VERMONT PRISON CLIMATE SURVEYS
2021
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VERMONT PRISON CLIMATE SURVEYS - 2021
ABOUT

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. More than 70% of SSCF staff and incarcerated persons completed the surveys. Summary results of Vermont's Prison Climate 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.

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 well-being 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.
SURVEY RESPONDENTS - STAFF

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 self-reported.

- 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
1. JOB SATISFACTION

- I take pride in my job.
  - Strongly Disagree: 16%
  - Disagree: 46%
  - Agree: 37%
  - Strongly Agree: 26%

- Staff in this prison are fairly compensated for the duties and tasks they are required to perform.
  - Strongly Disagree: 26%
  - Disagree: 38%
  - Agree: 33%
  - Strongly Agree: 28%

- Leadership in this prison shows appreciation for staff in meaningful ways.
  - Strongly Disagree: 28%
  - Disagree: 35%
  - Agree: 34%
  - Strongly Agree: 32%

- Promotions in this prison are done fairly.
  - Strongly Disagree: 32%
  - Disagree: 28%
  - Agree: 39%
  - Strongly Agree: 28%

- If I have a chance, I will change to some other job outside of corrections at the same rate of pay.
  - Strongly Disagree: 11%
  - Disagree: 22%
  - Agree: 27%
  - Strongly Agree: 40%

2. THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (CENTRAL OFFICE)

- The Department communicates a clear vision (mission) for Corrections.
  - Strongly Disagree: 16%
  - Disagree: 51%
  - Agree: 31%
  - Strongly Agree: 33%

- There are discussions involving all staff about the vision for Corrections and ways to achieve it.
  - Strongly Disagree: 33%
  - Disagree: 47%
  - Agree: 18%

- The Department has a clear understanding of what it's like for staff to work in this prison.
  - Strongly Disagree: 63%
  - Disagree: 26%
  - Agree: 8%

- The Department takes the things I say seriously and treats me and my ideas with respect.
  - Strongly Disagree: 35%
  - Disagree: 45%
  - Agree: 19%
3. COMMUNICATIONS & CHANGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication in this prison works well - I have the information I need, when I need it, to do my job.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When changes are made in this prison that affect me, I am included in the process.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When changes are made in this prison, we assess the impact to see how they worked.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. STAFF RELATIONSHIPS & CULTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a strong sense of trust among staff in this prison.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff in this prison operate as a real team.</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can rely on my coworkers to respond quickly during an emergency.</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff in this prison enforce the rules consistently.</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff behavior influences the behavior of those incarcerated in the unit.</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe speaking up about staff misconduct.</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff investigations are conducted with fairness.</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. CORRECTIONAL PRACTICES & ACTIVITIES

There are options for staff to reward incarcerated people for good behavior.

- Strongly Disagree: 22%
- Disagree: 51%
- Agree: 26%

The programs in this prison give incarcerated people the skills they need to be successful in the community.

- Strongly Disagree: 38%
- Disagree: 48%
- Agree: 13%

When incarcerated people do not have enough to do they are more likely to engage in negative behavior.

- Strongly Disagree: 42%
- Disagree: 53%

This prison provides enough opportunities so incarcerated people can stay busy all day.

- Strongly Disagree: 38%
- Disagree: 46%
- Agree: 16%

6. STAFFING

There are enough staff to meet the current needs of this prison.

- Strongly Agree: 85%
- Agree: 9%

Frequent staff turnover is a problem in this prison.

- Strongly Disagree: 13%
- Disagree: 84%

Mandatory overtime is a problem in this prison.

- Strongly Disagree: 14%
- Disagree: 82%

My work schedule causes conflict at home.

- Strongly Disagree: 11%
- Disagree: 31%
- Agree: 19%
- Strongly Agree: 39%

Generally, staff morale is high.

- Strongly Agree: 72%
- Agree: 23%

My coworkers show signs of stress.

- Strongly Agree: 18%
- Agree: 79%
When asked, "Since starting work in corrections, have you developed the following health conditions?" This is how correctional staff answered:

- **49%** Anxiety
- **46%** Depression
- **43%** Being overweight or obese
- **40%** High blood pressure
- **39%** Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- **23%** Alcohol or substance use disorder
7. HEALTH & WELL-BEING, CONTINUED

In the past 7 days, I felt depressed.
- Never: 32%
- Rarely: 10%
- Sometimes: 30%
- Often: 22%
- Always: 6%

In the past month, how much have you been bothered by emotional reactions when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?
- Not at all: 15%
- A little bit: 16%
- Moderately: 25%
- Quite a bit: 26%
- Extremely: 17%

Emotional (e.g. feeling numb or distant from people; trouble with sleep; avoiding thoughts, memories, or activities; feeling irritable, jumpy, or “super alert”).

At any time in the last 12 months did you seriously think about trying to kill yourself?
- 10% yes
SURVEY RESPONDENTS - INCARCERATED PERSONS

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 self-reported.

- Age: 39 years (median)
- Race: 80% white
- Ethnicity: 77% white
- Gender identity: 91% male
  - 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
1. COMMISSARY

- There are enough outside vendors to choose from: 63% Strongly Disagree, 29% Disagree, 7% Agree, 0% Strongly Agree
- There are enough options for things to buy: 52% Strongly Disagree, 37% Disagree, 8% Agree, 0% Strongly Agree
- The quality of the available items is good: 41% Strongly Disagree, 32% Disagree, 25% Agree, 0% Strongly Agree
- The costs are reasonable: 63% Strongly Disagree, 29% Disagree, 8% Agree, 0% Strongly Agree

2. PLANNING & PREPARATION FOR RELEASE

- This prison does a good job preparing people for release: 48% Strongly Disagree, 35% Disagree, 15% Agree, 0% Strongly Agree
- There are enough staff to help me get ready for release: 42% Strongly Disagree, 38% Disagree, 16% Agree, 0% Strongly Agree
- The programs in this facility give me the skills I need to be successful on the outside: 51% Strongly Disagree, 31% Disagree, 13% Agree, 0% Strongly Agree
3. PRISON ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have access to activities that promote well-being and growth.</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are a lot of times when there is nothing productive (or meaningful) for me to do.</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This prison gives me opportunities to feel proud and accomplished.</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This prison gives me enough recreation time.</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of activities during recreation time helps me to feel good.</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked, "What types of programs would you find most helpful to meet your needs?" This is how incarcerated people answered:

- **63%** Job Training.
- **49%** Community service (e.g. dog training program, gardening for food shelf).
- **47%** Meaningful activities to pass time (e.g. book club, music or art programs).
- **35%** Education.
4. MEDICAL & MENTAL HEALTH CARE

I get the medical treatment I need in this prison, when I need it.

- Strongly Disagree: 34%
- Disagree: 31%
- Agree: 30%
- Strongly Agree: 8%

I get the mental health care/treatment I need in this prison, when I need it.

- Strongly Disagree: 36%
- Disagree: 33%
- Agree: 27%
- Strongly Agree: 8%

I receive better medical care in this prison than I did on the outside.

- Strongly Disagree: 50%
- Disagree: 38%
- Agree: 38%
- Strongly Agree: 8%

5. HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Being in prison has been very hard for my mental health.

- Strongly Disagree: 11%
- Disagree: 37%
- Agree: 51%

When asked, "Since entering prison, have you developed the following health conditions?" This is how incarcerated people answered:

- 70% Anxiety
- 65% Depression
- 55% Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
5. HEALTH & WELL-BEING, CONTINUED

In general, how would you rate your mental health, including your mood and your ability to think?

- Very Good: 9%
- Good: 23%
- Fair: 30%
- Poor: 32%

In general, how would you rate your satisfaction with your social activities and relationships?

- Excellent: 7%
- Good: 24%
- Fair: 35%
- Poor: 31%

In the past 7 days, I felt depressed.

- Not at all: 9%
- A little bit: 6%
- Moderately: 26%
- Quite a bit: 36%
- Extremely: 23%

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

- Not at all: 12%
- A little bit: 14%
- Moderately: 15%
- Quite a bit: 31%
- Extremely: 28%

Emotional (e.g. feeling numb or distant from people; trouble with sleep; avoiding thoughts, memories, or activities; feeling irritable, jumpy, or “super alert”).

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

36% yes
### 6. PRISON CULTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some incarcerated people are afraid of other incarcerated people.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarcerated people feel like they have to be “tough” to get respect in this prison.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not trust many people in this prison.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixing different inmates (with certain charges or classification levels) causes problems.</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in prison teaches people how to get better at committing crimes.</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7. DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions are applied fairly here.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This prison has adequate alternatives to segregation.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarcerated people in this prison have a voice in their own discipline process.</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can keep my dignity even when being punished.</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. CORRECTIONAL STAFF & PRACTICES

I feel safe raising concerns with staff in this prison.
- Strongly Disagree: 27%
- Disagree: 43%
- Agree: 27%
- Strongly Agree: 6%

Staff behavior influences the behavior of those incarcerated in the unit.
- Strongly Disagree: 6%
- Disagree: 16%
- Agree: 43%
- Strongly Agree: 35%

Staff don't seem interested in my problems.
- Strongly Disagree: 22%
- Disagree: 44%
- Agree: 30%
- Strongly Agree: 6%

Staff don't have the resources to help me with my problems.
- Strongly Disagree: 6%
- Disagree: 18%
- Agree: 45%
- Strongly Agree: 31%

Staff here tend to reward incarcerated people for good behavior.
- Strongly Disagree: 34%
- Disagree: 44%
- Agree: 17%

9. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

The process for reporting staff misconduct works well.
- Strongly Agree: 43%
- Agree: 41%
- Disagree: 14%

The grievance process in this prison is a useful tool to address the concerns of incarcerated people.
- Strongly Agree: 48%
- Agree: 32%
- Disagree: 18%