



Evidence Summary

Prison Library Services in Croatia Need Improvement to Meet International Standards of Universal Rights to Access

A Review of:

Šimunić, Z., Tanacković, S.F., & Badurina, B. (2016). Library services for incarcerated persons: A survey of recent trends and challenges in prison libraries in Croatia. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 48(1), 72-89. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0961000614538481>

Reviewed by:

Carol Perryman
Assistant Professor
Texas Woman's University
Denton, Texas, United States of America
Email: cp1757@gmail.com

Received: 26 May 2016

Accepted: 15 July 2016

© 2016 Perryman. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons-Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike License 4.0 International (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed, not used for commercial purposes, and, if transformed, the resulting work is redistributed under the same or similar license to this one.

Abstract

Objective – To compare the status of prison libraries in Croatia to prior studies and ultimately, to guidelines for prison library services (Lehmann & Locke, 2005). Two research questions were asked: 1) How are Croatian prison libraries organized and managed? and 2) What kind of library collections and services are offered to incarcerated persons in Croatia?

Design – Quantitative survey.

Setting – 23 Croatian prison libraries.

Subjects – Persons in charge of prison libraries.

Methods – A paper survey was mailed to all 23 Croatian prisons in 2013. The survey consisted of 31 questions grouped into 3 categories: general library information, management of the library, and use. Analysis provided descriptive statistics.

Main Results – Twenty-one responses (91%) were received. For the 10 institutions providing data on library holdings size, the numbers ranged from 450 to 6122, but per capita figures were not possible to calculate as no responses provided prison population size. Most (65%) maintained an entry book for new acquisitions, while one library kept a card catalogue. Half performed collection assessment on an annual basis.

While all but 1 of the prisons had libraries, most (16 of 20) reported that funding was not provided on a regular basis; 13 had space allocated specifically for library purposes, but none were staffed by trained librarians, instead using prison staff or prisoners. Only two libraries practised regularly-scheduled collection development, with half acquiring materials solely through donations resulting in limited topical coverage. All collections included monographs, but only around 25% carried newspapers, magazines, music, or videos. While use of the libraries was high, most responses reflected severely limited educational, rehabilitative or cultural programming and access to the internet, and lack of space for collections and reading purposes.

Conclusion – Libraries in Croatia fail to meet international standards for staffing, collections, and services. Recommendations for immediate improvement are made, including legislative advocacy and funding, improved public library involvement, and the creation of national standards aligned with international standards.

Commentary

The authors provide an overview of prison library research worldwide and of the state of prisons in Croatia. Overall, however, incomplete descriptions of methodology and the lack of access to survey questions affect the quality of this study. The literature review is extensive and well documented, beginning with an overview of international prison libraries and followed by a section focused on Croatia's prison libraries. These reviews occupy nearly half the length of the article, offering the reader new to this topic a valuable overview of international circumstances in prison libraries, including international agreements that have not been adhered to. With regard to description of methodology, the authors devote a scant two paragraphs to survey questionnaire topics, distribution, and response. No mention is made of question types (e.g., open versus closed-ended, multiple choice, etc.) or order, validation of the survey, or methods of analysis. Although readers may

assume that the survey was based upon previous studies for comparison purposes, this is not stated.

The study population is representative of the overall population, as the authors attempted to survey all Croatian prison libraries, with a high response rate (91%). Written permission was obtained from prison officials, and the survey did not collect personal information. Whether the authors are involved in service to the settings examined is unclear.

Some explanations of results are equally unclear. In particular, the authors discuss prison collection sizes, stating that "in a 2003 study, it was calculated that the size of library collections varied significantly across institutions," but then state that "although seven respondents stated that their libraries had newspapers, only one respondent provided additional information and indicated that his/her library subscribed to two newspapers" (p.81). It is unknown whether this latter statement refers to the referenced study, or to their own survey results.

The methodologies, analysis, and discussion are somewhat less impressive than the well-researched literature review. Overall, there is an overuse of tables (12 in total), which is unnecessary to the readers' understanding. Authors make no mention of limitations of the study, and include only general information about the questions. Had the survey questions been included, evaluation and re-use would have been greatly aided.

The research adds to the literature on global prison libraries, which is sparse and limited in detail. A more in-depth literature review, published as a separate work, would enrich this corpus, aiding efforts for greater compliance with prescriptive standards. For practitioners, administrators, social justice researchers, and those employed in global standards organizations, the information provided is a valuable addition and update. However, additional detail would help those who hope to build on the study or to emulate its methods, so that future comparisons are possible. The work is of limited use in direct

application, as survey questions are broad in scope, but information about extant practices, collections, and services (e.g., catalogue use and non-book materials made available) aid readers' awareness.

Critical evaluation was performed using the LIS-specific Glynn checklist (2006), but some aspects of the review process were made more difficult because the referenced Croatian surveys which are built upon in this study (De Villa, 2007; Horvat & Nebesny, 2004) are available only in that language.

References

- De Villa, S. (2007). *Zatvorske knjižnice u Republici Hrvatskoj*. Master's thesis, University of Zagreb, Croatia.
- Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387-399. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/07378830610692154>
- Horvat A. & Nebesny T. (2004). *Zatvorske knjižnice u Hrvatskoj*. In: A. Belan-Simić and A. Horvat (Eds.) *Drugi i treći okrugli stol Slobodan pristup informacijama: zbornik radova*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko knjižničarsko društvo, (pp. 129–136).
- Lehmann V. & Locke J. (2005). *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*. The Hague: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Retrieved from <http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s9/nd1/iflapr-92.pdf>.