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**PRISON OFFICER SELF-LEGITIMACY AND SUPPORT FOR REHABILITATION IN  
GHANA**

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**Abstract**

Legitimacy refers to the moral recognition of power, and prison legitimacy remains a principal issue for prison researchers and managers. However, the prison legitimacy literature tends to focus on the views held by individuals in custody. Research on prison officer Self-Legitimacy – that is, the powerholders’ belief that the authority vested in them is morally right – remains scanty. Drawing on data from a survey of 1,062 prison officers in Ghana, this study examined both the correlates of prison officer Self-Legitimacy and the links between Self-Legitimacy and Support for Rehabilitation of individuals in custody. The results of multivariate analyses showed that having good Relations with Colleagues and being treated fairly by supervisors enhance prison officers’ Self-Legitimacy. In turn, Self-Legitimacy was found to increase officers’ Support for Rehabilitation. Finally, perceived Fair Treatment by Supervisors and positive Relations with Individuals in Custody were associated with increased Support for Rehabilitation. The implications of these findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** self-legitimacy; legitimacy; rehabilitation; recognition; Ghana prisons

## INTRODUCTION

Legitimate power is the fulcrum of prison life. As Sparks (1994: 15) argues, "... the presence or absence of legitimacy carries large consequences for all parties in a system of power relations". The evidence shows that how power is experienced affects the well-being and conduct of individuals in custody, as well as their desistance beliefs (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017; Crewe, 2009; Liebling, with Arnold 2004; Reisig & Meško, 2009). Consequently, research on power and legitimacy in prisons has increased over the past few decades. However, the focus has not been limited to people in custody; the research extends to how officers perceive and use their power (e.g., Liebling, Price, & Shefer, 2011; Symkovych, 2018).

Building on insights from police studies, the present study extends the prison legitimacy literature by exploring the correlates and consequences of prison officer Self-Legitimacy. 'Self-Legitimacy' refers to power-holders' belief in the rightness of their own individual authority or roles (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2013; Tankebe, 2019). It is, according to Bottoms and Tankebe (2012, 2013), different from officers' perceptions of organizational legitimacy, which had been the focus of previous research. Self-Legitimacy is self-referential – and entails what Archer (2003), in a different context, refers to as "inner conversation" – when power-holders seek to convince themselves that the authority vested in them is morally appropriate. With limited exceptions (Akoensi, 2016; Hacin, Fields, & Meško, 2018; Meško, Hacin, Tankebe, & Fields, 2017), the Self-Legitimacy of prison officers remains an unexplored topic, yet findings from quantitative studies of police officers show that Self-Legitimacy matters for police officers' commitment to the rights of suspects, to officers' support for the fair treatment of citizens, and to their attitudes to the use of force (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Jonathan-Zamir & Harpaz, 2018; Tankebe, 2019; Tankebe & Meško, 2015; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Given the influence of Self-

Legitimacy on the quality of officers' job performance in the police, one might look for a similar influence upon officers in prisons.

We advance the literature in two ways. First, we offer a quantitative analysis of the correlates of prison officer legitimacy in an African context. As various criminologists have argued, research inputs from the global south are necessary to establish whether concepts and generalizations in one context are merely "local truths" or whether they apply across different cultural settings (Bendix, 1963; Nelken, 2009). Second, for the first time in the literature, we investigate a potential link among prison officers between Self-Legitimacy and Support for Rehabilitation. This allows us to bring together two previously unconnected lines of research. The first concerns the support that criminal justice officials express for rehabilitation programs. As that research makes clear, lack of Support for Rehabilitation can result in deliberate efforts to impede or undermine such programs, and to discourage individuals in custody from participating in them (Cullen, Lutze, Link, & Wolfe, 1989; Jackson & Ammen, 1996). The second concerns research on Self-Legitimacy and why Self-Legitimacy matters in criminal justice. The answers have so far been limited to organizational commitment, proactive community engagement, and support for procedural justice. Our focus on Support for Rehabilitation adds to these consequences of Self-Legitimacy.

The data for our study come from a survey of 1,062 prison officers in Ghana. The paper is structured to begin with an overview of the literature on Self-Legitimacy and its hypothesized correlates. Next, we outline hypotheses linking Self-Legitimacy to officers' Support for Rehabilitation. We then offer a brief description of the study context, before moving on to describe the methods adopted in the study. Finally, we present the findings, followed by a discussion.

### SELF-LEGITIMACY AND ITS CORRELATES

Max Weber was the first to attempt a systematic exploration of Self-Legitimacy. In *Politics as Vocation*, he argued that persons in positions of authority needed to persuade themselves that their “good fortune” was justified (Kronman, 1983). A number of scholars have subsequently emphasized the importance of Self-Legitimacy for the stability and quality of governance (Boulding 1967; Sternberger, 1968; Wrong, 1995). The most important recent contribution came from Rodney Barker, whose book *Legitimizing Identities* was the first to focus entirely on Self-Legitimacy, defining it as attempts by power-holders to “justify to themselves or others the actions they are taking and the identities they are expressing or claiming” (Barker, 2001, p. 68).

Self-Legitimacy is not unknown to criminologists. Muir’s (1977) classic ethnographic work on the ways in which police recruits develop moral justifications for their work was a study of Self-Legitimacy in criminology. However, it was only recently, through theoretical work by Bottoms and Tankebe (2012, 2013), that we find a sustained exploration of the concept. Drawing on insights from the political science literature, Bottoms and Tankebe argue that criminal justice professionals – i.e., prison officers and police officers – are engaged in perpetual legitimization dialogues. These dialogues are not limited to attempts to build legitimacy among their multiple audiences, for police and prison officers also seek to convince themselves that their authority is morally justified. Bottoms and Tankebe (2013) argue that the confidence officers have in their Self-Legitimacy arises from the various relationships in which they might feel recognized and accepted. Tankebe (2019) refers to a ‘triad of recognition’, comprising recognition by supervisors, colleagues and clientele (e.g., individuals in custody). From their interactions with supervisors, colleagues and clientele, officers receive information or cues that might confirm, or lead to revisions of, constructed identities of legitimate power-holding.

*Fair Treatment by Supervisors* conveys symbolic messages about officers' self-identity and moral status. In the first of these studies, Tankebe (2014) reported from a survey of 181 police officers in Accra (Ghana) that Fair Treatment by Supervisors increased officers' feelings of Self-Legitimacy. Similarly, among a sample of police officers in Slovenia, Tankebe and Meško (2015) found a positive association between perceived Fair Treatment by Supervisors and expressions of Self-Legitimacy. In the US, Nix and Wolfe (2017) reported that perceptions of organizational justice improved feelings of Self-Legitimacy among a sample of 567 deputies. However, among officers in a police department in the United Kingdom (UK), Bradford and Quinton (2014) found that supervisory fair treatment was associated with a reduction in Self-Legitimacy. Still in the UK, Tankebe (2019) analyzed data from 222 officers in a different police department and found no evidence that recognition by supervisors influenced Self-Legitimacy.

Unlike officers in the police, prison officers are more visible to their supervisors and interact more frequently (Liebling, 2011). Being in regular contact with supervisors who treat officers unfairly might mean a constant challenge to their self-identity; conversely, experiences of fair treatment will serve as a constant positive reinforcement of the cultivated identity of legitimate power-holding. We know of two quantitative analyses of prison officer Self-Legitimacy. Analyzing data from Slovenia, Meško and his colleagues reported that Fair Treatment by Supervisors was related to Self-Legitimacy only indirectly (Meško et al., 2017). In a follow-up study, Hacin and his colleagues found that Fair Treatment by Supervisors was directly associated with increased Self-Legitimacy (Hacin et al., 2018). On this basis, we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The more that officers experience fair treatment from their supervisors, the greater will be their sense of Self-Legitimacy.

*Relations with Colleagues* constitute another factor shown to shape power-holders' Self-Legitimacy. In both police and prison contexts, relations with colleagues have been identified as an important aspect of the officer culture and one that can influence job performance (Chan, 1996; Liebling, 2011; Muir, 1977). In prisons, solidarity and cohesiveness are vital to officers' work on account of the everyday dangers associated with it (Kaufmann, 1988). Given Barbalet's (2001) argument about the importance of relationships in fostering confidence, it is hypothesized that the quality of interpersonal relations among colleagues will influence officers' confidence in their Self-Legitimacy. Among Slovenian police officers, Hacin, Fields, and Meško (2018) found that perceived positive relations with colleagues enhanced officer Self-Legitimacy. Meško and his colleagues had previously reported similar findings (Meško et al., 2017). These findings are also consistent with those reported by police scholars. For example, in Tankebe's (2019) study in the UK, it was found that positive Relationships with Colleagues correlated with increased feelings of Self-Legitimacy. Taken together, these findings show that good relationships among colleagues are vital for nourishing officers' self-belief that their roles are morally accepted and justified. Consequently, we hypothesized as follows:

Hypothesis 2: The more that officers experience positive relationships with their colleagues, the greater will be their expressions of Self-Legitimacy.

*The relationships between officers and their clientele* constitute the third of the hypothesized correlates of Self-Legitimacy. For prison officers, the clientele are the individuals in custody. Relationships are key to prison life; "the moral quality of prison life is enacted and embodied by the attitudes and conduct of prison officers" (Liebling 2011, p. 484). According to Liebling (2011), relationships are a double-edged sword: some relationships between staff and individuals in custody have several professional and instrumental benefits, such as improving information



flow, encouraging individuals in custody to pursue opportunities to improve their future, dynamic security, improving the prison atmosphere, preventing individuals in custody from becoming aggressive with staff, reducing the use of force by staff, and generally assisting prison officers to do their jobs well (Liebling, Arnold, & Straub, 2011; Liebling, Price, & Shefer, 2011). However, where they are not bound by professional standards of ethical behavior, staff relationships with individuals in custody can lead to staff conditioning and corruption, inconsistency in rule enforcement, and favoritism (Liebling, Arnold et al., 2011).

In a qualitative study in Ghana, Akoensi (2016) identified relationships between staff and individuals in custody as an important aspect of officers' Self-Legitimacy. Hacin and his colleagues' analysis of survey data from Slovenian prison officers found that the more officers believed those in custody held favorable views about them, the more confident of their own legitimacy the officers became (Hacin et al., 2018). In a sample of 529 police officers in Slovenia, Tankebe and Meško (2015) reported that positive relationships with citizens mattered for the officers' Self-Legitimacy. In Ghana, Tankebe (2014) found that relationships with citizens influenced officers' Self-Legitimacy indirectly via the quality of relationships with supervisors. In a study of deputies in the US, Nix and Wolfe (2016) reported that perceptions of negative publicity about policing undermined officers' sense of Self-Legitimacy. Since relationships are at the heart of a prison system (Liebling with Arnold, 2004; Sparks, Bottoms, & Hay 1996), we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The more that officers experience positive Relations with Individuals in Custody, the greater will be their expressions of Self-Legitimacy.

**SELF-LEGITIMACY, RELATIONSHIPS, AND REHABILITATION**

A key goal of imprisonment is to rehabilitate individuals in custody. This is not merely an official aspiration; there is evidence that individuals in custody place emphasis on the rehabilitative support offered to them. In an interview with individuals in custody in Scotland, Schinkel (2014) found that rehabilitation was one of the issues that elicited “most of the anger and frustration” (p. 131); individuals in custody expressed a strong need for “greater individual attention and support to be able to move away from offending upon release” (p. 132). The challenges to rehabilitation are multifaceted. They include negative signals from staff, which might discourage some individuals in custody from taking prison-based programs seriously. The research evidence points to the importance of officers’ personal characteristics and of organizational policing, including training (e.g., Jackson & Ammen, 1996; Kauffman, 1988; Kerce, Magnusson, & Rudolph, 1994).

However, the potential for variations in Self-Legitimacy to account for officers’ attitudes towards rehabilitation of individuals in custody is yet to be explored. In her discussion of self-identity and role performance, Archer (2003, p. 139) conjectured that people with different identities would “evaluate the same situations differently and their responses will vary accordingly”. The implication of this statement is that attitudes towards rehabilitation will vary according to differences between officers’ beliefs in their individual Self-Legitimacy. This is even more important in Ghana, where rehabilitation programs are limited in scope, and where officers have to be innovative and make sustained personal investments in the lives of those in custody in order to assist with changing their offending behavior (Akoensi, 2014a).

The evidence on Self-Legitimacy shows it fosters support for a range of pro-organizational goals. Police officers expressing confidence in Self-Legitimacy are less likely to

threaten citizens with the use of force, are more committed to policing ideals, tend to embrace procedural justice in police work and do more than is minimally required of them (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Jonathan-Zamir & Harpaz, 2018; Trinkner, Kerrison, & Goff, 2019). In prisons, Symkovych's (2018) study in Ukraine found that a loss of Self-Legitimacy can result in hesitancy and concession of authority. In the present study, we expect prison officers who express confidence in Self-Legitimacy also to endorse rehabilitation as an organizational goal.

Hypothesis 4: The more that officers believe in their Self-Legitimacy, the greater will be their Support for Rehabilitation.

Prison researchers define the moral climate of prisons as “those aspects of [an individual in custody's] mainly interpersonal and material treatment that render a term of imprisonment more or less dehumanizing and/or painful” (Liebling with Arnold 2004, p. 473). The evidence shows that the nature of that climate can have consequences for the well-being of individuals in custody – including risk of suicide – and their prospect of desistance (Brunto-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). Although approached from the standpoint of individuals in custody, the notion can be extended to prison officers, which allows us to define ‘moral climate’ as those aspects of interpersonal relationships in which officers feel more or less accepted and recognized as power-holders. This encapsulates experiences with supervisors and colleagues, and the signals these experiences convey about the norms that matter in a prison. The research evidence from police studies shows that the moral climate within police organizations has important consequences for officers' attitudes to ordinary citizens (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe & Meško, 2015; Tyler, Callahan, & Frost, 2007; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Based on evidence from the police literature, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 5: The more positive the relationships that officers have with their supervisors, the greater will be their Support for Rehabilitation.

Hypothesis 6: The more positive the relationships that officers have with their colleagues, the greater will be their Support for Rehabilitation.

Finally, evidence from police studies shows that officers' perceptions of the quality of their interactions with civilians affect both their attitudes and their actions. Bradford and Quinton (2014) report that officers who perceived a supportive public also tended to self-report support for the rights of suspects. In Israel, Jonathan-Zamir and Harpaz (2018) reported that police officers who perceived public support for the police were more likely to express support for the fair treatment of civilians (but see Tankebe, 2019; Tankebe & Meško, 2015). In a study in Slovenian prisons, Meško and colleagues found that prison officers who expressed commitment to fair treatment individuals in custody were officers perceived positive relations with those individuals (Meško et al., 2017). As Schinkel's (2014) study makes clear, the judgments of these individuals in custody about a fair exercise of authority include programs to help them move away from crime upon release from prison. Consequently, Support for Rehabilitation taps into support for the well-being of individuals in custody. Given this, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 7: The more favorably officers perceive their interactions with individuals in custody, the greater will be their Support for Rehabilitation.

## **PRISONS IN GHANA**

Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) is a west African country of 30 million people. Prisons as we currently know them in Ghana were introduced by the British in 1841. The first of those prisons was at the Cape Coast castle – a facility for holding slaves during the period of the transatlantic

slave trade (Akoensi, 2017). When Ghana gained independence from British colonial rule in 1957, it inherited 33 prisons, a prison population of 52 per 100,000 of the population, with an overcrowding rate in excess of 48%. Today, there are 43 prisons in Ghana with an average daily custody population of 14, 467 (or 50 per 100,000 of the population), and a staff population of 5, 898 (Ghana Prisons Service, 2016).

To become a prison officer, a person must hold Ghanaian citizenship, have no criminal record, be aged between 18 and 30 years (or 35 years in the case of superior officers), meet a height requirement (not less than 1.65 meters for male and 1.55 meters for females), and pass physical and medical examinations. Entry into senior positions requires a university degree, while junior officers are required to hold a high school qualification. Recruits undergo a six-month training period at a training school and a further three months of placement at one of the 43 prison establishments. The course content includes prison duties, penal law, and interpersonal skills, weapons handling, drill and martial arts. For those training for direct entry into senior positions, the course content comprises such modules as correctional management, penal law, financial administration, emergency and serious incident management, and management of information on individuals in custody.

By regulation, prison officers are to be promoted every three years upon completion of mandatory refresher courses. In practice, officers spend a longer time at a rank. Salaries are low compared to those in other state security organizations. Since salaries are linked to promotions, delays in promotion often cause disaffection among officers. Boateng and Hsieh (2019a) found that, among a survey of 169 officers in Ghana, perceptions of distributive and procedural justice explained officers' satisfaction with their job. They also reported that those on higher salaries were more satisfied with their jobs and expressed greater commitment to the organization.

Elsewhere, Boateng and Hsieh (2019*b*) showed that job satisfaction reduced the likelihood of self-reported misconduct but increased job stress.

There has been no research into public perceptions of prisons and prison officers. Historically, however, the status of prison officers is not highly regarded, which is partly due to poor working conditions (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019*a*). Yet, owing to widespread unemployment, recruitment exercises often attract large numbers of applicants. Officers work in one of two main categories of prison: low-security and medium-security. It is commonplace for unarmed officers to escort and supervise up to four individuals from low-security prisons to work on various farms, an activity referred to as ‘external labor’. This necessarily increases the risk of escape from low-security prisons. A range of prison-based rehabilitation programs is available to the individuals in custody, including formal education, doormat- and soap-making, weaving, and tailoring. While those in custody generally recognize officers’ authority and the prison atmosphere appears relatively relaxed, power relations in medium-security prisons are semi-formal.

A major problem for prisons is overcrowding (as they are 46% over capacity), and this has implications for maintaining order on the wings. With a ratio of 1 individual in custody to 1 officers, officers rely heavily on trusted informal leaders of individuals in custody to undertake some officer responsibilities, such as escorting the individuals in custody from cells to dormitories or the infirmary, and sometimes supervising them in cleaning their cells and other activities (Akoensi, 2014*b*). This is similar to what Symkovych (2018) reports in his work on Ukrainian prisons.

## METHODS

### DATA

The data for the study came from a survey of a convenience sample of prison officers in low-security and medium-security prisons. Most of the questionnaires were distributed during open meetings between officers, known as durbars. The first author, who carried out the fieldwork in March 2012, was given an opportunity at these meetings to explain the nature of the study and to invite officers to complete the questionnaires. All questionnaires were in English, the official language. Some officers completed these questionnaires on the spot; others took them away to their offices for completion. For purposes of keeping order at the prisons, not all officers were at these meetings. Consequently, efforts were made, successfully, to reach those officers. All participants were told of the voluntary nature of their participation, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Out of a total of 1,490 questionnaires distributed 1,117 were returned, a response rate of 74.9%. However, because of incomplete responses only 1,062 questionnaires were usable. The high response rate is mainly attributable to the meetings held for this research study in 26 of the 31 prisons, which generated an average response rate of 81.2%. Of the respondents, 65.9% were male, 70.9% had secondary school education, and 36.6% indicated that the opportunity to offer help to individuals in custody was their motive for becoming prison officers. Their time in post ranged from one year to 39 years, with a mean of 15.6 years (see Table 1). However, it is important to emphasize that the respondents were not a randomized sample. This necessarily limits the scope for confidence about the generalizability of the findings reported below. Nevertheless, we hope that they are sufficiently interesting to encourage future studies with more representative samples.

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**Inset Table 1 about here**

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## CONSTRUCTS AND MEASURES

Five key variables were measured: Self-Legitimacy, Support for Rehabilitation, Relations with Individuals in Custody, Fair Treatment by Supervisors, and Relations with Colleagues. All had response categories ranging through 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = uncertain; 4 = disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items we employed to measure these variables were adapted from the literature. Instruments were validated in a pilot study. A full list of the items measuring the various constructs have been reported in the Appendix, which displays factor loadings, mean scores and standard deviations for all items.

## DEPENDENT VARIABLES

There are two dependent variables – Self-Legitimacy and Support for Rehabilitation – drawing on survey instruments from the existing literature (see, Tankebe 2010; Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985). We operationalized officers' levels of Self-Legitimacy using five items drawn from the literature. The items included “as a prison officer, I believe I occupy a special importance in society”, and were combined to create a Self-Legitimacy scale. A higher score indicates greater Self-Legitimacy (Cronbach's alpha = .68,  $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = .61$ ). Our measure of Support for the Rehabilitation of individuals in custody consisted of four items, including “people in custody in this prison should receive treatment and rehabilitative services e.g., education and psychological treatment and counselling”. These items were summed to create Support for Rehabilitation scale, with higher scores indicating greater support (Cronbach's alpha = .74,  $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = .54$ ).



## **INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

We measured three independent variables, using instruments from Liebling, Price and Shefer (2011): Relations with Colleagues; Fair Treatment by Supervisors; and Relations with Individuals in Custody. Five items were used to operationalize Relations with Colleagues, and covered issues ranging across support, respect, trust, and loyalty to measure relationship with colleagues. The items included: “I feel respected by my colleagues in this prison”. The items were combined to create Relations with Colleagues, with higher scores indicating positive assessment of the officers’ relations with their colleagues (Cronbach’s alpha = .80,  $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). The second independent variables, Fair Treatment by Supervisors, was measured with five items. They included, “I am treated fairly by the superior officer in this prison facility”, and responses combined to create Fair Treatment by Supervisors index (Cronbach’s alpha = .75,  $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .59$ ). A higher score indicates greater perceptions of Fair Treatment by Supervisors. Four items were used to measure the third independent variable: Relations with Individuals in Custody. The items included “I feel respected by the individuals in this prison”. The responses were combined to form a Relations with Individuals in Custody scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .74,  $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = .73$ ). A higher score indicates a more positive assessment of those relationships.

## **CONTROL VARIABLES**

We included several variables to control for potential confounds: years of service, sex (0 = female, 1 = male), educational attainment (1 = secondary, 2 = post-secondary school<sup>2</sup>, and 3 = university education), and motivation for becoming a prison officer (1 = instrumental, 2 = to help those in custody, 3 = admiration for the job). We further controlled for the type of prison (0 = low-security prison, 1 = medium-security prison), and the frequency of contact officers had with

those in custody (0 = none or sometimes; 1 = daily). Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for each of the study variables.

### **ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

Two analytic strategies were employed. First, we conducted correlation analysis to establish initial associations between our substantive research variables. We were interested especially in the links between each of our independent variables (Fair Treatment by Supervisors, Relationships with Colleagues, Relationships with Individuals in Custody) and the two dependent variables (Self-Legitimacy and Support for Rehabilitation). Second, we employed ordinary least squares regression models to offer more robust estimates of the above links.

### **RESULTS**

We began by exploring bivariate relationships between our substantive research variables (see Table 2). We found that each of our hypothesized correlates of Self-Legitimacy was statistically significant: Fair Treatment by Supervisors ( $r = .24$ ), the quality of Relationships with Colleagues ( $r = .22$ ) and Relationships with Individuals in Custody ( $r = .10$ ) were all positively associated with confidence in Self-Legitimacy. Self-Legitimacy, in turn, was a statistically significant correlate of Support for Rehabilitation ( $r = .27$ ). Further, being treated fairly by one's supervisor ( $r = .28$ ), having good relationships both with fellow-officers ( $r = .20$ ) and with those who are in custody ( $r = .20$ ) exhibited positive associations with Support for Rehabilitation of individuals in custody. As the findings also show, none of the correlations between our independent variables was high enough to raise concerns about collinearity. Additional diagnostic checks confirmed these preliminary observations.

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**Inset Table 2 about here**

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Next, we conducted two sets of multivariate analyses to estimate the effects of our hypothesized correlates on the dependent variables, namely Self-Legitimacy and Support for Rehabilitation. For Self-Legitimacy, we estimated four ordinary least squares regression models to investigate the influence of the correlates. The findings displayed in Table 3 show that gender, education, and contact with individuals in custody or motivation for joining the prison organization exhibited no statistically significant influence on Self-Legitimacy. The background characteristics that predicted Self-Legitimacy were motivation for joining the prison organization and years of experience. In comparison with officers with an instrumental motive, officers who joined out of admiration for the job tended to display greater confidence in Self-Legitimacy ( $\beta = -.07, p = .031$ ). As years of service increased, Self-Legitimacy decreased ( $\beta = -.08, p = .008$ ). In terms of our substantive correlates, the results show that Fair Treatment by Supervisors ( $\beta = .20, p < .001$ ) and Relations with Colleagues ( $\beta = .14, p < .001$ ) were associated with increased Self-Legitimacy. However, the data did not support our hypothesis that Relations with Those in Custody would shape officer Self-Legitimacy. Finally, we investigated whether and to what extent the influence of any of our hypothesized correlates differed by prison type. We found no evidence of any such differences.

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**Inset Table 3 about here**

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In Table 4, we examined the correlates of officers' Support for the Rehabilitation of Individuals in Custody. There were a number of interesting findings. Starting with personal characteristics, we found that male officers were more supportive of rehabilitation than female officers were ( $\beta = .06, p = .004$ ), suggesting that Support for Rehabilitation of individuals in

custody might be gendered. In comparison with officers having a secondary school qualification, those with post-secondary ( $\beta = .08, p = .012$ ) and university qualifications ( $\beta = .09, p = .003$ ) expressed greater Support for Rehabilitation. Further, officers having regular contact with people in custody were most disposed to support rehabilitation ( $\beta = .08, p = .010$ ). Perhaps, the most striking of the effects of officers' background characteristics on their Support for Rehabilitation was that of experience ( $\beta = -.09, p = .004$ ): the more experienced the officers, the less support that they expressed for the rehabilitation, a finding contrary to what Tewksbury and Mustaine (2008) reported in their study of correctional officers in Kentucky (US).

We found support for three of our four hypotheses. Confidence in Self-Legitimacy emerged as a statistically significant correlate of Support for Rehabilitation ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ). Additionally, the more officers felt that they had positive relationships with those who are in custody ( $\beta = .09, p = .009$ ), the more supportive they were of the rehabilitation of individuals in custody. Further, experiencing Fair Treatment from Supervisors was also a statistically significant correlate of Support for Rehabilitation ( $\beta = .17, p < .001$ ). However, Relationships with Colleagues were not related to Support for Rehabilitation.

Does the influence of our hypothesized correlations differ across the type of prison in which our officers were working? To answer this question, we added interactions between type of prison (low-security versus medium-security) and each of our potential correlates (see Models 2 to 5). The results in Model 2 indicate that the influence by perceived quality of Relationships with Individuals in Custody upon Support for Rehabilitation was stronger in medium-security prisons than it was in low-security prisons. We found similar results for the other correlates: Treatment by Supervisors, Relationships with Colleagues, and Self-Legitimacy all had a greater

influence on Support for Rehabilitation in medium-security prisons than they had in low-security prisons.

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**Inset Table 4 about here**

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## **DISCUSSION**

Legitimacy is not a new concept to prisons research. At least since Sparks, Bottoms and Hay's book *Prisons and the Problem of Order* (1996), it has been a topic of sustained interest among researchers interested in understanding social order within prisons. Until now, however, work on Self-Legitimacy within criminology had been confined almost exclusively to police studies, with the exceptions of Meško's work in Slovenia (Hacin et al., 2018; Meško et al., 2017) and Akoensi's (2016) research in Ghana. The present study addresses this gap in our knowledge by using survey data obtained from prison officers in Ghana.

First, we focus on the correlates of officers' Self-Legitimacy. Our most important finding here is that, among the officers surveyed, Fair Treatment by Supervisors and good Relationships with Colleagues enhance beliefs in Self-Legitimacy. The findings are consistent with those reported from Slovenia by Meško et al. (2017) and by Hacin et al. (2018), specifically that supervisors and colleagues matter for prison officers' Self-Legitimacy. Yet, contrary to Meško et al (2017), our multivariate analyses found no evidence that Relationships with Individuals in Custody shaped the Self-Legitimacy of prison officers in Ghana. That we did not find such evidence is not by itself evidence that such effects were absent among Ghanaian prison officers. Indeed, a greater proportion of the variance in Self-Legitimacy remained unexplained by our independent variables. The implication is that there were more influential factors that we did not capture in our study. Consequently, future studies looking beyond the factors tested in the current

study so as to include broader structural factors might advance our understanding of the conditions that sustain Self-Legitimacy among prison officers. For the first time in the literature, we sought to investigate whether correlates of Self-Legitimacy vary across different prison settings. We found no evidence of variations across the low-security and medium-security prisons we studied.

Our second key finding relates to the influence of Fair Treatment by Supervisors, Relationships with Individuals in Custody, and Self-Legitimacy upon Support for the Rehabilitation of individuals in custody. Some have argued that unless prison officers endorse the rehabilitation ideology they might not help to prepare the individuals in custody for life after release (Cullen et al., 1989; Farkas, 1999). We found that officers who experience Fair Treatment from Supervisors, perceive a positive Relationship with Individuals in Custody, and express belief in their own legitimacy were more disposed to support rehabilitation. This is the first study to test that relationship. However, the finding appears to support Gilbert's description of the *professional* prison officer, which applies Muir's (1977) ideas to prisons. Such an officer is described as one who views individuals in custody as not much different from self and empathizes with the human condition of those individuals (Gilbert, 1997). This is consistent with Liebling's (2011) thesis that individuals in custody appreciate traditional-professional prison officers, whom she describes as being more comfortable with their own authority and as a result commanding respect among individuals in custody. In other words, officers with "an identity of legitimate power-holding" (Tankebe, 2019) are akin to Muir's professionals, empathizing with individuals in custody and seeking avenues to support those intent on avoiding illegal behavior.

Thus, our findings add to the growing body of evidence suggesting that Self-Legitimacy explains why some criminal justice professionals maintain values and beliefs about their

organizations and clientele. They are also consistent with evidence from prison research showing that prisons with officers who are clear about their identity are also prisons in which the individuals in custody feel supported and fairly treated (Liebling with Arnold, 2004). We cannot be certain that favorable attitudes to rehabilitation will translate into everyday behaviors supportive of attempts by individuals in custody to live crime-free lives, although there is evidence to show that individuals in custody feel better treated in prisons where officers hold favorable rehabilitative attitudes (Beijersbergen, Dirkzwager, Molleman, Van Der Laan, & Nieuwebeerta, 2015; Molleman & Leeuw, 2012). To the extent that attitudes sometimes influence behavior, our findings might hold practical relevance for prison managers seeking to understand and influence officers' work orientations.

Third, this concerns the officers' social characteristics. With the exception of experience on the job we found no evidence that Self-Legitimacy can be inferred from gender, education or motives for becoming a prison officer. However, with respect to Support for Rehabilitation, the correlation with each of the background characteristics was statistically significant. Officers reporting frequent contact with individuals in custody and those with better education were correspondingly more supportive of the rehabilitation of individuals in custody. Perhaps the most striking finding concerns the direction of the influence of experience: the more experienced officers expressed less confidence in Self-Legitimacy and less Support for Rehabilitation of individuals in custody. It is hard to be categorical about the reasons for the influence of experience, but there are at least two possible explanations for this unexpected finding. We make two conjectures: the first is that experienced officers were less supportive of rehabilitation because they felt secure enough to express some negative views about it. However, this requires an assumption that less experienced officers had been less candid, which we cannot substantiate.

A second and more plausible conjecture is that experiences on the job have led to cynicism not only about the morality of authority but also about the rehabilitative prospects for individuals in custody. With respect to the latter, officers might have witnessed a history of gaps between the official rhetoric about rehabilitation and the reality; alternatively, they have witnessed individuals in custody who take part in rehabilitation programs without any behavioral improvement (see, Trinkner, Kerrison, & Goff 2019). In other words, negative job experiences accumulate over time, leading to doubts and uncertainties about the morality of personal Self-Legitimacy and about the prospects for rehabilitation of individuals in custody.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Our study is not without limitations. First, our data are cross-sectional and, therefore, capture the views of officers at only a single time-point, with the possibility of response bias. How far the influence of the correlates of Self-Legitimacy and Support for Rehabilitation might change or remain stable over time was not addressed. Yet, as Hacin, Fields and Meško (2018) have recently shown, such changes are possible. Thus there is an urgent need for longitudinal studies of officers' Self-Legitimacy in order to address the potential importance of stability or change in Self-Legitimacy and its correlates. Such studies may also help to address problems with causal direction. For example, we reported that both relationships with colleagues and Treatment by Supervisors were positively correlated with Self-Legitimacy. However, it is equally plausible that prison officers with greater Self-Legitimacy were more disposed to characterize their relationships with colleagues and supervisors in positive terms.

Second, the factors we examined left the greater proportion of attitudes towards Self-Legitimacy and Support for Rehabilitation unexplained. A possible explanation might point to



issues of construct validity arising from difficulties in fully capturing a notion as complex as Self-Legitimacy. Officers scoring high on our Self-Legitimacy scale were assumed to have confidence in their moral authority. However, some might interpret the items as measures of the extent to which officers believe they have control, including backing from both prison and societal authorities. Consequently, officers might believe that their roles were legitimate but nevertheless doubt their ability to maintain control over the individuals in custody; conversely, they might view the political system and the laws as illegitimate but remain confident of their ability to wield authority. These are nuances that demand fresh thinking on how Self-Legitimacy is measured in order to improve construct validity. Fourth, we have focused on the implications of Self-Legitimacy for prison officers' attitudes towards individuals in custody, but attitudes do not always translate into behavior. Future studies examining the influence of Self-Legitimacy on behavior will greatly advance our knowledge.

## Notes

1. Bradford and Quinton did not attempt an explanation as to why Fair Treatment by Supervisors reduced Self-Legitimacy; they merely observed that it was a “residual” effect dwarfed in substantive terms by other aspects of the model” (p. 1037).
2. This comprised diplomas, and teacher and nursing certificates.

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**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Mean/Percent	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Gender			0	1
Female	34.1			
Male	65.9			
Experience	15.6		0.70	38.9
Education			1	3
Secondary	70.9%			
Post-secondary	19.9%			
University	9.2%			
Motivation			1	3
Instrumental	49.5%			
Help individuals in custody	36.6%			
Admiration	13.9%			
Type of prison			1	2
Low Security	23.2%			
Medium Security	76.8%			
Contact with individuals in custody			0	1
None or rarely	18.5%			
Daily	81.5%			
Self-Legitimacy	4.04	0.61	1	5
Rehabilitation Support	4.31	0.54	1	5

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Relations with those in custody	3.78	0.73	1	5
Relations with Colleagues	3.68	0.65	1	5
Fair Treatment by Supervisors	3.93	0.59	1	5

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**Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Scaled Variables**

	1	2	3	4
1. Self-Legitimacy				
2. Rehabilitation Support	.27**			
3. Relations with Individuals in Custody	.10**	.20**		
4. Fair Treatment by Supervisors	.24**	.28**	.35**	
5. Treatment by Colleagues	.22**	.20**	.41**	.46**

Note: N = 1062; \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 3: Correlates of Self-Legitimacy Among Prison Officers**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	
	(SE) $\beta$	(SE) $\beta$	(SE) $\beta$	(SE) $\beta$	
Gender	(.04) -.02	(.04) -.01	(.04) -.01	(.04) .00	
Experience	(.00) -.08**	(.00) -.04	(.00) -.04	(.00) -.04	
Education (ref. secondary)					
Post-Secondary	(.05) -.04	(.05) -.03	(.05) -.03	(.05) -.03	
University	(.07) -.04	(.07) -.03	(.07) -.03	(.07) -.03	
Contact with those in custody	(.05) .06	(.05) .06	(.05) .06	(.05) .06	
Motivation (instrumental)					
Help those in custody	(.04) .04	(.04) .06	(.04) .06	(.04) .06	
Admiration for role	(.06) .07*	(.06) .06	(.06) .06	(.06) .06	
Relations with those in Custody (A)	(.03) -.03	---	---	---	
Treatment by Supervisors (B)	(.04) .20***	---	---	---	
Relations with Colleagues (C)	(.03) .14***	---	---	---	
Prison Type	(.04) -.02	---	---	---	
Prison Type x A	---	(.01) .00	---	---	
Prison Type x B	---	---	(.01) .04	---	
Prison Type x C	---	---	---	(.01) .04	
	<i>F</i>	8.75***	1.66	1.82	1.89
	<i>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></i>	7.7%	1.0	1.0	1.0
	<i>N</i>	1015	1015	1015	1015

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p = .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 4: Correlates of Support for Rehabilitation**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	(SE) $\beta$	(SE) $\beta$	(SE) $\beta$	(SE) $\beta$	(SE) $\beta$
Gender	(.03) .06*	(.04) .07*	(.04) .06	(.04) .06	(.04) .07*
Experience	(.00) -.09**	(.00) -.06	(.00) -.07*	(.00) -.06	(.00) -.06
Education					
Post-Secondary	(.04) .08*	(.04) .08**	(.04) .08**	(.04) .09**	(.04) .09**
University	(.06) .09**	(.06) .10**	(.06) .10**	(.06) .10**	(.06) .10**
Contact with those in custody	(.04) .08*	(.04) .10**	(.04) .10**	(.04) .10**	(.04) .10**
Motivation					
Help those in custody	(.03) -.04	(.04) .00	(.04) .00	(.04) .01	(.04) .01
Admiration for Role	(.05) -.07*	(.05) -.06	(.05) -.06	(.05) -.06	(.05) -.06
Relations with those in custody (A)	(.02) .09**	---	---	---	---
Treatment by Supervisors (B)	(.03) .17***	---	---	---	---
Relations with Colleagues (C)	(.03) .03	---	---	---	---
Self-Legitimacy (D)	(.03) .21***	---	---	---	---
Prison Type	(.03) .05	---	---	---	---

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Prison Type x A	---	(.01) .10**	---	---	---
Prison Type x B	---	---	(.01) .10**	---	---
Prison Type x C	---	---	---	(.01) .10**	---
Prison Type x D	---	---	---	---	(.01) .12***
<i>F</i>	16.51	6.70***	6.9***	6.83***	7.45***
<i>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></i>	15.5	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.8
<i>N</i>	1015	1015	1015	1015	1015

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Appendix: Results of Principal Component Analysis**

	Factor loadings	Mean	SD
<b>Relations with Colleagues</b>			
1. I trust my colleagues in this prison	0.78	3.28	1.02
2. My colleagues in this prison trust me.	0.75	3.56	.94
3. I feel supported in my work by my colleague officers.	0.67	3.78	.86
4. I feel a sense of loyalty to my colleagues in this prison	0.60	3.86	.77
5. I feel respected by my colleagues in this prison.	0.53	3.92	.76
<b>Fair Treatment by Supervisors</b>			
1. The in-charge of this prison is approachable when I need to discuss an issue with him/her	0.69	4.07	.85
2. I am treated fairly by the superior officers in this prison facility.	0.64	3.82	.87
3. The in-charge of this prison takes interest in my welfare.	0.63	3.82	.90
4. I am trusted by supervisor officers in this prison facility.	0.56	3.96	.79
5. I am valued as a member of the prison service by my in-charge.	0.53	3.99	.78
<b>Support for Rehabilitation</b>			
1. Treatment/rehabilitation programs for individuals in custody are a good idea	0.73	4.32	.72
2. I would support the expansion of rehabilitation programs that are currently in place in some of our prisons	0.71	4.21	.74



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3. Individuals in custody at this prison should receive treatment and rehabilitation services. 0.71 4.28 .73

4. We need more educational and vocational programs for those in custody. 0.66 4.42 .70

**Self-Legitimacy**

1. I have confidence in the authority vested in me as a prison officer. 0.71 4.11 .82

2. As a prison officer, I believe I occupy a special position in society. 0.70 4.16 .78

3. I am confident that I have enough authority to do my job well. 0.63 3.99 .90

4. I believe the prison officer corps are capable of providing security to all Ghanaians. 0.56 3.98 1.05

5. Putting on my prison officer uniform makes me feel that I have a special kind of authority. 0.56 3.95 1.01

**Relations with those in custody**

1. I am trusted by individuals in this prison. 0.77 3.50 1.01

2. I feel respected by individuals in this prison. 0.77 3.89 .84

3. I have a good relationship with individuals in this prison. 0.73 3.94 .82