

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT JUSTICE RESEARCH INITIATIVE



VERMONT PRISON CLIMATE SURVEYS 2021

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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



www.go.uvm.edu/justiceresearch



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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 wellbeing 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.

www.urban.org/features/prisonresearch-and-innovation-initiative



SURVEY RESPONDENTS - STAFF



- 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

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 selfreported.



1. JOB SATISFACTION

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree Strongly Agree
I take pride in my job.	16%	46%	37%
Staff in this prison are fairly compensated for the duties and tasks they are required to perform.	26%	38%	33%
Leadership in this prison shows appreciation for staff in meaningful ways.	28%	35%	34%
Promotions in this prison are done fairly.	32%	28% 39%	
If I have a chance, I will change to some other job outside of corrections at the same rate of pay.	11% 22%	27%	40%

2. THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (CENTRAL OFFICE)

The Department communicates a clear vision (mission) for Corrections.	16%	5% 51%		3	31%	
There are discussions involving all staff about the vision for Corrections and ways to achieve it.	33% 47%			18%		
The Department has a clear understanding of what it's like for staff to work in this prison.	63%		26%	6 8%		
The Department takes the things I say seriously and treats me and my ideas with respect.	35	5%	45%		19%	

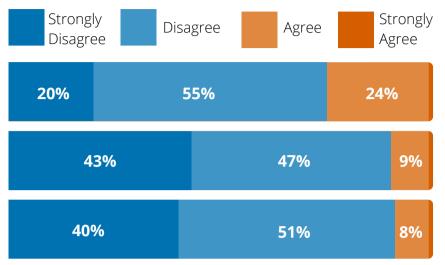


3. COMMUNICATIONS & CHANGE

Communication in this prison works well -I have the information I need, when I need it, to do my job.

When changes are made in this prison that affect me, I am included in the process.

When changes are made in this prison, we assess the impact to see how they worked.



4. STAFF RELATIONSHIPS & CULTURE

There is a strong sense of trust among staff in this prison.	22%	50%		20%	8%	
Staff in this prison operate as a real team.	18%	49%	49%		29%	
I can rely on my coworkers to respond quickly during an emergency.		39%	39% 54%			
Staff in this prison enforce the rules consistently.	23%		55%	:	20%	
Staff behavior influences the behavior of those incarcerated in the unit.	11%	55%		33%		
I feel safe speaking up about staff misconduct.	9%	28%	49%		14%	
Staff investigations are conducted with fairness.	18%	41%		38%		



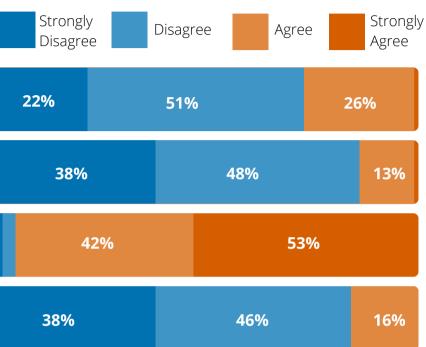
5. CORRECTIONAL PRACTICES & ACTIVITIES

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

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

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

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

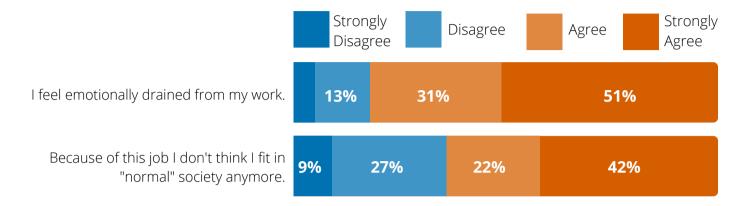


6. STAFFING

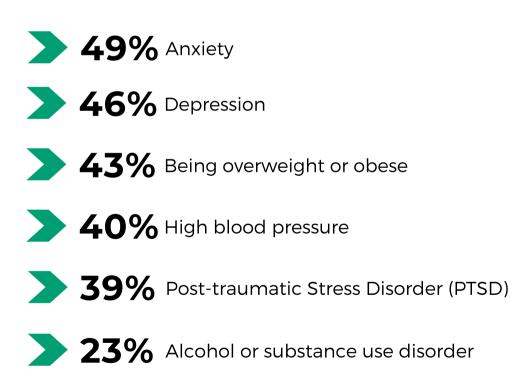
There are enough staff to meet the current needs of this prison.	85% 9%			
Frequent staff turnover is a problem in this prison.	13%	84%		
Mandatory overtime is a problem in this prison.	14%	82%		
My work schedule causes conflict at home.	11%	31% 19% 39%		39%
Generally, staff morale is high.	72% 23%			23%
My coworkers show signs of stress.	18%			79%



7. HEALTH & WELL-BEING

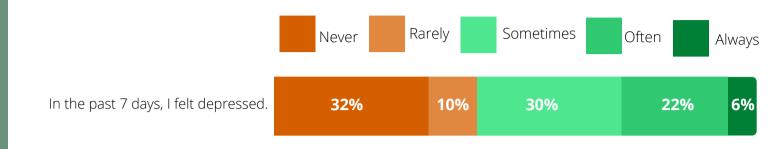


When asked, "Since starting work in corrections, have you developed the following health conditions?" This is how correctional staff answered:

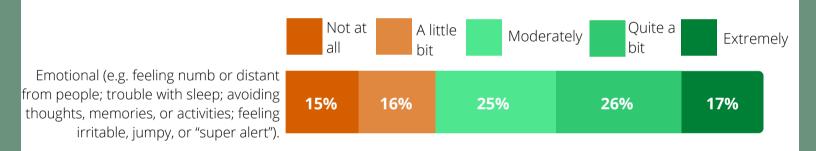




7. HEALTH & WELL-BEING, CONTINUED



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



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





SURVEY RESPONDENTS -INCARCERATED PERSONS



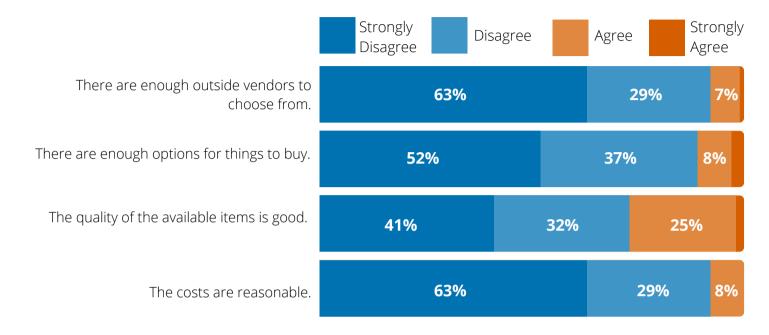
- Age: 39 years (median)
- Race: 80% white
- Ethnicity: 77% white
- Gender identity: 91% male
 o Transgender: 6%
- Status:
 - 27% Detained, awaiting trial
 - 50% Serving sentence
 - 22% Incarcerated for a violation of conditions
- # Years incarcerated at SSCF
 - 85% 0-5 years, 15% 6+ years

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 selfreported.



1. COMMISSARY

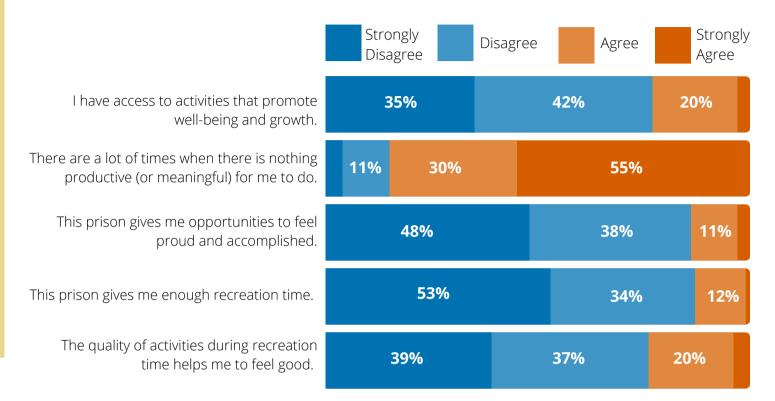


2. PLANNING & PREPARATION FOR RELEASE

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



3. PRISON ACTIVITIES



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





49% Community service (e.g. dog training program, gardening for food shelf).

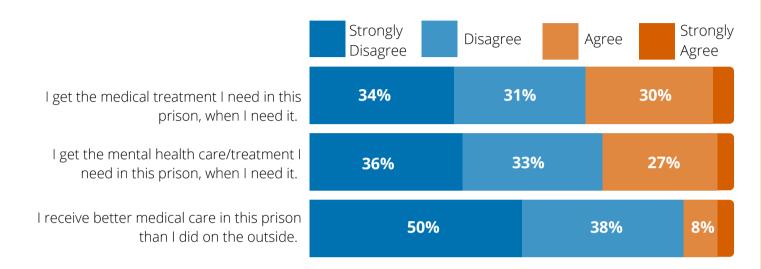


47% Meaningful activities to pass time (e.g. book club, music or art programs).





4. MEDICAL & MENTAL **HEALTH CARE**



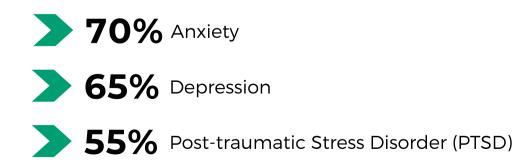
5. HEALTH & WELL-BEING

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

11%

37%

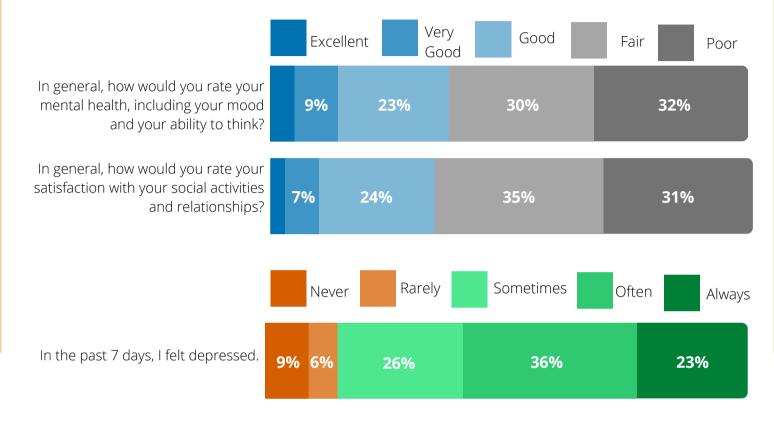
When asked, "Since entering prison, have you developed the following health conditions?" This is how incarcerated people answered:



51%

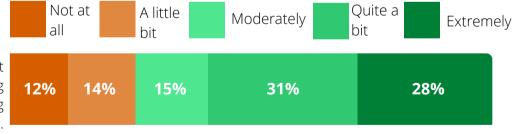


5. HEALTH & WELL-BEING, CONTINUED



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

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?





Strongly

Agree

6. PRISON CULTURE

Strongly Disagree Agree Disagree 10% 59% 26% other incarcerated people. 7% 18% 50% 25% 7% 49% 40% 12% 42% 42% 25% 42% 28% better at committing crimes.

Some incarcerated people are afraid of

Incarcerated people feel like they have to be "tough" to get respect in this prison.

I do not trust many people in this prison.

Mixing different inmates (with certain charges or classification levels) causes problems.

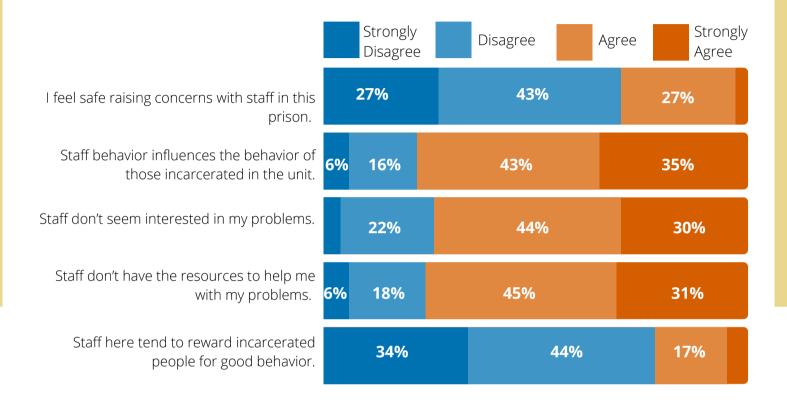
Being in prison teaches people how to get

7. DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES

Sanctions are applied fairly here.	42%		35%	21%
This prison has adequate alternatives to segregation.	37%		40%	19%
Incarcerated people in this prison have a voice in their own discipline process.	40%		40%	17%
I can keep my dignity even when being punished.	17%	34%	36%	12%



8. CORRECTIONAL STAFF & PRACTICES



9. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

The process for reporting staff misconduct works well.	43%	41%	14%
The grievance process in this prison is a useful tool to address the concerns of incarcerated people.	48%	32%	18%