Public Acceptability of Prisoners' Access and Use of Digital Technologies in UK

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Abstract

Prisons and its people are subject to digital inequalities whereby the distribution of Information Communication Technology (ICT), access, uptake and skills is restricted by strict regulations to control use. Two hundred and thirty-seven participants took part in our study on prisoners' access to digital technology. A scale (Attitudes Towards Digital Technology in Secure Environments (ATD-ISE)) was developed to assess attitudes towards the use and implementation of digital technology in prisons. We observed there is a potential opportunity to inform and educate the public on the value of enhancing digital literacy within our prisons for the benefit of rehabilitative outcomes.

Key Words: Prison, digital technology, public opinion, digital divide,

Introduction

People and Their Relationships with Technology

Technology is not neutral. It impacts on our social, psychological, economic and political lives and contexts. As a result, our perceptions and attitudes towards use tell us something about the value placed on technology in varying contexts such as economic, cultural, social and personal (see Helsper, 2012). The reach of technology is now extensive resulting in transformation in our homes, schools, hospitals, and workplaces. As a consequence our attitudes towards technology are diverse and complex. For example, parents seek to restrict, supervise and limit access for their children; some workplaces restrict employees' access to the Internet and tight security measures are built in to educational settings. These practices are linked to attitudes of use, and so risk is managed to reduce harm particularly for 'vulnerable' groups. These technological restrictions apply acutely to our prisons (Knight, 2015).

According to experts on digital inequality (Selwyn, 2004), our beliefs and values about technology are complex and woven (or not) into our everyday lives. The manner in which organizations and policy makers respond to technology contributes to how we talk about or 'frame' technology within popular and policy discourses. In many respects, these discourses can polarize the ways in which we understand technology – that it is good for us (optimist) OR it is bad for us (skeptic). The following section provides the context for technology within prison settings, discussing concepts that have particular resonance for people in prison.

Context of digitization in prisons

Small pockets of digitization in carceral settings are evolving, with some services for people in prison becoming established, such as self-service kiosks, email, and video conferencing (Knight, 2015). The advent of COVID-19 has brought an increased demand for digital services such as video calls as a result of strict social-distancing policies (Knight, 2020). However, these developments remain small and localized (see Mann 2017). Molleman and van Os' (2016) global survey of prison services outlines the significant digital disparities across most jurisdictions. The authors found that most areas use technology for information management systems. Unsurprisingly, prisoners' use of technology is still very restricted to those countries in developed areas. Development is slow, and the penal digital revolution is slowly unfolding and is certainly uneven. The reasons for these disparities are complex which present a number of challenges for prison managers and policy makers. Further, such challenges are also deeply rooted by concerns of how prison digitization initiatives, interventions, and their investments are perceived by the public. With many jurisdictions' experiencing growth in prison populations that typically presents a range of complex vulnerabilities, plans to invest in digitization are perceived to be contentious and sensitive (see Funnell, 2017).

There is a long history of cautious correctional system response to development, particularly in relation to digital and communications technologies. Mechanisms like the 'separate and silent system' and strict controls to limit prisoners' access to mediated technologies like print media, radio, and television represent emotive organizational responses to prisoners' communicative rights (Knight, 2016). Access to digital services across many jurisdictions remains privileged and no prison

service provides a blanket provision. This, as Martin Narey describes, the former Head of the Prison Service in England and Wales, is framed by fear

> *When I joined the prison service in 1982, people were terrified of allowing prisoners to have FM radios…* (Saul, 2015,)

In many respects services can become paralyzed by these perceived attitudes, and political rhetoric can stifle change due to the fear of being accused of going 'soft' on crime.

Penal populism has been used to describe this kind of response. As a result,

> *…penal populism was effectively mediated and translated into law, rather than writing it itself. In doing so, government officials brought into play some of their own interests as well as those of other less visible interest groups* (Pratt & Clark , 2005, 310)

Notably, public thinking about prison services and the impact on communities matters. Yet, as many public opinion surveys demonstrate, public views about prison are ambivalent and contradictory, and there are low levels of confidence in the penal system. In sum, the view is that prison 'doesn't work'. It is significant that the ways in which opinion is measured is varied with some surveys seeking opinion, attitude, acceptance, receptiveness or sympathy (see Roberts and Hough, 2011). In the next sections, we review some key findings from a range of public surveys and reflect on our findings regarding the public's views on prisoners' access to digital technologies. How receptive is the contemporary public with respect to prisoners' access to digital technology? For the public 'consumer,' can prison 'work' with digital technologies deployed as a rehabilitative intervention?

What the public thinks about prison and imprisonment

As Jewkes (2013) points out, our experience of prison is second-hand--delivered as re-presented experiences, via the mass media. Thus, 'prisons continue to be constructed in popular and political discourse within a very narrow framework' (Jewkes, 2007, 447). The extent to which this is helpful is debatable, and this often means that opinion can become skewed. As Roberts and Hough (2005) suggest, the public on the whole are unfamiliar with the prison system. Jewkes explains that,

> *When it comes to 'real' or 'realistic' representations of imprisonment, which many inmates experience as brutalizing, dehumanizing and intolerable, public indifference prevails and some of the worst atrocities go unnoticed and unchecked.* (Jewkes 2007, 448)

This lack of understanding means that certain discourses get recycled into the public's imagination, for example believing that prison is easy, people in prison are idle and incarceration does not work. This then equates to low levels of public confidence- cynicism and skepticism in the prison system and what it is capable of doing (Roberts and Hough, 2005). These narratives of imprisonment are powerful and can manipulate how punishment (and rehabilitation) are delivered. Whilst this is important, the synchronicity of opinion and action become misaligned. Public opinion research in the United States found that rehabilitation is rated a priority, followed by deterrence; punishment was considered the lowest priority (Maguire, 1995).

Flanagan and Caulfield (1984:31) discuss the 'improper use of public opinion data,' and warn that such surveys should not conflate the complexity of the public's views of prison policy. This highlights the need for such surveys to be triangulated, with qualitative accounts that enable social scientists to expand knowledge with

respect to the origins of public sentiments about prisons. Moreover, these explorations should also be redirected not just at the punitive end of the issue but also fully explore how rehabilitation is conceived and understood.

Use of Prison

Generally, there is a lack of public confidence in criminal justice (RCP 2002 in Allen, 2013). On the whole, the public perceives imprisonment to be disruptive and it extends opportunities to continue criminal deviancy (Roberts and Hough, 2005). Herein, 'public punitiveness' driven by social responses that demand a lowering of the custodial threshold by sending people to jail for less serious offences have resulted in restrictive measures in prison policy (Roberts and Hough, 2011: 182). Public opinion surveys, however, counter 'tough talk' but actually highlight sensitivity and leniency towards offenders of crime (Roberts and Hough, 2011). In our review of studies on public attitudes we observed that respondents in such surveys are not as punitive as discourses may portray. There is an understanding of rehabilitation and the need to deploy justice services to address social problems. Yet these kinds of studies fail to disrupt the framing of punitive agendas.

Public views also highlight that skewed perceptions undermine 'the penal value of imprisonment' (Hough and Roberts 2005:292). These softened perceptions of imprisonment can 'become a source of *penal escalation*' (Hough and Roberts, 2005:292 *emphasis* in original). The consequences mean that amenities that might facilitate useful and effective services and support for the incarcerated can become restricted. As Hough and Roberts warn, it is therefore necessary for the public to have a realistic idea of the nature of life in prison' (Hough and Roberts, 2005:292). Despite

this, surveys highlight that the public does not necessarily support restrictions and enhanced deprivations. This oversimplification, as some commentators argue, strengthens penal populism to boost political favour. Research in the United States suggests that the public does not want people in prison to be without air-conditioning (Applegate, 2001) or televisions and physical exercise (Doble Research Associates, 1995). They conclude that pathways to desistance through rehabilitation are necessary under secure conditions. These restrictions as viewed by the public are not extended to denying people in prison civic participation i.e. the right to vote (Manza et al, 2004). Roberts and Hough conclude that there is 'ambivalence about extending the use of imprisonment' (2005:301).

Prison Conditions

Roberts and Hough's (2005) analysis of public opinion of prison offers a helpful review, and they conclude that the public's awareness of prison does not mean they have a grasp of what goes on inside and how this is experienced. Their study notes views of the prison as inaccurate and negative, with little grasp of the day-to-day deprivations and pains that incarceration can create. The public underestimates the severity of prison life (Roberts and Hough, 2005 : 290).

Cost of prison

Building more prisons as a solution to crime is not regarded highly by the public. For example, in one study, one in ten were found to think that prison reduces crime (Mori, 2003). The public is sensitive to cost of dealing with crime (Roberts and Hough, 2011:193), and many surveys on prison focus on this aspect (see Nagin et al, 2006). A number of US surveys suggest that the public are *willing to pay* for better mechanisms

for assisting rehabilitation (Roberts and Hough, 2005). Allen (2013) describes how education is perceived to be a valid and credible way to enabling rehabilitation and thus a worthy investment.

What shapes public attitudes of prison?

Much less is known about the shaping of these views, and most explanations point towards the fact that our insights into prison are received second hand (Allen, 2013). The diversity of opinion can be explained by varying attitudes across different jurisdictions. For example, the UK public are more in favour of imprisonment compared to other countries (Van Kesteren et al, 2000). Economic situations also impact our attitudes towards offenders of crime. For example, in periods of prosperity and optimism, the public tend to be more sympathetic to offenders. Demographic characteristics also shape how people view the criminal justice system. Wood and Viki (2001) found that older people tend to be more punitive than younger people, and those that work in manual occupations tend to be more punitive. They also report that heavy television viewers and especially those that consumed crime programmes demonstrate increased desires to be more punitive towards offenders. However, being a victim of crime does not necessarily lead to more punitive attitudes (Allen, 2013). The consumption of newspapers is also an indicator. For example, broadsheet newspaper readers see increasing prison numbers as a bad idea (Mori, 2003). The following section describes this study's public survey to explore attitudes on prisoners' use of digital technology in prisons. The intent is to assist policy makers, service providers, and key stakeholders to understand how their current tax-payers and citizens perceive this development. Knight and Van De Steene (2019:38) undertook a

survey of correctional ICT managers and found that their informed status did indicate less punitive attitudes towards prison digitization.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and thirty-seven participants took part in this study on prisoners' access to digital technology, all of whom were recruited through Qualtrics Research Panels. The sample was stratified for age ranges (25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64), and comprised 116 males and 121 females. The age range for participants was 25-64 years with a mean of 43.16 (*SD* = 10.882). Qualtrics Research Panels is recognized as an industry leader in the field of data collection, and were chosen for both speed of data collection and robustness of the sampling. All responses were screened at the point of participation by Qualtrics to remove any individual that completed the survey too quickly, or who responded repetitively to more that 80% of the questions asked in the survey. Participants received a small reimbursement for their time of approximately £4. Participation in the Qualtrics panel is open to anyone who enrolls on their system, but obviously is restricted to those with internet access. However, as the research focused directly on aspects of digital inclusion and digital literacy, we felt that individuals with direct knowledge of the digital environment would be more relevant to the nature of the study.

Of the complete sample, 60% reported their occupational status as being full-time employed, 16% were part-time employed. 4% Self-Employed, 14% Unemployed and 6% were retired. All participants were residents in the UK. We recognize that this

might not be entirely representative of the UK population. Due to the limited size of our sample, we acknowledge that this is a snapshot of the population.

The Scale: Attitudes Towards Digital Technology in Secure Environments (ATD-ISE).

A scale was developed for the purposes of this study to assess key factors associated with attitudes towards the use and implementation of digital technology in secure environments. An initial 33-item scale was produced and included questions designed to probe attitudes related to aspects of security, prisoner rehabilitation, prison environment and financial implications (see Attitudes towards Digital Technology in Secure Environments Scale (ATD-ISE). (dmu.ac.uk) to access full scale). Participants were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert Scale (1=Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree). Example items included "I think that the use of digital technology in prisons could serve to improve prisoners' quality of life" and "I think that giving people in prison access to digital technologies could reduce reoffending rates". For the 33-item scale, a Cronbach's alpha of .905 was obtained, indicating good reliability. Possible scores on the ATD-ISE range from 33-165, with a higher score indicating a more negative attitude towards digital technology use in secure environments. The Cronbach's alpha calculation is an internal reliability check of the questionnaire. It is carried out to ensure that all of the items included are 'related' to one another (see Calvani, et al 2008).

Procedure

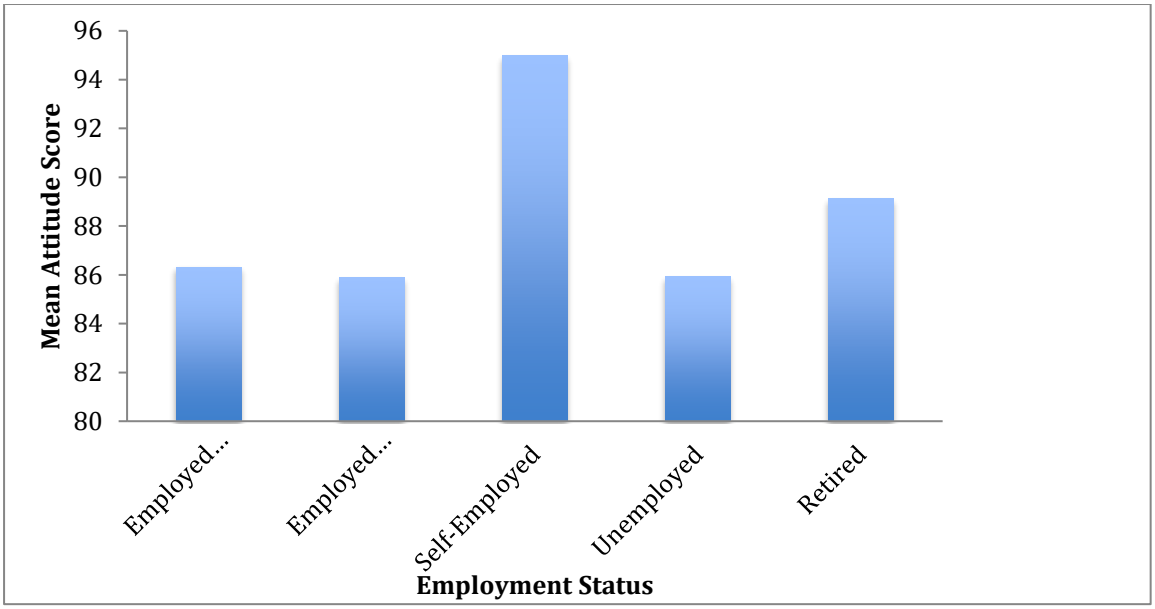
The above materials were combined into one survey that was distributed online via Qualtrics Research Panels during a one-week period in February, 2017 Participants were given full details of the aims for the study, as well as being informed about their

right to withdraw and informed consent. Upon completion of the study, participants were presented with a full debrief sheet.

Results

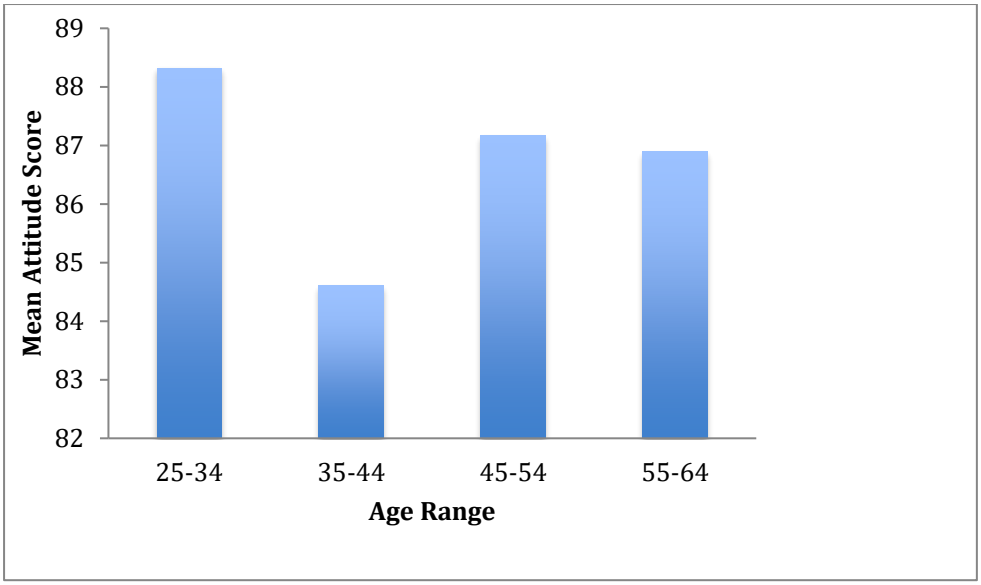
The means for the ATD-ISE by employment status are displayed in Figure 1 below, and for age ranges in Figure 2. The overall mean for the ATD-ISE was 86.747 (SD = 19.04). We can see that those individuals who are self-employed have a more positive attitude to digital technology use in prisons, with the unemployed and employed having a poorer attitude.

Figure 1: Mean scores on the ATD-ISE as a function of Employment status.



The means for the ATD-ISE by age (Figure 2) demonstrates that those in the younger categories (25-34) have a more positive attitude to digital technology use in prisons. The 35-44 age group are less positive. Mature groups appear to be more p????

Figure 2: Mean scores on the ATD-ISE as a function of age range.



The results of this survey are framed within four broad themes: which are?

Security and Surveillance

Questions in relation to security, risk and cyber security identified a fear of reoffending as a result of digital access and use. 80% felt that victims might be contacted if people in prison could have an online experience, and 86% felt that this might help people in prison to continue criminal activities. Whilst these fears were felt by most of the sample surveyed, 87% had an expectation that emails would be censored; 94% agreed that they should be screened for sensitive information.

Compliance, Order & Reducing Reoffending

Despite this strength in attitude when asked, respondents acknowledged the purposeful and rehabilitative benefits of digital use. Access to digital technology in prison is conceived by half (50%) of the respondents that this can help improve digital skills, make better use of time in prison, enhance learning opportunities as well as help finding and securing a job. The public was less convinced that digital technology can

improve self- confidence (41%). There were an even smaller proportion of respondents who perceived a direct relationship between digital access and use and a reduction in reoffending (22%).

Privilege and Access

The survey does highlight that there is initial 'nervousness' about inmates having access to digital technology. Over half (54%) of the survey respondents said in the first instance that they were against access. For example, they would want emails to be screened (73%). However. when pressed to respond to further questions, they acknowledged that access had to be earned (57%) - because the same number believed digital technology to be a luxury and should not be 'free' without cost and/or compliance. Conversely a lower proportion (42%) felt it was unreasonable that digital use is a luxury.

Enhancing Skills

The results of the survey highlight that (41%) believe the use of technology could make people in prison time productive. Yet, 43% of the sample could not see that use of technology could enhance learning opportunities. Moreover, 38% disagreed that digital literacy would assist with employability on release.

Cost and Implementation

Over half (52%) of the respondents agreed that people in prison should be charged to access and use a range of digital technologies whilst in prison. For those surveyed, 61% agreed that the taxpayer should not fund this kind of enterprise. However, 44% could see how technology might bring about efficiency savings and save them money. When asked, a few respondents envisaged the reduction of staffing in the advent of

digitization of the prison. With this in mind, 53% expressed that prison services are not capable of introducing these services right now, and it will, according to 62%, create additional work. Just under half, 47%, believe that this should not be a priority.

Discussion

The results of this survey highlight two noteworthy points for discussion. First the public's perception of the digital divide in the context of the penal landscape. Second, how there is scope for informing public knowledge about prisons in the era of digitization.

Digital Divide & Penal Divide

Selwyn's (2003; 2004) analysis of the 'digital divide' is helpful in contextualizing the results of this survey. His typology of understanding digital opportunities usefully draws our attention to the nature and features of uneven access to ICT. Selwyn distinguishes the stages of the digital divide in terms of 'formal/theoretical access' and 'effective' access but also 'engagement' and 'outcomes and consequences' (2004: 352). This framework is, therefore, not just a matter of access it reflects 'the extent to which technology use enables individuals to participate and be part of society' (Selwyn 2004, 351). The process of imprisonment deliberately denies and regulates incarcerees' communicative opportunities, social interactions (including face-to-face interaction), and ability to make autonomous choices with respect to communication. As Knight (2016) suggests, prisons are communication-poor environments where access and engagement are strictly limited. In the case of the prison, the 'divide' is two-fold, exacerbated by the state's intervention in limiting communicative opportunities. Reisdorf and Rikard, (2018) have adapted Helsper's

(2012) basic model of corresponding fields to develop a 'digital rehabilitation model.' In this model, access and digital competency can help boost economic, social, personal, cultural and health dimensions in returning citizens. Evidence which challenges what some of the public surveyed in this study fail to observe.

How the public perceives this outcome and such models of digital rehabilitation has proved noteworthy in our study. It is evident that public attitudes to digital opportunities and enrichment are complex. The survey reported in this article aligns with Selwyn's (2004) stages of the digital divide. For our purposes, we have adapted Selwyn's typology to consider how people view the *distribution of ICT* in prisons, *use and uptake* and related *skills.*

First it is acknowledged that the *distribution of ICT* in the prison context should be without 'cost' to the taxpayer. Second, *access* should be 'privileged' and meet 'security' conditions. Third, the public perceives that *use and uptake* would benefit the running of the prison and help achieve 'compliance and order' as well as assist in meeting 'reducing reoffending' outcomes. Fourth, the acquisition of *skills* using digital technologies is also favourable, but the public, according to our UK survey, is less clear or even knowledgeable that these processes could contribute to wider rehabilitative outcomes and crime reduction. Thus demonstrating a lack of knowledge.

Like other public opinion surveys on imprisonment (see Roberts and Hough 2011) , rehabilitation is valued and considered a priority, but are less clear about the direct association between digital literacy/competency and the potential for rehabilitation. Even though respondents do make an association between the need to rehabilitate and digital access, this is within limits. The majority of the public want assurances that those in prison cannot freely access the full interactive features of

the online world. Features of security and cost are considered vital for the majority of the participants.

A question of framing

One way of understanding these kinds of responses is to reflect on the manner in which digitization is framed in popular and policy discourses and set out in public agendas. Epstein et al (2011) highlight that the ways in which the digital divide is interpreted is based on the ways certain public agenda topics are 'framed'. What they suggest is the 'characterization of a public problem can often set the terms for how it will be perceived by policymakers, the press and the public...' (Epstien et al, 2011:94). On closer analysis of the digital divide, they identified that dominant discourses were framed around the notion that there is a 'problem of access' (Epstein et al, 2011; 94). They found, then, that responses to this were typically rooted in technological determinism and that ICT access was considered essential for economic growth and social prosperity. Their own study highlighted that responsibility for eliminating the digital divide was perceived to be down to the individual citizen to achieve access and develop their own skills. They found that access was considered a luxury and therefore not essential for the state to intervene. This is pertinent this survey's findings regarding inmates' gaining access and acquiring digital skills whilst in prison. The ways in which the use and purpose of prison are communicated to the public certainly corroborate with the less eligibility agenda-- that people in prison do not deserve access to ICTs. Their loss and restriction of communicative opportunities purports to a discourse of deprivation. Jewkes (2012:451) suggests that these discourses recycled in popular culture 'leads

to indifference'. In turn, Jewkes argues that populism and punitiveness can frame people in prison as 'living it up in prison holiday camps at the taxpayer's expense' (Jewkes, 2012 :455).

Our survey, then, highlights an important opportunity for prison policy makers and reformers. Whilst some of these sentiments and fears are reflected in the findings, this sample does not wholly uphold punitive views. The framing of some of our questions challenged those who responded to look beyond the deprivation model of imprisonment and consider the rehabilitative function in terms of skills and desistance. In addition, participants also hold their own views of digital technology more generally, and as Kvasny and Truex (2001:409) suggest, quite often technology is defined as 'polar opposites…growth/stagnation, new economy/old economy and progress/retreat'. One indicator may follow these principles of polarization in which our respondents were either techno-optimists techno-skeptics or, indifferent.

Shifting Attitudes: The Undecided

Polarization of opinion was evident in our survey across many of the items. However, a smaller percentage of individuals (approximately 25%) remained undecided and indifferent. This is denoted by the *neither agree nor disagree* category on the scale. This was identified in for example item 3 - *I feel that use of technology could reduce the potential for violence in prison* and also item 27 - *I think digital technologies will help save the taxpayer money*. This could be explained by the fact that those in the survey lacked knowledge upon which to base a clear opinion. The framing of the statements can suggest that those who answer do not know enough about the causal

links between meaningful use of technology upon either prisoner behaviour or efficiency savings resulting from digitization, for those proposed by Reisdorf and Rikard (2018) for example. There is current evidence to support both these statements that digital technology can reduce violence and save money (McDougall et al, 2017). Naturally, this evidence has not been adopted or translated into popular discourses readily available to the general public. Many respondents expressed a fear that technology could create even more opportunities for people in prison to engage in additional criminal activities. However, this is in the absence of clearer information about what prison security protocols, measures, and solutions are available to prevent this from happening. Digital solutions that are currently available for our prisons are secure, and it is not possible for users to undertake deviant and illegal online activities (Knight and Van De Steene, 2017). However, this information is not widely understood by the general public. In England and Wales, research found that the supply and use of illicit mobile phones in prisons was complex and the demand was not just down to criminal activity (Ellison et al, 2018). The research found that regular and cost-effective access to telephones in order to maintain family and friendship contact was significant. Consensus between inmates and prison staff was divided However research in the USA by Muffereh et al (2021) highlight that staff who also have access to technology are also keen for inmates to have access to it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In repeating and extending this study, it would be valuable to also assess psychosocial factors like emotional orientation, prejudice, and fear (see Wood and Viki, 2001). In addition, identifying the views of the administration of punishment would be valuable

in interrogating underlying attitudes towards digital provision to people in prison. We were also curious about respondents' own digital competency and the extent to which their own use would impact on their opinion. Further explorations might consider the basis of opinion as indicated by consumer choices, such as news intake, socio-economic status, and political opinion. There is a need to generate qualitative material that will provide more in-depth detail about attitude and explore how their opinions are expressed and felt. Moreover, in a post-Covid era, attitudes towards technology are evolving, seeing an increase and dependence on digital services to undertake everyday activities and access services- digital is normal.

Our prisons are at the beginning of a digital revolution, and there is inevitability that people in prison will be managing their daily lives using digital technology moving forward. The pace of digital maturity is increasing in a number of jurisdictions where people in prison can order their meals, book their visits, and make appointments to access services in and out of the prison (Knight, 2015) Crime education initiatives are useful, and the outcome of this study is valuable in this respect. Allen (2013) recommends that opportunities to inform are important for policy development. With a supportive and informed public, policy makers are more likely to respond positively. Whilst the public remains in many respects uninformed, policy makers too can appear indifferent and linger in the hinterland of indecision, which can lead to inaction.

Public engagement activities that are evidence-based can help to 'inform, influence, and involve' (Allen, 2013 65). Influencing opinion can help shape feelings and thinking, and so prison services can work directly with the public to undertake these kinds of activities. In the context of digitization of our prisons, it is also valuable to take into account social, political, and economic landscape. Attitudes towards

prisoners' getting access to digital technologies is shaped by the zeitgeist in which they are positioned. Currently austerity measures are impacting directly on our public services and so the public themselves experience austere measures. This would certainly inflame perhaps punitive attitudes towards our prisoners. In contrast public discourses are favouring health recovery in light of the pandemic. Furthermore, there is an increased awareness of digital literacy and the benefits it has in basic life skills, as explained;

Digital literacy programs give returning citizens the tools to break vicious, intergenerational cycles that disproportionately affect low-income families and communities of color. Returning citizens can become positive change agents for their own communities, promoting upward mobility through technology. (Arguelles & Ortiz-Lui, 2021, 17)

These kinds of messages require public dissemination in order to increase nuanced understandings of prison life and its impact on returning citizens. Scholars and researchers have a role to play in this enterprise and through partnerships with government and non-government agencies campaigns can be launched using a variety of platforms, such as social media. Recording and measuring change particularly around social issues is challenging and surveys like the one presented in this article have a role to play in assessing levels (including depth) of awareness on complex topics.

In light of digital progress, there is also the danger that this direction of travel for our prisons becomes a form of 'decorative justice'(Cheliotis 2014)- masking the punitive features of incarceration whilst ramping up tighter and harder modes of surveillance and control using technologically produced big data and artificial

intelligence for example. In this sense penal reform and rehabilitative transformation becomes restricted.

With respect to achieving digital inclusion and digitally-literate returning citizens, there is some need to convey evidence to the public in order for them to make informed decisions about their prisons. At the same time it is necessary to acknowledge, too, the public's attitude towards technology use. Selwyn (2003) reminds us that technology access can often be misjudged and that popular discourses purport to technological determinism which conveys a view that technology benefits all. Balancing these views with evidence is therefore important. Equally, technology in the context of prisons offers a curious dilemma for citizens. Whilst advocating punishment, most people would agree that prison should be useful and productive and lead towards a path of desistance from crime. Yet, powerful ethical and moral concepts can disrupt this line of thinking and concepts of technology use can evoke fear and trepidation. Moreover, the digitization of our prisons following a technological determinist position will maintain and uphold the punitive dimensions of imprisonment by enhancing increased surveillance and control (Van De Steene and Knight, 2017). There are important moral and ethical dimensions where people in prison will ultimately be forced to use technology to exist in prison. On such mechanism to widen impact and understanding of this could be achieved by drawing on co-production methodologies. Here development and implementation of penal services and interventions adopt a needs-based strategy whereby stakeholders, including the wider public are in active and regular consultation with policy makers, developers and service providers (Van De Steene and Knight, 2017).

Our final recommendation then would be to consider how a digital strategy model for prisons is developed with consultation with stakeholders and is grounded in their specific digital literacy values. The challenge, therefore, is to help stakeholders understand how digital literacy could contribute to desistance and what it means for serving prisoners. Communicating and informing stakeholders, particularly the public, is a complex undertaking. Framing digital literacy in the context of imprisonment and more broadly justice requires more evidence base in order to shed light on this issue. Whilst the evidence base remains small, services, policy makers and the third sector could benefit from adopting digital literacy models to communicate how digital competency could be nurtured for people in prison. Reisdorf and Rikard's (2018) digital rehabilitation model is helpful as it translates core fields such as economic, cultural, social and personal into the context of imprisonment and reentry. In further refinement we would also recommend that conveying these potential benefits into competencies.

Finally, a resource commissioned by the European Commission offers a digital competence framework (Carretero et al, 2017,) for citizens, outlining eight levels of competencies from basic to highly specialized. This model is effective in conveying what level of skills are required. Using the analogy of learning to swim, DigComp assesses digital tasks in relation to complexity of tasks, autonomy, and cognitive domains. So, when we envision prisoners' access and use of technology, it is possible to rationalize what the minimum standards would be necessary in order for them to thrive in the digital world. Whilst we would not advocate that people in prison are prevented from developing highly specialized skills, we would want it to be conveyed, as Reisdorf and Rikard (2018) do, that people in prison are presented with

opportunities to thrive upon their return to the community. Exploring digital literacy in the prison context is therefore necessary to provide the public with the value (as well as challenges) in order for them to make informed opinions about their prisons.

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