

Summary

Inappropriate behaviour among prison staff State of the art in the year 2011

This report discusses the results of the prison staff survey of the Dutch prison system in the year 2011. Special attention is paid to the answers to the survey questions on inappropriate behaviour that staff experience added by colleagues and superiors during the working day. This behaviour may be about verbal aggression, intimidation, sexual intimidation, discrimination, and physical violence. Two issues will be brought up, namely the tendency of the prevalence of inappropriate behaviour over the years, and the qualitative interpretation of incidents staff experienced. In the Dutch prison system, there are aims stated explicitly on inappropriate behaviour. In order to achieve the aims, the survey results should show, in comparison to the 2007 survey results, a decrease of 30% of inappropriate behaviour between colleagues, and a 50% decrease in inappropriate behaviour between staff and superiors.

In comparison to other occupational groups, prison staff have a relatively high chance of being exposed to inappropriate behaviour. This is not only due to the presence of inmates. The closed nature of the prison organisation and the high level of interdependence between colleagues contributes to this chance. Since 2001 the Dutch prison system pays attention to the issue and undertakes activities and measures to reduce the problem of inappropriate behaviour among staff. Moreover, a special covenant between government parties and the labour unions initiated specialised measures in the years 2005 through 2007. Despite these measures, the prevalence of improper manners even increased in the period of the covenant. Two mentioned explanations for the increase were the persistency of an organisational culture and the so called integrity paradox (by giving attention to an issue, one is more aware of the issue and will be more likely to report it). In the year 2007, the aims of the covenant were not met. Over 30% of the prison staff reported (just as in the year 2004) that they were treated in a improper manner by colleagues or superiors in the last twelve months. Consequently, the aims were stated again. For achieving those aims, the Dutch prison system invested in the development of leadership skills of all ground staff superiors and management staff. In this report, we examine whether these aims are met in the year 2011.

The prison staff survey of 2011 had a satisfying response, namely 62% of the population (6,688 out of 10,820 filled out the questionnaire). Furthermore, the analysis of representativeness shows that there are no serious drawbacks in formulating conclusions for the total population of prison staff on the basis of the sample in this study. Between 2004 and 2007, the percentage of staff who reported to be treated in an improper manner by inmates decreased to 46%. In 2011, this percentage is back on the level of 2004, namely 54%. The percentage of prison staff who reported to be treated in an improper manner by colleagues or superiors increased slightly between 2004 and 2007 to a 34% level. Thereafter, in 2011, this percentage is decreased dramatically to a 18% level. The decrease is concerned to all distinguished behaviour, that is sexual intimidation, intimidation (in what discrimination and verbal aggression is included), and physical violence. Furthermore, it is analysed whether differences exist between men and women in reporting inappropriate

behaviour. Over 10% of the female prison staff reported sexual intimidation by a colleague or superior in the last 12 months. Sexual intimidation is substantially present in the group of women under the age of 34. With regard to other aspects of improper manners there are no notable differences between male and female prison staff. Also prison staff who have relatively intensive contacts with inmates are analysed. These correctional officers (CO's) may have an increased risk for experiencing inappropriate behaviour due to their interaction with inmates on a daily basis. Remarkably, CO's report less intimidation by inmates than the total prison staff in the survey (30% against 50%). On the other hand, CO's relatively often report physical violence by inmates (40% against 20% in the total sample). A possible explanation to this finding might be the habituation to intimidation of inmates. However, the experience of physical violence is much more serious and one might not get used to such incidents. In their direct contacts with inmates, CO's are logically being more exposed to physical violence than the total staff. With regard to the inappropriate behaviour between colleagues and superiors, CO's report no significant differences with the total sample of prison workers. The exception is the reporting of CO's on inappropriate behaviour by their superiors. This percentage is substantively higher than in the total sample of prison staff.

In order to enable a more qualitative and subject-driven interpretation of the issue, the survey respondents were also given two open ended questions. In these questions, respondents are asked to describe what the inappropriate behaviour by colleagues and superiors was like and what can be done in future to prevent for these incidents.

The answers to the open ended questions indicate that experienced incidents are mainly the less serious forms of inappropriate behaviour. Extremely drastic forms such as beating, kicking, assaults and rape were not reported. Reported incidents arise mostly from disagreement on absenteeism, furlough, and workload of staff. In addition, discrimination was reported in verbal remarks on gender, religion, age, and sexual inclination. In a lot of cases, respondents wrote that they were able to make the incident debatable with colleagues and superiors which helped to get to a satisfying solution of the problem.

The second open ended question aimed to identify the ideas of the respondents about effective preventive measures they, or the prison management could undertake to decrease the problem of inappropriate behaviours. Frequently, respondents mentioned past and current staff training trajectories of the Dutch prison system, such as local initiatives, the staff violence project, the leadership improvement project, and the treatment style project based on motivational interviewing. A substantial part of the respondents mentioned the so called 'call you colleagues to account for their behaviour', stemming from a recent training course. Respondents wrote that this method resulted in satisfying solutions. Furthermore, it was often mentioned that superiors should have an exemplary role which would contribute to the decrease of inappropriate behaviour. Some superiors were reported to lack skills to deal with the issue. In addition, respondents mention that superiors should be more present at the prison floor.

In the prison staff survey, a lot of other aspects were assessed, such as aspects of personnel management and working conditions. Knowledge on the relations between those aspects and the prevalence of inappropriate behaviour could help reducing the problem. Regression analyses on the survey data showed that the before mentioned prevalence were found to be connected to different aspects of personnel management and working conditions (e.g. work stress, feelings of safety, moral consciousness, and leadership). Exactly those aspects were at the centre of the

activities and policy measures of the Dutch prison system to reduce the problem in recent years. Since we found a significant reduction in the prevalence of inappropriate behaviour in 2011, we examined whether improvement in these aspects of personnel management and working conditions could be found. Statistical tests confirm our expectations. Respondents reported in 2011 (compared to 2007) higher levels of safety, leadership, communication, carrier possibilities, and collegiality. Therefore, we have indications that there is a relation between the realisation of improvements on those aspects, and the prevalence of inappropriate behaviour between prison staff.

The reduction of the percentage of staff who reported inappropriate behaviour between 2004 and 2011 affirm that all aims that were stated are achieved (also see table S1).

Table S1 Reduction of the percentage of staff who report inappropriate behaviour between 2007 en 2011, aims are related to realised results

Improper manners between staff	By colleagues		By superiors	
	Aim	Realisation	Aim	Realisation
Sexual intimidation	30%	65%	50%	83%
Intimidation	30%	47%	50%	67%
Physical violence	30%	73%	50%	85%

A firm conclusion on the causes of the decline in inappropriate behaviour among prison staff can not be given with the results of this report. Some explanations are conceivable. For example, an explanation is that an organisational culture is not easily been changed. The prison system gives attention to the problem since the beginning of the millennium. Perhaps such a process takes a long time and after years of investments, results are observable. Linked to this idea is the interpretation that the reduction should be attributed to the past and current activities and policy measures. The results of this study lead us to believe that there might be a relationship between the improved aspects of personnel management and working conditions on the one hand, and the declined prevalence of inappropriate behaviour among prison staff on the other hand.