



# 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



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
**JUSTICE RESEARCH INITIATIVE**

[www.go.uvm.edu/justiceresearch](http://www.go.uvm.edu/justiceresearch)



[www.doc.vermont.gov](http://www.doc.vermont.gov)

*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 well-being 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/prison-research-and-innovation-initiative](http://www.urban.org/features/prison-research-and-innovation-initiative)





## SURVEY RESPONDENTS - STAFF



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# 70%

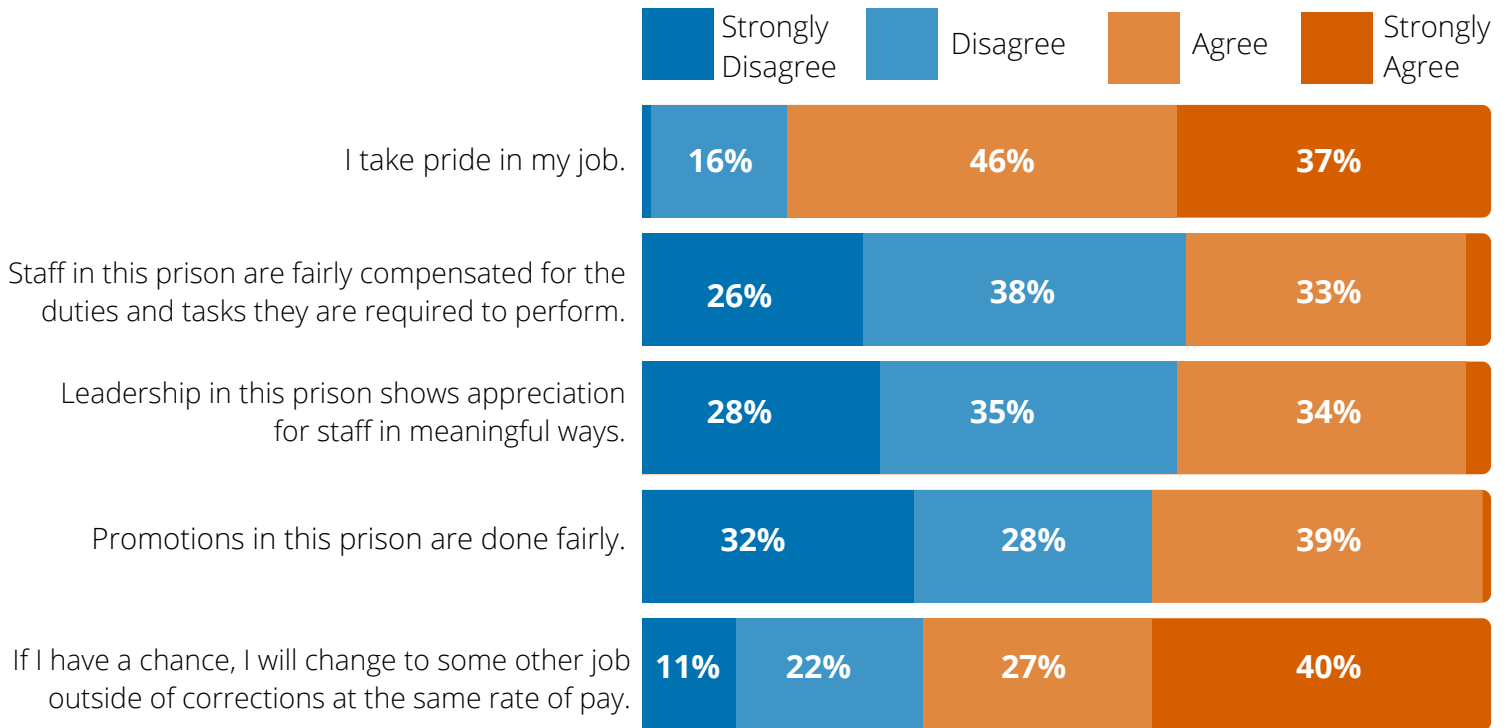
of correctional  
staff completed  
the survey.

- 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

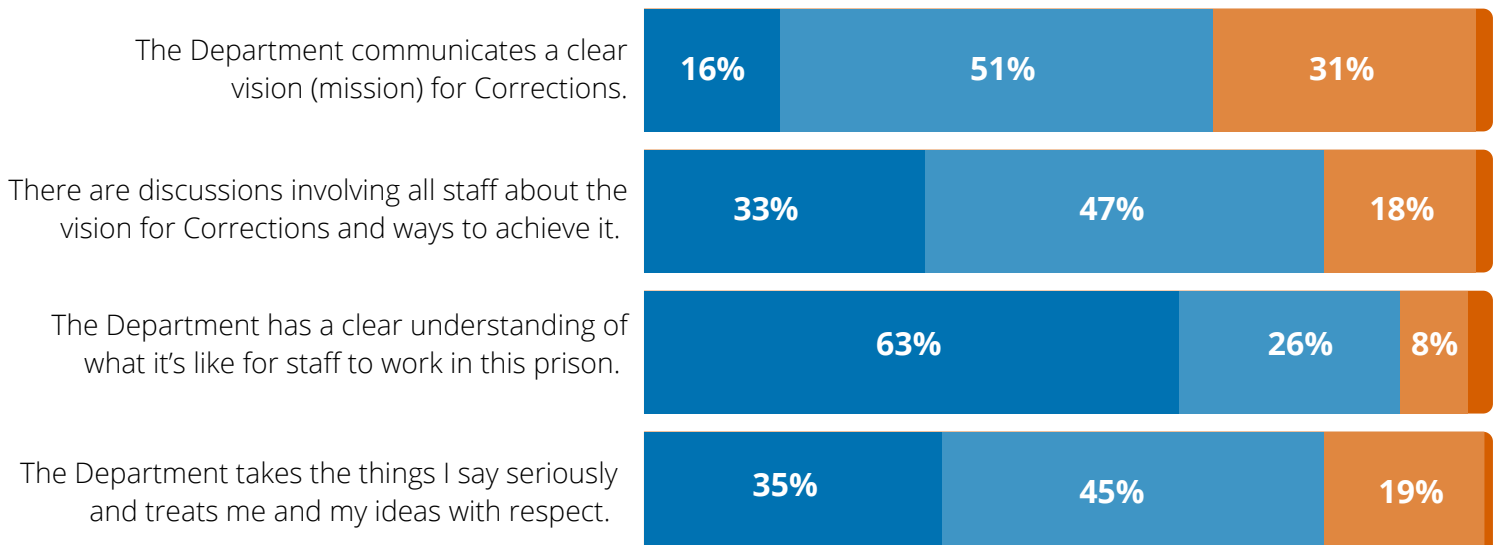
The Correctional Staff Vermont Prison Climate Survey was administered to staff working in Vermont's Southern State Correctional Facility in June 2021. Surveys were paper-based, confidential, and anonymous. Of 131 eligible correctional staff, 92 completed the survey (70% response rate). The demographic data presented here are self-reported.



# 1. JOB SATISFACTION

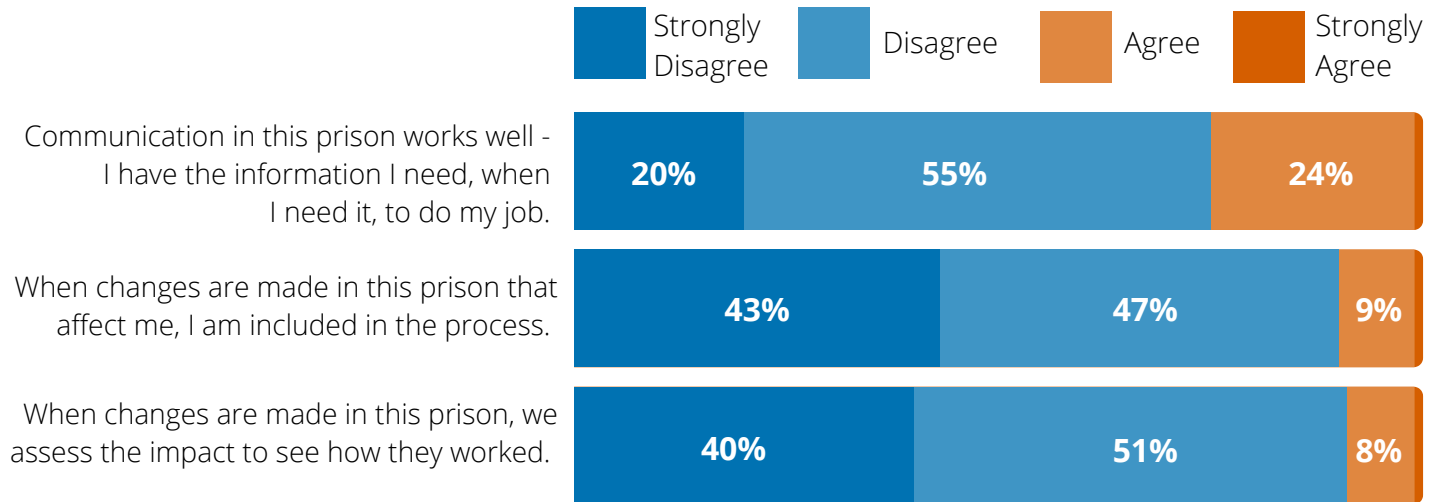


# 2. THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (CENTRAL OFFICE)

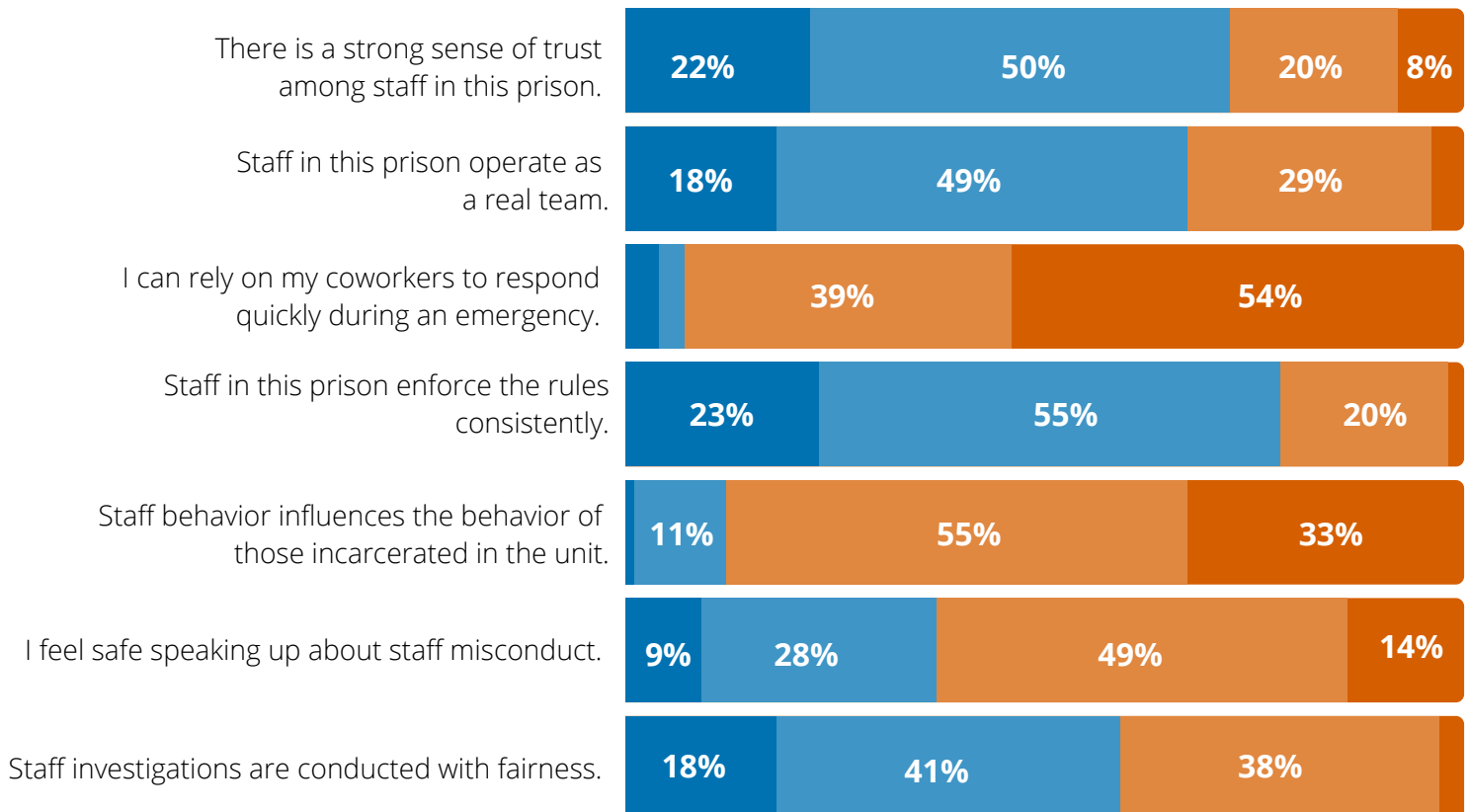




### 3. COMMUNICATIONS & CHANGE



### 4. STAFF RELATIONSHIPS & CULTURE

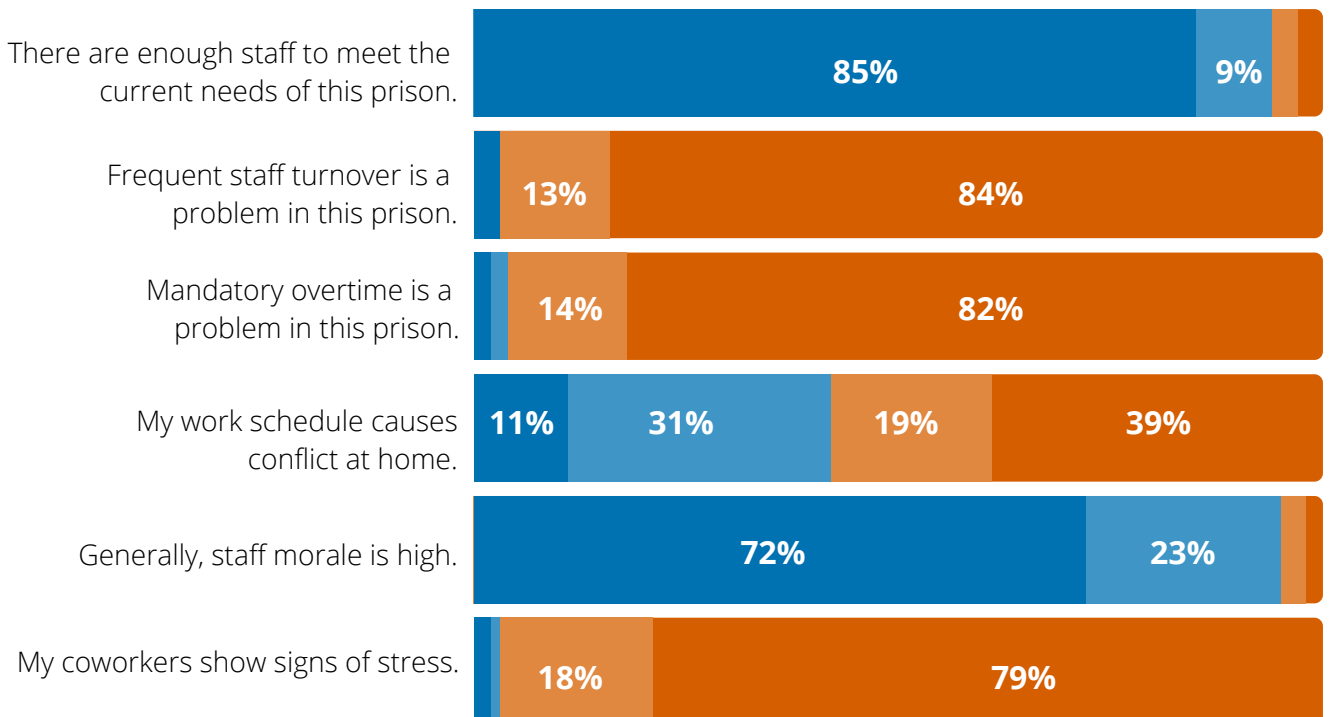




## 5. CORRECTIONAL PRACTICES & ACTIVITIES

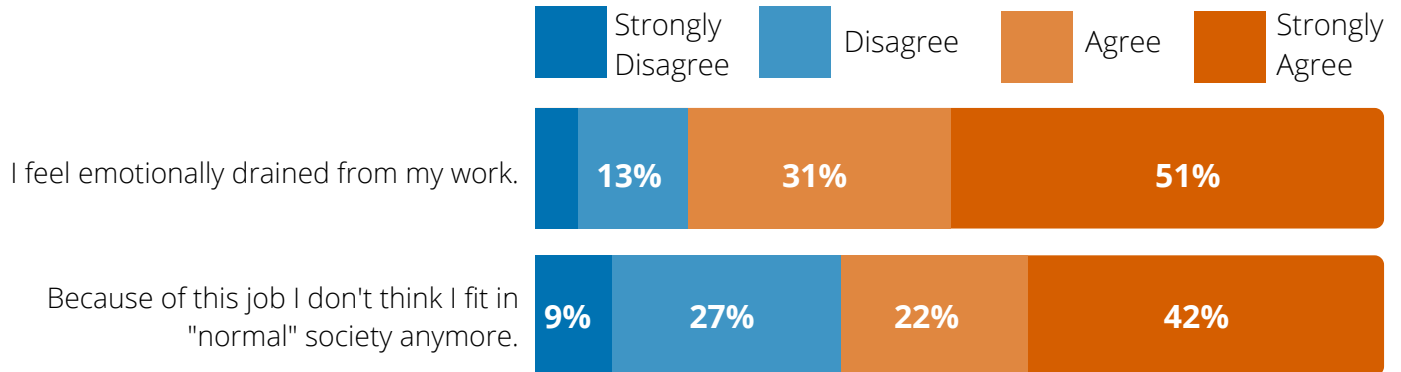


## 6. STAFFING





## 7. HEALTH & WELL-BEING



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

- **49%** Anxiety
- **46%** Depression
- **43%** Being overweight or obese
- **40%** High blood pressure
- **39%** Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- **23%** Alcohol or substance use disorder

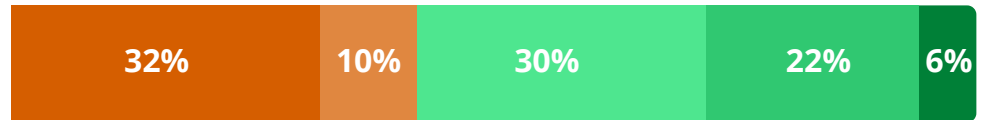




## 7. HEALTH & WELL-BEING, CONTINUED

Never
  Rarely
  Sometimes
  Often
  Always

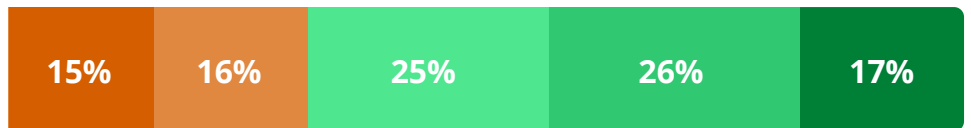
In the past 7 days, I felt depressed.



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

Not at all
  A little bit
  Moderately
  Quite a bit
  Extremely

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?***





## SURVEY RESPONDENTS - INCARCERATED PERSONS



**70%**

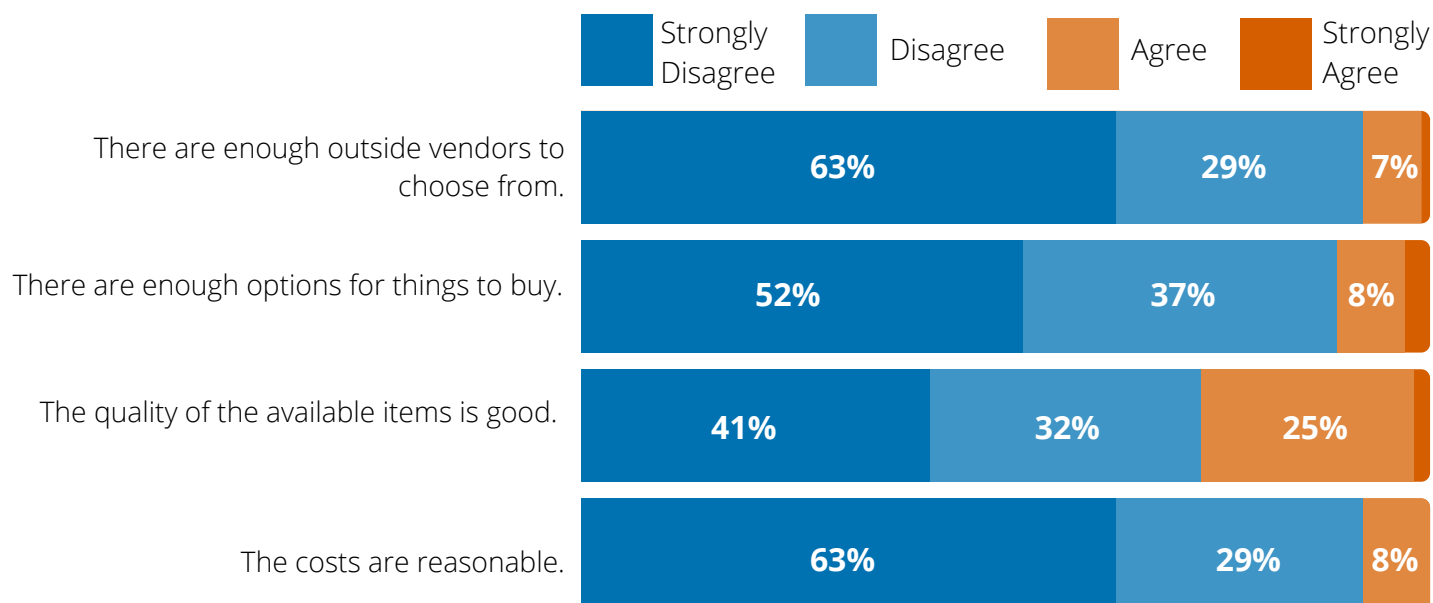
of incarcerated  
persons  
completed the  
survey.

- Age: 39 years (median)
- Race: 80% white
- Ethnicity: 77% white
- Gender identity: 91% male
  - 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

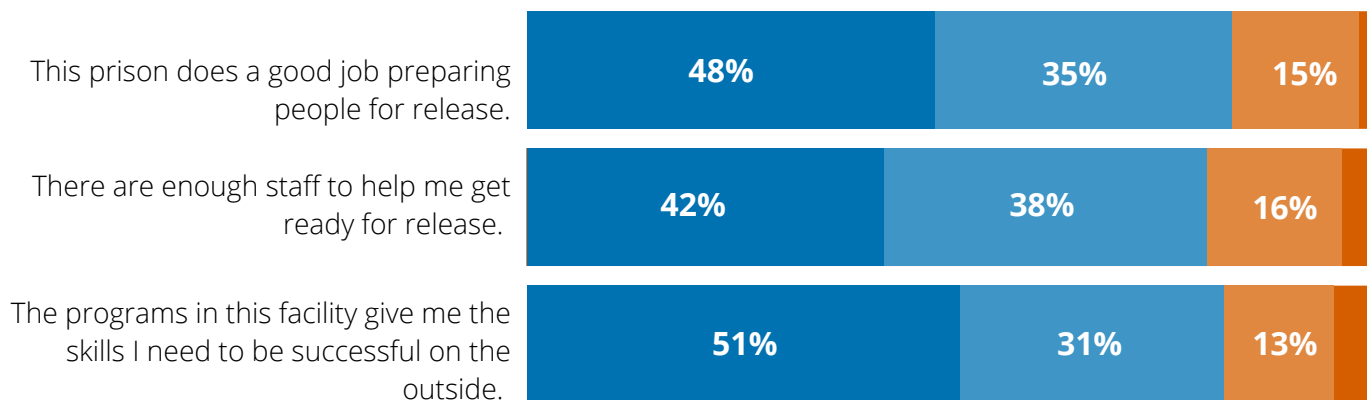
The Incarcerated Persons Vermont Prison Climate Survey was administered to people incarcerated in Vermont's Southern State Correctional Facility in June 2021. Surveys were paper-based, confidential, and anonymous. Of 267 eligible incarcerated people, 186 completed the survey (70% response rate). The demographic data presented here are self-reported.



## 1. COMMISSARY

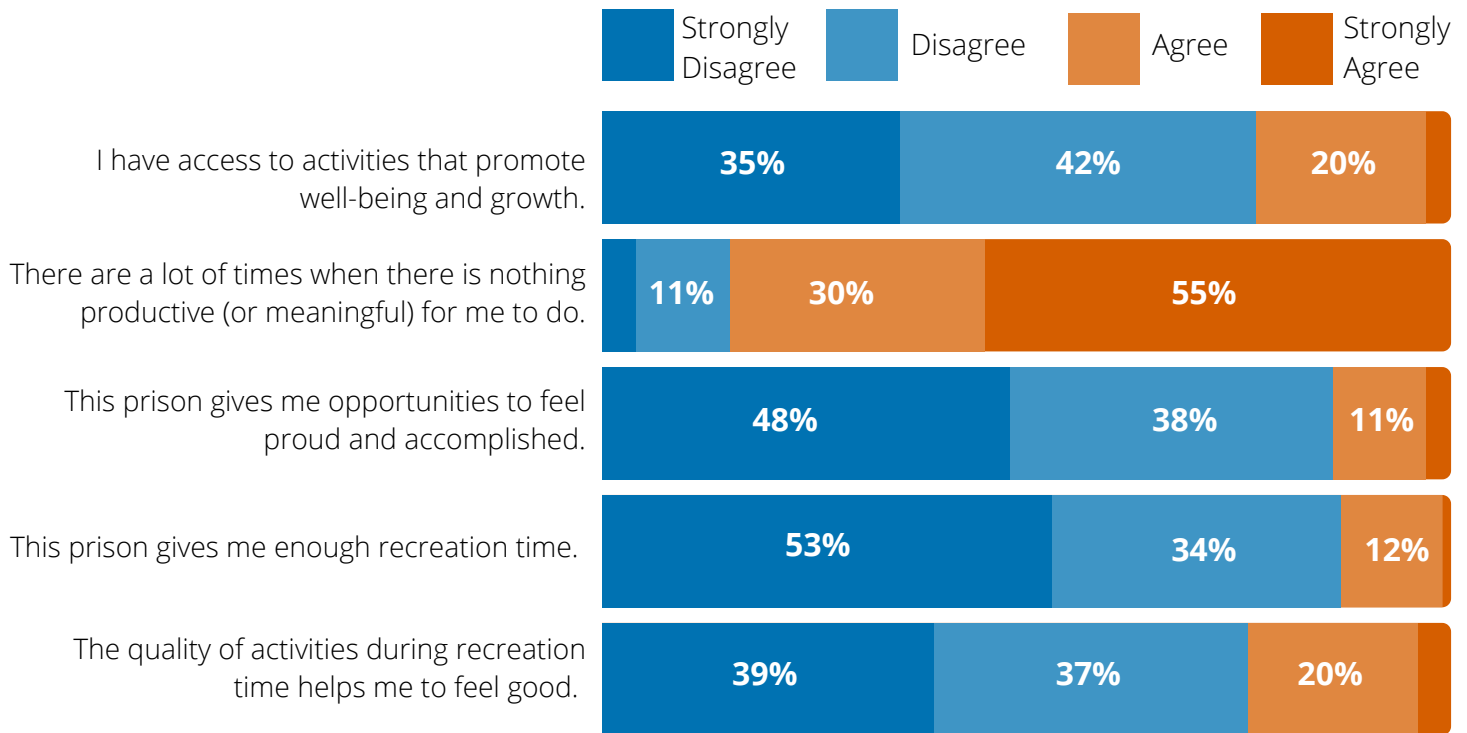


## 2. PLANNING & PREPARATION FOR RELEASE





### 3. PRISON ACTIVITIES

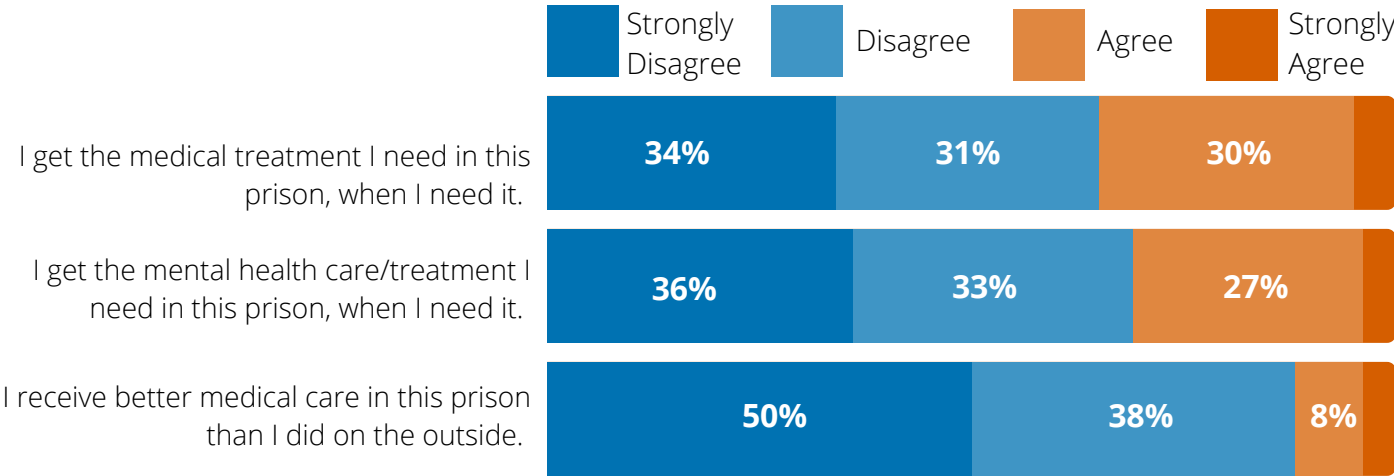


**When asked, "What types of programs would you find most helpful to meet your needs?" This is how incarcerated people answered:**

- **63%** Job Training.
- **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).
- **35%** Education.



## 4. MEDICAL & MENTAL HEALTH CARE



## 5. HEALTH & WELL-BEING



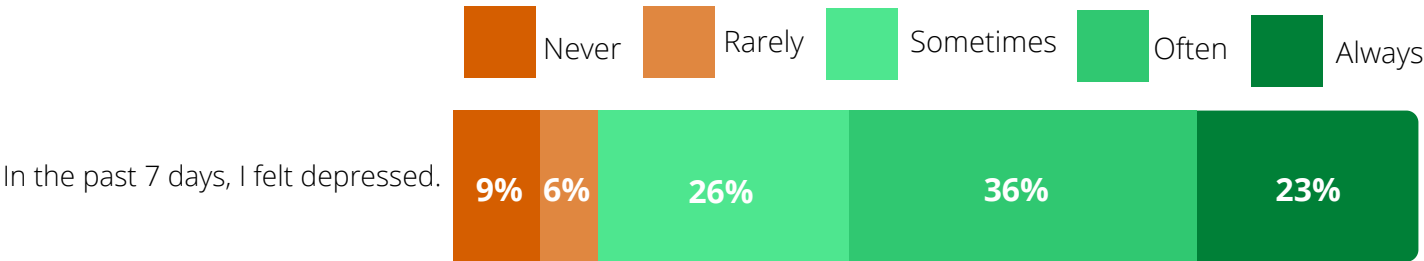
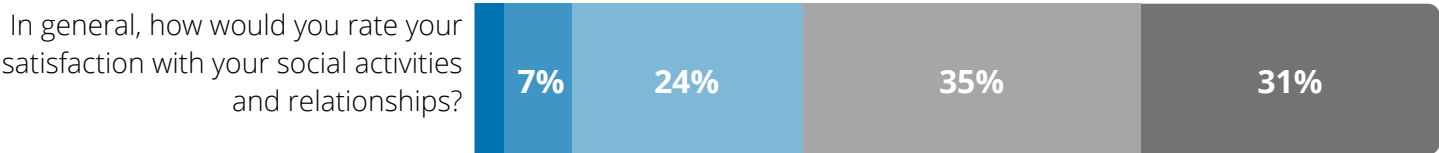
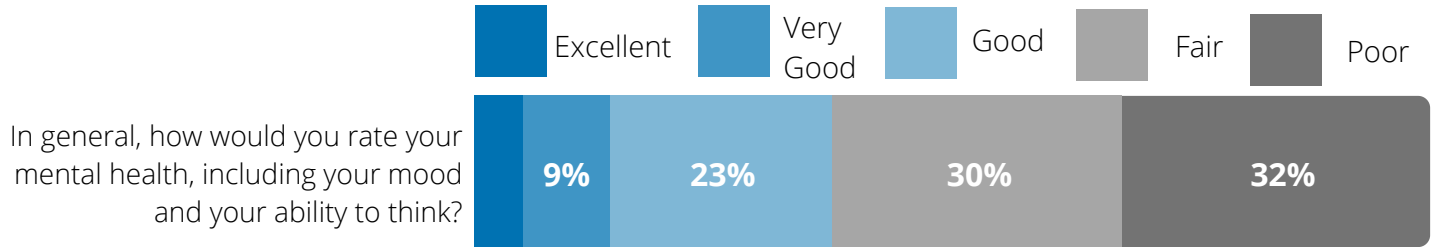
When asked, "Since entering prison, have you developed the following health conditions?" This is how incarcerated people answered:

- **70%** Anxiety
- **65%** Depression
- **55%** Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

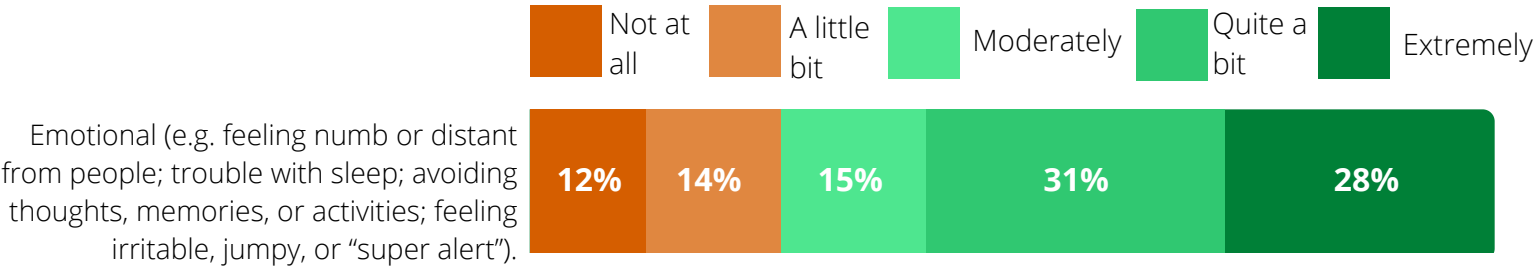




# 5. HEALTH & WELL-BEING, CONTINUED



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

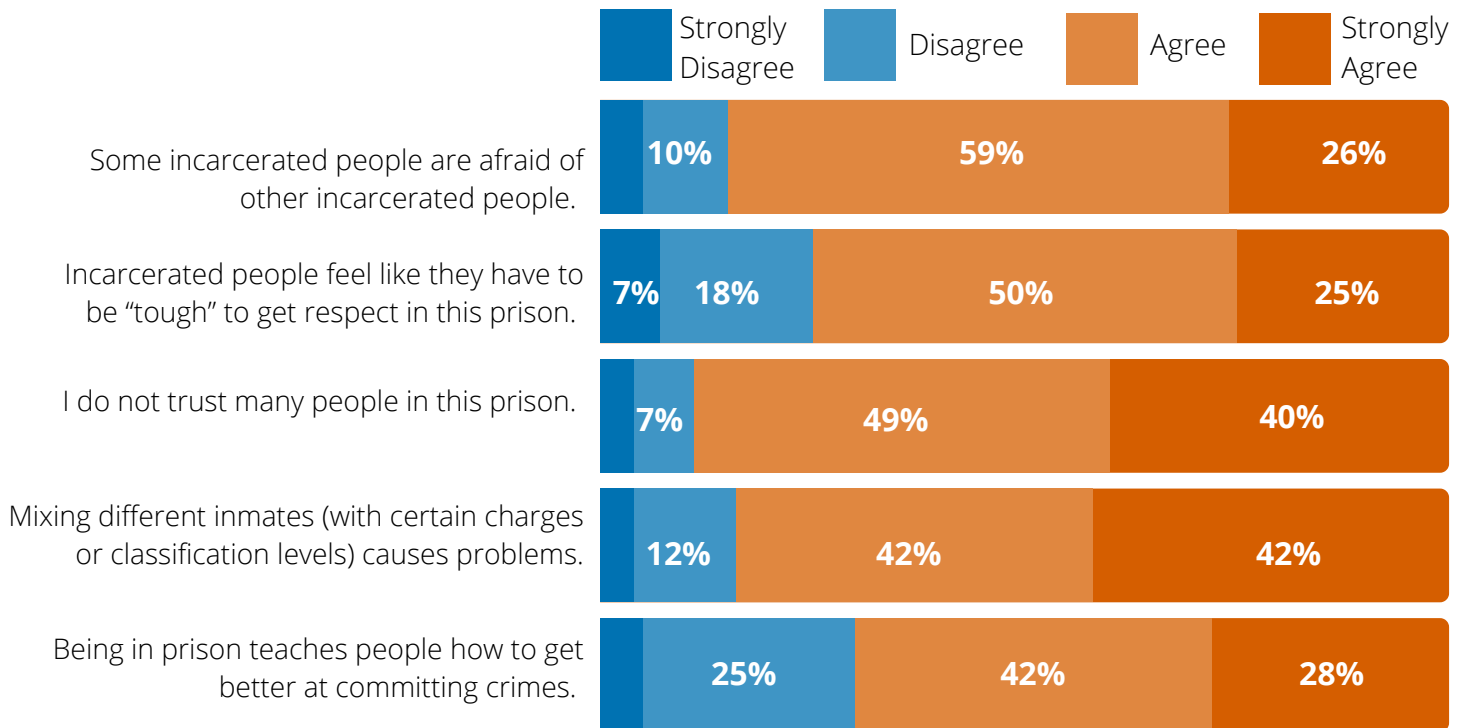


*At any time in the last 12 months did you seriously think about trying to kill yourself?*

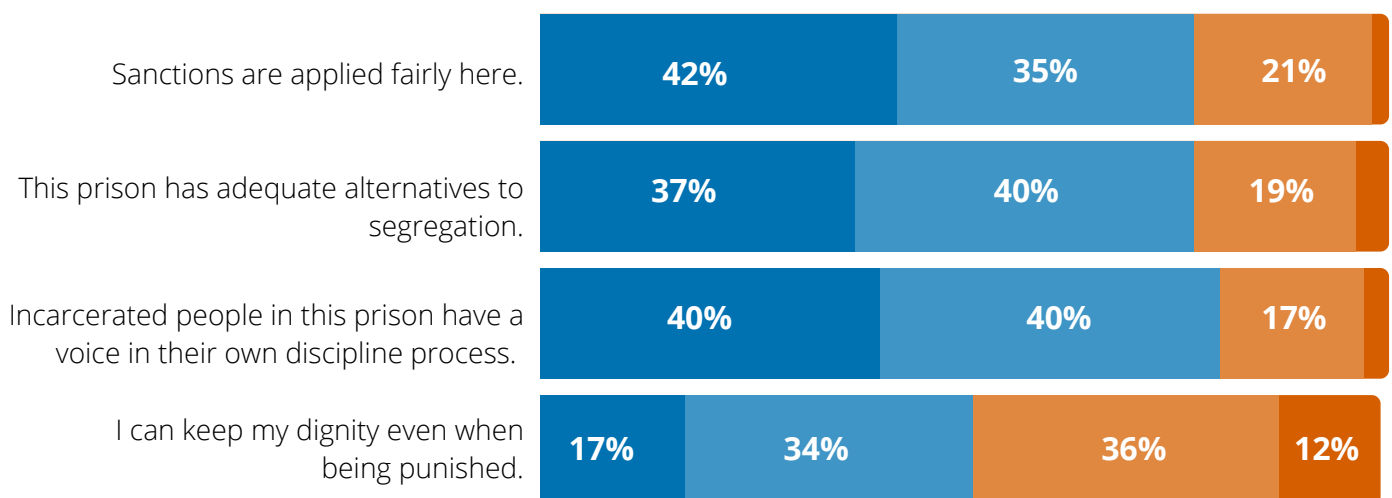




## 6. PRISON CULTURE

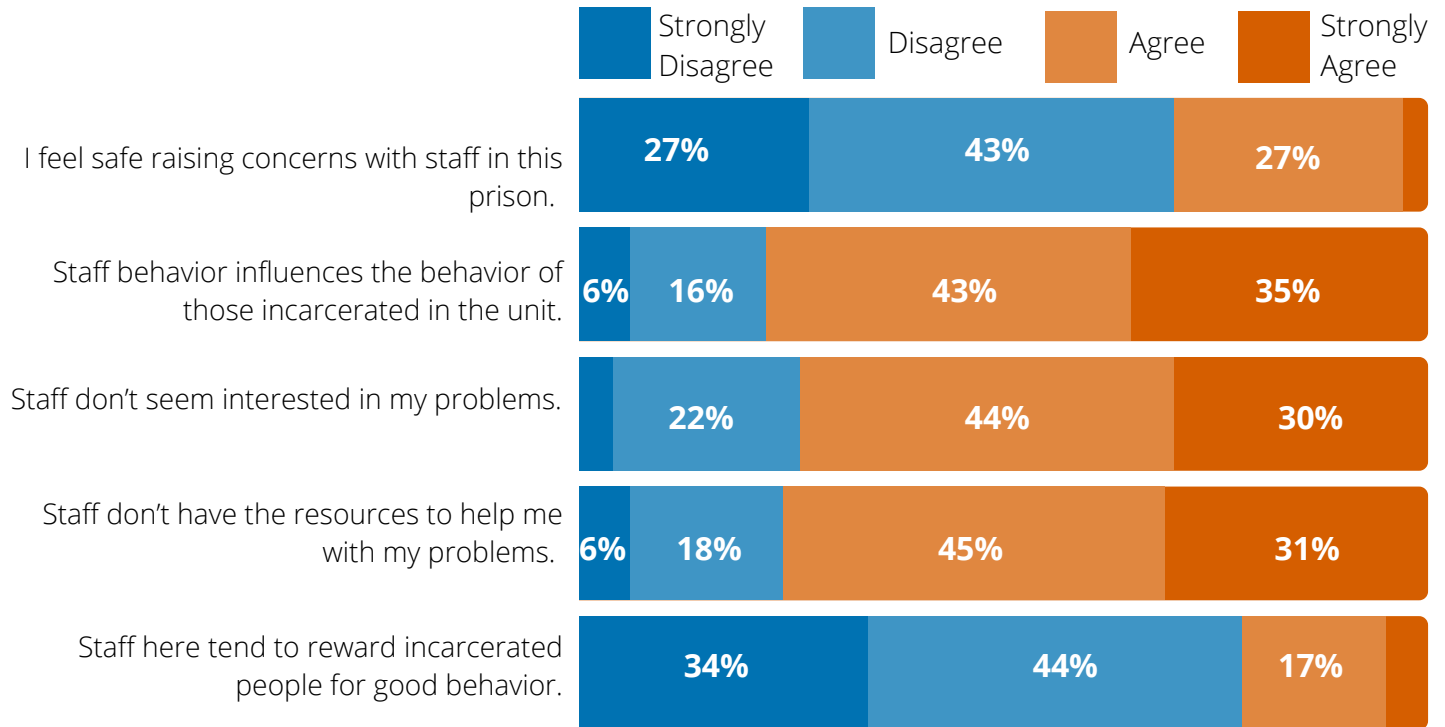


## 7. DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES





## 8. CORRECTIONAL STAFF & PRACTICES



## 9. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

