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Statement on the 2019/2020 Article of the Year:

‘Unhappy Staff, Unhappy Prisoners? The Relation Between Work Climate and Prison Climate in Dutch Prisons’

by Esther F.J.C. van Ginneken, Anouk Q. Bosma, Amanda Pasma & Hanneke Palmen

In modern states founded on the rule of law, custodial sentences are the ultima ratio for good reason. Depriving a person of their liberty is not a measure that should be taken lightly: when such a sentence is passed, imprisonment must take place under precisely defined conditions and in a dignified manner. Ultimately, the punishment should solely be the deprivation of freedom and not, for instance, difficult conditions within the prison setting.

Criminology must fulfil the crucial task of conducting research into the penal system as well as helping to humanise the process by sharing the outcomes of its analysis. However, in most European countries, research is usually focused solely on the national system and not conducted in a systematic fashion. Relevant studies predominantly centre on individual prisons. In general, the focus is on prisoners; only rarely does research explore the key role played by prison staff. Researchers seldom turn their attention specifically to the direct correlation between one side’s job satisfaction and the other’s satisfaction with prison conditions.

The authors Esther F.J.C. van Ginneken, Anouk Q. Bosma, Amanda Pasma and Hanneke Palmen have managed to successfully examine this interplay with the help of an impressive dataset. In their study ‘Unhappy Staff, Unhappy Prisoners? The Relation between Work Climate and Prison Climate in Dutch Prisons’, the researchers from Leiden University in the Netherlands investigate the extent to which differences in prison officers’ satisfaction with their work climate in various areas of a prison influence the perception of the prison climate. This study is the first to take a multivariate and multilevel approach to the question at the heart of the paper. The authors used a dataset from the Life in Custody Study, a nationwide survey of adult men and women incarcerated in the Netherlands. They examined responses from 1,508 correctional officers and 3,883 incarcerated individuals. The result confirms that a high workload was negatively associated with the perception of the prison climate, while support from colleagues showed positive associations. The authors are able to show that the correctional officers’ satisfaction and the wellbeing of the prisoners are linked. They accordingly stress that political decisions influencing one of these two parties would ultimately have an impact on both. This article is well structured, based on a remarkable pool of data and features an innovative study design. The results are important for both research and policymaking and thus take account of criminology’s duty to pursue ethical research that is relevant to society as a whole. The

significance of this study cannot be overstated, and it should serve as inspiration for similar research at the European level.

The German-speaking members of the advisory board and the editorial team at *Kriminologie – Das Online Journal | Criminology – The Online Journal* have thus decided to name the paper our 2019/2020 Article of the Year.

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