

Media Portrayals of Prison Life and Criminal Justice: A Narrative Literature Review on Shaping Public Perceptions and Policy Implications*


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The media plays a powerful role in shaping public perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and the criminal justice system, which are often negative and influenced by various factors, emphasising the importance of critically assessing these portrayals for a more nuanced understanding. This narrative review summarises and analyses existing literature on diverse depictions of prison life across different media. A comprehensive literature search resulted in 33 studies covering the years 1993–2023. Using content analysis, four themes exploring prison portrayals and public perceptions were identified: 1) discrepancies between media and reality of prison experiences; 2) specificities of public perceptions, including media representations; 3) media influence on public attitudes and beliefs regarding incarceration, rehabilitation, and punitive measures within the criminal justice system; and 4) impact on criminal justice policies and policy reforms. In conclusion, media representations of prisons, prisoners, and the criminal justice system significantly impact public attitudes by often sensationalising and perpetuating negative stereotypes, which, in turn, influences legal processes and policymakers' decisions, underscoring the need for more balanced depictions to foster informed discussions and challenge biases.

KEYWORDS: media representation / prison life / public opinion / media stereotypes / public perception / prison movies / prison / criminal justice policies

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Introduction

The visibility of prisons and prisoners has increased due to the development of communication media, profoundly impacting public perceptions of law enforcement, courts, and corrections (Kania & Walsh, 1993; Cheliotis, 2010). Media representations, particularly in movies and television, are powerful tools for shaping public perception and understanding of imprisonment, the criminal justice system, and the lives of prisoners. These portrayals can affect not only public attitudes but also the criminal justice community's views, highlighting the importance of critically assessing how these subjects are depicted in the media (Bougadi, 2016).

Public perceptions of prison life, prisoners, and prisons can vary widely, but they are generally negative. The public tends to view prisons as places of punishment rather than rehabilitation. This negative portrayal extends to prisoners, who often face stigmatisation and dehumanisation (Cheliotis, 2010). Various factors influence and shape these perceptions: media portrayals and representations, societal attitudes, individual socioeconomic status, political beliefs, and personal experiences with the criminal justice system (Brown, 2009; Cheliotis, 2010).

Numerous studies have explored this multifaceted topic, focusing on the attitudes, beliefs, and public opinions about prisons and their inhabitants. This narrative literature review, as defined by Grant & Booth (2009), examines recent or current literature, focusing on studies published within the last decade, on the influence of media portrayals on public perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and the criminal justice system. The content under analysis encompasses studies on media representations and public perceptions of prison life, prisoners, prisons, the criminal justice system, and policies. Drawing upon key frameworks such as cultural criminology, media effects theory, and framing theory, this literature review examines the collective body of literature to enhance our understanding of the intricate relationship between media portrayals, public attitudes, and policy decisions.

Methods

A literature search was performed to identify studies on media representations and public perceptions of prison life, prisoners, prisons, the criminal justice system, and policies. The extensive search was performed using Google Scholar – Advanced Scholar Search, without limiting the date range. The following keywords were used: *media portrayals, public opinion, media stereotypes, media representations, prison depictions, public perception, media impact, prison movies, prison films, prison series* combined with *prison life, inmates, prisoners, convicts, prisons, imprisonment, jail, public policy*.

Next, studies citing detected research were explored further at the level of titles and abstracts. The following studies were considered eligible: those that focused on characteristics and issues related to media representation and public perception of prisons and prisoners, those published in English, and those that were original, peer-reviewed articles or thesis/dissertations.

The literature search resulted in 2104 citations, and an additional 79 were screened at the title and abstract level. Using the above criteria and after excluding duplicates, 33 studies published in the last three decades, covering the years 1993–2023, were included in this narrative literature review. The search was completed in October 2023.

In this study, a qualitative content analysis approach was employed to review and synthesise the existing literature on media representations and public perceptions of prison life, prisoners, prisons, the criminal justice system, and related policies. Qualitative content analysis was chosen as it allows for a deeper exploration of themes, patterns, and perspectives within the scholarly articles and peer-reviewed publications and enables a comprehensive examination of the diverse insights provided by the selected studies. The categories for content analysis were derived through an inductive process, identifying recurring themes across the literature on selected topics. A single study may contribute to multiple categories, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the subject matter.

The results are categorised into four themes. The first theme covers key differences between how prisons and inmates are portrayed in the media and their actual experiences in prison. The second theme involves specificities of public perceptions, including media representations. This would allow us to glean how the public concretely perceives prison life, prisoners, and the prison system. The third theme focuses on media influence on public views in order to explore how media portrayals affect public attitudes and beliefs concerning incarceration, rehabilitation, and punitive measures within the criminal justice system. Finally, the fourth theme is dedicated to the impact on criminal justice policies and how media-influenced shifts in public opinion have affected criminal justice policies.

Results

Media Portrayals and Prison Realities

People frequently assume that all prisons share a uniform identity, influenced by media portrayals, such as those in TV shows and movies, which tend to present a homogenous image of prison life (Yousman, 2013). These depictions can create a ‘pseudo-environment’ in people’s minds, leading them to feel informed about something they have not directly experienced (Lippmann, 1922, as cited in Yousman, 2013; Shemtob, 2013). Nevertheless, Yousman (2013) reminds us that,

in reality, each prison is unique, much like schools or neighbourhoods vary. Media representations of prisons often oversimplify the complexities of real-life incarceration. Actual prison conditions vary widely, offering different inmate programmes and treatments. However, important issues such as inadequate healthcare, limited access to education and job training, staff abuse, involvement in illicit activities, post-release employment difficulties, and insufficient officer training are often neglected. Female inmates, especially non-violent offenders housed with violent criminals, face unique challenges in U.S. prisons (Yousman, 2013).

Media representations of prisoners also focus on sensational and extreme stories, contributing to skewed public perceptions (Boyle & Stanley, 2019; Yardley & Wilson, 2013). Summarising the literature, Umamaheswar (2013) found that media portrayals of prisoners could perpetuate stereotypes and influence public understanding of who is most affected by the criminal justice system. Furthermore, a study revealed that media outlets, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and websites, have the freedom to select how they present issues related to prison privatisation and existing private prisons (Adams, 2022). This research examined how the mainstream media frames prison privatisation and inmates held in private prisons. The analysis showed that prisoners are often depicted as either deserving or undeserving based on how private prisons are framed in terms of economic benefits, ethical concerns, or prison misconduct (Adams, 2022).

At the same time, gender plays a significant role in media portrayals of crime, with women frequently being portrayed as both victims and blameworthy, which is often rooted in patriarchal notions of femininity and gender stereotypes (Umamaheswar, 2013). Clowers (2001) addressed widespread misconceptions about female inmates, which were largely formed through inaccurate portrayals in films. Four films that depict female inmates and their lives in ways that perpetuate negative stereotypes were analysed: “Chained Heat” (Nicholas, 1983), “Red Heat” (Collector & von Theumer, 1985), “Fugitive Rage” (Ray, 1996), and “Angels in Chains” (Goff et al., 1983). Based on her experience as an educator in a maximum-security prison for female inmates, Clowers (2001) provided counterexamples of these misleading film portrayals, from the portrayal of inmates’ behaviour to the lack of security and unrealistic occurrences within the facilities. The results indicated that cinematic representations of female prisoners portrayed them as violent, worthless, and unworthy of humane treatment and investment in their rehabilitation or education. Despite the humorous initial impact of these inaccuracies, these cinematic depictions not only misrepresent incarcerated women but also contribute to their further marginalisation, even though they will eventually re-enter society (Clowers, 2001).

Bennett (2006) explored the role of prison films in depicting the relationship between the media, crime, and punishment, emphasising their influence on public beliefs, actions, and understanding of prisons. Three main roles played by the media in prison films were identified: as a dramatic device, a comparator, and a prism. First, the media often serves as a device to provide background information or show the societal response to prisons. Second, it acts as a comparator, highlighting the media's shortcomings in providing shallow or inaccurate coverage, reinforcing the films' claims of morality and authenticity. Lastly, the media serves as a prism, distorting public perceptions of prisoners, victims, and crime, and these films challenge this misrepresentation.

However, the representation is not always accurate or comprehensive. Media portrayals of prison life significantly differ from reality in various aspects, including conditions, architecture, violence, racial divisions, and the role of security personnel, sentence lengths, prison escapes, and cell privacy. Examining the concept of 'documentary realism' in films like "American History X" (Kaye, 1998) and "The Hurricane" (Jewison, 1999), it becomes clear that connecting these widespread depictions of prison to actual prison culture is challenging (Caster, 2008; Wilson, 2008). Moreover, documentary films like "The Farm: Angola, USA" (Garbus et al., 1998) further blur the line by partially aligning with popular perceptions of prison life, making it even more difficult to differentiate between fictional portrayals and true prison reality.

As a result, the media depiction of crime and imprisonment has been criticised on ethical, political and social grounds (Bennett, 2006). In addition, there is a significant gap between public perceptions and the reality of prison life, followed by two contrasting aspects of contemporary media representation (Marsh, 2009). Prisons are often portrayed in the media as violent and dangerous places with an ever-present threat of violence and brutality from both other prisoners and the prison staff, or conversely, as relaxed 'holiday camps' where inmates enjoy excessive comforts and leisure activities beyond what many free citizens experience. Films, TV shows, and other forms of media tend to emphasise the dramatic and sensational elements of prison life, highlighting violence, corruption, and conflicts among inmates. However, both representations are often extreme and do not accurately reflect the reality of prison life: the strict organisation and routines that prisons adhere to for security reasons. Research has shown that the actual reality of prison life is typically characterised by boredom, isolation, and a lack of meaningful activity, which is far removed from these extreme media portrayals (Crewe, 2011; Marsh, 2013).

Specificities of Public Perceptions of Prison Life, Prisoners, and Prisons

The research from the past thirty years has shown that the public holds complex and sometimes contradictory beliefs about punishment and corrections. One study showed that the public generally valued justice as a principle and believed in the importance of a fair and just legal system (Innes, 1993). There was a tendency to support rehabilitation efforts for offenders in prison systems, indicating a desire for positive reform. Despite supporting rehabilitation, the public placed a high priority on ensuring public safety. In summary, this finding indicated a concern for protecting society from potential harm (Innes, 1993). In essence, the public often favours more frequent and longer prison sentences than currently implemented (Cohen et al., 2003). The Open Society Foundations highlighted a significant shift in public opinion regarding crime and criminal justice during the late 20th century (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2002). During this period, the public favoured addressing the root causes of crime over imposing strict sentences. Additionally, nearly two-thirds of all Americans believed that the most effective strategy for reducing crime involved rehabilitating prisoners through education and job training, enabling them to abstain from criminal activities upon release. Later, Roberts and Hough (2005) reviewed public knowledge, attitudes, and opinions regarding prisons in the UK and internationally, revealing that most people believed prison conditions are too easy, life in prison is too comfortable and that prisons could foster criminal behaviour. However, only a minority supported the idea of increasing the use of imprisonment or making prison conditions more punishing. While most people endorsed the idea of rehabilitation, there was substantial doubt about its practical effectiveness. Consequently, this perception resulted in a significant decline in the overall confidence placed in the efficacy and effectiveness of the prison system in general. It is important to recognise that participants in these surveys were not limited by present policies or the government's practical capacity to accommodate these preferences regarding prison and prison facilities.

Tewksbury and Mustaine (2005) examined the views of correctional staff regarding prison amenities, such as programs, services, and resources for inmates and found that correctional staff generally supported the retention of most assessed amenities in prisons. As presented, correctional staff members appear to be more accepting or equally tolerant of prison amenities than citizens. More importantly, their views were related to their position within the correctional system, work experience, and education level. For example, security officers tended to have more negative views of prison amenities than other staff. At least 90% of staff agreed that 12 amenities should be retained in prisons. These included items related to basic prison conditions, educational programming, and some mild forms of entertainment. In contrast, most staff believed that six amenities should be eliminated from prison, including boxing and martial arts, conjugal visits, pornography, condoms, R-rated films, and cable TV. The views of correctional

staff are generally more tolerant than of some politicians and the public may assume (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2005). Furthermore, understanding these views could help predict staff reactions to administrative activities and changes in institutional operations and assist in managing interactions between staff members from different areas of the prison.

Frost et al. (2019) explored the impact of personal experiences on public perceptions and investigated public opinion on correctional privatisation. As presented, individuals who had personal experience with the criminal justice system were more likely to support public control of prisons, confirming the importance of personal experiences in shaping public attitudes towards prisons. A study conducted in Norway (Kjelsberg et al., 2007) provides a comprehensive overview of attitudes towards prisoners among different groups, including prisoners, prison employees, and college students. Prisoners generally held positive attitudes towards fellow inmates. Remanded prisoners had fewer positive attitudes than convicted prisoners did, indicating that the attitudes of remanded prisoners might be more in line with those of the general population. Among prison employees, those working in female-only prisons had more positive attitudes than those in male-only prisons, and this difference might be partly attributed to prison size. Prison officers generally held negative attitudes, similar to the attitudes of some college students, particularly those studying business economics. Older prison officers seemed to focus more on rehabilitation aspects and held more optimistic attitudes towards inmates compared to younger officers. Prison employees in administrative positions generally had more negative attitudes than those in other work positions, and the type of crime for which prisoners were convicted influenced their attitudes. Most respondents believed that the punishment level in Norway is either too severe or just right. Students tended to express stronger punitive opinions, whereas inmates and prison employees found the punishment level was adequate or too mild. Despite recognising that prisons do not function as intended, a small minority of inmates and prison employees believed that shutting down all prisons would be the best course of action.

Influence of Media Representation on Public Perception of Prisons and Inmates

Media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and perception, especially regarding complex and unfamiliar subjects such as imprisonment and the criminal justice system. Accordingly, media representation has a significant impact on how the public perceives prisoners and understands prison life. As noted by Cheliotis (2010), the media mainly focuses on the danger of criminal victimisation, constructing socially weak groups as targets for punitive intervention and criticising the prison system for being too tolerant of serious offenders. Moreover, the media often stirs up anxieties about the necessity for increased and more severe imprisonment. However, the depiction of human

suffering caused by these actions either is suppressed or diminished (Cheliotis, 2010).

One study explored American public opinion about prisons and the appropriate severity of punishment in prison, including public perceptions of life in prison (Wozniak, 2014). The results revealed that a plurality of respondents in the United States perceived life in prison to be unpleasant but believed that life in prison should be even harsher. Wozniak (2014) further argued that the perception of prison life as “easy” contributed to the support for longer and harsher sentences, confirming the role of public perceptions in shaping penal policies. A possible explanation for this finding was observed in the following study on people’s perceptions of prison conditions and their opinions on criminal justice policy and practice (Wozniak, 2016). As clarified, individuals’ perceptions of life and conditions in prison are closely connected to their views on various punitive and progressive aspects of criminal justice policy and practice. In other words, how people think about life in prison influences their opinions on related matters within the criminal justice system (Wozniak, 2016).

Media has the power to shape public opinions about crime and criminals, which can influence not only public attitudes but also policies, especially regarding women offenders (Umamaheswar, 2013). Moreover, media representation of prisons can contribute to deficit narratives and shape public perceptions of the treatment of inmates, while media coverage of punishment sends a message to the wider community and can shape public perceptions of the state authority (Shemtob, 2013). For example, the media portrayed Martha Stewart’s prison experience as normal, particularly due to her high public profile (Cecil, 2007). Such a distorted view of the prison system contributes to the prevailing misconception that women who have committed crimes are not sufficiently punished and that they effortlessly reintegrate into society after release, ignoring significant problems and challenges that incarcerated women, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, encounter.

Bougadi (2016) further examined the influence of media representation on public perception in a study. The author discusses the representation of prisons in fictional films and television series and explores the impact of these representations on the audience’s perception of prisons, highlighting the importance of media in shaping public attitudes towards prisons. As explained, people are naturally attracted to subjects and issues that are mysterious, remote, and beyond their everyday experiences. The criminal justice system, crime, and life in prison fall into this category. For many individuals, prison life is an unfamiliar experience (Bennett, 2006), and their primary knowledge about prisons, inmates, and the criminal justice system comes from the media, including fictional films and television series. Therefore, media representation attracts the audience by offering glimpses into these hidden or unknown worlds and often become their main source of understanding these topics. Films and television

shows often depict prisons, prisoners, and law enforcement in dramatic and sometimes sensationalised ways. These portrayals can significantly shape how the public views these aspects of the criminal justice system. Studies have demonstrated that media representation can influence or reinforce particular beliefs and attitudes about prisons and crime. Finally, the influence of media representation extends to the criminal justice community. Even experts in criminology can be influenced by media portrayals, at times sharing similar perceptions with the public. This can affect decisions on policy, public attitudes regarding criminal justice reforms, and public support for various elements of the system.

Studies, including one by Yousman (2013), reveal that sensationalised prison stories strongly resonate even with inmates, confirming that media portrayals significantly affect inmates' own perceptions and experiences in prison. This effect extends to former inmates, who draw on exaggerated depictions from prison TV series such as "Oz" (Fontana et al., 1997–2003) when discussing their experiences. This connection is attributed to the development of parasocial relationships between inmates and media characters (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956). Similar findings emerged in other studies, such as one in a Flanders prison (Van Den Bulck & Vande Bosch, 2003), where inmates' expectations of prison life were influenced by television portrayals.

Influence of Public Opinion and Media on Criminal Justice Policies

Cullen et al. (2000) acknowledged that the perception of prisoners, prisons, and related policies in the United States is complex and multifaceted. While there is public acceptance and even preference for punitive policies, such as capital punishment and strict sentencing laws, this support is not absolute and can vary depending on the specific circumstances. A mix of punitive and progressive attitudes characterises the public's stance on crime and punishment. On the one hand, there is support for harsh sentencing, but on the other hand, there is also support for more flexible, intermediate sanctions and restorative justice, particularly for nonviolent offenders. Furthermore, the public may be open to substitutions for extremely punitive measures. For instance, they might accept a sentence of life imprisonment without parole as an alternative to the death penalty and support rehabilitation, especially for younger offenders.

Mason (2006) demonstrated how the media's portrayal of prisons in the UK had played a significant role in the country's punitive penal policies, suggesting that the combination of media over-reporting of violent and sexual crimes and the fictional portrayal of imprisonment had contributed to the growth of the prison population during the late 20th and early 21st century. By analysing a month's worth of UK media content related to prisons, Mason (2006) revealed how the media constructs a discourse of dangerousness and fear, leading to the public's

perception of prison as an unproblematic solution to crime. When discussing the role of the media, the author argued that portraying prisoners as violent offenders obstructs reasoned conversations about alternatives to incarceration, including addressing prison suicides, prisoners' rights, and the growing population of incarcerated women and minors at the time.

Earlier, Blakely and Bumphus (2005) focused on the print media's portrayal of prison privatisation in the USA, highlighting how it is often associated with profit, efficiency, and overcrowding. This study explored how the print media portrayed prison privatisation and emphasised its role in shaping public perception. The authors noted that media portrayals were becoming less favourable and more neutral in the early 21st century, with increased negativity towards private prisons. The media focussed on external aspects such as financing and politics, providing limited information about internal prison operations. Furthermore, when a content analysis of 131 newspaper articles about private prisons and private immigration and customs enforcement facilities was conducted, the findings revealed that most news stories did not cover the wide array of factors that scholars considered essential in the privatisation debate (Montes et al., 2020). Overall, the private sector's secrecy contributed to media negativity, and promoting transparency could improve its public image.

Drake (2018) argues that despite the portrayal of prisons as effective and transparent enforcers of the rule of law in Western democracies, empirical and theoretical evidence shows that prisons often fail to fulfil their stated purposes or operate in line with democratic ideals. However, public perceptions of prisons and prisoners still have significant implications for policy and practice. Negative perceptions can contribute to punitive policies and practices, whereas more positive or nuanced perceptions can support efforts towards prison reform and rehabilitation (Brown, 2009).

At the same time, public opinion can hinder policy reform. In other words, public perceptions that favour punitive approaches to dealing with offenders can be an obstacle to policy reform and serve as a rationale for expanding prison systems. For instance, research suggests that incarceration may not be an effective tool for rehabilitating offenders and that rehabilitation programmes may be more effective in reducing recidivism rates (Arbour et al., 2021; Bhuller et al., 2020). In Australia, as in many other high-income Western countries, prisons are being expanded to accommodate more inmates despite decreasing crime victimisation rates. This increase in incarceration has significant economic and social equity costs, particularly due to the overrepresentation of Indigenous Australians and other socially disadvantaged groups in prisons. As indicated, new policies are needed to overcome this discrepancy. However, public opinion often holds punitive views towards offenders, typically assessed through non-deliberative opinion polls.

How the media represents prisons and inmates significantly influences public perceptions. Negative, sensationalised, or stereotypical portrayals can create fear and misconceptions about prisons, potentially leading policy makers to favour punitive measures over rehabilitation. In contrast, balanced, realistic media portrayals can foster constructive public discussions, encouraging policy makers to consider evidence-based, nuanced approaches to criminal justice and inmate rehabilitation. Media representations can shape both public opinion and the direction of prison-related policies (Cullen et al., 2000; Frost et al., 2019; Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2002; Simpson & Butler, 2015; Wozniak, 2014).

Simpson and Butler (2015) assessed the public's views on prison and prison alternatives in Australia by using a Citizens' Jury approach in three Australian cities, allowing citizens to critically engage with and deliberate on issues related to offending and society's responses to it. They found that public opinion generally holds punitive views towards offenders, which can hinder policy reform and contribute to prison expansion. By exploring the potential of deliberative methodologies in highly politicised public policy areas, the authors revealed public concern regarding the overuse of imprisonment despite punitive public opinion.

One line of research has demonstrated that media portrayals can humanise criminal offenders and foster empathy, potentially positively influencing public perceptions by reducing the negative stigma associated with criminality. Research conducted by Knoll-Frey and Mattison (2023) demonstrated that TV series such as "Orange is the New Black" (Herrmann et al., 2013–2019), "Mindhunter" (Fincher et al., 2017–2019), "Ozark" (Bateman et al., 2017–2022), "The Wire" (Simon et al., 2002–2008), "Prison Break" (Scheuring et al., 2005–2017), and "Oz" (Fontana et al., 1997–2003) positively influenced attitudes towards offenders. These shows depict the human side of criminals and the challenges they face rather than solely portraying them in a negative light. Such portrayals may help dismantle barriers to the successful reintegration of inmates into society, particularly in areas such as housing and employment.

Limitations

In defining our analysis scope, we focused on depictions in fictional and non-fictional media, including films and television series. However, we also focused on the influence of news media and social media on public perceptions. While news media provides factual information, it significantly impacts attitudes. Through its varied content, social media plays a crucial role in framing discussions and disseminating perspectives. We acknowledge the complexities of analysing different media forms and emphasise the need for further interpretations that will consider media forms.

Furthermore, we focused on an extensive body of literature in English, acknowledging the potential limitation of providing a comprehensive global analysis. While the literature draws from diverse geographic and cultural contexts, the predominant language bias restricts the generalisation of our findings to the entire global landscape. Our synthesis primarily pertains to insights derived from studies conducted in English or translated into English, encompassing a broad spectrum of geographical and cultural settings. However, we recognise the importance of future research incorporating multilingual sources for a more exhaustive understanding of the global landscape of media portrayals and public perceptions of prisons and criminal justice.

Conclusion

The way prisons are presented in the media significantly influences public attitudes towards the prison system and inmates. Media representations are often sensational, portraying a distorted image of prison life, focussing on violence and deviance, and perpetuating misconceptions. Media depictions of prisons are diverse, but they often emphasise negative aspects and stereotypes, shaping public opinion, legal processes, and prisoners' connections to the outside world. A public perception of prison life is generally negative, influenced by personal experience and education, and there is a disparity between symbolic representations of prisons and their actual realities. Furthermore, public perception, often shaped by media representations, plays a crucial role in shaping the direction and decisions of policymakers regarding prisons and criminal justice.

The identified themes in this review, including discrepancies between media portrayals and reality, specificities of public perceptions, media influence on public attitudes, and the impact on criminal justice policies, underscore the need for a more balanced and informed portrayal of the prison system. To foster a better understanding, the media should offer a more realistic, multifaceted portrayal of the prison system and inmate experiences. This approach would allow for more informed discussions on public policy and necessary reforms. Challenging sensationalised and stereotypical media depictions is crucial for developing a more nuanced understanding of crime and punishment and combating stereotypes and biases. Overall, media representation of prisons can shape public perception and attitudes towards the criminal justice system, highlighting the need for more balanced and informed depictions.

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Medijski prikazi života u zatvoru i krivičnog pravosuđa: Narativni pregled literature o oblikovanju percepcije javnosti i implikacijama za politiku*

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Mediji imaju moćnu ulogu u oblikovanju javnih percepcija zatvora, osuđenika i sistema krivičnog pravosuđa, koje su često negativne i utemeljene na različitim faktorima. Zbog toga je važno kritički analizirati ove prikaze kako bi se steklo dublje razumevanje problematike. Ovaj narativni pregled literature rezimira i analizira postojeću literaturu o različitim prikazima zatvorskog života u različitim medijima. Sveobuhvatnim pregledom literature izdvojene su 33 studije objavljene u protekle tri decenije. Korišćenjem analize sadržaja, identifikovane su četiri teme koje istražuju prikaze zatvora i javno mnjenje: 1) neslaganje, odnosno nepodudaranje medijskih prikaza i stvarnih iskustava u zatvoru; 2) specifičnosti percepcije javnosti, uključujući medijsko predstavljanje; 3) uticaj medija na stavove i uverenja javnosti u vezi sa lišavanjem slobode, resocijalizacijom i kaznenim merama unutar sistema krivičnog pravosuđa; i 4) uticaj na sistem krivičnog pravosuđa i reformu javnih politika. Zaključak je da mediji, putem često kreiranja i održavanja senzacionalističkih i negativnih stereotipa, značajno utiču na stavove javnosti o zatvorima, osuđenima i krivičnom pravosuđu. Ovakav uticaj, s druge strane, može da ima posledice na pravne postupke i odluke donosilaca javnih politika. Iz tog razloga, važno je naglasiti potrebu za uravnoteženijim prikazima kako bi se podstakle informisane diskusije i postavila pitanja o predrasudama.

KLJUČNE REČI: medijski prikazi / zatvorski život / javno mnjenje / medijski stereotipi / percepcija javnosti / filmovi o zatvorima / zatvor / politike krivičnog pravosuđa

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