

## Retribution Versus Rehabilitation: Why North America should Adopt the Nordic Prison Model

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### **Abstract**

Both Canada and the United States of America have a considerable imprisonment issue, leading to calls for prison reforms. When considering the role of punishment in the legal system, research indicates that individuals tend to want to achieve three objectives: retribution, general deterrence, or specific deterrence. The Nordic Prison Model, which focuses on rehabilitating the individual, may be a solution to the current North American retribution-oriented penal system. In this position paper, I will examine the contentious issues plaguing the current North American prison system, research around the role punishment plays in society, arguments against rehabilitation and the Nordic system, and finally, the growing evidence advocating for a paradigm shift toward adopting a rehabilitative-oriented remand system. Lastly, the paper ends with a call to action on future research into the feasibility of enacting a rehabilitative-oriented prison model in capitalist countries such as the USA and Canada, as well as policy implications including increasing educational courses or work-release programs.

**Keywords:** retribution, rehabilitation, punishment goals, justice system, prison, Nordic Prison Model, Canada

### **Résumé**

Le Canada et les États-Unis d'Amérique connaissent tous deux un problème d'emprisonnement considérable, ce qui a conduit à des appels en faveur de réformes pénitentiaires. Lorsque l'on considère le rôle de la punition dans le système juridique, la recherche indique que les individus ont tendance à vouloir atteindre trois objectifs : la rétribution, la dissuasion générale ou la dissuasion spécifique. Le modèle carcéral nordique, qui met l'accent sur la réhabilitation de l'individu, peut être une solution au système pénal nord-américain actuel, axé sur la rétribution. Dans cette prise de position, j'examinerai les questions litigieuses qui affligent le système pénitentiaire nord-américain actuel, la recherche sur le rôle que joue la punition dans la société, les arguments contre la réhabilitation et le système nordique, et enfin, les preuves de plus en plus nombreuses qui plaident en faveur d'un changement de paradigme vers l'adoption d'un système de détention provisoire axé sur la réhabilitation. Enfin, l'article se termine par un appel à l'action pour de futures recherches sur la faisabilité d'un modèle de prison axé sur la réhabilitation dans des pays capitalistes tels que les États-Unis et le Canada, ainsi que sur les implications politiques, notamment l'augmentation des cours de formation ou des programmes de libération par le travail.

**Mots-clés :** rétribution, réhabilitation, objectifs de punition, système judiciaire, prison, modèle pénitentiaire nordique, Canada

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## 1.0 Introduction

*“It is time to fix the flaws of the U.S. justice system, which is bloated, costly and harsh,”  
(Parker, 2015, para. 1).*

Consider the words of David A. Sklansky, a notable Stanford law professor and expert in police reform and law enforcement, when considering the mass imprisonment issue occurring in the United States of America (USA; Parker, 2015). According to the most recent statistics, the USA has the highest incarceration rate in the world at 20.3% of the total prison population (Lee, 2015; World Prison Brief Data, n.d.). This is a startling revelation as the USA only has 5% of the world’s population (Lee, 2015). These statistics are not the only ones highlighting the mass incarceration epidemic in the USA. Consider the high rate of individuals in prison; World Prison Brief reports the USA has just over 2 million individuals in prison—almost 500,000 more than the closest competitor, China (World Prison Brief Data, n.d.). In 2019, the USA had a high prison occupancy rate at 95.6% (World Prison Brief Data, n.d.). It also has 10.3% of the female prisoner population, ranked at 17<sup>th</sup> in the world behind Belarus and the Philippines (World Prison Brief Data, n.d.). It may come as no surprise that the country’s incarceration rate has steadily climbed upwards over time, from 264,834 inmates in 1940 to over 2 million in 2018 (World Prison Brief Data, n.d.).

Although the USA is notoriously quoted when advocating for prison reforms (Lee, 2015; Parker, 2015), Canada is not much better. In 2014, the most recent statistic, Canada had 5.6% of the female prison population, and has a prison population rate of 104 individuals per 100,000 of the national population, based on estimated national population in 2018 (World Prison Brief Data, n.d.). These statistics are staggering in comparison to European countries, particularly the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. When comparing prison populations, USA and Canada are ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> respectively, while the Nordic countries are

ranked much lower on the list at 112<sup>th</sup> (Sweden), 127<sup>th</sup> (Denmark), 136<sup>th</sup> (Norway), 141<sup>th</sup> (Finland), and 202<sup>nd</sup> (Iceland) out of a sample of 223 countries (World Prison Brief Data, n.d.). In addition, when comparing the rate of the prison population (per 100,000 of the national population), USA and Canada had a rate of 629 and 104 prisoners respectively, while the Nordic countries had lower rates of 72 (Denmark), 70 (Sweden), 58 (Norway), 43 (Finland), and 41 prisoners (Iceland; World Prison Brief Data, n.d.).

When comparing these statistics to those of the USA and Canada, it can be concluded that perhaps the current retribution-oriented system simply isn’t as effective as previously thought (Coons & Tillis, 2017; Larson, 2013; Lee, 2015). Why are there more people in prison in the USA than the rest of the world? Shouldn’t prisons prevent offenders from reoffending, and deter others from committing similar crimes? Based on these seemingly contrasting statistics, one may inquire what the secret is to the Nordic prison system. However, the main difference between the Nordic countries and the USA and Canada are that these countries focus on rehabilitation, rather than retribution, as their mode of punishment (Sweden Has, 2015). A notable example is Sweden, a country that has seen a drastic decrease in individuals being sent to jail, reaching a six-decade low in (Sweden Has, 2015). Nordic prisons have been globally recognized as being superior to their North American counterparts (Sweden Has, 2015).

I argue that North America (namely Canada and the USA) should adopt a more specific deterrence view in terms of its prison system, as seen among Nordic prisons, specifically focusing on rehabilitating the offender. To substantiate this argument, I will examine contentious issues plaguing the current North American prison system, the role punishment plays in society, arguments against rehabilitation and the Nordic system, and finally, the growing evidence advocating for the adoption of a rehabilitative-oriented remand system.

### 1.1 The Role of Punishment in Society

Research on the goals of punishment has identified three main objectives people wish to achieve through their punishment behavior: retribution, general deterrence (or general prevention), and specific deterrence (Cushman, 2015; Twardawski, Tang, et al., 2020; Weiner et al., 1997).

Retribution is sometimes called “the just deserts” theory (Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith et al., 2002). It is the sentence that society assigns as the fair punishment that the criminal deserves for the specific wrong committed (Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith et al., 2002). A “just deserts” sentence is proportionate to the intended harm, and lets the “punishment fit the crime” (Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith et al., 2002).

General deterrence is concerned with assigning punishment sufficient to deter others from committing such a transgression in the future (Twardawski, Hilbig, et al., 2020; Weiner et al., 1997). Another goal of general deterrence is to make people widely aware of the punishment for committing that crime; the purpose of the punishment is to reduce the likelihood of future crimes by teaching members of society that adhering to the law is the only sensible course of action (Twardawski, Hilbig, et al., 2020; Weiner et al., 1997).

Specific deterrence is concerned with assigning punishment sufficient to deter the same offender from committing a similar transgression in the future (Weiner et al., 1997). Depending on the likelihood of the offender committing crimes in the future, viable options are to incarcerate (i.e., prison) or rehabilitate the offender (i.e., educational programs). For rehabilitation to successfully work, an intervention must be utilized to “open the eyes” of the offender so one can recognize the wrong committed (Weiner et al., 1997).

Section 718 of the Canadian Criminal Code states the principle of sentencing is to protect and maintain a peaceful society, while ensuring the law is maintained and upheld by imposing specific sanctions (Criminal Code, 1985; Gerkin et al., 2017; Parker, 2015). These sanctions include but

are not limited to: separating offenders from society (e.g., prison), deterring the offender or others from committing a similar transgression (i.e., specific and general deterrence, respectively), and to assist in rehabilitating offenders (i.e., specific deterrence; Criminal Code, 1985). The fundamental principle that underlies Section 718 of the Criminal Code is the sentence imposed must be proportionate to the crime committed (i.e., retribution; Criminal Code, 1985). This principle explains why Canada takes a retributive stance when it comes to the legal system; retribution is intricately woven into our penal law “through the fundamental requirement that a sentence imposed be “just and appropriate”” (R v M, 1996, para. 79).

It is necessary to note that the Nordic Prison Model focuses primarily on achieving the punishment goal of specific deterrence through rehabilitation and reintegration (Sweden Has, 2015). In comparison, the current North American system is concerned with the retributive punishment goal through excessive means (Gerkin et al., 2017; Parker, 2015; R v M, 1996).

## 2.0 The Nordic Prison Model

The Nordic Prison Model utilizes the punishment goal of specific deterrence through rehabilitation of the individual. The rehabilitative approach is utilized in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and will hereafter be referred to as the Nordic Prison Model. Designs and implementations in each prison will undoubtedly vary, yet several fundamental principles remain the same.<sup>i</sup>

The “open prison” concept was first implemented in Finland in the 1930s (Dreisinger, 2016). Open prisons can have little to no fences, walls, or other barriers such as bars on windows, and can be located near communities or on an island (Pratt, 2007). Chalet-type living spaces and self-catering facilities such as communal lounges or cooking facilities are available, although meals are generally eaten together in the canteen with inmates and guards alike (Pratt, 2007). In some places, inmates may have the option to lock their

own doors, wander the prison grounds and sometimes the local community, where they might be employed (Pratt, 2007). Through their wages or allowance, inmates can buy food, pay taxes and “rent,” give money to their family or the victims, or save up for their release (Pratt, 2007). Unlike “closed prisons,” there are no external security precautions or electrified fences (Pratt, 2007).

An example of an open prison is Suomenlinna Island. Located near Helsinki, the capital of Finland, Suomenlinna Island has been an open prison since 1971 (Larson, 2013). A similar component to these types of prisons is that prisoners enjoy TV, educational programs, and a work allowance, along with personal choice on the types of clothing they wish to wear—there is no prisoner uniform. Prisoners are permitted visits to the mainland, sometimes even without electronic ankle monitors. The specific deterrence approach in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland alike ensures that correctional officers fulfill both security and rehabilitative roles (Larson, 2013). Prisoners are required to check-in regularly with officers, who then monitor and help advance their progress for release. Additionally, by commuting daily, open prisons often allow prisoners to retain their jobs in the mainland while serving time.

This humane and compassionate perspective allows prisoners to retain their rights and personal choices, while being treated as adults under confinement. This approach has been referred to as “penal exceptionalism” by criminologist John Pratt, who devised this term to characterize the humane conditions and low rates of imprisonment in these countries (Dreisinger, 2016). Pratt (2007) reports that in 2006, countries that utilized penal exceptionalism had lower rates of imprisonment; 66 (per 100,000 of the national population) in Norway, while in Finland 68, and Denmark at 67. The other main European country with comparable statistics was Italy at 66 per 100,000 of the national population (Pratt, 2007). Moreover, penal exceptionalism also includes prison conditions (Pratt, 2007). Pratt (2007) found that generally, admission to prison is viewed as the punishment for the crime (i.e., retribution); thus,

prison conditions attempt to imitate life outside of prison as much as possible, rather than be degrading and abusive within. Specifically, the philosophy of the Nordic prison system is one of normalization, where the loss of liberty is considered the punishment, and that the prison sentence is the *sole* loss of liberty. As such, core services including healthcare are provided by the community, rather than the prison service, and therefore reflect the values of the former. Additionally, these countries take a step further in protecting inmate’s rights; prisoner’s rights are protected in the Finnish Constitution, as well as the Imprisonment Act 2005 (Pratt, 2008).

Consider Norway for example: prisoners hold the same rights as any citizen not behind bars: they have the right to vote in elections, retain access to the internet, and have the ability to go to work or attend schooling, and can wear whatever they so desire (Sutter, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Norway’s Bastøy Prison Island was recently quoted by CNN as the “world’s nicest prison” and praised as a shining jewel of open prisons (Pratt, 2007; Sutter, 2012). In Bastøy, offenders are provided with everything from personal TVs and computers to proper sanitation and private showers (James, 2013; Sutter, 2012); simply put, inmates are treated with compassion and respect. Prisoners serve up to a mere 21 years in Norwegian prisons, regardless of crime, as life sentences and the death penalty do not exist in Norwegian society (James, 2013; Sutter, 2012). Inmates are provided educational means, from skill-building programs to technical training (James, 2013; Sutter, 2012). Individuals live in communities within the prison and guards are present to act not as snipers, but to count the number of prisoners daily (James, 2013; Sutter, 2012); as inmates are considered welfare clients rather than dangerous outsiders (Pratt, 2007), a guard’s role is similar to that of social workers (Berlioz, 2020). Inmates are provided a key to their own room, along with a personal food allowance to buy ingredients to cook their own meals for breakfast and lunch in the common kitchen (Sutter, 2012). They also work shifts in the kitchen to make wholesome, nutritious dinners for

fellow prisoners (Sutter, 2012). Every individual has responsibilities to attend to, be it chopping firewood or tending to livestock; offenders are treated as adults and are challenged to be good neighbours (Sutter, 2012). Indeed, this open prison comes complete with a school, church and library, which are all patrolled by unarmed guards (James, 2013; Sutter, 2012). The adoption of a “Principle of Normality” in Norway dictates that the punishment offenders receive is the restriction of liberty and ensures that inmates have all the same rights as those who live freely in society (Dreisinger, 2016; Kriminalomsorgen, n.d.). In addition, life inside would attempt to resemble life on the outside as much as possible (e.g., community pods, Dreisinger, 2016; Kriminalomsorgen, n.d.). Norway generates healing and hope in its inmates by building self-esteem and reforming their lives (Sutter, 2012). It can be understood why the Norwegian attitude towards prisoners differs vastly from that of North America’s (James, 2013; Sterbenz, 2014).

The Nordic Model attempts to combat the psychological phenomenon known as the self-fulfilling prophecy, defined as the outcome of a situation being influenced by one’s beliefs or expectations (Merton, 1948). Categorized under the sociological school of thought on crime, Labeling Theory occurs when individuals accept their deviant label since society treats them as such, which results in a self-fulfilling prophecy (Skaggs, 2016). In Nordic nations, prisoners are placed into community pods within the prison that encourages social competencies and help develop their sense of responsibilities for their actions (Pratt, 2007); this helps combat the corrosive spread of the criminal prison subculture that plagues traditional prison structures (James, 2013). Specifically, these community pods can be likened to chalet-type communities that are self-catering, with no walls or fences (Pratt, 2007). This is especially prevalent in Norway, as all prisons adopt this philosophy (James, 2013).

The American Department of Justice reported offender recidivism increased with strict incarceration, except in facilities where cognitive-

behavioral programs based on Social Learning Theory were offered (Sterbenz, 2014). This premise is precisely what the Nordic Model capitalizes on: Differential Association Theory, also under the sociological school of thought (Sterbenz, 2014). Differential Association Theory utilizes Social Learning Theory and posits criminal behavior (e.g., techniques, motives, etc.) as learnable via interactions with deviant individuals (Hermida, n.d.). Thus, if one is rejected from pro-social groups, then one will crave anti-social acceptance (Hermida, n.d.). The Nordic Model ensures prisoners are treated as humans and remain in pro-social groups by interacting well with others (Dreisinger, 2016; Kriminalomsorgen, n.d.), such as providing self-catering facilities including communal living spaces and cooking facilities, and allowing inmates to have direct input into prison governance (e.g., inmates meeting to discuss mutual concerns and then presenting their views to the warden; Pratt, 2007). However, this rehabilitative approach undertaken by some countries is not without its fair share of critics.

### 3.0 Arguments for Retribution

Opponents of the Nordic system of rehabilitation have long argued that the goal of prisons should be to punish in a retributive manner, to deliver punishment ‘that fits the crime’ committed by handing out long prison sentences (Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith et al., 2002). They argue that North American prisons are the correct system and that rehabilitative models could function only in welfare states, such as those of the Scandinavian countries (Sharma, 2015). Due to these vastly different economic and government paradigms, critics argue a capitalist society could never fully adopt a model that functions sufficiently in welfare states (Sharma, 2015).

Advocates for the rehabilitative model have found a way to refute this claim. In a groundbreaking case study, researchers were able to build and replicate a rehabilitative prison model on American soil. The Missouri River Correctional Center was the result of this social experiment

(Slater, 2017). Located in North Dakota, this correctional center is a minimum-security system, mirroring that of Norway's Bastøy Prison. After visiting prisons in Norway, wardens likened to their approach and immediately increased the existing work-release program (e.g., working jobs inside or outside of the prison) and provided more opportunities for inmates to earn more freedom (e.g., shopping excursions, the right to wear whatever attire they wish). Prisoners are also permitted to obtain day passes to visit family. There are no fences surrounding the center, and if inmates demonstrate exceptional behavior, there is a chance to live in private rooms. This shift to a rehabilitative approach is not the only radical adjustment; North Dakota has an incarceration rate of 240 prisoners (per 100,000 residents), which is among one of the lowest in the USA (Slater, 2017). This contrasts the incarceration national average at the time of the article's publication, which was 670 prisoners (per 100,000 residents), yet not as low as Norway's rate of 75 prisoners (per 100,000 residents; (Slater, 2017). These are simply unprecedented numbers when compared to the national average.

This experiment is not without limitations as recidivism rates for the Missouri River Correctional Center are unavailable. In addition, one needs to acknowledge that since 2011, the number of inmates in North Dakota have increased 28% (Slater, 2017). However, the statistics quoted are state-wide; it is incorrect to simply assume this rate is predictive of the failures of the Nordic approach in a capitalist society. There is no research indicating that because this *single* prison adopted a rehabilitative approach, that has led to an increase in the state's incarceration rate. Thus, the findings from the Missouri River Correctional Center case study require careful consideration in this debate and should not be simply dismissed.

#### **4.0 Evidence for the Nordic Prison System of Rehabilitation**

##### **4.1 Acquisition of Employment after Release**

At Bastøy prison in Norway, a prisoner was interviewed (Too Many, 2017). During his stay, the individual was able to acquire transferable skills and take a carpentry exam (Too Many, 2017). The prisoner will most likely be released in three years time, and on the day of release, he expects to obtain immediate employment (Too Many, 2017). He ultimately plans to set up his own business in carpentry (Too Many, 2017). Prisoners of Bastøy can begin employment outside of the compound 18 months before release (Too Many, 2017). The goal is to ensure inmates have housing, a source of income, and something to do upon release (Too Many, 2017). A study found that almost most Norwegian first-time offenders held employment before entering prison (60-70%, Aaltonen et al., 2017). Serving a term in prison had no adverse effect on employment, as the rate was stable after being released from prison (Aaltonen et al., 2017). This is in stark contrast to the current system implemented in the USA, where prisoners are released with simply the clothes on their back and a single bus fare (Too Many, 2017).

In contrast, a longitudinal research study examined the effects of prison on former prisoners in three American states (Visher et al., 2008). Most survey respondents lost work skills during their sentence and were provided little opportunity to gain useful work experience (Visher et al., 2008). Prior to incarceration, a majority of individuals held active employment (Visher et al., 2008). During their stay in prison, 9% of respondents held a "work release" job, 21% participated in a trade or job training program, and 32% partook in educational classes (Visher et al., 2008). Those figures are not exceptional and could certainly be improved. Only 69% of individuals said that they felt the pre-release programs were helpful (Visher et al., 2008); this provides a contrast to the optimistic views provided by the prisoner of Bastøy, Norway. In addition, almost half of the respondents mentioned they wanted to enroll in classes but were unable to (48%; Visher et al., 2008). Visher and colleagues (2008) found that in the two years after release, 43% of respondents were employed at some point while only 31%

currently held steady employment at time of survey completion; this contrasts the 50-60% Norwegian employment rate after release (Aaltonen et al., 2017). The largest implication of this study may be that 71% said that their criminal record affected their ability to successfully acquire employment, which is the complete opposite to what prisoners in Norway expect (Visser et al., 2008). Evidently, the Nordic Model allows ex-prisoners to acquire employment much readily after release.

#### **4.2 Recidivism Rates**

Recidivism may be defined by three measures: rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence following the offender's release (Recidivism, 2014). The USA has one of the highest re-offending rates in the world at 76.6% (Durose et al., 2014). An eight-year longitudinal study was conducted by the United States Sentencing Commission (USSC) that examined over 25,000 federal offenders who were either released from serving time in prison or placed on probation in 2005 (Recidivism among, 2016). It was found that nearly half (49.3%) of individuals were rearrested within eight years either by committing a new crime or violating conditions of their release or probation (Recidivism among, 2016). The USSC also broke down rearrest rates of individuals discharged from prison who had a rate of 52.5%, versus those released on probation, which came in slightly lower at 35.1%; the median time of arrest was a mere 21 months (Recidivism among, 2016). During the study period, almost one third (31.7%) of offenders were reconvicted and another 24.6% reincarcerated (Recidivism among, 2016). Based on these statistics, the tendency for reoffending is fairly common in the USA.

Canada's National Parole Board released the following statistics for the 2015-2016 fiscal year (Parole Board of Canada, 2018). At the federal level, there was a successful completion rate of 37% for full parole, meaning a recidivism rate of 63% was still evident. In addition, a statutory release of 63% was also reported.

However, a footnote in the report indicated that offenders of statutory release are likely to have their releases rescinded due to breaches in condition or a rearrest, when compared to offenders released on full parole. Thus, recidivism is still problematic in Canada.

The following study conducted by Fazel and Wolf (2015) was used to compare recidivism rates from North America to Nordic countries. Within a 2-year period, Canadian reconviction rates in 1994-1995 were at 41% and the USA at 36% in 2005-2010, while in Denmark it was 29% and a mere 20% in Norway in 2005. Reincarceration rates were not examined in Nordic countries in this particular study. Based on this study, it can be determined that it is difficult to compare recidivism rates across countries, especially within the same selection periods. However, Fazel and Wolf (2015) provided relevant data to demonstrate that recidivism rates are generally lower in the Nordic countries when compared to their North American counterparts.

In stark contrast to Canada and the USA, the small prison island of Bastøy, Norway has a recidivism rate of 16%, the lowest in Europe (James, 2013; Sutter, 2012). This recidivism rate is lower than the national average, which is at 20% (James, 2013; Sutter, 2012). This is surprising as even Norway houses mass murderers, namely Arntfinn Nesset (Wilson, 2008). Nesset was convicted of poisoning 22 geriatric patients (and presumably more victims) with a muscle relaxant in 1983, where he worked as a nurse. He was released in 2004 and is currently presumed to live under a new identity.

Whereas Norway has a recidivism rate of 20% within two years, the other Northern European countries are not too far behind (Kristoffersen, 2013). In a 2010 study that compared relapse rates among the Nordic countries, Norway had by far the lowest reincarceration rate, with Iceland (24%) and Denmark (26%) not far behind (Kristoffersen, 2013). The highest rates among Nordic countries were Sweden (30%) and Finland (31%), which is

relatively low when compared to their North American counterparts (Kristoffersen, 2013).

When comparing recidivism rates, the Nordic countries are statistically lower in contrast to North America. Individuals in Nordic countries reoffend at a lesser rate than their North American counterparts, thus providing supporting evidence in favour of the Nordic Model of rehabilitation.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Certainly, an immediate overhaul of the North American prison system would be unreasonable. Critics of the Nordic Model and the rehabilitation philosophy would clearly have to be won over. Policies would have to be re-written, and the justice systems of the respective countries re-examined. However, implementing the Nordic Model of rehabilitation is a possibility within reach over time.

I believe research is warranted in further examining a rehabilitative-oriented prison model in capitalist countries such as the USA and Canada, and thus could provide much needed research in this field. Critics argue that vastly different economic paradigms determine different concepts of government, and that a system used in welfare societies could never function in a capitalist country (Sharma, 2015). To date, there is research lacking in this field and it can be concluded that rigorous psycho-legal research must be conducted, perhaps in the form of erecting a community similar to the Nordic Model and studying the long-term effects it has on ex-prisoners in a capitalist society. Specifically, the Missouri River Correctional Center was a unique case study of implementing the Nordic Model in a country that is capitalist oriented (Slater, 2017). I believe additional social experiments should be utilized across North America, and longitudinal studies conducted on the recidivism rates and unemployment rate of ex-inmates. Moreover, there are currently limitations on comparing unemployment rates for recently released convicts across nations, so a collective psycho-legal research effort is necessary. Likewise, cross-

country comparisons on recidivism rates should be further examined in psycho-legal research, as they may be paramount to advocating for the Nordic Model of rehabilitation.

In terms of policy implications, the first step may be to provide more educational courses or work-release programs in the current North American prison system. Fostering responsibility by allowing inmates have some control over their lives, including choosing their work-release program and having environments that are self-catering (e.g., cooking facilities), further helps with future reintegration into society (Denny, 2016). Indeed, developing social competencies and promoting a sense of responsibility for their actions can be beneficial in allowing inmates to feel a sense of community, which can reduce the criminal prison subculture that often plagues traditional prison structures (James, 2013). Programs such as work-release would prove to be advantageous, as former convicts expressed a need for this opportunity (Visher et al., 2008). Similarly, structural changes such as providing self-catering facilities (e.g., communal living spaces and cooking facilities) are warranted (Pratt, 2007). In addition, a more compassionate method applied to the current prison system would be adequate initially. The first step may be treating inmates as individuals by allowing personal choice of attire like in Norway, as well as granting the same fundamental rights regardless if one was in prison or in society (Sutter, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

I am advocating for a paradigm shift in the direction of a more rehabilitative direction, one step at a time. Perhaps the solution to the overcrowded prison issue afflicting the USA is through the application of a rehabilitative model that has inspired Nordic countries. Perhaps the key to reducing recidivism rates in Canada is to take a more rehabilitative approach in the current justice system. One must acknowledge that there is a lack of systematic studies to support a rehabilitative approach to prisons but based on the presented case study of implementing a Nordic Prison Model in a capitalist society, it is a possibility worth considering. Furthermore, evidence for the ease of



acquisition of employment for ex-inmates, as well as lower recidivism rates demonstrate that the Nordic Prison Model is a worthy contender as a possible resolution to the flaws plaguing the North American system. As such, it is warranted to argue that North America (USA and Canada) should adopt a specific deterrence method in the form of

rehabilitation in its prison systems. It is after all, "...time to fix the flaws of the U.S. justice system, which is bloated, costly and harsh" (Parker, 2015, para.1).

I certainly think Professor David Sklansky would agree.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As prisons are a matter of national security, a specific overview of each country's prison system was unattainable. Thus, case studies of select prisons will be showcased in this paper.

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