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**Learning in and for work in
correctional services in Norway**

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Learning in and for work in correctional services in Norway

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This research project has been a fascinating learning process for me. I have conducted research in a range of fields of work, but this project was my first within the criminal justice system and correctional services. Prior to the actual project, two things had strengthened my interest and motivation. First, I understood that the public does not know much about the work of prison officers. People tend to think of prisoners rather than prison staff when talking about correctional services. Second, I found out that there is a scarcity of research concerning prison officers' learning and continuing professional development. These observations made me understand the relevance of my coming project.

When interviewing research participants in a Norwegian prison, I was positively surprised by how engaging and enthusiastic they were and how positive I felt after all the interviews. Severe problems and challenges were brought up, yet I felt that Norway's correctional services are doing great work in the rehabilitation of prisoners and the provision of purposeful services.

I would like to express my gratitude to the interviewees for taking the time to participate in my research and giving me this great opportunity to learn about their education and work within Norway's correctional services. I also want to thank the following persons for their reflections and support during my research: Sarah Hean (University of Stavanger), Berit Johnsen (University College of Norwegian Correctional Service), Päivikki Lahtinen (University of Agder) and Terhi Esko (University of Helsinki).

Abstract

The study explored the views of prison officer students and their supervisors regarding (1) prison officer education, (2) prison officers' continuing professional development, (3) prison officers' training needs and opportunities, and (4) the future of prison work. A total of ten interviews were conducted in a prison in Norway in October 2021.

The prison officer students who were interviewed expressed satisfaction with their education. Communication was highlighted as the most relevant learning topic. Regarding the continuing professional development of prison officers, learning about communication and mental health issues were expressed as areas of particular significance. Learning about services for female prisoners was also brought up. The issues that impede prison officers' participation in training were the limited time to arrange training and the lack of financial resources.

The importance of collaborating and learning together with mental health professionals was expressed, but borrowing learning resources from the neighbouring disciplines was considered to be problematic because of the specific character of prison work.

The future of prison work was discussed from different viewpoints. The numbers of aggressive prisoners, old prisoners and those with mental health issues were expected to increase. The need to continue the development of prisons and concerns over the future role of prison officer were also expressed. The report provided five suggestions for future research concerning correctional services.

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1. Introduction

Prison work is demanding, non-linear, unpredictable, highly stressful, and generally typical of so called “wicked problems” (Rittel & Webber, 1973) that do not lend themselves to standardised working methods. Prison officers need to find a balance between aspects of control/punishment and of care/rehabilitation, and they mainly work with vulnerable populations. Well-educated staff in correctional services and systematic continuing professional development are required to provide effective services within these dynamic work environments (Burton, 2018; O’Hara, 2012; Hean et al., 2020; Eide, 2020).

For decades, prison officers have been described as an under-studied area within criminology (Coyle, 2005), whilst research concerning prison officer students has been published somewhat more extensively (Behan, 2021). Although there has been a recent increase in research concerning prison officers (Arnold, 2016; Ryan et al., 2021), the absence of research concerning prison officers’ education and training seems to have remained as a weak point within criminal justice research (O’Toole, 1999; Burton, 2018; Ryan et al., 2021). This research, which is part of a research project *Learning gaps in the criminal justice system* (GAPSLE) is a study of staff’s learning within the criminal justice system (CJS) and contributes to filling the identified gap. The research project GAPSLE was funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 894280. The research was conducted in Norway and Finland.

In Norway, the original objective of the research was to study prison officers’ views of their continuing professional development. The study evolved to primarily focus on prison officer students’ views on (1) their education, (2) prison officers’ continuing professional development, (3) prison officers’ training needs and opportunities, and 4) the future of prison work. Supervisors/senior staff were also asked about their experiences and views. In Finland, the project focused on critical learning points in the process of implementing a new way of working: placing fine defaulters with substance misuse problems in rehabilitation centres instead of in prisons.

A total of ten interviews were conducted in a prison in Norway in October 2021. Seven of the interviewees were prison officer students (called *students* in the report), and three were experienced prison officers involved in the students’ learning and work (called *supervisors* in the report). The interviewees comprised three women and seven men. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 35 and 57 minutes. For the thematic analysis, the transcriptions were downloaded to the NVivo qualitative data analysis program.

The interviewees were asked for their views on prison officer education, the possibilities and obstacles concerning the continuing professional development of prison officers, the kind of learning and training that is beneficial, and the identity of the key internal and external collaborators and the learning opportunities available with them, and their views and experiences concerning collaborative learning and the future of working and learning in prisons.

The interviewees were not asked directly about their motivation to start prison officer education, but some of them talked about it. The motivating factors included: job security, learning about prison work and what staff can do to help prisoners, the impression that prisons were in need of staff, recommendations from friends, willingness to work with people, an aspiration to work as a prison officer since childhood, and wanting to do something new and different. Some had previously

worked in a military context or had volunteered in prisons prior to the commencement of their studies to become a prison officer.

The interviewees described similar motivational aspects as had been reported in previous studies. This shows that many prison officers start their career by working in a prison and not with the education. Experience of working in a prison is often highlighted as an important factor in their decision to start prison officer education. Furthermore, job security, familiarity of working in the uniformed services (childhood dream), economic pragmatism (income), the desire to improve themselves and others, and following the recommendations of friends or family who already work in the service have also featured in previous research (Crawley, 2004; Eide & Westrheim, 2020; Arnold, 2016).

2. Prison officer education

In Norway, prison officer education is a two-year, paid higher education programme (120 ECTS) at the University College of Norwegian Correctional Service (KRUS). The study comprises one year of theory and one year of practice in one or two prisons. The practical period is organised to comprise 60% practice and 40% study. After two years, students have one year of service.

In the prison officer education, the curriculum is organised around different interdisciplinary fields rather than traditional disciplines (Bruhn et al., 2016). The professional content is divided into different subject areas of different weight and duration: Introduction to the Role of the Prison Officer and the Norwegian Correctional Service; The Law of Execution of Sentences and Other Legal Topics; Safety, Security and Risk Management; Community Reintegration and Social Work II; and Professional Knowledge and Ethics. The two most extensive interdisciplinary fields are security and safety, and social work and reintegration (Eide & Westrheim, 2020; Bruhn et al., 2016).

There is a continuing education programme that gives prison officers the opportunity to complete a Bachelor's degree in correctional studies (180 ECTS). The above-mentioned subject areas are emphasised in the supplementary module in the Bachelor's studies, both in the obligatory courses and in the optional specialisation units. The purpose is to train prison officers to work in demanding environments and to contribute to the execution of the sentence in a way that is reassuring to society and aims to prevent reoffending. Prisoners should be given opportunities to change their lives (Eide & Westrheim, 2020). Changes to prison officer education are under discussion, and, in the future, it may entail three years' unpaid education.

2.1. Views on the content of prison officer education

The interviewees described and reflected on the current prison officer education from a range of different perspectives. The overall view was one of satisfaction with the education. It was considered relevant in preparing them to work as a prison officer:

I think everything we have in school is important, everything is good. (B3 student)

It is very pinpointed to what we are going to do. (B4 student)

I cannot think of anything that I question and ask, “Why do we need this?” Because I think most of the stuff we learn is very relevant to our work. (B7 student)

I think the balance is quite good. There are perhaps a bit too many school days, given how much ... Maybe you end up sitting a lot maybe joking around and sort of lose focus after a while. But I think it works, definitely. (B5 student)

When discussing the topics that are important for learning, the ones that were most often identified were physical training, law, and communication and soft/social skills. The latter topic encompasses issues such as, how to be a good person to others, how to treat others so they can feel valued, and how to learn about a prisoner’s background and their life.

There was also a concern that experienced prison officers who have not been able to update their knowledge might lack soft/social skills:

I think it is more important that you have the competence to understand also the inmates and what background they come from. If you have this, it is also easier to talk to them. (...) They who come from the prison school have a little more focus on trauma-conscious care, like trauma and how to understand people with different kinds of trauma in their background, how to handle them. (...) If you ask people who have worked here for a longer period of time, I do not think they have even heard of it. It is a fairly new way to look at things. But I think it is an important thing, important knowledge – how to relate to the inmates. (B10 supervisor)

Communication was highlighted as one of the most relevant learning topics by both students and supervisors. Communication skills encompass a range of skills: what is said, how it is said, active listening, and the use of non-verbal clues such as body language, facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures. Communication and conversation techniques are used, for example, to calm prisoners down when they are going through difficult times or being aggressive, and by listening and discussing with them.

Training with communication and soft skills is often overlooked, even though these are relevant in the prevention of use of force incidents with prisoners, and contribute to working more effectively and efficiently together. These skills provide prison officers with tools that help them to build relationships with prisoners when creating a safe, secure and humane environment, and to support prisoners’ rehabilitation (Ricciardelli & Perry, 2016; Curren, 2019).

Some students talked about these skills as follows:

And like that [communication] is probably the best courses that I know. Learning how to speak better, how to react, all these small things. (B2 student)

So when we have communication practice and that is maybe the most beneficial thing. (...) I did not know that the communication was going to be that important. I know communication is always important, but I hadn’t realised quite how important. (B4 student)

Especialy because I'm so young, and they have had difficult upbringings, etc. And I cannot relate to that because my life has been easy (...) At 23 years old, it's hard for me to tell a 50 year old man that, "Oh, it is okay". So I think that conversation techniques and ways of getting them to think and reflect on things themselves are quite nice to know. (B8 student)

Similarly, to communication, the learning of soft/social skills was described as being rather a new topic in prison contexts.

I think that was very helpful, because usually in prison we have one way of dealing with problems – if they are very aggressive, we just lock them inside, and they have to wait in the room until they behave. But it is better to spend more time, maybe and to listen to them and accept that they are angry and maybe tolerate some verbal abuse. (...) There were not that many workshops like that when I did my training over ten years ago. This has come in more recently with the new trainees, and I actually learn a lot when I do it with them, so it is helpful. (B1 supervisor)

Research also suggests that, beyond practical and often physical skills, prison officers also need to be taught how to manage prisoners in such a way that increases the officers' legitimacy and evokes prisoner compliance rather than opposition. Harsh treatment can increase prisoners' misconduct and decrease institutional stability (Steiner & Meade, 2014).

2.2. Methods of learning

Working in groups is one of the key methods of learning in prison officer education, and its relevance was acknowledged as a way both to learn and to learn how to collaborate. The students interviewed studied partly during the Covid-19 pandemic and lock-down, and a large part of the studying took place online. The lack of face-to-face teaching and learning was considered difficult by some students, in particular when doing group work:

In the beginning it was really challenging, because then we had still the corona thing going on and then everything was digital. So if you got in a group with people who lived in four separate places, there was a lot of discussion via the computer and you then had to try to write a cohesive assignment and make it sound like it was written by one person, and it is not easy to do that when you are several kilometres apart and sort of doing it on your own all the way through. But it is also good in a way, because you learn methods for cooperating with people. (B5 student)

We had corona, so we had a lot of studying from home. And that was a bit hard, because it was not as motivating to be on the computer at home, and you did not get to see the teachers or your classmates. (B7 student)

The practice period in prison mixes theory and practice. The students interviewed highlighted the relevance of this. The usefulness of the practical exercise in KRUS was also brought up:

We had different exercises at KRUS and here [the prison]. There was like a prison cell at KRUS and someone acted as if they were an inmate, and we came in and practised with different scenarios. So that was very good, because you can get some thoughts about the different things that can happen. So that was very practical. (B8 student)

The importance of practice has been reported previously, from the point of view of both students' own learning preferences and the curriculum and learning outcomes (Eide & Westrheim, 2020).

Although the students appreciated learning both theory and practice, there were doubts about the usefulness of the theories introduced:

And also we have very much theory, but as we all know there is often a big difference between theory and practice. And we do not use all the tools we learn in school, like risk evaluation. When we see a risk, we fill out this whole diagram. But we never do that in the prison. Maybe we do it more in our head. So I think what we learn is important, but we do not use all of it in practice. But maybe we use it unconsciously. (B8 student)

During the practical period, prison officer students learn from experienced prison officers while working with them. Similarly, prison officers may learn from students. The interviewees' perceptions of such learning varied:

Yes, I think most prison officers appreciate having students here, because they remind them of the important tasks. So they ask questions, sometimes all the officers have to think, "Why am I really doing this this way?" (B10 supervisor)

It depends on who you are with or how long that person has been working. (...) But I think they learn something. Because (...) the education is updated all the time. Because now there is more focus on dynamic security, and talking with the prisoners and talking people down rather than using force. (B5 student)

I like to think that [experienced prison officers learn from students]. But I am not sure ... they say that they learn a lot about how the students do prison work, they spend a lot of time with the prisoners, they do a lot of social work with the prisoners. At the same time, they are quite exhausted by the tempo the students have (...) Yeah, in the '90s the prisoners were locked inside if they were not at work, nothing was rushed. But the students are learning that here, you know, prisoners come first – it is important to do work, it is important to be sociable with the prisoners. And they are not quite as used to that. But now we have had students here for 12 years, so they are getting used to it. In the first three years it was terrible for me, because I was ... it was so stressful for them to have students. Because they were doing so much, all the time. But if you think about all the time they have spent learning, I think the prison is better because of what the students are implementing at the prison, if you know what I mean. Before it was navel-gazing, a prison that was only ourselves. And now we get inputs from the students, and then we have lifted because of it over time. (B6 supervisor)

The last excerpt above also describes how prison work has developed during recent decades towards dynamic security, and how this has created tensions between the old and the new ways of working. The authorities in Norway have stated, for example, that a trade-off between safety/security and rehabilitation can be managed by well-educated staff in modern correctional services (Bruhn et al.,

2016). This shows the importance of education and training in the field, and suggests the need for resources to be allocated to these activities.

Assignments that involve reflection on what is being learnt were mentioned as an example of good learning practice.

There is a lot of self-reflection involved in almost every assignment we get. And I think that is pretty good in the sense that you can go outside of your own bubble, you see things from different perspectives. And then you sort of see it from your perspective, from the perspective of security and wellbeing for the inmates, and then you have to see it from the inmates' perspective. (B5 student)

Within correctional services, reflective practice – the ability to reflect on one's actions and to engage in continuing learning – is suggested as a way for frontline workers to be competent and capable of addressing misbehaviour, detecting and eliminating abuse, and reducing criminal activity and violence. Frontline professionals need to know how to “think well” when working with people who have been victims or involved in crime (O'Hara, 2012).

3. Continuing professional development of prison officers

Prison populations and the character of prison work have changed significantly, and prison officers now face greater challenges in their work than before. They require more in-depth knowledge to do their work, which should align with their education and continuing professional development. Previous research shows that the prison officers themselves have expressed the need for continuing education, especially with regard to conflict management, substance abuse issues and preventive work related to the prisoners' mental health. This indicates that these areas are not adequately covered in current prison officer education (Grimen, 2013; Eide & Westrheim, 2020; Brooke & Rybacka, 2020).

3.1. Learning and training needs

In this study, the interviewees were asked about the learning and training needs of prison officers. Both students and supervisors had varied views. Two students linked the needs to changes in prison work:

Prisons in Norway are constantly changing. Rules are constantly changing, the ethics are constantly changing, and if you are not up to date on all of this, you will also struggle to keep up with the ethics and the actual rules. I have found some rules where, we had done one thing but when we looked at the official laws, we thought, “Hm, I am not sure this was quite how it should be done”. Because it was such a new rule, and it had not been taught to more than maybe the leaders or the people working in the law department in prison. So it has not come down to every officer. (B2 student)

Sometimes you realise that 10 years ago, this school was very different from how it is now. We learn so much more, and I think that it's very sad for a person that has been here for 10 years. Because they are so good in so many ways, they know the human side, they know how to work. If they could just have some of the things we learn now, they would be 100% better. So there should be something every year. (B3 student)

A number of training needs to supplement current education were listed; those that were the most discussed were associated with mental health issues and communication skills.

3.1.1 Mental health

One recent development in prisons in Western countries is that the number of prisoners with mental health problems is increasing. In prisons in the United States, for example, there are more people with mental illnesses in prisons than there are mental health patients in hospitals (transinstitutionalisation) (Allison et al., 2017; Melnikov, 2017; Torrey et al., 2014).

In Norway, studies describe a higher incidence of mental disorders among prisoners than among the general population. Among offenders, only 8% have no mental illness, whereas the rest have extensive diagnoses (personality disorders, 73%; drug abuse, 51.3%; anxiety, 42%; alcohol abuse, 28.7%; mood disorders, 23%; ADHD, 18%; risk of suicide, 12%; and psychosis, 3.3%) (Cramer, 2014). Mental health issues among prisoners have also been highlighted in Hean et al.'s studies (Hean et al., 2021).

Concern about having the competence to work with prisoners with mental health problems was expressed by the interviewees.

I think the first thing, and this is something that has kind of been addressed now, is to learn more about mental health and how to cope with people that are suffering from poor mental health. (...) We now have a class in KRUS that is about mentally ill inmates and how to behave around them, how to work around them. But that is an area that we need to be better at, because we are not good. Because we have always done this and done that, we are used to people coming in from the street and maybe get a psychosis and so on. But we do not have the skills implemented by training, and that is something we should have. (B6 supervisor)

It has been emphasised that prison officers are those who are in contact with prisoners on a daily basis, and that they therefore play a central role in treating and rehabilitating prisoners with mental illness. They need to be trained to identify symptoms of mental health problems, but many prison officers do not receive such training (Torrey et al., 2014). This may result in the misinterpretation of prisoners' actions, and, at worst, prisoners being placed in solitary confinement in order to manage and control their behaviour, thereby inhibiting rehabilitation efforts (O'Keefe & Schnell, 2007; Kowalski, 2020). Similar concerns were also expressed by one interviewee:

I think we should have more practical skills in how to deal with people with mental problems. (...) So I think it would be helpful to learn to deal with them in a good way. Because now I think many officers perhaps make the problem worse, because of how they deal with people with mental problems. They do not have the right skills, so I think they need to learn, myself

included, need to learn more skills like that. Because that is the trend I see, that we have more people with mental problems and we need more skills in how to deal with them. (B1 supervisor)

If they have been punished instead of treated for mental health symptoms, prisoners may, after their release, return to the community with their continued illness, and continue offending and thus compromise public safety (Macmadu & Rich, 2015; Kowalski, 2020).

International experiences show that multiprofessional workshop interventions and an interdisciplinary team approach in designing and delivering learning and training around mental health issues in prisons can be successful. One study reports on how psychiatric nurses designed and led a training event to improve the knowledge, views and professional attitudes of correctional prison officers with regard to persons with mental illness. The researcher suggests that such intervention can be more widely deployed as a tool to improve officers' ability to identify and address the special needs of people with mental illness in prisons. Furthermore, he brings up the idea of incorporating such workshop interventions into the training of novice prison officers, especially in prisons that provide psychiatric care services, such as outpatient clinics and psychiatric wards (Melnikov, 2017).

Effects on prisoners in isolation and violence towards prison officers were other learning needs that were brought up:

Isolation, we hear quite a lot about it now, and about what it can do to a person when they are inside a cell as much as they are every day. (B8 student)

So I have noticed a change in the inmates we get here. Usually, it is more people with psychological problems we have here, and they have become more and more violent and threatening. (...) So, it is worse for us, there have been more threats and violence against us in the past few years. Yeah, it is a very bad trend for us in the high security prisons. (...) many of the ones who come here should not be in a prison cell but in a hospital – a mental hospital or something, to get more help. (B1 supervisor)

Substance misuse, in particular when combined with mental health problems, was also perceived to be a challenge that needs to be taken into consideration in continuing professional development:

Maybe our role becomes like a sort of pseudo-therapist. Because we talk to them about their problems and we try to help them, and the more knowledge we have about what they are going through – if there is mental illness involved, and combined with drug use – the better able we will be to find the best approach for them when talking about it. I think that learning more about mental health and drug problems is important. (B5 student)

We need to learn more about drugs – about how the inmates get drugs inside, how they affect them, how they affect other inmates and us. (...) I think we just need to learn a lot. Yeah, just to prevent it. Because right now it is not good. And it makes the environment bad, both inside the prison and outside. (B4 student)

The scale of drug use in prisons cannot be underestimated. Worldwide, about one in three people held in a prison is estimated to have used drugs at least once while incarcerated (UNODC, 2019). A

recent Norwegian study gives similar figures. It also showed that 65.2% of prisoners reported having used drugs during their lifetime, 54% had used drugs in the six months prior to their latest imprisonment, and 47% had used drugs on a daily basis before their latest imprisonment (Pape et al., 2021).

3.1.2 Communication skills

Communication was identified as one of the most relevant topics to study in prison officer education. Similarly, its importance was also highlighted in prison officers' continuing professional development.

If we are up here, and we have like a practice day every week, and usually it is about first aid or fire, or how to use force correctly. It is a big thing, to handle crisis or emergencies. But on the other hand, these events represent about 2% of the workday. The other 98% is spent like handling everyday conflicts and setting boundaries, and a lot of this is to do with communication. So I think communication is one of the most important things to focus on. (B10 supervisor)

Usually we train with things like that [fire and force] and not communication, which is also very helpful. So I think there should be more focus on communication training and things like that – not always this emergency training, because communication is something we can use like every day. (B1 supervisor)

Other training needs that were expressed concerned competence in the areas of safety, radicalisation, online crime and soft/social skills.

Concerns linked to the ways of understanding, on the one hand, the background of prisoners and difficulties they have had in their life, and, on the other hand, issues concerning the prisoner from a wider perspective were also identified:

What about when somebody's husband is in jail because he has mistreated her? (...) How do we care for the wife and the kids? How do we talk to the person that is in jail about what they have done? We should know more about that as well, because then it is easier to help. Because the wives come to visit them here, and they can say to us, "Oh, I am afraid about how it will be when he comes out, but I do not say this to him". What are you going to do then? Are you going to help the woman who is afraid? (...) My job is to help the one that is in jail, but the one on the outside – who is going to help her? Or him? Maybe we will learn this the last few months before we leave school, I am not sure, but that is the kind of thing I think we should be much better at, and we should know more about the person's life. (B3 student)

When discussing the form of learning and training that is most beneficial, the emphasis was on the practical. The theoretical courses in the prison officer education curriculum were not necessarily perceived as being the best ones for prison officers' professional development.

In a study that explored training around issues of ageing, the researchers suggested that using prison officers' valuable experience as a learning resource and involving it in the learning material, as well as

allowing participants to directly apply what they had learnt, could be successful. The researchers emphasised that correction workers are not an easy group to impress with required training materials, and involving them in the resource production is therefore important (Cianciolo & Zupan, 2004).

3.2. Opportunities and obstacles in continuing professional development

The interviewees' view was that prison officers have a range of learning opportunities, offered by KRUS or trade unions, for example, but participation was not necessarily at a high level. Those working in supervisory roles have an opportunity to update their knowledge via teaching and supervising. In addition, they also reported recent participation in continuing professional development activities, including the Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

Two main issues impeding prison officers' participation in professional development were limitations to time to arrange training and a lack of financial resources. Prison officers undergo compulsory regular training on the use of force, fire safety and first aid. This and other weekly training time is limited to three hours, in order to ensure that prisoners are not locked in their cells for a prolonged period of time. Having only three hours for training means that implementing new rules or methods is not straightforward.

So to be able to implement new things takes time. We always say six weeks, because in six weeks everyone will have done it. And what is not so beneficial is when we work with heavy theoretical education (...) we always have to have people at work – we cannot just say, “OK, we will do this tomorrow”. No, we cannot close the prison. So it is quite difficult to just say, “OK, we will do it next week”. Because if we do this next Tuesday, only one third will be getting it done. (B6 supervisor)

The problem of ring-fencing time for learning for prison officers is a challenge that is recognised internationally. One study of mental health awareness training and learning by using a workbook in custodial settings showed that staff were motivated to complete the workbook in their own time, but felt that this was not as effective as using it in a group learning situation. Many prisons, however, were not able to allocate time for staff to undertake the training in groups (Brooker & Sirdifield, 2006).

Another study that assessed the feasibility and acceptability of adapting and implementing a problem-solving training intervention for prison staff and prisoners at risk of self-harm indicated that staff can be trained in using these skills, although most were unable to implement what was learnt, due to time pressures (Perry et al., 2019). This is a known problem in the design and implementation of complex interventions in organisations other than healthcare (Batalden et al., 2016).

The interviewees also described the difficult economic situation and its effect on learning.

The prison school is in Lillestrøm, so it can be very expensive to send people there to attend courses – perhaps, you know, two or three days away from work, and they have to find other officers to fill in, and it becomes too expensive and too inconvenient for the prison. And now the economy is very, very bad. So there have been fewer and fewer opportunities to study

more courses in recent years. (...) I think it has to start at the very top, you know, to get more money and more resources for the prison service, because it is not prioritised right now. (B1 supervisor)

Let's say you want to start a new course for the inmates, such as anger management or dealing with stress. And then we go and talk to them: "Would you like to hold courses for the inmates? If so, you have to attend this course first." But most of the time they find this interesting, and want to learn more about this. And then they apply through their leader and (...) But due to our financial situation, we now have discussions about every cost and expense. Sadly, learning new skills is one of the things that costs money. (B6 supervisor)

One interviewee reflected on the earlier stage of his career, and felt that there had been more opportunities for continuing professional development then. He also brought up the issue of inequality between female prisoners and male prisoners:

Before that, in 2015, I attended a course to be a program instructor for female inmates. (...) I think there were more opportunities like that before. (...) The female inmates are not prioritised with things like that, they do not have the same opportunities as the male inmates. So that is a real problem. (B1 supervisor)

There are arguments that those who have long work experience and have adopted certain routines may not feel motivated to enrol on the courses that are available. However, non-participation in continuing professional development cannot entirely be explained by a lack of willingness. In Norway, KRUS has a range of free courses that are offered to employees, but if they want to take a course other than one offered by KRUS, it is often denied because of a lack of finance. This means that continuing and further education has become a financial issue that hinders professional development. The previous Norwegian government cuts in funding for the prison services have aggravated the situation (Eide & Westheim, 2020). Bruhn et al. (2016) argue that quantitative indicators are extensively used, and that one of the most important success criteria in the correctional services has been efficiency in the form of cost reduction, together with the maximal utilisation of prison capacity. This is a combination that can harm the development of prison work and services for prisoners.

One suggestion to overcome challenges regarding time pressures and resources in the field of learning and training was to arrange more learning and training opportunities on-site in prisons:

If they can see that multiple officers are interested in the same classes, they can have more local classes. Not only in Lillestrøm, because it costs a lot with plane tickets, accommodation – everything costs money. But if they were to move some of the courses to different parts of the country, it would be easier. So here you have different prisons who can attend one class, if the class is held nearby or in between the prisons. (B10 supervisor)

International research concerning problem-solving training to reduce self-harm has summarised five items that are to be considered when designing continuing professional development (Perry et al., 2019). These can also be applied in other training initiatives:

- 1) training needs to be an ongoing sustainable process that becomes part of what the prison does, as opposed to a one-off session,
- 2) training should be incorporated into existing mandatory training for staff,

- 3) training should be available on induction courses for new staff joining the prison, as well as being part of an ongoing strategy to maintain the skills of staff who have been within the services for some time,
- 4) the timing and implementation of any new initiative within the prison site should be carefully timed to ensure where possible that it does not coincide with any other changes that staff are meant to deal with, and
- 5) intervention delivery needs to suit the needs of staff in a brief format that can be delivered in a few minutes of repeated support throughout the working week.

4. Working and learning in collaboration

This study gathered information about how and with whom prison officers collaborate, both internally and externally. The key collaborators listed were professionals from the health and social care sectors (nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, dental assistants, social workers). Other important professionals were teachers and school staff, criminal justice staff (police, criminal court), volunteers, priests and work supervisors/activity leaders.

Previous studies have shown the importance of different professional groups working and learning together and from each other within the CJS (DeHart & Iachini, 2019; Hean et al., 2017; Hean et al., 2021; Melnikov, 2017; Winship et al., 2019). This was also discussed in the interviews. Mental health problems among prisoners are increasing, and the need for collaboration between prison officers and mental health professionals was emphasised.

In one of the few studies from the Norwegian context, Hean et al. (2017) explored prison officers' perceptions of collaboration between different professions. The findings showed that prison officers perceived significantly less collaboration with mental health specialists than with nurses and social workers in the prison. There are clear indications of the need for the development of new approaches to collaboration in the trajectory from prison to society (Hean et al., 2021).

The prison has established procedures for information sharing, such as the *ansvarsgruppe*, which encompasses different actors to support the prisoners, weekly meetings with social workers, a short meeting with (for example) teachers and nurses, and a short information-sharing session among prison officers in the mornings, between shifts. However, the need for more intensive collaboration was still identified.

One challenge in Norway is that prisons and healthcare services function as separate organisations, and the obligation of confidentiality can become an obstacle that hinders collaboration between different parties. It can also hinder the provision of client-oriented services.

But we also have an obligation of confidentiality – we are not allowed to share information about the inmates, and the nurses and doctors usually know a lot about the inmates that we do not know, and vice versa. We cannot always share information freely. So that is sometimes a problem. (B1 supervisor)

Maybe we should learn from the police, and the police should learn from us. Healthcare staff should come to us, and we should (...) Because it's a shame is that I cannot tell them

anything, and they cannot tell me anything. And how can we then do it together, if I cannot talk to them about it? And the same applies to the priest in the church. She talks a lot with them, and if things are very bad for them she cannot tell us about it. And she is there for one hour a week, and we are there with them every day. So maybe it would be much easier if we could talk openly with each other. (B3 student)

It was explained that the prison has annual training with the police, and the relevance of this was highlighted. The need to train and learn with other professionals, and health professionals in particular, was also brought up:

Of course, we see the police often, but we do not work that much with them. But we are going to have an exercise with them later. But, of course, with the health department very much. (B4 student)

As the excerpt shows, even though prison officers train with the police, they do not necessarily work with them very closely, as they do with health professionals. Research shows that many prison officers view their role as being closer to that of nurses, particularly mental health nurses, rather than police, as is more commonly assumed (Crawley, 2004; Baldwin, 2021).

International research suggests that there are gaps in learning and training within the CJS. Although traditional education and training for professionals working with vulnerable offender populations are derived from a variety of disciplines (e.g., criminal justice, social work, psychology, public health, nursing), not many training programmes address the intersection between corrections and mental health (DeHart & Iachini, 2019). Professional education is needed in order to prepare prison staff to assist in addressing and referring prisoners with mental health disorders at the earliest possible point, using collaborative models. This helps to improve correctional safety, and prevent incarcerated persons with mental illness from suffering the effects of untreated disorders and reoffending (DeHart & Iachini, 2019).

There are also concerns that academic resources and guidebooks have been developed for clinicians and facility administrators (Drapkin, Collins, & Mays, 2009; Scott, 2010; Trestman, Appelbaum, & Metzner, 2015), as well as curricula for multidisciplinary crisis intervention team training applicable to corrections (DeHart, 2019). What is missing is dedicated training in mental health or trauma for large numbers of prison staff who have daily contact with prisoners. Prison officers in particular may not have the time or resources for self-guided learning. Orientation training in prisons can include a brief introduction to mental health issues such as suicide and self-harm, but there are few resources for in-depth training, refresher training or more comprehensive multi-day training (DeHart & Iachini, 2019).

The importance of collaborating and learning together was brought up, but borrowing learning resources from the neighbouring disciplines was considered to be a problem. One interviewee explained that there is a general lack of context-specific learning materials for prison officers whose work involves finding a balance between control and rehabilitation:

I also have a problem with the curriculum – we do not have enough research in prisons, nor enough literature from prison work. So we borrow some literature from other similar professions, like nursing and stuff like that. But it is not always quite the same for the work in prisons. Especially since we have this very special role, where we are both guards and also

should rehabilitate. This is a very dualistic role that they do not have in other professions – like nurses, they only help, but we are supposed to, like, punish them and help them at the same time. And we also have this power that we have to deal with in a very responsible way. So there should be more research and literature in prison work that we can use here. Because I think that is why it maybe feels like it is not useful, because it is not made for prison a lot of the time. (B1 supervisor)

This suggests there is a need to conduct more research concerning prison officers' work – not only associated with collaboration with mental health professionals, but also in other fields of their work and learning.

5. The future of prison work

The interviewees had varied views of the future of prisons and prison work – both positive and negative. One major concern was cuts in funding targeted at prisons and the CJS. The cuts were explained to be largely salary-based, and their effects on prison officers' work were described. It was explained that not only prison officers but also other professionals, such as social workers and drug consultants, had experienced cuts.

One interviewee's negative perception of the future was that there will be fewer prison officers and more aggressive inmates challenging the security of prisoners, staff and the community. Other negative viewpoints were that the developments in prison work will be reversed, that there will be fewer possibilities for rehabilitation, and that the role of the prison officer will become less dynamic:

[Because of cuts in funding] there will be less help for the prisoners, there will be less progression in the sentencing, so they ... For the people in prison, it is going to be like when I started in the '90s – you are in prison, period. (B6 supervisor)

Maybe it is a little bit old school in some ways [now]. Because it is like it has always been like this – they have to be in the cells from this time to this time, and we are just sitting in the office and could have them outside, we could bake with them or we could go out with them. So I hope the future is to do more normal things with them too. (B3 student)

Prisoners do not get better – they get more ill if they are locked up in a room. I hope and think there will be some new units, or collaboration between the healthcare and the prison system, so we can have a better system to help them. That will maybe also affect the client groups, what kind of people we have in the prison. So I do hope that we do not change, like that everything gets externalised for services, that our role doesn't become more like that of the static guard. Because I see the value of working with the inmates and building the relationships – it is also important for my security to have a good relationship, professional relationship, with the inmates. And you get that by acting together with them or doing things together. So I think that is a way to be active in the common areas, to do things with the inmates. (B10 supervisor)

Increased collaboration with the key actors within the CJS was considered to be important, but there were doubts about this materialising in the future:

We speak and communicate even more with the other departments, like school and health. And we get a lot of those who are coming from the outside, like I was in the Red Cross, more communication with them as well.

Interviewer: Do you think that is going to happen, or is this something that you wish will happen?

I do not think it is going to happen, but I wish there would be more things like that. Because we are walking around in a uniform, the uniform creates a distance. There is no doubt about it. So it is not always easy to gain access, if I can put it like that, to the inmates. Sometimes you do, and sometimes you do not. (B4 student)

Another interviewee emphasised the importance of working together with the key actors, but also had concerns over decreasing resources initiating the increased involvement of third sector organisations and municipalities, and what this could mean for the role of the prison officers:

The positive thought is that, in the future, the prison officers will have become a lot more integrated with the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, the Blue Cross, health, school, and be a part or a team. (...) The negative thought is that future prison officers will be prison officers, and just be locking and unlocking the prisoners in their cells or following them around, and all of that work with the prisoners – you know, the work to make them better people – will be done by other professionals, like health municipal workers, Red Cross, Blue Cross, the Salvation Army. That is a negative when we look at how much money we have and what KDI [the Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service] wants us to do. (B6 supervisor)

I do hope that we do not change, like that everything gets externalised for services, that our role doesn't become more like that of the static guard. Because I see the value of working with the inmates and building the relationships – it is also important for my security to have a good relationship, professional relationship, with the inmates. And you get that by acting together with them or doing things together. So I think that is a way to be active in the common areas, to do things with the inmates. And I think some prisoners are good at it, but not everybody. (B10 supervisor)

One future prospect was to focus on rehabilitation on the individual level, helping prisoners to integrate better into society when released:

I think there is going to be more focus on treating people who have problems, sort of identifying more at the individual level – what they have been through, how to help them (...) It will become more important for the inmates to learn, (...) teach them how to fix things for themselves. Because when they eventually get out if, we have ended up doing everything for them, they will not have any experience of dealing with their own problems. (B5 student)

It was also predicted that there will be an increase in the number of open prisons, which would also make it easier for released prisoners to integrate into normal life.

The interviewees talked about changes in the prisoner population and in crimes. One of the changes mentioned was the growing number of prisoners with mental health issues, with the potential need of having a system or a place that is between the prisons and the mental health institutions.

I hope and think there will be some new units, or collaboration between the healthcare and the prison system, so we can have a better system to help them. That will maybe also affect the client groups, what kind of people we have in the prison. (B10 supervisor)

The increased average age of the prison population was also considered to create challenges in the future – in particular, older age combined with health issues. Older prisoners (aged over 50) are the fastest-growing group in many countries. In conjunction with the ageing prison population, there will also be a growing number of prisoners with dementia, but prison staff and health and social care professionals have reported a lack of skills and knowledge not only to identify and support prisoners with dementia, but also to identify the difference between dementia, mental health conditions, and psychotic episodes due to illegal drug use in the prison setting. This may be due to a lack of dementia education that is designed and comprehensively delivered specifically for prisons (Brooke & Rybacka, 2020; Dillon et al., 2018; Gaston, 2018).

There were views that online crime (crimes that require the use of computer technology or the existence of other information technology) and sex crime will be increasing.

I have also talked to people, prison officers who have worked here a long time, who say that this [sex crimes] has gone through the roof lately. (B5 student)

Research shows that both online and sex crimes have increased in severity and frequency over the past two decades (Maimon & Louderback, 2019; Friestad et al., 2021). The proportion of sex offenders in Norwegian prisons has risen considerably, and constituted 20% of the prison population in 2018 (The Prison Service, 2020: 28). The recent introduction of harsher punishments for sexual offences is likely to be the cause of this development (Friestad et al., 2021).

Following a professionalisation strategy, there are plans to introduce changes to prison officer training, making it a three-year, unpaid programme of education. These changes were discussed by some of the interviewees. One assumption was that the new programme would attract more young people than it currently does. This is because it would no longer be paid education. Such a change was considered to be somewhat problematic, as it was explained that employees who have longer life experience are needed in prisons.

Technological developments and digitalisation were welcome prospects. Instead of relying on paper forms, online communication and information would be beneficial for both prisoners and staff.

I believe that the whole picture is developing in a positive way – as you said about the digitalisation, the prisoners are becoming more self-efficient. They can, for example, contact their social networks by themselves, maybe that is making things easier. And I have not tried it, but maybe that gets rid of some of the work for us, so we can focus on something else, for example. (B9 student)

It has been reported that the use of digital technologies increases prisoners' wellbeing and independence, which helps in their integration into society. What is not yet known is whether

technology decreases prisoners' contacts with other humans (Burns, 2013; Johnson & Hail-Jares, 2016).

From a global perspective, it was emphasised that Norway has the lowest percentage of people returning to prison within five years, and the importance of the continued development of the CJS was also taken up:

I think it is important that, as an organisation, it keeps challenging itself. Not thinking that, "this has always worked, so we should just keep doing this", but to see new opportunities, possibilities. (...) So you have seen several changes over the years – some for the better and some for the worse, in my opinion. But I do hope that, as an organisation, kriminalomsorgen [the Norwegian Correctional Service] keeps moving forward and continues to focus on rehabilitation with the inmates, and the prison officers shall also have an important role in the rehabilitation work. (B10 supervisor)

Lastly, an important ethical issue was taken up from the perspective of finding the balance between treating the prisoners with respect and ensuring the safety of the prison officers:

The big question is how we can make their stay here less humiliating for the inmates. Trying not to like to screw up the laws, and not just national laws, but international laws. And see that we treat them with respect – that is probably the biggest change that is going to happen. Then again, it is going to be really hard finding a compromise – for example, concerns about not using too much force – how much force can we use, how much force can we use on inmates who are like crazy? Should we just take them to the hospital straight away? (...) Who can decide that? Are people just like that more because we need the doctor to tell us, and maybe when the doctor comes the inmate is not that bad, and when he leaves he is crazy again? Should we just let him sit in his cell and destroy everything and call us the most (...) "Yeah, I am going to rape your family" or whatever, and not use any force on him – should that not get consequences, there and then? (...) Can we put them in a safety cell? That is a big ethical question: should we focus on what is best for the inmates, or should we focus on what is best for the prison officers? That question is already up for discussion, and it is going to be even bigger question in the next 5-10 years. It is going to be a huge question in the next 5-10 years. (B10 supervisor)

This can be conceptualised as an ethical value dilemma that involves, on the one hand, various interpretations of care and/or rehabilitation, and, on the other hand, concern towards prison officers and the institution (van Dijk et al., 2021).

6. Summary

The study showed that the prison officer students who were interviewed were satisfied with the education, and the importance of both practice and theory was brought up. The views regarding how much experienced prison officers learn from students varied. Learning in collaboration with other students was viewed as a good way to learn and also to learn how to collaborate. Reflecting on what had been learnt was an example of good learning practice. Communication was highlighted as the most relevant learning topic.

Regarding the continuing professional development of prison officers, the most-discussed learning needs were concerned with communication and mental health issues. Prison officers were described as having a range of learning opportunities, offered by KRUS or trade unions. Two of the main issues impeding prison officers' participation in continuing professional development were the limited time to arrange training and a lack of financial resources. One suggestion was to arrange more learning and training opportunities on-site, to make them easier to attend. Not learning about or being able to provide specific services for female prisoners was also considered to be a problem.

The importance of collaborating and learning together with other professional groups, with mental health professionals in particular, was expressed by the interviewees. Borrowing learning resources from the neighbouring disciplines was considered to be problematic, with regard to the need for context-specific learning materials for prison officers, whose work involves finding a balance between control and rehabilitation.

The future of prison work and the CJS was discussed from a range of different viewpoints. The numbers of aggressive prisoners, old prisoners and prisoners with mental health issues were expected to grow. The need to continue the development of prisons was emphasised, and concerns over the future role of the prison officer were expressed.

Possible changes in prison officer education were considered to be challenging from the demographic viewpoint of students. Non-paid education might not attract the experienced candidates that are needed in prisons.

7. Recommendations for future research

The research process provided five suggestions for future research:

- Conduct research into prison officers' learning and continuing professional development (see Ryan et al., 2022).
- Continue research into collaboration between prison staff and the key stakeholders, in particular mental health professionals, and develop new ways of working to support collaboration (see Hean et al., 2020; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).
- Conduct research into prison services, in Norway in particular, to support the development of specific learning materials and methods in the field of prison officer education and prison officers' continuous professional development.
- Conduct research into prison officer education in Norway. As this is more extensive than in many countries, others can learn from Norway (see Eide & Westrheim, 2020).
- Conduct research into female prisoners, with the aim of developing gender-specific services for them to overcome the inequality between female and male prisoners. Similar concerns were expressed in this project's case study in Finland (Kaatrakoski, 2022).

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