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How architecture and design matter for prison services: a rapid review of the literature

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Background

- Capacity in Swedish Prisons and Remand Prisons are close to 100 %
- Building projects and large renovations ongoing and more are needed
- Our focus on treatment and dynamic security need Supportive Environments
- Our work methods are based on client-staff relations - central to keep staff
- SPPS strive to have evidence-based practices

The rapid review

- Systematic searches in 4 academic databases
- Focus on newer studies (1998-2018) conducted in countries similar to Sweden
- Analysis of studies from prisons (no=27) + summaries of previous literature reviews conducted in other (closed) institutions (no=9)
- A so-called "rapid review" method, less comprehensive and quicker

Results

- The physical prison environments matters for both staff and inmates in several ways:
 - It may impact on staff possibilities to oversee the inmates;
 - (dis)enable contact between staff and inmates;
 - and influence the number of security incidents
- Loud noise levels are common in prisons. Can negatively affect mood, motivation and well-being. Affects sleep, learning, etc.
- Lack of sunlight can lead to vitamin D deficiency, hormone imbalance, depression. Negative affect on sleep.
- One American study found more sick leave and greater staff turnover at prisons with poorer physical environment (noise, dirt etc.)

Results

- Layout: smaller units and low social density appears more important than the size of the prison/remand prison. Important that staff can have a good oversight and meet inmates in a natural way.
- Interior: Home-like environments are soothing and lead to fewer incidents (incl. vandalism, self-harm). Details that can be flexible and therefore controllable like light, temperature, air, can play important roles. "Normalization" reduces stress and prevents institutionalization and can be expanded to include activities like cooking, play with children, physical exercise, reading.

Results

- Windows are a distraction and can contribute to a reduced feeling of isolation and boredom. Windows fills particularly important functions when access to outdoor space is limited
- A window with a view of nature has proven positive for blood pressure and heart rhythm. Also, make patients recover faster
- Windows should have curtains or similar so that the inmate can regulate exposure from the outside or limit direct sunlight (and thus the temperature of the room)
- Artificial light should be regulated to imitate daylight
- Lighting, especially natural daylight, has e.g. has been shown to reduce the need for pain relief in patients.

Results

- Colors affect different people in different ways. There is no evidence that e.g. blue color is soothing to everyone. More important seems to be to use color for variety, to reflect daylight or as a contribution to a homelike environment
- Locked and inaccessible outdoor environments can reduce the experience of control and instead increase stress
- **Inmates seem to be more sensitive to their physical environment than a normal population.** E.g. more sensitive to noise, more often have sleep problems. Inmates with a history of aggressive behavior need significantly more personal space than others to avoid getting stressed.

Challenges and next steps

- Safety and security demands, is there a conflict?
- Costs in relations to improved effectiveness in terms of reduced recidivism
- How to incorporate user perspectives? Can we increase prisoners' control over their living space?
- Politics and the public's views, what is the purpose of imprisonment?
- Digitalisation, what kind of opportunities?
- Time aspects ("Building for 50 years")

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