

## Abstract

This research concerns the value of one on one meetings between volunteers and prisoners. We describe first results from a literature search and present then a conceptual framework for the study from care ethical perspective, followed by a method section. Subquestions direct at: numbers, significant elements, experienced profits, content of the conversations, quality of the relationships and comparison with professional contacts. Five parallel studies were conducted, in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected.

First, the registered numbers of volunteers' organisations were analysed in order to obtain an impression of the numbers of meetings. We found out that more than 550 prisoners had had three or more meetings in 2013. Volunteers' focus groups show that the encounters between humans is conceived as an important element of the meetings. In these meetings coaching on diverse situations of life is also conducted.

The qualitative research based on interviews (n=21) shows that the value experienced is very considerable, especially when compared to other contacts within the penitentiary environment. This environment is being experienced as negative, prisoners state that they wear a mask and that they do not express themselves. With the volunteers they find a safe relationship, understanding and recognition of who they are. Yield declines if the match between volunteer and prisoner is less, or if the latter forces his or her (religious or other) convictions. Participants often return to their ward in relief after a conversation, provided with good advices.

The quantitative research (n=80) shows that 3% of the prisoners had one on one meetings at the time of our study. The average age of the participants is just over 40 years and 89% of them is male. The average volunteer is just over 50 years old and about half of them is male. The respondents state that in the meetings all kinds of subjects are discussed (93%), about a quarter states they also get help in coping with emotions, while another number states they get information (18%) or practical help (11%). On average, the bond between prisoner and volunteer is valued with an 8.6 (on a 1 to 10 scale). Of the participants 86% states they always or often reach the goal for which they asked for a volunteer, which suggests experienced benefit. Participants find the meetings generally speaking outstanding or good (90%), delivering sufficient result and would advise their volunteer to another prisoner.

From the prisoner survey's data it comes out that about 10% of the prison population had or had had one on one meetings with volunteers during their period of detention. About 70% finds the meetings with volunteers valuable and would advise his or her volunteer to another prisoner.

The researchers conclude that the meetings are of great value to the prisoners during their period of detention and possibly conducive for the time after that as well. From a governmental point of view, the meetings contribute to a humanitarian execution of penal law.

For a theoretical reflection the work of Judith Butler was drawn into the research. She observes that accusation is not the only way of calling to account. Also the desire to get to know another person can lead to address the other. The leading question then is not, as in the case of accusation, 'What are you, guilty or not?', but 'Who are you?'. The value of volunteers meeting with prisoners can be supported by Butler's 'Who are you? interest in an otherwise accusing environment.