

Prison Study: A Review of Research Gaps and Future Directions*

Milena Milićević¹ 

Introduction: With numerous studies examining life in prison, identifying research gaps is necessary for mapping focus areas, refining unanswered questions, and avoiding redundant efforts. This process could optimise resources, fosters collaborative approaches, and ultimately lead to more robust and insightful research outcomes. Therefore, this scoping review aimed to identify and address research gaps and future directions within the field of prison studies, specifically focusing on prison climate. *Methods:* Comprehensive searches were conducted across two databases and a web search engine, with no time restrictions, targeting papers with 'prison climate' in their titles. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were collected. Their limitations and recommendations for future research were analysed using a convergent integrated framework, followed by thematic synthesis. *Results:* A review of 97 studies identified several critical areas. The studies included diverse samples, but research predominantly focused on Western countries and adult male populations. Various ethical, logistical, and institutional factors frequently influenced sample representativeness, data quality, and measurement reliability. In general, there is an urgent need for longitudinal studies examining prison climate and rehabilitation outcomes. Comparative cross-cultural studies and qualitative explorations of the experiences of both inmates and staff remain underrepresented. Additionally, limited research addresses the relationship between inmate personality profiles and their specific needs within prison programs. Similarly, limited attention was given to how the work environment impacts staff attitudes and behaviours, as well as how these, consequently, shape inmate perceptions of prison climate. The effectiveness of gender-sensitive rehabilitation programs and the role of interventions focused on family, housing, and health in reducing recidivism also require further exploration. *Conclusion:* Geographic diversity and representation of under-researched groups (e.g., elderly inmates, non-Western populations) remain limited. While quantitative methods dominated, qualitative approaches,

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¹ Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade, Serbia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8344-5504>

Correspondence: Milena Milićević, Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Gračanička 18, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia. Email: mileninaadresa@gmail.com

context-specific validation, and longitudinal designs emerged as priorities for future research. Additionally, expanding research beyond Western prison populations and adapting measurement tools for diverse inmate and staff groups is recommended. Establishing evidence-based thresholds could help set policies that prevent institutions from falling below safety standards and ensure minimally acceptable conditions regarding overcrowding, violence levels, and staffing ratios. These thresholds can guide resource allocation and intervention design towards positive rehabilitation outcomes, such as increased program participation and improved re-entry support. Finally, engaging individuals with lived experience and other relevant stakeholders in research could further ensure the relevance and applicability of findings.

KEYWORDS: prison climate / scoping review / research gaps / cross-cultural studies / comparative research / correctional environment / evaluation

Introduction

The prison climate, which encompasses interpersonal relationships, environmental conditions, and institutional characteristics, consistently emerged as a significant factor in influencing inmate behaviour and outcome, staff attitudes, and overall institutional stability (J. Bennett & Shuker, 2018; P. Bennett & Shuker, 2010; Crewe, 2011; Hacin & Meško, 2018). Several studies found that elements such as social support, security, and sense of belonging were crucial for a positive climate (Blagden et al., 2017; Green et al., 2023; Van Ginneken et al., 2020). Negative environments, including overcrowding, inadequate staff support, and high perceived threat levels, were linked to higher incidences of violence, self-harm, and staff-prisoner tensions (Day et al., 2011; Durante, 2020; Gadon et al., 2006; Green et al., 2023; Walters, 2022; Williams et al., 2019). Some authors identified a direct connection between the work climate for prison staff and the prison climate perceived by inmates (Heynen et al., 2014b; Palmen et al., 2022; Van Ginneken et al., 2020). Furthermore, workload, co-worker support, and staff perceptions of their own job satisfaction were all closely linked to prisoner well-being and institutional order (Chesnut, 2020; Crewe et al., 2015; Howard et al., 2022; Lambert & Paoline, 2008; Sauter et al., 2019). In addition, high staff stress and dissatisfaction contributed to negative inmate perceptions, reinforcing the need for positive workplace practices and strong support systems for correctional staff to enhance overall prison climate (Higgins et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Pane, 2016; Piccoli et al., 2015; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006).

However, with numerous research on life in prison, it is important to identify research gaps to better understand the complexities of prison environment and guide future studies. Identifying and addressing research gaps is crucial for advancing any field of study, as recently highlighted by Ajemba and Arene (2022). Research gaps are areas where knowledge is limited or missing, and identifying these gaps can guide future research, inform policy-making, and enhance practice

(Chand, 2023; Islam, 2024; Nassaji, 2018; Nyanchoka et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2011). Moreover, identifying research gaps helps focus on specific topics or unanswered questions within prison studies that require further attention, while also preventing duplication of existing research, thereby saving time and resources. Therefore, this scoping review aimed to identify and address research gaps and future directions within the field of prison studies, specifically focusing on prison climate.

Methods

A literature search was conducted to identify studies on prison climate. The databases Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science were selected for their coverage of multidisciplinary articles. The search focused on articles with both 'prison' and 'climate' in the title, with no date restrictions applied. Initial searches were conducted in May 2024 and supplemented in October 2024. A qualitative content analysis approach was employed to review and synthesise the existing literature on prison climate. Their limitations and recommendations for future research were analysed using a convergent integrated framework, followed by thematic synthesis.

Results with Discussion

Research Summary

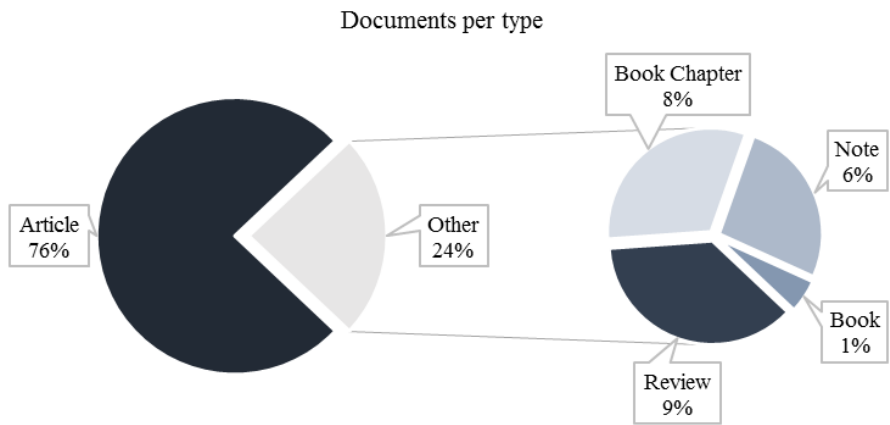
A total of 97 studies were collected and analysed. The final article selection included reviews, qualitative studies, theoretical works and cross-sectional surveys (Graph 1). The publication dates ranged from 1972 to 2024 (Graph 2). The studies reviewed in this scoping analysis are summarised in Table 1, which provides an overview of their aims, identified research gaps, future directions, and limitations. This detailed summary of existing research on prison life is given in the Appendix 1.

Graph 1 illustrates the types of documents contributing to prison climate research. Articles dominate the field, comprising 60 out of the total, reflecting the preference for publishing findings in peer-reviewed journals. Reviews (seven documents) and book chapters (six documents) represent a smaller proportion. Notes (five documents) indicate contributions that may focus on brief communications or preliminary findings, while books (one document) can be considered rare, suggesting limited comprehensive or standalone volumes dedicated to prison climate research.

As shown in Graph 1, the prevalence of articles underscores the dynamic and ongoing nature of the field, where researchers frequently engage in publishing shorter, focused studies. The smaller number of reviews and books suggests opportunities for more comprehensive future analyses and consolidated resources in this area.

Graph 1

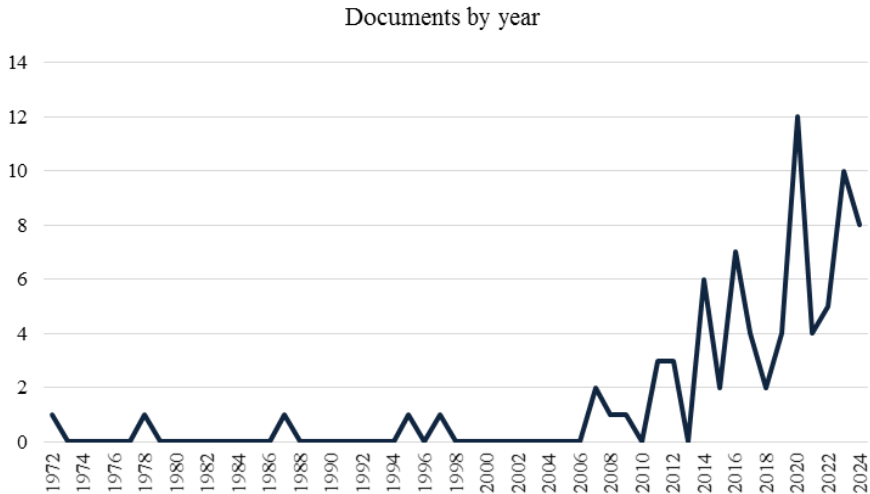
Document Types in Prison Climate Research (1972–2024)



Note. Source: Scopus Advanced search, using query string TITLE(prison AND climate).

Graph 2

Trends in Published Studies on Prison Climate (1972–2024)

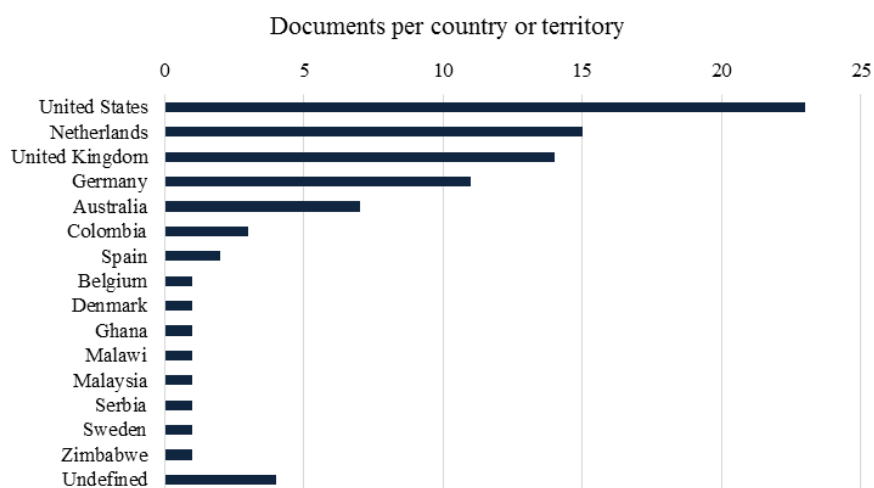


Note. Source: Scopus Advanced search, using query string TITLE(prison AND climate).

Graph 2 illustrates the distribution of studies on prison climate published annually from 1972 to 2024. Initial research activity was sparse, with only one study each published in 1972, 1978, 1987, 1995, and 1997. Research interest began to increase modestly in the early 2000s, with notable growth observed from 2007 onward. The number of publications peaked in 2020 with 12 studies, reflecting a heightened interest in the topic, possibly influenced by global discussions on prison reform and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on correctional facilities. Subsequent years, particularly 2023 and partially available 2024, maintained strong output with 10 and eight studies, respectively, indicating sustained scholarly attention. To summarise, there is a trend of increased research interest over the past two decades, confirming the growing recognition of prison climate as a critical area of study.

Graph 3

Geographic Distribution of Studies on Prison Climate (1972–2024)



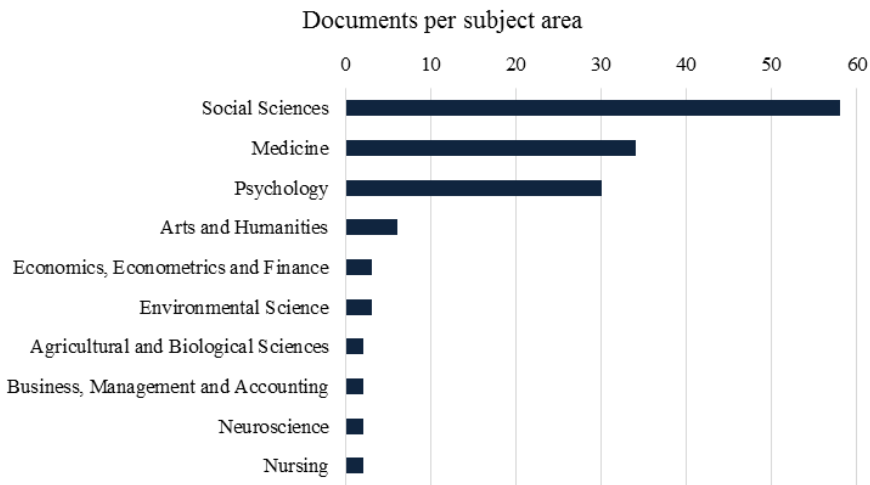
Note. Source: Scopus Advanced search, using query string TITLE(prison AND climate).

Graph 3 shows the geographic distribution of studies on prison climate, with the United States leading in research contributions, accounting for 23 studies. This is followed by the Netherlands (15 studies), the United Kingdom (14 studies), and Germany (11 studies), reflecting the strong focus on prison research in Western countries with established criminological traditions. Australia also features prominently with seven studies, indicating significant engagement with prison climate research in the Asia-Pacific region. It is important to note that contributions from non-Western countries are limited, with only a few studies emerging from regions such as Africa (e.g., Ghana, Malawi, and Zimbabwe) and Asia (e.g., Malaysia). Serbia is the sole representative from Southeast Europe, and

there are four studies classified as “undefined”, suggesting either multinational research efforts or missing data on the study’s origin (Graph 3). The dominance of Western nations in the dataset confirms the need for more geographically diverse research to capture variations in prison climate across different cultural, social, and political contexts. Therefore, future studies need to expand geographical representation, particularly in under-researched regions.

Graph 4

Subject Area Distribution of Studies on Prison Climate (1972–2024)



Note. Source: Scopus Advanced search, using query string TITLE(prison AND climate).

Graph 4 illustrates the distribution of studies on prison climate across various subject areas, with the majority (58 studies) situated within the Social Sciences, confirming the centrality of sociological and criminological perspectives in this field. Medicine (34 studies) and Psychology (30 studies) can also be considered dominant, reflecting the growing interest in the health and mental well-being of prison populations. Other disciplines, such as Arts and Humanities (six studies), Economics, Econometrics and Finance (three studies), and Environmental Science (three studies), demonstrate interdisciplinary approaches to understanding prison climate, albeit with fewer contributions. Fields like Agricultural and Biological Sciences, Business, Management and Accounting, Neuroscience, and Nursing are minimally represented, each contributing two studies, suggesting tangential interest in prison-related topics.

In general, the distribution per subject areas confirms the dominance of social and health sciences in prison climate research (Graph 4). This trend indicates opportunities for broader engagement from less-represented disciplines in future studies.

Sample Characteristics

Sample Sizes and Populations

The studies included varied sample sizes ranging from small qualitative samples of under 20 participants to extensive quantitative analyses with over 500 inmates or staff members. Many studies had mid-sized samples of 100–300 participants.

Regarding populations, both male and female inmates were included, with a few studies focusing on specific groups such as high-risk offenders, juveniles, or individuals with mental health or substance abuse issues. Majority of studies focused exclusively on male inmates, while only a few highlighted the unique needs and experiences of female inmates (Batrićević et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Sheehan, 2014). Some studies included prison staff (e.g., correctional officers, social workers, administrative personnel) to examine climate and relationships within institutions. Research involving staff generally focused on their perspectives on prison conditions, mental health, job satisfaction, and the impacts of institutional policies (Gibson, 2021; Gonzales et al., 2023; Howard et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2024; Palmen et al., 2022; Van Ginneken et al., 2020; Yoosefi et al., 2019).

Certain studies focused on inmates with specific characteristics, such as: a) mental health challenges (inmates diagnosed with mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, or PTSD, as well as those exhibiting symptoms of psychoticism and neuroticism); b) substance abuse issues (inmates with substance abuse histories, their treatment needs, engagement in rehabilitation programs, and challenges in re-entry); c) high-risk and violent offenders (inmates with histories of violent behaviour or recidivism, and relationship between prison climate, behaviour management, and violence reduction strategies); and d) individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (Kelly & Welsh, 2016; Louis et al., 2023; Ruiz, 2007a, 2007b; Sheehan, 2014; Toch, 1978; Vinter et al., 2024; Woessner & Schwedler, 2014).

Age Ranges

Most studies focused on adult inmates, with ages generally ranging from 18 to 65. Within this group, some research specified age brackets to compare experiences across younger and older adults, especially in areas like recidivism, mental health, and program engagement. A smaller number of studies concentrated on juvenile offenders, generally ages 12 to 18, and explored the unique rehabilitation needs, treatment motivation, and developmental challenges facing young offenders in juvenile correctional facilities (Heynen et al., 2014b, 2014a, 2024; Owusu Ansah et al., 2022; Podgorski & Prislán, 2019; van der Helm et al., 2009). Finally, studies addressed the growing demographic of elderly

inmates (ages 60+) and focusing on their specific physical, psychological, and healthcare needs are still lacking (Ruiz, 2007b).

Other Demographic and Contextual Characteristics

Educational Background and Employment History

Some studies included data on inmates' educational levels and employment history, examining how these factors influenced re-entry outcomes, program participation, and overall prison climate perceptions (Ali et al., 2016; Durante, 2020; Podgorski & Prislan, 2019; Sheehan, 2014).

Sentence Length and Security Level

Research often segmented samples based on sentence length (short-term vs. long-term inmates) and the security level of the facility (minimum, medium, or maximum security) (Casey et al., 2016; Durst, 1994; McLellan, 2022; Meussling, 1984; Williams et al., 2019).

Ethnicity and Cultural Background

Ethnic and cultural diversity were noted in a few studies, especially those conducted in countries with diverse populations (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom) (Bruhn et al., 2011; Durante, 2020; Galouzis et al., 2023; Goomany & Dickinson, 2015; Milićević et al., 2024; Neubacher et al., 2021; Pérez et al., 2014).

Urban vs. Rural Facility Location

Some studies compared facilities located in urban areas with those in rural regions, examining how location influenced climate, resource availability, staff recruitment, and community reintegration outcomes (Durante, 2020).

Key methodological considerations and limitations

Sample Representativeness and Generalisability

Many studies reported challenges with sample representativeness due to restricted access or voluntary participation. Convenience sampling, common in correctional research, limited generalisability as participants often did not represent the broader prison population. This issue was particularly noted in studies that relied on participants who were willing and able to engage in research, possibly skewing results toward healthier or more compliant inmates (Day et al., 2012; Peart et al., 2024; Reading & Ross, 2020; Van Ginneken et al., 2019). Ethnic and cultural diversity was underrepresented, especially outside North American and European contexts, raising questions about how findings apply to inmates from diverse backgrounds and correctional systems globally. Additionally, studies

frequently focused on either male or female populations, with limited mixed-gender or comparative analyses (Batrićević et al., 2023).

Data Collection Constraints

Obtaining permissions for data collection in correctional facilities was challenging, often leading to delays or constraints in research scope. Ethical and logistical barriers, including confidentiality concerns and institutional policies, limited researchers' access to both inmates and staff in some regions. Furthermore, some studies relied on self-reported data from inmates or staff, which may be influenced by social desirability bias, fear of retribution, or selective reporting (Bosma, van Ginneken, Sentse, et al., 2020; Howard et al., 2022; McLellan, 2022; Mikolon, 2017). This is particularly relevant in studies on sensitive topics like mental health, drug use, or perceptions of prison conditions, where participants might withhold information or respond strategically. Finally, there are studies reporting issues with incomplete datasets, especially in longitudinal studies or research spanning multiple institutions (Auty & Liebling, 2024; Vinter et al., 2024).

Studies conducted pre- and post-COVID-19 noted the influence of the pandemic on prison environments, particularly regarding restrictions, health protocols, and inmates' mental health. Those that did not cover the COVID-19 period recognised it as a potential limitation, as changes during the pandemic likely altered prison dynamics in ways that were not captured (Auty & Liebling, 2024; Canada et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Richter & Hamatschek, 2024).

Measurement Tools and Instruments

A majority of studies employed widely used scales, like the Correctional Institutions Environment Scale (CIES), the Essen Climate Evaluation Scheme (EssenCES) and the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) surveys, which helped with comparability (Liebling, 2004; Moos, 1974; Schalast et al., 2008). However, these tools sometimes missed context-specific nuances, especially in cross-national studies. Hence, many scales were developed and validated in Western contexts, and their applicability to diverse populations (e.g., non-English speakers, ethnic minorities) was often limited. Few studies adapted or validated these tools for specific cultural contexts or demographic groups, which could impact the reliability of findings when applied globally ((Harding, 2014; Heynen et al., 2014a; Ilijić et al., 2020; Međedović, Drndarević, & Milićević, 2024; Milićević et al., 2024; Pérez et al., 2014; Stobbe, 2017).

Consequently, a few studies introduced new or adapted scales, such as subscales for physical environment or social climate, to capture specific aspects of prison conditions. However, new instruments often required validation, and complexity in measurement posed challenges in interpreting results or comparing with existing scales (Ajdukovic, 1990; Kim et al., 2024).

Analytical Approaches

Most studies used cross-sectional or correlational designs, limiting conclusions about causality. While these designs were effective in identifying relationships (e.g., between prison climate and inmate behaviour), they did not clarify causative factors. Therefore, this trend led to call for more longitudinal and experimental studies to better establish directionality (Day et al., 2011; Guéridon, 2020; Harding, 2014; Heynen et al., 2014b, 2014a, 2024; McNeil, 2021; Ross et al., 2008; Sauter et al., 2019; Van Ginneken, 2022; Van Ginneken et al., 2019). Moreover, quantitative surveys were the dominant method, whereas fewer studies employed qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, ethnographies) to explore inmate or staff perspectives in depth (Blagden & Wilson, 2020; Thaler et al., 2022). Finally, some studies acknowledged the need for more detailed study design (e.g., inmates within specific prisons or units) (Auty & Liebling, 2020; Bosma, van Ginneken, Palmen, et al., 2020; Bosma, van Ginneken, Sentse, et al., 2020; Reading & Ross, 2020; Tonkin, 2016; Woessner & Schwedler, 2014).

Ethical and Practical Considerations

Obtaining informed consent in correctional settings presented unique ethical considerations, as participants might feel pressured to participate due to power dynamics with staff. Ensuring voluntary participation and clarifying non-coercive conditions were emphasised as essential (Batrićević et al., 2023; Ilijić et al., 2024; Stevanović et al., 2024; Woessner & Schwedler, 2014). Moreover, confidentiality was a particular concern, as prison environments sometimes represents risks for participant identification, especially in sensitive studies on drug use, violence, or staff-inmate relationships. Researchers also noted the importance of reducing bias, particularly when examining topics like inmate behaviour or staff roles. Some studies highlighted potential bias introduced by researchers' own views on criminal justice, which could inadvertently shape interpretations or focus areas (Bosma, van Ginneken, Sentse, et al., 2020; Kelly & Welsh, 2016; Peart et al., 2024; Reading & Ross, 2020).

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Longitudinal Analysis on Prison Climate and Rehabilitation Outcomes

The majority of research relies on cross-sectional designs and many studies highlighted the need for longitudinal designs to capture changes over time in prison climate, institutional adaptation, and inmate rehabilitation outcomes. In other words, future research on the long-term effects of climate on rehabilitation, recidivism, and mental health and institutional health are currently lacking. Longitudinal research could also explore individual adaptation, the persistence of mental health outcomes post-release, and the sustainability of re-entry programs, especially recidivism rates and employment stability (Batrićević et al., 2023;

Dewey & Prohaska, 2022; Guéridon, 2020; Heynen et al., 2024; Howard et al., 2022; Ilijić et al., 2024; McLellan, 2022; McNeil, 2021; Mededović, Drndarević, & Ilijić, 2024; Mohamad et al., 2017; Owusu Ansah et al., 2022; Palmen et al., 2022; Sauter et al., 2019; Stevanović et al., 2024; Van Ginneken, 2022; Van Ginneken et al., 2019).

Comparative Cross-Cultural Studies

Prison systems vary greatly across cultural, economic, and legal contexts. However, most research is concentrated in a limited number of high-income countries. The majority of studies are limited to single-country contexts, especially high-income countries (primarily the United States, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Australia). Comparative studies could explore prison climate, rehabilitation practices, and recidivism across different legal and cultural frameworks (Gibson, 2021; Neubacher et al., 2021; Van Ginneken et al., 2020). Using this approach, cultural factors affecting prison interventions could be identified and adaptable best practices for different prison systems established.

Qualitative Exploration of Inmate and Staff Experiences

Quantitative surveys dominate prison research. However, these studies may lack depth in understanding personal experiences, particularly regarding mental health, rehabilitation, and interpersonal dynamics. Therefore, in-depth qualitative interviews and case studies could explore inmates' emotional and psychological adaptations to prison life, especially among marginalised groups like women, juveniles, LGBTQ+ population and those with mental health conditions. A qualitative approach would also help further explore the impact of staff attitudes on prison climate and overall institutional atmosphere.

Overall, qualitative interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic research could explore the lived experiences of inmates and staff, focusing on various underexplored themes like mental health, rehabilitation, social interactions, and resilience (Baharudin et al., 2021; Batrićević et al., 2023; Bosma, van Ginneken, Palmen, et al., 2020; Day et al., 2011, 2012; Gibson, 2021; Green et al., 2023; Heynen et al., 2014b; Kelly & Welsh, 2016; McLellan, 2022; Mikolon, 2017; Peart et al., 2024; Prentice, 2022; Reading & Ross, 2020; Ross et al., 2008; Stasch et al., 2018; Tonkin, 2016; Williams et al., 2019).

Individual Personality Traits in Prison Climate Perceptions

Some studies explored the association between inmates' personality traits (such as neuroticism, criminality, and psychoticism) and their perceptions of the prison environment. These traits were found to shape how prisoners view and interact with their surroundings, potentially impacting their adaptation to prison life. While some studies examine personality traits and inmate perceptions, few explore how these traits interact with prison climate to predict behaviour (Mededović, Drndarević, & Ilijić, 2024; Vinter et al., 2024).

Future research could assess the degree to which personality influences inmates' adaptation, their engagement with rehabilitative programs, and potential behaviour changes. Exploring how traits like neuroticism, psychoticism, or criminal inclination correlate with responses to prison climate factors (e.g., security, social support) could help develop tailored or individualised treatment plans or specific therapeutic approaches for inmates with certain personality profiles. Furthermore, future studies could investigate how specific personality traits shape inmates' perception of climate factors like security, social support, and staff relationships (Heynen et al., 2014a; Mejovšek et al., 2007; Woessner & Schwedler, 2014).

Thresholds for Safety and Rehabilitation Effectiveness

Only a few studies proposed the idea of thresholds within prison climates, introducing minimum safety standards that institutions must meet to maintain a baseline level of safety and reduce violence (Auty & Liebling, 2024). Identifying and enforcing such thresholds could offer a practical framework for policymakers to evaluate and improve prison conditions systematically, though challenges in accessing reliable data were noted as a barrier. Research to establish evidence-based safety thresholds, using data from a wide range of facilities, could yield benchmarks for minimally acceptable conditions, especially regarding overcrowding, violence levels, and staffing ratios. Additionally, thresholds for positive rehabilitation outcomes and well-being (e.g., participation in programs, re-entry support) are needed, as well (Goomany & Dickinson, 2015).

Impact of Altered or Temporal Changes in Prison Dynamics

Prison climate is a dynamic factor influenced by many different factors, such as changes in policies, inmate population, and societal events (e.g., pandemics) (Canada et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Richter & Hamatschek, 2024; Šabani, 2013). For instance, longitudinal studies and post-incarceration follow-ups could reveal the persistence of climate impacts in community reintegration or capture how prison climate evolves over time or its ongoing impact on inmates' psychological well-being and rehabilitation.

Staff Climate and Its (In)direct Effects on Prisoners

Although there are studies on the staff influence on climate, research on how the work environment affects staff attitudes, behaviour, and consequently, inmate perceptions is still limited. This gap could be considered critical, as negative work climates can result in increased inmate-staff tensions and adverse prison climate (Bullock & Bunce, 2020; Lugo, 2016; Williams et al., 2019). As suggested, further research on staff climate, including workload, job satisfaction, co-worker support, and burnout, could help understand indirect factors impacting inmates.

Individualised and Gender-Specific Research on Prison Climate-related Issues

Women face distinct challenges in the criminal justice system, often related to family, mental health, and social reintegration. Although some studies address women-specific challenges (Batrićević et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Sheehan, 2014), there is limited research on tailored re-entry programs or gender-specific interventions that consider gender-based issues such as family reunification, housing stability, and mental health. Additionally, development of policy measures that counterbalance the security-focused “risk paradigm” with resources dedicated to social reintegration for women is still needed (Sheehan, 2014).

Role of Family and Community Ties

Family and social support are important for successful reintegration, yet few studies fully explore how these relationships evolve during incarceration and affect post-release outcomes (Baharudin & Mohamad, 2020; Ilijić et al., 2024; Ruiz, 2007a, 2007b; Sheehan, 2014; Sučić, 2021; Sučić et al., 2018). Therefore, it is recommended to examine how maintaining family ties and receiving community support impact inmates' rehabilitation and reduce recidivism. Research could also explore how policies around visitation, family contact, and community-based programs during incarceration influence these post-release outcomes, potentially guiding the development of family-focused re-entry support services.

Influence of Socio-Spatial and Physical Conditions on Inmate and Institutional Outcomes

Overcrowding and basic spatial conditions are analysed in some studies (Ajdukovic, 1990; Durst, 1994; Podgorski & Prislan, 2019; Sučić et al., 2018; Van Ginneken, 2022; Williams et al., 2019). However, the impact of physical and socio-spatial elements, such as cell design, natural lighting, and access to communal spaces on the prison climate and behaviour within correctional institutions needs to be further explored. That way, detailed examination of the socio-spatial design of facilities and its psychological impact on inmates could inform facility improvements and help promote mental health, reduce stress, and foster social cohesion. This research could advocate for design principles that enhance inmate well-being and overall climate.

Intersection of Prison Climate with Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Inmate Behaviour, and Program Engagement

The relationship between prison climate and inmate mental health has been explored previously (Calles-Rubiales & Ibáñez Del Prado, 2020; Goomany & Dickinson, 2015; Kim et al., 2024; Owusu Ansah et al., 2022; Ruiz, 2007b; Sučić et al., 2018; Vinter et al., 2024; Wenk & Moos, 1972; Yoosefi et al., 2019). However, more research is needed on how specific climate factors, such as

perceptions of safety, staff support, and inmate interactions, directly or indirectly impact mental health outcomes. Additionally, the research on impact of climate on staff mental health and job satisfaction is recommended, as well. Consequently, findings could help gain a deeper understanding of intersection of prison climate with mental health, substance abuse, inmate behaviour, and program engagement.

Diverse Population Representations (Gender, Youth and Juvenile Facilities, Cultural and Geographic Diversity)

Much of the existing research on prison climate has primarily focused on male adult prison populations, and largely overlooks the perspectives of female inmates and youth/juveniles. Given that women and youth populations may experience prison environments differently, influenced by a range of factors including health needs, psychological well-being, and social dynamics (Bullock & Bunce, 2020; Caulfield, 2016; Edgemon & Clay-Warner, 2023; Murray, 2021; Slotboom et al., 2011), there is a need for gender- and age-sensitive studies that account for unique aspects of female and juvenile incarceration. Furthermore, youth populations have distinct developmental and rehabilitative needs that most likely shape their perceptions of prison climate. Future studies on the climate within female, juvenile and young offender institutions could inform policies aimed at fostering constructive and supportive environments for these prison populations.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study relied on three databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science), which may not have captured all relevant studies, particularly those published in non-indexed journals or in other languages. Additionally, the search was restricted to documents with both 'prison' and 'climate' in the title, potentially excluding studies that address relevant aspects of prison climate using alternative terminology. While no date restrictions were applied, the review reflects a historical perspective rather than focusing exclusively on contemporary research priorities and trends. Future research could broaden the search terms to include synonyms and related concepts, such as moral or social climate in prisons, quality of prison life, and prison moral performance. Incorporating grey literature, non-English publications, and studies from non-indexed journals and books is also necessary to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.

Conclusion

Progressive trends in published studies on prison climate confirm both the increasing recognition of the complexity of prison environments and the need for evidence-based approaches to enhance inmate and staff experiences. To conclude,

there are several key limitations and recommendations for future research on prison climate.

Firstly, there is limited diversity and representation due to geographic bias and underrepresentation of specific groups. More precisely, research often overlooks the unique experiences of elderly, female and juvenile inmates or inmates from non-Western backgrounds and most research focuses on specific regions, neglecting the experiences of inmates and staff in other parts of the world.

Secondly, methodological diversity is lacking. There is over-reliance on quantitative methods and context-specific validation. Therefore, future studies could incorporate more qualitative approaches (like interviews and observations) and validate research findings within specific prison contexts, as conditions and experiences can vary significantly between institutions. Overall, longitudinal studies or research should track changes in prison climate over time and help understand the long-term impacts of interventions and policies.

Thirdly, research scope should be expanded, with focus placed beyond Western prisons in order to better understand global trends and challenges in prison systems worldwide. Additionally, existing research tools may not be suitable for all inmate and staff populations, and adapting measurement tools is recommended. These tools need to be culturally adapted and validated to accurately reflect the experiences of diverse groups.

Next, there is a need for establishing evidence-based thresholds. This approach could be useful in future efforts to define acceptable standards, which could include setting clear, evidence-based standards for key aspects of prison climate (e.g., overcrowding, violence, staffing levels). As presented, this could prevent unsafe conditions and ensure basic human rights are upheld.

Finally, fostering co-creation of knowledge and incorporating collaborative research approach that actively engage individuals with lived experience and other relevant stakeholders and all interested parties is recommended. Including the perspectives of individuals with lived experience in prisons (former inmates, staff) in the research process can help ensure that research findings are relevant and applicable to real-world situations. This research approach will facilitate the effective transfer of research findings to inform prison policy and practice.

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Appendix 1

Table 1

Overview of Studies on Prison Life: Aims, Research Gaps, Future Directions and Limitations

Study, Country	Aim	Research Gaps/Directions/Limitations
Blagden et al. (2017), United States	To examine the rehabilitative and therapeutic climate of a sexual offender prison, focusing on prisoner-staff relationships and personal growth	Need for research on minority, female, and transgender populations in rehabilitative environments. Lack of inclusion of staff and prisoner perspectives in correctional reform. Call for measuring prison climate at the facility level.
Bosma, van Ginneken, Palmen, et al. (2020), The Netherlands	To develop and validate the Prison Climate Questionnaire (PCQ)	The PCQ has not been tested on special populations (e.g., juveniles, prisoners with severe psychiatric issues). Developed and validated only in Dutch prisons, limiting generalisability. Lacks qualitative measures to complement quantitative psychometric assessment. Further adaptation needed for specific populations or settings.
Tonkin (2016)	To review existing questionnaires measuring social climate in secure settings and evaluate their psychometric properties	No comprehensive validation of reviewed questionnaires across all secure settings and populations. Sparse evidence on reliability over time and across diverse samples. Lack of empirical guidelines for sample selection and subsample size in social climate assessment. Limited research on the speed of social climate changes and influencing factors. Need for comparative studies on conceptual overlap and operationalisation of different social climate questionnaires.
Peart et al. (2024), Australia	To explore perceptions of prison climate among prisoners and staff in two small Australian prisons using a mixed methods approach	Comparison of prisons with differing size, security ratings, and environments may confound findings. Systematic demographic differences between prisoners and staff may influence results. The EssenCES questionnaire does not fully capture social climate; qualitative methods help but remain limited. Potential sampling bias due to self-selection of participants. Future research should explore additional variables (e.g., wing size, staff experience, prison design) and include qualitative components.

Heynen et al., (2014b), Germany	To translate and validate the Prison Group Climate Instrument (PGCI) for use in German forensic psychiatric settings and secure youth facilities	The PGCI has been used only once in a single German institution; longitudinal studies are needed for consistency over time. Group climate fluctuations due to inmate turnover require further investigation. Only prisoners' perspectives have been assessed; staff perspectives and their interplay with group climate need evaluation. The impact of repressive work climates on staff well-being and prisoner experiences needs exploration. Future studies should address group-specific differences (e.g., rules, hierarchies, detainee and staff compositions, and personalities).
Day et al. (2011), Australia	To validate the EssenCES as a brief measure of social climate in two Australian prisons, assessing its potential to support rehabilitative goals	Limited to short-term data collection; longitudinal studies needed to monitor social climate over time. Lack of large-scale controlled studies to generalise findings. Challenges in comparing social climate across institutions due to diverse inmate and staff profiles. Interventions must address constraints like rigid schedules, resource limitations, and conflicting security priorities. Future research should involve stakeholders in change management and implement targeted staff training to enhance workplace culture.
Day et al. (2012), Australia	To compare staff and prisoner perceptions of social climate in two Australian prisons (therapeutic vs. mainstream) and examine their relationship to prisoner rehabilitation outcomes	Prisoners' ratings did not consistently align with the hypothesis that therapeutic prisons offer a more favourable social climate, requiring further investigation. Methodological limitations include sample self-selection and variations in social climate across prison units. Larger sample sizes and further research are needed to define and achieve optimal social climate characteristics for rehabilitation.
Van Ginneken et al. (2019), The Netherlands	To investigate the relationship between individual and shared perceptions of prison climate and the well-being of incarcerated individuals, specifically examining the influence of these perceptions on subjective well-being and psychological distress	Limited understanding of prison climate's impact on well-being across countries. Need for longitudinal studies on mental health and well-being interactions. Insufficient use of comprehensive tools to measure multidimensional well-being. Well-being variance is mainly at the individual level, with minimal prison unit impact. Correlated climate dimensions hinder isolating individual effects. Brief well-being scales limit depth of insights. Conduct cross-national studies on prison climate and well-being. Use extensive tools to explore well-being and mental health interactions. Minimise pre-trial detention and improve its conditions.

Van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta (2020), The Netherlands	To examine the concept of prison climate, assess shared and distinct climates in prisons and units, and explore their relationships with well-being and misconduct using nationwide survey data in the Netherlands	Lack of clarity in theoretical assumptions and empirical studies on prison climate. Limited understanding of causal relationships and determinants of prison climate. 90% of variance attributed to individual perceptions, not unit or prison-level effects. Methodological limitations may have overestimated shared climate effects. Use multilevel methods to account for data structure. Investigate causal links and determinants, including staff culture, prison design, and individual traits. Develop reliable tools like the Prison Climate Questionnaire to guide policy and management.
Canada et al. (2024), United States (Midwest region)	To explore incarcerated individuals' perceptions of prison culture and climate during COVID-19 using summative content analysis of open-ended questionnaires	Limited understanding of prison climate and culture from incarcerated individuals' perspectives. Need for innovative methods to overcome challenges in primary data collection during crises like COVID-19. Single-site study limits generalisability. Potential participant hesitance due to institutional constraints during the pandemic. Broaden research to include diverse prison settings. Enhance community-engaged methods to incorporate incarcerated individuals' insights into prison reforms and policy.
Reading & Ross (2020), United Kingdom (England)	To compare the social climate of therapeutic and mainstream wings in an English Category B prison and identify areas for improvement	Lack of qualitative insights into reasons behind social climate ratings. Limited understanding of transferring therapeutic wing principles to mainstream wings. Potential selection bias due to participant characteristic differences. EssenCES tool does not explain the rationale behind ratings. Findings may not generalise to other prison settings or populations. Differences between rehabilitative and mainstream wing participants may influence results. Use qualitative methods (e.g., culture web, social climate week) to explore cultural dynamics. Address selection bias by examining additional variables. Investigate how therapeutic principles can be integrated into mainstream settings to enhance rehabilitation.

Woessner & Schwedler (2014), Germany	To explore the relationship between prison climate, changes in dynamic risk factors, and recidivism among male violent and sexual offenders	Limited understanding of how changes in dynamic risk factors influence recidivism. Lack of integration of desistance theory and protective factors in offender rehabilitation research. Therapeutic changes in dynamic risk factors did not predict recidivism. Reliance on self-reported measures raises validity concerns. Small sample size and high dropout rates limit generalisability. Investigate mechanisms linking therapeutic change to recidivism outcomes. Focus on creating a prison climate conducive to therapeutic change. Integrate risk management with strengths-based approaches in treatment.
Ruiz (2007a), Latin America	To analyse the relationship between emotional climate, subclimates, organisational culture, stress, coping, and social support in Latin American prisons	Limited measurement of victimisation experiences, such as violence from detainees or staff. Need for better understanding of how group activities enhance positive emotional climate. Lack of causal evidence linking emotional climate to PTSD and stress symptoms. Overestimation of detainees' positive emotions by employees. Challenges in directly measuring negative experiences like victimisation. Emotional climate assessments cannot establish causality. Develop better tools to capture subtle indicators of victimisation. Investigate the impact of group activities on emotional climate. Explore causal pathways between emotional climate and psychosocial outcomes like PTSD and stress.
Heynen et al. (2016), The Netherlands and Germany	To compare living group climate and treatment in juvenile justice institutions in two countries and examine how these differences relate to their residential youth care systems	Limited understanding of how institutional characteristics influence differences in living group climate. Differences in survey results may reflect variations in institutional systems rather than inherent group climate factors. Investigate specific institutional characteristics that impact living group climate to improve treatment in juvenile justice settings.
Bosma, van Ginneken, Sentse, et al. (2020), The Netherlands	To examine the relationship between prisoner characteristics, prison climate, and prisoner environment with prisoner misconduct using data from a nationwide cohort	Limited understanding of whether misconduct influences perceptions of prison climate or vice versa. Insufficient distinction between types of misconduct (e.g., violent vs. verbal). Shared method bias due to simultaneous self-reported data on prison climate and misconduct. Low incident rates of misconduct limited analysis of variations. Investigate the causal relationship between prison climate and misconduct. Develop targeted interventions for high-risk groups (e.g., younger males with violent histories). Explore the influence of different prison regimes on misconduct rates.

Kelly & Welsh (2016), United States	To examine the concept of the treatment group and its impact on treatment climate in prison-based substance abuse programs, focusing on differences across 12 groups within a single prison over time	Limited research on group dynamics and treatment outcomes. Lack of generalisability due to single prison setting and small sample size. Potential bias from low non-consent rates, excluding high-need inmates. Influence of unmeasured factors (e.g., staff dynamics). Investigate group dynamics in diverse settings using multilevel models. Develop strategies to enhance treatment climate.
Auty & Liebling (2020), England and Wales	To analyse the relationship between prison moral and social climate, as measured by the MQPL survey, and reoffending rates in prisons	Limited exploration of post-release factors influencing reoffending, overshadowing prison climate effects. Insufficient focus on moral legitimacy within prison systems. Subjective prisoner ratings in the MQPL survey introduce measurement error. Prison-level analysis limits insights into individual variances. Impact of prison transfers on reoffending risk not fully accounted for. Short 12-month follow-up may miss long-term recidivism trends. Investigate characteristics of "morally intelligible" vs. "morally unintelligible" prisons. Explore the role of moral legitimacy in rehabilitation and recidivism. Examine broader social context influencing reoffending post-release.
Gonzales et al. (2023), United States	To explore how the beliefs of prison staff about incarcerated individuals' life experiences and future trajectories influence prison social climate, using interviews and observations across nearly 100 correctional facilities in eight U.S. state prison systems	Limited inclusion of incarcerated individuals' perspectives. Lack of representation of uniformed staff viewpoints. Insufficient exploration of long-term impacts of recommended reforms. Focus on non-uniformed staff may not capture full prison dynamics. Findings may not generalise to uniformed staff or other correctional contexts. Investigate the impact of staff perceptions on rehabilitation and recidivism. Examine long-term outcomes of policy reforms in diverse prison settings. Explore how systemic criminal justice reforms complement prison interventions.
J. Bennett & Shuker (2018), United Kingdom	To explore how positive social climates in democratic therapeutic communities (DTCs) can improve prison outcomes and be applied to mainstream prisons	Limited exploration of scaling DTC practices in mainstream prison settings. Challenges in implementing cultural shifts within resource-constrained prisons. Reflective practice approach may lack empirical validation. Findings may not generalise to non-therapeutic or traditional prisons. Investigate scalable strategies for integrating DTC-inspired practices into mainstream prisons. Assess long-term impacts of social climate improvements on safety and recidivism. Explore cross-disciplinary approaches, including forensic mental health, to inform cultural change in prisons.

Van Ginneken (2022), The Netherlands	To examine the effects of cell sharing on prisoner wellbeing, misconduct, and prison climate in non-overcrowded conditions	Excludes individuals in immigrant detention, limiting generalizability. Cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences. Lack of data on timing and duration of cell sharing. Conduct longitudinal studies to explore causal effects of cell sharing. Investigate the impact of cell sharing policies on diverse detention populations. Develop policies considering prisoner preferences for single or shared cells.
Sauter et al. (2019), Germany	To examine the relationships between occupational factors (job satisfaction, self-efficacy, organisational structure), prison climate, staff sick days, and inmates' treatment motivation in correctional treatment	Adapted self-efficacy scale showed low reliability; further validation needed. No long-term outcomes (e.g., recidivism) assessed. Heterogeneous sample from three facilities; limited generalizability. Cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. Conduct longitudinal studies to explore causal relationships. Develop and evaluate programs to enhance team climate, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy. Investigate the impact of prison hierarchy on occupational and treatment outcomes.
Ross et al. (2008), USA and UK	To evaluate the stability and comparability of the Prison Social Climate (PSC) survey factor patterns across US and UK prison samples	Small UK sample with low response rate, risking response bias. High inmate illiteracy may exclude certain groups. Low item-to-sample ratio affects factor analysis reliability. Differences in prison conditions and data collection periods (US: 2000; UK: 2004) may influence results. PSC may not capture all relevant dimensions, especially nuanced inmate-staff interactions. Use larger, more representative UK samples and broader Western prison systems. Conduct longitudinal studies to assess policy impact on prison climate.
Heynen et al., (2014a), Germany	To validate the German version of the Prison Group Climate Instrument (PGCI) for forensic and juvenile treatment facilities	Incorporate qualitative data from inmates and staff to identify additional factors. Reliance on self-reports; potential bias and shared variance. Predominantly cross-sectional design; limited causal evidence. No experimental studies or investigations of group climate as a treatment moderator. Use mixed methods (e.g., observations, staff ratings). Conduct longitudinal and experimental studies to assess causality and treatment effects.
Van Der Helm et al. (2011), The Netherlands	To validate the construct validity and reliability of the Prison Group Climate Instrument (PGCI) in Dutch youth and psychiatric prison	Small sample size and two-prison inclusion limit generalisability. Measurement invariance between juveniles and adults not tested. Convergent, divergent, and criterion validity (e.g., antisocial behaviour, recidivism) not examined. Replicate in larger, diverse samples to test measurement invariance across age, gender, and prison types. Assess concurrent and predictive validity of PGCI. Explore the relationship between group climate, antisocial behaviour, and recidivism.

Lugo (2016), United States (Ohio)	Examine the factors underlying organisational climate in correctional institutions and its measurement using confirmatory factor analysis	Limited measurement scope due to reliance on Taxman et al.'s scale. Inconsistent survey response rates and missing data from one institution. Management changes and inmate shifts not fully considered. Explore technology's role in staff coordination. Investigate organisational climate's impact on staff stress and inmate misconduct. Broaden measurement dimensions and assess interventions for improved outcomes.
Schalast & Laan (2017), Germany	To compare the social climate of German therapeutic prison units with traditional units using the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES) and validate its psychometric properties	Correlational findings limit causal interpretations. Sampling limitations restrict generalisability across all German prison units. Expand research to include diverse prison types (e.g., traditional prisons, treatment units, independent facilities). Investigate factors influencing social climate perceptions, such as staff qualifications, therapeutic programming, and treatment unit selection criteria.
Vinter et al. (2024), United Kingdom	To examine how autistic traits influence prisoners' experiences of social climate, mental wellbeing, and readiness to engage with rehabilitative interventions in UK prisons housing individuals with sexual convictions	High rates of incomplete responses required data imputation, raising validity concerns. Measures (e.g., CVTRS, AQ50) may lack suitability or discriminative validity for this context. Did not account for physical-sensory environments, which impact anxiety and stress. Sample may not be representative, with potential self-selection biases. Adapt or co-produce measures with inmates for better relevance and validity. Incorporate sensory experiences into prison climate models. Use alternative autism screening tools for improved accuracy. Ensure representative sampling to better reflect broader prison experiences.
Heynen et al. (2024), Germany	To examine longitudinal changes in living group climate (support, growth, repression, and group atmosphere) among male adolescents in a German youth detention centre over five years	No individual-level data on detention duration or group composition, key for understanding repression and deprivation. Excluded female adolescents, limiting generalisability. Did not account for offence nature or severity, which may influence perceptions. Atmosphere scale may lack sensitivity, potentially impacting results. Collect individual-level data on detention duration and group characteristics. Include female adolescents to improve generalisability. Develop interventions to improve living group climate. Refine measurement tools for better sensitivity and accuracy.

Blagden (2022)	To examine the importance of rehabilitative prison climate in the effectiveness of interventions for men with sexual convictions	Limited research on the role of rehabilitative climate in intervention success. Lack of focus on the broader prison environment in program design and implementation. Define and measure rehabilitative climate more clearly. Integrate prison climate considerations into intervention design. Explore how the wider prison environment impacts rehabilitation outcomes.
Kim et al. (2024), United States (Midwest)	To explore the organisational climate in a women's prison based on correctional staff perceptions and its impact on staff mental health	Limited diversity in the sample, predominantly non-Hispanic White participants. Measures developed from an item pool require further validation for psychometric reliability. Conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially influencing stress and burnout levels. Investigate the organisational climate's impact on additional areas identified by correctional staff. Validate the measures used for assessing organisational climate. Address diversity in future samples to better reflect staff composition in correctional facilities.
Owusu Ansah et al. (2022), Ghana	To investigate the influence of peer victimisation on psychological distress among juvenile offenders in the Senior Correctional Centre of Ghana, with prison climate and resilience as mediators.	Reliance on self-reported data may lead to over-reporting of victimisation; absence of prison officers' perspectives. Sample limited to male juvenile offenders from one institution, reducing generalisability. Cross-sectional design limits understanding of victimisation changes over time. Include prison officers' reports to validate findings on victimisation. Expand research to include female offenders and multiple institutions for broader generalisability. Use longitudinal designs to explore trends in victimisation over time.
Stasch et al. (2018), Germany	To examine the relationship between prison climate, treatment motivation, and their impact on changes in risk factors among inmates in four correctional facilities in Berlin, Germany	Long-term effects on recidivism were not tested. Sample heterogeneity across facilities limits generalisability. Small sample size restricted in-depth analysis of therapeutic relationships and program variables. Replicate study with a larger sample to test long-term recidivism effects. Include therapist- and program-specific variables to assess therapeutic relationships. Explore the role of therapy stages in treatment outcomes.

Ruiz (2007b), Colombia	To investigate emotional disturbance (anxiety, depression, PTSD), emotional climate, and culture among inmates in Bogotá, and their relationships with social support, locus of control, coping strategies, and traumatic/daily events	Cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. Limited sample representation; findings may not generalize to diverse prisoner populations. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine dynamic interactions over time. Include post-release follow-up to inform interventions and policies. Focus on psychosocial needs of specific groups (e.g., women, youth, elderly).
Durante (2020), United States	To examine factors influencing racial and ethnic disparities in U.S. prison admissions for Blacks and Latinos, focusing on racial/ethnic threat, socioeconomic inequality, and political/legal climate	Missing data in NCRP and lack of Latino arrest rate data in UCR underrepresent disparities. Inability to differentiate types of prison admissions. Analyse regional dynamics, particularly in the South. Investigate economic factors influencing incarceration disparities. Address data gaps to improve Latino arrest and incarceration rate capture.
Louis et al. (2023), United States (northeast state)	To examine the relationship between prison climate and corrections officer stress, focusing on organisational factors and perceptions of inmate personal growth	Did not account for shift patterns or work schedules as stressors. Limited generalisability due to specific economic context. No multi-level analyses or comparison of perspectives. Include shift patterns and institutional variables in stress analyses. Conduct multi-level studies across diverse facilities and states. Compare perspectives of officers, administrators, and inmates.
Harding (2014)	To review and examine the relationship between prison social climate and the effectiveness of prison-based rehabilitation programs in reducing post-release reoffending	No rigorous quasi-experimental studies directly linking positive prison climate to improved rehabilitation outcomes. Limited integration between research on prison climate and "What Works" rehabilitation programs. Develop and implement robust methodologies to directly assess the impact of prison social climate on rehabilitation effectiveness. Integrate findings from desistance literature to inform policies improving prison conditions and offender reintegration.
Goomany & Dickinson (2015)	To explore how the prison environment influences the mental health of adult prisoners through a thematic synthesis of existing literature	Limited research on prison climate's impact on BME prisoners and mental health. Lack of evidence-based interventions for specific groups and settings. Investigate mental health effects of prison climate on BME individuals. Enhance mental health support in prisons with evidence-based interventions.

Neubacher et al. (2021), England, Germany, and Switzerland	To examine the transferability of prison climate research methodologies and concepts from England to Germany and Switzerland within a cross-cultural research project	Language and cultural differences may limit generalisability. Subjective lived experiences may lead to varying interpretations not fully captured by methodology. Suggest exploring the interplay of language, culture, and prisoner experiences across jurisdictions. Recommend conducting comparative studies across diverse countries and prison systems. Propose investigating culturally resonant terms and concepts to refine research methodologies.
Durst (1994), United States (Ohio)	To examine factors shaping prison climate, focusing on inmates and staff, using data from Ohio state agencies to identify determinants of safe and decent prison environments	Limited to data from 1991, potentially outdated for understanding current prison dynamics. Focused on Ohio, limiting generalizability to other jurisdictions. Investigate prison climate in diverse geographical and temporal contexts to enhance generalisability. Explore how evolving societal changes influence prison infrastructure and climate over time.
Gibson (2021), United Kingdom	To measure staff and prisoner perceptions of social climate and levels of hope in a UK high-security prison to support rehabilitative culture initiatives	Sample skewed towards newer staff, excluding long-serving individuals or those with less hopeful views. Exclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities or brain injuries limits generalisability. Use qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups, interviews) for deeper insights. Conduct comparative studies across UK prisons using EssenCES to evaluate rehabilitative initiatives. Explore relationships between social climate, hope, and time served.
Podgorski & Prislan (2019), Slovenia	To analyse the social climate in the Celje Juvenile and Adult Prison, and identify satisfaction levels, potential issues, and staff-prisoner relationships	Limited focus on interpersonal relationships and working conditions of prison staff. Insufficient attention to prisoners' perceptions of procedural justice by officers. Improve interpersonal relations and working conditions for staff. Enhance prisoners' perceived procedural justice of prison officers. Extend research to other Slovene prisons for comparative insights into the prison system's social climate.

Richter & Hamatschek (2024), Germany	To compare inmate and prison officer perceptions of the social climate during the COVID-19 pandemic and analyse the impact of contact restriction burdens on these perceptions	Data collection at different times across federal states may introduce variability. Shortened EssenCES scale may have limited social climate assessment. Unaddressed nested data structure may miss institutional-level effects. Track social climate changes over time, especially post-pandemic. Investigate differing perceptions between inmates and officers through interviews and questionnaires. Explore social desirability and response biases in climate evaluations.
Brochu et al. (2010), Canada (Quebec)	To investigate the impact of an indoor smoking ban on the social climate in Quebec's provincial correctional facilities	No analysis on long-term effects of smoking ban on prison dynamics. Findings are context-specific, limiting generalisability. Limited exploration of substance restrictions' impact on inmate behaviour and well-being. Conduct longitudinal studies on long-term smoking ban impacts. Expand research to diverse facilities with varying demographics and security levels. Examine relationships between smoking bans, mental health, and inmate well-being.
Guéridon (2020), Germany	To review recent German prison climate research, highlight methodological and conceptual challenges, and provide recommendations for advancing the field	Fragmented research with limited focus on specific facilities. Small-scale, cross-sectional studies with low staff participation. Lack of longitudinal data and multilevel analysis. Challenges in validating climate measurement tools. Insufficient large-scale studies compared to Europe. Conduct longitudinal studies across diverse facilities. Expand sample sizes and validate robust measurement tools. Clarify theoretical framework and use tools like EssenCES or PGCI.
Casey et al. (2016), Australia	To examine how inmates' perceptions of prison social climate are influenced by security classification (protective vs. mainstream custody) and length of incarceration (less or more than six months)	Small sample size (76 male prisoners) limits generalizability. Arbitrary categorization of incarceration length (less or more than six months). Findings may not apply to other prisons or jurisdictions. Replicate and expand the study with larger and more diverse samples. Explore perceptions of prisoners with longer sentences. Investigate the implications of social climate perceptions for preventing deaths in custody, reducing riots, and improving rehabilitation programs.
Stasch et al. (2017), Germany	To evaluate changes in prison climate before and after the construction of a new preventive detention facility in Berlin, comparing perceptions of detainees and correctional officers using the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema	Small sample size and difficulty in accessing inmates. Potential novelty effect influencing positive assessments. Limited generalizability to other facilities. Conduct studies with larger samples across diverse facilities. Investigate long-term effects of new facilities on prison climate. Explore how organisational structures influence perceptions of treatment and security.

Palmen et al. (2022), The Netherlands	To explore the impact of shared perceptions of prison climate and work climate on correctional officers' subjective safety in the Netherlands using data from the Dutch Life in Custody Study	Cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Lack of individual-level predictors explains modest variance (19%). Climate measurement instruments may lack validity. Findings may not generalise to different correctional contexts. Conduct longitudinal studies and incorporate individual-level factors. Develop robust, objective measures for prison climate. Compare findings across diverse correctional systems.
Pérez et al. (2014), Colombia and Spain	To adapt and validate an emotional climate scale for prison environments, analyse its factors, and examine their relationship with burnout among prison workers	Limited focus on burnout, neglecting other work experience factors. No analysis of workload, institutional support, and interpersonal relationships. Need to explore contextual and role-based variations among staff. Investigate organisational emotional climate and its impact on well-being. Examine factors like workload, support, and staff-inmate relationships. Study diverse roles to improve correctional practices and inmate reintegration.
Williams et al. (2019), United States (Midwest)	To validate the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES) for measuring prison social culture in U.S. correctional facilities and explore its associations with environmental and situational factors	Uncertainty about EssenCES capturing U.S. prison culture. Limited variables and incomplete scales. Overlooked impact of inmate transfers. Lack of structural and individual-level data. Validate instruments with improved measures and sampling. Examine structural and individual factors. Use qualitative interviews for deeper insights. Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes. Study staff burnout, trauma, and perceived inmate threat.
Heynen et al. (2017), Germany	To validate the German Adolescent Treatment Motivation Questionnaire (ATMQ) for assessing treatment motivation in detained youth	Small sample size (N=76) limits generalizability. Test-retest reliability and convergent/predictive validity not examined. Unexplored demographic differences (e.g., gender, age, culture) in factor structure. Relationship between duration of stay and recidivism not explored. Replicate with larger, diverse samples to improve validity. Test measurement invariance across demographic groups. Investigate correlations between treatment motivation, recidivism, and duration of stay. Assess ATMQ's predictive validity for treatment outcomes and recidivism.

Mededović, Dmdarević, & Ilijić (2024), Serbia	To examine the relationships between Dark Tetrad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism), prison social climate, and institutional misconduct in convicts, with a focus on the mediating role of social climate	Non-representative sample; findings may lack generalizability. Short Dark Tetrad scales; longer, multidimensional measures needed. Bias risk from self-reported misconduct; staff reports or records could improve accuracy. Longitudinal studies on Dark Traits and social climate effects on recidivism and adaptation. Multimethod approaches for more reliable data. Examine Dark Traits' predictive value beyond basic personality traits for recidivism.
Goossens et al. (2023), Belgium	To examine the influence of individual risk factors (from community crime theory) and prison climate dimensions (relationships, safety, autonomy) on prisoner victimisation	Limited focus on specific prison climate dimensions; other dimensions and environmental characteristics remain unexplored. Investigate additional prison climate dimensions and environmental factors influencing victimisation. Emphasize the role of dynamic security through relationships alongside hard security measures
Blagden & Wilson (2020), United Kingdom	To examine the rehabilitative climate of a re-rolled UK prison for individuals with sexual convictions, focusing on prisoner experiences of purpose, relationships, and regime at two time points: post-re-roll and one year later	Context-specific findings may not generalize to other settings. Variability in individual prisoner experiences. Limited scope of the longitudinal design. Investigate rehabilitative climates in diverse prison settings. Conduct further longitudinal studies to assess changes over time. Examine the impact of deviant behaviours within prisons. Compare rehabilitative environments in co-located versus isolated settings for sexual offenders.
van der Helm et al. (2009), The Netherlands	To examine the role of group climate in fostering treatment motivation and internal locus of control among adolescents in a Dutch youth prison	Low reliability of climate scale and underreporting limit data validity. Small sample (49 adolescents) and unmatched control groups reduce generalisability. Self-report data may be biased and multi-level analysis is missing. Recommend longitudinal, multi-level studies with matched controls and improved measurement reliability.
Dewey & Prohaska (2022), United States	To examine how correctional educators perceive incarcerated individuals' life experiences, motivations for education, and the role of educators in influencing prison social climate	Underexploration of correctional educators' role in shaping prison social climate. Potential biases in educators' perceptions, including overlooking systemic inequalities and barriers to reentry. Lack of longitudinal studies to assess the impact of educators' beliefs on student success and prison dynamics. Research the impact of educators' beliefs on educational outcomes, and the broader prison environment, including the integration of current and former prisoners in educational programming.

Bruhn et al. (2011), Sweden	To examine the effects of increased security measures and expanded rehabilitation programmes after high-profile escapes, emphasising the balance between security and treatment approaches	Limited focus on the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes amidst rising security measures. Lack of exploration into the long-term effects of the structural changes on prison culture and inmate outcomes. Future research to explore the effectiveness of rehabilitative programmes in the context of heightened security measures and the impact on inmate rehabilitation.
Galouzis et al. (2023),	To review the influence of prison social climate on institutional violence and propose ways to conceptualise, define, and operationalise the climate for prevention efforts	There is a need to better define and measure prison social climate, incorporating both psychological and sociological perspectives, to effectively prevent violence. The lack of clear, operationalised constructs for measuring prison social climate limits the ability to collect valid and reliable data for driving prevention strategies.
Ilijić et al. (2020)	To review the concepts of quality of prison life and social and moral climate in prisons, focusing on their impact on prisoner behaviour and social reintegration	Limited research on the quality of prison life and its impact on social reintegration in Serbia exists. Focus on theoretical exploration without empirical data from Serbia. Promote systematic research on prison life quality to improve treatment and management. Need for further research into the dynamics of prison life in Serbia to improve prisoner treatment and management.
Howard et al. (2023), Australia (New South Wales)	To examine assessments of prison climate using the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES) and inmates' experiences of prison climate in NSW correctional centres	Limited research on the application of the EssenCES tool in NSW correctional centres and the influence of individual and situational factors on prison climate perceptions. Restricted sample size, limited site diversity, potential response biases, and lack of predictive power for program completion outcomes. Future studies should expand the sample size, include diverse sites, and address response biases to enhance understanding of prison climate dynamics and improve correctional practices.
Chesnut (2020), United States (Washington)	To explore the role of correctional officers in obstructing the translation of policy reform into practice within solitary confinement units in state prisons, identifying mechanisms and barriers to reform	Limited understanding of how interpersonal dynamics and the adversarial climate in solitary confinement units influence policy reform perceptions and implementation. Future research should include more diverse correctional officer demographics, replicate studies in different prison systems, and expand to lower custody institutions to explore broader implications of policy reform. Limited generalisability due to a predominantly male and white sample; future studies should include a broader range of racial/ethnic and gender backgrounds.

Thaler et al. (2022), Australia (New South Wales)	To explore the experiences of inmates and staff in Rapid Build correctional, comparing their perceptions of prison social climate with traditional centres, and examining how innovations in design, management, and inmate selection impact the social climate	Limited to the comparison between two Rapid Build centres and two traditional centres. Focuses on perceptions rather than measurable outcomes, such as recidivism or rehabilitation success. The research addresses the gap in understanding how innovative prison designs and management practices affect the social climate. Future research could further investigate the long-term impact of the Rapid Build model on inmate behaviour, rehabilitation outcomes, and staff dynamics.
Ilijić et al. (2024), Serbia	To investigate differences in how prison life quality is perceived by individuals in different departments and treatment groups in penitentiary facilities	Small sample size (14% of the total population), potential selection bias due to voluntary participation, and lack of representation from certain groups (e.g., open departments). Future research should include longitudinal studies, a wider range of convicted individuals, and cross-national comparisons. Need for revised risk assessment tools that better account for dynamic factors and individual treatment journeys.
Baharudin & Mohamad (2020), Malaysia	To develop and validate a model exploring the relationships between personality, prison climate, and quality of life (QoL) among drug-abusing inmates in Malaysia, with social support as a mediating variable	Limited research on how personality, prison climate, and social support influence the QoL of drug-abusing inmates. Need for empirical validation of these relationships using advanced statistical techniques (EFA, CFA, SEM). Reliance on conceptual frameworks without prior empirical validation. Specific focus on Malaysian prisons may limit generalisability to other contexts.
Rodríguez-Díaz et al. (2015), Spain	To examine the relationship between burnout syndrome and emotional climate among prison professionals in Spain, comparing two prison models: Therapeutic and Educational Units (UTE) and traditional modules	Limited understanding of how different prison models influence burnout and emotional climate among staff. Need for further exploration of how positive emotional climates in therapeutic models affect staff well-being and prisoner reintegration outcomes. Context-specific findings may not generalise to other countries or prison systems. Focus on two specific prison models may overlook variations within broader institutional contexts.

Sučić (2021), Croatia	To compare prisoners' and prison officers' perceptions of their group's emotional climate in Croatian prisons and explore its impact on well-being, coping, and resilience	Limited research on comparative perceptions of emotional climate between prisoners and prison officers. Need for strategies to promote a positive emotional climate that fosters adaptive coping, resilience, and social support for both groups. Gender and time in prison/service showed no significant effects, possibly due to sample characteristics (predominantly male, short sentences, experienced staff). Findings may not generalise to other contexts due to cultural and organisational differences.
Sučić et al. (2018), Croatia	To investigate the influence of prison conditions, prison experiences, and emotional climate on dimensions of prison climate (support, growth, atmosphere, and repression) in Croatian prisons	Limited understanding of how emotional climate and tolerance for deprivation contribute to prison climate dimensions and their role in correctional treatment outcomes. Need to explore strategies to enhance emotional climate and address deprivation to improve prison climate. Convenience sampling may limit generalisability. Focus on Croatian prisons may not capture variations in prison climates across different cultural or organisational contexts.
Ware & Galouzis (2019), Australia	To propose an integrated model linking prison social climate to rehabilitation and desistance, emphasising its mediating role in facilitating behaviour change and reducing reoffending, with examples from Australian prisons	Limited empirical clarity on how prison climate directly and indirectly influences rehabilitation and desistance outcomes. Need for advanced statistical methods to explore pathways between prison climate, cognitive changes, and recidivism. Positive shifts in prison social climate correlate with cognitive changes but are not predictive of reduced reoffending. Methodological constraints in existing studies necessitate more robust analyses.
Calles-Rubiales & Ibáñez Del Prado (2020)	To review the literature on the influence of inmates' mental health on the prison relational climate and assess existing interventions to address related challenges	Limited literature on the impact of mental health on prison relational climate and interventions. Need for long-term studies on incarceration effects and tailored programs for inmates with mental illnesses. Inadequate mental health interventions exacerbate behavioural issues, stigma, and relational instability. Lack of sufficient, high-quality programs to address the needs of inmates with mental health disorders.

Mededović, Dmdarević, & Milićević (2024), Serbia	To evaluate the reliability, validity, and central aspects of the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) survey in assessing prisoners' well-being and social climate in Serbian prisons	Limited generalisability due to a non-representative sample. Need for inclusion of prison staff data to provide a comprehensive view of the prison social climate. Future research should refine MQPL to address informational redundancy and expand its application. Sample heterogeneity limits generalisation to the entire prisoner population. High intercorrelations among MQPL dimensions suggest informational redundancy.
Yoosefi et al. (2019), Kurdistan	To examine the relationships between organisational climate, occupational stress, job involvement, and the psychological and spiritual health of prison staff in Kurdistan	Limited exploration of factors influencing spiritual health in relation to organisational climate and job stress. Future research should investigate interventions to reduce occupational stress and enhance organisational security and participation to improve staff well-being. The study did not establish significant correlations with spiritual health, suggesting a need for further exploration of its determinants. Findings are limited to the specific population of prison staff in Kurdistan and may not generalise to other regions.
Mohamad et al. (2017), Malaysia	To identify factors shaping prison climate to inform the design and execution of effective rehabilitation programmes for drug-abuse inmates in Malaysia	Limited to drug-abuse inmates in peninsular Malaysia; future studies should expand to other inmate groups and prisons in East Malaysia to validate findings. Causality cannot be established due to the cross-sectional design; longitudinal studies are recommended. Generalisation is limited to drug-abuse inmates and specific prisons in peninsular Malaysia.
Baharudin et al. (2021), Malaysia	To explore the role of Quality of Life (QoL) as a mediator between prison climate and life satisfaction among Malaysian drug-abuse inmates	Cross-sectional data restricts causal interpretations. Limited to drug-abuse inmates in peninsular Malaysia; future studies should include other inmate groups (e.g., juveniles, foreign inmates) and prisons in Sabah and Sarawak. Expand to other settings, such as public and private drug treatment centres, to examine variations in outcomes. Investigate additional constructs (e.g., personality, resilience, motivation) to deepen understanding of QoL and life satisfaction. Focused exclusively on drug-abuse inmates, limiting generalisability to other prison populations. Quantitative methodology restricts depth; mixed-method approaches could provide richer insights.

Prentice (2022)	To quantify the relationship between Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) programmes and prison social climate through a meta-analysis	Lack of studies on CBT's impact on environmental quality of life, a key element of prison social climate. Limited sample size and narrow literature scope; future studies should broaden search criteria and include qualitative or mixed-method approaches. Investigate variations in CBT (e.g., individual vs. group therapy) and contextual factors (e.g., funding, security level). Excluded environmental quality of life due to insufficient data. Small sample size of primary studies limits generalisability. Correlation observed does not imply causation.
McNeil (2021), United States	To assess the relationship between participation in dog training programmes (DTPs) and prison social climate through a quantitative meta-analysis	Lack of studies on DTPs' impact on environmental quality of life, a key element of prison social climate. Limited use of rigorous research designs (e.g., randomised-controlled trials) to establish causality. Insufficient representation of diverse prison contexts and populations (e.g., female inmates, varied age groups). Need for longitudinal studies to explore long-term effects of DTPs. Exclusion of environmental quality of life due to insufficient data. Correlational findings only; causation not established. Small sample sizes and variations in prison characteristics limit generalisability.
Worthington (2012), United Kingdom	To explore organisational climate within a prison setting and its impact on social and emotional functioning, focusing on the interaction between work-home boundaries and employee well-being	Limited to one male prison, with unclear implications for female prisons or other establishments. Findings may not be generalisable beyond the single male prison studied. Need for further research into how different climate quadrants align with staff roles and safety. Exploration of "dirty work" and its influence on organisational climate is required. Positivist methodology limits deeper understanding of work-home dynamics and identity consistency. Gender-specific influences on climate remain unexplored. Simplistic boundary management theories may not fully capture the complexity of the prison setting.

Alisabri (2001), Bosnia and Herzegovina	To present the theoretical framework of the social climate in a closed-type prison, during the transitional period, focusing on the interplay of deprivation, inmate code, entropy, and repression	Highlights the need for further exploration of the transitional social environment's instability and unpredictability in prisons. Suggests future research on the role of repression as a primary driver of conflict and its implications for prison management. Focuses exclusively on a single closed-type prison in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, limiting generalisability to other prisons or contexts.
McLellan (2022), United Kingdom	To identify organisational-level factors contributing to work-related distress among prison workers and evaluate the predictive roles of organisational justice and social climate in psychological distress	Limited focus on organisational-level interventions despite the ineffectiveness of individual-level approaches. First study to investigate social climate and organisational justice as predictors of distress in UK prison workers, requiring replication with larger samples. Future research should explore key job resources, distinct facets of organisational justice (distributive and procedural), and variations in organisational factors across job roles. Qualitative studies are needed to better understand the complex experiences of prison workers. Cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. Small sample size and opportunity sampling reduce generalisability. Reliance on self-report measures introduces potential response bias. Lack of gender data prevents analysis of gender differences. Inability to examine the distinct impacts of organisational justice facets.
Wenk & Moos (1972), United States	To develop and standardise the Correctional Institutions Environment Scale (CIES) to assess social climates in correctional institutions	Addresses the lack of a standardised instrument for assessing social climates in correctional institutions. Future research could explore the application of the CIES in diverse institutional settings and its impact on institutional management and policy development. Limited discussion of the scale's reliability and validity across different populations and contexts. The examples provided are based on a national reference group, which may limit generalisability to other settings or countries.
Toch (1978), United States	To propose a context-centred perspective on prison violence that offers positive programming options beyond conventional security-focused approaches	Existing perspectives focus either on inherently violent inmates or on prison environments as triggers for violence, with an emphasis on prevention through security measures. A need for programming that addresses the motives and dispositions of participants in violence, offering constructive alternatives. Future research and policy should explore how context-centred approaches can positively influence inmate behaviour and reduce violence. The article primarily critiques existing views but does not empirically test the proposed context-centred perspective. Practical implementation and evaluation of positive programming options remain unexplored.

Howard et al. (2022), Australia (New South Wales)	To assess staff and inmates' perceptions of prison social climate and staff work-related outcomes during the first two years of operations at Rapid Build correctional centres	Limited understanding of how Rapid Build centre features interact with operational or population differences to influence outcomes. Future studies should incorporate pre-transition data, objective measures (e.g., administrative indicators), and longitudinal research to evaluate long-term impacts. Non-equivalent respondent samples between centre types; potential for response bias. Lack of pre-transition data limits causal conclusions. Anonymity of surveys prevents tracking individual changes over time. Findings may reflect early implementation dynamics rather than stabilised outcomes.
Meussling (1984), United States	To evaluate the task, nature, and impact of teaching Interpersonal Communication in a maximum-security male prison, focusing on curriculum design and inmate responses to self-disclosure and open communication	Limited research on the role of interpersonal communication education in fostering psychological trust and attitudinal change in prison settings. Further studies could explore long-term impacts on post-release integration into society. Findings are based on observations and journal entries within a single classroom setting, limiting generalisability.
Ali et al. (2016), Malaysia	To examine the effects of prison social climate on life satisfaction among drug-abuse inmates in a Malaysian prison and identify factors that enhance their rehabilitation and reduce recidivism	Limited exploration of the link between prison social climate and life satisfaction. Future research should expand to other inmate populations and consider characteristics such as gender, age, sentence length, and offender status to validate the model. Focused only on drug-abuse inmates, limiting generalisability. Cross-sectional design precludes understanding long-term effects.
Mikolon (2017), United States	To investigate the factors influencing corrections fatigue among federal correctional officers, examining variables such as gender, tenure, perceptions of safety, and institutional security level	Limited assessment tools (13 survey items) constrain understanding of corrections fatigue. Further research should include enhanced measurement scales, longitudinal studies, and qualitative interviews to explore coping mechanisms and fatigue development. Broader samples, including diverse correctional roles and demographic/institutional data, are needed. Comparisons with other law enforcement settings could clarify stressors unique to corrections work. Self-reported data may underreport symptoms due to correctional subculture. Lack of demographic and institutional data limits findings. Excludes non-officer correctional employees, narrowing scope.

Bent (1978), Australia (Tasmania)	To assess the psycho-social climate of a Tasmanian maximum-security prison and its sub-units using the Correctional Institutions Environment Scale (CIES) and compare results to Moos' norms from American institutions	Limited exploration of prison staff perceptions and their role in shaping the institutional climate. Future studies should integrate CIES with sociometric investigations of inmate relationships and examine variables like remaining sentence length. Regular use of CIES during exit interviews could provide dynamic insights into institutional climate changes. Applicability of Moos' norms in Australian prisons remains debatable. Lack of staff responses restricts a holistic understanding of the prison environment.
Ross et al. (2011), England and Wales	To examine the relationship between prison social climate and inmate satisfaction with health care in 49 correctional institutions	Limited generalisability to other Western prison systems due to jurisdiction-specific health care characteristics. Future research should explore the impact of health education programs for inmates and the interplay between health care provision and institutional climate. Data collected before full integration of prison health services into the NHS in 2006 may not reflect current practices. Variations in health care quality across the studied institutions were not addressed.
Stobbe (2017), Canada	To assess whether the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES) can provide insights into the overall prison climate and distinctions between units to inform conflict management in correctional centres	Limited exploration of how climate assessment tools like EssenCES can guide targeted conflict management strategies in prisons. Future research should focus on applying climate assessments to develop evidence-based responses to conflict across varied inmate populations. Findings are specific to four correctional centres in British Columbia, Canada, limiting generalisability to other regions or prison systems.
Smith & Ivester (1987), United States	To explore the impact of social environments on human functioning, with a specific focus on how differing organisational climates in juvenile correctional institutions influence staff perceptions, authority dynamics, and inmate social relations	Limited research on the broader implications of institutional goals (e.g., obedience, re-education, treatment) on inmate behaviour and staff-inmate dynamics. Future studies could examine how these findings translate to adult correctional settings or other institutional types. Focus on juvenile institutions limits applicability to other correctional populations or environments.

Green et al. (2023), United States (Midwest state)	To compare prison climate characteristics across facilities and over time, identifying predictors of climate change and their effects on perceived livability in three U.S. Midwest state prisons	Limited facility-level comparisons of prison climate over time. Need to validate the concept of "assurance" and its relationship to social cohesion. Further exploration of structural conditions and their influence on facility-specific responses to environmental stress. Recommendation for qualitative methods to capture nuanced inmate and staff experiences. Subjective nature of survey responses limits depth of insights. Fluidity of prison populations complicates longitudinal studies. High costs of multi-wave research reduce feasibility.
Van Ginneken et al. (2020), The Netherlands	To examine the relationship between prison officers' work climate and incarcerated individuals' perceptions of prison climate using a large dataset from the Netherlands	Need for larger datasets to include unit-level variables and assess staff attitudes toward prisoners and management. Exploration of how prisoner composition (e.g., age) affects prison and work climate. Comparative research to identify best practices across countries with varying prison conditions. Limited statistical power for unit-level analysis. Findings generalizable only to the Netherlands. Excludes variables like overcrowding and cross-national dynamics.
Stevanović et al. (2024), Serbia	To examine differences in the perception of prison social climate and quality of prison life (measured via MQPL) between first-time inmates and penological recidivists	Lack of comprehensive studies on prison life quality in Serbia, especially using MQPL. Future research should focus on larger, more representative samples, include diverse security levels and subgroups (e.g., open prisons, inmates in isolation or treatment), and explore longitudinal and cross-national comparisons to enhance generalisability and identify good practices. Sample represents only 14% of the convicted population in selected institutions. Excludes certain subgroups (e.g., isolated inmates, treatment recipients, or those working during data collection). Bias due to retrospective responses and lack of longitudinal data. Not cross-national; limited to Serbian closed institutions.

Šabani (2013)	To explore the theoretical construct of prison social climate within penal institutions, emphasising the work of R. H. Moos, and to present measurement scales that quantify its quality and impact.	Further validation and application of social climate measurement scales in diverse penal settings. Examination of how different social climates influence inmate outcomes. Theoretical focus with limited empirical validation in the study context.
Auty & Liebling (2024), England and Wales	To empirically determine quality-of-life thresholds in prisons using MQPL survey data and examine their relationship with serious violence outcomes in prisons	Lack of empirical exploration of performance benchmarks in prison quality of life. Need for studies on individual-level characteristics and their influence on prison violence. Further research on the interplay between prison culture and violent incidents. Exclusion of data from the COVID pandemic period. Focus on institutional culture without examining individual-level factors. Challenges in database creation, leading to potential data errors.
Sheehan (2014), Australia	To examine risk factors driving women into offending and evaluate the Better Pathways Strategy by Corrections Victoria, Australia, focusing on reintegration and gender-specific responses for women offenders	Need for evidence on the effectiveness of gender-specific programmes amidst challenges from the risk paradigm prioritising surveillance over therapeutic responses. Importance of exploring how 'joined-up' services can be sustained despite budgetary and societal challenges. Rising focus on surveillance diverts resources from community-based and therapeutic interventions. Budget constraints and lack of community support threaten the sustainability of effective reintegration strategies.
Mejovšek et al. (2007), Croatia	To examine the relationship between inmates' personality traits and their perception of the psychosocial climate in prisons, using factor analysis of the Psychosocial Climate Scale	Need to explore how perceptions of psychosocial climate and personality traits influence inmate behaviour. Further investigation is required to determine whether perceptions or personality traits better predict behaviour. Limited to male inmates (N=282) in prisons across three security levels. Relies on self-reported measures, which may introduce bias.
Ajdukovic (1990), Croatia	To assess whether adding three new subscales to the Correctional Institutions Environment Scale (CIES) provides significant new insights into institutional climate	The study challenges the sufficiency of the original nine CIES subdimensions, suggesting they may not fully capture the distinct attributes of correctional social climate. Future research could explore the applicability of these new subscales across different correctional settings. Limited to two male correctional facilities (maximum and minimum security). Generalisability to other contexts remains untested.

Batrićević et al. (2023), Serbia	To examine the quality of prison life among female prisoners in Serbia, identify challenges across five dimensions of the prison climate, and propose gender-sensitive interventions for improving their prison experience	Limited focus on female prisoners globally due to smaller representation. Future research should include larger, more representative samples, explore socio-demographic and custody profiles, and examine longitudinal and cross-cultural variations in prison life quality to inform targeted interventions and policy reforms. Small, voluntary sample (40% response rate) limits generalisability. Lacks analysis of socio-demographic factors, offence types, and sentence lengths. Relies on retrospective data, potentially subject to recall bias. Findings may not apply to other prison systems or cultural contexts.
Milićević et al. (2024), Serbia	To adapt the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) survey for the Serbian context, ensuring cultural and linguistic relevance while maintaining equivalence with the original instrument	First instrument to assess prison life in Serbia, addressing a significant gap in the literature. Future research should validate the adapted survey with larger, more diverse samples and assess its reliability across various correctional facilities. Small pre-testing sample and focus groups conducted in only two of nine facilities limit generalisability. Cultural and linguistic nuances may still affect item interpretation and response accuracy. Social desirability and personal biases may influence participants' feedback. Findings are context-specific and may not reflect changes over time or broader systemic factors.