

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT JUSTICE RESEARCH INITIATIVE



VERMONT PRISON CLIMATE SURVEY

2021

Prison Research and Innovation Network (PRIN)

go.uvm.edu/justiceresearch

ABOUT - 2021

The Vermont Prison Climate Surveys were developed as part of the **Prison Research and Innovation Network** (**PRIN**) - a consortium of 5 states, each working to establish a model of transparency, accountability, and innovation in prisons. The 5 states participating in the PRIN project are: Vermont, Delaware, Iowa, Missouri, and Colorado.

The purpose of PRIN is to better understand prison environments: enhance prisons' data collection capacities to promote transparency and accountability: and design, implement, and evaluate evidence-based programs and policies to improve conditions for individuals incarcerated in and working in prisons. PRIN is a 4.5 year project taking place from January 2020 to June 2024.

Phase I (January 2020 – December 2021). Researchers at the University of Vermont developed two Prison Climate Surveys - one for correctional staff and one for incarcerated persons. Both surveys were developed using participatory research methods, elevating the voices and perspectives of correctional staff and incarcerated individuals. Surveys were developed and administered in Southern State Correctional Facility (SSCF), the PRIN pilot facility. In June 2021, just over one year into the Covid-19 pandemic, baseline surveys were administered. More than 70% of SSCF staff and incarcerated persons completed the surveys. **Results of 2021 correctional staff and incarcerated persons surveys are presented in this report.**

Phase II (January 2022 – June 2024). The Vermont Department of Corrections will use findings from phase I to identify priority areas for change and implement and test innovations in the pilot facility to make prison environments more humane and rehabilitative. The Vermont Prison Climate Surveys will also be administered in SSCF on an annual basis throughout the PRIN project, providing the opportunity for researchers to evaluate the impact of innovations and build the evidence-base for change.



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www.doc.vermont.gov

This work was completed under the Urban Institute's Prison Research and Innovation Initiative (PRII), supported by Arnold Ventures—a five-year effort to leverage research and evidence to shine a much-needed light on prison conditions and pilot strategies to promote the wellbeing of people who are confined and work behind bars. The views expressed here are those of the author/authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, Arnold Ventures, its trustees, or its funders

www.urban.org/features/prisonresearch-and-innovation-initiative

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

2021: SURVEY RESPONDENTS - STAFF



- Age: 42 years (median)
- Race: 91% white
- Ethnicity: 86% white
- Gender identity: 21% female, 79% male
- Employer: 95% corrections, 5% contractor
- # Years working at SSCF
 40% 0-5 years, 60% 6+ years
- *#* Years working in Corrections
 - 33% 0-5 years, 67% 6+ years

70%

of correctional staff completed the survey.

The Correctional Staff Vermont Prison Climate Survey was administered to staff working in Vermont's Southern State Correctional Facility in June 2021. Surveys were paper-based, confidential, and anonymous. Of 131 eligible correctional staff, 92 completed the survey (70% response rate). The demographic data presented here are selfreported.



JOB SATISFACTION

		Always	Often	Sc	metimes		Never	
1. I look forward to coming to work.	7% 23%		% 46%		:		24%	
		Strongly Disagree	Disag	ree	Agree		Strongly Agree	
2. l take pride in my job.	169	%	46%		37%			
3. It is clear what it means to be successful in my job.	7%	7% 38%			41%		14%	
4. I have the skills I need to do my job well here.	54%				38%			
5. Leadership in this prison shows appreciation for staff in meaningful ways.	:	28%	35%		34%			
6. My supervisors are invested/interested in my career path and help me achieve my career goals.	11%	. 4	1%		38%		10%	
7. Promotions in this prison are done fairly.		32%	289	%		39%		
8. If I have a chance, I will change to some other job outside of corrections at the same rate of pay.	11% 22%		27%		40%			
9. Staff in this prison are fairly compensated for the duties and tasks they are required to perform.		26%	38%		339			



THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS ("CENTRAL OFFICE")

	Strongly Disagree Disagree Ag			gree Strongly Agree		
10.The Department communicates a clear vision (mission) for Corrections.	16%		51%	3	1%	
11.There are discussions involving all staff about the vision for Corrections and ways to achieve it.	33	%	47%		18%	
12.The Department has a clear understanding of what it's like for staff to work in this prison.	63%			26%	8%	
13.The Department takes the things I say seriously and treats me and my ideas with respect.	35	5%	45%		19%	

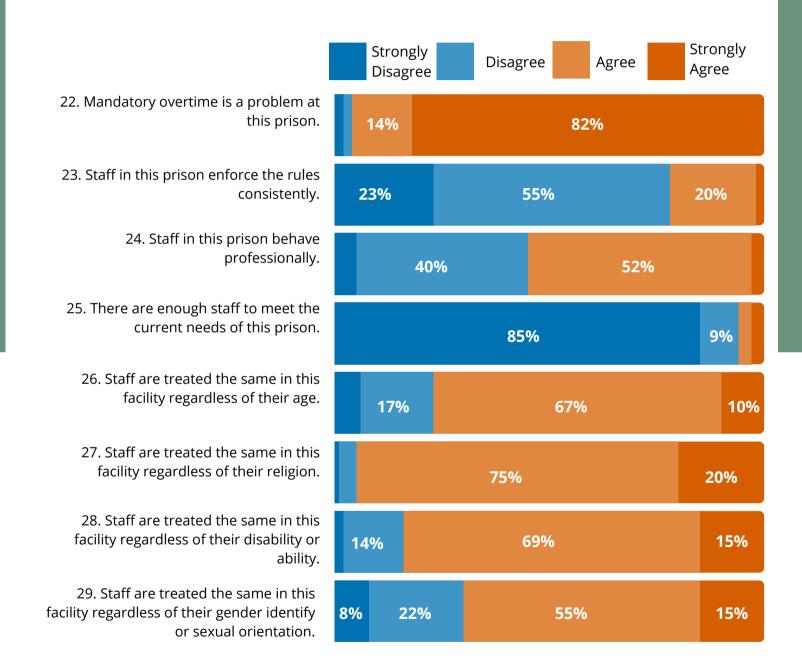


WORKPLACE CULTURE (1/4)

	Strongly Disagree Disagree		ŀ	Agree	Strongly Agree			
14. I feel that I can rely on other staff in this facility.	7%	21%		63%		9%		
15. This prison's leadership does everything possible to keep staff safe here.	17%		41%		34%	8%		
16. I can rely on my coworkers to respond quickly during an emergency.	39%				54%			
17. Staff in this prison make newer employees feel welcome.	12%	51%		34%		6		
18. Overall, I feel this is a safe prison.	8%	33%		!	52%	7%		
19. There is a strong sense of trust among staff in this prison.	229	6	50%	50% 20		6 8%		
20. Staff in this prison operate as a real team.	18%	6	49%		49%		29	%
21. Frequent staff turnover is a problem at this prison.	139	%		84%)			



WORKPLACE CULTURE, Continued (2/4)





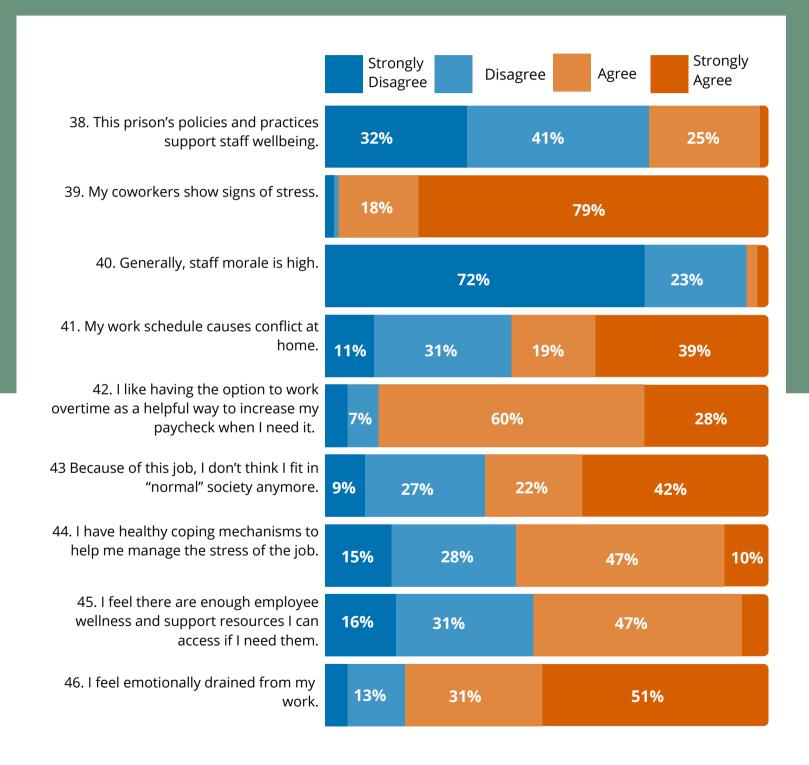
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WORKPLACE CULTURE, Continued (3/4)

	Strongly Disagree			A	Agroo		trongly gree	
30. Staff are treated the same in this facility regardless of their race or ethnicity.	7% 74%		6			17%		
31. This prison has a high level of coordination across departments when it comes to delivering services and programs to incarcerated people.	15% 52		52%			27%		
32. Communication in this prison works well - I have the information I need, when I need it, to do my job.	20% 55%					%		
33. When changes are made in this prison that affect me, I am included in the process.		43%			4	17%		9%
34. When changes are made in this prison, we assess the impact to see how they worked.		40%			5	51%		8%
35. Staff generally feel comfortable discussing mistakes, errors, or problems with supervisors.	12%		51%			34%		
36. I feel safe speaking up about staff misconduct.	9%	289	/o		499	%		14%
37. Staff investigations are conducted with fairness.	18%	18% 41%			38%			



WORKPLACE CULTURE, Continued (4/4)

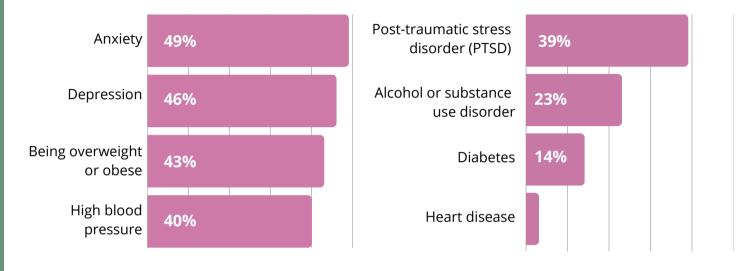




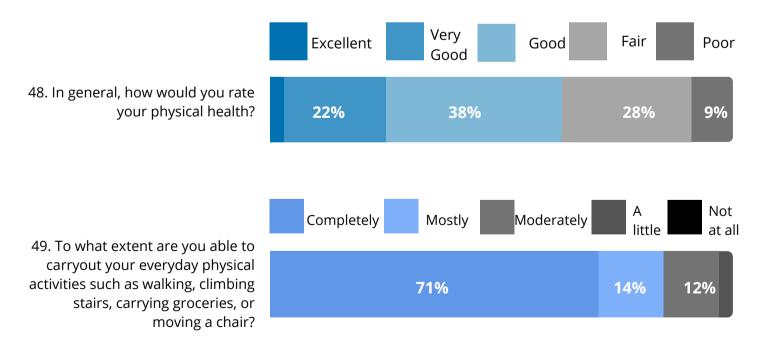
STAFF HEALTH

47. Since starting work in corrections, I have developed the following health conditions (check all that apply):

% Yes

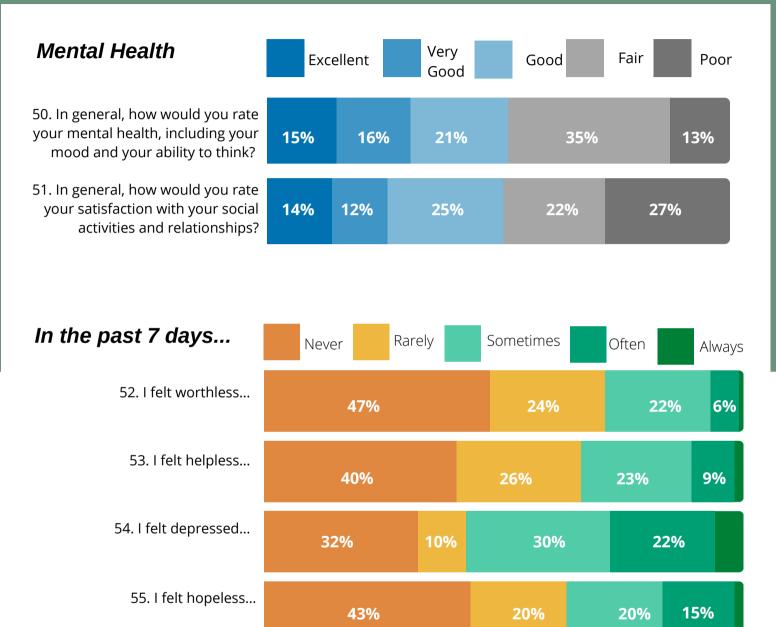


Physical Health





STAFF HEALTH, Continued



Suicidal Thoughts

56. At any time in the last 12 months did you seriously think about trying to kill yourself?

10% yes



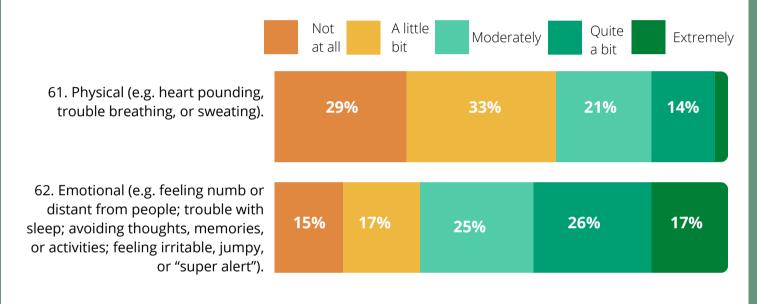
TRAUMA

Consider your entire life, have you experienced? (happened to you or witnessed it) yes % no % 10% 90% 57. Physical assault? If yes, did it happen in prison? 73% 27% 71% 29% 58. Assault with a weapon? 74% If yes, did it happen in prison? 26% 59. Sudden or unexpected death 28% 72% of someone close to you? If yes, did it happen in prison? 26% 74% 60. Any other very stressful event or 13% 87% experience? If yes, did it happen in prison? 44% 56%



TRAUMA, Continued

In the past month, how much have you been bothered by physical or emotional reactions when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?

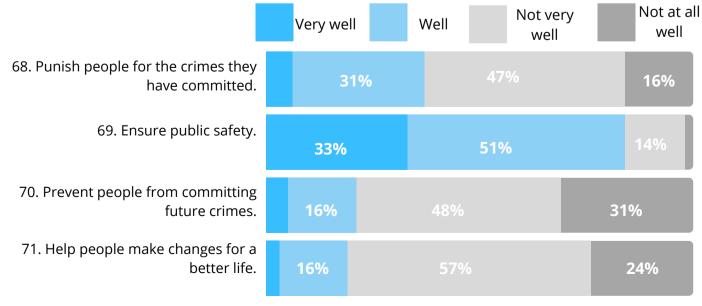




PURPOSE OF PRISON

		ongly sagree	Disagree	Ag	ree	Strongly Agree
63. I believe rehabilitation is possible for the people incarcerated here.	10% 29%		57%		7%	
It is important that prisons.	Very	rtant	Important		very ortant	Not at all important
64. Punish people for the crimes they have committed.	14% 51%		22%		13%	
65. Ensure public safety.	75%					23%
66. Prevent people from committing future crimes.	63%				329	%
67. Help people make changes for a better life.		73% 23%			23%	

How well does this prison do these things?

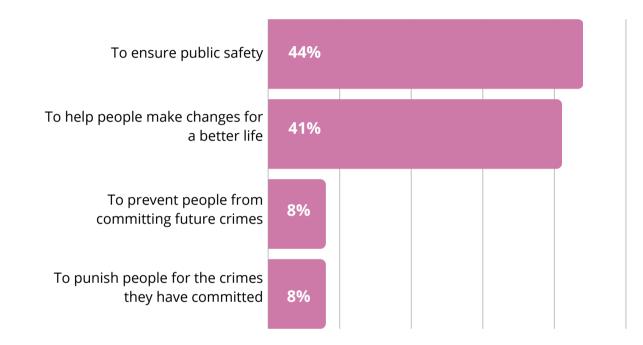




PURPOSE OF PRISON, Continued

72. Which of these things should be the <u>most important</u> purpose of prison? (choose one)

% Yes



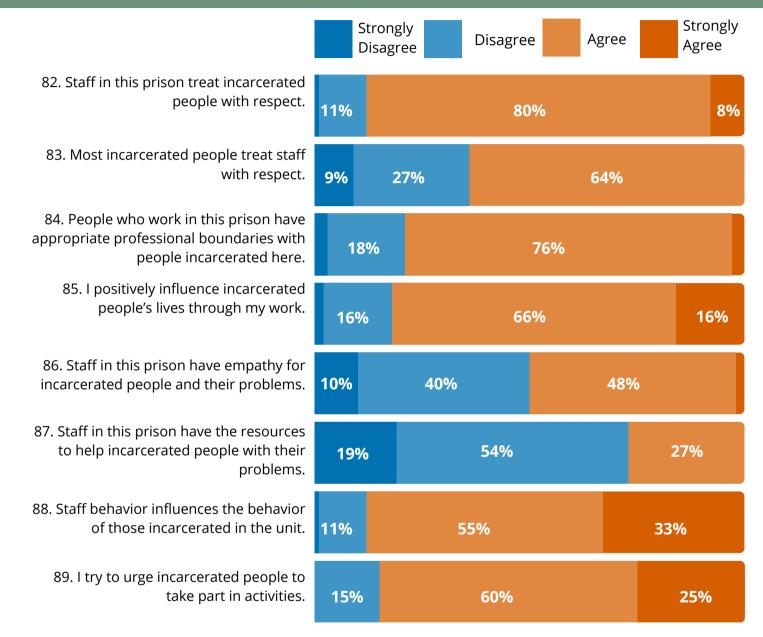


PRISON CONDITIONS

	Strong Disagi		Agree	Strongly Agree
73. Incarcerated people get enough to eat here.	10%	45%		41%
74. The quality of food provided to incarcerated people here supports a healthy lifestyle.	19%	33%	37%	11%
75. This facility gives incarcerated people what they need (e.g. soap, regular showers, sanitary products) for good personal hygiene for free.	7% 15%	57%	57%	
76. Incarcerated people are usually able to get a good night's sleep here.	26%	54%	54%	
77. It's easy for incarcerated people with physical disabilities to get around in this prison.	18%	58%		22%
78. Incarcerated people get enough natural light in this prison.	7% 3	32%	51%	10%
79. This prison is clean.	12%	64%		20%
80. The quality of incarcerated people's living space is good here.	20%	67%		10%
81. Working in a prison makes me feel like I am "doing time" too.	14% 12	2% 38%		36%



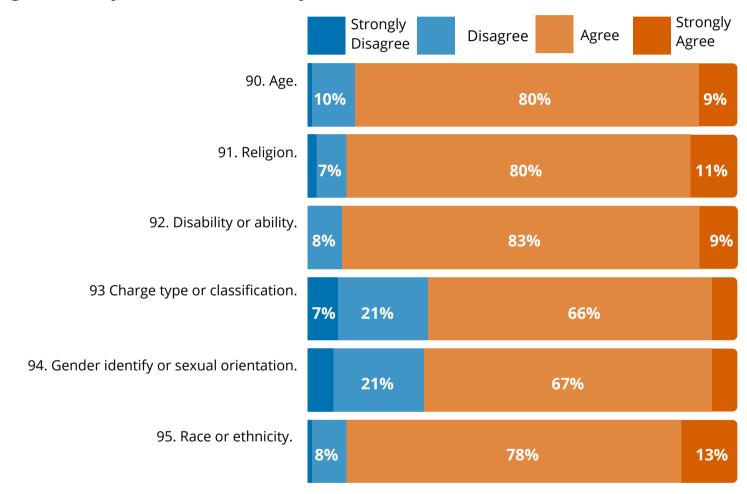
STAFF-INCARCERATED INTERACTIONS





STAFF-INCARCERATED INTERACTIONS, CONTINUED

Staff in this prison treat incarcerated people the same regardless of the incarcerated persons'...





CORRECTIONAL PRACTICES AND SANCTIONS

		Strong Disagr		Disagr	ee	Agree		Strongly Agree
96. This prison has adequate alternatives to segregation.	8% 43%					43%		
97. Staff in this prison are more likely to use segregation over other disciplinary options.	9%		69%	69%			18%	
98. Incarcerated peoples' discipline procedures are applied fairly and consistently.	27%			62%				
99. Incarcerated peoples' discipline procedures are effective at holding them accountable.	26%		429	42%			31%	
100. There are options for staff to reward incarcerated people for good behavior.		22%		5	51%		26%	
101. This prison provides enough opportunities so incarcerated people can stay busy all day.		38%	6	46%		46%	% 10	
102. People incarcerated in this prison can participate in activities that promote their health and well being.	149	6	39	39%			47%	
103. When incarcerated people do not have enough to do they are more likely to engage in negative behavior.			42%	%		53'	53%	
104.This prison does a good job preparing people for release.		30%			52%			18%
105. The programs in this prison give incarcerated people the skills they need to be successful in the community.		38%		49%		9%		13%
106. Caseloads are manageable to adequately support incarcerated people as they get ready for release.	2	0%		46%			34%	



DURING COVID-19,...

	Strongly Disagree Disagree		Disagree	Agree	Stro Agr	ongly ee			
107. This prison's leadership has demonstrated care for the well being of staff.	19%	30%		38%		12%			
108. Staff here have had access to sanitary items like soap or hand sanitizer.	66%					66%			%
109. Staff here have been supplied with cleaning supplies to disinfect/keep areas clean.	66%				28%				
110. Staff here have been supplied with masks to contain the spread of the virus.	65%			25%					
111. Most staff here have been wearing masks to contain the spread of the virus.	58%			40%					
112. This prison's leadership has been letting incarcerated people make more free phone calls when visits have been restricted.	14%	61%		24%					
113. This prison's leadership has been clearly communicating changes to normal operations, like new procedures for mealtimes and phone time.	8% 2	6%	49%		17%				
114. This prison's leadership has been clearly communicating information about COVID rates in the facility.	9%	9% 61%			27	%			
115 Staff here have been increasing the use of segregation as a form of punishment.	37%		53%			8%			
116. The COVID-19 restrictions on incarcerated people have been too strict.	76%		53%		19%				



MEDICATION ASSISTED TREATMENT (MAT) PROGRAM

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Agree	Strongly Agree
117. The purpose of the MAT program was clearly communicated when the program was started.	36%	41%	19%
118. The MAT program is implemented in a manner that supports the prison's operations and safety.	48%	41%	11%
119. The MAT program has had a positive effect on the prison.	58%	26%	13%



2021: SURVEY RESPONDENTS -INCARCERATED PERSONS



- Age: 39 years (median)
- Race: 80% white
- Ethnicity: 77% white
- Gender identity: 91% male
 o Transgender: 6%
- Status:
 - 27% Detained, awaiting trial
 - 50% Serving sentence
 - 22% Incarcerated for a violation of conditions
- # Years incarcerated at SSCF
 - 85% 0-5 years, 15% 6+ years

70%

of incarcerated persons completed the survey.

The Incarcerated Persons Vermont Prison Climate Survey was administered to people incarcerated in Vermont's Southern State Correctional Facility in June 2021. Surveys were paper-based, confidential, and anonymous. Of 267 eligible incarcerated people, 186 completed the survey (70% response rate). The demographic data presented here are selfreported.

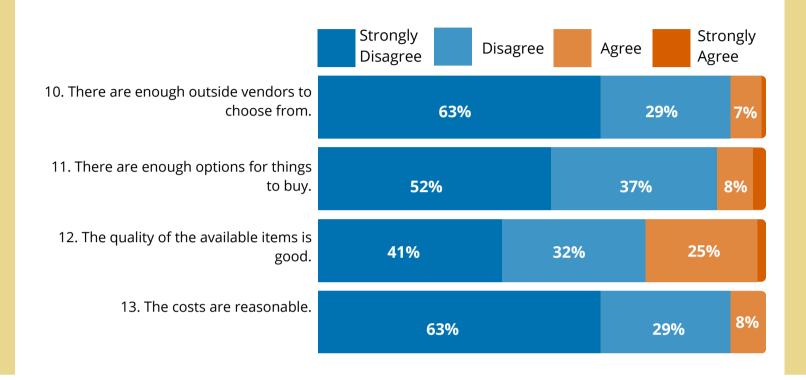


PRISON CONDITIONS & ENVIRONMENT

	Strongly Disagree Disagree		ee	Agree	Stro Agro	ongly ee					
1. I get enough to eat here.	14%	3	33%		33%		3% 46%		46%		7%
2. The quality of food here supports a healthy lifestyle.	27%		48%		48% 2						
3. The facility gives me what I need (e.g. soap, regular showers, sanitary products) for good personal hygiene.	29%		34%		31%						
4. I am usually able to get a good night's sleep here.	27%		30%		39%						
5. It's easy for incarcerated people with physical disabilities to get around in this prison.	16%	3	32%		46%						
6. I get enough natural light in this prison.	24%		37%		35%						
7. I get enough fresh air in this prison.	30%		3	9%	27%						
8. This prison is clean.	18%		33%		41%		8%				
9. The quality of my living space is good here.	19%	38%			37%						



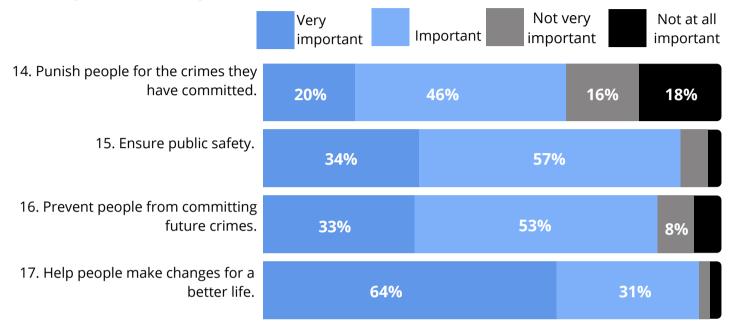
COMMISSARY





PURPOSE OF PRISON

It is important that prisons...



How well does this prison do these things?

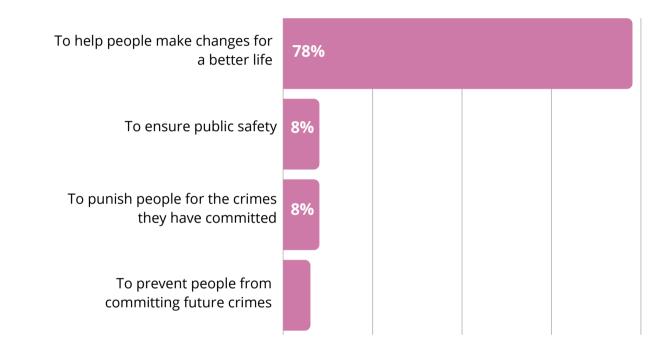
		Very well	Well Not we			t at all well
18. Punish people for the crimes they have committed.	2	2%	45%			12%
19. Ensure public safety.	17	%	54%	22%	7%	
20. Prevent people from committing future crimes.	8%	26%	34%		32%	
21. Help people make changes for a better life.	8%	23%	27%		42%	



PURPOSE OF PRISON, CONTINUED

22. Which of these things should be the <u>most important</u> purpose of prison? (choose one)

% Yes





PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL SAFETY

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree	Agree		rongly gree
23. Overall I feel this is a safe prison.	11% 21%		58%			10%
24. The staff at this prison make me feel safe.	22% 3		35%		8%	
25. Sexual assault of incarcerated people by staff is a problem here.	39%		47%		99	
26. Sexual assault between incarcerated people is a problem here.	24%		54%		13%	9%
27. Racial tension between incarcerated people is a problem in this prison.	24%		40%		%	12%
28. Victims of bullying get the help they need here.	27%		38%		9%	
29. Some incarcerated people are afraid of other incarcerated people.	10%		59%		26%	
30. I have to constantly be alert and on guard.	13% 2	2%	40%		25	%
31. Incarcerated people feel like they have to be "tough" to get respect in this prison.	7% 18%		50%		25	%
32. Theft is common in this prison.	10% 33%		5 37%		20%	
33. Weapons are an issue in this prison.	34%		49%			%
32. Theft is common in this prison.	10% 33%					



PRISON CULTURE

	Strongly Disagre		Disagree	Agroo	Strongly Agree	
34. I am encouraged to work towards goals in this prison.	31%		39%	23%	7%	
35. Even if I never got out of prison, my life here has meaning.	38%		38% 26% 259		11%	
36. Sale and trade of contraband is a problem here.	23%	48%		20%	9%	
37. I get emotional support from other incarcerated people.	18%	18% 32%		43%	7%	
38. I do not trust many people in this prison.	7%	49%		41%		
39. Mixing different inmates (with certain charges or classification levels) causes problems.	12%	2% 42%		42%		
40. Being in prison teaches people how to get better at committing crimes.	25%		25% 42%		2	.8%
41. Incarcerated people are treated the same in this prison regardless of their: Charge type or classification.	35%		32%	25%	8%	



PRISON CULTURE, CONTINUED

	Strongl Disagre	Disagroo	Δστοο	Strongly Agree
42. Incarcerated people are treated the same in this prison regardless of their: Age.	16%	32%	45%	7%
43. Incarcerated people are treated the same in this prison regardless of their: Gender identity or sexual orientation.	24%	39%	30%	7%
44. Incarcerated people are treated the same in this prison regardless of their: Race or ethnicity	21%	37%	33%	9%
45. Incarcerated people are treated the same in this prison regardless of their: Religion.	20%	32%	38%	10%
46. Incarcerated people are treated the same in this prison regardless of their: Disability or ability.	22%	37%	34%	7%



CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND PRACTICES

	Strong Disagr	Dicagroo	Agree	Strongly Agree
47. I feel safe raising concerns with staff in this prison.	27%	43%		27%
48. Staff in this prison treat me with respect.	21%	29%	41%	9%
49. People who work in this prison have appropriate professional boundaries with people incarcerated here.	19% 32%		44%	
50. Relationships between staff and incarcerated people in this prison are good.	16%	35%	46%	
51. Staff behavior influences the behavior of those incarcerated in the unit.	7% 15%	43%		35%
52. Staff don't seem interested in my problems.	22%	44%		30%
53. Staff don't have the resources to help me with my problems.	18%	45%		31%
54. Staff here tend to reward incarcerated people for good behavior.	34%	34%		17%
55. In this prison, staff enforce the rules consistently.	28%	26%	36%	10%

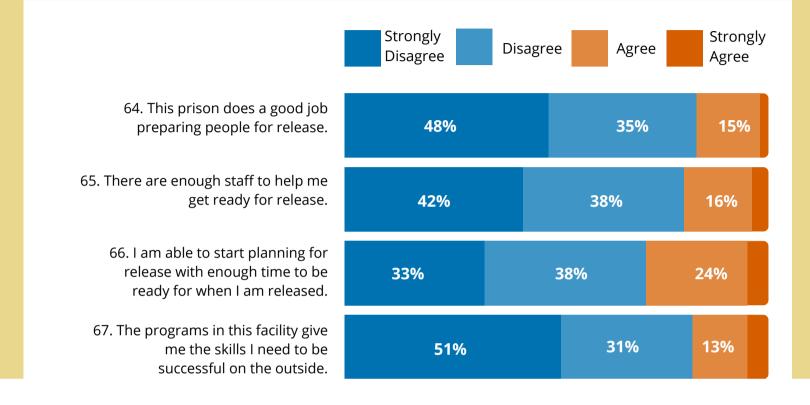


DISCIPLINE AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

	Strongly Disagree			Disagree	Agree	Strong Agree	ly
56. The process for reporting staff misconduct works well.	43%			41%		14%	
57. The grievance process in this prison is a useful tool to address the concerns of incarcerated people.	48%			48% 32%		18%	
58. Sanctions are applied fairly here.	42%				35%	21%	
59. This prison has adequate alternatives to segregation.	37%			37% 40%			
60. Staff in this prison are more likely to use segregation over other disciplinary options.	7%	7% 29%		40%		24%	
61. I can keep my dignity even when being punished.	17	17% 34%		34% 36%		12%	6
62. Incarcerated people in this prison have a voice in their own discipline process.	40%		0% 40%		40%	17%	
63. The discipline and grievance processes would benefit from external oversight.	9%	17%	28%		40	5%	



PLANNING FOR RELEASE





PRISON ACTIVITIES

	Strong Disagre	-	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
68. I have access to activities that promote wellbeing and growtth.	35%		42%	42% 2		
69. There are a lot of times when there is nothing productive (or meaningful) for me to do.	10%	30%		55%		
70. This prison gives me opportunities to feel proud and accomplished.	48	8%		38%	11%	
71. This prison gives me enough recreation time.		53%		34%	12%	
72. The quality of activities during recreation time helps me to feel good.	39%		37%		20%	
73. I am able to practice my religion in this prison.	22%	25%		46%		
74. The prison provides enough opportunities for incarcerated people to earn money.	45%		33%	b	17%	
75. The risk reduction programming in this facility is helpful to me (leave blank if does not apply).	39%		28%	% 22%		
76. The education program in this facility is useful to me (leave blank if does not apply).	36%		30%	23%	11%	



PRISON ACTIVITIES, CONTINUED

77. What types of programs would you find most helpful to meet your needs? (choose up to 3)





MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTHCARE

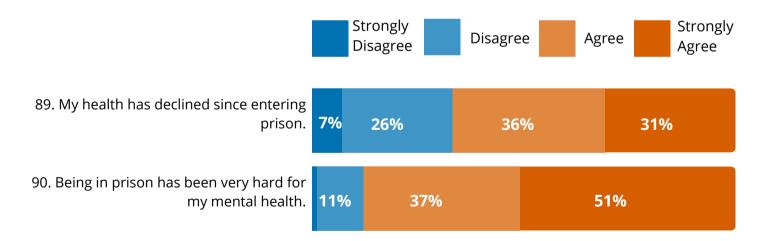
		Strongly Disagree	Disagre	ee A	gree	Stro Agre	
	78. I get the medical treatment I need in this prison, when I need it.	34%		1%	30	%	
	79. I get the mental health care/treatment I need in this prison, when I need it.	36%	3	33%	2	27%	
	80. I receive better medical care in this prison than I did on the outside.	50%		3	8%	6	
	81. There are enough staff to meet the current medical and mental health care needs of the prison.	43%		34%	6 18%		
	82. There are enough mental health care services here.	43%	33%			20%	
m	83. When I became incarcerated in this prison, I was able to continue taking the edications my doctor had prescribed to me on the outside (leave blank if does not apply).	44%		25%	20	5%	
	84. I am able to get adequate treatmenṫ for my substance use disorder here (leave blank if does not apply).	32%	30%		29%		9%
	85. When people are first incarcerated in the prison, they are screened adequately for medical and mental health needs.	24% 34%			36%		
	86. While incarcerated, people receive regular screening to update their medical and mental health needs.	28%	28% 39%		3()%	



MEDICATION ASSISTED TREATMENT (MAT) PROGRAM

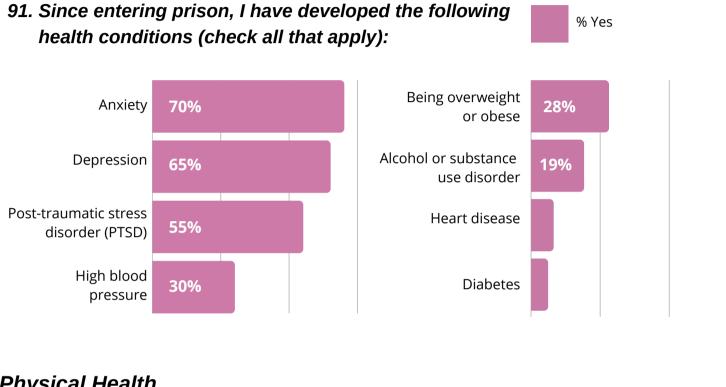
	Strongly Disagree		Disagree Ag	ree Strongly Agree
87. The MAT program is implemented in a manner that supports the prison's operations and safety.	21%	18%	38%	23%
88. The MAT program has had a positive effect on the prison.	24%	12%	33%	31%

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

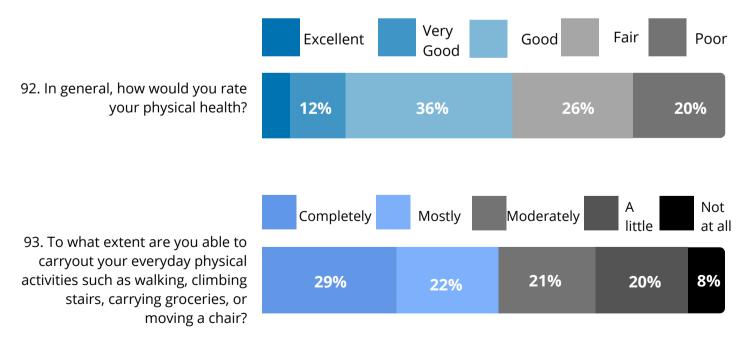




HEALTH AND WELLBEING, CONTINUED

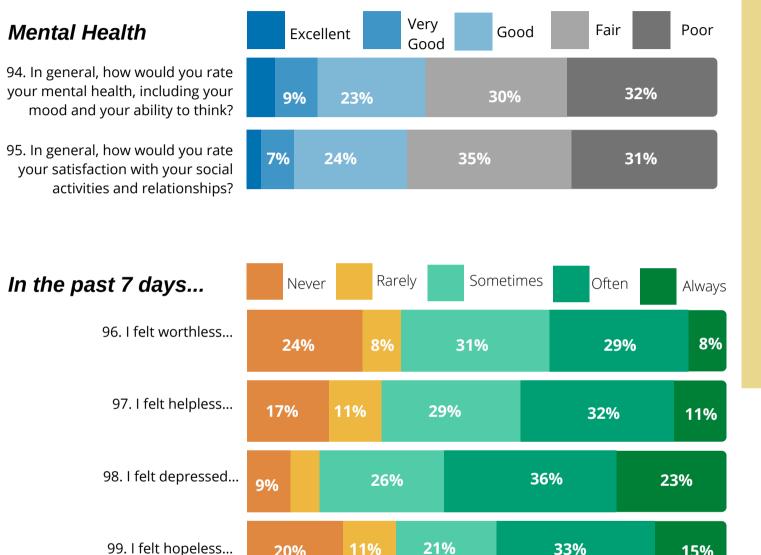


Physical Health





HEALTH AND WELLBEING, CONTINUED



Suicidal Thoughts

100. At any time in the last 12 months did you seriously think about trying to kill yourself?

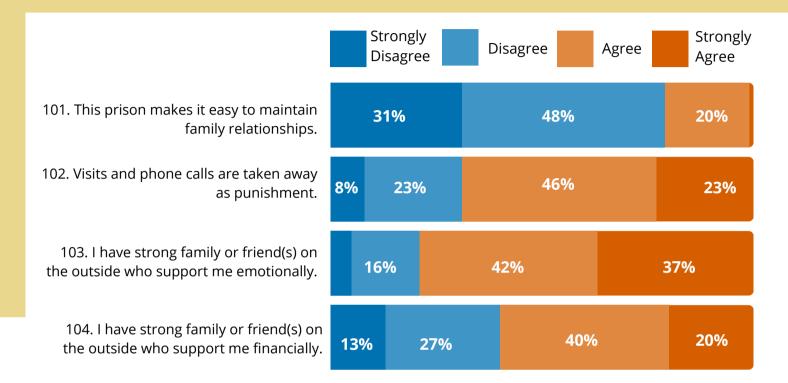
20%



15%



CONTACT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS



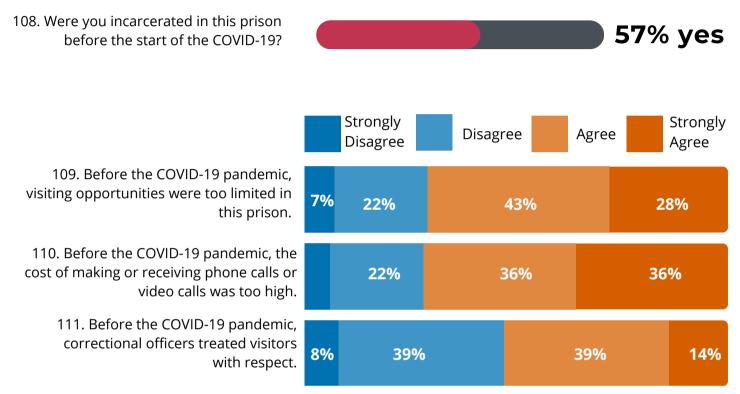
If you have children under the age under the age of 18 years old:

105. Before entering prison, l was an active part of my children's lives.	10% 11% 33%			46%	6				
106. This facility makes it possible for me to play a meaningful role in my children's lives.	49%			34%	10%	7%			
107. My children are well cared for while l am incarcerated.	7%	11%	28%	54%					



CONTACT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, CONTINUED

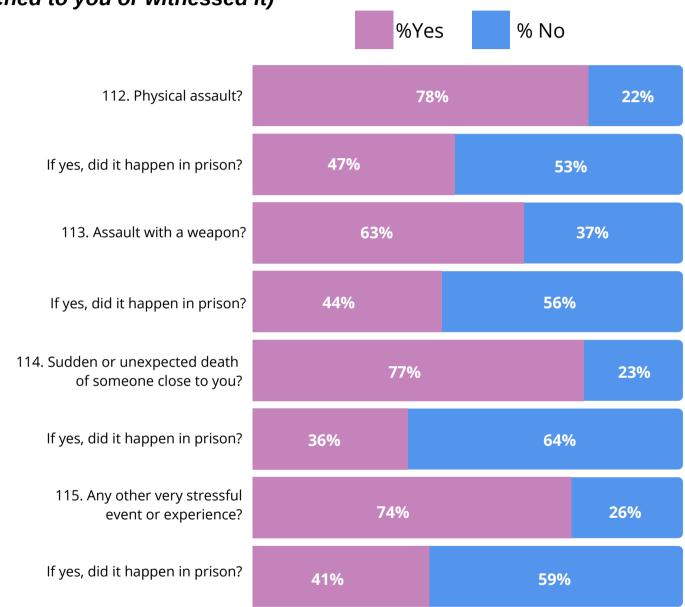






TRAUMA

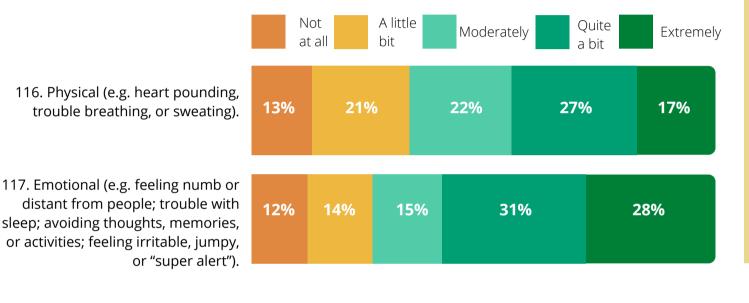
Consider your entire life, have you experienced ? (happened to you or witnessed it)





TRAUMA, CONTINUED

In the past month, how much have you been bothered by physical or emotional reactions when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?



ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE)

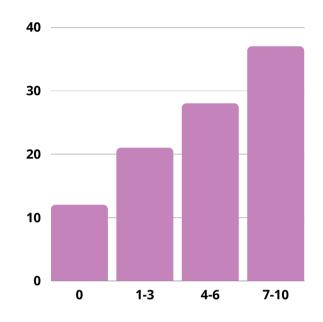
A series of 10 questions about difficult or stressful things that sometimes happen to people in their childhood. Respondents are asked to consider the time before they were 18 years old as they go through the questions.

One point is assigned for each "yes" response, and then points are summed to calculate a total ACE score.

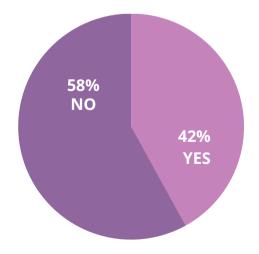
ACE scores greater than 4 are associated with significantly negative outcomes. Those with scores greater than 6 are in the most severe category of risk – including having an estimated shortened lifespan by 20 years.



ACE categories



% with history of incarcerated parent





DURING COVID-19,...

		Strongly Disagre		Disa	gree	Agr	ee	Str Agr	ongly ree
128. The prison has demonstrated care for the wellbeing of people incarcerated here.	14	14% 37%			41%			8%	
129. People incarcerated here have had access to sanitary items like soap or hand sanitizer.	159	%	23%			53%			9%
130. People incarcerated here have been given masks.		69%						25%	6
131. Most staff here have been wearing masks.	109	%	60%					289	6
132. Correctional staff here have been letting us make more free phone calls when visits were restricted.	9%	34%			41%			6%	
133. Correctional staff here have been clearly communicating when and why our movements, activities, and visits have been restricted.	2	21% 45%		,	25%			9%	
134. Correctional staff have been clearly communicating information about COVID rates in the facility.	139	%	36%)		41%			9%
135. Staff here have been increasing the use of segregation as a form of punishment.		36%	Ď			43%		16%	
136 The COVID-19 restrictions on incarcerated people have been too strict.		25%		38%	38%		31%		
137. Incarcerated people have understood the need for the COVID-19 restrictions inside the prison.		29%				57%			9%
138. The COVID19 restrictions have had a significant impact on my wellbeing.		19%		45%	6		34	%	