



Learning to be (crime-)free

Subjectification within a Finnish prison rehabilitation wing for women

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Introduction

In order to reduce recidivism, the Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency is remodelling imprisonment in Finland. This remodelling is articulated by a prison concept, 'an operation and facility model, which is based on the strategic goals of the Criminal Sanctions Agency' (Criminal Sanctions Agency, 2020). By means of reforming the prison staff's working culture, prisoner activities, and prison design, prisons are to be transformed into *learning spaces of life without crime*. Piloting this reform, the new Hämeenlinna closed prison for women opened in November 2020. The new prison is supposed to bring together innovative prison design (following the footsteps of, e.g. Halden Prison in Norway and Storstrøm Prison in Denmark), digital equipment, a humane working culture, and effective, rehabilitative prisoner activities. Ideally, the new prison is envisioned to operate as a 'reinventive prison' (Crewe & Levins, 2020; Ugelvik, 2021).

In my PhD¹ research project, I explore the intersection of education and governmentality within remodelled imprisonment. Through an ethnographic approach, I examine Hämeenlinna Prison's rehabilitation wing as an educational space and analyse how the prisoners conduct themselves as rehabilitating, crime-free subjects within it.

In this essay, I briefly outline the research. I elaborate the idea of imprisonment as an intersection of education and governmentality, introduce the research context of Hämeenlinna Prison, and describe the research task. Finally, I make some remarks concerning the Nordic relevance of this research.

1. The study is conducted at Tampere University, Finland, and is estimated to be completed in 2023. Fieldwork at Hämeenlinna Prison will be completed at the end of 2021.



1. Imprisonment as an intersection of education and governmentality

In my research, I explore the intersection of governmentality and education within imprisonment. The English word *education* does not quite grasp the full meaning of the Finnish word *kasvatus*, which bears the meaning of cultivation and upbringing. Instead of formal education in prisons, I look into the more general, cultivating aspect of the prison institution.

In the Nordic context at least, it can be argued that the prison institution embodies an educational agenda. The institution aims to alter the people within it: people step into prisons (seen) as offenders, and the aim is for them to leave the prison as people who don't offend, or at least will offend less or commit milder offences. This process of cultivation, I argue, is the desired outcome of the prison's educational/governmental agenda.

I look at the prison as a governing technology that seeks to influence prisoners' subjectivities – their self-understanding and conduct (see Foucault, 1977; 1990). I talk about governmentality together with this educational aspect of imprisonment because I understand the educational or pedagogic nature of prison to be intrinsically woven into all practices within the prison – as well as its physical environment – and not only in the activities of teachers or other pedagogically oriented individuals. In this sense, I consider the prison to be not only a governing technology, but an educational institution by its very nature. This, of course, does not mean that the actual 'outcomes' of imprisonment-as-education necessarily match any deliberate or subconscious curriculum of the prison.

The educational nature of imprisonment is highlighted in the Finnish prison concept. In line with the concept, Hämeenlinna Prison is branded a 'learning environment for a life without crime'. The prison concept is not so much about straightforward pedagogic interventions or teaching. Instead, the prison is supposed to offer an environment where those incarcerated are supported to cultivate themselves into crime-free subjects.

2. Locating the research: a prison rehabilitation wing for women

The specific site of my ethnographic fieldwork is the rehabilitation wing² of Hämeenlinna Prison. The wing accommodates up to 12 people at a time. The residents are selected through an assessment and an interview process, and

2. It is to be noted that the rehabilitation wing, along with everything else at Hämeenlinna Prison, was only starting to take shape when I first set foot in it in February 2021. Secondly, at the time of writing this essay, I am still only halfway through my nine-month fieldwork. Thus, this essay is based on a preliminary understanding of the field.



they commit to taking an active part in the wing's activities and staying drug-free. There are some similar rehabilitation wings in Finnish men's prisons, but the wing in Hämeenlinna Prison is the first rehabilitation wing for women in Finland, as Hämeenlinna Prison is the only closed prison for women in the country.

The design of the rehabilitation wing is identical to the other wings of the prison. The wings consist of 12 individual cells containing basic furniture, a bathroom, a TV, and a computer with limited internet access. The common area in each wing contains a kitchen area with a dining table, a TV area with some sofas, and a laundry room. Attached to each wing, there is a small room for staff, with a window facing the wing's common area. Each wing has a private yard where smoking is allowed. Practices vary, but on the rehabilitation wing prisoners have free access to the yard during the day. The prison design seeks a 'homelike' feeling and refrains from some characteristic elements of prison, such as long corridors and bars on the windows.

The rehabilitation wing combines elements of a Therapeutic Community approach and the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy model (see Bruhn, Lindberg & Nylander, 2017), with a stronger emphasis on the former. Most of the prisoners attend an accredited rehabilitation program (the VINN program, designed for female prisoners), while the communality aspect is emphasised in all activities on the wing. Additionally, the staff utilises trauma-informed and restorative justice approaches in its work.

The weekly schedule on the wing is organized into separate days for the VINN program (or other prison work for those who do not attend the program or have already completed it), and community days for all prisoners on the wing. Weekly routines include a wing meeting, where topical issues are discussed with the staff, and varying group activities to enhance the sense of cohesion within the group. Prisoners on the wing spend practically all their time with each other, as the idea is to avoid socializing with prisoners on other wings.

The wing has a drug-free policy, and the prisoners commit to weekly drug tests. Although all the prisoners residing on the wing during my fieldwork had a background of substance abuse, the actual rehabilitation is not focused on addiction. VINN is 'a motivational program addressing rehabilitative needs specific to convicted women' (Højdahl *et al.*, 2013, p. 177), which covers a range of topics, like substance abuse, relationships, and violence. The reasoning for using this particular program is its applicability for all imprisoned women. Although most prisoners have substance abuse issues, the rehabilitation wing is intended to also serve those who do not have them.

Prison rehabilitation, including the therapeutic community approach, is not a new thing in Finnish prisons, and thus it is not something that was introduced by the new prison concept. However, the rehabilitation wing is very much in line with the overall ideas of the prison concept. As the operations of the new prison were only taking shape at the beginning of my fieldwork, the rehabilitation wing stood out as more organised and systematically managed than



the rest of the prison. The rehabilitation wing appears to lead the way in the process of remodelling imprisonment in Hämeenlinna Prison.

3. Becoming rehabilitated, becoming crime-free?

The task of my research is to study imprisonment within the context of a rehabilitation wing of a modern women's prison. What kind of an educational space is the women's rehabilitation wing, and how are the prisoners supposed to cultivate themselves into crime-free subjects? What actually happens on the wing and how is it experienced by the prisoners?

Halfway into my ethnographic fieldwork, the rehabilitation wing appears to be a complex, even paradoxical site. The physical environment and the practices within the wing contribute to the different, often conflicting ways the prisoners are understood and understand themselves. There are tensions between, e.g. self-direction and institutional control, and between communality and individual recovery.

Compared to the regular wings, the prisoners on the rehabilitation wing enjoy relative 'freedom' and special liberties as a reward for their mostly blameless conduct. Following the ideal of democracy in therapeutic communities, the prisoners are encouraged to take part in making decisions about the wing's principles and activities. The wing offers a special position to the prisoners, but it also demands a lot. Lateral regulation on the wing is strong, and the standards for self-government are intense (see Crewe & Levins, 2020). Being a part of the community requires 'opening up' about one's emotions and past experiences as well as receiving constant feedback on one's behaviour and giving constructive feedback to others.

Following Michel Foucault's idea of subjectification (e.g. Foucault, 2005; 2008; 1990), I will analyse the ways in which the prisoners work on themselves: how they conduct themselves as rehabilitating, crime-free subjects within this contradictory setting. The rehabilitation wing promotes the prisoners' self-direction in everyday activities, as well as introspection and continuous reflection on the self. Thus, the wing is an especially fruitful context for analysing the productive work the prisoners do on themselves (see Ugelvik, 2014, p. 71).

Understanding the subjectification processes within the daily practices of prison is a crucial part of a wider comprehension of what happens in modern prisons, and why. It is also vital for detecting both the constructive and the hindering aspects of prison rehabilitation and developing further rehabilitation practices for imprisoned women.



4. Concluding remarks: the Nordic relevance

Through this research, I shed light on Finnish imprisonment, which is somewhat underrepresented in the Nordic criminology field. The research is located in an up-to-date, modern prison facility, which is at the same time unique in the Finnish context and in line with Nordic prison design trends. Analysis on the carceral conditions and the prisoners' experiences in these modern prison facilities is topical and highly relevant for the understanding of both the current state and the future of Nordic imprisonment. Hämeenlinna Prison, as a pilot for the Finnish prison concept, is intended not only to set an example for future prisons in Finland, but to set an international example as well.

This study contributes to the research on women's imprisonment and rehabilitation practices for women. A gender-sensitive approach to punishment is only taking its first steps in the Finnish correctional system, and it is important to produce knowledge about the practices that are especially targeted at incarcerated women. As the prison's educational/governmental project seeks for the prisoners to construct themselves as non-offending subjects, this study is also connected to the research on women's desistance (e.g. Gålnander, 2020). Ideally, Hämeenlinna Prison as a reinventive institution is supposed to put in motion a process of successful desistance.

All in all, this study digs into what Peter Scharff Smith and Thomas Ugelvik (2017, p. 514) call the 'nexus of rehabilitation, welfare, rights and power' in the Nordic prison context. Ethnographic analysis on a modern prison's rehabilitation wing offers a close-up of the entanglement of rehabilitation and punishment in an institution that is intended simultaneously to punish and enhance welfare and social inclusion.

Kontaktoplysninger

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