

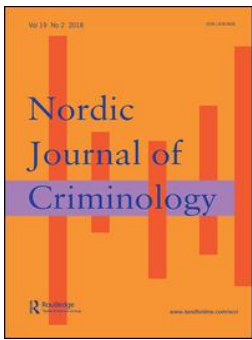
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Incarcerated people's challenges for digital inclusion in Finnish prisons

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ABSTRACT

The digitization of society creates both challenges and opportunities for prisons. Previous studies show that prisons' digitization affects interaction between incarcerated people, prison culture and reduces recidivism, however it also poses security risks. In this study, we ask how do barriers to digital inclusion appear among incarcerated people in the prison context, and how do they perceive whether face-to-face interactions with employees can be replaced by digital services. The analytical starting points of the study are rhetorical analysis and Goffman's micro-sociological analysis. The research material consists of 26 incarcerated people's interviews from different parts of Finland. The results show that gaps in digital skills and access to the internet are key barriers to digital inclusion in prisons. The question of whether digital services can replace face-to-face encounters raised conflicting comments. Interviewees emphasized the importance of social interaction in their desistance, but also the benefits of digitization such as the possibility of anonymity. In addition, the research highlights the tense nature of prison culture, as well as the different aspirations of prisoners. The pursuit of digital agency can also manifest itself in various secondary adjustments. The digitization of prisons means a change in the prison employee's role and work approach.

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Digitization of prisons; social interaction in prison; incarcerated people; digital inclusion; digital agency; frame analyses

Introduction

The digitization of services has been rapid over the last 10 years, both in prisons and in the wider society. Digital services have been seen as a means of improving the efficiency of social and health care services and other public services, while at the same time increasing accessibility, as well as the quality and safety of care. The spectrum of public digital services is large, and includes for example, electronic booking, e-forms, databases, self-help services, chat advisory services, video-mediated services, as well as websites that provide a diverse range of information. In addition, digital therapies and peer support groups can provide important services, in particular for people with substance abuse problems.

In this article, we focus on the digital services available in prisons. However, the complex issue of electronic monitoring is excluded from the analysis. Many reasons can be found for the development of digital services and their availability in prisons. Toreld et al. (2018) have examined a prison's digital services by adopting a principle of normality.

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This also includes incarcerated people's access to digital services, as well as the opportunity to communicate with relatives. According to many studies, digitization promotes incarcerated people's social skills, self-esteem, rehabilitation and their re-integration into society (Knight & Van de Steene, 2017a; McDougall et al., 2017; Reisdorf & Jewkes, 2016; Toreld et al., 2018). Digital technology in prison also increases the digital literacy of released persons, as well as promoting their job-searching skills on re-entry (Ogbonnaya-Ogburu et al., 2019). Moreover, McDougall et al. (2017) have shown that self-service technology significantly reduces disciplinary offences in prison, as well as reoffending in the first year after release.

However, the digitization of prisons has been slow. For instance, McDougall et al. (2017) have suggested that although prisons aim to rehabilitate people, they fail to prepare them for their release into modern digital society. Many current prisoner rehabilitation, re-entry models and practices in correctional systems only target offline realms, and disregard the digital realm (Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018). In many cases, digitation is rejected on the grounds of prison security. Obstacles to the use of prison technology and digital development are commonly posed by security employees, who are often resistant to the introduction and application of new technologies due to their potential or imagined security risk (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016).

On the other hand, wide-ranging and extensive digitization development is being carried out in many countries, for example, the Beveren prison's *PrisonCloud* in Belgium, and two new prisons that have been digitalized in Agder in Norway (Knight, 2015; Knight & Van De Steene, 2017b; PrisonCloud, 2020; Toreld et al., 2018). The present study locates in Finland, and in particular, considers incarcerated people's experiences and views on the use of public digital services during imprisonment and release. In Finland, *The Imprisonment Act (767/2005)* determines the right to use computers to study or to conduct personal matters (e.g. those related to housing, work and welfare) whilst in prison. Computer use is supervised and their use requires permission. In practice, it has been difficult for a person in their prison release phase to use digital services due to their having poor digital skills, limited computer access, and the lack of online banking IDs which are required in Finland for identification when accessing public digital services (National Audit Office of Finland, 2016).

The *Smart Prison Project* of the Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency (Puolakka & Hovila, 2019) aims to promote incarcerated people's digital inclusion. The project focuses on all prisons in Finland, but the Hämeenlinna Prison (a new women's prison with 100 females and 100 cells) is being used as a special pilot case in the project. As part of the project, a white list of safe websites (e.g. school sites, social and health care, employment, and rehabilitation services, etc.) has been drawn up. The pilot prison seeks to develop best practices and digital practices for rehabilitation, reintegration and reducing recidivism in a smart prison, and includes the independent use of digital services and communication made possible through personal devices provided in every cell.

This research focuses on the opportunities and challenges of prison digitization through the experiences of incarcerated people, firstly from the perspective of digital inclusion and its barriers (Helsper, 2008; Monteiro et al., 2011; Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018). The study also connects with the contradictory research on the relationship between digital services and face-to-face encounters (e.g. Batastini et al., 2015; Champion & Edgar, 2013; Hansen et al., 2016; Knight & Van De Steene, 2017b; Morgan et al., 2008) and asks whether face-to-face interactions can be replaced by digital encounters in prisons.

During the research process, various cultural tensions related to the use of digital services and the relationships between incarcerated people and prison employees were revealed, and so Goffman's (1957, 1974) research on *total institution* and *frame analysis* provided a good starting point to examine this particular issue. Through an analytical perspective based on Goffman's studies, it is possible to make visible how power relations and the cultural dynamics of social relations in the prison community determine different meanings for digital inclusion. In particular, the concept of a frame (Goffman, 1957) combines the real situation of incarcerated people with their subjective experiences and goals. Thus, the identification of frames used by incarcerated persons plays a key role in defining barriers to digital inclusion.

Theoretical framework

Concepts of digital inclusion, exclusion and agency

From a broader perspective, the digitization of prisons is linked to the issues of inclusion and exclusion. An inaccessibility to use ICT increases the risk of digital exclusion, which in turn can lead to a digital divide at the societal level (Selwyn, 2004). According to Perlgut (2011), digital inclusion means the ability of individuals and groups to access and use ICT, which includes access to the Internet, suitable hardware and software, and training for digital literacy skills. From the perspective of digital inclusion, agency is also a key factor. Digital agency means the individual's ability to control and adapt to a digital world, and is constructed through the development of digital competence, digital confidence, and digital accountability (Passey et al., 2018).

Digital inclusion and digital social inclusion have been discussed in the context of mental health rehabilitation (e.g. Farooq et al., 2015; Truswell et al., 2014), but only a few research studies have been conducted in rehabilitation in the prison context (e.g. Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018). According to Toreld et al. (2018), the theme of digital exclusion has not been explicitly raised when talking about the principle of prison normality.

Helsper (2012) has highlighted links between social and digital inclusion (offline and online) by analysing social, personal, economic and cultural resources, as well as digital resources. In terms of digital exclusion, three barriers to ICT use are relevant: access, skills and attitudes (Helsper, 2008). In addition, trust is also seen as a key factor in digital inclusion in a prison context (Monteiro et al., 2011). The concept of trust refers to the secure use of ICT platforms in the minimization of breaches in prison security. After release, the weak digital skills and lack of motivation of older and long-term incarcerated people (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016), as well as the possible lack of digital IDs (National Audit Office of Finland, 2016), will likely be a challenge. In addition, due to their criminal record, incarcerated people face prejudice and weak job prospects, which results in prolonged and profound digital and social exclusion (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016; Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018).

Reisdorf and Rikard (2018) have adapted Helsper's (2012) model into the prison context and created a new Digital rehabilitation and re-entry model, which identifies three realms: prison, re-entry and digital. When rehabilitation measures are targeted in a timely manner at different stages of the process, both offline and online, this can reduce the digital inequality of returnees. Recognizing the needs, insecurities and strengths of the returning

citizens related to these realms provides an opportunity to strengthen their agency in digital society. Furthermore, the digital realm could also serve to alleviate the negative effects of incarceration, and promote efficient re-entry.

The relationship between digital services and face-to-face encounters

The digitization of services has raised the question of whether digital services can replace face-to-face encounters. For example, Hansen et al. (2016) state that screen-to-screen interaction does not replace face-to-face encounters, even though some users might prefer impersonal contact. However, Champion and Edgar (2013) point out that in prison, ICT should act as an adjunct to face-to-face encounters, and not as a substitute.

In previous research, technology-based treatment for mental disorders and substance abuse appears in a positive light (e.g. Moore et al., 2011; Naslund et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2011), which poses challenges to traditional forms of rehabilitation. Batastini et al. (2015) have analysed tele-psychological services with criminal justice and substance abuse clients based on a systematic review. The meta-analysis shows that tele-psychological outcomes were at least comparable with traditional in-person approaches. So, being physically present in the room with a client is not a necessary requirement for gathering adequate clinical information or for producing positive effects. Morgan et al. (2008) have compared incarcerated people's perceptions of the working alliance, post session mood, and satisfaction with services in telemental health and face-to-face mental health services, but found no significant differences between them.

The replacement of face-to-face encounters with digital activities is also consistent with the managerialistic trend of criminal policy (Liebling & Crewe, 2012), and allows for more efficient and in many cases, more reliable practices. On one hand, there has been a recent emphasis on adopting an interactive work approach that combines support for the rehabilitation and integration into society of incarcerated people by way of dynamic security management (Järveläinen & Rantanen, 2019; Ylisassi et al., 2016). According to previous studies, having the right kind of relationship between employees and incarcerated people also appears to increase security (Nash, 2010; Liebling et al., 2011, p. 119). Tait (2011) argues that prison culture is influenced by factors related to the prison officers' approaches to provide care, and also by incarcerated people's specific codes of behaviour adopted in order to get care. Therefore, incarcerated people's and employees' relationships and interactions can also be seen to contribute to prison culture.

The link between prison's digitization and the relationship between employees and incarcerated people has also been examined from another perspective. Knight (2017) highlights that technological solutions such as in-cell televisions have been used in a variety of ways, such as a reward, a punishment, as therapy, to pacify, and to exercise control in prisons. These actions have a direct impact on the interactions between prison employees and incarcerated people. On one hand, they can reduce some of the harms of incarceration and negative power relations. Yet ICT in prison is also utilized as a privilege system, and prison officers exercise 'soft power' in the use of ICT by acting as gatekeepers (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016). Overall, studies show that prisons' digitization affects social relations within prison, but the question of whether digital services can replace face-to-face interactions is controversial.

Methodological approach

Methodological starting points

The present study investigates the social reality of prisons and incarcerated people from a qualitative perspective. Qualitative research can be focused on different ontological positions (Mason, 1996). This study does not investigate the facts (e.g. the actual level of digital skills of incarcerated people), but rather examines the verbal descriptions given by incarcerated people on the topic. Their comments are assumed to reflect not only their own experiences or views, but also cultural phenomena. In addition, it is assumed that the cultural reality of prison is dynamically changing, and that incarcerated people are reconstructing their perspectives on the conditions of digital activity by way of their own actions. Furthermore, in line with the rhetorical approach (e.g. Billig, 1987; Vesala & Rantanen, 2007), the study assumes that many cultural issues such as the significance of digital services or optimal relationships between incarcerated people and employees are going to be seen as controversial, and that both incarcerated people and employees will take different positions and justify their views in different ways.

The Goffmanian approach

According to Goffman (1974), social interaction always takes place in a context-specific system of meaning, i.e. a frame. These frames are generated in social and cultural processes, and combine both action and interpretation (Johnston, 2004). Goffman (1974) distinguished two fundamental types of frames; *natural* (including natural, involuntary events) and *social* (including man-chosen and maintained events) frames. Frames are maintained and interpreted in discussions through the jointly interpreted frameworks of the parties involved, and in several parallel ways. The interpretive frame makes it possible to look at cognitive structures that have been modified from individual past experiences to help define situations, and so addresses the question of 'what's going on here?'. Interest is related to situations and their meanings, and the interpretive frame is tied to language, giving us a way to see and experience the world. In the present study we assume that in the light of different frames, digital inclusion and incarcerated people's interactions with prison employees can also take on different meanings.

When identifying frames, we also pay attention to the characteristics of the *total institution* and *face work* presented by Goffman (1957, 1955). In Goffman's (1957) analysis of the total institution, he describes different ways how people act when they are deprived of their freedom. Goffman talks about a mortification process, in which an individual's identity is literally stripped upon entering a total facility, and replaced with a stigmatized inmate status. Through various countermeasures and ways of conduct, inmates seek recognition for their own existence and agency. Goffman's term of 'messing up' refer to forbidden activities, violations and opposing prison rules which intentionally cause harm or disruption. While 'secondary adjustments' (e.g. conniving, gimmicks etc.) do not directly challenge the prison employees, they provide some access to benefits by illegal or controversial means. They offer evidence that the inmate is still his own man, and yield a kind of reward of independence. According to Goffman, an inmate can adapt to total institution (prison) in different ways, such as by using 'situational withdrawal' or

taking a 'rebellious line'. In addition, an inmate can choose for instance, a tactic of 'playing it cool' in order to get out of a particular situation undamaged, while still maintaining loyalty towards the group of inmates.

In Goffman's (1955) analyses on face-work, maintaining the dignity of the parties involved and preserving 'face' is conditional on a common agreement, which is in both parties' interests. Integrity can be broken, preserved, and even rebuilt in the interactions between parties. Goffman's studies are based on a situation more than 50 years old, however, the analysis still provides a starting point for examining certain features of the dynamics of prison culture (e.g. DeValiant et al., 2020; Mesko & Hacin, 2018).

Methods

Aim and questions

This study relates in particular to two controversial issues. First, the debate on digital inclusion and exclusion (Helsper, 2008, 2012; Monteiro et al., 2011; Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018) raises the question of whether digital services can prevent dropout and exclusion on release from prison. On the other hand, previous studies on digital welfare services (Hansen et al., 2016), prison digitization (Champion & Edgar, 2013; Knight & Van de Steene, 2017a), as well as telepsychological services and digital therapies (e.g. Batastini et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2008) have raised the issue of a changed client-employee relationship. We approach these issues through the experiences and views of Finnish-incarcerated people. In particular, we ask:

- (1) How do barriers to digital inclusion appear among incarcerated people in a prison context?
- (2) How do incarcerated people perceive whether face-to-face interaction with prison employees can be replaced by digital services?

The context of the study

The study focuses on people that were due to be released or had recently been released from prison in Finland. The goal of the Finnish Criminal Sanction Agency is to move towards increasingly open sanctions, and to gradually release almost every incarcerated person through supervised probation (Criminal Sanction Agency, 2020). Supervised probationary freedom (SPF) offers an opportunity to serve the last 6 months of a sentence outside the prison under electronic monitoring. This pre-supposes conditions of being drug-free and having an obligation to follow the implementation plan, which includes e.g. the housing and subsistence of a person on probation, an activity obligation, establishing a daily schedule (including e.g. substance abuse rehabilitation, studies or work), and the supervision of SPF (Criminal Sanction Agency, 2014; *The Probationary Liberty under Supervision Act (629/2013)*).

The prison is responsible for supervising SPF. Rehabilitation and support services related to the activity obligation are the responsibility of the municipality and various organizations or foundations. During the SPF, a person is entitled to access various social and health care services (e.g. family welfare, child protection services, and substance abuse

rehabilitation) and social benefits provided by the municipality and the state (the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, *Kela*), as well as services supporting employment and education.

Sample and data collection

People who had been released from prison with SPF were selected for interview. The interviewees were contacted throughout the Criminal Sanctions Agency's release unit, open prisons, and three different NGOs that offer services to currently and formerly incarcerated people. In addition, a targeted invitation to participate was also made through the author's working life networks. Those interested in being interviewed contacted the interviewer as individuals.

The interviews took place at the interviewees' rehabilitation facilities, workplace (non-profit organizations etc.), in open prison, the prison's release unit, and on university premises. All of the interviews were conducted in the autumn of 2019. The duration of the interviews varied between 28 and 90 min, with an average duration of 52 minutes.

Interviewees

This study aimed to achieve a nationwide coverage and collect interviewees from across Finland. The final interviewees ($n = 26$) were drawn from all of the three Criminal Sanctions Regions in Finland (Southern Finland $n = 16$, Western Finland $n = 5$, Eastern and Northern Finland $n = 5$). Of the 26 interviewees, 22 were men and 4 were women. Interviewee's ages varied from 24 to 67 years old, with an average age of 42. All of the interviewees had completed primary school. Twelve had completed vocational education, and three were currently studying in vocational training (e.g. in IT, catering, construction, gardening, social and health care, etc.). Three had dropped out of their vocational studies. One of the interviewees had a master's degree and one had a doctoral degree. In addition, six of the interviewees had undergone expert-by-experience training to give peer support to currently and formerly incarcerated people, and substance abuse clients.

Seventeen had completed their SPF and nine were in the process of completing it. The number of prison sentences served by the interviewees ranged from 1 to 17. Three of the interviewees were currently serving a prison sentence in a release unit. Of the interviewees, 19 participated in substance abuse rehabilitation or peer groups (NA, AA) as part of their SPF. Four interviewees were in vocational training, 13 were in paid employment (peer instructor, mentor, supervisor, job coach, project worker, manager, entrepreneur, etc.), three were on a work trial, two were retired, two were unemployed, and one was in intoxicant rehabilitation. Twenty of the interviewees had one or more children.

Instrument

The research interviews were conducted following the qualitative attitude approach (Peltola & Vesala, 2013; Pyysiäinen & Vesala, 2013; Vesala & Rantanen, 2007). The interviewees were presented with ordinary and controversial statements, on which they were free to comment during the interview. Interviewees were asked to take a position on each

statement and to justify their views. Additional spontaneous questions were also asked during the interviews.

During each interview, a total of nine statements were presented to the interviewee regarding the significance of incarcerated people's expertise in planning activities during SPF, incarcerated people's and employees' social interaction, digital services in prison, the relationship between support and control in SPF, and the effectiveness of SPF. Pertaining to the present study, we paid attention to two statements: 1) 'Digital services can prevent dropout and exclusion upon release from prison', and 2) 'Digital services can never replace a good interaction relationship with the prison employee'.

Analysis

Consistent with the qualitative attitude approach (Peltola & Vesala, 2013; Pyysiäinen & Vesala, 2013; Vesala & Rantanen, 2007), the data are analysed as a commentary which consists of the statements of the interviewees, and the arguments and explanations accompanying them. The first phase of data analysis focussed on classification, and the second on interpretation. The classification of the interviewees' position and their justifications on the statement were analysed separately for both statements. Next, we focussed our analysis on the barriers to digital inclusion, as well as the relationship between face-to-face interactions and digital services.

The interpretative analysis is based on Goffman's (1974) analysis of frames. Frames are identified from the interviews by paying attention to the goals which determine the activities and interactions taking place in everyday lives. In different frames, digital inclusion and the incarcerated people's interactions with the employees also take on different meanings. When identifying frames, attention was also paid to the characteristics of total institution presented by Goffman (1957). Interviewees perceived their situations either while in prison or through the release phase, which led to the frames being defined differently, related to context (cf. Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018).

Research ethics

The principles of research ethics and good scientific practice were taken into account throughout the study (The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012; The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, 2019). A research management plan was developed before applying for research permissions. The study respected the dignity of the interviewees and their right to self-determination. Interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and each interviewee gave their individual consent to take part. Interviewees had the opportunity to suspend their participation at any point in the study. The interviewees were informed about the study's content, aims and scope, and the role of the researcher was explained. The identities of interviewees were anonymized, and their names pseudonymised during the data analysis phase. The interview material was stored on a secure server and on a hard drive which requires password access. Permission to conduct the research was granted from the Criminal Sanctions Agency and the three NGO's involved.

Analysis and findings

Upon release from prison, incarcerated people need different social and health care services, and social welfare support. In addition, many released people often face challenges related to unemployment, housing, and their social network. The interviewees mentioned a need for e.g. social assistance, housing benefits, seeking an apartment from a municipality or organization, accessing education, job search support, substance abuse rehabilitation, and rehabilitative peer group activities (NA/AA), and access to everyday support services including family welfare and child protection services. The interviewees had used digital services in varying degrees.

In the interviews, statement 1 was 'Digital services can prevent dropout and exclusion upon release from prison'. All of the interviewees took a positive position on the statement, but most expressed some reservations towards it. Their justifications were related to the challenges they faced in the use of internet and digital services in prison, such as access to digital services, incarcerated people's lack of competence and motivation to use these services, and a need for support in the use of digital services. Digital services were seen to prevent dropout from society, because before release, digital services were seen as a viable solution by which to organize their everyday life while still in the prison setting (e.g. income support, housing, unemployment, etc.).

Statement 2 was 'Digital services can never replace a good interaction relationship with the prison employees', and raised controversial arguments. Many interviewees emphasized the significance of social interaction between incarcerated people and prison employees as a rehabilitative measure, which they felt digital services cannot replace. A few also highlighted the benefits of digital services related to rehabilitation, and for contacting other officials or family in society. An opposite position was also presented, and justified with the view that the use of digital services alone may lead to isolation and further social exclusion. However, the capacity to handle matters anonymously through digital services made it possible to maintain 'face' in certain situations, and also avoid possible threats and conflicts in the prison community. In addition, digital transactions helped to speed up proceedings.

Digital services as a prevention for dropout and social exclusion

The interviewees almost unanimously agreed that digital services can prevent dropout in the release phase, and also social exclusion. Interviewees saw that digital services made it possible, for example, to fill out online applications, renew medicine prescriptions, or contact officials (e.g. social worker). Interviewees were excited about the possibility of participating in NA groups or being in contact with their families via the web, and they considered that this supports their rehabilitation. However, three interviewees felt that digital services do not meaningfully prevent dropout, and in the worst case, they may even exclude incarcerated people from society. In addition, some interviewees argued that the use of digital services can add to the timidity they experience in human contact.

The interviewees also discussed various barriers to the use of digital services. First, the material revealed the importance of *attitudes*. Some interviews stated that their own willingness to use digital services was very weak. However, the importance of *digital skills* and internet *accessibility* was particularly highlighted. For example, one interviewee said:

“Yes, of course, the difficulty with digital services is that if you have been in an institution (prison) for five years where you do not have access to those services, it is very difficult to use them. Identity cards, bank IDs, came as a challenge for me at the bank. You won’t get IDs before the law changes a little. You have to have all these IDs in order, and then you can log in. Now there are a lot of these *Suomi.fi*, *Omakanta.fi* and fifty other services. Yes, it’s a jungle, if you have to face them without any preparation. If you only have the IDs and a smartphone, and you don’t have the ability to use a laptop or money to buy a laptop, it can be really difficult.” (Kalle, man, 58 years)

In this excerpt, the interviewee was missing an identity card as well as online banking codes, and without these, making transactions in digital services was completely impossible. The excerpt above is also an example that older interviewees, in particular, found it very difficult to use digital services. On the other hand, some of the younger interviewees told that they were fluent in using all of the digital services and applications they needed in their daily lives. From the perspective of digital skills, some interviewees made a distinction between ‘*millennials*’ and people who have spent ‘*30 years in prison*’ (Pera, man, 59 years).

The material highlights the significance of *counselling and training* for digital skills. Many of the interviewees had completed online forms related to social assistance, housing benefits, rehabilitation or pension, either via the internet or by telephone. However, most of them needed a professionals’ or relatives’ help and support in using these online services. Thus, if help is not available, then there is a risk that any complicated electronic forms will remain unfilled.

“It would be really good if, for example, before going into SPF, you could practice filling out these applications for electronic income support (in prison) and how to add attachments to it. In this job (as a peer), I see how much rage it causes in these people when things don’t work because they don’t know how. They are easily left undone because they cannot and will not try. Then something changes again. It is a really difficult process. If their resources are otherwise really scarce, then it will be an unnecessary burden on those people.” (Heini, woman, 33 years)

Furthermore, one interviewee argued that it is not desirable that ‘*someone will do it for you, but rather they will sit next to you and give advice*’ (Hannu, man, 38 years).

Access to ICT devices or the Internet in prison was seen as challenging or as something denied for incarcerated people. According to the interviews, access to digital services varied a lot between prisons. In closed prisons they have to apply for separate permission to use a computer, and the use usually takes place under direct supervision. In open prisons and release units, computers were often available, but according to the interviewees, accessibility was also related to *trust* and *accountability*.

Overall, the discussion of the barriers to using digital services was consistent among interviewees, and the main focus was on how digital services could better support incarcerated people’s reintegration and social inclusion. So, in this context, prison employees appeared more as supporters, rather than as supervisors or deniers.

The conflicting relationship between digital services and face-to-face encounters

The question of whether digital services can replace inter-personal interactions with a prison employee raised conflicting opinions. Almost every interviewee highlighted the

importance of face-to-face interaction with employees. In the interviewees' justifications, encountering and discussing issues with an employee was felt to be important and supported their transition towards a desistance of crime. In principle, incarcerated people were seen to have '*poor social skills*' and employees were often their only rehabilitative contact during the day. The interaction with employees was seen as developing incarcerated people's interaction skills. Therefore, after release, they could interact independently with different officials. With face-to-face appointments, interviewees felt that employees showed care, and even in problematic situations, they could ask for help and advice.

Interviewees also highlighted risks of digitization of prisons. The computer was seen as a '*cold guy*', without the ability to respond or comprehend human emotions or a person's history. The mere use of electronic services in a person's own cell was considered to lead to '*cell holding*' and to further isolate them. Thus, the tension between the benefits of a smart prison and incarcerated people's needs for human contact is obvious. As a further observations, according to one interviewee, the use of digital services may reduce the already limited human contact in prison even further, and make people more '*socially timid towards people*'.

However, some interviewees took the opposite stance and saw that in some situations, digital services could replace interactions with a prison employee. One interviewee argued that virtual encountering is easier with a familiar employee, when trust has already been achieved face-to-face. It was also pointed out that in digital interactions, an employee can also show interest by listening and making observations. Overall, digital encounters were seen as being better than having no encounters at all.

The interviewees also emphasized the benefits of digital proceedings in relation to face-to-face encounters. One interviewee stated that it is easier to discuss difficult issues when it is possible to be anonymous and *preserve your own face*.

"It is precisely the freedom of a man to keep his/her face and own self secret. You may be able to discuss things more freely on the computer than you do face-to-face with anyone, even if it is a prison employee. Even if it is a complete stranger, it is terribly difficult for a person ... It is easier like this when you don't have any face to talk to. And whoever answers, [...] he/she is like an existing person." (Susa, woman, 56 years)

The excerpt highlights how important it is for a person to preserve their face and maintain their own self. Interactions with a prison officer can pose a threat to this, and the use of digital services was seen as a potential opportunity to avoid this threat.

The cultural logic of the prison becomes interestingly reflected in the discussion of a '*grumble note*' (a colloquial term for a contact form). In Finnish prisons, the senior instructor's or social worker's services may have long queues, and incarcerated people have to leave a contact form in order to see an employee. One interviewee noted that when they deliver a contact form to a prison officer (who in-turn delivers it to the rehabilitation employee), this might be the only human contact they have during the day. However, several interviewees made critical comments on the issue, for example, when prison officers respond sarcastically to their requests to see a social worker with an attitude akin to '*let's just think about this*' (Nikke, man 43 years), then this causes them insecurity and frustration. At worst, things can go this way;

"(The prison officer) looks at the contact form and thinks, '*I won't do that. I'll have coffee now*'. Then the '*grumble note*' is left somewhere and will get lost." (Jouko, man, 48 years)

Electronic proceedings were seen as a potential way of speeding up the progress of, for example, seeing a rehabilitation employee, and at the same time, make it possible to achieve a 'faceless' interaction and to avoid any potential employee arbitrariness.

One challenge raised in the interactions between prison employees and incarcerated people was that having too close a relationship with a prison employee could give them a reputation of being a snitch. Therefore, remaining invisible was seen as one way to cope in prison.

"The only problem, of course people who are antisocial and have authority problems – they may have a problem. But that requires long-term work, doesn't it? Like the 'close guards' interactive work which they [Criminal Sanctions Agency] are trying hard to launch. They get acquainted and when that confidence is established, the prisoner dares to open up. Then the prison community accepts that with a prison officer (PO) you can say more than just yes and no. Only work like this should start at the beginning of the prison sentence, so that it doesn't end upon transition to society. Interaction is difficult for many prisoners, when you have an unstable personality disorder and ten other problems. In addition, there is the problem of authority and possible hatred towards "batons" (POs), and then there is the problem of violence. Perhaps the worst is that the prisoners' community talks about everything if you deal too much with the POs or with the authorities. So it immediately becomes a more negative thing (...) You dare not do anything, of course not. (...) Well, at worst, you can die when suspicions rise among prisoners, and even if the suspicions are untrue. Then if you become a snitch, your life is at risk. Then you are sent to isolation. People can die there." (Kalle, man, 58 years)

In the excerpt, prison employees were spoken of as '*prison officers*', '*close guards*', and as '*batons*'. At the same time, while a close relationship with prison officers was emphasized as being important, the importance of keeping a distance and observing the rules of the prison community by *withdrawing* from a potentially problematic situation and *playing it cool* was also evident in the material.

Overall, the discussion on social interaction makes visible two different ways to give meaning to situations that occur in the prison community. First, the material emphasized recovery and social inclusion. From this perspective, the interviewees strongly emphasized the importance of physical encounters and interactions with prison employees. Digital services were seen to add value to prison activities, but they felt these should not serve to reduce employee encounters. The interviewees almost unanimously felt that both face-to-face and digital encounters were needed in the pursuit of a crime-free and drug-free life already during their imprisonment. On the other hand, when the aim was agency, people were able to deal with issues anonymously and preserve face, which facilitates their adjustment to prison. From this point of view, the employee was seen not so much as a support resource, but rather as a threat to the incarcerated person's own agency. So in this context, digitality was seen to offer many additional advantages.

The struggle for digital agency

Material also reveals the complex relationship between trust and the conditions of digital inclusion. Traditionally there is a lack of confidence in prisons, and in this context, this can be seen in the restrictions placed on allowing access to computers, and formal supervision whilst they are being used. One interviewee described a situation where a prison officer was sitting in a corner during a foreign incarcerated person's video call, despite the fact that he may well have not understood what was being said.

When freedoms are given in prison, there is always a risk that someone ‘*messes it up*’. That is, trust in incarcerated people does not necessarily build agency when the use is not responsible. There is clearly an identifiable risk that incarcerated people will misuse the internet to commit crimes.

“So, I’m excited about it. We were with K.R.I.S. [Criminals’ Revenge in Society, NGO] listening to what there is. That community-based activities are coming to the smart prison. We have been asked to play soccer there, and there were suggestions related to [forming] NA groups. I’ve been asked to guide the NA group, if we get permission. Prisoners there can apparently communicate through a computer, so prisoners are familiarised with the use of computers. I’m excited about it, if it is all implemented, and if the prisoners don’t mess it up. Then it’s up to one of us. It is definitely a good prison and setting, if it is designed in the way I’ve heard.” (Veera, woman, 39 years)

The interviewee uses the term ‘*one of us*’ and emphasizes their own responsibility. From the perspective of incarcerated people’s digital inclusion, an interesting question is how any restrictions on digital inclusion can be justified. At several points, it would appear that restrictions are justified as a result of the incarcerated people’s own actions. In the above excerpt, it would seem that the interviewee does not perceive incarcerated people as a target of the exercise of power, but rather as active players, who through their own actions cause a situation which merits restrictions. However, the presence of computers and access to them may not be a perfect solution, and once the resource is controlled, the incarcerated people themselves may prefer not to use it.

“Well, from (the prison) I got to visit the city’s library, so there were good computers. There is also a computer in prison, but its use was monitored, and it is old and slow. However, I don’t understand how it can be bypassed so easily if you go to visit the library and take care of all your things. A criminal is still able to commit crimes that way. Why couldn’t the prison also have a computer . . . Even a computer classroom for everyone, if [the current system] is so easy to bypass?” (Mikael, man, 30 years)

Restraint and a lack of trust is quickly followed by a struggle for agency, which manifests in both employees and incarcerated people. The prison employees look to restrict access to ICT devices and the Internet. The slow and bureaucratic processes in prisons could limit their agency in this regard. However, many counterintelligence strategies and *secondary adjustments* for incarcerated people can be seen in the material.

“Osku: MTV3 (television channel website) has that chat thing. There, someone always says good night. [laughter] (...) When one is in a closed prison and your partner is at home, then the partner is able to send their good night wishes. (...) Then the prisoner always knows that their partner is also thinking of them at the same time, so a thought contact takes place. (...) There are many prisoners looking at these chat pages and sending greetings.

Interviewer: Is there anything else like this that you can keep in touch with?

Osku: Secret cell-mobiles. [laughs]

Interviewer: Well what does that entail?

Osku: Well ... I guess ... Every now and then they can be found in prison. (...) Someone smuggles them in there. But of course, there were none during my last (sentence). [laughs]”

(Osku, man, 52 years)

A lack of collective responsibility would seem to act as a barrier to trust, and it follows that digital agency therefore has to be developed by individual means, for example, by having cell-mobiles, media channels such as MTV3, library facilities, etc.

Three frames for digital inclusion and social interaction

The interpretive analysis of the data followed the principles of Goffman's (1974) frame analysis. Identified frames reflect the different goals that determine activities and interactions in everyday life. Not only do they represent different ways of perceiving digital inclusion and the significance of face-to-face relationships, but also ways of adapting to prison life. In terms of framing, a key question is therefore whether the person perceives his or her situation from the point of view of release, or from the point of view of imprisonment. Furthermore, based on the data, the period of imprisonment can be seen in two ways, depending on whether the person seeks to adapt to the role of a prisoner and remain invisible, or whether they struggle against the power structures and rules of prison.

On the basis of the analyses, three different frames emerge in the interviews. First, the use and challenges of digital services were discussed using a frame of the *pursuit of social inclusion*, where digital services were seen as a means of reintegrating into society, and prison employees seen as a source of support. In this frame, the importance of digital skills and access to the Internet are particularly emphasized, and prison employees appear to be a potential support for rehabilitation. Second, a frame of *fading of self* can be identified from the interviews. This frame emphasized maintaining face and remaining invisible. In this case, digital services were seen as a way to avoid face-to-face interactions, and the perceived threats associated with such encounters. In a third frame, the interviewees spoke about the use of the Internet and digital services using the frame of a *struggle for agency*, and their discussions clearly highlighted the structural tensions and power relations that exist in the prison community. In this context, the social dynamics of prison are described by talking about, among other things, secondary adjustments, a rebellious line, and messing up (cf. Goffman, 1957). Furthermore, the social relations in prison appear as a struggle between prisoners and prison officers or as some kind of game, and the pursuit of digital agency can even manifest as an illegal activity in itself (See Figure 1).

	Frame of Pursuit of social inclusion	Frame of Fading of self	Frame of Struggle for agency
Goal that determines activities and interaction in everyday life	Inclusion in society (relationship with relatives, rehabilitation, etc.).	Neutralising conflicts and thereby facilitating the execution of a sentence.	Retention of agency.
Digital inclusion	Digital skills and Internet access are critical factors in digital inclusion.	Digital services make it possible to operate independently without others.	Illegal or semi-illegal means of accessing the Internet.
Relationship with employees	Support is needed from employees in the use of digital services. Digital services cannot replace face-to-face support.	Avoidance of social interaction and related threats. Digital services can replace face-to-face support.	The prison employee is seen in a surveillance role. The relationship with employees is seen as a game or struggle.

Figure 1. Three frames relating to goal determination, digital inclusion, and the relationship with prison employees.

Discussion

Findings on digital inclusion

According to the study, digital services appear to offer support for social inclusion and a desistance from crime, but on the other hand, they may also act as a potential source of exclusion. When opportunities for social inclusion are otherwise limited, digital activities offer an opportunity to prevent exclusion upon release from prison. The interview material brings out many influencing factors and barriers of digital inclusion, and overall, the findings are consistent with previous research on digital inclusion (Helsper, 2008, 2012; Monteiro et al., 2011; Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018). In particular, incarcerated people's lack of digital skills and internet access in prison appear to pose major barriers to digital inclusion. Ogbonnaya-Ogburu et al. (2019) point out that strengthening digital literacy is a key prerequisite for returning to society. In addition, the interview data highlights the significance of training, and supporting incarcerated people who lack skills in using digital services.

According to Monteiro et al. (2011), trust is a digital inclusion indicator, and Passey et al. (2018) argue that digital confidence and accountability are main factors in achieving digital agency. Consistent with these studies, the gaps in internet access seen in prisons seem to be associated with a lack of trust in the prison community. The interviewees pointed out that misuse by other incarcerated people can lead to a ban on all of them using the Internet. This lack of trust is reflected in the data, for example, in the formal supervision of video calls.

On the other hand, when the use of ICT devices and the Internet is strongly controlled and opportunities for inclusion are limited, incarcerated people may be seen to have alternative goals and strategies. Instead of *pursuing social inclusion*, they may in fact prefer to adopt a '*fading of self*' approach and serve out their sentence as smoothly as possible. In this situation, digital services were seen as a way to avoid face-to-face interactions that may draw attention, and the threats associated with them.

Incarcerated people can also seek a digital agency that is under their own control. Despite a lack of trust and attempts to restrict the use of ICT devices, incarcerated people have a variety of means to access the Internet, including illegal cell phones. When *struggling for agency*, various secondary adjustments can be made, so that they may get back at least part of their sense of autonomy which they have lost in prison. Thus, digital agency in prison does not necessarily relate solely to the idea of inclusion that is perceived by the wider society.

Findings on the significance of face-to-face interaction

The material makes visible the contentions between digital services and face-to-face encounters, and the many meanings associated with relationships between incarcerated people and prison employees. The interviewees strongly emphasized the importance of personal interactions in helping with the desistance from crime, but also the significance of everyday interactions in prisons, as well as the relationship between social interaction and dynamic security (cf. Järveläinen & Rantanen, 2019). Additionally, the interview

material highlighted many other benefits of digitization, such as providing the opportunity for anonymity, speeding up processes, and improving their efficiency and reliability.

The results of this study differ from previous studies on digital therapies and treatments, which emphasize (inter alia) that digital services can replace face-to-face encounters. In the prison environment, the potential for human contact between incarcerated people is limited. Thus, further restricting them through digitization poses a threat to incarcerated people inclusion. Particularly, the prison context differs as it is not just a matter of managing things or therapy, but involves a need for normal everyday encounters, and in this sense, the results are similar to those of Hansen et al. (2016).

In prison culture, prison employees have a variety of approaches which represent different forms of care (Tait, 2011). The digitization of prisons challenges the prison's culture and practices, as well as the relationships between incarcerated people and employees (Knight, 2017; Knight & Van De Steene, 2017b). According to McDougall et al. (2017), prison's digital services promote incarcerated people's rehabilitation, self-direction and problem-solving capacity, as well as releasing employee resources for rehabilitation.

The conflicts between employees and incarcerated people raised in the material are understandable in the light of Goffman's studies. In total institutions (in this case the prison), the power relations between prison officers and incarcerated people emerges in their interactions as a constant struggle for power and as self-serving actions, undertaken in order to preserve 'face' (Goffman, 1955, 1957). On the other hand, the potential for handling issues anonymously and communicating electronically with a professional were seen as a way to support 'keeping face', and also minimize the aspect of power relations between prison employees and incarcerated people.

Different opportunities for the digitization of prisons

The digitization of prisons can take place in different ways. One starting point for development is to acknowledge the various threats that digitization could pose, such as a potential digitizing of the drug trade. Thus, this approach necessarily emphasizes security and controlled use above all. Secondly, digitization can be seen as a part of the managerial development of prisons. For example, the introduction of cell terminals can streamline many processes, and thus reduce the need for employee involvement. In this regard, smart prisons can bring much-needed financial savings to prisons. A third possibility is that digitization can be carried out from the perspective of the rehabilitation and social inclusion of incarcerated people. In this case, cell terminals and the Internet are seen as tools through which incarcerated people can connect with their relatives, peer groups and normal social and health care services. In an ideal case, digitization can also increase the human resources that are needed for the support and rehabilitation of incarcerated people (McDougall et al., 2017; Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018; Toreld et al., 2018).

Each of these models has its own advantages and challenges. From the point of view of the digital inclusion of incarcerated people, a model that combines access to public digital services and interactive work would probably offer the best starting point. Considering these aspects, the digitization of prisons can contribute to a person's employment, rehabilitation and timely support, as well as assisting in a more efficient re-entry process (e.g. Reisdorf & Rikard, 2018). Digitization can help overcome many of the challenges, obstacles, and prejudices incarcerated people face. Especially, ICT allows

them to engage more easily with the digital society and enhances their potential for employment (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016; Ogbonnaya-Ogburu et al., 2019; Reisdorf & Jewkes, 2016).

While the study reveals that prison culture contains many tensions, it also shows how digital services could provide a means to avoid some of the potential threats incarcerated people face. From a managerialist point of view (Liebling & Crewe, 2012), it would be justified to replace face-to-face encounters with employees by digital means. However, regardless of the approach that is taken, the digitization of society is something that cannot be excluded from prisons (cf. Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016).

Limitations

In this study, the studied sample was limited to 26 interviewees, and the results are accordingly limited to their experiences and views. Thus, we are cautious in generalizing the study's findings. It should also be noted that from the perspective of the digitization of prisons, the situation is constantly changing. Therefore, the experiences of past convictions does not necessarily reflect the current or future situation. In this article, we considered the perspective of digital services, and not the perspective of electronic monitoring which has its own challenges. It is also acknowledged that the status of the researcher can have an impact on the interviewees' comments, which can contribute to framing the interview situation. However, there was no indication in the analyses or results that suggested any bias had been introduced in this way.

Conclusion

Although the digitization of prisons is inherently challenging, it is in many ways justified. Digitization supports the digital literacy of incarcerated people and increases their access to digital services. Through this, it also promotes rehabilitation, employment, digital equality and social inclusion. Prison cannot be detached from the digital world around it, but it has to find appropriate ways to support the digital inclusion of incarcerated people, and to understand the importance of social encounters in terms of a desistance from crime. However, it also requires the recognition of certain risks as well as the need to have confidence in incarcerated people. This means a change in the prison employee's role and work approach, particularly in the way that digitization is used to enhance the process of prison life, and aid the smooth integration of incarcerated people into a digitized society upon their release.

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