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Examining the Past Injustices Suffered by Those in Corrections and the General Public: A New Therapeutic Approach May Be Necessary

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ABSTRACT

One under-researched area within corrections is the connection among (a) past adverse events, particularly in the form of injustices against those who now are incarcerated, (b) crimes committed and then (c) healing from the effects of that past adversity of injustice. Might those who have experienced severe injustices against them develop an anger or a hatred that then is displaced onto others, leading to arrest, conviction and imprisonment? This is not to imply that societies condone illegal behaviour but instead to assist in the healing from the adversity so that future crime is reduced. As a first step in this sequence, the study here examined in detail the kinds of injustices suffered by men in a maximum-security correctional institution ($N = 103$) compared with men in a medium-security environment ($N = 37$) and in the general public ($N = 96$). Findings indicated differences between those in the general public and those in the two correctional contexts. The latter two groups had (a) a higher severity of injustices against them (rated by a panel of researchers), (b) a more negative current impact that past injustices are having on them (also rated by a panel of researchers), (c) more reports that the injustices contributed to their choices to harm others, (d) more serious types of hurt (such as sexual abuse), (e) a stronger degree of self-reported hurt and (f) more injustices from family members. Implications for correctional rehabilitation to reduce the negative psychological effects caused by the injustices of others are discussed.

1 | Introduction

Correctional institutions need a new approach to rehabilitation based on the recidivism rates or reverting back to criminal behaviour, throughout the world. Fazel and Wolf (2015) analysed the recidivism rates of ex-prisoners across 21 countries. Theirs was a difficult task because the criteria for recidivism varies. Recidivism can include rearrest, reconviction or re-imprisonment. The recidivism statistics were sometimes reported after 6 months of release from corrections or after a period of years. Despite these challenges, Fazel and Wolf (2015) found high rates of recidivism. For example, in Australia, the recidivism rate in 2014–15 was 53% for reconviction after 2 years. In Quebec, Canada, for the years 2007–08, that rate was 55% for reconviction after 2 years. In Denmark, 2013, the reconviction rate was reported to be 63% after 2 years, and in the United States in the years 2005–10, the reconviction rate was reported to be 51% after 4 years. In each of these cases, over half of those previously committing crimes were doing so again in subsequent years. There are many proposed causes for this recurring pattern of

Summary

- An under-studied area of correctional rehabilitation for imprisoned people involves unhealed emotional effects from unjust treatment by others.
- Those in corrections appear to have more severe injustices with more severe current reactions to those injustices than those in the general public.
- Correctional rehabilitation may go far in reducing recidivism with a focus on helping incarcerated people to examine and heal from the negative reactions to severe adversity caused by others' injustices.
- Forgiveness therapy, as an empirically validated treatment, may be an answer to this kind of healing for people in corrections.
- Given that people in the general public also report past injustices against them that still are not healed, forgiveness interventions for this population also are recommended. Widely disseminating accurate information about forgiveness to this population may be worthwhile.

crime such as past economic circumstances and the challenges within one's current environment such as a lack of adequate housing and unemployment (Visher and Courtney 2006), institutional misconduct (Huebner and Berg 2011) and a lack of aftercare (Otu 2015). Our concern in this article is particularly on unresolved unhealthy anger from being treated unjustly, even as far back as childhood.

Is it possible that in some cases, people are imprisoned, at least as one among many causes, because, in addition to committing crimes, they are emotionally wounded from others' unjust treatment against them, perhaps as long ago as childhood? In other words, the emotional hurt from deep injustice festers within, causing a rage that is then perpetrated onto, displaced upon, unsuspecting others. Bartlett and Sacks (2019) make a distinction between adversity and trauma. Adversity includes the actual events that befall a person, such as living in an oppressive environment, the illness of a parent or physical or sexual abuse. Trauma involves the internal negative reactions by the person to the adverse situations experienced. Our focus in this article is on a specific type of adversity in the form of severe injustices perpetrated on the person. The more severe the adverse experiences of unjust treatment are, experienced over longer periods of time, then the more trauma, specifically in the form of excessive anger within a person, may be present (Enright and Fitzgibbons 2024). Empirical studies show that when people are treated deeply unjustly by others, excessive anger can be present in research participants prior to psychological interventions to reduce that anger (Coyle and Enright 1997; Freedman and Enright 1996; Lee and Enright 2014; Lin et al. 2004; Park et al. 2013).

Another important distinction needs to be made about adverse events. The major focus for people who experienced adversity has been on material adversity (Gustafsson et al. 2012) such as residential overcrowding or financial strain. Another form is psychological adversity (Snowden and Snowden 2021), which includes mental disorders. Less emphasized are the adversities that are caused by unjust treatment from other people, and this is especially true within the context of incarceration (see Yu et al. 2021). Previous research has shown that those who have been abused in childhood or adolescence have more arrests than those with no or fewer abuses toward them (Ashekun et al. 2023). Although the term ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) often is the label attached to such abuse, we are not referring generally to ACEs because these can include a host of adversities, such as living with a parent who was previously incarcerated or who was diagnosed with a mental illness (see, for example, the classic work on ACEs by Felitti et al. 1998), rather than specifically focusing on injustices in particular against the person. Another study (Browne, Miller, and Maguin 1999) reported that more than 70% of women who were incarcerated at the time of the study experienced physical violence from a parent or caretaker. In contrast to the current study, these two studies do not assess the degree of severity of the injustices or the degree of reported impact on those who experienced them. Further, there was no examination of injustices, experienced in the past, based on the severity of incarceration (such as medium-security versus maximum-security incarceration). The unanswered question to date is this: Are those in the more restrictive institutions, such as maximum security, showing more severe injustices against them with a reported more severe impact on them? This may be important to know so that mental health professionals can be sure to focus treatment on those who need the most help.

2 | Adverse Childhood Experiences and Arrest Rates Among Individuals With Serious Mental Illness

Research outside of the correctional context shows that when people are treated deeply unjustly by others, there is a tendency to get angry (Enright and Fitzgibbons 2024). If the anger is not addressed, then it can deepen and abide within a person literally for years, leading to other traumas such as anxiety and depression (again, see Enright and Fitzgibbons 2024; Freedman and Enright 1996). If this is the case for people in corrections, and if the inner rage is not addressed, then continued crime, even violent crime, and the passing of this unhealthy anger to one's own family members, may be indications of unhealed unhealthy anger. The negative effects of excessive anger on internal psychological challenges (Rude et al. 2012; Stringaris and Goodman 2009; Zhu, Simons, and Goldstein 2022), on relationships (Hyatt, Halvorson, and Campbell 2023; Strohschein 2005) and on the displacement of that anger onto unsuspecting victims (Schuster et al. 2022) are well documented in the published literature (Enright and Fitzgibbons 2024). Yet, too often, anger as an important, even a central, variable in current interactions with others has not been given sufficient attention in the literature as a cause of psychological and behavioural disruption (Enright and Fitzgibbons 2024; Stringaris and Goodman 2009).

The build-up of anger in correctional institutions is seen as a serious concern (e.g., Dargis, Newman, and Koenigs 2016; Mills and Kroner 2003). Regarding rehabilitation efforts in correctional institutions, the actual empirical research that centres on participants' past hurts from deep injustices of others, and the healing from the effects of these, is rare. As evidence of this, we went to the website crimesolutions.ojp.gov

and searched 'programs' there with the question of 'anger reduction'. The first two pages (20 entries) yielded one program on cognitive behavioural therapy and 19 programs on anger management, none of which focused on healing of deep hurts from the past through confronting them or healing the current effects of them through forgiveness or a related approach. The research emphasis, instead, is on such issues as behavioural change by taking personal responsibility (Yorke, Friedman, and Hurt 2010), anger management (Hutchinson et al. 2017) and the reduction in particular psychological disorders such as substance abuse disorder and depression (see, for example, Saradjian, Murphy, and McVey 2013, Wilson 1990, and Wolff et al. 2012).

In contrast to the above studies, Yu et al. (2021) made the case that one important factor that is practically ignored in the published literature is the way forward to curing people from the effects of the deep injustices that befall them prior to arrest, conviction and imprisonment. When the injustices against a person are severe, this can lead to a build-up of unhealthy anger, even rage, that can be displaced onto unsuspecting others. Yu et al. (2021) found that when over 100 men in a maximum-security institution were questioned, 90% of them reported moderate to severe injustices against them, as judged by a panel of researchers, in the form of unjust treatment by others prior to imprisonment. There was a statistical association between deep injustices against the men, prior to committing crime, and current patterns of challenged mental health in the form of clinical anger, anxiety and depression. These mental health challenges were reduced to normal levels because of a novel treatment, forgiveness therapy, in which the men had the opportunity to forgive those who have hurt them in the past, even the far distant past of childhood, and to improve psychological health, including an increase in empathy (see also Song, Yu, and Enright 2020; Yu et al. 2018). While there is the potential for subjective bias in incarcerated people's recollection of past events, possibly interpreting their experiences as more unjust than nonprisoners, thus contributing to their anger, we do not think this occurred in the Yu et al.'s (2021) study. We say this because it was not the participants themselves who rated the severity of the offences against them. Instead, as pointed out above, this rating was done by a panel of five graduate students and one professor who established agreement on each participant's protocol. Further, a mental health professional was with those in the experimental groups for 6 months as they engaged in forgiveness therapy, sufficient time to ascertain whether or not there was exaggeration or balanced judgement in the participants' views of the injustices against them.

Forgiveness therapy starts with the assumption that the one unjustly treated by others needs to willingly choose the therapy so that it is not forced upon the client. To forgive is to offer goodness of some kind in the form of kindness, respect, generosity or even love to the offending person. To forgive is not to excuse what happened, not to forget or repress what happened, not to necessarily reconcile with an offending person who still is dangerous to the forgiver and not to abandon the quest for justice. Research has shown the effectiveness of forgiveness therapy for people deeply hurt by others such as in situations of incest (Freedman and Enright 1996), emotional abuse in marriages that have ended (Reed and Enright 2006) and incarcerated adolescent females in Korea (Park et al. 2013).

Yu et al. (2021) brought attention to past injustices that were related to present psychological traumas that can be healed. With clinical anger reduced, this can take away the motivation to hurt others. Thus, the awareness of past adverse events, centred on injustices from other people, suffered by the imprisoned, combined with effective treatment of the current trauma, may lead to an improvement in rehabilitation rates. If we can deepen our knowledge about those past injustices, it seems that a reasonable next step is to more precisely examine the quality of those injustices. Two unanswered questions, with implications for psychological treatment for overcoming the trauma of injustice from other people, are these: (1) Are the findings of being treated unjustly by others, as reported above for maximum-security corrections, similar to or different from the injustices reported by people in a medium-security corrections context? (2) How do the profiles of injustice for those in either a maximum- or medium-security context compare with those in general society? In other words, are the injustices experienced in the past by those in a correctional institution qualitatively different from the injustices reported by those who are in general society? If so, then it may become paramount to address and take steps to heal participants from the effects of those injustices by including empirically validated treatments that focus on cure in this context of trauma recovery.

As a step in this direction, it is the goal of the research here to more deeply examine the reported injustices by the men who took part in the study by Yu et al. (2021). The current study differs from Yu et al. (2021) in that the earlier study looked only within a maximum-security correctional institution without a comparison of the data with men either in a medium-security correctional context or in general society. We have six questions that may distinguish the quality of injustices experienced by those in maximum security, medium-security corrections and those in the general society. Do these three groups differ on (a) whether or not an injustice is even reported; (b) the reported severity of the abuse, when an injustice is reported; (c) the type of abuse reported (sexual abuse, neglect and so forth); (d) the degree of emotional hurt reported as a result of the injustice; (e) the origin of the injustice as occurring in the family or outside the family? Family members are supposed to protect, and so if they violate, this kind of abuse might end up with more dire outcomes such as serious crime against unsuspecting others as rage is displaced; and (f) whether the serious injustice occurred in the person's childhood/adolescence or in adulthood, when the person may have a greater maturity for processing the effects of the abuse?

We have conducted a mixed methods research approach using both quantitative and qualitative viewpoints. We examine, across the three groups (maximum security, medium security and the general public), these six qualities of injustices against them: whether an injustice occurred, severity of injustice, type of abuse, degree of reported emotional hurt, whether the injustice occurred by family members and when the injustice occurred. Answers to these questions may set the stage for focusing on those incarcerated persons who suffer the most serious

injustices, with the possibility of more interventions centred on ameliorating the effects of these injustices. Further, answers to the questions may set the stage for more careful identification of the kinds of abuse and the severity of abuse perpetrated on children so that they, too, can have empirically validated interventions for confronting and overcoming the effects of these injustices, early in life, as a way of healing, particularly debilitating anger, before that anger spills over to violent crime as a displacement of the anger onto others.

3 | Methods

3.1 | Participants

We sought to question participants to determine if they experienced injustices in their lives and the possible effects of those injustices on them. Recruitment flyers were posted at the two correctional institutions. Those who were interested filled out a standard form at the facility and presented it to a staff member. An announcement about the research was uploaded onto Mechanical Turk for the general public. Samples in corrections consisted of those who may undergo in the future a forgiveness therapy intervention to alleviate negative psychological effects of severe injustices against them. One hundred three males at a maximum-security correctional institution and 37 males at a medium-security correctional institution in the United States, who had never previously participated in forgiveness research or received a forgiveness intervention, voluntarily enrolled in the study. Ninety-six men from the general public in the United States also agreed to participate. The demographics of the participants can be found in Table 1. The data from the maximum-security facility are from the study by Yu et al. (2021). Across all three samples, all participants are in the United States, all are males, the modal age is 21–40 and the 41–60 age group is the next most populated in each of the three groups. As expected, educational levels differ as do the racial differences particularly between African American/Black in corrections and Caucasian/White in the general public. The general public data parallels to a degree the actual demographics of the United States in which approximately 14% of the population is African American (Pew Research Center 2023).

3.2 | Testing Procedures

Participants voluntarily signed the consent forms to participate and then completed the questions about past unfair treatment and a personal and criminal history questionnaire. There are strict criteria for joining Mechanical Turk such as (a) having a valid social security number; (b) presenting valid tax information; (c) a good credit history; and (d) proof of a permanent address. Research shows that the typical respondent in Mechanical Turk is employed and in a specific industry (Huff and Tingley 2015) and a college graduate (Pew Research Center 2016). Approximately 46% of the Mechanical Turk workers are in such industries as management, business owner, office and administrative support and 'professional' (Huff and Tingley 2015). In contrast, research (Andersen 2023; Remster 2021) shows that men who are released from medium-security and maximum-security correctional institutions often are homeless. Given these issues above, respondents from the general public group were not given the personal and criminal history questionnaire, especially given that these respondents were not currently incarcerated. Also, we did not want to exclude anyone from the general public who might have been arrested in the past for this reason: The separation between those in the general public and those who are currently incarcerated would be even wider, thus possibly leading to even more statistical differences among the groups, thus biasing the results. None of the general public participants mentioned an issue of arrest or incarceration when reporting their issue of deep injustice, which was open for them to report in that it could have taken place any time from childhood to the present.

Men from the medium- and maximum-security correctional institutions completed the research through the paper-and-pencil method, while the general-society respondents answered the questions online through Mechanical Turk and SurveyMonkey platforms.

3.3 | Measures

3.3.1 | Open-Ended Questions About Unfair Treatment for Those in Corrections

The following questions were given in written format: Did you experience some deep unjust abusive events prior to your first crime? If so, please describe the event in detail (e.g., When, where, by whom and how did it happen? What did the person do? What did the other person say? How did you respond to that? How did this event develop later? What happened at last?). What were your feelings like at that time, 3 months, and a year after it happened? Do you think such bad feelings from this deep hurt brought about some bad influences in your life? Do you think this deep hurt contributes to your choice to harm others/or engage in crime? Have you shared this hurt with anyone? Or has anyone asked you about that? If so, who? Has anyone recognized or helped with the healing of this deep hurt? If so, who?

3.3.2 | Open-Ended Questions About Unfair Treatment for Those in the General Public

Questions involving crimes were modified for the general-society group respondents. An example related to the first question is this: Did you experience some deep unjust abusive events in the past (childhood, adolescence, adulthood and so forth)? If so, please describe the event in detail.

3.3.3 | Personal and Criminal History Only for Those in Corrections

This is a 9-item questionnaire to gather demographic information (age, ethnicity/race, education level, work history, home area prior to incarceration) and crime history (first crime, crime that led to prison, length of time in custody). This questionnaire was not given to the general-society respondents. A similar

TABLE 1 | Demographic information of participants.

		Maximum security		Medium-security prison			General society	
		N	**%**		***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**
Race/ethnicity	African American/Black	54	52.4%		17	45.9%	6	6%
	Caucasian/White	19	18.4%		15	40.5%	85	89%
	Hispanic/Mexico	7	6.8%		1	2.7%	1	1%
	Native American	3	2.9%		0	0%	1	1%
	Asian	2	1.9%		0	0%	2	2
	Biracial/multiracial	14	13.6%		4	10.8%	0	0%
	No report	3	2.9%		0	0%	1	1%
Age	Under 21	2	1.9%		0	0%	Under 21	0	0%
	21 to 40	55	53.4%		20	54.0%	21 to 38	68	70.8%
	41 to 60	24	23.3%		14	37.8%	39 to 58	24	25%
	Over 60	4	3.9%		3	8.1%	Over 59	4	4.2%
	No report	18	17.5%		0	0%	No Report	0	0
Educational level	Elem/middle school	13	12.6%		1	2.7%		2	2.1%
	High school, or HSED/ GED in prison	72	69.9%		25	67.6%		5	5.2%
	Technical or vocational college	18	17.5%		11	29.7%		0	0%
	Some college							3	3.1%
	College grad							49	51%
	Masters							36	37.5%
	Doctoral							1	1%
The crime that ultimately resulted in incarceration (the most common four)	Robbery	29	28.2%	Sexual assault	13	13		N/A	N/A
	Homicide	22	21.4%	Homicide	10	27.0%		N/A	N/A
	Sexual assault	21	20.4%	Drug-related crime	7	18.9%		N/A	N/A
	Felony murder	20	19.4%	Battery	5	13.5%		N/A	N/A

Note: Over 90% of participants in maximum-security were recidivists, some serving life sentences for more than one felony.

demographic questionnaire was given to the general-society respondents without the crime-related questions.

3.4 | Response Coding Procedure

The criteria for rating participants' stories were created by Yu et al. 2021 (in Appendix S1) for all coding of the data and were based on the measures described above. Participants' (men within a correctional institution and those in general society) stories of unjust treatment were coded and analysed according to the following: whether there was an actual injustice, the category of the injustice (physical, sexual, verbal, failure to protect or provide, secondary injustice defined as injustice against a loved one), age when the injustice occurred, identity of the one who acted unfairly, severity of injustice, severity of impact, their view of whether the injustice contributed to their choices to harm others or, in the case of the imprisoned participants, engage in crime, whether or not they shared their pain with anyone, whether anyone recognized or helped heal their pain and whether the psychological hurt is still present. Judgement of severity was made by independent rating and then discussed until consensus was reached by a three- to six-member panel. Five of the raters were graduate students, all trained together, with more than 1 year of experience studying and doing research on the psychology of forgiveness. One of the raters was a professor with over 30 years of experience doing research on the psychology of forgiveness. The criteria

for story-rating followed Yu et al.'s (2021) study. For example, to distinguish between somewhat severe (scored as 5) and severe (scored as 6), consider the case of sexual assault as an example. A rating of 6 was always given for penetration by a family member. A rating of 5 was given for inappropriate touching from a family member or a person not in the family. As we examine the data in Tables 2–6, the sample sizes vary within the groups. This is the case because participants had the right, based on the information in the consent form, to not answer any question that might make them uncomfortable or prefer not to answer.

The responses of those who claimed 'no injustice', left the story-writing section blank or did not meet the study criteria for unjust treatment were excluded from the section of past injustice story's 'severity of injustice' and 'severity of impact' rating and analysis.

3.5 | Case Study Strategy

In addition to the quantitative data collected, we used a descriptive case design (Yin 2017) to construct two case studies in each of the three samples. A descriptive case study is used to describe a phenomenon in some detail as it occurs in an ecologically valid context. When examining cases across different samples, as we have done here, Yin (2017) recommends at least two cases for each sample. Further, in choosing the two cases in maximum security, medium-security corrections, and the general public, we chose what Seawright and Gerring (2008) call the typical case selection procedure, which attempts to capture cases that are common within each of the samples. In other words, we tried to describe cases that are not extreme within each sample but instead typify that which many of the participants have in common within that sample, such as when the injustice occurred, the severity of the hurt, the kind of hurt experienced, the reaction to the injustice by the participant and who was the one who was unjust (such as a family member or someone outside the family). The scoring directions in Appendix S1 from Yu et al. (2021) were used by the raters in extracting the content of the six case studies from the measures described above in which the participants' own words were analysed by the panel of raters.

4 | Results

4.1 | Insight into Past Injustice

Ninety-six percent (96%) of participants (99 out of 103) in the maximum-security correctional institution and 95% of participants (35 out of 37) in the medium-security institution reported a past injustice prior to their first crime and told their stories in detail. On the other hand, for those in general society, only 48% or 46 out of 96 disclosed that they experienced a deep injustice by others at some point in their lives, whether in childhood, adolescence or adulthood.

Severity of injustice, as determined by the independent raters, and severity of impact for the participants, also determined by the raters, are reported as percentages in Table 2. As can be seen in this table, severe injustice against participants is observed in the maximum-security context in which 64.8% of the

TABLE 2 | Percentage of severity of injustice and impact.

	Maximum-security prison		Medium-security prison		General-society people			Maximum-security prison		Medium-security prison		General-society people	
Severity of injustice	***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**	**Severity of Impact**	***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**
6 (severe)	48	47.1%	4	10.8%	1	1.0%	6 (severe)	59	57.3%	10	27.0%	1	1.1%
5 (somewhat severe)	18	17.7%	17	46.0%	8	8.3%	5 (somewhat severe)	22	21.4%	11	29.7%	3	3.1%
4 (moderate)	16	15.7%	11	29.7%	17	17.7%	4 (moderate)	9	8.7%	9	24.3%	13	13.5%
3 (somewhat moderate)	10	9.8%	2	5.4%	8	8.3%	3 (somewhat moderate)	4	3.9%	1	2.7%	13	13.5%
2 (mild)	3	2.9%	0	0.0%	12	12.5%	2 (mild)	2	1.9%	2	5.4%	7	7.3%
1 (very mild)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1 (very mild)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	9	9.3%
0 (none)	7	6.9%	3	8.1%	50	52.1%	0 (none)	7	6.8%	4	10.8%	50	52.1%
Total	103	100%	37	100%	96	100%	Total	103	100%	37	100%	96	100%

TABLE 3 | Types of injustice reported by participants.

	Maximum-security prison		Medium-security prison		General-society people	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Physical abuse	70	72.9%	17	48.6%	12	26.1%
Sexual abuse	33	34.4%	11	31.4%	9	19.6%
Emotional or psychological abuse	53	55.2%	9	25.7%	26	56.5%
Neglect or failure to protect or provide by their families	75	78.1%	14	40.0%	11	23.9%
Secondary injustice	15	15.6%	2	5.7%	2	4.3%

Note: Many of the participants reported several categories of abuse. This is why the total percentages add up to more than 100%.

TABLE 4 | Self-reported degree of hurt caused by the injustice at the time when the injustice occurred.

	Maximum-security prison		Medium-security prison		General-society people	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
A great deal of hurt	77	74.8%	25	67.6%	5	5.2%
Much hurt	13	12.6%	10	27.0%	17	17.7%
Some hurt	5	4.9%	1	2.7%	15	15.6%
A little hurt	5	4.9%	1	2.7%	8	8.3%
No hurt	3	2.9%	0	0.0%	51	53.1%
N/A	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	103	100%	37	100%	96	100%

TABLE 5 | Assessing whether the adverse event was in the family or not.

		Family		Nonfamily	
	Number of responses	*N*	%	*N*	%
Maximum-security prison	95	59	62%	36	37%
Medium-security prison	35	21	60%	14	40%
General-society people	53	16	30%	37	70%

TABLE 6 | Assessing whether the adverse event happened during childhood/adolescence or adulthood.

	Number of responses	Childhood/adolescence		Adulthood		Unspecified	
		N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Maximum-security prison	103	93	90%	9	9%	1	1%
Medium-security prison	35	22	63%	11	40%	2	6%
General-society people	53	31	58%	37	70%	0	0%

respondents had a rating of 6 (severe past injustice) or 5 (somewhat severe). For those in the medium-security institution, 56.8% had a rating of 6 or 5. In contrast to the men in these institutions, only 9.3% of those in general society had a severe or somewhat severe injustice against them.

Further, the current impact of the injustice, again determined by the raters, is clearly seen as influencing only those in corrections, with 78.7% of those in maximum security and 56.7% of those in medium security being influenced right now (in a severe or somewhat severe way), as seen by the judgement of the raters in Table 2. In other words, even now they have negative feelings that are associated with the past injustice. In contrast, only 4.2% of those in general society have somewhat severe to severe negative feelings now from the past injustices, again as judged by the panel of raters. This is a substantial difference that implies that rehabilitation from the effects of past injustices is warranted for those in either maximum-security or medium-security correctional institutions.

We tested the hypothesis that there was a difference by population, of those who scored the highest on each scale (the severity of the injustice and the severity of the impact) in Table 2. The null hypothesis was that the population is independent of the highest rating for both severity of the injustice and severity of the impact. Upon examining the data, the chi-squared test of independence could be conducted with a 5% alpha, and two degrees of freedom, with the critical value being 5.99. The chi-squared test for severity of the injustice was evaluated to be 48.58, far above the critical value, showing the strong association between severe past trauma and incarceration, $\chi^2(2, N=53)=48.58$, $p=<0.001$. Additionally, the severity of impact was evaluated and given the same chi-squared test of independence. The chi-squared value was 53.09, robustly rejecting the null hypothesis and revealing that severity of impact was strongly related to incarceration, $\chi^2(2, N=70)=53.09$, $p=<0.001$.

The specific types of injustice (based on the deep injustices experienced in the past) are reported by the participants in Table 3. As can be seen in this table, those in maximum security have experienced high rates of abuse in all categories (over one-third to almost three-quarters of the participants) except for 'secondary injustice' in which a loved one is abused, affecting the emotions of the participant. A similar pattern is seen for participants in medium security. In all cases, except for emotional and secondary abuse, from one-third to almost half of the participants experienced physical and sexual abuse and neglect or a failure to protect them. In contrast, only one abuse category, emotional abuse, is experienced by more than one-third of the participants in the general society group. Emotional abuse includes being bullied at school or at work, verbal abuse, being ignored by peers or excessive control by a parent.

In Table 3, we have six main cells of data, based on the three populations that we have already described, and asking if physical and sexual abuse is evenly distributed across the populations, or as it appears by sight, for both traumas to be highly skewed toward the incarcerated persons. With $\alpha=5\%$, two degrees of freedom, the critical value is again 5.99. When calculated, chi-squared analysis reveals a value of 49.0, well above the critical value, $\chi^2(2, N=153)=49.00$, $p=<0.001$. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Incarcerated persons have suffered significantly more physical and sexual abuse than those in the general public. Thus, in both Tables 2 and 3, we see a sharp contrast between those in either of the correctional contexts and those in the general public context. Those in corrections have more severe injustices, more severe reactions to these injustices and more types of injustices including the severe issue of physical and sexual abuse than those in the general population.

The degree of emotional pain, at the time of the injustice, and caused by the past injustices, as reported by the participants themselves, is shown in Table 4. Results showed 74.8% of maximum-security participants and 67.6% of medium-security participants indicated 'a great deal of hurt' at the time that the injustice occurred. In contrast, only approximately 5.2% of those in general society reported this level of 'a great deal of hurt' caused by the injustice. With the three populations, $\alpha=5\%$, two degrees of freedom, and a critical value of 5.99, all of the data were analysed with the chi-squared test of independence. All rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternate hypothesis. Thus, self-reported hurt, rated at the highest level, 'a great deal of hurt', when analysed had a chi-squared of 57.79, well above the critical value of 5.99, $\chi^2(2, N=107)=57.79$, $p=<0.001$. Incarcerated persons described their most traumatic experience as significantly more likely to contain 'a great deal of hurt'. As with the findings in Tables 2 and 3, there is a considerable difference between those in the correctional facilities and those in the general population.

As Table 5 shows, the majority of men in both maximum- and medium-security corrections (62% and 60%, respectively) reported their most serious abuse in life from family members, whereas only 30% of those in the general public reported such abuse originating from family members. With a chi-squared test value of 10.30, incarcerated persons were significantly more likely to have been traumatized by a family member than those in the general public, $\chi^2(2, N=181)=10.30$, $p=<0.0058$. The number of men in the general population for Tables 5 and 6 equals 53 because the rest of the participants in this sample did not provide sufficient information to code the results. A typical response was their saying that they would rather not give out this information. Further, and importantly, as seen in Table 6, 90% of the men in the maximum-security correctional institution reported the injustice as occurring early in their life, when they were children or adolescents. In contrast, 63% and 58% of the men in the medium-security correctional institution and the general public, respectively, reported the injustice as occurring when they were children or adolescents. For the general public, close to half of the injustices against them (42%) occurred when they were adults. With a chi-squared test value of 42.53, incarcerated persons, particularly those in maximum security, were significantly more likely to have had their worst trauma occur in childhood rather than in adulthood, $\chi^2(2, N=203)=42.53$, $p=<0.001$.

Three other patterns of findings, not in the tables, are as follows. First, when asked directly if they still have negative feelings from the past injustice, approximately 80% (79 out of 99) of the participants in maximum security, 77% (27 out of 35) in medium security and 52% (24 out of 46) of those in general society stated that they still harbour these negative feelings. The fact that about half of those in the general public still have negative feelings from the past injustice is a solid rationale for psychological treatments that can reduce those feelings if people find them disruptive in any way. As in Table 2, in which raters classified the current impact of the injustices, the participants themselves, particularly in corrections, state that they currently are impacted emotionally by the past injustice. In contrast, only about 1% of those in the general public are severely impacted by the past injustice as seen in Table 2.

Second, as an unexpected finding, 54% of the maximum-security participants (52 out of 96) and 37% of the medium-security participants (13 out of 35) never shared such injustice experiences with anyone. Only 27% of the maximum-security participants (26 out of 96) and 43% of the medium-security participants (15 out of 35) indicated that someone recognized or assisted with their healing. In contrast, more adult men from the general-society group shared their stories with others (63% or 29 out of 46) and more people recognized or helped out in their healing process (54% or 25 out of 46).

Third and finally, in essence, participants might have been retraumatized by holding onto their pain. For example, 76% of the maximum-security participants (73 out of 96) and 54% of the medium-security prison participants (19 out of 35) reported their abuse experience directly contributed to their choice to harm others and/or engage in crime compared to only 30% (14 out of 46) from the general-society group who admitted that the deep hurts brought some bad influences in their lives. Segments of the stories of injustices and hurts, in the form of case studies, are presented below with identifying information altered.

The findings are clear. Data illustrate that those in maximum-security and medium-security correctional institutions have a pattern of abuse against them, including the effects of that abuse, that is reported as quite different when compared with the responses from those in the general public. It is imperative that rehabilitation of the current traumas, borne out of past injustices from others, commences within both levels of correctional institutions. This is the case because the injustices as reported here tend to be severe, occur particularly early in life, with subsequent psychological effects. We conclude Section 4 with two case studies from each of the three samples. We start with the case studies in maximum security, then move to medium security and end with two typical case studies from the general population. As will become evident, the adversity, caused by others' injustice, experienced by those in corrections is more severe and more persistent than the adversities reported by the individuals in the general population. The adversity reported by the four men in corrections also occurred early in life, when they were children.

4.1.1 | Two Maximum-Security Corrections Participants' Stories

4.1.1.1 | Case Study 1. John (not his real name) was imprisoned for what he described as 'self hatred' and attempted 'suicide by cop'. He was born in prison and adopted at 6 months. He was badly abused by his adoptive mother as a child. Although his adoptive father did not abuse him, he never intervened. John used to be locked away for as much as a week at a time, so no one would see all the marks and bruises on him. He got hit with anything, belt, boards, rayon straps, mop handles, hands and so forth. He also was sexually abused and beaten so severely that he thought he was going to die. What confused him greatly is that he received presents, toys and special foods after the abuse. 'I had to do whatever she told—sex talk, having oral sex, fondling, even full penetration, etc., because not to do so would lead to certain pain.' All this continued until he was 13 or 14 years old. When the abuse was happening, 'I got sick to my stomach during the sexual abuse and was subjected to terrible pain from the beatings. I began to hate everything about myself and my life, who I was, what I was doing, being native, and BEING BORN!' After joining the army, John struggled with negative feelings and started using drugs to escape feeling anything at all. He was extremely resentful but kept those feelings all inside. His wife never knew anything in their past 20 years of marriage. He reported he still had a lot of the same feelings today and struggles with severe depression.

4.1.1.2 | Case Study 2. Josh (not his real name) was imprisoned for sexual assault. He experienced physical and sexual abuses, emotional manipulations and secondary injustice from his stepfather when Josh was a child. When Josh was about 7 to 8 years old, his stepfather wanted Josh to play with him and to engage in sexual behaviour together. Josh obeyed because 'I was so young and I did not know if it was okay' and 'I would be grounded at home with him until I did such sexual thing to him'. His stepfather would ground Josh and his siblings for anything without any reason. Josh also witnessed his stepfather abusing his mother. 'He grabbed my mother, hit my mother, and threw her to the floor. After he had done that, he took all of us to his mom's house where we were kept for about two weeks without seeing our mother.' They could not meet their mother until his mother called the police for kidnapping. When Josh told the surrounding people what happened to him, they just thought he was lying to them. One day, he was told by his mother that one of his friends was sexually assaulted by his stepfather, and the police wanted them to come down to the hospital to leave some DNA samples. His stepfather wanted Josh to tell the police that this whole story was made up. Josh saw his mother crying and hated himself for telling the truth, so he lied to the police. Once his stepfather came back home, the sexual abuse toward Josh started again. 'I was mad. I hated myself and wanted to kill myself. I wish I had never been born. I had a chance to keep him locked up, and I blame myself from then on.' He reported such terrible feelings never stopped even into the present time.

4.1.2 | Two Medium-Security Corrections Participants' Stories

4.1.2.1 | Case Study 1. Jason (not his real name) was imprisoned for sexually abusing a child. The sexual abuse that he experienced began when he was 6 years old. It started with his uncle taking photographs of him while undressed. It progressed to inappropriate touching and then to unwanted sex acts. The sexual abuse continued with two of his mother's best friends. While Jason was staying for 2 weeks with them (one male and one female), they insisted that he engage in sexual acts with them and he was not allowed to have dinner until he complied. They made him watch pornographic films with them. His father treated him like a 'toy' in that he was not given gentleness and respect. Instead, as he explained it, he was treated like the kind of toy 'a child plays with and beats up, but when it breaks, "Oh well, we can throw that disgusting thing away."' His confusion about interpersonal relationships led to isolation from his peers when he was growing up in that he reports never having a true friend, only superficial acquaintances. As a result, he began to blame himself, saying that his inability to make friends was all his fault. Even today, if he sees certain films or listens to certain music that reminds him of his childhood, he gets "triggered" with anger and anxiety.

4.1.2.2 | Case Study 2. Samuel (not his real name) was imprisoned for driving while intoxicated and he had an accident in which a person was killed. He reported, as a child, that he often would be almost asleep in his bed for the night and, all of a sudden, his intoxicated father would burst into the room, pick up Samuel and throw him onto the floor. His father would

be in a rage about something seemingly unimportant, such as a household chore not getting done that day. His father would commence to hit him with a belt or with his powerful hand. This was not an isolated incident, but a pattern that occurred throughout Samuel's childhood until he was 12 years old. He developed a deep resentment for his mother who would allow the father to continue this kind of nightmarish physical abuse once Samuel was in bed for the night. To make matters worse, the father's brother sexually abused Samuel when he was a child, creating a rage in him. He fantasized about killing his father and uncle and at times even taking the rage out on himself through suicidal ideation. He began to take his anger out on the family pet and on other children in school, as he bullied some of his peers. As he grew older, he went into 'a spiral of drugs, alcohol, and violence' replicating his father's addictions and abusive actions.

4.1.3 | Two Participants' Stories From the General Society

4.1.3.1 | Case Study 1. Brian (not his real name) is a single, employed person with a college degree. When he was in high school, he had general verbal abuse by male classmates. For one thing, he was criticized for his appearance, for not styling his hair in the way that was normative or for the clothes that he wore to school, which were not in keeping up with the fashion of the day. At times, he was knocked down, even by those who considered themselves to be his friends. These kinds of public displays of verbal abuse were embarrassing to Brian. As much as he tried to ignore them, they were at times unrelenting in showing him that he was not conforming to the normative expectations of adolescent culture. He never shared this experience with his parents and he felt as if he could not share this with friends, given that some of them were perpetrators of this bullying. He reports that he harboured much hurt during his high school days. Now as an adult, he reports that he has forgiven them for this abuse even though he has some residual anger.

4.1.3.2 | Case Study 2. Raphael (not his real name) has a Master's degree, is married with one child and holds a steady job. One day, he experienced abuse from his manager at work. This occurred within a few months of his taking this job. In his words, 'My boss yelled at me for a mistake done by my teammates in the final project submission. I made efforts to tell my boss that I was not involved.' The boss did not listen and ignored Raphael. Again in his own words, 'The event developed into a debate show and everyone around began to watch the heated conversation.' Even though his coworker acknowledged that she was entirely responsible for the mistake, the boss refused to listen and continued to blame Raphael. This induced deep anger in him, but he was able to share the experience with his supportive spouse and to move past the situation, but not completely. He since has not forgiven the boss for his behaviour that occurred in front of other coworkers.

5 | Discussion

The contrast between those in correctional institutions and those in the general public shows consistent differences. A rather dramatic finding is that close to 100% of those in corrections, whether in maximum- or medium-security institutions, have reported a deep injustice against them at some time in the past. Only 48% of those in the general population report such offences against them. The intensity of injustice experienced separates those in maximum security from those in either medium security or the general public, with over 50% in maximum-security and medium-security contexts showing a severe or somewhat severe injustice against them, as judged by a panel of researchers, and as also seen in the case studies, compared to less than 10% in the general public. It seems that from these data alone, a call for intensive interventions to address this issue is warranted in both correctional contexts. As further evidence that these injustices need attention, the current negative impact now for those in both maximum-security and medium-security corrections is high (well over 50% in each case), compared to those in the general population, which is less than 5% as judged by the research panel. When the participants were asked directly about the impact, we again see that those in either kind of correctional environment report more hurt. As Bartlett and Sacks (2019) argue, there can be both adversity or events that are severe and enduring, and trauma, or the negative reaction to adversity. It appears from our descriptive analysis that those in corrections have both the adversity and the negative reactions as current challenges. In other words, the need for psychological amelioration for those in corrections seems necessary. This is not as pressing an issue for those in the general public, given that what they experienced was not severe. They certainly have a right to such care, but the immediacy of this for so many is not as apparent.

Might the negative feelings of the participants in correctional institutions be linked predominantly to current conditions in the correctional institution rather than to the past injustices in childhood or adolescence? The best answer we can give is to engage in a true experiment, as in Yu et al. (2021), in which the participants, all of whom are screened for current clinical levels of anger, anxiety and depression, are given a forgiveness intervention for the abuses of the past. If the participants forgive those who abused them and if the clinical levels of anger, anxiety and depression fall to normal levels, then this kind of design shows that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between current levels of these clinical variables and the adverse childhood/adolescent experiences specifically of being treated deeply unjustly by others.

Those in either kind of correctional context have experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse and the failure to protect by family members to a far higher degree than those in the general public. As members of the same family community, it may be shocking for people who experience abuse from those who are supposed to protect the participants, especially during the formative years of childhood. This finding likely is correlated with the reported severity of the injustice and the severity of impact on those who experience injustices from family members. A full 90% of those in the maximum-security environment report that the abuse against them occurred when they were in childhood or adolescence, when they were still growing and trying to figure out how to cope with life. In contrast, 42% of those in the general population reported experiencing the injustice in adulthood, with perhaps a greater psychological maturity for dealing with the

effects of this injustice. Only 9% in maximum security reported this for their adult years.

Those in maximum- and medium-security corrections were not even given a chance to process this abuse, as a large percentage of them (54%) in the maximum-security context and 37% in the medium-security context never told anyone about this. We can help these people who have suffered silently for a long time. This does not invalidate their crimes. Assisting them with their disrupted internal struggles from unfair treatment, with empirically validated interventions, may make the world safer for others as well as for themselves. Examining the recidivism rate following such interventions is an important next step for future research.

What might be the pathway from past injustices to crime? After all, not everyone who has serious injustices against them commits crimes. We first want to make clear that we are not suggesting an inevitable link between being treated deeply unjustly and then automatically going into crime, as if free will is not involved. Such a view would be a simplistic materialistic philosophy that would not withstand careful scrutiny because of the fact that some people are treated unjustly, feel psychological disruption and yet remain crime free. It seems to us that the following factors are involved in the injustice-to-crime link. First is the issue of free will. Some people, and we do not know why this is the case, choose crime when they are deeply angry with others. Second, family context matters. Research shows that those who are exposed to consistent verbal aggression as children have a tendency to show physical aggression (Vissing et al. 1991), and patterns of physical aggression are related to the kinds of aggression that lead to arrests in adolescents (Dewall et al. 2007). Third, when a person consistently uses the psychological defence of displacement, particularly in the context of point two just described, this may lead to imposing one's own unhealthy anger onto others. Fourth, the failure to develop empathy is implicated in crimes perpetrated against others, as seen in the early work of Miller and Eisenberg (1988). While this finding has led to programs in corrections that try to foster empathy, it is our opinion, based on the research here and in Yu et al. (2021), that a precursor to growth in empathy is the amelioration of the inner unrest, the deep anger, caused by the prior unjust treatment. We say this because if there is internal disruption in a person, will this person be able to pay attention to lessons on empathy? A quieter inner world may help the person focus better on the instructions about empathy. A fifth possibility is consistent substance abuse that has been shown to be related to violent behaviour (see, for example, Kilpatrick et al. 2003). In conclusion, if we see individuals who have severe injustices against them in childhood or adolescence, have a weak free will to follow through with goals, have a challenged family context, use the defence mechanism of displacement, show a failure of empathy and engage consistently in substance abuse, these are clear signals that forgiveness therapy needs to be taken very seriously and as soon as possible. Even without these mediators between past injustice and crime, anyone who has been treated deeply unjustly could benefit from forgiveness therapy.

When the data are isolated to only the two correctional contexts, there may be a tendency to conclude: Well, this may be just like everyone else in the world; everyone is hurt at one time or another, and so they need to get over it. Yet, when we now bring in the finding from the general population context, we see quite a different picture. Those in corrections have much more severe challenges, which continue to adversely affect them in the present, than those in the general population. We, therefore, need stronger interventions for them compared with those in the general public. As discussed in Yu et al. (2021), published randomized clinical trials in maximum-security contexts are rare. The authors found only six other published studies that examined the effects of psychological interventions in this population, with none of them focusing on the emotional healing from past injustices experienced by those in corrections.

Forgiveness therapy (Enright and Fitzgibbons 2000, 2024), and early screening for past injustices suffered by those in corrections, may be an important answer for the rehabilitation of the human heart and for the reduction in recidivism once those hearts are healed from a gnawing resentment that is hurting the imprisoned, hurting others and hurting communities. Meta-analyses show that forgiveness therapy is effective with a wide variety of people who have different clinical challenges and this occurs across different world cultures (Akhtar and Barlow 2018; Baskin 2023; Baskin and Enright 2004; Lundahl et al. 2008; Wade et al. 2014). Reliable and valid measures exist for assessing the degree of forgiveness and change in forgiveness following clinical treatment (Enright et al. 2021; Subkoviak et al. 1995). Restorative justice programs have been shown in a meta-analysis (Latimer, Dowden, and Muise 2005) to increase offender and victim satisfaction and restitution compliance. This may be a complementary step to forgiveness therapy in helping those who have been treated unjustly to begin dealing with the emotional effects of that injustice. Further, other approaches that augment forgiveness therapy, such as acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson 2012) and the ever popular cognitive behavioural therapy, could be used as a way of reducing the pent-up anger from injustices suffered long ago. Yet, even Aaron Beck (back cover of Enright and Fitzgibbons 2000), the founder of CBT, stated that CBT by itself can be resistant to deep anger caused by past grievances and forgiveness can help finalize the past resentments. In other words, CBT should not be a substitute for forgiveness therapy but instead an addition to it.

Even in the general public, in which all participants, based on the Mechanical Turk criteria, have good tax, credit and job histories, 30% of the participants (from the general public) stated that the deep hurts that they experienced brought some bad influences in their lives. The implication is that not all who have serious injustices against them react so negatively as to deeply harm others. Those in the general public obviously did not perpetrate very serious harm onto others; otherwise, they would now be in a correctional institution. They can and do continue with lives that are civil and organized. To this point in the research, we do not know why this is the case, why some end up with violent crime against innocent victims whereas other people continue on with their lives. The mediators discussed above may provide answers through more research in the future. Further, preventive measures for reducing the negative psychological effects of past injustices should be considered within the general public, given that we do not know with certainty who will react violently and who will not.

In light of the findings that the men in corrections suffered serious injustices with serious effects against them when they were young, this serves as a rationale for introducing the theme of forgiveness to children so that they begin not only to understand what forgiveness is and is not but also to become familiar with the process of forgiving others. This kind of education may prove to be preventive for violent crime in adulthood because forgiveness education has been shown through a meta-analysis of 24 studies to reduce anger in children and adolescents (Rapp, Wang Xu, and Enright 2022). It also is never too late to introduce and educate adults with forgiveness principles to help them thrive well psychologically and physically toward their elderly years and not to pass on hatred and resentment to the next generations.

5.1 | Limitations

This study has several limitations. There was a racial difference between the imprisoned participants and those in the general public, but this is typical in the United States because African Americans are imprisoned at a rate approximately five times that of the Caucasian/White population (Nellis 2021). Thus, the sample here was not atypical. It is not clear why African Americans are arrested at this higher rate, but Nellis (2021) speculates that, long before imprisonment, there are disadvantages for African Americans of poverty, lack of employment and adequate housing and family differences that make for deeper injustices against them.

All data were collected by self-report at only one time for each participant. Thus, inferences to causality are limited (Heppner, Kivlighan, and Wampold 1999). The disruption of internal validity by the use of questionnaires only, such as an exaggeration of the injustices against those in corrections, was addressed in the literature review here. As a further guard against invalid responses to the questionnaires, the consent form clearly stated that there will be no benefit to the participants in corrections for filling out the surveys.

The number of participants in the medium-security correctional institution was smaller than the number in the other two groups. The researchers recruited all participants in this medium-security institution who were willing to participate. It is a general observation that men in a maximum-security facility have far fewer opportunities to leave their cells, and so they take advantage of various opportunities, including answering questionnaires. In contrast, men in a medium-security facility have more opportunities for this, and so they can be more selective in that to which they agree to participate. The numbers in each group were sufficient to provide adequate statistical power (Corder and Foreman 2009; Mordkoff 2016). According to Corder and Foreman (2009) and Mordkoff (2016), most researchers encourage a minimum of 30 participants for adequate research. Further, these were not random samples but instead convenience samples. Thus, there could be differences between those in the general public who filled out the questionnaires and those who did not. Finally, because this was not an experiment, we cannot make cause-and-effect conclusions of the findings.

6 | Conclusion

The pattern in the data here suggests that those in maximum- and medium-security corrections suffer substantially from severe injustices against them and particularly from family members. The effects of this abuse need to become a part of the rehabilitation process in corrections. Such an approach does not invalidate the current treatments for those who now are in a correctional facility. Yet, adding empirically validated approaches to psychologically heal those who are so abused may be a new path forward that will reduce recidivism rates and make individuals, families and communities healthier. Forgiveness therapy, as an empirically validated treatment, does just that: It significantly reduces anger, anxiety and depression and increases empathy in incarcerated people who have suffered serious injustices from others. Because people in the general public also report current emotional challenges from past injustices against them, the accurate dissemination of information about forgiveness as well as forgiveness interventions seems worthwhile for this population.

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