Criminal Justice Issues
Journal of Criminal Justice and Security
Year XI, Issue 5-6, 2011. p. 59-73
ISSN 1512-5505

CHALLENGES IN CONDUCTING PRISON RESEARCH

Review scientific paper

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Abstract:

This article reflects on tension experienced in researching the prison world with both qualitative and quantitative styles of research, mainly drawing on an ongoing PhD research project "Proactive criminal investigations in the penitentiary system of Bosnia and Herzegovina", but also reflecting on other research projects conducted in prisons that were used as guidelines in the aforementioned PhD project. The article focuses on the methods that should be used in research in correctional facilities, inconsistencies between official data and information provided by prisoners, and the significance of the emotional reactions and narrative accounts of inmates, staff, and even researchers during interviews in correctional settings. The purpose of this work is to provide critical insights into conducting prison research and to acquaint readers with some of the problems that can arise when researching prisons and prisoners in order to facilitate future research.

Key words:

prison research, qualitative methods, quantitative methods, emotions, researchers, prisoners, interviews

Introduction

Historically, research in correctional settings has moved away from the exploitation of a vulnerable population and become overly protective and restrictive. Today, doing prison research is very difficult. There are numerous articles and chapters devoted to these issues (King, Wincup, 2007, chapter 15 and chapter 18; Bosworth, 1999, chapter 3; Bosworth, 2001; Liebling, 1999; Brewer-Smyth, 2008). Correctional facilities traditionally have relied on a bureaucratic, paramilitary organizational configuration that is, by definition, hierarchical, risk averse, and security focused. This control-oriented model has worked effectively for prison administration. It has also inhibited other potentially beneficial functions like research. Highly structured organizations, such as prisons, are by design risk averse and often resistant to the changes associated with research. Corrections departments are authoritative and seek to minimize the potential risks to prisoner subjects, researchers, custody and other staff, often at the expense of beneficial research findings (Wakai et al. 2009).

Even if a researcher obtains the necessary approval, there are still many sometimes unpredictable obstacles that s/he must address while preparing and implementing a research project in a correctional setting, and it is necessary to plan consent procedures, recruitment processes, and data collection in ways that minimize the burden to corrections staff and minimize safety issues. Because no two facilities are alike, even within the Bosnia and Herzegovina ("BiH") prison system, the early part of a study must include the establishment of institution-specific best practices for data collection. The timelines for completing different parts of a research project, as well as the entire project, must be flexible in a correctional environment. Prison research takes longer than comparable research conducted in a community setting (Trestman, 2005). The researcher must consider the burden to the correctional system. Researchers put additional demands on staff for escorts and security. The challenges encountered in conducting research in a correctional environment are ongoing and unavoidable.

Conducting research in correctional facilities also gives rise to methodological questions and questions concerning the compatibility of the official data and data provided by prisoners (Daggett et al., 2009). Even though criminologists tend to present their analysis of the prison in the form of objective, numerical data, research in a correctional environment gives rise to emotional responses that researches have to deal with during and after the completion of the research. In the qualitative part of the research, the researcher must consider the aims, aspirations, and emotions of those being interviewed.

Conducting qualitative and quantitative research among prison inmates and staff

This article reflects on the tension experienced in conducting both quantitative and qualitative research in a prison environment, mainly drawing on an ongoing PhD research project entitled "Proactive criminal investigations in the penitentiary system of Bosnia and Herzegovina", but also reflecting on other research projects conducted in prisons (Gosting et al., 2007; Wakai et al., 2009; Bosworth et al., 2005; Liebling, 1999; Patenaude, 2004; Jones, 1995).

Methodological questions have historically been very significant in prison research. Sociological, medical, administrative and psychological approaches have competed for epistemological significance from different sides of the prison walls.[1] Both qualitative and quantitative styles of research give rise to these problems. Quantitative research in correctional facilities relies heavily on operational data derived from official statistics. Common problems that occur during qualitative research projects

[1] As Liebling (1999) has documented, since the 1970s, the socio-theoretical critique of the prison tended to start outside the prison and venture inside. Medical, administrative and psychological research has historically been conducted without in-prison research, adopted a broad theoretical approach, and offered little in the form of practical findings (Foucault, 1979;; Sim, 1990).

involving more than one prison (or in all of the prisons within the penitentiary system of one state) are impairment of the official statistic records and unevenness of internal prison regulations. Because of these methodological problems, qualitative researchers also frequently gather data by interviewing prison inmates and staff about the subject(s) of interest. One problem with relying upon inmate interviews, however, is that prison administrators are often skeptical of the objectivity of inmates in assessing their current situation in prison, even though research has demonstrated that inmate perceptions vary systematically across prisons, and are not just uniform complaints about prison management (Camp, 1999; Camp et al., 2002). The inaccuracy and subjectivity of inmates' perceptions and their emotional states (deriving from everyday frustrations and deprivations) can lead researchers to draw erroneous conclusions from data gathered through interviews. Nonetheless, the subjective viewpoints (of inmates, staff and even researchers) can be a valuable source of data and, in combination with quantitative data, can inform more complete qualitative conclusions.

The section below introduces the problems and observations acquired during the author's ongoing PhD research project. It focuses on the experiences that the author had while carrying out research in prisons, which are likely to have general application. The purpose of this work is to provide critical insights into conducting research involving prisons and prisoners and the problems that can arise during such research, particularly in projects for which prisoner interviews are necessary.

Emotions and prison research

The study of the role of emotions in criminology in particular and research in general is relatively new (Morrison, 1995; Carrabine, 2009). The role of emotions in research poses many dilemmas. Many authors argue that scientific research has to be objective and, according to that theory, emotions are suspect. They contaminate research by impeding objectivity and should be eliminated from the research process. Is it truly possible, however, to conduct research in any human environment without subjective feelings, especially in prison? Ignoring emotions can have significant costs for analysis and for competence as researchers (Kleinman et al., 1993).

"Proactive criminal investigations in the penitentiary system of Bosnia and Herzegovina" is an empirical project that aims to identify limitations in the implementation of measures and methods in criminal and deviant behavior prevention in prisons in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter "BiH"). Based on empirical data, it presents certain conclusions and propositions for more successful prevention de lege ferenda. It is based on research that tests the success of control programs that use criminal investigations during the execution of criminal sanctions in closed-type penitentiaries, as well as during the conditional release phase. For the purposes of this paper, it was essential to analyze theoretical apprehension about proactive criminal investigation and prevention, individual as well as general, and explore

crime phenomena in the penitentiary system of BiH. Because of the stated aims of this paper, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. The structure and scope of crimes committed within the penitentiaries of BiH was determined by collecting and analyzing official records of the institutions involving the execution of criminal sanctions for the commission of criminal acts by prisoners, while the formal knowledge of the sanctions policy was explored in a series of semi-structured interviews with prison guards, parole officers, and offenders in all entity prisons in BiH. The research targeted randomly selected employees in correctional institutions, who are responsible for carrying out the crime control measures, and the prisoners, who were subject to the crime-control regime on a daily basis while serving their prison sentences.

Out of a total of 90 interviews, the respondents included 40 employees and 50 prisoners in institutions across the country.[2] The prisoners comprised: 20 first-time offenders, 30 repeat offenders, 40 prisoners who had committed disciplinary offenses while serving prison sentences, and 5 prisoners who committed a new offense while serving time in prison. Research began immediately after approval was granted. The researchers familiarized themselves with the particular venues in which the prisoners reside. Determining the level of security at which a particular prison functions and how much freedom inmates are allowed before entering the institution is an integral part of preparation. Nonetheless, research in a prison environment is inherently unpredictable and researchers must be flexible and adjust to unanticipated situations. For example, a separate department of one prison where we conducted our research functioned at a law security level. As novice researchers, we were unaware of the levels of inmate "freedom" that we would find on arrival. Thus, we were entirely unprepared to drive across the prison fields where the prisoners were cultivating and to walk across the prison grounds through inmate lunch breaks "in the open." Our presence on the prison grounds triggered a noticeable change in the atmosphere as we walked through the yard. Once we entered the prison grounds, we were not prepared to encounter prisoners before encountering guards and to interact with such large numbers of inmates in such close proximity, nor were they prepared for our arrival.

Once they started, the interviews in general were long and detailed, especially with the prisoners. They covered a lot of issues of great significance to prisoners and often we received more information than we had anticipated. This was true because, while staff spends only a fraction of a day in the institution, inmates live in prison. Therefore, inmates are likely to be more directly affected by factors like general safety, crime committed within the penitentiary, disciplinary violations, corruption, activities, privileges, etc. Individual interviews with employees more than once grew into group discussions, and, on many occasions, researchers spoke

[2] The 40 employee respondents comprised: 5 Institution Directors, 10 members of the correctional service, 15 members of the security service and 10 members of the disciplinary committee.

informally to prison staff about the research subject and its questions. This intensity of the fieldwork exposure to every prison establishment undoubtedly affected the style of the interviews and the openness that the researchers encountered.[3] Researcher role, personal interaction, and the presentation of self all contribute to the outcome of the final project, and addressing these issues early in the process is pertinent. No one can walk into a prison for the first time fully prepared for what goes on inside. Prison is an environment that requires researchers to adapt constantly and reevaluate the ways that they regard themselves and, subsequently, present themselves to interact with others. Having in mind the lack of sufficient time to break down barriers and gain the trust of prisoners, the researchers carried out the interviews as a "conversation," as much as possible, when this conversational style was compatible with the need for structural analysis.[4] This 'narrative' style allowed the researchers to negotiate better the maze of identity-shaping interactions and observations that inevitably emerged as a product of multiple and unforeseeable embedded contexts and situations (Clarke, 1975). The timing of the daily prison routine was a significant problem. A few times, prison guards interrupted "conversations" ostensibly because it was lunchtime, the time for daily exercise, etc. These timing issues deprived the researchers of the opportunity properly to introduce the project and its intentions and to convince prisoners of the researcher's serious interest in prison life.

The informal group discussions with the prison staff, described supra, sensitized researchers in some ways to issues that arose later in individual interviews, and the lack of an opportunity for the same communication with prisoners is a significant deficiency in the research methodology. Because prisoners learned about the re-

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[3] Field research can be difficult and complicated to conduct, and sometimes it can put the researcher in situations in which it is difficult to know what the appropriate action is. A participant observation research study by James Marquart (2001) conducted in prisons while working on a project to evaluate the training of prison guards illustrates some of these issues. Marquart met a prison warden who invited him to visit his prison. During these visits, Marquart met many of the guards and inmates, who encouraged him to learn what prison life was "really" like by working as a fulltime prison guard. Marquart's specific research goal was to examine the official and unofficial methods of prison control and discipline in a large maximum security penitentiary within the Texas prison system. He worked as a researcher-guard for nineteen months and collected ethnographic materials while working, participating in and observing a variety of locations and activities. One major issue that a field researcher confronts is what to tell the people that s/he is observing in the field. In Marquart's research, one of the goals was to observe and analyze the building tender system. He did not tell the prison officers this, because he feared that they would become defensive about the practice that they had implemented and refuse him accesses. Instead, he stated his interest as something more general. By doing so, he committed an act of deception by omission and recognized that intentional falsification was morally unacceptable. Without that omission, however, he believed that the research could not be done. For more observations about the difficulties of conducting fieldwork in human environments, see Monette, D. R., Sullivan, T. J., DeJong, C. R. (2011) *"Applied Social Research: A Tool for the Human Services",* Belmont, USA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning *and* Pogrebin, M: (2003) *"Qualitative approaches to criminal justice: perspectives from the field",* London: Sage Publications.

[4] The interviews lasted between one hour and a entire afternoon, and the percentage of prisoners choosing not to be interviewed in every prison generally was very low

search project and its intentions for the first time at the very beginning of the individual interviews, it took some time to "break through" the formality of their responses and lead them to talk freely. After that, most prisoners participated actively and were willing to share their opinions and experiences.

At the beginning of the research project, members of the staff were wary of the research and the researchers. Even though they were interviewed first and knew the scope and the aims of the project, they were very anxious about the interviews with prisoners. Some guards made remarks about how, outside of prison, all anyone cares about are the prisoners, that no one cares about the staff and their lives, and that even we spent more time talking to the prisoners than to them.

The researchers also encountered the everyday pressure of refraining from action and participation. Directors, members of the correctional service, members of the security service, prison guards, members of the disciplinary committee and prisoners drew the researchers into their dilemmas, trying to achieve assistance, opinion, advice or a sympathetic ear. It was impossible not to become involved occasionally. Once we entered our research world, we inevitably changed it. That raised a question of the characterization of the research. Was it independent (Lahm's Inmate Assaults on Prison Staff: A Multilevel Examination of an Overlooked Form of Prison Violence, 2009) mutual research and prisoner interested (Elsila's Music behind bars: Liberatory musicology in two Michigan prisons, 2007), mutual staff and research interested (Towl's Suicide in prisons, 2002) or action research? How did researchers involvement define the research? Was it more or less scientific due to the researcher involvement? This article contends that the project and its inclinations were appreciative and that the researchers managed to maintain relative independence, especially having in mind that fieldwork is not only a science and that it should not be restricted by the scientific method. Wolcott (2005: 4), in The Art of the Fieldwork, rightly argues: "Collecting data can be done scientifically, but fieldwork consists of more than collecting data. Whatever constitutes that exclusive 'more' makes all the difference. That needs to be stated emphatically, for a crucial aspect of fieldwork lies in recognizing when to be unmethodical, when to resist the potentially patterns, relationships, and meaning."[5]

Although this research was launched with all of the discipline of the social science methodology, once it started, it was based on intuition, creative instinct and the ability to connect with others. As Liebeling (1999: 160) describes: "[T]he term observation does not adequately capture the process of being present in the others world. We see, observe, but inwardly digest scenes and encounters, our inner lives interplaying with the lives of the others. We watch, hear, take notes, drink tea,

[5] Wolcott, H. F. (2005) *"The Art of the Fieldwork",* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc. disclaims: *"My position is that fieldwork is best regarded as its own thing, neither as wildly creative as art sometimes may appear nor as characteristically systematic as science is reputed to be."*

chat, experience periods of engagement, distraction… we are no more passive agents in our research." [6]

Interesting dimensions of the project experience arose in connection with the age and especially gender of the researchers. The project's fieldwork suffered from the lack of a male researcher because it was evident that, in male establishments, our lack of previous "male" experiences in the outside world (drinking, smoking, gambling, and interest in football) made our "connecting" with the prisoners more difficult. On a few occasions, however, our perceived capacity for emotional support as women helped us to achieve more profound connections. It is also interesting that most of the members of the staff treated us in a professional manner during the interviews, but, outside of the "research situations", during the informal parts of our conversations (coffee brakes, lunches, etc.) this rapidly changed and they asked us about different aspects of our private life.

Qualitative research in prison: The experience of the interviews

"You are expecting me to tell you that prison guards are corrupted and after that to stay within these walls? You must be joking!"
(Prisoner)

Very often discussions of prison research focus on methods, researchers, their emotions, the manageability of the research, gaining access to prison, the construction of research concepts and instruments, inmate identity, institutional influence, etc. What about those from whom the researchers seek information? How do they experience the process? What do researchers need to know before entering the prison walls and starting inmate interviews?

By analyzing interviews and our experience while conducting them through this study, the researchers hope to reinforce the idea that researchers, like participants, are human beings with personalities, characteristics, whishes, hopes, likes, and dislikes. Even though researchers are able to rise above their emotions, prisoners are not supposed to. They are not objects. Honesty in the interview process is always beneficial for all parties involved, but it can be difficult to maintain (Noakes et al., 2004). Bosworth (2005) points out that, in the current penal climate, as ever increasing numbers of people are incarcerated, this simple observation is all too often forgotten.

The researchers interviewed one prisoner in Orašje Prison[7] in the early spring during the hour scheduled for "walking" and "landscaping." He wanted to tell his story

[6] Wolcott (1995: 67) describes fieldwork, as opposed to mere data gathering, as a wholehearted commitment. 'Everything becomes fieldwork.'
[7] Orašje is a departement within the prison at Tuzla with a population of 80 prisoners, 2 guards (only one

and was frustrated when the researchers tried to lead the conversation. "Stop for a second and look outside," he told us. We did so and saw about 50 prisoners in the yard talking, walking and landscaping. Some of them had different forms of tools for gardening, and there was only one guard (as far as the author knows, one guard is always stationed at the prison's entry). "What do you think, that, if I decided to kill you or anyone else in this damn building, if we decided to kill you all, you could stop us?" Our trembling voices gave away our feeling, despite our attempts to remain calm and look relaxed. In his anger against the system and unfair mode of communication in which he was not the agent of the process, but only the subject, he made his point.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were long and exhausting. In most cases they were conducted one-on-one, out of sight of the staff in the educational and administrative areas. The idea was to minimize unnecessary safety risks, which existed despite the researchers lack of awareness of them. The staff were sometimes troubled by the presence of researchers and their insistence on conducting interviews one-on-one, so it was necessary to negotiate deals, checking names with members of the treatment service before being granted permission to conduct interviews without the presence of the staff and assigned locations in which to conduct them. For a few prisoners, prison staff denied permission to carry out the interviews in a one-on-one setting. [8]

Although the prisoners were largely interested and responsive, researchers had to give frequent reassurances about the confidentiality of the information that they provided. It is, therefore, important, as Sclosser (2008: 1512) has suggested, to explain to study participants that the researchers have no affiliation with any state, entity, or cantonal correctional or justice system early on in the interview process. In general, interviewees did not want to be just research subjects, but rather they wanted to be active participants, make choices, and involve researchers in their world. For some of the prisoners, the study represented their only form of contact with the outside world. For the researchers, the interviews were the first chance to see what prison officials meant by the terms "angry'" "challenging" and "difficult prisoner." Some interviews became unpleasant because prisoners were trying to transfer their frustration onto the interviewer. Researchers were dependent upon their voluntary participation for the study. Researchers and academics need participants who agree to take part in their research more than they often like to admit.[9]

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is armed), one member of the treatment service and five persons from the administrative sector (including the director and his secretarry).

[8] The staff claimed that conducting interviews with some prisoners was too risky and that the prison administration was not willing to take the risk of the researchers being injured of any way. They were only willing to allow interviews of those prisoners, whom they labeled "high risk," in the presence of prison guards. Since the presence of prison guards would have directly affected the candor of their interview answers, researchers decided not to interview those prisoners.

[9] One of the prisoners in the Bosworth (2005: 252) study made a similar point: "*Just because you wrote that book, because you are an editor, a teacher at a university, so knowledgeable . . . none of that means*

This gives rise to the question: what about those from whom researchers seek information? What are their motives in participating in the research? To be honest and truthful? To help the researcher? To be heard? All human beings need relationships that are rich and diverse, but is that the only motive of research subjects? These different motives for participating in prison studies demonstrate more than the nature of qualitative research. They show a series of subjective and emotional factors that motivate prisoners to an extent of which the researcher usually is not aware (Bosworth, 2005).

Researchers are often unable to determine who will participate in a study or how the participants will feel about the research because gaining direct contact in correctional settings is increasingly difficult as research access has become increasingly restricted (Grimwade, 1999).[10] Given this restrictive regime, how is a researcher expected to connect with an examinee? How is a researcher expected to connect with a person who has been disconnected from the real world for years? More significantly, how do participants connect with the researcher? Their motives for participation are indicative of how qualitative research works in practice. Specifically, it shows the centrality of subjective reasons that the researcher cannot usually control, as well as the important influence of emotional factors on research participants. Determining how such factors influence a respondent's decision to participate in a study reveals the deficiency of traditional social scientific concern with the validity of the sample.[11]

A qualitative part of this research shows that the process of compiling information is an emotional experience for everyone involved in the research project. If, as anthropologist Kirschner (1987: 213) has argued, "[e]motional responses in the field can constitute an important channel through which ethnographic knowledge is gathered," such feelings may provide a powerful basis for analysis.[12] By recognizing these emotions, interviewer and interviewee verify their humanity. In the process, research may be transformed into an experience that is much more than the gathering of information, into one in which the researcher becomes an advocate for certain matters. To address some of these problems, academics should work as a connection between the prison and the government, as well as between prisons and the public. Researchers mainly tend to present their analysis of the prison in

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a damn thing! It doesn't mean that you know a damn thing! How much time have you did? How many strip-searches? How many hours in chains? How many beatings? How many brutalities? You know nothing! All that you know (of the truth) is what we tell you! Are you listening? Are you really listening?'

[10] Although feminist researchers highlight the importance of reciprocity, egalitarianism, and sharing in research, it is not always clear how to put these concepts into practice (Harrison *et al*., 2001).

[11] Academic researchers tend to avoid these questions of subjective intent by employing procedures like obtaining "informed consent" in order to deal with any responsibility that they may have toward their research participants. This is a result of the culture that institutional boards and staff have created, in which protection from lawsuits has become more important than the emotional security of research participants.

[12] See also Campbell, 2002.

the form of inhuman data and, as a result, prison studies have become detached from humanity and calculated. Working with prisoners as human beings, rather than just writing about them, narrows the distance between their fate and the capacity that we may have to influence their situation.

Compatibility of qualitatively and quantitatively retrieved data

As Focault (1979) has pointed out, prisons have long been recognized as microcosms of the larger societies in which they exist, with their own rules and dynamics. Nonetheless, the methodology that researchers use inside of prisons is largely the same general social science methodology that they use outside of them. In their efforts to stay objective, researchers in prisons tend to prefer quantitative styles of research over qualitative ones and to present their results in the form of surgically clean data. But, as argued supra, it is impossible to "get the whole picture" without both quantitative and qualitative research because only the methodological triangulation achieved by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches can generate reliable data (Robson, 2002: 174).[13] The idea behind the conventional approach to triangulation is that, if diverse kinds of data support the same conclusion, confidence in the conclusions is increased.[14] But that approach raises an interesting and complicated question of the compatibility of the official data and the data retrieved from the prisoners. Another interesting issue is the explanation of results from studies using qualitative and quantitative methods that appear to agree. As Sale et al. (2002: 47) has asked: "How can the results be similar if the two paradigms are supposedly looking at different phenomena? Achieving similar results may be merely a matter of perception." Occasionally, in order to synthesize results obtained via multiple methods of research, researchers simplify the situation by packaging results to reflect what they think is happening. The truth is that we rarely

[13] Triangulation is not the only way that qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined. Besides triangulation, two other approaches to method combination can be used: sequencing and "hybrids." In sequencing, qualitative and quantitative methods are employed within one and the same study, although in different phases of the research process. The most common example would be a qualitative phase of data collection that is followed by a quantitative phase of data analysis, with interviews that are coded and for which coding frequencies are determined. "Hybrids" constitute a combination of qualitative and quantitative elements in themselves. These elements may be so closely "packed" as to be practically indistinguishable—systematic content analysis that combines the (qualitative) coding of texts with the (quantitative) calculation of coefficients of inter-rater agreement is an example (Rustemeyer 1992; Groeben *et al.* 1994). More often, hybrid approaches comprise a number of phases, some of which are qualitative, others quantitative; all, however, are equally necessary for achieving the objective of the approach.

[14] While the social science application of triangulation is widely regarded as having originated in psychology, the argument has also been made that qualitative research, especially ethnography, is particularly well suited to triangulation. Many have followed Denzin's (1970) argument that triangulation should not only involve multiple methods ("data triangulation") but multiple investigators ("investigator triangulation") and multiple methodological and theoretical frameworks ("theoretical and methodological triangulation").

know the true extent of disagreement between qualitative and quantitative results because that is often not reported.[15]

Encouraged by these questions, we examined the correspondence between the official data on the structure and scope of crimes committed within the penitentiary and the responses achieved through the series of interviews conducted with those who are mostly affected by it in their everyday work and life. In the process, the researchers faced problems related to this inquiry, several of which were as follows. While trying to determine the structure and scope of crimes committed within penitentiaries, we determined that official rulebooks defining types of misconduct are not uniform. For the purpose of our research, we had to group all manifestations of misconduct according to the definitions given in the Law on the Execution of Criminal Sanctions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[16] Also, penitentiaries do not have uniform methods of official recordkeeping. In most prisons, official misconduct data are record in improvised booklets and notebooks that make the gathering of data more complicated.[17] The number of instances of reported misconduct in one prison (in Zenica) in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was higher than the total number in the thirteen others across the country. The reason for this discrepancy was the fact that, in the Zenica prison, smoking in the dorms was treated as misconduct, while, in the other prisons, it was not. Because of this, the misconduct rate recorded in the official records at the Zenica prison was not a good gauge of the rate of crime.

After separately analyzing all quantitatively and quantitatively gathered data, the researchers drew our conclusions regarding proactive criminal control in penitentiaries and compared the findings. Even though the qualitative part of the research was wider, it also involved determining the rate of misconduct, and, except for in two of the prisons,[18] subjective inmate evaluations of the structure and scope of crime correlated most clearly with the objective rates in official statistics. Whether this correlation is the result of perception or whether the researchers unconsciously packed the qualitative results to reflect what they thought was happening is an open question and should be examined and determined in future research.

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[15] Another possibility that may account for seemingly concordant results could be that both are, in fact, quantitative. Conducting a frequency count on responses to open-ended questions is not qualitative research. Given the overwhelming predominance of the positivist worldview in health care research, this is not surprising (Sandelowski, 1986). This often translates into a misapplication of the canons of good "science" (quantitative research) to qualitative studies (Sale *et al.* 2002).

[16] Zakon Bosne i Hercegovine o izvršenju krivičnih sankcija, pritvora i drugih mjera, Službeni glasnik BiH br. 13/05.

[17] No penitentiaries in BiH use electronic databases of misconduct.

[18] In the prisons in Zenica and Foča, the misconduct rate as calculated based on interview responses was grater than the one documented in the official statistics.

Concluding observations

It is difficult for an individual who has not personally conducted research in prison to learn how properly to do so, because neither previous research experience in the social sciences nor the variety of academic articles on the subject can fully prepare one for the challenges encountered in the world of "prison research." From beginning to end, the process of research in prison is a powerful one. Due to the obstacles that a researcher must address while implementing a research project in a correctional setting, it is necessary to plan research consent procedures, recruitment processes, and actual data collection in ways that minimize the burden to corrections staff and minimize safety issues. The timelines for completing different parts of a research project, as well as an entire project, in prison must be planned with flexibility, and a researcher has to demonstrate ingenuity in coping with various impediments.

The methodological challenges facing prison researchers are numerous, but not insurmountable. Gaining access to prison as an academic researcher requires knowledge of the rules and regulations, but it also requires ingeniousness. Designing acceptable instruments that protect the participants and remain applicable to research design are inevitable challenges that arise when doing prison research. Combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, narrative dialogue with participants, and irregular intervals of involvement and distance combine to create a tension out of which credible research can be built. Comprehension of the role of researchers in the prison setting and in relation to the participants is important for achieving satisfying results.

In conducting interviews with the prisoners, treating inmates with respect and patience can help outweigh prisoners' tendency to avoid participating in academic research and allows the research to remain truthful and honest. Throughout a research project, researchers should interact with prisoners as human beings, rather than just writing about them, which will narrow the distance between their fates and the capacity that they may have to influence them.

While our hope is that this article will offer some insight into prison research, it is inevitable that personal experience is far more enlightening for those who begin their research in correctional environment. Our intention is not to reveal all of the obstacles or to offer all of the solutions, but rather to point out the proper direction in which researchers should go once they have decided to conduct research in correctional facilities.

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