

Social Media and the Military Prison: Talkbacks Influence Soldier's Perception on Military Prison Rehabilitation Program

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Background: Social media plays an essential role in maintaining human connection and accumulation of knowledge. Researchers have reported the use of talkbacks in that context, yet no previous research has investigated talkbacks in military and military prison contexts.

Purpose: The current study examines how Israel Defence Forces (IDF) soldiers perceive the Israeli military rehabilitation program in an open internet forum framework and how it influences their decision-making about entering the military prison.

Methods: To this end, 373 different talkbacks in 34 different discussions carried out during the past decade on the subject were sampled. Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was conducted, from which a central theme was derived.

Results: Findings show that those talkbacks lead soldiers to incarceration in a military prison, and the rehabilitation program emerged as a tool that soldiers could use to achieve their personal goals.

Conclusions: The research conclusions refer to the importance of transferring formal information regarding the operation of the rehabilitation program between IDF and its soldiers, so the soldiers will not seek incorrect information on social media.

Keywords: *social media, internet forum, talkbacks, military prison, military and society.*

In 2019, 11,224 male soldiers and 1,799 female soldiers were held in military prisons in Israel. The most common offense precipitating their imprisonment was absent without official leave (AWOL) (64%), followed by disciplinary offenses (25%) and criminal offenses (9%) (Israel Defence Forces Spokesperson, 2020). Since Israeli society regards military service as an emotionally maturing experience that hastens the process of moulding the individual's character (Livio, 2011), the case of dropout from the army following completion of a prison sentence could have an adverse effect on the social, academic, and vocational opportunities available to the soldier (Benbenishty, 2008). These potential consequences lie at the core of the rehabilitation

program known as Gahélet (the Hebrew acronym for Factors in a Return to Regular Service), one that has been in operation in Israeli military prisons for the express purpose of helping imprisoned soldiers complete the full duration of army duty after serving their sentences (Itzik, 2019).

Open, informal dialogue between soldiers and pre-service youths regarding the various jobs and units in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) is routine. With the burgeoning influence of the internet, the dialogue has been extended to include online discourse, allowing groups to cohere around a common interest (Barak et al., 2008; Barzilai-Nahon, 2004). To date, no research has been conducted on how the internet, particularly the talkback platform, serves as a forum for online discussion between soldiers. The current study aims to analyze talkback characteristics over the past decade concerning the Gahélet program and understand how the responses perceive rehabilitation and its influence on military incarceration.

Military Service in Israel

The Israeli context needs to be studied in a unique perspective, given the policy of compulsory service and the fact that the soldiers are not IDF employees, receiving only a subsistence allowance rather than a monthly salary. Military service in Israel is subject to the Defence Service Law, according to which every young man and woman above age 18 is required to enlist. This significant event occurs in parallel with the developmental period of emerging adulthood, in the course of which the youths must assume responsibility in the spheres of employment, earning a livelihood, intimate relationships, and parenthood (Arnett, 2000, 2007). Except for infancy, there is no other stage in which the individual experiences such a diversity of changes in parallel on so many different fronts (personal, emotional, familial, and social) (Wood et al., 2018).

Military service helps youngsters effectively navigate the development challenges they encounter while enabling them to cope with emotional stresses that others find burdensome (Meir & Allen, 2008). There is no gainsaying that enlistment in the army engenders a renewed socialization process. The recruit sheds his previous statuses, moving from civilian to soldier while adopting norms and values commensurate with the new setup. These processes could clash with attempts on the part of the youths at this stage of development to consolidate a unique, coherent identity, leading to unsafe behavior

patterns, including criminality and suicidal attempts (Heath et al., 2009; Salvatore & Taniguchi, 2021; Settersten & Ray, 2010). Accordingly, it is possible that soldiers serving in the army during such a complex and dynamic period of development will feel frustrated in the face of the unit assigned them, their designated role, or their relationship with the commanding officers. Whether thinking on a conscious level and rationally or emotionally, they could take measures to allay their feelings of frustration that would appear to be unacceptable. They could thus be on the road to committing an offense punishable by incarceration in a military prison.

Based on the understanding that there are extenuating circumstances in the case of offenses committed by soldiers and the desire to help them complete their military service despite their imprisonment, the IDF has set up Gachelet, a rehabilitation program operates within the army prison.

Gachelet Rehabilitation Program

Operating in the framework of the IDF since 2003, Gachelet is oriented to providing rehabilitation for imprisoned soldiers during their term of imprisonment, enabling them to return to their units on completing their sentences and end their military service with a full record. Until early 2021 the program dealt with male and female soldiers imprisoned for being AWOL only. Currently, it handles all cases of imprisonment. The program carries out a comprehensive psycho-social diagnosis of the soldiers, among other things, to identify criminogenic needs – risk factors that could interfere with attempts on the soldier's part to complete his military service. While also identifying resources in the way of resilience, both internal and external, which could be of help. The program is authorized to change the soldier's assignment to one where he will serve in a unit close to home, to alter the conditions of service to less demanding ones, convene the Service Adjustment Committee to examine suitability for service, and recommend an exemption from army service altogether (Itzik, 2019).

Gachelet's operations can be examined in terms of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews et al., 1990) and the three principles it embodies: the risk principle seeks to identify the offender's dangerousness and the probability that he will repeat his offense, resulting in imprisonment. The need principle pinpoints needs that encourage criminal activity; in the course of the diagnosis, the soldier

and the tester meet to converse on general matters in the soldier's life, including economic, medical, and mental status, relationships with other family members, and friends, adjustment to systems in civilian life prior to enlistment, relationships with commanding officers, and functioning in the IDF prior to imprisonment. The responsivity principle refers to the requirement to develop a rehabilitation program that would consider the soldier's abilities and learning capacity.

Where necessary, the soldier's details are forwarded to the prison's mental health officers for professional intervention and reinforcement of the internal and external support systems available to the soldier. In parallel, relevant details are transferred to Gachelet's Service Conditions Section to commence the process of financial assistance for the soldier and his family. The aim is to prevent the economic situation from catalyzing committing an additional offense in the future and enable the soldier to complete his sentence while receiving all he is entitled to in the way of financial support. The soldier's details are also sent to Gachelet's Education Section, responsible for incorporating the necessary tools in the intervention program to strengthen attachment to the country in general and the IDF in particular (Itzik, 2019).

As of now, except for the evaluation research conducted in the framework of a pilot for activating Gachelet in its year of inauguration (Weinstein, 2003), no study has been carried out to examine the program's operational effectiveness. Gachelet prompts a discussion among IDF soldiers since it has the authority to change the soldier's assignment and take steps to end his military service on the recommendation of the Service Adjustment Committee. The program's clout also derives from the fact that the criteria detailing who is to be serviced are confidential. Information on the rehabilitation program is exchanged between the soldiers by word of mouth, but principally through soldiers who have served prison sentences and have been through the program, or alternatively, were not handled by the program during their imprisonment. Information is transferred informally, among other means, through various internet platforms, especially on social media, where queries on the subject can be posted.

Online Talkback

A talkback is a tool that allows internet users to respond to sources of content, such as that originating in various forums, which are part of user-generated content (Dror,

2011). Talkback offers readers an unrestricted arena to express their opinions (Valier, 2004). Research has shown that talkback allows freedom of speech by encouraging social interaction while maintaining spontaneity, immediacy, and availability (Nagar, 2011). Bergstrom (2017) claims that among the motives behind talkback users is the search for creative activity during leisure hours. An analysis of the personality of talkback users shows that they are relatively extroverted, possess a sense of control over online media, are influential, have high self-competence, and seek gratification (Gazit et al., 2018). Alongside those who view talkback as a medium for social involvement and release tension and frustration, others regard it as an instrument of violence, drawing power from defamation and slander. Thus, for example, a research study that examined the perceptions of responses concerning violence on the part of women towards their spouses found that the commonest response was ridiculed for both the battered husband and the event itself (Shoham & Maguri-Cohen, 2017). An additional research study that examined the features of light-hearted adversarial banter between fans online found that the talkback world serves to troll individuals while polarizing dissimilar groups and bolstering separate group identity (Leventhal, 2016).

Mechanisms such as neutralization and denial were also investigated. A study that examined denial techniques by responses vis-à-vis stories of excessive aggression used by police officers found a denial of responsibility and a denial of victim. The responses mostly attacked the veracity of the stories and the reliability of the teller, posted alternative stories of other events that showed the police officers' actions as stemming from self-defense, and presented the victim as being harmful and dangerous (Shoham, 2012). In interviews held with journalists and newspaper editors, talkbacks were presented as impulsive, shallow, and belligerent, owing to the high level of anonymity enjoyed by the responses (Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013; Reich, 2011). The advantage of talkback lies in the fact that there is no limit to the number and scope of the posts, no formal editing is carried out, the writer can remain anonymous, and responses can be spontaneous (Galili, 2008). An additional advantage is the ability of the posts to create a social-cultural dialogue and develop a group identity, as found in a study that examined the responses to online news items (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015).

The present research aims to examine the perceptions of responses on the internet through items posted during the past decade on the subject of Gachelet and answer the following questions: How do responses view the rehabilitation program are slated for incarceration in military prisons? Whom does Gachelet serve more, the prison system or the soldier? To date, no study has been conducted on how the program is perceived by soldiers who were serviced or not serviced by the program. The present research seeks to fill this gap, focusing on the online domain, to better understand IDF's prison and rehabilitation program. Accordingly, ways can be presented to improve the efficiency of the work carried out by the rehabilitation program

METHODS

The present research is based on the qualitative paradigm in general and content analysis in particular – the latter being a research technique used for systematic, objective, and quantitative description of media content (Berelson, 1952; Gideon, 2019). Content analysis is seeing increased use in research based on content posted by discussion initiators in internet forums and social media (Krippendorff, 2018). Herring (2010) refers specifically to web content analysis, claiming it to represent a pluralistic methodological paradigm that contains a variety of techniques, such as image analysis, feature analysis, language analysis, exchange analysis, and theme analysis. The present study focuses on the latter.

For the purposes of the study, a search was carried out for open forums hosting discussions on items relating to military service and exposing issues raised by soldiers, with immediate responses from other soldiers or from individuals who served in the IDF in the past. Following an intensive search, the FXP site (www.fxp.co.il) was selected, being one that features diverse community forums differentiated on the basis of content. The website includes an active community on the subject of “the army and security,” in which daily discussions are raised under different user names and fictitious handles. The discussions are open to the general public and require no user name or password to access them.

A search was conducted of community discussions in 2010-2020 (the latest discussion analyzed in 2020 took place in September), using the keyword “gachelet”. A total of 74 discussions were found, of which 40 were rejected for failing to meet the criteria

defined in the present study: discussions with no responses (10), discussions that received one to two responses (20), and discussions in which reference was made to the keyword in other contexts, e.g., Judaism and cinema (10). Thus, 34 discussions were analyzed, receiving 373 responses referring to the IDF rehabilitation program. The discussions for sampling were selected based on the following criteria: 1) they referred directly to the rehabilitation program in the title or the question; 2) they contained more than three responses, enabling in-depth analysis. In terms of gender, men opened all the discussions, and men also posted all the responses.

The study included a qualitative and quantitative content analysis performance by thematic analysis based on codification and creation of differentiated categories incorporated in the central themes. Also included was an examination of repetitive themes and determination of their frequency in the sample. Content analysis was initially performed for each discussion separately, followed by comparing the different themes. This comparison served as the basis for deriving the frequency of the various types of content that emerged from the analysis. Finally, the sampled content was revisited in order to confirm the frequency of the established themes. This continuous, iterative process allowed categorization of the coded data.

The codification system used in the present study is based on the summative content analysis approach, according to which the research begins with keywords based on the personal interest of the researcher or the relevant research literature, with identification of the keywords being done both prior to and during the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Examples of the principal keywords defined are AWOL, criteria, gahélet directives, court of law, and number of imprisonments.

RESULTS

The content of 34 discussions in the sample was analyzed in parallel, from which recurrent themes were extracted, and a principal category was formulated that related to the content of the talkback and the message conveyed therein in answer to questions posed by the individuals conducting the discussions.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding regarding the content analysis of the talkbacks, it is important to understand the basis on which it rests, namely, the discussion

to which the forum members responded. The content analysis showed that the central theme that engaged the attention of the discussion initiator in the past decade was a search for general information on how Gachelet operates. The personal stories conveyed by the discussion initiator to the forum members and the questions accompanying these stories bore the signs of a search for the missing piece in the puzzle since a wider understanding of the Gachelet program would allow them to make decisions regarding future military service, as seen in the following example:

I serve in a combat unit and am already on my way out [of combat duty] but am continuing at headquarters and must [serve under conditions of] duty on a daily basis in order to help out at home and earn a full salary at the end of each month. If the battalion commander does not give me daily duty, I intend to go AWOL and see Gachelet in prison. Does anyone know how this Gachelet business works and when one gets to see it?

In a different discussion, the questions were similar: “Can someone explain to me about Gachelet? I have presently gone AWOL. When does one get to see it? Does it always help? Can I already see it in my first detention?”

The discussion initiator is clearly looking for someone who can refer to the problem raised – someone with personal experience and familiarity with their difficulty. Accordingly, they detail the reasons that they are interested in switching from one base to another and finally present the question about the Gachelet system and their request for help and consultation. Thus writes one of the discussion members:

I am in a bad job that I am not suited to and am also at a base that isn't right for me, and I have tried to get out in every way possible but have not succeeded. I now understand that if you are AWOL for 75 days, you get Gachelet or can ask for it, and from there, it will be easier to change jobs and base. I want to do this, but I have a number of questions.

It can be seen from the above excerpts how a search for information can benefit discussion members. It is clear from their statements that as soon as they receive an answer to their questions and deliberations, it will be much easier to decide on the next step to take. Most of the questions referred to technical aspects – what one must do to be

serviced by Gachelet, e.g., What offense is it worth committing? When is the best time to commit the offense? Is it right for a soldier to give himself up to the IDF authorities? There is also the more fundamental aspect: Does the attention received by soldiers in the rehabilitation program help them? In most cases, the discussion initiators pose questions on the forum before committing an offense to be imprisoned. It appears that such online consultation allows them to make the right decisions, ones that are best suited to their situations.

Another common subject found to feature in the discussions conducted in the forum dwells on the criteria for receiving attention in the framework of Gachelet. The criteria that determine which imprisoned soldiers will be serviced by the system are confidential and not made known, whether in the IDF or outside it. This fact makes it urgent for soldiers to seek information from any source that can provide it, principally through the online forum, including someone the program has serviced in the past. This is exemplified by the following statement by one of the discussion initiators:

I went AWOL due to various problems at home and didn't see myself returning as a combat soldier. My aim in going through prison is to see Gachelet, but I've heard it isn't easy to obtain. Does it depend on what I say in the ongoing trial AWOL? Can the judge recommend seeing the Gachelet NCO? Does it depend on him or someone else?

In another discussion, the initiator asks much more clearly: "What are the conditions for getting Gachelet in prison?"

Talkback Content

The theme focuses on the talkback content written by those who chose to respond to a question posed by the discussion initiator. The principal theme explains how the Gachelet system can be activated (56.3%). Some of the respondents referred to the extended time served, equal to the number of AWOL/imprisonment/detention days, as a criterion included in the Gachelet system. "You get Gachelet for more than 80 days AWOL"; "It's very difficult to get Gachelet, you have to go AWOL for it (more than 43 days)"; "To get Gachelet you have to ask for it, or you have to have something like a million AWOL days, and then you get it."

Some responses referred to the serial number of the imprisonment, i.e., the first or subsequent. According to them, to be serviced by Gachelet, the soldier must commit several different offenses and be imprisoned several times in the army prison: “To get Gachelet you must be at least 3-4 times in prison”; “You get Gachelet after a number of imprisonments or a long time in prison”. In contrast, some claimed that the number of imprisonments was not the main parameter in deciding who would be serviced by Gachelet and that the system conducts its examinations on a case-by-case basis: “There are soldiers who get Gachelet already in the first imprisonment, and there are those who do not get it even after the sixth imprisonment”. This discourse by the responses could have far-reaching consequences since it could influence the discussion initiator to commit several offenses to enter prison several times and benefit from assistance from the Gachelet system. More importantly, the discourse could lead to a rise in the percentage of recidivism in the IDF due to soldiers acting in accordance with the briefing given them in the forum, which may not be based on hard facts or data.

Reference is also made to the military courts of law. These courts rule in the case of offenses that are not subject to juridical decision-making by the commanding officers under the Military Justice Law, 1955. The decisions of the military courts are binding on all levels of command, including the medical corps and the adjutancy, but not Gachelet. This is because the rehabilitation program operates according to criteria that apply across the board to all male and female soldiers. At the defense’s request, the military court can instruct the Gachelet headquarters to check if the soldier meets the criteria for servicing by Gachelet. Still, it cannot instruct them to service the soldier. Clearly, in this matter too, the discourse between the responses could mislead the soldier who wishes to consult with the forum: “The only way to ensure Gachelet in prison is to be tried in court and to have your lawyer see to it that the sentence will be such that you will see Gachelet in prison”; “If the court sees fit it issues an instruction to the Gachelet program to meet with you. Even a directive from the court does not oblige them to give you Gachelet”.

Some of the respondents presented a clear picture of the fact that one cannot know what the criteria are and that there is no way the soldier can influence the process and the final result – whether he will or will not be serviced by the system, as explained by one of the responses:

You don't see Gahélet and don't request Gahélet, it comes to you. It makes no difference how many days you have been in prison or how many times. Gahélet receives the dossiers of all those on the base [in the military prison] and decides who to help according to its own procedures.

Since the criteria for receiving attention by the program are confidential, with respect to both the soldiers and the commanding officers, here too, it is possible to understand that accepting the recommendations of the responses at face value could harm the soldier consulting with the forum.

DISCUSSION

The present study examines existing talkback features concerning the rehabilitation program operating in military prisons in Israel. Analysis of the discussions and talkback sessions shows that the Gahélet program is perceived as a factor that can change the course of the soldier's military service and that the online dialogue between soldiers relates principally to ways in which to benefit from being serviced by the program. The findings present the fundamental themes of the discussion members and the respondents, including their attitudes concerning army service, incarceration in military prisons, and the modus operandi of the Gahélet program.

The findings reveal the need felt by soldiers for help and consultation, spurring them to appeal to users of the forum in searching for a solution to their problems while telling their personal stories and posing specific questions. These findings are congruent with Help-Seeking Theory, which maintains that to effectively cope with complex issues in life relating to relationships in various contexts, one must seek help (Butler, 1993, 1998). It is a question of self-monitoring strategy, a concept that involves approaching formal or informal sources to obtain information or acquire skills (Hsu, 2005; Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Karabenick & Dembo, 2011).

There are two types of motivation in seeking help: instrumental and administrative. Instrumental motivation seeks guidance, counseling, explanations, or work strategy. It is considered adaptive since it is geared to lessening the need to seek help in the future. In contrast, administrative motivation is oriented to avoiding exertion and receiving clear solutions to cease coping with the problem; it is thus regarded as ineffective since it is

based on superficial cognitive processes (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Karabenick, 2004). Content analysis in the present research shows that those seeking help are actually seeking solutions to their condition from individuals with experience in similar situations or from those in the know regarding how the Gachelet program works. Members of the discussion group are not interested in receiving emotional support, encouragement, or guidance that will help them in decision-making regarding how they should act, but rather ask for clear-cut ways to cope. It is therefore supposed that they will seek help again in the future.

As discussed in previous research, the Help-Seeking Theory was examined among prisoners. Skogstad et al., (2006) found that New Zealand prisoners are unwilling to seek help from the prison psychologist. Similar results emerged in Howerton et al., (2007), whose research, among female prisoners, referred to general practitioners. Those previous findings contrast the current research findings that show soldiers wish to seek help from the military prison rehabilitation program. Cobb et al., (2014) explain that prisoners avoid formal support due to a sense of injustice toward the system. Interestingly, they found that when prisoners participate in help-seeking behaviors, they do so “to work the system.” The current study supports those results by showing that the rehabilitation program is used to ‘work the military system’, and the learned how to do it from the social media platform.

Based on an analysis of the talkbacks, it is clear that the Gachelet rehabilitation program is perceived as a tool that can be used to achieve personal aims with respect to the type of army service (such as a change in assignment). The discourse revealed by the talkbacks did not attach importance to the imprisonment itself or its emotional or social consequences. Furthermore, it appears that the price of imprisonment that the soldiers are willing to pay is negligible in comparison with what they will get in exchange through the Gachelet program. The responses present profit and loss considerations, for, in the long run, imprisonment will, in their opinion, produce a favorable outcome. This can be explained in the fact that the responses are engaged principally in briefing one another on how to act and what to do to be serviced by the Gachelet program, presenting imprisonment and the rehabilitation program in a complex light. This finding supports research that examined the circumstances surrounding the imprisonment of male and

female soldiers of Ethiopian backgrounds (Itzik, 2019). These soldiers stated that the army prison in general, and the Gachelet program, served as a tool that acted towards securing the soldiers' personal benefit.

The fact that the Gachelet program becomes a tool in the hands of responses contradicts the approach that regards deterrence as the essence of imprisonment. Effective deterrence is manifested in the concept of punishment that is certain, severe, and immediate (Von Hirsch et al., 1999). The perception of certainty refers to the potential of pursuing legal proceedings, as stipulated in the law. The severity of punishment refers to the consequences of the legal proceedings. The concept of immediacy refers to the time that elapses between committing the offense and the subsequent punitive measures. Research has shown that certainty of punishment leads to a reduction in the incidence of criminal activity (Nagin, 2013). In the context of the army and its attitude to going AWOL, the rule is extremely clear, defining when a soldier is considered missing from service and the expected punishment regarding the period of AWOL. In addition, the time that elapses between proceedings regarding extension of the soldier's first detention and issue of the verdict is only a few months. Thus, *prima facie*, it may be expected that military prison will constitute a deterrent.

The findings of the present research show that this is not the case. The responses shared their personal stories of imprisonment, meeting with the Gachelet NCO, or familiarity with another friend or relative incarcerated in a military prison and how Gachelet's intervention helped him. This information, conveyed through the online forum, on how the program can help the soldier shape the decision-making process to achieve his aims significantly tones down the army prison's perception as a deterrent to criminal activity.

Data on recurrent imprisonments in the IDF speak for themselves, showing a significant rise in the phenomenon from 25.70% to 41.89% during 2004-2019 (Shoan, 2015; Israel Defence Forces Spokesperson, 2020). This period corresponds to the time of the establishment of the Gachelet program. Based on the data and findings of the present research, throughout the period of the program, the incidence of recidivism has risen, reinforcing the fact that Gachelet serves as a tool that the soldiers themselves manage. The data on the instances of recurrent imprisonments are reflected in the talkbacks, which

describe the number of imprisonments as one of the criteria for being serviced by Gachelet. Thus, this information on the need for imprisonment in an army prison more than once to be helped by the rehabilitation program that leads, among other things, to high recidivism. As to the matter of adjustment to imprisonment, Haney (2001) claims that it is almost always experienced as a difficult process that creates habits concerning thinking and acting that could act to the offender's detriment on his release from prison return to society. At the same time, according to him, the psychological impacts of imprisonment could vary from one person to the next while often being perceived as reversible.

In this context, the present study contradicts the existing theoretical and research data on the psychological effects of imprisonment, supporting the claim that military prisons must be examined differently from civil prisons. The very fact that the entry into an army prison is the result of a clear and conscious choice helps soldiers to deal with the rigors of prison life, as described in the literature (Crewe, 2011; Parisi, 1982; Sykes, 1958; Toch, 1992), possibly even alleviating these rigors to an appreciable degree. In their mind's eye, the soldiers see the final goal – an exemption from military service or a change in their assignment, authorized by the Gachelet system – enabling them to confine the pain of imprisonment to a specific context without it encroaching on other walks of life.

Another way to explain the willingness of responses to commit an offense punishable by imprisonment to be serviced by the Gachelet program is by relating to the IDF as a total institution, as defined by Goffman (1961). Zurcher (1965) examined service on vessels belonging to the US Navy and found characteristics that were similar to those of a total institution: the sailors are isolated from general society throughout the time they are at sea, the purpose of their activity is decided by others senior to them, and work on the vessel calls for round-the-clock duties under the watchful eye of the commanding officer. In contrast to other total institutions, where friendly relations between individuals are prevented, the army encourages social cohesion because it helps individuals live and work together more efficiently (MacCoun & Hix, 2010). In the present research context, a setup in which the prison staff has control over mealtimes, showering, study, and sleep. The commanding officer issues orders that must be heeded is not essentially different from the framework governing conduct in their natural habitats in their units (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). It may be said that the very fact of the IDF being a total institution makes

the time spent in military prison easier to bear; imprisonment becomes a negligible factor vis-à-vis the goal the soldier wishes to attain. Paradoxically, in light of the above, given that army prison is the harshest possible place where soldiers can spend time, it is precisely the prison that becomes the Holy Grail in their hands.

Limitations and Recommendations

The principal limitation of the present research derives from the fact that the talkbacks are not a representative sample of IDF soldiers or those serviced by Gachelet. An additional limitation lies in the gender separation in the research. Since the discussions and talkbacks were in every case written by male soldiers and ex-soldiers, the viewpoint of female soldiers, which can shed a different light on the phenomenon, is missing. Accordingly, it is recommended to carry out further research, not based on talkback, to study the attitudes of both male and female soldiers towards the military rehabilitation program.

The current research presents a content analysis of responses in the forum to issues raised by the discussion initiator. An additional reference point that can be examined in further research is an analysis of the respondents' dialogue. As regards applicable recommendations, the current research points to the paradox existing inactivation of the rehabilitation program: to be serviced by the system and obtain help regarding the nature of the military service and its continuance, the soldier is required to commit an offense punishable by imprisonment. The understanding that Gachelet constitutes a tool in the hands of the soldiers to achieve their personal goals results in high recidivism rates, defeating the purpose of rehabilitation.

In order to address the issue, action can be taken on two fronts: 1) establishment of an alternative system outside the army prison walls that would help soldiers who find it difficult to perform their army service in the face of economic and familial difficulties, and in parallel act to strengthen the soldier's sense of affiliation with the IDF; and 2) Examining the possibility of presenting to commanders and soldiers the criteria, enter into the treatment of the rehabilitation program. This is to stop the rumor mill, allow the discussions in the forum to be based on facts, and lead the soldiers to a state of informed decision-making.

In conclusion, the current research presents a complex picture concerning the online search for information by soldiers in general and help and consultation regarding activation of the army's Gahelit rehabilitation program in particular. This complexity is evident in the way soldiers relate to the rehabilitation system, namely, a tool they can use to change the course of their service in the army. The rationale underlying the system is compromised, with military prison becoming a game chip that can be manipulated by conscious choice.

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