PRISON STAFF SATISFACTION SURVEY

2020

PRISON STAFF SATISFACTION SURVEY

When studying the situation in the penitentiary establishments, less attention is paid to the state of human rights of the prison personnel. However, the working environment in the penitentiary establishments, including professional activities and inter-relation between the prison administration and the staff members, social and legal aid guarantees, significantly affect the environment in the facility and treatment of the prisoners. Consequently, general policy and approach is important factor, which, includes effective communication with the staff members and improvement of their working conditions.

Prisons all around the world (Georgia is no exception) have difficulty attracting highly qualified staff. Very few of those working within the prison system tend to purposely seek out a professional career in this sphere: some are transferred to prisons from positions in the military, some are unable to find better employment and opt for a job in the prison system rather than face unemployment; for some a prison job is the first step in a career headed towards another form of paramilitary service for which it is hoped experience obtained in prison will be beneficial, and so forth.

Staff turnover, the result first and foremost of the stressful working environment, is high. Prison staff are often subjected to verbal or physical abuse from prisoners. This tends to be more severe in high risk institutions accommodating a special category of prisoners. And it's all topped off by an atmosphere of lock-down and isolation that prohibits employees from taking a telephone onto work premises and having any contact with the outside world. Since prisons are located outside of cities, break times cannot be used to go out and buy products or other items in shops. This problem can be particularly acute for those working 24-hour shifts.

Understaffing is another problem that increases workload and security risks, calling the dynamic security concept into question without even mentioning additional working hours, long shifts, and partial use of holiday leave. All this leads to professional "burnout" and employee exhaustion.

Stressful work often affects the health of the prison staff, leading to depression, heart disease, fixation on work, inability to relax, and insomnia. Psychological stress can further be accompanied by infectious diseases existing in prison environment: Hepatitis B and C and Tuberculosis.

According to international standards, the prison staff's stressful working environment must be compensated to a maximum extent by social security guarantees, physical security guarantees, appropriate working hours, adequate remuneration, the existence of a

variety of encouragement mechanisms and incentives, and a psychologically supportive environment. This may involve stress management and "burnout" training, free psychological assistance for prison personnel, etc. However, the reality is that almost all prison staff in Georgia can confirm that their salary does not match the difficult working environment. In most prisons, it is the usual practice to require overtime hours (including holidays) that are never recorded and therefore not compensated. Another problem is the full use of holiday leave: employees "are given" a maximum of 10-12 calendar days per year. There are no showers or comfortably furnished rooms for the personnel working 24-hour shifts. Even eating food can be problematic due to the absence of a cafeteria. Staff are forced to eat the dry, pre-made food they have brought from home at their desks. From January 2019 Special Penitentiary Department introduced a new initiative for staff working in 24 hour shifts: they will be provided with 2 free meals per day, which is welcoming initiative.

Career advancement in prison is less likely due to a strictly centralized system. As regards incentives, the system lacks an incentive mechanism that would individually assess the work carried out by the employees. Symbolic incentives, including monetary incentives, are available, though they are issued only periodically and for specific position holders and not by assessment of individual work, which does not serve to raise motivation in any way.

Effective prison management requires appropriate investment in personnel selection, training, professional development, and employment. The State must protect prison staff from work-related stress and violence (including gender-based violence), provide these people – who are so essential – with fair remuneration for their work, social benefits, continuous training and professional development, motivation raising plans, overtime work compensation, and provide them with decision-making power within their area of competence and the possibility of career advancement. These things would most definitely improve the prison working environment and increase worker motivation and the quality of work carried out, which would in turn better serve prisoners' needs and better protect their rights.

penalreform.org