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Reward systems in prison

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The Dutch reward system in prison (*Promoveren en Degradere*) has never been formally evaluated, therewith obscuring its theoretical soundness, application and effects. There are scholarly concerns, however, regarding all three of these aspects. Therefore, the current dissertation aims to improve our understanding of reward systems in prisons, by studying the Dutch reward system in prison. Specifically, the soundness of its theoretical assumptions is tested, prior research is mapped, predictors of receiving rewards are identified (e.g. motivation, self-governance ability and behaviour), and the association between rewards and feelings of autonomy is examined.

The current dissertation reveals that the theoretical assumptions can only partially be supported by scientific knowledge and that the system is not fully applied as intended. Moreover, the current reward system disadvantages incarcerated individuals low on self-governance ability. Finally, some rewards do increase feelings of autonomy in prison. These results underscore the relevance of promoting intrinsic over extrinsic motivation for compliance, and of adapting the current system to the level of self-governance ability of incarcerated individuals. Policymakers are advised to effectuate such policy changes, and practitioners are advised to look beyond behaviour as the key determinant of who is ‘deserving’ of rewards.

This is a volume in the series of the Meijers Research Institute and Graduate School of the Leiden Law School of Leiden University. This study is part of the Law School’s research programme ‘Criminal Justice: Legitimacy, Accountability and Effectivity’.

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