# Prisoners' and Prison Workers' Views on the Prison Subculture in Slovenia[1]

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This paper addresses the hypothesized problem of prison subcultures in Slovenia. In 2015 and 2016, structured interviews were conducted with 193 prisoners and 151 prison staff in all Slovenian prisons and a correctional home. The analysis of interviews conducted documents the presence of a prison subculture in all prison settings studied. In general, exploitation, distrust, opportunistic friendships, hierarchy and social structure, secrecy, and anti-authoritarian stance are common characteristics of the prison subculture present in all Slovenian prison settings. The universal impact of deprivation factors (restriction/lack of safety, autonomy, freedom, heterosexual relations, goods and services, etc.) on prisoners' adaptation to prison life and their commonplace choice to enter the prison subculture was confirmed. Several pre-prison characteristics of prisoners (criminal history, age, gender, etc.) were identified as influential factors on their adaptation to prison life and their decision to enter into the prison's informal society. However, it was also found that behavioural norms that constitute the prison subculture differ significantly across prisons, especially regarding the prison regime (openness of the prison). Furthermore, it was noteworthy that prison staff admitted that they allow the prison subculture to exist within reasonable limits. Informal prison leaders help the staff to maintain order in the prison setting. Implications of these findings for prison management practices are discussed in the paper's conclusion.

**Keywords:** prison staff, prison code, prison subculture, prisoners, Slovenia

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## 1　Introduction

Individuals in prison constitute a specific form of closed society, for which specific norms and traditions are characteristic. The presence of criminal traditions in prison is broadly considered to undermine prisoner "rehabilitation" or "correction," and to threaten order and safety; in general, rebellion against accepted social and legal norms characterizes the criminal world (Shoham, 2010). However, maintaining peace in prisons is strongly dependent on maintaining the prisoner code (Symkovych, 2017). Norms constituting the prison code, and internal rules that are based on these norms, strongly influence prisoners' everyday behaviour. Consequently, most prison staff embrace the prison code (permit the breach of formal rules to some extent) and recognize its practical if not

legal legitimacy. Embracing the prison subculture can be seen as an individual's desire to belong to the prison group; acceptance into the group requires that one act in defiance to some of the official rules of the total institution. Goffman (1961) defined the prison setting as a place of work and residence, where a great number of similarly situated people, who are isolated from the wider community for extended period of time, live formally organised life according to a mix of compliance with and defiance of many official rules known as the prison code.

Slovenian prisons have for the most part avoided the effects of penal populism and increasing toughness of prison regimes, developments which have come to characterize most European countries. Flander and Meško (2016) described Slovenian prisons as an exceptional example of prisons in the post-socialist societies. Slovenian prisons operate in a setting within which imprisonment rates and the rehabilitation orientation are quite comparable to prisons in the Scandinavian countries (for example, the average number of prisoners in Slovenian prisons in 2017 was 1,067). Small prison facilities characterize the Slovenian prison system, which consists of six prisons operating in 14 different locations and a correctional home. The average capacity of these prisons is 94 prisoners, while the largest prison has the capacity to house 450 prisoners. Due to the specifics of the Slovenian prisons (small

facility size, rehabilitative orientation, openness of confinement regimes, small prison population, etc.), we assume that a specific form of the prison subculture was developed among the prisoner population. The aim of this paper is to explore the specific aspects of the prison subculture present in Slovenian prisons. Characteristics of the prison subcultures present in different prison regimes (open, semi-open and closed), different size prisons, and in different prisons in which adult prisoners, female prisoners, and juvenile offenders are held, are of particular interest. In the following sections, the process of a prisoner's adaptation to prison life will be presented. Moreover, the theoretical framework of the prison subculture and prison code will be highlighted. In the second part of the paper, results of the qualitative study of the prison subculture in Slovenian prisons will be presented, and in the final section of the paper the findings will be discussed with respect to implications for prison management practices.

## 2 Prisoner's Adaptation to Prison Life

Regardless of the formal orientation of prisons with respect to rehabilitation, restitution, retribution, etc., the punishment of an offender for wrongdoing remains the main element of a prison sentence. During their imprisonment, prisoners are exposed to five distinct dimensions of punishment: 1) deprivation of safety (fear of fellow prisoners); 2) deprivation of autonomy; 3) deprivation of freedom (social isolation and restriction of contacts with individuals outside the prison); 4) deprivation of heterosexual relations; and 5) deprivation of goods and services (Bereswill, 2001; Meyer, 2001; Sykes, 1971).

The effect of punishment in its various forms of deprivation invariably influence a prisoner's adaptation to life in prison. Adams (1992) identified three factors that tend to influence a prisoner's form of adaptation to prison life: 1) *individual characteristics* of a prisoner (demographic characteristics that affect the likelihood of suicide or self-injury, prison misbehaviour, criminal history, history of psychological illness, prisoner's personal problems, emotional disorders); 2) *characteristics of the sentence* (time already served, sentence length, type of the sentence); and 3) *environmental factors* (physical barriers and the level of safety, overcrowding, process of institutionalization, contacts with the external environment). Use of violence in prison, and prisoner misconduct generally, are seen as the consequences of unsuccessful adaptation of prisoners to life in prison and failure to internalize the basic elements of the prison subculture. Rocheleau (2015) argued that predictors of violence in prisons can be categorized into those found at: 1) *prisoner level* (Camp, Gaes, Langan, & Saylor, 2003; DeLisi, Berg, & Hochstetler 2004; Gaes, Wallace, Gilman,

Klein-Saffran, & Suppa,. 2002; Steiner & Wooldredge 2008); 2) *institutional level* (Colvin, 1992; Useem, 1985; Wortley, 2002); and 3) *situational level* (Huebner, 2003; Reisig, 2002). Each prisoner must learn specific rules (formal and informal) of behaviour that are present in a prison during the process of adaptation (Weinrath, 2016). Moreover, he or she has to learn how to cope with prison stresses and problems that occur on a daily basis (Rocheleau, 2015; Toch, 1975). Individual characteristics of prisoners influence their rate and extent of adaptation to prison life and development of relationships with fellow prisoners and the prison staff. These personal characteristics are as follows: 1) ethnicity and race; 2) age; 3) gender; 4) education; 5) self-control; and 6) prior criminal record or previous experience with the criminal justice system (Casper, Tyler, & Fisher, 1988; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Reisig & Meško, 2009; Tyler, 1990). Social support provided for prisoners by the prison staff has a positive impact on their adaptation to prison life; lack of social support either on the inside or outside of the prison leads to the misconduct of prisoners during their imprisonment and upon release from prison. Sentence characteristics, such as: 1) the length of the prison sentence; 2) time already served; 3) type of prison regime; and 4) the type of criminal offence for which the individual was convicted are important factors influencing a prisoner's adaptation to life in prison. Prisoners who are serving longer prison sentences are more likely to: 1) adapt to prison life, and 2) develop supportive relations with the prison staff. Regarding environmental factors that influence a prisoner's degree of adaptation to life in prisons, studies on prison social climate have revealed that relations among prisoners and with prison staff tend to be better in more liberal (socio-therapeutic orientated) prison regimes than in more punitive and restrictive settings (Brinc, 2011; Day, Casey, Vess, & Huisy, 2011; Schalast & Laan, 2017). Moreover, prisoners adapt more easily to prison life in more liberal prison regimes.

Goffman (1974) wrote that time, place and events or situations have an impact on the learning and the dissemination of cultural frames. Regardless of prisoner's intention of internalising the norms of prison subculture, an understanding of the prison code and prison subculture is necessary for establishing the preferred primary frame in prison, a frame with which prisoners identified and learn to adapt to life in the prison setting.

### 2.1 Deprivation and Importation Models

Consequences of deprivations in prison are seen in the unsuccessful adaptation of prisoners to prison life, and their escape into the prison subculture. Clemmer (1940) asserted that after entering the prison social setting, prisoners typically assimilate into a hostile, anti-conventional social subsystem,

one which is characterised by deviant behaviour, absence of manners, and disregard for social customs. This form of socialisation termed "prisonisation" refers to prisoners taking on of the "folklore", morality, customs and general prison subculture common to incarcerated persons virtually everywhere. The deprivation model or deprivation theory assumes that there is a sense of deprivation shared among prisoners because of the nature of the prisoners' oppressive social system (loss of freedom, interrupted contacts with family and friends, lack of heterosexual relations, etc.) which is a product of life being led behind bars (Lahm, 2009; Sykes, 1971). Moreover, the social environment present in prison, fairness or inequity witnessed in the procedures and practices of prison staff, and influences of various stressful situations experienced in prison are seen as factors that have an impact on the deprivation felt by prisoners and their adaptation to prison life (Morris, Carriaga, Diamond, Piquero, & Piquero, 2012; Reisig, 2001; Tasca, Griffin, & Rodriguez, 2010). Reisig and Meško (2009) highlighted their finding that prisoners' who perceive prison staff's procedures toward them as being just were less likely to violate prison rules than those who viewed staff actions as unfair or arbitrary. Camp and his colleagues (2003) defined what they termed the situational model of prisoner's adaptation to prison life. This type of adaptation takes place when behavioural norms, including the prison code, come to guide the prisoners' behaviour, leading to adjustment to the special nature of an individual prison.

Irwin and Cressey (1962) have argued to the contrary, maintaining that the social system of prisoners derives in major part from the basic criminal subculture present in the wider social context far beyond prison walls. Prisoners are seen as importing cultural norms from the street into the prison setting. Supporters of the importation model (Bukstel & Kilmann, 1980; Drury & DeLisi, 2010; Sorenses & Cunningham, 2010; Tewksbury, Connor, & Denney, 2014; Trulson, DeLisi, & Marquart, 2011) tend to highlight the importance of pre-prison characteristics (e.g., criminal history, race, ethnicity, age, gender, etc.), as the most noteworthy determinants of assimilation into prison society and subsequent prisoner misconduct once incarcerated. As a result of prior experience, prisoners assume new social roles and tend to affiliate with deviant norms in ways done outside the prison setting (Jacobs, 1977; Reisig, 2001; Roebuck, 1963; Walters & Crawford, 2013). The importation model assumes that adaptation to life in prison is unique for each prisoner; his or her adaptation to life in prison depends on his or her specific needs, and the willingness of taking risks to meet these needs (Bukstel & Kilmann, 1980).

Kigerl and Hamilton (2016) have presented a new theory on the matter of prisoner misconduct. Their so-called "trans-fer theory" posits that influences of misconduct can originate from a prior institution, following a transfer between prisons – whereby deprivation-related characteristics (overcrowding and population instability) of the institution from which a prisoner was transferred and importation-related characteristics of a prisoner (mental health, employment status, criminal history) can influence prisoner adaptation to prison life and misconduct in the second institution.

A prisoner's integration into a prison subculture is affected by his or her overall adaptation to prison life. If the pressure of deprivation on a prisoner is overwhelming or the influence of pre-prison characteristics is very strong, these experiences can cause his or her escape into the prison subculture. The levels of disorder and violence in prison tend to increase proportionally with worsening physical conditions of prisons (Morris et al., 2012) and with the severity of the prison regime (Reisig, 1998). Ricciardelli and Sit (2015) found that higher security prisons decreased prisoners' feeling of safety and lead to increased violence, while the informal relations and mechanism in lower security prisons tend to deter aggression and encourage desirable behaviour. But not all prisoners "break" under the pressure of deprivations in the prison environment; prisoners' compliance with the norms of prison subculture has a negative impact on peace and order in prisons, and likewise adversely affect recidivism. Prison staff generally attempt to establish good relations with prisoners who do not internalise the norms of prison subculture, relations that are based on fairness of treatment and sometimes informal relations not based on coercion. These relations provide the foundation for prisoners' recognition of prison and the prison staff as a legitimate power-holder and authority in the prison environment.

## 3   The Prison Code and Prison Subculture

Sykes (1971) highlighted the fact that prison staff do not possess total power within the prison setting. Consequently, in the areas where the near total power of the prison staff is greatly limited, social systems and norms observed among prisoners are created; these norms are the key elements of prison subcultures (Bottoms, 1999; Liebling & Price, 2001; McDermott & King, 1988). Goffman (1961) wrote convincingly that the institutional environment of the prison leads to the formation of the "prison code" – that is, rules, norms and values that are developed by prisoners within the prison system, and which often run contrary to formal rules established by the prison staff and administrators. Kaminski (2003) argued that the prison subculture typically dictates prisoners' behaviour in nearly all situations of everyday life in the prison setting. Symkovych (2017) wrote that the informal hierarchi-

cal power structure in prison (prison "underworld") is seen in the prisoners' eyes as the only viable option to ensure peaceful coexistence among prisoners. For such a social structure, hierarchical class structure, machismo, domination, defiance, rebellion and open antagonism against the establishment and its representatives, and the situational use of violence, especially in cases of a physical threat to a prisoner or an attack on a prisoner's honour, are quite characteristic of most prison settings (Reisig & Meško, 2009; Shoham, 2010).

Sykes and Messinger (1960) defined the following norms of the typical prison subculture: 1) do not inquire into the interests of fellow prisoners in a sense that prisoners do not inform on fellow prisoners, are not curious about fellow prisoners, and do not expose fellow prisoners – and importantly there are no excuses for failing to comply with these, particularly "keep your nose out of other people's business" rules; 2) do not argue with fellow prisoners, be calm and tolerant and do your own time; 3) do not exploit fellow prisoners, honour any arrangements made, and always pay your debts; 4) do not show weakness and deal with frustration and threats without complaining – "be a man" or risk "being seen as a woman"; and 5) do not trust prison staff and do not be naive – prison workers are always wrong, prisoners are always right in any conflict arising. In Table 1, a codified form of rules of the prison subculture are set forth relating to the status, appropriate behaviour and mutual respect established between prisoners (Weinrath, 2016).

**Table 1:** The Prison Code (source: Weinrath, 2016: 25–26)

| Status |
| --- |
| Prisoners, who are smart and discreet in their dealings, are respected in the prison. |
| Prisoners, who commit more serious violent crimes, enjoy higher status. |
| Prisoners, who are new, have less status than those who have done more time. |
| Informants rank near the bottom of the prisoner hierarchy, and should be beaten or killed if possible. |
| Sex offenders are ranked at the bottom, and should be beaten or killed. Child molesters rank lowest of all. |

| Appropriate behaviour |
| --- |
| Do not talk to staff unless you have to do so. |
| Oppose administration, or do not be agreeable to rules. |
| Do not inform on other inmates. |
| Do your own time, and do not involve yourself in others' problems. |
| Stand up for yourself, be strong, and do not show weakness. |
| Do not bring problems from the "street" into prison with you. Conflicts on the street must be forgotten once incarcerated with others. |

| Mutual respect |
| --- |
| Do not stare at other prisoners. |
| Do not ask other prisoners about their business. |
| Do not look into another prisoner's cell. |
| Do not steal from other prisoners. |
| Do not insult other prisoners. |
| All conflicts arising among prisoners are settled one-on-one. |

The decision to join the group of prisoners that are under the influence of the prison subculture entails the rejection of the power and conventional values that prison staff exhibit. Hostility towards authority prevents prisoners from entering into relationships with the prison staff that would promote trust and cooperation between prisoners and prison staff, and approximation of prison staff values to the prisoners. Moreover, the perception of procedural justice is seriously compromised, as prisoners who are under the influence of the prison subculture often defy commands and do not comply with prison rules. Defying prison rules and commands leads to many conflicts between prisoners and the prison staff (Ritzer, 1996). Consequently, these prisoners are often sanctioned and do not receive benefits or privileges. The prison subculture, which is present in every prison, has a negative impact on the quality of relations between prisoners and the prison staff.

## 4 Qualitative Study of the Prison Subculture in Slovenia

Prior to the study, which took place from October 2015 to March 2016, the formal consent of the Director General of the Slovenian Prison Administration and of the directors of individual prisons was obtained. Structured interviews with adult male prisoners, adult female prisoners, juvenile prisoners, prison officers, specialised correctional workers, senior managers, and other personnel were conducted in all six prisons (Celje, Dob, Ig, Koper, Ljubljana, Maribor), with departments (Ig, Murska Sobota, Nova Gorica, Novo mesto, Puščava, Rogoza, Slovenska vas), and with the correctional home (Radeče). Participation in the interviews was voluntary. All prisoners and prison staff were invited to participate in the study; all participants were older than 18 years of age – according to Slovenian statutory law a person who is 18 years old is granted full legal capacity (Zakon o zakonski zvezi in družinskih razmerjih [Marriage and Family Relations Act], 2004). Before any interviewing took place, the context of the study was presented to the prisoners and to prison staff. The second author conducted face-to-face structured interviews in a private room or office with those individuals who decided to take part in the study. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Answers of interviewees were recorded on paper.

The use of structured interviews ensured consistency of the content and format of interviews conducted. The interviews were transcribed in electronic form, translated from Slovene to English, and duly analysed. The analysis can be summarized in terms of four separate steps, as described by Mesec (1998):

1) editing the materials (systematic and chronological scheduling of notes – transcription of interviews to electronic form, labelling them with place, time, date etc., and entering them into the register);

2) determining the coding units (breakdown and analysis of summarised texts of the interviews in order to determine the coding units to be applied in the form of key phrases and highlighted sentences);

3) open coding (determination of concepts from empirical descriptions – texts with the same meaning were collected and separated from other texts in order to categorise the data); and

4) selection of relevant concepts and categories (selection of relevant concept for further research).

### 4.1 Sample Characteristics

Over a six-month period, 193 prisoners and 151 prison staff were interviewed. In Table 2 characteristics of an individual sample are presented. The sample of prisoners (N = 193) represents 16.5% of the average number of prisoners incarcerated in Slovenia in 2015 (15.7% male prisoners, 24.6% female prisoners, and 26.3% juvenile prisoners). The sample consists of 177 males (91.7%), out of which five were juveniles, and 16 females (8.3%), which is proportional to the ratio between male and female prisoners in Slovenian prisons. Two-thirds of the interviewees were younger than 45 years. Moreover, approximately 12% of prisoners were younger than 24. The majority of interviewees (89.6%) has completed elementary, vocational or high school. Almost 40% of prisoners were sentenced to imprisonment between 13 and 36 months. Approximately 20% of prisoners were sentenced to imprisonment of more than five years. The length of sentences of interviewed prisoners was proportionate to the average length of sentences in 2015. More than a third of interviewed prisoners served six months or less of their prison sentence. Moreover, 40.4% of interviewees had served from 7 to 24 months of the prison sentence. Approximately 15% of interviewed prisoners had served 37 months or more of their prison sentence. More than 60% of interviewed prisoners were imprisoned for the first time. Less than half of interviewees (45.0%) served their sentences in closed departments of prisons. Almost 40% of interviewees served their sentences in semi-open departments, and 15.6% of interviewed prisoners served their sentences in open departments of prisons.

The sample of prison staff (N = 151) represents 18.5% of all prison workers in 2015 (15.7% prison officers, 23.1% specialised workers, and all directors and heads of departments). The sample consists of 103 males (68.2%) and 48 females

(31.8%). More than half of interviewees were younger than 45 years. Approximately 40% of interviewed prison workers have completed vocational or high school, while the rest of the interviewees achieved higher or university education. Most of the interviewees were employed in the judicial police – prison officers (51.7%). More than 40% of interviewed prison workers had been employed in the prison system for 16 years or more. Moreover, less than 17% of interviewees had been employed in the prison system for five years or less at the time of the interview.

**Table 2:** Sample Characteristics

| **Prisoners** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 177 |
| | Female | 16 |
| Age | 24 years or younger | 23 |
| | 25–29 | 27 |
| | 30–34 | 27 |
| | 35–39 | 33 |
| | 40–44 | 29 |
| | 45 year or older | 54 |
| Education | Elementary school | 43 |
| | Vocational school | 109 |
| | High school | 21 |
| | Vocational college | 9 |
| | University/M.A./Ph.D. | 11 |
| Length of sentence | 12 months or less | 56 |
| | 13–36 | 75 |
| | 37–60 | 22 |
| | 61 months or more | 39 |
| | No answer | 1 |
| Length of served sentence | 6 months or less | 71 |
| | 7–12 | 37 |
| | 13–24 | 41 |
| | 25–36 | 14 |
| | 37 months or more | 30 |
| Prison regime | Open | 30 |
| | Semi-open | 76 |
| | Closed | 87 |
| **Prison staff** | | |
| Gender | Male | 103 |
| | Female | 48 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age | 25–29 | 8 |
| | 30–34 | 21 |
| | 35–39 | 21 |
| | 40–44 | 30 |
| | 45 years or older | 71 |
| Education | Vocational school | 41 |
| | High school | 15 |
| | Vocational college | 18 |
| | University | 70 |
| | M.A. | 7 |
| Workplace | Prison officer | 78 |
| | Specialised worker | 61 |
| | Director/Head of department | 12 |
| Years in service | Less than 5 years | 25 |
| | 6–10 | 40 |
| | 11–15 | 19 |
| | 16 years or more | 67 |

### 4.2  Prisoners' Views on the Prison Subculture

During the interviews, prisoners highlighted problems (deprivations) that arise as a result of life in prison, and that have a negative impact on relations: 1) small living place; 2) lack of privacy; 3) heteronomous population; 4) tense climate in prison; 5) presence of the prison subculture (reception of newcomers [fishes], hatred toward informants [rats], rapists and paedophiles, gathering of prisoners into groups, severe punishments for infractions etc.; and 6) illegal activities taking place (drug trafficking, money lending, etc.). They identified the capability of predicting crisis situations and ingenuity as the key elements needed for "surviving" in prison.

These relations are very different. There is a lot of alpha males and people who are steerable. It is like a reality show. Subgroups and clans are formed that mingle with one another. (Prisoner, closed department)

I am predicting a little bit. When I see that something is cooking I withdraw. Serving sentence with older prisoners is easier because they are defined personalities. Younger guys still look for their place. (Prisoner, closed department)

Ah, that is a heavy topic. You have all sorts of relations. When newcomers arrive older female prisoners always want them on their side. They lobby them. Some kinds of friendships are formed, but then these friendships end. You have everything… quarrels, fights, clashes… everyone knows everything about everyone. Hypocrisy, envy, jealousy. (Female prisoner, semi-open department)

To tell the truth, some kind of tension is present all the time in here. There is no relaxed atmosphere. It is some form of an apparent correctness. You live with people, with whom in a normal world you would not want to have anything to do with. (Prisoner, open department)

The prison subculture, which is based on the internal rules that are present in prison, dictates prisoner's everyday behaviour in prison. The presence of the prison subculture in Slovenian prisons is more intense in closed departments, where prisoners pointed to: 1) the presence of hierarchy among prisoners that depends on the length of the sentence and the type of criminal offence, 2) the law of silence, and, 3) the law of power (physical and financial). In more open regimes, prisoners pointed out that the presence of a prison subculture depends on the prison population and that its intensity varies over time. In general, most of the prisoners stated that their values differ from the values of prison staff, which suggests the internalisation of norms of the prison code.

Yes, there is a hierarchy. We rank ourselves by the length of the sentence being served. Those who are in for a longer time enjoy greater respect. And by criminal offences. We do not tolerate pedophiles and rapists. They are isolated from us. (Prisoner, closed department)

The standard law of the strongest is present. (Prisoner, closed department)

Yes, there are values. Shut up and mind your own business. (Prisoner, closed department)

Importation and deprivation factors are shown to influence an individual's integration into the prison subculture. Prisoners highlighted the importance of position held in the criminal world outside the prison and financial state as the main predictors of an individual's status in the prisoners' society. Moreover, they identified the strength of the prisoners' group as an influence upon an individual's way of thinking vis-a-vis the prison subculture.

Such behaviour is carried on as the way of thinking. Individuals who come to prisons have their own thinking that develops as a result of a negative behaviour, which is already present in the organisation. I came here from detention together with this fellow, who has completely changed his way of thinking. When we were together he was all about… I will do this and this so that I can get a parole. Because of certain circumstances, they separated us. It is interesting how his way of thinking had changed in just three days. This is the problem when you are under the influence of a powerful group that is already present in a prison. The fundamental human need is that you belong somewhere when you are put in a new environment. It pulls you. (Prisoner, closed department)

Yes, there is a subculture. The higher you are in the criminal life and more financial support that you have, the more respect you enjoy from your fellow prisoners. If you have money you can get everything. And if you are caught doing something not approved of, somebody else will take the blame. Additionally, street credit is important in here. (Prisoner, closed department)

Occasional violations of prison rules gives a prisoner a certain status among fellow prisoners, and sometimes provides a way of solving problems in prison. A prisoner who is violating the prison rules whereby consequences are not felt by fellow prisoners advances in the prison hierarchy and earns the respect of fellow prisoners. This type of resistance to authority is one of the fundamental elements of the prison subculture.

Yes, I have violated the prison rules. I was on my walk and I refused to return to my room. You have to get some disciplinary measures applied to you, otherwise you are not a real prisoner. (Prisoner, closed department)

Yes, I have violated some of the prison rules. I fought with other prisoners. I argued with someone because of the cheering [soccer hooligans] and he was also a snitch. I and my buddy beat him up. (Prisoner, closed department)

Part of the prison life. This is a way to establish acceptable relations. (Prisoner, semi-open department)

Prisoners were, despite the problems that arise from the common life in prison, willing to help fellow prisoners. However, they were not willing to help all prisoners, but only to those with whom they develop good relationships and to whom helping (influence of the prison subculture) is allowed. They noted that providing help to prisoners is quickly forgotten in prison, and moreover, some prisoners (most of them were imprisoned in semi-open and open departments) admitted that certain forms of assistance, such as loaning money, is not practiced.

I help certain prisoners. Junkies are the problem. They ask for money on a daily basis. In such cases, I do not help them. There are things that are better to leave alone. Blackmail also occurs. (Prisoner, closed department)

I always help them. But I have to emphasise that nothing is appreciated in here. You help but then come that one time that you cannot help and that five or six times that you helped are forgotten. Here everything is confused. (Female prisoner, semi-open department)

### 4.3 Prison Staff's Views on the Prison Subculture

Prison workers pointed out the problem of the prison subculture, which is present among prisoners and affects their everyday behaviour. They feel that the prison subculture is present in all prisons, and that it is more intensive in closed departments and larger prisons. Prison workers admitted that they allow the prison subculture to exist within reasonable limits, as informal leaders help them to maintain order in prison. Moreover, they noted that they cannot successfully suppress the prison subculture because informal leaders do not violate prison rules and use subordinated prisoners to do their "dirty work". Prison workers highlighted the fact that the positive effects (maintaining order) are rather trivial in comparison with the negative effects of the prison subculture (violation of prison rules, inability to establish good relationships with prisoners, exploitation of weaker prisoners, etc.).

Oh, there is a subculture. We have to allow them that. I am old school regarding this. Suppressing this subculture, just because it is not allowed, is quite pointless. But I must not say this out loud. And I do not mean prison bosses – capos, as in the old days. They have their world, their rules. You have to be careful about this because of the debts and exploitation. This has to be monitored. (Prison officer)

Prison underground always has existed. It is known who the boss is, who collects, who works, who guards. Informal leaders are always present. Sometimes we have one clan in

here and we have peace in prison. But if two clans are present, fights erupt because of two informal leaders. (Prison officer)

Yes, we have subculture, hierarchy and the underground. We know exactly who the boss is. Their main characteristic is that they obey the rules. They rule from the back. Somebody else will expose himself, as a boss. Bosses only provide the peace. Prisoners with seniority are usually the leaders. (Prison officer)

Subculture is established. Their moral values are completely different from ours. Some things, for which I deem that a man should never do, they perceive as completely OK. Prison subculture is present in all prisons. At the receiving department, they are separated from other prisoners. Nevertheless, they know the informal rules before they get acquainted with our rules. One of their rules is that you are a newcomer until you do at least one year of the sentence. It is expected that newcomers do not talk with pedagogues, make coffee, and share their things. God help them if they do not comply with these rules. (Specialised worker)

Yes, there is a subculture. I met a couple of prisoners, who were completely alright, but they had to save face in front of other prisoners and did not establish normal relations with us. (Specialised worker)

Senior managers highlighted problems that arise from the treatment of prisoners (lack of funds, unrealistic wishes of prisoners, lack of knowledge, etc.), and the prison subculture present among prisoners. Similarly to prison staff, they pointed out that the prison subculture is present in all prisons, but differs by its intensity; it is less intensive in open and semi-open departments. Moreover, they admitted that they are not effective in suppressing the prison subculture, as prison leaders are resourceful and do not often expose themselves. They highlighted the negative aspect of the prison subculture on a criminality of a prisoner upon release from prison.

Of course. This [prison subculture] is and will be. If you have more than 200 prisoners you have difficulties controlling them. The subculture is present in every room. These are natural laws. We found who prison leaders are by the position of their beds. But they found out about this, and the leaders then choose different beds. Every now and then a pyramid [hierarchy] is formed, but this is rare as they are housed in different departments. (Director)

But of course there is a subculture. We would blind ourselves if we would say that it does not exist. They are often arranged by the type of criminal offence. Paedophiles and rapists are the least respected. Other criminal offences are ranked up the scale. We also have those who dare to oppose the prison system and have higher rank among them. Those who have some organisational skills do not involve themselves in a dirty

business. This is a problem. We know of who those [prison leaders] are, but they do not do anything that would violate the prison rules or laws. (Director)

There are differences in the prison subculture between closed and open departments. The closed department experience more of this. But when they come to open departments, this new freedom throws them off the track. Fluctuation of prisoners is high, but nevertheless, they form groups. They proceed with criminal activities, upon release from prison. They connect within the prison. Here [open department] the prison subculture is minimal in comparison with closed departments. Here, prisoners are more focused on the outside world. (Head of a department)

## 5 Conclusion

Prison society is a special type of closed society, one populated by individuals who adopt norms and guidelines for behaviour that differ markedly from those generally accepted in the broader society from which they have been extracted. Despite cultural and organisational similarities common to all prison societies, each prison differs from others in that it features a unique social structure reflective of its own characteristics and resident populations.

The analysis of interviews conducted with prisoners and prison staff confirmed the presence of a prison subculture in all Slovenian prisons. However, as Camp and his colleagues (2003) suggested, different behavioural norms that constitute the prison subculture are formed within each individual prison setting. The extent of a prisoner's adaptation to prison life is determined by the degree to which he or she decides to internalise the norms of the prison subculture. The universal impact of deprivation factors (restriction/lack of safety, autonomy, freedom, heterosexual relations, goods and services, etc.) on prisoners' adaptation to prison life (Sykes, 1971) and their choice to enter the prison subculture was confirmed in the Slovenian prison settings studied. However, it is also the case that the level of impact of these factors differed significantly across prison settings. While prisoners in closed departments were fully exposed to these deprivations, prisoners in semi-open and open regimes enjoyed the privileges of [semi] autonomy and [partial] freedom. Among deprivations experienced, the lack of heterosexual relations presented a huge problem in all departments. Only the largest prison for men at Dob, where prisoners with longer sentences are housed, feature facilities for overnight conjugal visits. Female prisoners who were serving long-term prison sentences expressed strong feelings of gender injustice because female prisons do not have such facilities for overnight visits. In general, it can be said that prisoners felt relatively safe in the prisons where

they are being held. Prisoners residing in open and semi-open department settings felt completely safe, while prisoners in closed departments reported that no major incidents took place of which they were aware. They typically commented that this is the case because all prisoners are afraid of losing their benefits and privileges.

Several pre-prison characteristics of prisoners (criminal history, age, gender, etc.) were identified as important factors affecting their adaptation to prison life and internalizing the prison subculture (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). The prisoner's previous encounter with crime (sexual offences and pedophilia are excluded) give him or her a certain status in prison and earns them the respect of fellow prisoners. Prisoners in all departments highlighted the influence of "street credit" and financial capability on establishing the prisoner's status in their prison society. While in closed departments prisoners pointed to members of organised crime organizations, convicted murderers, and bank robbers as high status members of their prison setting. Prisoners serving time in open departments in contrast highlighted individuals who committed white collar crime and [ex-] politicians as high status prisoners. The age of a prisoner was identified as one of the crucial factors that influence adaptation to prison life. Younger prisoners, especially those in the correctional home, were less adapted to life in prisons than their older counterparts. According to fellow prisoners who are older the younger prisoners are still in a search of themselves, and as such they were more likely to be experiencing the hazing of more experienced fellow prisoners. We agree with observations of Rocheleau (2015) that [younger] prisoners who coped with hazing through joking, bravado, or took direct action in response to hazing are more likely to become involved in the use of violence. Some of the most severe attacks on the prison staff in recentt years took place in the correctional home setting involving youthful offenders. Regarding gender, several important findings emerged from the interviews: 1) female prisoners tend to adapt to prison life better than male prisoners; 2) less direct confrontation occurs among prisoners and between prisoners and prison staff in female prison settings; and, 3) rumors, insults, gossip, hypocrisy, envy, and jealousy are far more frequent in female prison settings than in male prison settings; these behaviours are seen as substitutions for use of violence in settings where conflict among prisons or between prisoners and staff arise.

In general, exploitation, distrust, opportunistic friendships, hierarchy and social structure, secrecy, and anti-authoritarian stance are all documented as core characteristics of the prison subculture phenomenon in Slovenian prisons. While some level of situational use of violence is present in Slovenian prisons, especially in cases of a physical threat to a

prisoner or an attack on a prisoner's honour (Reisig & Meško, 2009), the resort to justified violence element of the prison subculture is mediated with the use of benefits that prisoners can obtain and privileges they can lose in the case of serious misconduct such as fighting. Even though official statistics fail to capture the full extent of violence occurring in prisons (Bowker, 1980), the statistical data reported by the Slovenian Prison Administration support our findings that the prison subculture phenomenon is indeed present in Slovenian prisons, but entails very limited use of violence in comparison to prison subcultures in other countries. The number of recorded physical attacks on prison staff, number of violent conflicts between prisoners, number of violent conflicts resulting in injured prisoners, and number of disciplinary measures imposed upon prisoners in 2017 were all relatively low in comparison to prisons in other countries. In fact, almost no attacks or violent conflicts were recorded in open and semi-open departments (Uprava Republike Slovenije za izvrševanje kazenskih sankcij, 2018).

While the above-mentioned universalities of the prison subculture are indeed present in every Slovenian prison setting, certain noteworthy differences were also noted suggesting that prison subcultures differ systematically in response to specific aspects of facilty operations. These differences would appear to occur as a result of the severity of prison regime, the size of the prison, and prisoner's age and gender. Most of the prisoners housed in open and semi-open departments progressed from the closed regime facilities based on their good conduct and cooperation with the prison staff in connection with their rehabilitative treatment program. These would be prisoners who rejected the norms of prison subculture, in particular the norm which prohibits cooperation with prison staff and dictates some degree of opposition to authority (breaking prison rules) and siding with prisoners in disputes arising between prisoners and prison staff. Nonetheless, even among such prisoners an informal hierarchy is established among them, usually due to the presence of charismatic individuals and/or prisoners of means and access to financial ressources in the broader society. Moreover, the salience of prison subculture norms is lower in dislocated open and semi-open departments. It should be noted that several open and semi-open departments are located in the same facility as the closed department. Regarding the effect of prison's size on the prison subculture, the findings reported here suggest that in smaller prisons (50 prisoners or less) some form of hierarchy is established at the level of an individual room, while in medium sized prisons (51 to 100 prisoners ) hierarchy is established at the level of an individual tract. Where the number of prisoners exceeds 100, the entire prison experiences a single prison subculture of high saliency and immediacy for prisoners.

With respect to prisoner age and gender, several noteworthy differences between men's prisons, the women's prison, and the correctional home were identified: 1) the intensity of impact upon prisoners of the prison subculture is much greater in men's prisons and in the correctional home than in the women's prison; 2) the rate use of violence is much higher between juveniles than among adult prisoners or among female prisoners; juveniles are still in search for their identities (and their place in the prison society) and often try to come off as macho in front of their peers. This display of hypermasculinity (in some cases it can be described as bravado) is often put to the test by other juveniles; 3) in most cases the use of violence in men's prisons is associated with the breaking of the prison code (e.g., being a fish, taking the side of the prison staff instead of a prisoner in disputes), while in women's prison settings fights usually erupt due to current rumor-based tensions among female prisoners; 4) adult male prisoners are more inclined to help fellow prisoners (those who they are permitted to help) than are juveniles or female prisoners to render assistance to their counterparts; 5) the status of a newcomer differs significantly between these groups; while in men's prisons and the correctional home newcomers are in a disadvantaged position and often experience exploitation, newcomers in women's prisoners are usually subjected to manipulation by other more veteran female prisoners who want the newcomers on their side (i.e., creating fake friendships); and 6) the social hierarchy and the degree of intolerance of certain criminal offences is much more intensive in men's prisons than in either the women's prison setting or the correctional home setting.

In Slovenia the prevalence of small prisons, the management policy of zero tolerance of use of violence, harsh punishments exacted for prison staff found to exceed their authority or commit criminal offences, and the absence of prison gangs all contribute to the establishment of relatively good relations between prisoners and the prison staff. The effective rehabilitation of prisoners requires such favorable relations. Within the Slovenian prison environment, where some prisoners have not established good relations with the prison staff and where the deprivations of a total institution are more intensive, that the greater the likelihood of individual prisoners seeking refuge in the prison society and internalizing the norms of the prison subculture.

The main limitation of researching prison subculture lies in the sincerity and truthfulness of the prisoners and prison staff participating in the interviews. A possibility exists that both groups of participants (prisoners and the prison staff) gave socially desirable answers rather than honest answers on some sensitive questions. Moreover, researcher working in the prison setting encounter ethical dilemmas in terms of not re-vealing the answers of prisoners and prison officers who confessed to certain breaches of prison rules during the interview process. Fortunately, none of the participants in this study expressed intentions to break prison rules or engage in a serious breach of prison rules. Based on what was learned in this study, future research should focus on researching the following three areas: 1) processes and policies that would moderate the adverse effects of deprivation and importation factors and facilitate prisoners' adaptation to prison life; 2) identification of the specific aspects of an individual's cultural background that can influence the content of the prison subculture; and, 3) identification of the specific characteristics of individual prison settings, including sentence orientation, prison staff, size, etc., that facilitate a prisoner's adaptation to prison life and influence his or her decision to embrace the norms of the prison subculture.

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# Pogledi obsojencev in zaporskih delavcev na zaporsko subkulturo v Sloveniji

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V prispevku se osredotočamo na problem zaporske subkulture v Sloveniji. V letih 2015 in 2016 so bili opravljeni strukturirani intervjuji s 193 obsojenci in 151 zaporskimi delavci v vseh slovenskih zaporih in prevzgojnem domu. Rezultati analize intervjujev so pokazali, da je zaporska subkultura prisotna v vseh zaporih. V splošnem temeljne značilnosti zaporske subkulture v slovenskih zaporih predstavljajo: izkoriščanje, nezaupanje, priložnostna prijateljstva, hierarhija in socialna struktura, tajnost in upiranje avtoriteti. Potrjen je bil univerzalni vpliv dejavnikov pomanjkanja (pomanjkanje varnosti, avtonomije, svobode, heteroseksualnih odnosov, storitev itd.) na prilagoditev obsojenca na zaporsko življenje in njihovo odločitev za vstop v zaporsko družbo. Številne značilnosti obsojencev pred prestajanjem kazni zapora (kriminalna zgodovina, starost, spol itd.) tudi vplivajo na njihovo prilagoditev zaporskemu življenju in odločitev, da vstopijo v zaporsko subkulturo. Vedenjske norme, ki tvorijo zaporsko subkulturo, se močno razlikujejo med zapori glede na zaporski režim (odprtost zapora). Ugotovitve kažejo, da zaporski delavci dovolijo obstoj zaporske subkulture v manjšem obsegu, saj jim obsojenci, ki so neformalni vodje, pomagajo pri vzdrževanju reda v zaporu. V zaključku prispevka razpravljamo o pomenu ugotovitev študije.

**Ključne besede:** zaporsko osebje, zaporniški kodeks, zaporska subkultura, obsojenci, Slovenija

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