniques that aid in reforming the habits and lifestyles of inmates in order to produce a desistance of committing criminal acts. Normalization refers to the programs and guidelines within prisons that allow prison life to resemble life in the outside world, while reintegration connotes an inmate's transition back into society post-incarceration. These concepts are very important to the prison system since they help determine the success (or failure) of these human institutions.

The Scandinavian countries have very low recidivism rates compared to other Western countries. Norway has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world at about 20 percent.⁵ It has more highly secured prisons compared to some of the other Scandinavian countries, yet still maintains normalcy within its prison system. Although very violent crimes are rare in Norway, the case of Anders Breivik is one of the exceptions. The Norwegian prison system is vastly different from many Western prisons, and this case study reviews the differences in sentences, programs, and goals. This particular Nordic prison system features open prisons, small prison capacities, and opportunities for inmates that many other Western countries do not offer, which may explain its lower recidivism rates. These rates are drastically lower than other Western nations, especially the United States, which stands at 52 percent. Why does Norway have such low recidivism rates, so few violent crimes, and relatively humane prison sentences for those who do commit violent crimes? This qualitative study suggests that use of educational and normalization programs as a part of the rehabilitation process in Norwegian prisons has led Norway to have one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world.

This paper contains three main sections. The first section is a review of the literature surrounding prison systems and offers a conceptualization of recidivism and reintegration. The second section presents the research methodology and explains the two types of source—primary and secondary—in this qualitative study. This section also outlines the shortcomings of this research. The third section includes research findings and argues for the importance of educational and normalization programs in the Norwegian prison system as major contributors to low recidivism rates in Norway. The study ends with a conclusion and some takeaway points.

⁴ "About the Norwegian Correctional Service. Kriminalomsorgen," Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service. Accessed 30 October 2015. <<http://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/index.php?cat=265199>>.

⁵ Carolyn W. Deady, "Incarceration and Recidivism: Lessons from Abroad," *The Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy at Salve Regina University*. Accessed 29 November 2015. <https://www.salve.edu/sites/default/files/filesfield/documents/Incarceration_and_Recidivism.pdf>.

Conceptualization of Recidivism and Reintegration

The literature in the area of recidivism is extensive. In recent decades, recidivism has become a pressing matter in the correctional system as the rates have risen in many industrialized countries. Prison systems have grown to accommodate an increase in inmate population over the years, and there has been a push in academic circles to understand the consequences. Some recurring themes in the study of reducing recidivism include methods of encouragement and assistance in reintegration; a change in the perceptions of prison systems and inmates; normalization techniques; and successful educational and vocational programs.

The most basic definition of recidivism is simply a relapse in criminal behavior, which can result in several outcomes such as re-arrest, reconviction, and re-imprisonment.⁶ These various possible outcomes complicate the analysis of recidivism rates internationally as countries define recidivism differently. For instance, Sweden reports a two-year reconviction rate of 43 percent among prisoners, but this rate does not include the reports of fines in that two-year period. In comparison, England and Wales have a two-year reconviction rate of 59 percent among prisoners, which is a much higher statistic, but it does include the reports of fines.⁷ The most reported time period of study released in the recidivism reports is two years, but it could range from six months to five years or more. Due to the variances in data collection stemming from differences in definition among many countries, true recidivism numbers are elusive. This does not, however, devalue the importance of recidivism in understanding the efficacy of prison systems. With accurate and comparable data, recidivism can potentially be used as a measuring tool for the success of prison systems and eventual reintegration.

Every individual released from prison goes through a transition called re-entry, which is the “process of leaving prison and returning to free society.”⁸ This is an unavoidable process that prisoners face, but it is not as key as the process of reintegration, which is the “individual’s reconnection with the institutions of society,” and is not only a process, but a goal.⁹ As individuals successfully reintegrate themselves after release, recidivism becomes less likely due to changes in that individual’s behavior and environment. There are four dynamic markers in this reintegration process: the individual’s characteristics, family and peer ties, community contexts,

⁶Seena Fazel and Achim Wolf, “A Systematic Review of Criminal Recidivism Rates Worldwide: Current Difficulties and Recommendations for Best Practice,” *Plos ONE* 10, no 6 (2015): 6.

⁷Ibid., 8.

⁸Christy Visher and Jeremy Travis, “Transitions from Prison to Community: Understanding Individual Pathways,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 90.

⁹Ibid., 91.

and state policies.¹⁰ A person's experiences in prison—positive and negative—highly correlate to his or her future attitude and behavior. The family and peers that the individual interacts with can prevent or encourage re-offending, so these relationships are very important. The community's willingness to support and encourage employment and engagement post-release is also an important factor in helping individuals reconnect with societal institutions. It makes sense that positive reconnection to society through community assistance deters a person from returning to crime. However, this is only if state policies of aftercare and follow-up monitoring are fulfilled to ensure the success of the rehabilitated inmate. One prominent factor that determines whether a community is or isn't involved in rehabilitation is perception. State policies can also hinder the progress an individual makes after release as they can feel ostracized or neglected through aftercare and follow-up monitoring.¹¹ All of these facts underscore the importance of the reintegration process, especially in affecting an individual's likelihood of becoming another recidivism statistic.

It is through normalization that the barrier of perception is targeted. Normalization is a new concept being used in Scandinavian prisons, most notably in Norway, that seems to be having a positive effect on inmates and their lives post-incarceration with its ability to help inmates have a positive rehabilitative experience in prison. Educational and vocational programs offered in prisons have also been effective in improving the skill sets and mindsets of prisoners for use after their release. Encouragement is crucial throughout the entire process, but especially during reintegration. The length of sentences has been connected to resettlement problems as discussed in terms of returning to the normalcy of everyday life.¹² When inmates spend long periods of time in jail, their ability to function in an open society becomes compromised. Understanding the psychological effects of prison on inmates is important in determining the likelihood of those inmates finding employment and being able to provide a life for themselves as functioning members in society. The chances for employment also seem to be diminished after a long prison sentence. That is why it is important to have a strong system of post-incarceration follow-up programs and aid for ex-inmates to utilize in order to start this difficult process in a positive way.

The most successful programs assist released individuals in finding employment post-incarceration. As the number of inmates employed post-incarceration increases, recidivism rates decrease. In general, employment can add a sense of control and stability to the lives of ex-inmates, allowing for more routine daily activities. Many

¹⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹¹ Ibid., 91.

¹² Melissa Munn, "Living in the Aftermath: the Impact of Lengthy Incarceration on Post-Carceral Success," *Howard Journal Of Criminal Justice* 50, no. 3 (2011): 233.

ex-inmates continue to participate in routines developed in prison, such as waking up at a certain time, just to help with reintegration.¹³ Studies have shown that it typically takes almost thirty months for 30 percent of inmates released to find employment.¹⁴ A country's socio-economic conditions play a role in the ability of inmates to find jobs post-incarceration, but the skills developed in prison allow for greater opportunities than the inmates may have had beforehand. Although those studies conclude that employment reduces recidivism, there are variables not taken into account, such as the varying levels of crimes committed and the sentences served, which can have serious effects on the employability of an ex-inmate.

Other research has argued that employment post-incarceration does not have any causal relationship. It has been discussed that employment is found after the turning point of an individual's decision to turn away from crime.¹⁵ The self-determination of going the "straight and narrow" must come before an ex-inmate makes the conscious decision to become employed. Although the studies do show that a small sample of the studied population did cease to offend after employment, if they acquired employment during an active phase of criminal behavior, this was a very small sample of the ex-inmate population studied. This non-causal argument for employment and desistance of crime is a small counter-argument, considering that employment is still shown to provide a sense of stability and routine for ex-inmates, especially after long sentences. This stability aids in reintegration, which is strongly linked to the desistance of crime.

Perceptions of a prison system and inmates certainly impact recidivism rates. The three main attributes of locus, stability, and controllability shape people's views of a prison system. People look at criminal offenses in terms of controllability.¹⁶ The stability, both mental and physical, of a person who commits a crime also determines how a community perceives the offense. The amount of control over the situation the person has in committing a crime is important. The more likely someone is to believe that criminal offenses occur because there are "bad people" who do "bad things," the more likely the prison system will be set up to reflect that through retributive and utilitarian structures. It is generally accepted that reform and rehabilitation programs within prisons are affected by the perceptions of the community in regard to safety. The Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service states that the goal

¹³ Ibid., 235.

¹⁴ Skardhamar and Jukka Savolainen, "Changes in Criminal Offending Around the Time of Job Entry: A Study of Employment and Desistance." *Criminology* 52, no. 2 (2014).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Megan O'Toole and Gail Sahar, "The Effects of Attributions for Crime on Attitudes Toward Prison Reform," *Applied Psychology In Criminal Justice* 10, no. 1 (2014): 46.

of prisons in Norway is rehabilitation, enabling offenders to “change their criminal behavior” using the “principle of normality,” so the Norwegian people have provided an environment for this type of progress.¹⁷

In contrast, American citizens have been concerned with the punitive and retributive practices within the prison system. A poll taken asking a community how safe its members felt with reference to the prison located in that community showed that people felt generally secure, but felt any relaxation in extant security should be prevented. This harsher perception of the prison system is not seen in cases in Finland, for instance, where the practice is gentle justice with relaxation of security measures and an emphasis on rehabilitation. Here, the rehabilitation programs take the lead in the prison system, as most Finnish people believe that crime is a social responsibility gone wrong. Most people in Finland believe in giving criminals a second chance at leading a life without crime after release.¹⁸ The literature also discusses the likelihood of Americans to choose alternative forms of punishment or rehabilitation once introduced to different penal interventions. Americans are shown to prefer rehabilitation programs within the prison system. Once introduced to these different programs, most people believe that rehabilitation is the best solution for reintegration of past criminals into society effectively.¹⁹ This perception has yet to be addressed by policymakers in the United States, but it seems that the ideals set forth by Americans about rehabilitation are less punitive than policymakers believe. This might allow for a change in the penal system in the United States as the perceptions of communities have such a strong impact on prison structures. An open mind about prisons and rehabilitation has already allowed for the Norwegian prison system to develop much differently from the prison system in the United States, for example.

As prison systems in Scandinavian countries have grown more open, crime seems to have gone down, and so has the number of inmates and violent crimes committed.²⁰ There is a strong sense of trust between citizens and state authority, especially in Norway, and this translates to an inclusive society, as well as an inclusive prison system. Normalization (i.e., the concept of trying to keep conditions and situations in prisons similar to everyday life outside of prison), openness, and responsibility are important factors in the rehabilitation process in prisons in Norway. It is important to allow

¹⁷ “About the Norwegian Correctional Service. Kriminalomsorgen.” *Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service*. Accessed 30 October 2015. <<http://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/index.php?cat=265199>>.

¹⁸ Ikponwosa Ekunwe, Richard Jones, and Katie Mullin, “Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Incarceration in Finland,” *Researcher: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 23, no. 1 (2012): 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

for inmates to feel as connected to the outside free world as possible, and inmates in open prisons get to experience this.

Openness is a central component in Scandinavian prison systems. Finland prisons, for example, encourage family visits and even allow for an application to return home for up to six days after six months of imprisonment.²¹ Understanding that the monotonous routines and constant supervision of closed prisons have negative consequences on inmates is the first step to reform. Taking steps to preserve a normal life while in prison helps inmates believe there is a possibility for a productive life after prison. Danish prisons allow private visiting rooms, which provide the sense of a somewhat normal private life.²² When looking at the “luxurious” and “humane” prisons (as described in the media) found in Scandinavia, most notably in Norway with its prisons at Halden and Bastoy, people may question what sort of punishment exists if these types of environments are allowed and encouraged. The punishment, as noted by the Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service, is the restriction of liberty. It is not the job of those who work in the prisons to increase this restriction, but rather to aid in prisoner rehabilitation.

Open prisons foster inmate responsibility. Promoting responsible citizens is evidenced in allowing inmates to have some control over their daily routines. Inmates are allowed, sometimes, to choose their jobs within the prison and to be paid wages for those jobs that are almost competitive with similar work in the outside world. This creates the possibility for inmates to secure a sense of responsibility as part of the prison community, which translates into their future reintegration. They also exercise responsibility in controlling what they spend their money on.²³ If prisoners are not trapped in rigid prison routines, especially after long prison sentences, then they have a better chance of functioning successfully upon release.

These programs can also be tied to education and vocational programs, which is another focus in the literature. Education among inmates is considered to be on the same level as the general population of twenty-five years ago.²⁴ The “import model” of education in Norway allows outside educators to come into the prison system and teach inmates.²⁵ This keeps community ties alive for inmates as well as keeps the

²¹ Ibid., 10.

²² William Rentzmann, “Prison Philosophy and Prison Education,” *Journal of Correctional Education*, 47, no. 2 (1996): 63.

²³ Ibid., 60.

²⁴ Hilde Hetland, Ole-Johan Eikeland, Terge Manger, Age Diseth, and Arve Asbjørnsen, “Educational Background in a Prison Population,” *Journal of Correctional Education* 58, no. 2 (2007).

²⁵ Torfinn Langelid, “The Sharing of Responsibility in the Rehabilitation of Prisoners in Norway,” *Journal of Correctional Education* 50, no. 2 (1999): 52.

responsibility for rehabilitation part of the community's job. Education is important in helping rehabilitate inmates into members of society. Scandinavian countries such as Sweden believe each inmate's level of education must be assessed, and educational options must be provided according to each individual's assessment. Not only should there be academic opportunities, but also chances to learn the work and soft skills needed for everyday life.²⁶ These opportunities can be invaluable for inmates who never had the chance to get an education, and since many inmates have lower levels of education, conclusions indicate the correlation of lower education levels and higher incarceration rates.

Educational programs also have an effect on recidivism rates. It has been discussed that the opportunity to get an education and a diploma while in prison has a positive effect on recidivism rates. In Washington state, a study showed the inmates who received diplomas and were exposed to educational programs while in prison had significantly lower recidivism rates.²⁷ Even vocational programs have been shown to be effective in improving the skills of inmates in order to help them get jobs after release. What's more, vocational programs can enhance an inmate's self-confidence and skill set in order to provide more stability and reassurance when trying to enter the job market.²⁸ In short, educated inmates are less likely to return to jail.

Research emphasizes the importance of reintegration after incarceration and the essentially positive effect that employment has on this process. Perceptions of prison systems determine the nature of the system, whether it is oriented toward rehabilitation or punishment, and normalcy within prisons, along with educational opportunities, allows for more rehabilitation of inmates. The next section focuses on the methodology and research design.

Methodology

The primary data for this research is based on a survey created and given to a group of Norwegian citizens randomly selected for convenience and time constraint: one male and two females from Skien, a female from Oslo, and a male and female from Stavanger, all ranging from the ages of twenty-five to seventy years old. The survey was made up of five open-ended questions about the Norwegian prison system aimed at collecting general views of the Norwegian prison system and its structure. In order

²⁶ Theron Pettit and Julie Kroth, "Educational Services in Swedish Prisons: Successful Programs of Academic and Vocational Teaching," *Criminal Justice Studies* 24, no. 6 (2011): 215.

²⁷ Charles Kelso, "Recidivism Rates for Two Education Programs' Graduates Compared to Overall Washington State Rates," *Journal of Correctional Education* 51, no. 2 (2000): 233

²⁸ Diane Young and Rachel Mattucci, "Enhancing the Vocational Skills of Incarcerated Women Through a Plumbing Maintenance Program," *Journal of Correctional Education* 57, no. 2 (2006): 126.

to grasp the benefits and drawbacks of the Norwegian prison system, this random survey targeted the main questions that underlie this research on recidivism: benefits of education, openness, normalcy in prisons, and challenges to the reintegration process.

The secondary sources of information came from a variety of sources. Documents and articles were found in scholarly journals on correctional education, criminology, criminal justice, and sociology. Government reports from Norway's criminal justice department were also used, as well as media outlets such as BBC. These secondary sources were mainly used to define and conceptualize recidivism and reintegration, as well as to identify the exceptionalism associated with Norway's prison system. Understanding and defining terms such as recidivism and reintegration is important in order to identify key related factors. Norway bears peculiar characteristics that set it apart from many Western nations, a fact essential to understanding its unique goals and regulation of the prison system. The story of Anders Breivik is a clear case in point, as he likely would have received a much harsher penalty in other Western countries.

This research does have some limitations. Given time and schedule constraints, there were not many survey responses, even though many surveys were sent out. Thus, data collected does not necessarily reflect a large portion of Norwegian sentiments, nor was the random sample group varied extensively across Norway. Some of the scholarly articles found were also lacking information, specifically about Norway's prison system, though many of them referenced Norway's exceptionalism. Again, the limited time for the research restrained the extent and reach for respondents and reviews of significant documents. The next section expands and draws on some survey responses to support the main argument of this paper that the educational and normalization programs within the Norwegian prison system have led directly to the low recidivism rates in Norway.

Argument and Findings

Due to the emphasis on rehabilitation during incarceration rather than on punishment, Norway has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world. There are three main reasons why this is true. First, research has shown that the higher the level of education, the lower the likelihood of re-incarceration. Second, normalization within the prison system increases the likelihood of reintegration. Third, the increased education and the smooth reintegration process can aid in receiving and maintaining post-incarceration employment. Altogether, the Norwegian prison system's focus on rehabilitation proves to be successful in reducing recidivism.

Education is an important factor in the demographics of inmates and findings show that inmates have lower education levels than the general populace. In 2007, a study

was done to determine the highest levels of education in Norwegian prisons, and results showed that the level of education in the prisons is comparable to the level of education of the general populace of twenty-five years prior.²⁹ According to the report, inmates having the highest level of education, being primary and lower secondary education, is almost double that of the general Norwegian population. Vocational training was found only among a third of the inmates, with the lowest rates among the youngest inmates.³⁰ This shows the disparities in education of inmates and the population of free, law-abiding citizens. Respondent 6 reported on the survey that “many prisoners will have poor educational backgrounds for any number of reasons,” so, even in Norway, the general prison population includes those with lower levels of education.³¹ Although it cannot be shown that education levels have a direct, even causal, relationship with incarceration, these lower levels of education in inmates show a potential correlation between education and crime, whether it has to do with intrinsic benefits of knowledge or external benefits such as employment.

Educational and vocational programs increase the marketable skills of inmates post-incarceration. These skills increase inmates’ self-confidence and their sense of self-improvement.³² The Norwegian prison system, with its educational opportunities, allows inmates the chance to improve their training in ways that may not have been afforded to them in life. Respondent 1 commented that immigrants often do not speak Norwegian, and because “they know that they will be given a job and salary in prison, along with free education...this is a better alternative than being sent back to their home countries.”³³ Respondent 6 notes that many inmates’ “lack of education will most likely have given them a poorer sense of self-worth and possibly pushed them to commit crime,” which further underscores the role education plays in the prison system.³⁴ The recent Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik, although having received the highest form of punishment of twenty-one years in prison under its Regime of Particularly High Security, was able to apply to Oslo University in 2013, and again in 2015. His application was rejected in 2013 due to being unable to meet requirements for admission, but he was accepted in 2015. This shows that although Breivik is considered to be one of the most dangerous criminals in Norway, he still enjoys the right to an education as long as he meets admissions standards. Though his admission was met with some public outrage, the university further clarified that

²⁹ Hilde Hetland, et al. “Educational Background in a Prison Population,” 146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

³¹ Respondent 6, email communication with author, 31 January 2016.

³² Hilde Hetland, et al. “Educational Background in a Prison Population,” 150.

³³ Respondent 6.

³⁴ Respondent 6.

the admission process must be fair to all, regardless of who applies, including Breivik. The tolerance and acceptance of the Norwegian system in regard to education in its prisons is quite unique among many Western countries.

With normalization techniques prominent in the everyday life of inmates, open prisons in Scandinavian countries have defied the reasoning of penal systems in many Western nations. Punishment in closed prisons is clear, tactics such as solitary confinement or straightjackets are familiar, but the punishment in Norwegian open prisons is less extreme. The main form of punishment in these prisons, as Respondent 6 stated, “is the loss of freedom.”³⁵ While freedom of mobility outside of the prison is prohibited, daily life can be considered very similar inside the prison. Respondent 2 stated that, in Norway, “the thought is that open prisons are supposed to function like a ‘normal’ society/community.”³⁶ The conditions in these open prisons in Norway are very progressive, as Respondent 1 stated, “some prisons, even those that are reserved for the most serious of felons, allow inmates to come and go as they please,” which is almost unheard of in most Western prisons.³⁷ Anders Breivik had three cells to himself within the Ila prison: one for studying, with a desk and a laptop (with no Internet connection); another for sleeping, with a bed and a television; and a third for fitness, with workout equipment. He also had access to the prison library. Even with these seemingly luxurious prison accommodations, Breivik wrote a letter of complaint about his conditions being inhumane, stating, “I highly doubt that there are worse detention facilities in Norway.”³⁸ Among his complaints was that his cell was too cold and that he had to rush his morning shave and brushing his teeth. These conditions are very different from the average U.S. prison, even when the prisoner has been charged with extremely heinous crimes. This further shows Norway’s emphasis on rehabilitation and normalization rather than punishment, as these prisons give inmates “the opportunity to develop themselves as human beings,” a feature that Respondent 3 considers to be a key component in the Norwegian prison system.³⁹

Anders Breivik’s case can be used to illustrate the emphasis on benevolence in the Norwegian prison system as well as the intent to rehabilitate broken and dangerous people. Officials concerned with his case claim that “isolation is torture”; since he is unable to be around other inmates, he is offered more interaction with guards and

³⁵ Respondent 6.

³⁶ Respondent 2, email communication with author, 25 January 2016.

³⁷ Respondent 1, email communication with author, 23 January 2016.

³⁸ “Anders Behring Breivik’s Prison Conditions ‘Inhumane,’” *BBC News Europe*, 2012.

³⁹ Respondent 3, email communication with author, 25 January 2016.

officers, along with more educational and work opportunities.⁴⁰ These opportunities allow inmates to find some comfort in routine, and although they are woken up every morning at 0700, there is no security on when they go to sleep, as there is no “lights out” policy.⁴¹ Staff training in Norwegian prisons is also very important. Respondent 6 asserted that the Norwegian prison officers “go through a two-year education at the Staff Academy...better training makes better officers.”⁴² Keep in mind that Breivik was imprisoned in one of Norway’s more highly secured prisons, where the staff is comprised of half men and half women, and none of them is armed. They do carry batons, and they are allowed to use tear gas if needed, but one official reports having worked there for more than thirty years without once seeing the tear gas used.

This model of prison system is vastly different from other prison systems that utilize the death sentence, straightjackets, and solitary confinement. The Norwegian system is progressive and humane, encouraging rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The importance of this kind of system in Norway can be imagined as Respondent 5 pointed out that “inmates don’t feel like animals, so [they] don’t act like animals.”⁴³ As educational opportunities and normal everyday routines help them practice appropriate behaviors of getting along in society as law-abiding citizens, inmates can use these tools to transition smoothly back into society.

The tools and skills gained through educational programs are possibly related to lower recidivism rates since they increase the likelihood of post-incarceration employment. Respondent 6 noted that when an “offender leaves [prison] with nationally recognised qualifications, then with the right guidance, that person would be easier to employ and thereby stand on his/her own two feet” after incarceration.⁴⁴ Employers often refer to education and past experience when determining a person’s employability, and with enhanced education and vocational skills acquired during a prison sentence, ex-inmates are more likely to gain employment than they were before incarceration. The stigma of prison in Norway has been most successfully combated with programs such as the import-model. The import-model integrates the outside world and its inhabitants into the prison system by not separating institutions in the community from the prisons. Teachers in prisons are teachers in the community, doctors in prisons are local doctors, librarian services are locally provided, and so on, so the responsibility of rehabilitation and reintegration can be passed on to community stakeholders.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Respondent 6.

⁴³ Respondent 5, email communication with author, 24 January 2016.

⁴⁴ Respondent 6.

Employment has a relationship with recidivism in Norway, though some researchers argue it may not be causal. As more ex-inmates find employment post-incarceration, the less likely they are to return to prison.⁴⁵ Although it can vary by the types of crimes the ex-inmates committed, as more time passes, ex-inmates who find jobs are less likely to be re-incarcerated, and employment can bring stability after release. Some scholars argue that employment is not a causal factor of recidivism, but it is rather a consequence of deciding no longer to commit crimes.⁴⁶ The turning point of desistance, they argue, comes before employment, so it may look as though employment causes the desistance. This could be a valid counterargument, but the same scholars show that some portion of offenders found employment and that a substantial decrease in offending occurred thereafter.

Employment is usually a choice, but it does lead to some stability and a sense of responsibility that can become a sort of deterrent for offending. Respondent 1 tied employment to desistance in crime by noting that “Norway has a very high minimum wage, which helps in alleviating crime in the first place... basic education ensures that they [prisoners] will be able to get a job and support themselves” after incarceration.⁴⁷ This is similar to Respondent 3’s statement that after prison, inmates must “take care of themselves by finding a place to live, a job, a new healthy circle of friends, and not going back to their old lives.”⁴⁸ Consensus can be found among all six responses that employment is one of the most important aspects post-incarceration that can help aid in reintegration. Employment helps inmates “stand on their own two feet” as Respondent 6 stated, and the income from employment can be a deterrent for crime as well as a way of providing food and shelter and a lifestyle that discourages crime.⁴⁹ The responses were also clear from Respondents 2, 3, 5, and 6. That reintegration is one of the biggest challenges for inmates, and that the stigma that follows imprisonment can hinder that process. Respondent 1 noted that Norwegian prisoners are aided in this process as “interviews are set up for them and the employers are informed of the inmate’s situation beforehand.”⁵⁰ Norway’s prison system clearly tries to improve inmates’ lives even after incarceration by providing employment opportunities and normalization programs during incarceration. These aspects of the Norwegian prison system have a positive effect on the recidivism rates as they enable inmates to reintegrate back into society more easily, which can significantly deter re-offending.

⁴⁵ Torbjørn Skardhamar and Kjetil Telle, “Post-release Employment and Recidivism in Norway,” 629.

⁴⁶ Torbjørn Skardhamar and Jukka Savolainen, “Changes in Criminal Offending Around the Time of Job Entry: A Study of Employment and Desistance,” *Criminology* 52, no. 2 (2014): 263.

⁴⁷ Respondent 1.

⁴⁸ Respondent 3.

⁴⁹ Respondent 6.

⁵⁰ Respondent 1.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research offers three main takeaway points. The literature, as well as the data collected from the survey, showed reintegration after incarceration to be a challenge for inmates. Finding employment and being able to support themselves, along with being able to readjust to life after prison, are key to the reintegration process. Norway's open prison system is built upon the principle of normalcy, one that aims to keep life in prison as similar to outside living conditions as possible. This allows inmates to keep a semblance of normal life while serving their time. Norway's prison system also offers many opportunities for inmates to get better educations, sometimes at no cost. These opportunities to gain skills and degrees have a positive effect on an inmate's ability to find employment after incarceration. The low recidivism rate in Norway reflects these key aspects of the Norwegian prison system. The normalization techniques and the educational programs allow inmates to reintegrate more easily back into society post-incarceration, which can then be considered a deterrent to re-offending.

Despite the implications of this research in regard to Norway's low recidivism rates, more research is needed. As this work was purely qualitative in nature, and the data collected was limited, future research might further explore other aspects from a quantitative approach, or even from a comparative approach, using other Scandinavian countries such as Finland or Denmark. Gathering information on inmates released from prison and their transitions back into society would be an important next step. Studying the successful transitions, as well as the cases in which the ex-inmate re-offended, would be helpful in determining the factors that contribute to re-offending and those that deter it. Taking the recidivism data and determining the typical re-offenders would also aid in targeting the specific people, or groups of people, who are more likely to relapse. Quantifiable data could be collected on the demographics of re-offenders spanning different crime levels, as well as those who successfully reintegrate. These findings could hold implications for understanding the nature of prison systems in many countries around the world, including the United States. Although the size and socioeconomic conditions in Norway seem conducive to such programs producing low recidivism rates, it may be possible for aspects of these programs to be applied successfully in other countries, as well.

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