

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES FOR PRISONS / CORRECTIONS LEADERS

Brief Description of the Proposed Book:

Information will be presented on a group of twenty countries using the personal views and experiences of a correctional leader in each country. In each country, a corrections scholar or researcher will be asked to conduct a comprehensive interview of the experiences and thoughts of a high-ranking corrections official in his or her country. The interviews will be edited to emphasize personal experiences, ideas, and detailed examples of issues (both positive and negative) in their country's correctional system. The relationship between theory, evidence, and practice will be highlighted.

Suggested Guidelines for Interviewers

Goals and Information:

The general goal of the interviews is to present the views and interpretations of the developments, crises, and current issues in the correctional system **by experienced practitioners**. What do those directly involved in the corrections profession see happening in the correctional system in their countries and internationally? How do they evaluate or interpret developments (either positive or negative) in corrections? There are many books and articles that analyze and interpret the state of current correctional policy, programs, and prisons by scholars and policy makers from outside the correctional system. What we would like to have are views and interpretations from within correctional organizations. What do leaders in the field of corrections who work in the jails and prison systems see happening in corrections? What are the issues they consider important? What changes do they see as successes or failures? What aspects of the system are likely long-lasting versus those policies or programs they see as more transient?

The main goal of the interviews is to capture the views of correctional officials. Your role should not be to criticize or interpret what the officials meant to say, but to write as accurately as possible what the officials told you. The chapter will be based on their views, experiences, and thought processes. We know what scholars think about corrections, but we know less about what the people who work in the corrections field think about and how they evaluate trends, developments and issues in corrections.

The basic reason for doing the interviews is that we firmly believe that corrections officials possess a wide variety of information and that practitioners can make significant contributions to our insight into the issues and problems of current correctional practices. The knowledge these individuals possess is not easily captured, but our goal is to describe their personal information for this book. The practical reason that we are asking scholars to conduct the interviews is because leaders in the field of corrections do not have the time to write and reflect on their experiences, views, opinions and perspectives. We think in-depth interviews are one means to depict the knowledge of correctional practitioners, and it is why we are requesting researchers like you to record their views.

We want to emphasize one major point. **We do not want the official rhetoric (or the official success stories)** that high level people sometimes fall back on during interviews; we want their **personal views and thinking**. If you have the sense that you

are getting the formal language and official views on correctional policy and issues, see if you can get the officials to go beyond the official story and push them for their own views. The interviewer should seek to get the person being interviewed to move beyond simple answers, and get them to analyze and reflect on their experiences, ideas, and knowledge. Our trust in your interviewing skills is why you were asked to do the interview.

Topic areas to be covered:

- In some situations there may be areas of importance in your country or community that are different than the questions posed below. In those cases, you should focus on these areas more completely and ask about these issues in addition to the questions listed. For example, questions for correctional leaders in transitional countries will likely deal more with changes in correctional philosophy and in organizations than questions for leaders in stable democracies. Even in stable democracies; however, a particular area or locale can be in a state of prison crisis, and we hope that these specific issues will be addressed as well. Being familiar with the correctional policies and situations (such as any lawsuits) in your country will enable you to tailor your questions toward the dominant local issues which have had to be dealt with by the countries' leaders. Be creative while sticking to the main issues at hand.
- We have listed a number of general and specific questions that should be covered in the interview. Please try to cover the topics mentioned below as the flow of the interview dictates. Please add, elaborate, and use follow-up questions as you see necessary to clarify points, expand on ideas, or pursue an insight offered.
- All the topics below should be asked, but the specific questions listed for each main area are suggestions. Interviews have their own dynamics. Follow them down their most productive paths. Since each of you will be interviewing officials within different organizations, the list and sequence of questions will have to be adjusted for each interview.
- How you word each question is up to your own preference. When asking follow-up questions, please try to get specific examples or details of any generalizations made by the official. (Specific examples of over-arching problems or situations in the leader's country are probably among the most useful and interesting pieces of information to readers.)

1. Career: Tell us a little bit about your career: length, organizations worked in, movements, specializations, trajectories in your career that might differ from those expected, etc.

- What motivated you to enter the field of corrections?
- Did the way your career developed surprise you?
- Did your work prove as interesting or rewarding as you thought it would?

- Do you have any regrets about an opportunity you pursued or chose not to pursue during the course of your career?

2. Changes experienced: What do you see as the most important changes that have occurred in the field of corrections over the course of your career (philosophies, organizational arrangements, specializations, policies and programs, equipment or technologies, methods of rehabilitation, methods of community supervision, intermediate sanctions, personnel, diversity etc.)?

- What changes in external conditions (support from communities, legal and legislative powers, relations with minority communities, resource provision, political influence, etc.) have had a significant impact on current correctional practices and policy?
- Overall, has the quality of prisons, jails, and community supervision in your country/community improved or declined over the past ten years? (such as number of personnel per inmate ratio, amount and type of training offered, programs offered to inmates, rehabilitation strategies and the amount of money available to implement these programs, what percentage of inmates are able to have access to programs, how recidivism of both technical violations and new criminal activity has been affected, interagency cooperation, the effectiveness of top management providing quality control and directing managing and line personnel, inmate and staff safety, and inmate suicide rates)?
- In general, is it more or less difficult to be a correctional officer (or supervisor, warden, regional management) now than in the past?

3. Personal correctional philosophy. What do you think should be the role of prison, jail, and community supervision officials in society?

- What should be their job, functions and roles? What should be left to other people or organizations? What about line staff such as corrections officers? Prison/jail/community supervisors and wardens?
- What organizational arrangements work and which do not?
- What policies does your country have in regards to relations with the community, political groups, and other criminal justice organizations? Do these policies work well? What hampers cooperation with other agencies and groups?
- How should corrections institutions be run? What programs should be provided, and how would you prefer sentencing laws to be modified so as to have prisons and jails include the individuals most deserving of incarceration? What are the best correctional strategies to ensure the safety and security of the inmates, staff, and community? What services should prisons and jails provide that are currently not offered? What services are provided that you believe should be cut?
- How should supervision post-prison or post-jail (or in lieu of prison or jail) be dealt with? Is the procedure used in your country working, or do you see an increased recidivism rate due to issues those supervised in the

community experience? How would you improve this problem or why is this process working in your country?

- Do you feel that your country uses appropriate intermediate sanctions when needed or is there a lack of such sanctions? Are intermediate sanctions such as treatment programs, intensive supervision, or electronic monitoring utilized, and do they reduce recidivism while keeping those in the community safe? If not, what do you feel is the problem?

4. Problems and successes experienced: In your experience, what policies or programs have worked well, and which have not? Can you speculate for what reasons?

- What would you consider to be the greatest problem facing the correctional system at this time?
- What problems in corrections do you find are the most difficult to deal with? What would be easy to change? Internal problems (culture of the organization, managerial deficiencies, allegations of corruption or gender related problems) or externally-generated problems (resources, community support, parole or probation procedures, or lack thereof)?
- What is the most successful program you have worked with in corrections? What is the most successful policy in regards to the positive improvements that have been made to prisons, jails, or community supervision?

5. Theory and Practice: In your view, what should be the relationship between theory and practice? What can practitioners learn from studying and applying theories, and what can those who create theories of punishment gain from practitioners?

- What is the relationship between theory and practice right now? Does it exist? Does it work? What holds collaboration or interactions back?
- What kind of research, in what form, and on which questions would you find most useful for practice? If not very useful, what could or should creators of theory do to make their ideas more useful to you?
- Where do you find theory-based information? Where do you look: journals, professional magazines, books, publications, reports?
- Does the department of corrections you work for conduct research on its own? On what types of issues or questions?

6. Evidence-based Corrections: In your experience, has your county's correctional system made use of various evidence-based programs? Do you feel that it is best to use evidence-based practices (or "what works") or that this focus is not important?

- What evidence-based practices are used now in prisons, jails, for intermediate sanctions, or in community supervision? Do you agree with the use of these practices? Do you feel that using more evidence-based practices would benefit the correctional system?
- Do you read information on evidence-based practices? Where do you get this information? If you do not have this information would you be interested in having access to these practices? What programs have been

proven to work best in your country?

6. Transnational relations: How have you been affected by the following in your organization's work by developments outside the country (human rights demands, universal codes of ethics, practical interactions with corrections officials from other countries, personal experiences outside the country, programs developed by other countries, new sentencing laws, political strife or war in your or neighboring countries)?

- Have those interactions been beneficial or harmful? What kind of external international influences are beneficial and which ones less so?
- How have international relationships with other countries or other political influences had an impact on correctional policy or practice in your country?

7. General assessments: Are you basically satisfied or dissatisfied with developments in the field of corrections?

- What do you think of the relationship between sentencing laws and public opinion to the functioning of prisons, jails and community supervision?
- How do you view the release procedures in your country and do they contribute to or inhibit recidivism?
- What rehabilitative programs could be offered either in or out of prison or jail that could decrease recidivism?
- How are intermediate sanctions (such as house arrest, ankle bracelets, rehabilitative programs in the community, or intensive supervision, among others) in your country used, and how are they working or failing to work?
- Which intermediate sanctions would you increase or create, and why?
- How could changing the balance between intermediate sanctions affect prison and jail environments? Would that be an improvement?
- What are the developments you see as most likely to happen in next few years, and which developments would you prefer to see happening?
- What is most needed now to improve prisons, jails, community supervision, and the overall punishment process in your country?

Preparation for the interview and instructions for writing your chapter:

Before the interview:

- Get a sense of how much time you are likely to have and what questions you will be able to ask during that time. No interview will enable you to ask all the questions you want, so it is best to choose your priorities based on who you are interviewing.
- You will have space for about 6-8,000 words (on the average) when writing your interview. It is important to pick the most interesting information that you have obtained (in your opinion). Our top priorities are the officials' reflections on the changes experienced during their careers, how they evaluate these changes, and the interrelationship between theory and practice. Thus, these areas are high priorities for the interviews.

After the interview:

1. Please write a short introduction to the actual interview. The introduction should:
 - Briefly describe the basic structure of corrections in your country. You have to be the judge of how much an informed reader is likely to know about the country and how much should be explained.
 - Briefly describe the interview itself. Where and when was the interview conducted, how long did it take, was there one or multiple sittings, and how honest and open do you feel the discussion was? What was the demeanor of the interviewee?
2. You should, if at all possible, record the interview by audiotape. For publication, edit the interview to bring out the most important discussion and answers. You will likely have much more information from your interview than we will have space for in the proposed book.
3. Write a short conclusion about your impression of the interview. What were the major themes? Briefly describe how accurate the leader's views were in accordance with known literature, without being overly critical about any lack of knowledge.
4. Write a glossary of terms or events mentioned in the interview a reader might not be familiar with. For example, if you interviewed a California correctional official and the *Plata v. Schwarzenegger* lawsuit was talked about, please define this lawsuit so that readers without knowledge of a country's specific terms and laws might be able to understand what is being referenced.
5. We have had two basic styles that are used to write up interviews. Both are acceptable, but we prefer the second style.
 - The first style is to simply transcribe the interviews - questions asked, answers given.
 - The second style, which requires more work, is to write short statements about the topic of a question and then insert long excerpts from the interviews. The main point is to have the voice and views of the leaders being interviewed, not your own.
6. Send the completed interviews to Dr. Jennie Singer jksinger@saclink.csus.edu and Professor Dilip Das dilipkd@aol.com .
The total interview, including the introduction, body of the interview, conclusion, and glossary should be approximately 6-8,000 words.