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## Juvenile Prisoners Well-Being and implications for Prison Practice

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**Abstract**

*Background:* Juvenile prisoners in Germany are prone for recidivism. Self-Determination Theory offers an explanation, as it serves as a mean to explain prosocial behavior and social integration, but also human malevolence and recidivism. Accordingly, there are three basic needs referred to as autonomy, competence and relatedness which constitute the prerequisites of well-being. Well-being refers to optimal psychological experience and functioning. In prison, the needs seem difficult to fulfill. Self-Determination Theory postulates that unfulfilled needs will result in low well-being, leading to poor adaptation to prison life and a higher probability of recidivism. If the needs are fulfilled, prisoners experience increased well-being which can serve as a mean to decrease recidivism. Juvenile sentence and rehabilitation may be improved through means aiming to intensify prisoners basic need satisfaction and well-being.

*Objective:* The objective was to better understand well-being of juvenile prisoners and to generate implications for well-being increasing measures.

*Method:* Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 juvenile prisoners. Participants were asked 1. Whether they perceive the three basic needs as fulfilled, 2. Which prerequisites they need in order to experience well-being, 3. How they assess their current well-being in prison compared to perceived well-being before and expected well-being after detention, 4. If there is a training interest to increase well-being and which topics such a training should cover. Additionally, prompting cards were used to explore sources of well-being and possible training contents; well-being was examined by a Likert-Scale. Interviews were audio-recorded and analyzed by one coder both deductively and inductively. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze probing card choices and Likert-Scale ratings.

*Results:* The outcomes showed that: 1. Of all three needs, it only appeared that autonomy was restricted. 2. Prisoners most frequently named prerequisite of well-being was categorized as relatedness, followed by regular life. 3. The majority of the prisoners perceived their well-being as increased in prison compared to before, and expected it to further increase with the forthcoming release. 4. Prisoners were interested in a training, covering the topics learning and education.

*Conclusion:* The results showed that prisoners need fulfillment and well-being are satisfactory. However, additionally steps to increase well-being are advisable. Prison practice should enable prisoners to experience relatedness, initiate a regular life and improve their education. Besides, possible frustrations of prisoners' future expectations should be anticipated.

*Keywords:* Self-Determination Theory, Well-being, Prison, Course of well-being, Well-Being Training, Recidivism, Qualitative, Interview, Content Analysis

## **Introduction**

### *The role of the prison context*

Approximately four million euro are spent in Germany each year for the execution of prison sentences (Maelicke, 2015). Most prisoners become delinquent in their teenage years for the first time (Meier, 2015) and generate enormous costs through subsequent offences. In 2006, German federal law decided that the juvenile justice system should ultimately provide juvenile delinquents the possibility for social reintegration as well as to stay crime free (Meyer, 2016). Nevertheless, juvenile sentences without probation still come along with a probability of recidivism of 70 percent (Jehle, Albrecht, Hohmann-Fricke & Tetal, 2013).

The sociologist Goffman labels a prison a *Total Institution*, as it influences every life domain of the inmates and presents a closed system. The life in this closed system restricts the sovereignty and privacy of the inmates, to provide safety and order for the prisoners, the prison personal and the society as a whole (Goffman, 1968). The daily routine of the inmates is externally controlled and inmates are unable to move freely. The inmates stay in the prison is involuntary. Activities and assistance by the prison staff is perceived as enforced and imposed. The experiences of inmates of German juvenile prisons in relation to Goffman's construct of Total Institution have been examined by Bereswill (2006). Especially teenagers suffer under the separation with their caregivers and the outside world. Furthermore, high-quality relationships are difficult to attain in a prison setting (De Claire & Dixon, 2017). According to research (Greve, Enzmann & Hosser, 2001), the prison environment is unfavorable for personal development such as learning, because stimulations and experiences from the outside world are missing. Positive learning experiences would be important, as inmates frequently grew up in underprivileged and less educated environments.

In the environment, the required reintegration seems difficult to impossible, as illustrated by rates of recidivism (Jelled, Albrecht, Hohmann-Fricke & Tetal, 2013). Despite the intended rehabilitation of young offenders which is aimed by the prison sentence, delinquent behavior occurs both within the prison and after release. According to Ryan and Deci (2000a) there are three basic needs, which can explain human alienation and malevolence, but also individual growth and well-being taking the individual's environment into account. These needs will be discussed in the next section within the theoretical framework of Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory.

*Self-Determination Theory*

Ryan and Deci (2000a), state that delinquent behavior may be explained using Self-Determination Theory. They assume that people have three inherent basic needs: *autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness*. If these needs are fulfilled, people experience well-being, are more likely to show prosocial behavior (Keyes, 2010) and integrate “themselves into larger social structures” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p.229). In contrast, suppressed needs predict low well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000), high probability of recidivism and poor adaptation to the environment (van der Lana & Eichelsheim, 2013). In the light of the mostly unsuccessful reintegration of juvenile offenders into the structures of society, a closer look on the needs of Self-Determination Theory seems necessary.

The first need that Deci and Ryan defined as an essential nutriment for individual growth and well-being is autonomy. Autonomy refers to the sense that one’s activities “are endorsed by or congruent with the self” (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe & Ryan, 2000). The need for autonomy is not fulfilled if one feels pressured or controlled to display a certain form of behavior. The second nutriment in the Self-Determination Theory is the need competence. People experience competence when they effectively obtain desired effects and outcomes (Reis et al., 2000). More explicit, competence is defined as ability to successfully achieve of a developmental task “salient in a given age period in a given place and time in society” (Graber, Nicolls, Lynn, Brooks-Gunn & Botvin, 2006). The contrary is the experience of incompetence and ineffectiveness. Finally, relatedness is essential, referring to the human need to be close and connected with persons considered personally important (Reis et al., 2000). If the need for relatedness is not fulfilled, this will result in feeling alienated or ostracized (Sheldon & Filak, 2008). In the context of a prison sentence these three basic needs can be assumed difficult to fulfill, with likely negative effects on the inmate’s well-being and the goal to stay crime-free (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Consequently, it is important to understand well-being and its manifestations. In the following section, well-being will be outlined.

*Well-being*

Well-being constitutes another component of Self-Determination Theory. It refers to optimal psychological experience and functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2006). One of the main characteristics of Self-Determination Theory is the belief that people have the natural tendency towards well-being, and therefore the preposition to actively meet the necessary needs. Ogloff and Davis

(2004) pledge to enhance individual's well-being to show ways of living that will prove more satisfying than a criminal lifestyle.

Traditionally, well-being has been categorized from either the hedonic or the eudemonic perspective. According to the hedonic perspective, people's main objective is to experience as much pleasure as possible while avoiding any painful experience (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002). Among others, Ryff & Singer (2013) argue for a different perspective on well-being. They criticize the vulgar nature of this form of well-being, making the human slave of his desires. Instead, they highlight a more eudemonic approach, emphasizing to live according to values – to do what is worth doing. Self-Determination Theory refers to the eudemonic view of well-being. However, both perspectives of well-being are a matter of interest as there is a gap in knowledge about prisoners' accounts of prerequisites for the experience of well-being. Furthermore, the question was whether and how the prison effects the course of well-being in prisoners. Therefore, it is essential to know how the prisoners assess their well-being in contrast to their well-being before prison and their expectations about their well-being after release. It has to be considered that time plays a central role in the assessment of well-being. Robinson and Ryff's study (1999) shows that well-being is perceived as low in the past, present well-being is assessed in the middle range and that future expectations are characterized by unrealistic optimism and high well-being.

To facilitate the currently unsuccessful rehabilitation of the offenders, continuous well-being is necessary (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Accordingly, programs aiming to prevent recidivism should take Self-Determination Theory and the fulfilment of the three basic needs into account. In the following section, German juvenile justice and the current point of research concerning need-supportive conditions in rehabilitation will be discussed.

#### *Juvenile sentence and rehabilitation*

Juvenile sentence is the hardest punishment in the German juvenile law. According to Goerdeler and Polähne (2007) the primary reason for imprisonment is to deter potential offenders by strengthening the belief in the existing state of law. From this point of view, it seems more reasonable to design the prison as a place where the needs of the inmates cannot be fulfilled. This seems to be the case, as a large body of literature showed that the prisonisation process destroys the inmates' well-being (van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013; Falardeau, Morin & Bellemare, 2015). However, with low well-being inmate's adjustment into society after release seems not promising. Instead there is a high probability of recidivism (Ogloff & Davis,

2004). This increases the chance of criminal reoccurrence with negative implications for victims and offenders. Increased well-being however has positive short-term consequences for inmates and prison administration, as well as positive societal consequences in long-term (van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013). Perhaps, deterrence and successful reintegration do not have to contradict. Instead, conditions could be organized punishing delinquent behavior consequently, but nevertheless facilitating positive developmental tendencies. Effects of several internal programs aiming to increase inmate's well-being with regard to their needs are discussed subsequently.

The possibilities for autonomy are restricted in a prison setting. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to increase inmates' feelings of autonomy and well-being, such as intensified interaction with the prison personal (van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013). Other research showed that a greater extent of daily activities has a positive effect on the inmates. Activities such as work, sport, education or recreational activities predict feelings of autonomy (van der Kaap-Deeder, Audenaert, Vandeveld, Soenens, Van Mastrigt, Mabbe & Vansteenkiste, 2017) what in turn leads to well-being (Liebling, 2004) and decrease the chances for recidivism (Itelano, 2016; Bouwers, 2015). Furthermore, possibilities to experience competence are limited in the prison environment. Inmates' involvement in educational and work-related programs however can increase inmates' feelings of competence and additionally decrease the chance of recidivism (Steurer, Smith & Tracy, 2001; Crocker & Park, 2003, 2004). Taking the multidimensional sources for a sense of competence into account, it becomes necessary to investigate competence enhancing interventions deviating from common educational and work-related programs. Cohen's research (2012) for example illustrated that prisoners taking part in a prison community choir generates positive effects. Beside prisoners increased sense of competence, rising well-being and simplified social reintegration are the consequence. Finally, relatedness seems difficult to fulfill in prison. Cohens (2012) research demonstrated the positive effect of social relationships on prisoners. The most important bonds for juvenile prisoners are their parents (Carcedo, López, Orgaz, Toth & Fernández-Rouco, 2008). De Claire and Nixon's (2017) reviewed the effects of family visits on well-being and recidivism. It showed that social contact to relatives has positive effects on well-being and decreases offending behavior in general. Finally, McKinney and Cotronea's study (2011) shows that applying elements of the Self-Determination Theory is a way to develop effective correctional school programs.

To sum up, the results of the studies discussed above together illustrate that prison programs aimed at meeting the basic needs are a favorable way to increase well-being while reducing the likelihood of recidivism. Nonetheless, there is a knowledge gap about inmates'

well-being and the fulfilment of the three basic needs in the group of particularly relapse-prone juvenile delinquents. This study incorporates newly gained knowledge for thought-provoking impulses to prospectively implement measures which aim to increase the prisoner's well-being as a mean to prevent recidivism.

### **Current Research**

Several aspects of prison environments may help to reduce the negative effects of confinement on well-being, and thus on recidivism. Therefore, it is important to investigate if it is possible to create prisons that are more suitable to meet the needs of inmates. This study intends to understand if the prison context allows the inmates to fulfill their basic needs, namely: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Besides, is it necessary to understand the inmates' prerequisites for the experience of well-being in prison. Moreover, it is important to comprehend how prisoners assess their well-being in prison in contrast to their well-being before and after imprisonment. Finally, it is examined if inmates would be interested in a training to increase their well-being; and if so, which thematic areas the training should cover. Consequently, the research questions can be formulated as followed:

- 1. How do juvenile prisoners experience the fulfilment of the needs autonomy, competence and relatedness in prison?**
- 2. According to the prisoners, which are the prerequisites for the improvement of their well-being?**
- 3. How do prisoners assess their current well-being in prison, compared to their perceived well-being before and expected well-being after prison?**
- 4. Are juvenile prisoners interested in a Well-Being Training and which topics should such a training cover?**

## Method

### *Participants*

To investigate the well-being of juvenile prisoners, a qualitative study was conducted. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they are the method of choice in order to facilitate individual sense making (Smith & Osborne, 2003). The sample (N=15) consisted of 15 males from lower Saxony, Germany with ages ranging from 14 to 21 years (M=14.13, SD=1.38). This age group is chosen because of their current experience in a prison setting, depicting a juvenile prisoners' perspective. The sample consisted of convicted juvenile offenders who received prison sentences ranging from 1 up to 4 years (M= 2.27). The nationality of the participants is German. They were sentenced because of either one, or a combination of following crimes; violence (N=9), thievery (N=8), sexual offence (N=4), fraud (N=4) or others (N=4). Most of the participants do not have a school-leaving certificate (N=10), some of them have a lower secondary school leaving-certificate (N=4) and one of them has a special school-leaving certificate (N=1).

### *Procedure*

Participants were asked to take part in an interview held by the prison psychotherapist, a familiar face in the prison. Participation in the research was voluntary and it was clarified that the data remains confidential and without consequences on penalty and treatment. The prison psychotherapist emphasized the importance to create a natural conversation during the data gathering. This was the reason why the psychotherapist, who is already well known to the participants, took over the conduction of the interviews and to forego audio recordings. Instead, the psychotherapist's notes served as the data basis. The interviews were organized by the three topics Self-Determination, well-being and a Well-Being Training (*Appendix A.*) and were developed in collaboration with a supervising expert. They were hold in German, transcribed and afterwards translated to English.

Firstly, it was examined if the basic needs of the participants were met. Open questions were used, such as "How do you experience a feeling of control in your life?" to query the need autonomy. If the need for competence was met was addressed by the questions "Is there something you are especially good in? Do others know? Can you use or improve your talent?" Moreover, the questions „How satisfied are you with relations you have? Are there people within prison you get along with? Are you in good contact with people outside of prison?“ were used to understand if the need for relatedness was met. After the open questions concerning

each need were examined, detail orientated questions, such as “why, when, what, how” were used to clarify the origins of fulfilled and unfulfilled needs.

Subsequently, prisoners’ well-being was examined through four open questions, such as *What does well-being mean for you?* and *“In which moment do you have a sense of well-being?”* Further questions were “What makes you feel good?” and “What do you need to feel good?” In addition, the researcher and a collaborating expert prepared eleven probing cards referring to potential sources of well-being. The cards comprised sources of well-being such as: learning and education, money and possession (Table 1.). Moreover, a blank card was provided, allowing the participants to relate to a personal source of well-being not corresponding with the prepared cards. Participants were asked to choose three of the cards they considered as personal relevant. Subsequently, they were asked to clarify their choice of cards by detail orientated questions as stated above.

Moreover, participants should assess the development of their well-being. To do so, they should rate their well-being prior prison, during the imprisonment and their expected well-being subsequent to their release. Well-being was evaluated making use of a Likert-scale. The values had a range between zero to ten, whereby zero represented low well-being and ten high well-being. This was explained to the participants in comparison to a ladder, as presented by following opening sentence: “Here you can see the picture of a ladder. The highest rung of the ladder ten represents the best possible life you can imagine. The lowest rung of the ladder zero represents the worst possible life you can imagine.” Subsequent to each rating, the participants were asked concerning their well-being before, currently and after prison. The perception of the participants well-being before prison was examined by the question “On which rung were you when before the arrest, concerning your personal well-being?” Afterwards, participants current well-being was queried in the following way “On which rung are you in the moment, concerning your personal well-being?” Finally, the expectations about their prospective well-being after release were explored by the question “On which rung do you think you will be after prison, concerning your personal well-being?” To specify their ratings, the first two ratings were followed by the open question “Why don't you assess your well-being higher/lower?” and the rating concerning the prospective well-being by the open question “What are your future expectations regarding your well-being?” Finally, the possibilities for a Well-Being Training were elaborated. Firstly, participants were asked whether there is an interest in a Well-Being Training. Afterwards, the eleven cards used to explore personal sources of well-being, including the blank card for individual ideas, were presented again to examine potential contents of this

training (Table 1.). Participants were asked to choose the three most interesting cards from the possible training contents.

Table 1.

*Prompting cards to explore sources of well-being and possible training contents*

Card Label
Relations with others
Learning and education
Talents and hobbies
Positive feelings, joy and fun
Religious belief
Inner satisfaction
Positive thinking
Goals and values
Friendliness and gratitude
Sport and movement
Money and possession

*Analysis*

The aim of this work was to look in-depth at what well-being means for prisoners. Besides prisoners own accounts, their well-being was examined in the theoretical framework of the Self-Determination Theory. In order to do so, a content analysis was conducted. A content analysis enables to work on the material accompanied by theory and facilitates to go through the material while developing coding categories emerging from the data (Mayring, 2015). The iterative process applied in content analysis summarizes the text and its underlying meaning by reorganizing it in the coding categories within a system. The system with its categories, subcategories, category definitions and examples constitutes the latent meaning in the analyzed text (Mayring, 2015). Moreover, a content analyses aims to inform about the material generating participant and the situation surrounding the data collection. The reader should be able to re-create the context of the interview. In this study, a combination of inductive and deductive content analyses was used. The analysis started in order to become familiar with the transcripts and to create a first impression about the data.

Subsequently, participants' answers concerning Self-Determination Theory were analyzed. The participants' answers were coded based on the needs autonomy, competence and relatedness of Self-Determination Theory, which presented the deductive part of the content analysis. Afterwards, the inductive part of the content analysis was applied to participants' answers regarding their personal prerequisites for well-being. Therefore, answers to the open questions about personal well-being and to the detail orientated questions following the prisoners probing card selection were analyzed. Concerning this research question, the probing cards were only used to encourage the participants to start reporting about their well-being. Participants' answers were examined in relation to topics which seemed to be relevant for the participants. Topics with similar meanings and major overlaps were integrated or, in case of too large numbers, organized in sub-themes according to the principle of parsimony. While some categories had strong overlaps with Self-Determination Theory, others had similarities with the probing cards and again others were completely new. Themes and categories of both content analyses were discussed with a supervisor and if necessary adjusted until consensus was reached.

In addition, participants' perceptions of their well-being before prison, currently in prison and after prison were analyzed. Their answers on the Likert-Scale ranged between zero and ten and were each converted individually. The outcomes represented the relative course of participants individual well-being, displayed as increase, decrease or remaining constant. For example, ratings of a prisoner assessing his well-being before prison as nine, then in prison as five and thereafter as seven resulted in a course of well-being as followed: decrease, increase. The different patterns emerging from the rating were grouped. Accordingly, answers to the open questions following each rating were attributed to the different patterns. For each pattern, a stereotype answer was presented and in case of conflicting answers these were presented as well. Afterwards, participants answers concerning the Well-being Training were examined. In this descriptive step, firstly the general training interest of the prisoners was analyzed. Afterwards, the possible training contents were examined calculating the frequencies of the card selection among all prisoners. In the end of the analytic process a comparison between the emerging categories and descriptive data was conducted and conclusions about overarching topics were drawn. The overarching topics with suitable quotations are presented subsequently in the results section.

## Results

In the next section, prisoners' assessment of well-being in the prison context is presented, starting with prisoners' perception concerning the fulfilment of the basic needs autonomy, relatedness and competence. Subsequently, prisoners' prerequisites for the experience of well-being are illustrated. In addition, the expected course of prisoners' well-being due to imprisonment is presented. Finally, inmates' suggestions regarding a potential Well-Being Training are outlined.

### *Prisoners' perception of autonomy, relatedness and competence*

*Autonomy.* The results showed that the fulfilment of the need for autonomy is perceived as severely limited to non-existent by all inmates. When asked, if inmates experience a feeling of control about their life, one of them mentioned that *"I feel like I'm not really in charge of my own life at the moment. Here, the officials determine what I do and they decide what happens."* This statement corresponded to the answers of all the interviewees. Four inmates however stated that their autonomy is severely limited, but that they can decide about certain aspects of prison life. Being asked if he feels to have control of his life, this detainee answered *"No, but somehow yes. You can make your choice of profession and school here. But you can't decide on your own when the door closes or where you go. Most of the time, the officers tell me what to do."* Under these conditions, the need for autonomy is obviously not met. Nevertheless, one of the inmates emphasized the positive aspects of being controlled, as illustrated by following answer about restricted autonomy: *"that's a good thing, otherwise everyone would walk all over the officers."*

*Competence.* The results showed that prisoners perceived their need for competence to be met to a certain degree. All except one prisoner named something they thought to be especially good at, what they described as their talent. The attributions of competence were versatile, answers ranged from being technically talented to pedagogical qualities, as illustrated by following quote: *"Well, I'm good with kids. My sister knows that; she trusts me to be caring and take care about her children. Nevertheless, I can improve this talent even further."* Only one of the interviewees indicated to not have experienced competence at all. To illustrate his statement served following quote *"I'm not good in anything, there aren't examples coming to my mind."*

*Relatedness.* The results showed that the prisoners perceived their need for relatedness to be met to a certain degree. Relatedness played a central role for the inmates, and almost all stated that they have people they feel close and connected to. The prisoners made a clear distinction between relationships in and relationships outside prison. All of the prisoners reported to get

along well with fellow inmates and seven prisoners declared to have a good relationship with the prison personnel. This is illustrated by following comment: *“There are two people in the housing group who have become my friends. Furthermore, I have a good relationship with the prison guards.”* Three prisoners even pointed out the importance of relationships with inmates as a necessity to survive prison life. One of them explained that without being related in prison *“you would be lost here.”* Nevertheless, viewed three other prisoners the relationships with fellow inmates critically, stating that fellow prisoners could be a bad influence. For example, one of them said to be satisfied with his contacts in prison but adds that *“they are not a good company for me.”* In contrast to the mixed feelings towards their fellow inmates, which only seemed to be a means to an end, the inmates attached particular importance to external relations. External relationships appeared to play a major role in the life of the inmates and were most common mentioned in their reports. They referred to family members, romantic partners or friends. The majority of the prisoners rated their family members as the most relevant contact persons outside of prison. One of the inmates for example acknowledged: *“I’m in contact with my family outside, especially my father, he supports me.”*

#### *Prisoners’ prerequisites for the experience of well-being*

Prisoners’ prerequisites for the experience of well-being can be illustrated through nine categories (Table 2.). Most prevalent was the dimension relatedness, which was further divided into four subcategories, namely relatedness with family members, friends, romantic partners and finally relatedness in general. Additional categories emerging from the analysis were labelled: regular life, possess, competence, freedom, activities, inner satisfaction, drugs and others. The category definitions and examples are presented below.

*Relatedness.* The category of relatedness occurred in the responses of all fifteen interviewees. It is defined as the feeling of being close and connected with people who are important for the interviewee; people the interviewee cares for and who in turn care about him. The subcategories of relatedness are presented subsequently, illustrated by relevant quotations.

*Relatedness Family.* Thirteen prisoners referred to being related with their family members as a prerequisite for well-being. One of the prisoners reported that he experiences well-being *“when I’m together with my family and we do something together that makes me happy.”*

*Relatedness Peers.* Eleven prisoners referred to the contact to peers as a source of well-being. The following quotation provides insights in perceived well-being related to

allied people of the same age: *“I’m happy outside (of prison), when I’m able to meet up with friends.”*

*Relatedness Romantic Partner.* Moreover, romantic relationships of the inmates played an important role with regard to well-being. Four of the inmates stated to perceive relatedness with a romantic partner as a prerequisite for well-being. One of them illustrated the category by following quote: *“I’m happy in moments when I’m with my fiancé.”*

*Relatedness general.* Eight of the interviewees reported about feelings of relatedness, without narrowing the persons or situations that it would be suitable in the previous subcategories. As one of the inmates described to *“experience well-being when I talked with someone about my problems.”*

Table 2.

*Content analysis regarding prisoners’ prerequisites for the experience of well-being*

Category	N	%
Relatedness	15	100
Family	13	87
Peers	11	73
Romantic Partner	4	27
General	8	53
Regular Life	11	73
Possess	9	60
Competence	7	47
Freedom	4	27
Activities	4	27
Inner Satisfaction	3	20
Drugs	2	13
Others	3	20

*Regular Life.* This dimension as a precondition for well-being was literally mentioned by one of the detainees. He explained to need a “regular life” to experience well-being. The precondition of well-being was attributed to the statements of about two-thirds of the prisoners. It is defined as the achievement of age-specific development goals, being an appreciated part of society and having a life course adapted to social norms. The answer of one of the prisoners

who emphasized to need *“an own apartment, a bit money and work that`s it.”* served as an example.

*Possess.* The category possess as a requirement for well-being is defined as having, owning or controlling something. It was assigned to the answers of nine interviewees, who reported to experience well-being by money or owning a specific object. For example, one of the inmates reported that *“money makes me happy.”* Others stated that they would experience well-being when they own *“an own scooter”* or *“a computer.”*

*Competence.* The category competence as a prerequisite of well-being was named by seven of the interviewees. It is defined as the feeling of being able to achieve own goals and to do things well. The following quote of one of the inmates is illustrated this category: *“Well-being means for me to have something achieved, then I experience a good feeling. When I`ve reached my goals, then I`m happy.”*

*Freedom.* Responses of four of the interviewees indicated that they attribute the feeling of well-being directly to the forthcoming release, temporary day release or the act of *“coming home,”* and the associated gain in freedom in contrast to institutional rules. One of the inmates described to experience well-being: *“When I`ve day release, so that I can get out, then I feel free and happy.”*

*Activities.* Another four prisoners stated to require certain pleasuring activities to experience well-being. One of the prisoners illustrated this category by following quote: *“I`m happy when I`m allowed to ride in a truck that`s it.”*

*Inner Satisfaction.* Three interviewees reported that their well-being depends on the feeling of being satisfied with oneself. This interviewee described to experience well-being when he is *“content with himself, everything is running smoothly.”*

*Drugs.* Finally, the category drugs emerge, as two of the interviewees` stated that substance consume is a prerequisite for the experience of well-being. One of the detainees illustrated the category by following quote *“cannabis and medicine make me happy.”*

#### *Perceived and expected course of well-being due to imprisonment*

The assessment of the inmates` well-being before, during and after the prison sentence revealed four patterns (Table 3.). A majority of the interviewees stated that compared to their well-being prior detention, it is increased within the prison environment and that they expect their well-being to continuously increase after release. These prisoners assessed their well-being prior prison sentence as low. This was illustrated by the following quote of a detainee, who stated that before prison *“everything was going down, I had to quit my work, [...] stole cars and*

*crashed them under the influence of alcohol, my girlfriend threw me out of the apartment. Afterwards, I found an apartment without furniture; I only had a mattress. Then I lived on the street for three weeks until I got arrested.*” Rising well-being during the prison stay can be understood, taking the statement of this prisoner into account, who declared *“I’m behind bars, but [...] it’s quite good and if you behave, you can have a good life here.”* After the prison sentence, the majority of the prisoners expected their well-being to increase. The following quote of one detainee, who described the expected circumstances of future release, served as an example: *“I’m not going to commit crimes anymore. I’m going to finish my school education. I’m going to get a small but fine circle of friends, I going to be with people who accept me.”* In contrast, two prisoners who expected increasing well-being focused on the uncertainties after release. One of them stated that *“You just don’t know what’s coming. When I get out, I wonder what it is like. Am I going to be recidivistic or am I staying out of prison?”*

Table 3.

*The course of well-being with regard to prison stay*

Before – in prison	Prison – after Prison	N=15	%
Increase	Increase	9	60
Decrease	Increase	3	20
Increase	Decease	2	13
Constant	Increase	1	7

The second pattern incorporated reports by three detainees who perceived their well-being to decrease with the prison stay, but expected it to raise again after release. In the assessment of their well-being in the prison context, the restrictions played a major role. Low well-being within prison is justified by one of the prisoners, who stated: *“It’s because I’m here (in prison), I don’t have any self-determination, no family. I’m not completely finished yet, but almost.”* The third pattern which two prisoners showed involved the perception of an increase in well-being due to the prison environment and the expectation of a decrease in well-being after imprisonment. The explanation of one of the inmates, who stated to have been trapped in addiction and acquisitive crime before imprisonment may serve as an example. With his release, he feared *“being alone, possibly having a relapse.”* His current situation in prison, allowed him to *“stay clean, the daily routine is arranged”* and to graduate. Finally, the last pattern is shown by one prisoner. He described his well-being as constant before and during prison and stated

that his well-being is “*remaining the same.*” After release, he expected the well-being to increase.

*Prisoners’ assessment of a potential Well-Being Training*

Twelve in fifteen prisoners indicated that they would approve a Well-Being Training. Furthermore, inmates chose out of a selection of sources of well-being as possible content for the Well-Being Training. All in all, the results showed that the inmates would like the training to cover the topic learning and education, compared to religious belief which is seen rather critically as a topic to be addressed (Table 4).

Table 4.

*Possible topics to work on in a Well-Being Training*

Topic	N	%
Learning and education	12	80
Inner satisfaction	11	73
Sport and movement	11	73
Relations with others	10	67
Goals and values	10	67
Positive thinking	10	67
Talents and hobbies	8	53
Self-determination	8	53
Positive feelings	7	47
Money and possession	6	40
Religious belief	2	13

**Discussion**

The goal of this study was to examine well-being of juvenile prisoners. Increased well-being decreases offending and criminal behavior in general, as conditions emerge that make a normal life more satisfying than a criminal lifestyle (Ogloff & Davis, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Consequently, the chance for recidivism should decrease. In the following section, the outcomes of this research will be discussed taking already existing literature into account. Consequently, implications for prison practice will be outlined and methodical limitations of

this research discussed. Additionally, suggestions about future research will be given. Finally, a conclusion of this research will be provided.

### *Main Findings and Theoretical Implications*

*Self-Determination Theory.* The results showed that of all three basic needs, it appeared that only autonomy was severely restricted in the inmates. Prisoners reported not being in control of their lives. Instead, they must submit to the decisions of the prison personal. This is noticeable, as limited autonomy is already discussed since Goffman (1968) demonstrated that the prison environment restricted the sovereignty of the inmates. Nevertheless, little has changed about this situation, even though prisoners limited autonomy has negative effects on their adjustment to the prison environment (Liebling, 2004) and increases the chances for recidivism (Itelsano, 2016). However, restricted autonomy in prison seems less problematic today, as prison sentences are only used for juvenile offenders conducting especially serious crimes and showing little willingness to change through other corrective measures. All in all, one must also take into account the desire of the population to punish criminal behavior. A punishment in general implies a restriction of the autonomy of the offender, unless the latter complies entirely with the punishment. As a last resort, a prison environment restricting inmates' autonomy might not be the most promising way for a successful reintegration, however it complies with the justification of imprisonment, deterring potential offenders by strengthening the belief in the existing state of law.

Nevertheless, there are possibilities to increase prisoners sense of autonomy within this restrictive environment, for example through educational and work-related activities (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2017) which lead to increased well-being and decrease chances to be recidivistic after prison (Liebling, 2013; Itelsano, 2016). These activities show some overlap with the second basic need competence, as they provide prisoners possibilities to perceive themselves as being able to achieve own goals.

In contrast to the need for autonomy, the results showed that the need for competence is met in the prisoners. The majority was confident to do things well and could name personal talents. This result is desirable, as inmates' feelings of competence have positive effects on their well-being and the chance for recidivism decreases (Steuer et al. 2001; Cohen, 2012). From this point of view, it seems even desirable to intensify feelings of competence in prisoners. This can for example be done through looking on the individual talents of inmates, and how these can be promoted. It can be based on the traditional offers in prisons, which are mainly focused on vocational and school education, but should also take the diversity of competence sources into

account. To give an example, the diversity of competence has been shown by Cohen's research (2012), enabling prisoners to take part in a choir, which led to increased sense of competence, well-being and simplified social reintegration.

As well as the need for competence, prisoners reported to perceive their need for relatedness to be fulfilled. The results showed that contact with the prison personal serves as an important source of relatedness. This was unexpected, as the prison staff is first of all a personification of the prison with its restrictive nature. However, these results were in line with literature. Laan and Eichelsheim's (2013) showed that staff interactions give the inmates a feeling of being supported. Their study showed moreover that staff interaction is positively related with well-being of prisoners. Furthermore, perceived a majority of the prisoners the contact with fellow inmates as important. Nevertheless, a minority of the inmates viewed the contact with other prisoners to some extent critically. The main focus of these critical inmates is that fellow prisoners might be a bad influence. This goes in line with research (Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013), showing that prisoners experience well-being through contact with other inmates but rather than close relationships, juveniles reported about "tactical friendships" to survive prison. Finally, external relations played an important role in the reports of the inmates. The results showed that these were essential to satisfy the need for relatedness. Contact with family, friends and romantic partners gave the prisoners the feeling of being close and connected with people who are important to them. This sense of relatedness and the maintenance of contact is important, as it can promote reintegration as it allows the prisoners to re-enter their social surrounding after release (De Claire & Nixon, 2017).

*Prerequisites for well-being.* Relatedness took another important role in this study, as it has represented the most frequent mentioned prerequisite of well-being being of the prisoners. In Sum, it is desirable that the need for relatedness is met in prisoners, as it increases well-being, prevents recidivism and offending behavior in general (De Claire & Nixon, 2017; Cohens, 2012). It seems therefore desirable to even increase prisoners sense for relatedness. An implication for the practice is for example to promote and intensify the prisoners contact with the personal. Another possibility is to encourage social contacts with fellow inmates, taking into account that some prisoners were suspicious about their fellow inmates. This suspiciousness could be approached by trust building programs within prison. Although it seems to be a well-known problem, nothing is known about the implementation of such programs in prison. Finally, it is advisable to simplify visits of relatives and facilitate communication with them, as demanded in De Claire and Nixon's study (2017).

The second most mentioned prerequisite of well-being was regular life, which had some overlap with the need for competence. While competence was all about feeling capable to do things well, prisoners answers grouped by the category regular life included the achievement of age-specific goals and complying to social norms. That prisoners considered regular life as a prerequisite of well-being is desirable, as it shows inmates motivation to become reintegrated into society after release. Therefore, this should already be approached in prison. During the prison stay, a plan could be generated how this regular life after prison should look like. If possible, the prison should support prisoners in achieving first steps towards regular life, for example by promoting the achievement of a school- certificate or the completion of vocational training. Although such offers are already part of a jail sentence for juveniles, additional opportunities to facilitate a regular life after release seems worthwhile.

*Course of Well-being.* Another interesting result was the assessment of prisoners' well-being prior, during and after their detention. Most of the prisoners described that their well-being in prison as increased compared to the time before imprisonment, and expect their well-being to further increase with the forthcoming release. This shows that inmates in prison are doing relatively well and that there are actually positive expectations for the future, which is desirable. However, it should be noted that these results contradicted a large body of research (van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013), which showed that the prison process has negative effects on well-being. A possible explanation for this pattern is that the inmates of the prison under investigation lead a fairly good life. The results showed that the majority of the prisoners saw the prison as a relative positive environment, allowing them to follow positive development tendencies. Other possible explanations will be discussed in the following *Limitations* section. The positive evaluation of the present prison environment and the high expectations of the well-being after release correspond to actual demands. It would go along with Ogloff and Davis (2004) claim to increase the well-being of the prisoners, in order to make a lifestyle attractive that does not involve criminal activities.

However, there are still constant high numbers of recidivistic juvenile prisoners. These can be interpreted as a result of positive well-being expectations linked to the forthcoming release which become frustrated when prisoners return to normal life. As a consequence, former prisoners could be tempted to resort to criminal behavior in order to increase their well-being. Preventing these frustrations could serve as a mean to forestall recidivism. This is significant to practice, as it explains why expectations about the future should be addressed within prison. On the one hand, positive expectations can be used to motivate inmates to prepare for the time after release, for example by intensified efforts in educational offers. On the other hand, positive

expectations can serve as a communication tool, to talk about prisoners' goals and desires after release, but also take into account possible risk when these expectations become frustrated. By determining these risks, they can be anticipated and alternative action plans considered to prevent recidivism.

*Assessment Well-Being Training.* Besides offering insights in prisoners' accounts of well-being, the study also provides valuable information about prisoners' assessment of a potential Well-Being Training. The great majority of the prisoners stated that they would take part in a Well-Being Training. If one takes into account that of all three needs only autonomy was severely restricted, one could have assumed that prisoners wish for a training aiming to increase their autonomy. However, when the prisoners decided about possible training topics, it became clear that they particularly have the desire to promote their competence by addressing the topic learning and education. In this case, the name Well-Being Training is only of limited use, as these desires rather focus on a broader range of education in prison. A possible explanation is that they want to learn and get educated to increase their competence in order to be more important and capable for society after release. This assumption reflects the educational levels of the participants. The majority of the prisoners did not have completed school successfully. Research (Steurer, Smith & Tracy, 2001; Crocker & Park, 2003, 2004) showed congruently that educational and work-related programs have indeed a positive effect on the feeling of competence. Another possible explanation for participants desire for a broader range of education is that educational activities predict feelings of the particular restricted need autonomy and well-being (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al. 2017; Liebling, 2004). In reference to the prisoner's prerequisites of well-being, highlighting the second frequently cited category regular life, enable learning and education the achievement of age-specific goals, such as school diplomas. School diplomas again may lead to a better position on the labor market, which could allow prisoners to live a regular life.

### *Limitations*

Besides the many implications of the study discussed in the previous section, certain general limitations of the research should be addressed. The role of the prison psychotherapist was shaping in the research. First of all, the psychotherapist chose the interviewees. Personal preferences and relationships may have influenced his choices. This in turn may have had an impact on the data collected for the study. Another limitation was that the prisoners were dependent on the goodwill of the psychotherapist. In his function as senior personal of the prison his decisions determine prisoners' punishment and mitigation. He decides whether to

approve request of the prisoners, for example concerning leisure and education offers. Despite the assurance that the interviews had no effect on the punishment or conditions of imprisonment, this position of power may have tempted the prisoners to give particular answers to please the psychotherapist. Another limitation was the lack of audio recordings. Only the notes of the therapist were used during the study. These in turn depend on the subjective opinion of the psychotherapist. He decided what is important enough to be noted and what is not. Accordingly, a part of the data got lost and what remained was subject to the choice of the psychotherapist. Moreover, did the notes mostly contain short sentences only. This made it difficult to place the quotations in the right context, which in turn decreased their significance.

Furthermore, the assessment of the prisoners' well-being has to be taken with caution. Research (Robinson & Ryff, 1999) indicates that well-being is perceived as low in the past, present well-being is assessed in the middle range and that the future is characterized by unrealistic optimism and the expectation of high well-being. This bias may have influenced the assessment of well-being within prison, the perception of past and the expectations for prospective well-being. Finally, the study was based on a relative small number of participants of one particular prison, so the results should be considered with caution. Findings from qualitative studies are very context and case dependent. Commonly, the view on context and case can be expanded by providing background data of the interviewee`s. In this case it was decided against including the age, court judgements and behaviors towards prison personal to the study, to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees. In addition, juvenile justice in Germany is subject to the federal states. Therefore, apart from differences between individual prisoners and prisons, there are also differences between the different federal states. This should be considered in case of generalizing the results.

#### *Future Research on Well-being in Prison*

As this research examined prisoners' well-being and presented implications prison practice, it became clear that a lot of work has to be done to fully examine how the prisonisation process effects the well-being and behavior of inmates. The actual study used an approach of Self-Determination Theory comprising the fulfilment of the basic psychological needs only. However, theoretical implications of Self-Determination Theory in the prison environment are not yet fully explored, but open up new research opportunities. The Organismic Integration Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000b) for example, is a sub-theory of Self-Determination Theory, examining properties, determinants, and consequences of extrinsic motivation. The focus on

extrinsic motivation implies that the theory fits the corrective goal of the prison, where decision-making power is held by the prison personal, instead of the inmates. Particularly because the theory characterizes human motivation as exposed to variations ranging from internalized, autonomous to externalized, controlled motivation. The theory focuses on how context and the social environment influence internalization and seems therefore convenient for the prison environment. Internalization describes the tendency of individuals to assimilate and transform controlled regulations. In doing so the regulations can nevertheless be perceived as autonomous. Thus, the theory seems to be particularly suitable for the correction of unlawful behaviors taking into account the particularities of the prison context. Additionally, this sub-category might be used to examine new possibilities to address restricted autonomy in prison.

### *Conclusion*

In sum, it has been shown that the prisoner's basic needs of the Self-Determination Theory were less restricted than expected. While autonomy actually seemed to be limited, prisoners reported about feelings of competence and relatedness. Prisoners most frequent mentioned prerequisite for well-being was the category relatedness, which presented an overlap with Self-Determination Theory. Detainees second most mentioned prerequisites for well-being were grouped in the category regular life, which showed their desire to reintegrate into society. Prison practice should aim to enable prisoners to fulfill their need for relatedness and take first steps towards regular life. An unexpected result was the assessment of the prisoners' well-being. Most prisoners perceived their well-being in prison to be increased compared to their well-being before detention and expect their well-being to further increase with regard to their forthcoming release. Anticipating possible frustrations of this expectations could prevent prisoners resort to criminal behavior. Furthermore, detainees expressed their interest in a Well-Being Training, but demand that the training targets the topic learning and education. Rather than a Well-Being Training, they seem to require broader educational offers. All in all, the results indicated that it is advisable to invest more resources in learning and education of detainees, which besides increasing competence has a positive effect on the currently limited autonomy and facilitates a regular life. Apart from that, prison practice should aim to improve the possibilities to fulfill the needs competence and relatedness. The results suggest that these measures increase prisoners' well-being accordingly lower the chances for recidivism. All in all, the results show that juvenile prisoners well-being is considerable satisfactory.

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Appendix A

Method, Category, Original questions in German and Corresponding questions in English per research question

Table 4.

*How do juvenile prisoners assess the fulfilment of the needs autonomy, competence and relatedness in prison?*

Method	Category	Original questions in German	Corresponding questions in English
Interview	Autonomy	Inwiefern haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Sie im Moment die Regie über ihr eigenes Leben haben?	How do you experience the feeling of control in your own life?
	Competence	Gibt es etwas, worin Sie gut sind? Wissen andere, dass Sie gut darin sind? Können Sie Ihr Talent benutzen und verbessern?	Is there something you are especially good in? Do others know? Can you use or improve your talent?
	Relatedness	Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit den Kontakten, die Sie haben? Gibt es Menschen mit denen Sie sich innerhalb der Jugendanstalt gut verstehen? Haben Sie guten Kontakt mit Menschen außerhalb der Jugendanstalt?	How satisfied are you with relations you have? Are there people within prison you get along with? Are you in good contact with people outside of prison?

Table 5.

*To which prerequisites of well-being do prisoners refer to?*

Method	Original questions in German	Corresponding questions in English
Interview	Was bedeutet glücklich sein für sie?	What mean well-being for you?
	In welchen Momenten sind sie glücklich	In which moments do you have a sense of well-being?
	Was macht Sie glücklich?	What makes you feel good?
	Was brauchen sie um glücklich zu sein?	What do you need to feel good?
Prompting Cards	Welche der folgenden Quellen von Glück sind ihrer Meinung nach am wichtigsten?	Which of the following potential sources of well-being do you think are most important?
	• Beziehungen zu anderen	• Relations with others
	• Lernen und Ausbildung	• Learning and education
	• Talente und Hobbys	• Talents and hobbies
	• positive Gefühle, Freude, Spaß	• Positive feelings, joy and fun
	• religiöse Überzeugung	• Religious belief
	• innere Zufriedenheit	• Inner satisfaction
	• Positiv denken	• Positive thinking
	• Ziele und Werte	• Goals and values
	• Freundlichkeit, Dankbarkeit	• Friendliness, Gratitude
	• Sport und Bewegung	• Sport and movement
	• Geld und Besitz	• Money and possession

Table 6.

*How do the inmates experience the course of their well-being?*

Method	Original questions in German	Corresponding questions in English
Likert Scale rating/ Detail orientated questions	<p>Hier ist das Bild einer Leiter. Die oberste Sprosse der Leiter „10“, stellt das beste vorstellbare Leben für Sie dar. Die unterste Sprosse der Leiter, „0“, stellt das schlechteste vorstellbare Leben für Sie dar.</p> <p>Auf welcher Sprosse standen Sie vor der Inhaftierung, was Ihr persönliches Glück angeht?</p> <p>Auf welche Sprosse stehen Sie im Moment, was ihr persönliches Glück angeht?</p> <p>Warum nicht eine Sprosse (Zahl sagen) niedriger? Warum nicht eine Sprosse (Zahl sagen) höher?</p> <p>Was glauben Sie, auf welche Sprosse Sie nach ihrer Inhaftierung stehen werden, was Ihr persönliches Glück angeht?</p> <p>Was sind Ihre Erwartungen für die Zukunft, nach Ihrer Inhaftierung, wenn es um Ihr zukünftiges Glück geht?</p>	<p>Here you can see the picture of a ladder. The highest rung of the ladder „10“ represents the best possible life you can imagine. The lowest rung of the ladder „0“ represents the worst possible life you can imagine.</p> <p>On which rung where you when before the arrest, concerning your personal well-being?</p> <p>On which rung are you in the moment, concerning your personal well-being?</p> <p>Why not a rung (saying number) lower? Why not a rung (saying number) higher?</p> <p>On which rung do you think you will be after prison, concerning your personal well-being?</p> <p>What are your expectations for the future, after imprisonment, concerning your personal well-being?</p>

Table 7.

*Would juvenile prisoners be interested in a Well-Being Training and which topics should such a training cover?*

Method	Original questions in German	Corresponding questions in English
Interview	Was sehen Sie selber für Möglichkeiten, um Ihr Glück zu verbessern?	What for possibilities do you see improve your well-being?
Card-sorting	<p>Auf diesen Karten stehen Dinge, an denen man während des Glückstrainings arbeiten könnte. Machen Sie zwei Stapel. Legen Sie die Themen, an denen Sie gerne arbeiten würden und Sie interessant finden auf die rechte Seite. Legen Sie die Themen, die Sie nicht interessant finden auf die linke Seite.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beziehungen zu anderen</li> <li>• Lernen und Ausbildung</li> <li>• Talente und Hobbys</li> <li>• positive Gefühle, Freude, Spaß</li> <li>• religiöse Überzeugung</li> <li>• innere Zufriedenheit</li> <li>• Positiv denken</li> <li>• Ziele und Werte</li> <li>• Freundlichkeit, Dankbarkeit</li> <li>• Sport und Bewegung</li> <li>• Geld und Besitz</li> </ul>	<p>On these cards are potential sources of well-being which could be worked on in a potential well-being training. Make two stacks. Put topics you are interested and would work on to the right side. Put topics you don't find interesting on the left side.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relations with others</li> <li>• Learning and education</li> <li>• Talents and hobbies</li> <li>• Positive feelings, joy and fun</li> <li>• Religious belief</li> <li>• Inner satisfaction</li> <li>• Positive thinking</li> <li>• Goals and values</li> <li>• Friendliness, Gratitude</li> <li>• Sport and movement</li> <li>• Money and possession</li> </ul>

