

Summary

Staff members of Dutch Immigration Detention Centres: working conditions, aggression and violence

The present report is about the working conditions of staff members who work at the detention centres for foreigners in The Netherlands. In the beginning of 2012 the detention centres conducted a prison staff satisfaction survey (PSSS). The measurement instrument used for the PSSS is the Internetspiegel questionnaire. Satisfaction was also measured in 2007, with a PSSS called BASAM-DJI. The aim of the PSSS is to assess staff members' opinion on their working conditions and which problems these conditions may cause. The focus is on learning and improving but explicitly not on judging or sanctioning managers and line staff when negative results occur. The basic Internetspiegel questionnaire, which is used by several organizations in the Dutch public sector, contains topics concerning job content, workplace stress, the relationship with colleagues, and leadership. Additional questions have been formulated by the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency about staff safety and aggression and violence committed by detained foreigners and inappropriate behaviour by colleagues (as perceived by staff members). Also additional questions were added measuring the treatment orientation of staff.

The detention centres and their living units received reports with their results of the PSSS to make comparisons, benchmarks, and plans for improvement. In order to create a better understanding of the development of staff satisfaction, this study provides a comparison between the survey years of 2007 and 2012. Furthermore, this report shows differences concerning several context characteristics of staff members and specific aspects of the detention centres. The significance of staff's working conditions is not only a result of the Dutch Working Conditions Act, also the empirical evidence on the relation with the mission statement of the prison system makes that the conditions are a major subject. When the working conditions are more appreciated, staff members report having better possibilities to supervise and treat inmates (Molleman & Van der Broek, forthcoming). Furthermore, it is known that perceived aggression and violence decrease in situations wherein the working conditions are more favourable. Those research findings come from Dutch standard prisons and may not be simply generalized to the detention centres for foreigners. Therefore, the management of the centres for foreigners wants to know whether there are staff members characteristics connected to more and less favourable assessments of the working conditions.

The response of the PSSS in 2012 is 63%. The analysis of representativeness shows that, based on the sample in this study, there are no serious drawbacks in formulating conclusions for the total population of staff of the detention centres. As far as the subjects in the questionnaire were measured in exactly the same way, comparisons are presented between the survey results of 2007 and 2012. In sum, comparisons could be made for ten subjects for these years. Moreover, we looked at background characteristics of staff and aspects of the detention centres' significance. Each characteristic (e.g. age or regime) is divided into categories. In the present analyses, the mean score of each category is tested against the mean of all respondents using multivariate analysis of variance.

First, the most significant results of the analysis on inappropriate behaviour will be discussed. In 2007, 55.6% of the staff members experienced violence committed by foreigners. This percentage increased in 2012 to 67.8%. The percentage of staff members who reported to be treated in an improper manner by colleagues or superiors is 19.2% in 2012 against 31% in 2007. It is difficult to determine whether there is an actual in- or decrease of inappropriate behaviour. In 2012, besides intimidation, sexual intimidation and physical violence, we also measure verbal aggression and discrimination. Furthermore, in contrast to 2007, their manners are defined in the 2012 questionnaire. Therefore, a different measurement tendency might trouble a comparison of the results of inappropriate behaviour. When inappropriate behaviour is divided into intimidation, sexual intimidation and physical violence, comparisons are more sound. Physical violence (as perceived by staff) committed by *foreigners* is reported more often in 2012 than in 2007 (an increase from 29.4% to 35.3%). The percentage of staff members, who reported inappropriate behaviour by *colleagues*, remains nearly the same. The percentage of staff members that report sexual intimidation and intimidation by foreigners, decreased between 2007 and 2012. That also goes for sexual intimidation and intimidation by colleagues. All three forms of inappropriate behaviour by superiors (as perceived by staff) decreased between 2007 and 2012. Verbal aggression and discrimination are measured for the first time in 2012. Of the 1,018 respondents 65.3% experienced verbal aggression by *foreigners*. Verbal aggression by *colleagues and superiors* is reported by respectively 7.6% and 5.5% of the responding staff members. Furthermore, 22.9% of the staff members report being discriminated by *foreigners*. Discrimination by *colleagues and superiors* is reported by respectively 6.9% and 2.1% of the staff members. The observed decrease of intimidation between 2007 and 2012 might be explained by differences in phrasing of the questions, as was argued above.

In order to enable a more qualitative and subject-driven interpretation of the issue of inappropriate behaviour *among staff*, the survey respondents were also given two open ended questions. In these questions, respondents are asked to describe the inappropriate behaviour by colleagues and superiors and what can be done in the future to prevent these incidents. Part of the respondents filled out these questions. The answers to the open ended questions indicate that experienced incidents are mainly the less serious forms of inappropriate behaviour, such as verbal aggression, anger, negativity, and conflicts (often about absence due to holiday or illness). It seems that staff lacks empathy since they also report that they sometimes do not stand by each other or even let each other down in presence of colleagues and detained foreigners. Moreover, staff reports that they experience discrimination by verbal remarks under the guise of a joke.

The second open ended question aimed to identify ideas of the respondents about effective preventive measures they, or the management could undertake to decrease the problem of inappropriate behaviour. Respondents think that inappropriate behaviour could be solved by activities and measures aimed at the staff teams and their superiors. For example, colleagues should improve communication. Therefore respondents recommend that staff discusses how things are going and have periodical performance interviews. The familiarity with confidants (independent officials to discuss matters of confidence with) and complaint procedures are also assessed as being improvable. Other possible solutions given by the staff for the problem of inappropriate behaviour are setting a good example and keeping approachability low of colleagues and superiors in particular. Moral issues are not always discussed because of a lack of leadership skills. When incidents occur, according to the respondents, superiors do not intervene or they forget to give feed-

back on how a complaint is dealt with. In addition, respondents mention that superiors should be more present at the working floor. In conclusion, a couple of staff members of the detention centres for foreigners think that a solution for inappropriate behaviour is found in their own conduct. They say they have to indicate their own boundaries and give a good example to others. These respondents report they want to learn more about communication on inappropriate behaviour. Research in Dutch regular prisons showed similar findings (Molleman, 2011).

The second part of the findings in the present study concerns the working conditions. Between 2007 and 2012 several improvements are found, in particular on appreciation of subjects such as information and communication, collegiality, leadership of the direct superior, and the way staff interacts with foreigners. However, respondents report to have less time for the tasks they must perform.

It is analyzed whether there are differences in the appreciation of the working conditions stemming from background characteristics of staff. Older staff members seem to be more satisfied with the working conditions than younger staff. Female staff members are less positive about the amount of work than their male colleagues. Male staff report more violent behaviour by foreigners while female workers often feel more unsafe. Experienced staff members are more satisfied with the working conditions than their less experienced colleagues. Furthermore, relatively young staff faces more violence by foreigners (almost three-quarters) than their older colleagues (about fifty percent). In the detention centres for foreigners, there are public (civil servant) and private (G4S) employed staff. Civil servants are more positive about different subjects of the working conditions than their G4S colleagues. The appreciation of the work, the leadership of the direct superior, and the amount of work is more positive for civil servants. No differences were found concerning the way staff treats foreigners, the experience of safety and integrity. Furthermore, analyses were executed to find differences in perceived working conditions stemming from variations in characteristics of the living units in the detention centres. Staff members on living units for 'article 6' placement (regime for foreigners who are rejected at the border) are relatively positive about physical work stress, directive leadership, and violence by foreigners (they experience violence less often). Staff on 'extra care units' are more positive about the interaction with foreigners, professional motivation, and collegiality. Staff members in a remand prison for foreigners are relatively negative about the interaction with foreigners. Staff members, who are employed on units with relatively little use of cell sharing, are more positive about the working conditions than staff in units where cell sharing is common practice. In units which are not fully occupied, staff is more positive about the working conditions than staff in units where (almost) every cell is occupied. Staff members working on small units, also better appreciate the working conditions than staff working on bigger units.

The findings of the present study give insight in which categories of staff members are more positive about the working conditions and which categories get in touch with inappropriate behaviour, aggression, and violence. With these findings, staff groups at risk can be assessed and special human resource policy can be developed to improve the working conditions and to prevent staff from inappropriate behaviour. The information obtained with the open ended questions can be of supplementary value.