

Information needs and behaviour of incarcerated persons in Croatia: findings from a national quantitative study

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Abstract

Introduction. *This paper examines the information behaviour and information needs of incarcerated persons in Croatian correctional facilities.*

Method. *A total of 620 printed questionnaires were mailed to six Croatian penitentiaries and administered to prisoners who were serving a long-term period sentence. Sample included both male and female prisoners with the response rate of 81.3%.*

Analysis. *The data was analysed with the help of statistical software SPSS.*

Results. *Almost all incarcerated persons that participated in this study have a greater need for information while in prison than they had before incarceration. The largest majority of respondents require information about the life in penitentiary, information about their family members and friends, and information about life-after-prison. In most cases, respondents seek required information from their family members and friends. Very rarely are their varied educational, informational, legal and recreational needs met by a prison library.*

Conclusions. *The findings indicate that about a third of respondents revealed that their current information needs were not met and that Croatian prison libraries are unequipped to meet information needs of incarcerated persons. In order to change present situation, better cooperation between Croatian Library Association and Croatian prison administration is needed.*

Keywords: *information needs, information behaviour, prisoners, Croatia*

Introduction

Basic human civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are regulated and protected by a number of international human rights documents gathered around the so-called International Bill of Human Rights (United Nations, 2021). The document *Basic principles for the treatment of prisoners* (United Nations General Assembly, 1990), based on the international human rights law and the International Bill of Human Rights, states that all prisoners should be treated with dignity and respect and shall retain the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in afore mentioned documents (Basic principles, 1990). In addition, prisoners should have the rights to participate in cultural activities and education with the access to an adequate library and conditions should be created to enable prisoners to undertake employment which will facilitate their reintegration into society after they serve their sentence (Basic principles, 1990). Croatian judicial system adheres to the international human rights law and ensures that prisoners have right to, among other things, protection, education, health care, and participation in state elections (Croatia. Ministry of Justice and Public Administration, 2021).

The most important role of the correctional facilities all over the world is reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners. For prisons to achieve those objectives, there is a need to employ learning mechanism which will reverse the old, anti-social type of behaviour and encourage new behaviour, compliant to social norms (McGuire, 2002). Participation in a democratic society requires that a person obtains access to current information in all fields. This also applies to prisoners because only through access to ideas and information created outside the prison premises can the successful transition to freedom and integration to outside society take place (American Library Association, 2019). Unfortunately, today's correctional facilities throughout the world are overpopulated and there is a growing crisis of a prison system. Facilities are finding it increasingly difficult to provide humane conditions and ensure the rehabilitation activities based on international standards (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018). Prisoners' rehabilitation is a complex task and includes activities of educational, medical, psychological and behavioural nature accompanied by counselling and cognitive-behavioural programmes (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017).

Good prison libraries should be equipped to support prisoners' varied educational, informational, legal and recreational needs and have a vast potential of being an important link in prisoners' rehabilitation process (Krolak, 2019). International Federation of Library Institutions and Associations has published guidelines for prison libraries and should be viewed as a practical tool for designing a well-functioning prison library (Lehman and Locke, 2005). An incarcerated person preserves the right to learn and access information, which means that the prison library should offer the same scope of materials and services as public libraries do. Restrictions and limitations to access to materials should only be imposed when it presents threat to prison security (Lehman and Locke, 2005). Prison libraries offer space where prisoners can pursue their interests at will and the usage of prison libraries' services is voluntary, which is one of the rare personal activities prisoners have control over while incarcerated. Good prison libraries offer various informal educational programmes such as book-discussion groups, creative-writing classes or (family) literacy workshops (Finlay and Bates, 2018; Onyebuchi, *et al*, 2020). The research has shown that prisoners place high value on informal, non-institutional nature of those programmes (Hopkins and Kendall, 2017). As a result, prison libraries are heavily used – they offer recreation, education, tools for preparation for life after prison and integration into society, and last but not least, they are safe places that offer escape from harsh reality.

Unfortunately, not all prison libraries offer high quality services – they are faced with insufficient funding, they are understaffed or are lacking professional staff, collections are often outdated and cannot meet prisoners' reading interests, sometimes there is a censorship and the free access to information is obstructed (e.g. through limited access to Internet), to name just a few biggest obstacles the prison libraries face. (Eze, 2015; Faletar Tanacković, *et al*, 2021)

Since in most of the countries in the world the majority of inmates have limited education or poor reading and writing skills (Campbell, 2006) the value of prison libraries in the rehabilitation process should not be overlooked by authorities. Unfortunately, it often is (Ings and Joslin, 2011; Šimunić, *et*

al, 2014; Folorunso and Folorunso, 2019). The importance of a prison library is most visible in its support of prisoners' reading experiences, especially the pleasure or recreational reading (Lehman, 2003), and there are a few studies that focus on prisoners' reading experience (Scott, 1979; Faletar Tanacković, et al., 2021;). However, for prison libraries to successfully fulfil their role(s), they must understand the prisoners' information needs that motivate their subsequent information behaviour.

In Croatia prison libraries were investigated in several studies but those studies provide insight into the collections and programming of these libraries (Horvat and Nebesny, 2004; De Villa, 2007; Šimunić, et al., 2016), and prisoners reading interests and library use experience (Faletar Tanacković, et al., 2021). In contrast, this paper focuses on information needs and information behaviour of prisoners, in order to contribute to the growing, but still insufficient, number of studies on this topic, particularly in Croatia.

Information needs of prisoners

There are many information theories and models that have been used to explain human information behaviour (Case, 2007; Naumer and Fisher, 2015) and for this paper the social constructionist theory is of particular interest. This social view theory suggests that information need is not static but dynamic and that it changes as one interacts with information and society at large (Hjørland, 1997). It states further that the information need is being socially situated and that, beside the individual needs there also exist the needs of a (social) group (Naumer and Fisher, 2015).

Studies of information behaviour and information needs of prisoners are studies that address the information behaviour, and consequently information needs, in a social context. One of the earliest authors to discover that information needs were influenced by social factors was Chatman (1999) in her research of information behaviour of US adult female prisoners. Chatman introduces the term '*small world*' (community of like-minded individuals who share the same social reality) when she describes the prison environment. New prisoners become integrated into the small-world of the prison by changing their belief-system and adopting prison language and customs. According to her, there are certain factors influencing the dissemination of information in prisons: *social norms* (codes of behaviour that dictate what behaviour is acceptable and what is not), *social types* (personal traits that distinguish one prisoner from others), and *worldview* (a collective set of beliefs shared by members who live within a particular small world). Chatman concludes that the small world of the prison contributes to the information impoverishment of prison inmates who fail to obtain the required information due to various social barriers. However, Chatman's study, although relevant for this paper, focuses more on information (seeking) behaviour of prisoners than on their information needs.

A number of studies across the world reveal that prisoners, in general, have an extremely low level of education and literacy (Wilhelmus, 1999; Mortensen, 2015; Sambo and Ojei, 2018; McInerney, 2019) and some other studies found that information related to education in general (including the information literacy) and particularly to vocational education are the most frequently expressed information needs in prisons (Visher and Lattimore, 2007; Tarzaan, et al., 2015; Scott, 2016; Rafedzi, Abrizah i Yu, 2016; Canning i Buchanan, 2019; Chandani, 2019). Other information needs include information related to health issues (Ford, 2009; Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Scott, 2016; Usman, et al., 2019) or legal and financial topics (Tarzaan, et al., 2015; Scott, 2016; Canning and Buchanan, 2019). Furthermore, studies also identified information needs related to prison life rules and routines (Ijiekhuamhen I Aiyebilehin, 2018; Canning and Buchanan, 2019). Other information needs may include: cultural activities, housing and family (Canning and Buchanan, 2019), personal development and morality (Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Ijiekhuamhen and Aiyebilehin, 2018; Sambo and Ojei, 2018), religious information and support (Tarzaan, et al., 2015), sports and recreation (Tarzaan, et al., 2015), information about family, relatives and friends (Sambo and Ojei, 2018), and current affairs in country and the world (Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Ijiekhuamhen and Aiyebilehin, 2018). Many studies found that all information relevant for integration into civil life after being released from prison (housing, employment, accommodation, etc.) is particularly important for prisoners (Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Scott, 2016; Canning and Buchanan, 2019).

International studies have established that the least preferred sources of information for prisoners are social workers (Scott, 2016), notice boards and/or information posters (Scott, 2016; Sambo and Ojei, 2018; Canning and Buchanan, 2019) and prison library (Scott, 2016; Ijiekhuamhen and Aiyebilehin, 2018; Sambo and Ojei, 2018; Canning and Buchanan, 2019).

There are many barriers for prisoners to obtain information within the prison setting. First of all, there is the low level of education and information literacy among prisoners (Scott, 2016; Canning and Buchanan, 2019; Onyebuchi, et al., 2020) and other socio-demographic features that prevent them from finding and retrieving the necessary information (Agarwal, 2018). Other factors that may prevent prisoners from accessing the necessary information may include the prison policy and negative attitudes of prison guards (Scott, 2016; Ijiekhuamhen and Aiyebilehin, 2018) or blocking of the Internet access (Wilhelmus, 1999; Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Ijiekhuamhen and Aiyebilehin, 2018; Bingman-Forshey and Gibbons, 2020). Many prisons also implement some sort of censorship, which further prevents prisoners from accessing the necessary information (Wilhelmus, 1999; Bingman-Forshey and Gibbons, 2020). There are also additional problems related to budgeting of prison libraries and consequently the type of materials that can be found in them (mostly outdated) (Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Ijiekhuamhen and Aiyebilehin, 2018; Sambo and Ojei, 2018; McInerney, 2019). Considering the goal of prison libraries, their role in the rehabilitation process of prisoners is undisputed. However, prison libraries are not always at the required level of development and cannot assist prisoners and/or meet their information needs in the degree they are supposed to do. That is true for many countries in the world such as Pakistan (Hussain, et al., 2018), Nigeria (Fasae and Folorunso, 2020), Turkey (Demir, 2011) or Croatia (Šimunić, et al., 2014; Faletar Tanacković, et al., 2021), to name just a few. However, it is necessary to point out that the quality of prison library services differ not only between more and lesser developed countries – there are variations in quality within one country, as well (Costanzo and Montecchi, 2011; Cramard, 2011; Ljødal and Ra, 2011).

When we think about information needs of prisoners we must not forget that those information needs must be met within the prison culture which is characterized by a high level of stress, fear, insecurity, and distrust (Demir, 2020). Canning and Buchanan (2019) believe that the low self-esteem and mistrust, combined with the problem of misinformation and rumours have the highest impact on prisoners' information behaviour. Prisoners tend to avoid asking for information from other prisoners as well as sharing the information with others (prisoners or prison guards).

This paper looks into the information needs of Croatian prisoners and some aspects of their information behaviour. It is one of the few studies that deals with the topic. As already mentioned, prison libraries in Croatia were the subject of several previous studies (Horvat and Nebesny, 2004; De Villa, 2007; Šimunić, et al., 2016; Faletar Tanacković, et al., 2022) and a few of them looked into the reading interests of inmates (De Villa, 2007; Faletar Tanacković, et al., 2021). However, those papers contain only implied information on information behaviour and information needs of incarcerated persons but do not focus on those topics. We believe that this paper will contribute to better understanding of prisoners' information needs and will help librarians in Croatian prisons adjust their collections and services to better meet the needs of their patrons.

Context of the Study

Prisons and prison libraries in Croatia

The rights of prisoners in Croatia are protected by national and international human rights documents, but the most significant documents are the European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms from 1950 and European Prison Rules from 1987. Also, Croatia is one of the European countries that signed and are bound by The European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (ECPT) that regularly visits all signatories and reports about prison conditions. Furthermore, the Croatian Bureau of Prisons and Probation acts in coordination with European standards and states that its mission is to ensure that prisoners served their sentence in a humane, safe and dignity-preserving environment. Their main goal

is to create environment that will foster prisoners' rehabilitation and prepare them for life after the release from prison (Vlada Republike Hrvatske, 2021).

According to Eurostat, the number of prisoners in Croatia per 100.000 inhabitants in the period 2017-2019 was 80,6. In comparison, the highest percentage of prisoners had Turkey (325.2) and the lowest Iceland (39.76) (Eurostat, 2021). Furthermore, according to Croatian Bureau of Statistics, the number of convicted and accused adult persons has been continually dropping (from approximately 24000 convicted in 2008 to approximately 13000 convicted persons in 2017) (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Croatian correctional facilities include six penitentiaries (where sentences longer than 6 months are served), 14 prisons, 2 correctional institutes for minors and one prison hospital. During 2020 in Croatia there were altogether 11607 prisoners of various type and forms whereas 4291 (37%) of them were adult prisoners and 20 (0.2%) juveniles (Vlada Republike Hrvatske, 2021). They were mostly male (95%) and serving prison sentence longer than six months (95%). The most represented age-group was between 30 and 40 (30%) and slightly half of them finished some sort of secondary school (51%). However, 48% had lower education (unfinished secondary school, finished only primary school, and there were even six prisoners who could not read, write or perform basic mathematical operations). Prisoners also suffered from addictions – 10% were addicted to narcotics and 7% to alcohol. During 2020 prisoners took part in various manifestations and activities – most of them were sports (football, table-tennis or basketball – 18%) or religion-related (17%), with a few cultural events (concerts, exhibitions – 0.2%). Prisoners' activities in 2020 were additionally limited by the outbreak of COVID-19 disease. However, correctional authorities made efforts to include prisoners in music, literary, journalistic or art workshops. In addition, prison libraries organized reading-aloud chapters from books and elected the 'best readers' in their prison communities.

Majority of correctional facilities in Croatia have prison libraries, but over the course of 15 years (from 2003 through 2018) almost no improvement was registered in relation to prison library management, their inadequate space allocation, insufficient funding, non-professional staffing, outdated and unresponsive collection and almost non-existent user services (Faletar Tanacković, et al., 2022). However, lately there have been some positive examples of library services and programmes aimed at prisoners (e.g. Book Night activities such as book and reading promotion, literary clubs and book discussions, guided reading activities, etc.) (Hrgović, 2012; Bagarić, 2018; Vlada Republike Hrvatske, 2021). Those programmes are often carried out as a cooperation of a prison library and some outside institution (public library, non-government association, etc.). In addition, minor criminal offenders sometimes serve their punishment (probation) in libraries (Vlada Republike Hrvatske, 2020).

This study confirmed the findings of earlier studies (Horvat and Nebesny, 2004; De Villa, 2007; Šimunić, et al., 2016) and stressed out the invisibility of prison libraries for prison administration. Although it is undisputed (among library community) that prison libraries have a significant rehabilitation role, no official Croatian government document (e.g., issued by the Croatian Bureau of Prisons and Probation or some other government agency) mentions the role or activity of prison libraries – even when it reports about an obvious prison library activity (e.g. the best reader competition). One of the reasons for this can be found in the fact that the empirical research about prison libraries is reported primarily to library and information community and very rarely finds its audience outside this narrow community (Finlay and Bates, 2018).

Prisoners' information behaviour and their information needs present one of the under-researched topics in the field of prison librarianship in Croatia. This paper therefore presents an important contribution to understanding of this particular problem internationally and can help prison librarians in Croatia tailor the services for their patrons according to their actual needs.

Study

Methodology and Research Questions

In this paper authors will present only a portion of results obtained in a large national study which aimed to explore the information needs and behaviour of incarcerated persons in Croatia, to understand their reading interests and habits, and to learn about their perception and use of the prison library. In this paper authors will report findings related only to the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the information needs of incarcerated persons in Croatia?

RQ2: How do they obtain the required information?

RQ3: What barriers do they face in this process?

In line with the established research ethics, respondents were guaranteed anonymity and were informed that they are free to stop participating in the study at any point. Also, during the months-long preparation phase of the study, regular communication with representatives from Central Office of Prison Administration at the Croatian Ministry of Justice was maintained. As a result, details about the method to be used for collection of data were agreed upon and questions to be included in the survey were approved. Since it proved highly complicated to obtain the permission and arrange for the presence of researchers in prisons during the study, and it would also be too much a financial and time burden for researchers to visit all prisons scattered across the country, it was decided to mail the print questionnaires to prisons. Authors aimed to reach approximately 30% of the population in penitentiaries where prisoners were imprisoned for a long-term period (over six months). Therefore, the number of surveys sent to each penitentiary was calculated based upon the total number of prisoners in each studied penitentiary. This data was provided by the Central Office of Prison Administration at the Croatian Ministry of Justice. The number of surveys sent is as follows: 335 surveys to high security penitentiaries (Glina – 135 and Lepoglava - 200), 225 surveys to medium security penitentiaries (Turopolje -30, Lipovica Popovača – 45, and Požega - 170) and 40 surveys to minimum security penitentiaries (Valtura). A total of 620 questionnaires were mailed to all six penitentiaries in which inmates were imprisoned for a long-term period (over six months), and which have different levels of security (maximum, medium, minimum). Packages with questionnaires were accompanied by a supporting letter from the Ministry of Justice and instructional letter drafted by researchers. An official letter from the Ministry invited administration in selected prisons to facilitate the study, while researchers provided detailed instructions on how to conduct the study: print survey was to be distributed by prison officers to inmates during a lunch time. A total of 30% of prison population (male and female) in selected prisons was included in the study and a total of 504 valid questionnaires were returned (response rate of 81%).

Questionnaire consisted of 37 questions of different types: open, closed and Likert-type questions. In order to obtain answers to the set research questions, survey questions were grouped into five thematic sections. In the first section respondents had to provide their demographic data (gender, age, education level, literacy skills, library membership and working status before imprisonment, sentence time), information needs (type and motivation), information behaviour (information sources, barriers, information avoidance), reading interests and habits, prison library perception and use. The data was analysed with the help of statistical software SPSS and statistical differences were tested with Chi-square tests.

Findings

General characteristics of respondents

Out of 504 respondents, 87% were male and 13% female which is fairly close to the general ratio of male and female prisoners in Croatian correctional institutions. The majority of respondents fall into the age group 26-35 (36%), have a high school degree (67%) and were employed before imprisonment

(52%). Educational level of respondents corresponds only partially with general educational level of Croatia's population: the studied population has a higher education level than the general population. For example, similarities are noticed in relation to the high school degree: the largest portion of both country's population (ca 46%) and of studied prison population (67%) has a high school degree. However, in general population there are far more people with elementary school certificate (ca 30%) or no formal schooling (ca 13%) than in our sample (4% and 1% respectively) where respondents with higher educational degree outnumber excessively those with lower educational level. Respondents reported that at least once in their lifetime they had a library card (74%). On average, respondents were sentenced to a prison sentence of 5.18 years. (Table 1)

Table 1. Respondents' demographic characteristics

		N	%
Gender	Male	437	86.9
	Female	66	13.1
Age	18-25	41	8.2
	26-35	182	36.5
	36-45	146	26.3
	46-60	98	19.6
	60+	32	6.4
Education	No formal schooling	5	1
	Elementary school	72	4.3
	High school	336	66.9
	College or university	89	17.7
Working status	Student	15	3
	Employed	257	51.5
	Unemployed	174	34.9
	Retired	53	10.6
Previous public library membership	Yes	372	73.8
	No	132	26.2

When asked to assess their reading and writing skills (in Croatian), respondents assessed them as very good (Mean 4.58 and 4.47 respectively) but their computer skills as good (Mean 3.31). While large majority of respondents (73%) revealed that they did not participate in any educational or training programmes while imprisoned, 7% respondents are enrolled in some kind of professional training, 6% respondents are taking computer classes and 5% are taking basic literacy classes (writing, reading).

Information needs

When asked about their information needs, the largest majority of respondents reported that they require information about the life in penitentiary, in particular about prison rules and their rights while incarcerated (56%). This is closely followed by information about their family members and friends (51%). The third type of required information refers to life-after-prison in general (49%), employment upon release (40%) and finances (how to get financial support after release, how much does the life on the outside cost etc.) (31%). Almost a third wants to learn more about sports (33%), health (30%), and legal resources (legal sources, court cases and practices, legislation etc.) (29%). Less than a quarter needs information about education and professional training (23%) and current events in Croatia and in the world (22%). Interestingly, only 20% require information about their court case. Information regarding culture (books, theatre shows, movies etc.) is needed by 19% respondents. A total of 16% respondents require information about religion and 78 (16%) about popular psychology and self-help (how to deal with stress, depression etc.). Least often respondents require information about celebrities and popular culture (9%). Something else was marked by 6% respondents and they indicated the following information needs: psychiatric help, starting their own business, judiciary system, art, new drugs etc. (Table 2)

Table 2. Information needs

	N	%
Life in penitentiary	284	56.3
Family and friends	255	50.6
Life after prison	249	49.4
Employment upon release	199	39.5
Sports	165	32.7
Finances	158	31.3
Health	151	30
Legal resources	146	29
Education and training	117	23.2
Current events	109	21.6
Own court case	100	19.8
Culture	94	18.7
Religion	82	16.3
Popular psychology	78	15.5
Celebrities and popular culture	44	8.7
Something else	29	5.8

Statistically significant difference has been established in relation to gender. While female respondents require more frequently information regarding life in penitentiary ($\chi^2 = 4.504$, $p=0.034$), male respondents require the following information more frequently: information about their own court case ($\chi^2 = 7.221$, $p=0.007$), education and training ($\chi^2 = 10.470$, $p=0.001$), religion ($\chi^2 = 5.671$, $p=0.017$) and sports ($\chi^2 = 14.505$, $p=0.000$). (Table 3)

Table 3. Information needs by gender

	Male	Female	χ^2	p
Life in penitentiary	36,4%	50,0%	4,504	0,034
Sports	35,7%	12,1%	14,505	0,000
Education and training	25,6%	7,6%	10,470	0,001
Own court case	21,7%	7,6%	7,221	0,007
Religion	17,6%	6,1%	5,671	0,017

Majority of respondents required information in order to learn something new that they did not know before (63%). About half needed information in order to stay abreast with news (54%), to understand something better (54%) and to amuse or entertain themselves (53%). A total of 43% looked for unspecific information in order to pass time and 18% in order to have topics to talk about with other inmates. Only about a quarter required information in order to solve a particular problem 21%, and to make a decision 19%. Least respondents looked for information in order to decrease feeling of insecurity 10% and for educational purposes such as learning for exams 8%. A total of 3% respondents listed some other reasons which triggered their information need, such as increase of knowledge, personal satisfaction, out of habit. (Table 4)

Table 4. Reasons behind information need

	N	%
To learn something new	317	62.9
Be informed	271	53.8
To understand better	270	53.6
For pleasure	269	53.4
To pass time	218	43.3
To solve a problem	104	20.6
To make a decision	97	19.2
To talk with others	91	18.1
To decrease feeling of insecurity	49	9.7
Education	43	8.5
Something else	15	3

Statistically significant difference was identified in relation to gender. Male respondents require information more often in order to solve a specific problem ($\chi^2 = 6.217$, $p=0.013$), to understand something better ($\chi^2 = 7.626$, $p=0.006$), and to have topics to talk about with other inmates ($\chi^2 = 5.669$, $p=0.017$). Female respondents require information more often for pleasure and amusement ($\chi^2 = 4.301$, $p=0.038$). (Table 5)

Table 5. Reasons behind information need by gender

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
To solve a problem	22.4%	9.1%	6.217	0.013
To understand better	56.1%	37.9%	7.626	0.006
To talk with others	19.7%	7.6%	5.669	0.017
For pleasure	51.5%	65.2%	4.301	0.038

Although almost all respondents 96% reported that their needs for information are larger now than before their incarceration, when asked to assess how well their current information needs are met, 34% respondents revealed that their information needs are not met. Only 23% reported that their information needs are met. Majority of respondents (44%) indicated that their information needs are neither met nor unmet (Mean 2.85).

Information behaviour

Information sources

In most cases, respondents seek required information from their family members and friends (60%). Respondents ask for information far more frequently from counsellors and officers at the correctional treatment department (58%) than from prison security guards (38%). Slightly less respondents ask for information other inmates (36%) or their lawyers (31%). About a third looks for required information in books and magazines (31%), and 16% searches the Internet. Only 5% respondents ask information from prison librarians. A total of 3% respondents reported that they look for information in some other ways but they did not explain how. (Table 6)

Table 6. Information sources

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Family and friends	305	60.5
Correctional treatment department officers	292	57.9
Prison security guards	192	38.1
Inmates	181	35.9
Books and magazines	158	31.3
Lawyer	156	31
Internet	80	15.9
Prison librarian	24	4.8
Something else	17	3.4

Statistical analysis identified that male respondents turn more frequently to other inmates when looking for information than women ($\chi^2 = 14.075$, $p = 0.000$), and that they look for required information in books and magazines more often than female respondents ($\chi^2 = 4.839$, $p = 0.028$). On the other hand, female respondents seek information more frequently from officers from correctional treatment department ($\chi^2 = 13.655$, $p = 0.000$). (Table 7)

Table 7. Information sources by gender

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Inmates	38.9%	15.2%	14.075	0.000
Books and magazines	33.2%	19.7%	4.839	0.028
Correctional treatment department officers	54.7%	78.8%	13.655	0.000

Barriers

Respondents face many barriers when looking for information. Most frequently they report the lack of Internet access as their largest problem (52%). A total of 25% indicate that their problem lies in the fact that there is no place to look for information and that information sources that are available to them (both persons and print sources) do not contain the information they need (19%). A total of 16% reports that prison officers do not wish to give them the required information even if they have it. Respondents do not know who to address or where to look for the information (15%), and they feel that nobody cares about their problems and need for information (15%). A total of 11% respondents do not know how to ask for information they need, and 9% do not know where to look for information. While 4% respondents reported that they do not face any barriers when finding required information, a total of 10% respondents indicated something else, and one respondents described difficulties in acquiring books form outside of the prison. (Table 8)

Table 8. Information barriers

	<i>N</i>	%
No Internet access	262	52
No place to look for information	128	25.4
Available sources do not contain the required information	98	19.4
Prison officers do not wish to give information	78	15.5
Do not know who to ask	77	15.3
Nobody cares about their problems	75	14.9
Do not know how to ask	57	11.3
Something else	48	9.5
Do not know where to look for information	45	8.9
No barriers	21	4.17

Statistically significant difference has been established in relation to gender. Male respondents indicated more often the following barriers: not knowing how to ask for information ($\chi^2 = 5.211$, $p=0.022$), nobody cares about our problems and information needs ($\chi^2 = 6.433$, $p=0.011$), prison officers do not wish to give them the information they need ($\chi^2 = 11.351$, $p=0.001$). (Table 9)

Table 9. Information barriers by gender

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Do not know how to ask	12.6%	3.0%	5,211	0,022
Nobody cares about their problems	16.5%	4.5%	4.839	0.028
Prison officers do not wish to give information	17.6%	1.5%	13.655	0.000

Avoiding information

The largest portion of respondents (29%) reported to avoid negative information about their case in the court. This is followed by family problems (28%) and life outside of the correctional institution (15%). A total of 3% respondents avoid information about other inmates (their problems and prison experience). 19% respondents reported that the avoid something other information. While one respondent (0.2%) described that they avoid all information and 2% avoid information that they do not need. Several respondents reported also that they avoid information about their marriage, family and children, friends, their health, their business outside of the prison, current events in the world etc. A total of 13% respondents revealed that they do not avoid any information because they want to know everything, no matter how negative or bad the information might be. (Table 10)

Table 10. Information avoidance

	N	%
Negative information about their case in court	145	28.8
Family problems	139	27.6
Life outside the prison	75	14.9
Information about other prisoners	16	3.2
Something else	96	19
Nothing	67	13.3

Respondents were also asked if they ever stopped looking for some information, and to describe the context if they do. Almost half of the respondents (46%) reported that they often stop looking for required information when they realize that obtained information cannot change anything, and additional 12% think that new information can only worsen the situation. A total of 2% revealed that they often stop looking for information they need when they realize that they cannot get accurate and timely information since they are in prison. One respondent (0.2%) often stops looking for information because they are lazy, and one (0.2%) because they fear bad news. A total of 19% believe that inmates who constantly ask questions are perceived negatively.

Statistically significant difference was identified in relation to gender. Male respondents stop looking for information far more often than their female counterparts because they do not know where to look for information ($\chi^2 = 5.041$, $p=0.025$).

Concluding discussion

The study presented in this paper examined information behaviour and needs of Croatian prisoners. The study revealed that almost all incarcerated persons that participated in this study have a greater need for information while in prison than they had before incarceration. However, about a third revealed that their current information needs were not met (RQ1).

Respondents in this study were persons who stayed in prison for longer time periods (over 5 years) and they experienced the need for information for a variety of purposes: to learn something new, to stay abreast with news, to understand something better or amuse themselves. They also need information in order to solve a particular problem or make a decision. Similar to other studies (e.g. Scott, 2016; Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Sambo and Ojei, 2018; Ijiekhuamhen and Aiyebelehin, 2018; Canning and Buchanan, 2019), the information they require, in most cases is related to the life in correctional institution, their family and life after the release (RQ1). Similarly, the information respondents tend to avoid most often is also information related to family problems and life outside of the correctional institution. However, the most avoided information is negative information about their case in the court. Information needs of our sample were, obviously, socially constructed because they were strongly modified and dependent on their immediate environment and social setting,

Although they look for required information in different places, they prefer to use personal sources. When looking for information, more than half of respondents turn to people they trust most: their family and friends. It is interesting to see that they turn more often for information to officers from the treatment department than to other prisoners. Similar to some other studies that found that the prison libraries were unfrequently used as sources of information (Scott, 2016; Ijiekhuamhen and Aiyebelehin, 2018; Sambo and Ojei, 2018; Canning and Buchanan, 2019), less than 5% of respondents in this study asked for information they need from the prison librarians (RQ2). To some degree this is not surprising because prison libraries in Croatia are poorly stocked and they do not employ professional librarians. The lack of professional staff in prison libraries, specially trained to work with incarcerated persons as a special user group, is obviously the biggest disadvantage of prison libraries in Croatia. An engaged and enthusiastic librarian, trained in catering for prison inmates, would find ways to overcome the problems such as lack of appropriate materials or staff through close cooperation with local public libraries, or even other prison libraries in Croatia. Unprofessional staff in majority of Croatian prison libraries at the moment need an intensive education and training before they can raise the level of service of the present prison libraries.

The respondents identified the lack of Internet access as the most important barrier to finding required information. This is followed by a vast lack of information sources and a place (i. e. library) where they could look for needed information. It is alarming to notice that significant portion of respondents (about 15%) revealed that they feel like nobody cares about their problems (and subsequent information needs) and that prison officers often do not wish to give them the required information even if they have it (RQ3).

Presented research findings evidence the missed opportunity of prison libraries in Croatia to fulfil their purpose and meet the information needs of long-term prisoners. Reasons for that are manifold and are dealt with elsewhere, but as a consequence Croatian prison libraries do not have any significant influence on rehabilitation of prisoners. As presented in this paper, prison libraries in Croatia are faced with numerous problems that cannot be overcome in a short period of time. Croatian library community (particularly Croatian Library Association and Croatian Library Board) should ensure closer cooperation with the Croatian Bureau of Prisons and Probation. Prison librarians, as well as selected prison officers, should take part in continuous educational workshops about the specifics of work with incarcerated persons. In addition, the Croatian Bureau of Prisons and Probation should be alerted to the rehabilitative role of public libraries and their programming through which newly released prisoners might acquire new skills and competences, and consequently more easily integrate into Croatian society. It is therefore necessary to motivate Croatian Library Association and Croatian Prison Administration to address this problem jointly and provide adequate support to Croatian prison libraries so that they could live up to their full potential.

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