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Ethical Considerations and Reimagining State Corrections: Education and Work Partnerships for Offenders Return to Home and Community

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Abstract

This paper describes a mixed method study of 16,000 postings on Twitter, YouTube, and Reddit related to corrections (prison) reforms and a survey of 140 participants in this discourse who expressed a strong interest in reform focused on ethics, education, and work partnerships. The theoretical modeling of “what works,” arguably, can facilitate the reform of individual offenders as well as rehabilitation and recidivism-reduction programs. The methodology combined a review of empirical research for years 1990 to 2018 with social media posts by members of the public and a narrative survey of public professionals. The results indicated that work, education, and morality all have significant roles to play in reimagining prison systems so that simply warehousing prisoners and “nothing works” thinking become ideas of the past. The COVID-19 pandemic and social justice concerns about prisoners have created conditions conducive to social media activism aimed at making prisons more humane. Accordingly, corrections professionals, policymakers, and students need solid research on these issues to assess the outcomes of corrections policies for communities.

Introduction

Advocates for efforts to promote administrative efficiency in corrections (i.e., prisons) object to the traditional warehousing of offenders’ characteristic of modern prison management an approach that shows the failing design of department of corrections (prisons) while research proves the efficacy of education and training programs in many situations. The public discourse on social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Reddit draw attention to issues as arrests and incarceration in correctional facilities and, especially, the use of excessive force against minority suspects (Mihalek & Frankel, 2019). There are currently around 250 million U.S. users of these social media platforms, with an increase of 10 million by 2023 predicted to bring user penetration to 67% (Marrow, 2019; Statista, 2020); and, 52% of Americans “strongly agree” that social media channel discussions can impact public policy making (Holmes, 2017). Social media posts can generate millions of responses (including likes and heart, thumbs-up, and face emoji) and retweets, all of which the Pulsar Social Media Listening system analyzes. Analysis of thousands of posts for this study were identified using the keywords “prison reform,” “ethics,” and “morality,” including mentions of the inhumane nature of prisons, over-reliance on incarceration, and the possibility of second chances (Roth & Manager, 2014) for offenders through education and work.

Successful prisoner reintegration in society (i.e., as ex-offenders) depends on numerous factors, including prison-based education and work training (Hughes, 2016; Moses & Smith, 2007; Smith, 2018; Tolbert, 2002; Waintrup & Unruh, 2008; Western et al., 2000). Moral and ethical characteristics such as integrity, empathy, and grace are attracting increasing attention as managerial skills with which prisons must equip members of their staff, especially those working to prepare prisoners to reenter the workforce (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2018). The present study summarizes and interprets the recent research about work and education rehabilitation programs with public-private partnerships and describes recent discussions on social media and the responses of 140 participants in a survey on issues relating to rehabilitation and morality.

Problem Statement

The specific problem addressed here is the discrepancy regarding the best way forward for corrections in the United States between the conclusions of researchers on the one hand and the opinions of individuals involving reform of correctional systems. The failing discussants on social media platforms and survey respondents about the topic are staff professionals in criminal justice, future careerists, students and activists that anticipate civic engagement on social media channels to influence policy making to improve future prison systems. This discrepancy reflects differing views about a proper balance between social equity and public safety. Political and social welfare scholars and social scientists tend to envision corrections in distributive terms, as the equitable provision of benefits to organizations and members of a community (Rawls, 1971). Simon's ideas about efficiency require distinct innovation using evidence and public discourse in public policy making processes, otherwise threatens free speech/expression. To understand why corrections (prison) administration over-rely on recidivism reduction schemes as electronic monitoring and prison cells and retributive justice ideology, I examine the literature, combining new knowledge from the social media users and survey respondents perspectives. There is a role for work partnerships (public-private job trainings) and education which have proved effective in the context of modern correctional systems and those envisioning for the future (U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance [BJA], 2018; U.S. BJS, 2018). The U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons (2020, p. 19) reported that its costs in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 were \$7.1 million, representing an increase of 0.8% over the previous year. Among these costs were pastoral activities programs (\$49,000), and education and vocational programs (\$150,000), and unit management for vocational life skills training (\$400,000). Of course, the overall costs of incarceration are very high (Marshall Project, 2019). The disproportionate funding of prison infrastructure has left inmates' medical needs unmet. In a sense, these outcomes are the price of accountability, which is only achievable by providing the appropriate resources to committed professionals whose decisions are guided by morality with empathy and grace (Burlone, 2006; Costello, 2008; Gigerenzer, 2009). Civic discourse, including discussions on social media, can help to resolve the ethical dilemmas that have prevented corrections institutions from realizing their potential. Subdivide text into unnumbered sections, using short, meaningful sub-headings. Please do not use numbered headings. Please limit heading use to three levels. Please use 12-point bold for first-level headings, 10-point bold for second-level headings, and 10-point italics for third-level headings with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns. Leave one blank line (1.5 times spaced) before and after each heading. (Exception: no blank line between consecutive headings.) Please margin all headings to the left.

Literature

Work, Education, and Morality

The issues of employability, training, and proper behavior are, then, central to efforts to return ex-offenders to society successfully. Consider that annually some 650,000 ex-offenders returning home fail to meet conditions of parole within 6 months to 3 years having trouble rebuilding their life at home and in the community (Public Law 110-199, Sec.3, 2021). Collaborations often represent the optimal context for addressing these issues and reducing ex-offenders' employability risk factors (ERFs; Garth-Lewis, 1994). Such aspects of an individual's work ethic as reliability, dependability, interpersonal skills, and teamwork need to be inculcated in prison programs and reinforced in post-release programs. The jobs available in the modern labor market—from hairdressers and retail salespersons to administrative office support staff and construction workers—nearly all require more than a secondary (high school) education. For this reason, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) lists a college degree as a minimum job standard for most new entrants in the labor force, with the data for the years since 2014 revealing a growing demand for special certifications.

At the same time, administrators have been facing an outcry from ethnic minorities and advocates for reform of the justice system that highlights the need to develop more just and safer workplaces. Since the tasks of modern workers are so often collaborative, these issues are central to the formation and deployment of effective teams. Political realities continue to shape corrections policies while prison administrators seek to provide education as an alternative to the haphazard and often futile efforts at both corrections reform and crime control. Restraint is necessary here, for there is a danger of losing track of “what works” amid the ongoing reforms (for instance, through the enactment of various sentencing schemes). Research in the social sciences regarding “what works” in the reform of individual offenders consistently points to approaches that are collaborative, systematic, and empathetic.

Codes of ethics serve to clarify the duties of public servants working in corrections, which include helping to guarantee social justice at their institutions. They can do so by emphasizing ethics, especially in the context of educational and training initiatives. A new framework is necessary that reflects the demographic and economic conditions of a global society as well as communities' values and expectations so that ex-offenders return ready to contribute rather than destabilize. Friends, crime victims, and criminal offenders as well as policymakers, educators, and justice professionals must join forces to reduce recidivism.

Alongside the principle of “what works,” that of “doing the right thing” informs successful efforts to help individual offenders achieve reform goals. By contrast, structural inequities, including insufficient funding of rehabilitation programs, exacerbate social instability. There is general agreement that access to correctional education and collaborative job training (Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Programs) prepares offenders to contribute once they return home (Sexton, 1992; Urban Institute, 2016; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

Partnerships for Job Preparation

Research on the British penal system has shown the value of work programs and the impact of various philosophies regarding the efficiency and accountability of public organizations (Simon, 1999). The efficacy of prison-based work models such as promising joint-venture work programs reveals the irrationality of corrections policies forged without meaningful conversations about providing prisoners with marketable job skills and experience during incarceration. The fewer than 3% of prisoners who have been obtaining real-world work experience through Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Programs (PIECPs; BJA, 2018), for example, work for private employers in collaboration with prison-based companies. These positions pay the minimum or prevailing wage for comparable work done by free labor. The triple bottom line with respect to profits, people, and social responsibility is always in view with PIECPs because they act as businesses, interviewing, hiring, training, and paying inmate laborers. The PIECP law encourages state and local departments of corrections to collaborate with private companies, creating specific arrangements corresponding to each partners' needs. Partner models such as the PIECP Customer and Employer (Joint Venture) model (Sexton, 1992) are popular. The various forms of this model are as follows.

1. In the *Customer Model*, a private-sector firm purchases a significant amount of product from a state-owned and operated venture. For example, at the Utah Correctional State Prison at Draper, the printing and graphics shop operation manufactures signs that re purchase by outside vendors.
2. In the *Manager Model*, the management of a publicly owned concern is manageable entirely by a private firm, an example being PRIDE Industries' collaboration with Florida's state correctional agencies.
3. In the *Joint Venture or Employer Model*, a private firm pays inmates to do work on the prison grounds. This model is popular among penal institutions for juveniles as well as adults. The private company controls the hiring, firing, and supervising of the inmate-workers and pays the prevailing or minimum wage. An outstanding example of this model is the Kansas Correctional Institution partnership with Zephyr Products company, bringing the private firm's metal fabrication operation behind bars (inception in the 1990s), which has generated several million dollars in federal and state taxes and returned over \$600 million to society through reimbursements to the state for room and board and other fees.

This kind of work is meaningful when it commands offenders' interest, utilizes their skills, and enhances their marketable job skills while reducing their ERFs. Among the factors leading to recidivism, the issue of employment bulks large (U.S. Department of Justice Archives, 2020). Simply put, the evidence indicates that offenders who work in prison-based workshops have lower recidivism rates than those without work experience. Certainly, the various prison-based work models have various advantages and disadvantages. Any kind of partnership between prisons and private industry in this regard is likely to suffer during economic downturns when jobs are scarce, as in the 2008 recession. Likewise, unions have often opposed such partnerships out of concern that prison labor may replace free labor and create downward pressure on wages and efforts to improve working conditions (Lewis, 1994; PIECP, 2018). There have also been disturbing allegations regarding the exploitation of incarcerated workers, including violations of Occupational Health and Safety (OSHA) and Fair Labor Standards Acts rules (Prison Labor Megs, 2018). In state

departments of corrections, the updating of administrative rules and regulations and oversight from the U.S. Department of Justice are helping to eliminate problems (BJA, 2018).

Morality (ethics) concerns relate to the treatment of prisoners as individuals who deserve a second chance to gain marketable job skills and contribute to their families and neighborhoods have been informing the “what works” ethos of rehabilitation. Humane treatment includes making counseling and medical treatment as well as work and education available to prisoners and ex-offenders. A roundtable discussion bringing together corrections and business professionals reflected on the extent of the fiscal burden of the nation’s one million incarcerated men, reducing the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) by \$100 to \$200 billion dollars (Urban Institute Report, 2016). Petersilia (2004), on the other hand, found that releasing thousands of prisoners per year stretches correctional supervision services so thin as to have an adverse impact on outcomes for ex-offenders

Social Media and Prison Reform

The work to re-envision corrections, then, can begin with a consideration of promising evidence-based rehabilitation strategies for counseling, substance-abuse treatment, job skills training, and other basic services for prisoners that have been investigated in the social sciences literature (e.g., Andrews, 2012; Cullen & Gilbert, 2012; Koenig, 2007) as well as public discussions of these services on social media platforms. To begin with, there is a clear need to bolster ex-offenders’ self-esteem and sense of belonging to a household and community. Reconceptualizing corrections administration from the perspective of rehabilitation also involves systemic change and assessing the moral and ethical accountability of corrections professionals throughout their careers.

An approach to prison management and prisoner rehabilitation is emerging, then, that combines organizational efficacy with humanitarian (ethical) considerations within the context of the existing public correctional infrastructure. However, the comparison of notions of “what works” in prison reform and reincorporating ex-offenders into their communities as described in the literature on the one hand and social media posts and survey responses for this study on the other revealed tension between the former and the latter. In recent years, administrators involved in policymaking and agenda-setting as well as powerful politicians (including governors and presidents) have been turning to social media as a source of information about a range of issues, including corrections, a gauge of public opinion, and a bully pulpit (Christenson et al., 2020). Currently, the members of the millennial generation now entering the field of corrections and mid-career professionals alike are anxious to implement meaningful reform. Therefore, there is optimism about corrections reforms, especially those that consider morality and ethics—in particular, accountability and managerial empathy—to bring about the long-hoped-for change “from nothing works to what works” (Gendreau & Ross, 1987). Collective opinions on social media have the potential to change policies that politicians implement under the influence of lobbyists rather than considering the empirical evidence, such as the prohibition against prisoners from accessing Pell Grants for college study that Batiuk et al. (2005) described as “ill-conceived.”

Regarding parole preparation programs that can reduce recidivism by providing education and training to practitioners and generally helping to fulfill the mission of rehabilitation, perhaps discarding uniformed penology that over-relies on retribution. Future corrections require policies rooted in “faith in prison’s curative powers” (Cullen & Gendreau, 1989, p. 23; cf. Gehring, 2000). Public expressions on social media can pressure national leaders to consider corrections reforms that address issues such as racism in the system and the mistreatment of prisoners as well as education and post-incarceration employment (Echiner, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The public is not alone in its desire to do more than simply warehousing prisoners. Thus, the findings presented here indicate that professionals entering the field want to feel a sense of accomplishment on the job. Importantly, according to a recent report from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons (2020), prisoners have been returning home with increasing self-confidence, and correctional professionals have had greater confidence in working with them. This outcome seems attributable, at least in part, to the availability of additional resources and a new mission for U.S. corrections rooted in the notion that the rehabilitation of prisoners can enhance public safety (RAND Corporation, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Theory

Herbert Simon (1946) outlined key aspects of administrative science and theory in his day, including principles for administrative efficiency. Recognizing the politics and power influence on public administrations and management, then pathways to effective compromise is essential. Considering tasks shared among the members of groups, forms of authority, and purposes of control in agencies as well as rational and non-rational decision frameworks, Simon viewed administration from the perspective of the logic of rational choice. Information is necessary for rational choices, especially in the context of markets and of government responses to public crises—such as large numbers of ex-offenders returning to society. However, public administrators daily recognize that high quality and unbiased information is not always easy to come by. Accountability systems are hierarchical, involving layers of approval, and the various specializations in modern public organizations have requirements for various certifications, degrees, and ongoing training that can be frustrating and even counterproductive. Therefore, sometimes, the status quo practices, being familiar, are the only ones considered feasible. We forget how to lead with humility. Laws such as the Second Chance Act of 2008 provide guidance for corrections and education professionals by promoting work and education as recidivism-reduction strategies as well as administrative dynamism. Likewise, faith-based initiatives incorporate rational assessments of the relevant facts, and the practice of grace facilitates justice and inclusion for those seeking to resolve problems and crises by emphasizing coordination and collaboration. In prison administration, these measures foster accountability, moral and ethical behavior, and reform.

Evidence for practice is combining reliable and sufficient information otherwise it is *non-rational and* favors gut reactions to problem solving. *Nonrational decisions are not irrational and can, in fact, be useful for uniting people in support of a transformative cause—such as corrections reform.* Simon’s ideas about administrative behavior and efficiency, including the importance of scientific inquiry (i.e., empirical research), remain relevant to identifying compromise and political-administrative will to manage corrections. In the present context, they provide a basis for assessing the role of social media discourse in policy decisions. Simon’s goal of developing a

science of administration and disseminating knowledge to assist policymakers and public administrators with decision-making, especially to promote administrative efficiency, remains applicable and, for this reason, students in the social sciences (i.e., public administration, business, and corrections) continue to make use of his approach to scientific research and public discourse to inform decision-making. It is clear that the ability to make evidence-based decisions and the moral temperament to recognize humane alternatives, in the context of both rational and non-rational frameworks, are key characteristics of transformational public leaders.

Thus, the thinking about corrections reform has been evolving rapidly, fueled in part by discussions on social media of the need to focus on offenders' humanity and the reincorporation of ex-offenders into homes and communities. These considerations guided the formulation of the following research questions:

1. What extent does public discourse affect corrections (prison) reform?
2. What are the perceptions of social media users and scientists (expert researchers) about evidence relating to corrections (prison) reforms?

The research focused especially on perceptions of morality and ethics in relation to corrections reform efforts.

Method

The Pulsar audience intelligence and social listening platform quantifies the reactions to posts on social media (retweets, shares, and comments) and emojis, which are pictorial representations of hearts, faces, hands, and so on used to represent reactions to posts. The platform measures these data in the form of "engagements" by users of social media indicating actual counts (i.e., of pieces of the content in re-tweets and comments). Total posts plus engagements in affinity groups, forums, and blogs have comments and emoji expressions (for total impressions). The actual comments—the qualitative data—are determined by reviewing each one; on a specific social media channel, such as Twitter. These results show numbers of emotional content on a "sentiment rating scale" using happy, neutral, or sad emojis.

For this mixed method study, first, the Pulsar Social Medial Learning TRAC system collects social media communications. The Pulsar qualitative data are social media users communications from news sites, corrections forums, and professional forums on which the topics of reform, work, education, and ethics relating to corrections were popular. In graphical representations of the data such as the one shown in Figure 1, the blue timeline indicates the volume of the engagements and mentions on these social media channels pertaining to the search terms "corrections reform," "prison reform," "morality and prisons," "work and education," and, simply, "prisons." The sentiment scale is based on the frequency of emoji and words such as "trust," "good," "bad," "anger," "happy," and "disgust," with a scale in this case ranging from -50 to +50. The ratings represent slogans such as "prisons punishing people is bad" and "prisons are cages" as well as, again, thumbs up or down (likes, dislikes) and emoji faces (happy, neutral, unhappy). Attached to each number are the actual engagements representing a given social media channel in the Pulsar Index. The analysis aggregated large amounts of commentaries and multiple impressions.

The search covered the social media outlets Twitter, YouTube, Facebook (through a 30-day topic search), and

Reddit, which together accounted for the bulk of social media users’ communications with the research topic. Prison affinity groups were particularly prominent on YouTube, their posts attracting numerous pointed comments about the need to make prisons more effective and humane. Notably, the Reddit posts focused on non-violent offenders, and compassionate approaches to prison reform. These social media users, then, addressed the efficiency, morality, and ethics of the professionals who work with prisoners and ex-offenders, some even entertaining the notion of defunding prisons and rendering them obsolete. The quantitative methodology involves an analysis of public domain materials in the library databases JSTOR and ABI/Inform as well as a conducting computerized survey (September 8-15, 2021) of 150 corrections professionals (140 of whom completed it), social workers, and educators with a keen interest in these issues. Data analysis support was using Intellectus Statistical software. Lastly, a comparison of the results of the survey and the social media data on the one hand with the academic literature on the other provide the basis for the study conclusions.

Results

The keywords for the search, as mentioned, included “corrections/prison reform,” “work and education,” and “morals and ethics.” There were 24,220 total mentions and engagements of these terms on Reddit (7,891), YouTube (944), and Twitter (15,385) during the period of data collection (Figure 1).

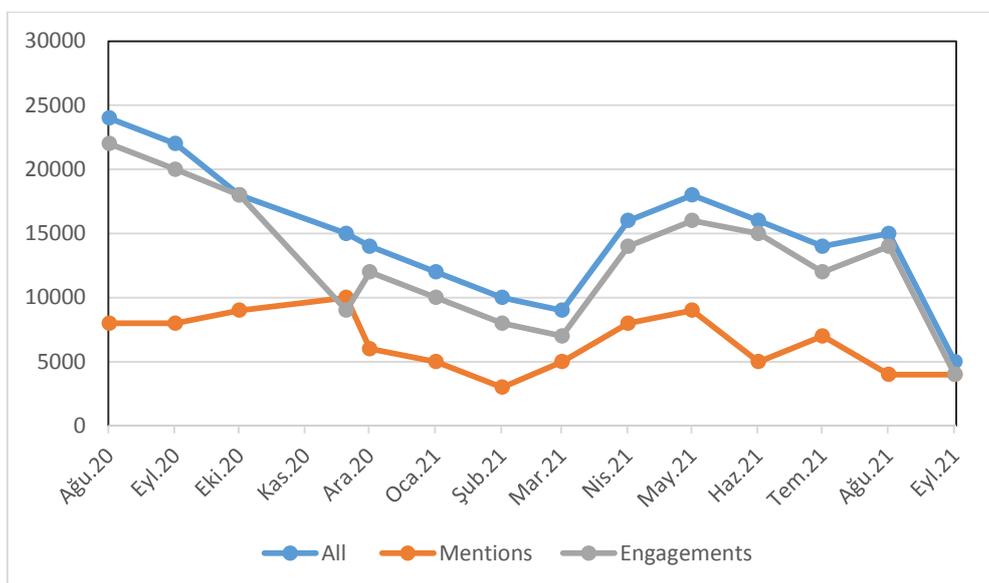


Figure 1. Mentions and Engagements on Social Media Platforms

The analysis of the social media forums on the topics of corrections, prison, work, and education covered the period from August 3, 2020, to August 2, 2021. In all, the 85,000 communications include nearly 25,000 engagements and mentions (Figure 1) were of interests that mention all our key words prison reform, work and education and moral or ethics. The engagements were richer discussions (2 or more lines). Together, the communications will generate millions of impressions (likes, dislikes, hearts, and other emoji characterizations) without discussions (text, or anecdotes). The sentiment scale rating was 19 (representing 24% positive

engagements and 62% negative comments), as indicated by a sad emoji. Sixty-two percent of discussions were on Reddit, with 40 engagements related to prisoners and prisons, 23.7 impressions, and a -25 rating on the sentiment scale. The demographic, geographic, and employment data analyzed by the Pulsar platform as well as the survey data represent U.S. residents. The survey respondent’s groupings by age cohorts (18-29, 38%; 30-44, 53%; 45-60, 25%). Their jobs or industries included education (28%) and, naturally, criminal justice (23%; corrections, police, and aftercare workers). The forum titles served to perform a manual count of the social media users’ occupations, again including corrections as well as students in the social sciences and economics. The Pulsar results provided insights into users’ perceptions, as did their comments. For instance, a Reddit user’s comment that “Prisoners need help” received 4 hearts, 173 views, and 23,314 impressions; another that “People are suffering, laws still exist today that were relevant 200-years about and not used to institutionalize slavery in private prison; morally wrong” received 589 views and 4,302 impressions. The probability that social media had a great effect on corrections reform was moderate ($p=0.4$). The participants’ age had a moderate effect on their perceptions of prison reforms (e.g., for the 18-29 cohort, $p=0.3$; for the 30-44 cohort, $p=0.4$).

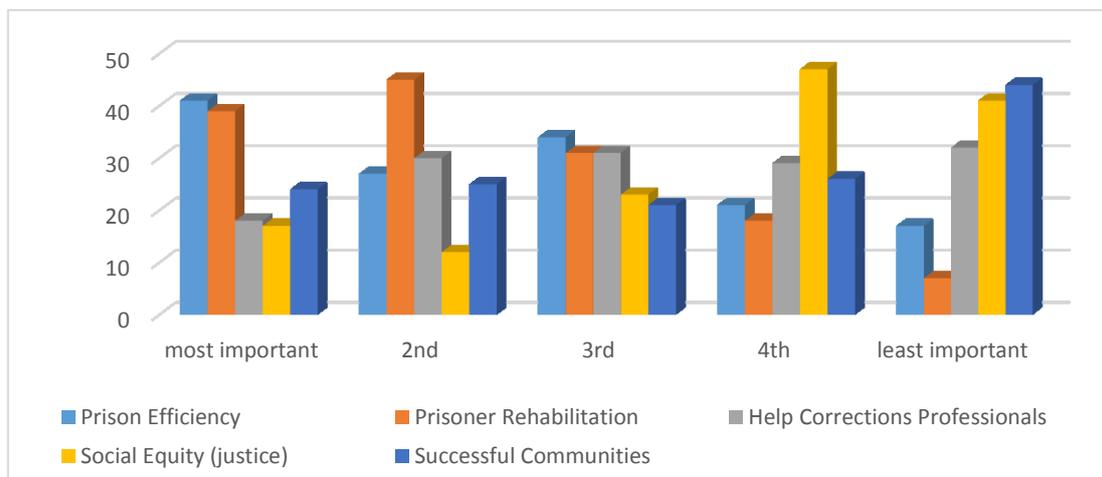


Figure 2. Q6: Reasons for Corrections (prison) Reform

As shown in Figure 2, all 140 participants in the survey singled out rehabilitation as the primary reason for prison reform; the second most important reason was prison efficiency; the third was helping corrections professionals with their job tasks; the fourth was social equity and justice; and successful communities was the least important reason. The social media data results were similar though not ranked. About 40% of the respondents agreed with the experts (i.e., the scientific literature) that equipping communities with information, regulations (e.g., Public Law 110-199, or Second Chance Act) and focusing on rehabilitation (work and education) and risk factors can help individual prisoners achieve their goals.

The bulk of these sentiments were expressed in discussions on Reddit and Twitter and YouTube posts, among which 62% of commentaries included the words or phrases “rehabilitate,” “help offenders, or “second chance” and/or called for more humane corrections policies. There was no consensus among the respondents to the survey regarding the value of religious activities (i.e., pastoral counseling), with 38% expressing no opinion and 30% viewing such activities favorably. There was little discussion of these topics on social media

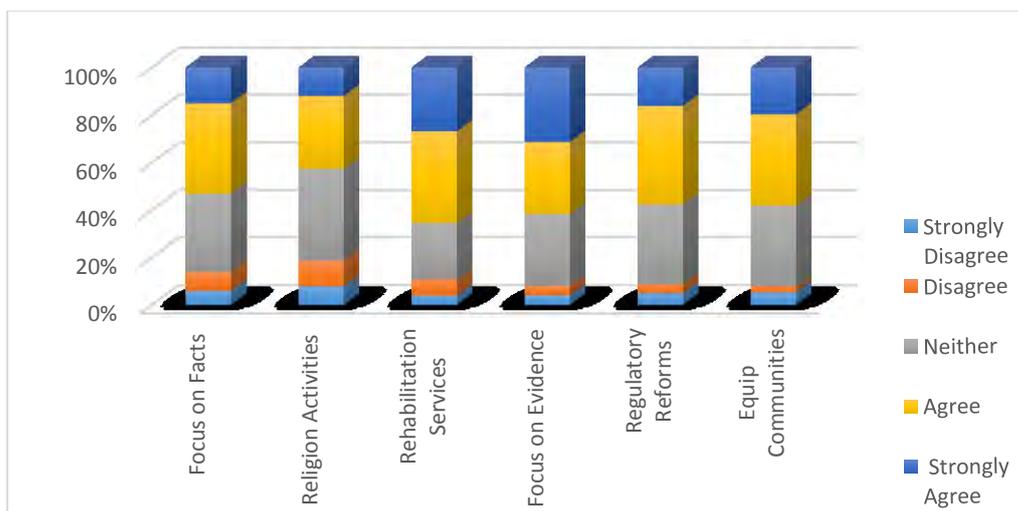


Figure 3. Q5: Level of Agreement Among Experts (research) About Prison Reform

As Figure 3 shows, the 140 responses to the question about “what works” in prison reform most often named aftercare services (43%), and sizable portions named family and community ties (30%) and rehabilitation and recidivism reduction resources (30%). A third (33%) expressed strong disagreement with the notion of eliminating prisons, with greater support for this notion expressed on social media. For example, among the survey narratives, one respondent says Prison Reform should be our first issue. Follow the Scandinavian model. Prison is not ‘rock bottom’ people can rehabilitate. Punishment in the name of forced labor is unhealthy. Habitual criminals drain our resources.” Among the social media comments, one user states “Overcrowding is a problem in time of COVID-19”; another affirmed that morality and ethics are “tossed aside for power”; and another urged “abolish prisons because they are cages.” A YouTube user wrote that “crimes committed by nobility in Aztec society were usually punished more severely than crimes committed by commoners, since nobles and the elite were held to a higher standard and expected to behave better,” garnering 121,084 views and 2,829,787 impressions.

Most of the social media posts about morals and ethics mentioned dishonesty and injustice in the prison system (e.g., “dishonesty and lock-up is the fate of people”). A Spearman correlation analysis is conducted for the mentions and engagements. Cohen’s (1988) standard served to evaluate the strength of the relationship, with coefficients from .10 to .29 representing a small effect size, from .30 to .49 representing a moderate effect size, and above .50 indicating a large effect size ($\alpha = 0.05$). A significant positive correlation was observed between mentions and engagements ($r_s = 0.64$, $p = .015$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.87]), with a correlation coefficient of 0.64 indicating a large effect size. This correlation indicates that, as mentions of prison reform, morality, and work and education increased, so did engagements, with richer descriptions and expressions (emojis).

The figure below (Figure 4) represents the level of agreement among social media users about prison reform for 136 respondents (4 respondents were incomplete and discarded) (see Table 1). The bars titles include rehabilitation, family and community ties, eliminating prisons, religion, prisoner aftercare, recidivism reduction schemes and social justice ideas.

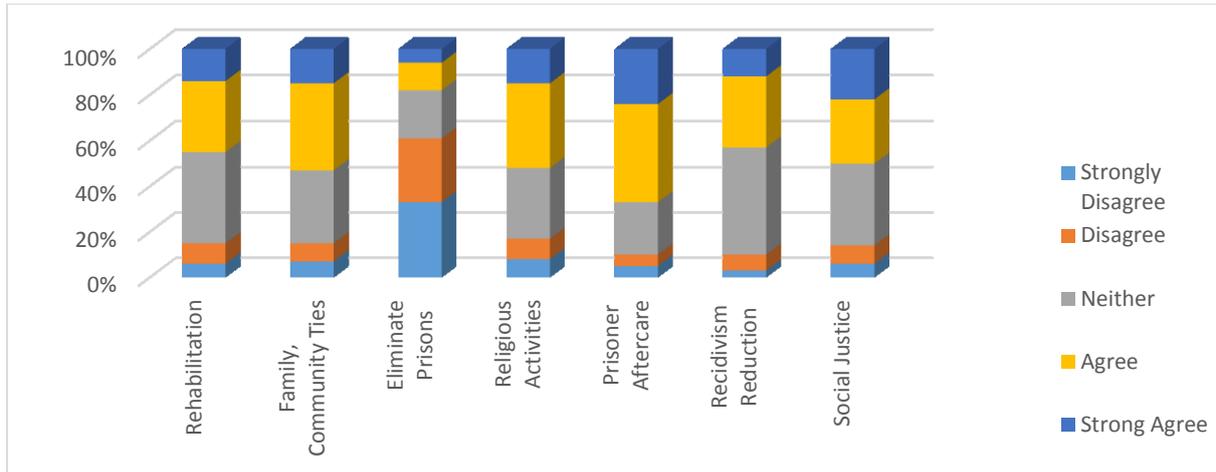


Figure 4. Q4: level of agreement among social media users about prison reform

Table 1. Responses to Q3: How Well Do Prisons Help with Prisoner Rehabilitation?

Scale	Percent (%)
Very well	22%
Poorly	34%
Average	31%
Good	11%
Excellent	4%

The social media expressions aligned with the survey responses on the perception that prisons can do more rehabilitation. Interestingly, the empirical findings indicated increasing investment in prison-reform efforts.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was, first, to assess the influence of public discourse on corrections reform. The social media and survey responses seemed to show a strong interest in policymaking regarding prison reform. The desired direction for such reforms is unclear, though calls for humane treatment and justice were frequent. Second, the study design was to examine the perceptions of social media users and the survey respondents of the scientific evidence about corrections noting discrepancies. The results indicate that social media expressions have value for promoting accountability, humane treatment, and morality through work and education programs. Envisioning future corrections with humility leadership and ethical behaving towards offenders (prisoners) is an idea of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons (2020), pointing to rehabilitation programs with the potential for reforms to reduce both costs and recidivism. The perceptions of the social media users and survey respondents analyzed for this study diverged from the dominant opinions in the literature about the efficacy of prisons, especially in protecting citizens from predators and providing opportunities for prisoners to build skills and recognize their worth to their families and society. Accountability is essential in the reimagining of prisons; without it, policies may undermine the confidence of corrections professionals or meet with resistance from them.

The narratives calling for corrections reform reflected the emotional content indicated by the emojis regarding the moral dimension of corrections. Assessments of efficiency (Simon, 1946) must account for the costs associated with recidivism. Findings such as those published by the Marshall Project (2019) lend support to those calling for rehabilitation and social equity, but counseling, rehabilitation, and work programs still tend to receive insufficient funding. Nevertheless, for researchers and other advocates for partnerships such as joint ventures and PIECPs, there is reason for optimism in the potential for activism catalyzed by social media, particularly by millennials. The disproportionate funding of correctional security staff compared with “curative” programs thus remains a perennial concern. At the same time, it is necessary to control misinformation and self-promotion for a new vision of corrections rooted in truth, empathy, and accountability to emerge.

Recommendations

Further research is needed into social media as a space in which a wide range of stakeholders—prison administrators and staff members, prisoners, ex-offenders and their families, and policymakers and researchers—share and discuss developments and promote effective rehabilitation. Funding, then, is a key issue, as is buy-in from corrections professionals amenable to reform. Looking forward, insights into policymaking and the philosophical constraints on preparing offenders for successful reentry into society can inform improvements in the curricula delivered to students who are preparing for careers in criminal and justice administration.

Conclusion

All stakeholders in the reform of the justice system can benefit from the sharing of relevant knowledge through social media. Currently, there is strong support for rehabilitation, and activists can improve the prospects for the incarcerated by engaging with departments of corrections in the pursuit of policies that take into account the overall well-being of the community as well as offenders and ex-offenders. Today’s corrections professionals are not responsible for implementing the old prison management model, but they have been enforcing it and will need training and moral support to adapt to new and better models rooted in an understanding of prisoner rehabilitation through work and education and its implications for the victims of crime, the families of lawbreakers, and the community.

Notes

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the PA Times and GovLoop.

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