
Survey Report



Analysis of 2023 MQPL Survey Comments

**Top issues reported by
respondents at Menard
Correctional Center**

Menard Correctional Center

Menard Correctional Center is primarily a maximum-security male prison within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), which housed 1,859 people on March 27, 2023 between the maximum-security population and a medium-security unit (MSU, housing about 340 people). The John Howard Association of Illinois (JHA) conducted a modified short [Measuring the Quality of Prison Life](#) (MQPL) survey by providing enough survey packets (consisting of the [MQPL survey](#), an informed consent notice/instruction sheet, and a privileged mail prepaid business reply envelope addressed to JHA) so that every person incarcerated at Menard max and MSU had an opportunity to participate in the voluntary and anonymous survey if they chose to do so. Menard also operates the southern Reception & Classification Center (housing approximately 50 people), where people were not surveyed. JHA received 742 responses to the MQPL survey from people at Menard through the July 19, 2023, representing approximately 40% of the static population.

This report highlights some of the most common issues raised in response to our MQPL survey question **"What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"** We selected this question to analyze because it is where most survey respondents chose to report the issues that they were experiencing while incarcerated. All survey comments for Menard can be found in our [2023 MQPL Survey Comments](#) report. Quantitative survey results for Menard can be found in our [2023 MQPL Survey Results](#) report.

Methodology

To identify the most common issues, we identified the most common words people used in response to the question "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?" For the Top Ten Words, all instances of each word and its plural form were counted (e.g., "program" and "programs.") Hyphenated words were counted as one word. Words like "the" and "not" were filtered from the analysis. Then, indicator words were counted under seven issue categories to determine top issues in each facility's survey responses. When an indicator word appeared within a longer word, the longer word was included. For example: the indicator word, "medic," picked up both "medical" and "medication." Prior to the issue analysis, the language in each report was standardized so that indicator words consistently appeared in a form that would be picked up by our software (e.g. "CO" was changed to "C/O," "good time" was changed to "good-time"). The indicator words by issue can be found [here](#).

To avoid double-counting issues, issue categories were only counted once per response. This means that the response "the cells are cold and dirty" would count as raising only one issue related to conditions, even though two indicator words ("cold" and "dirty") are used in the response.

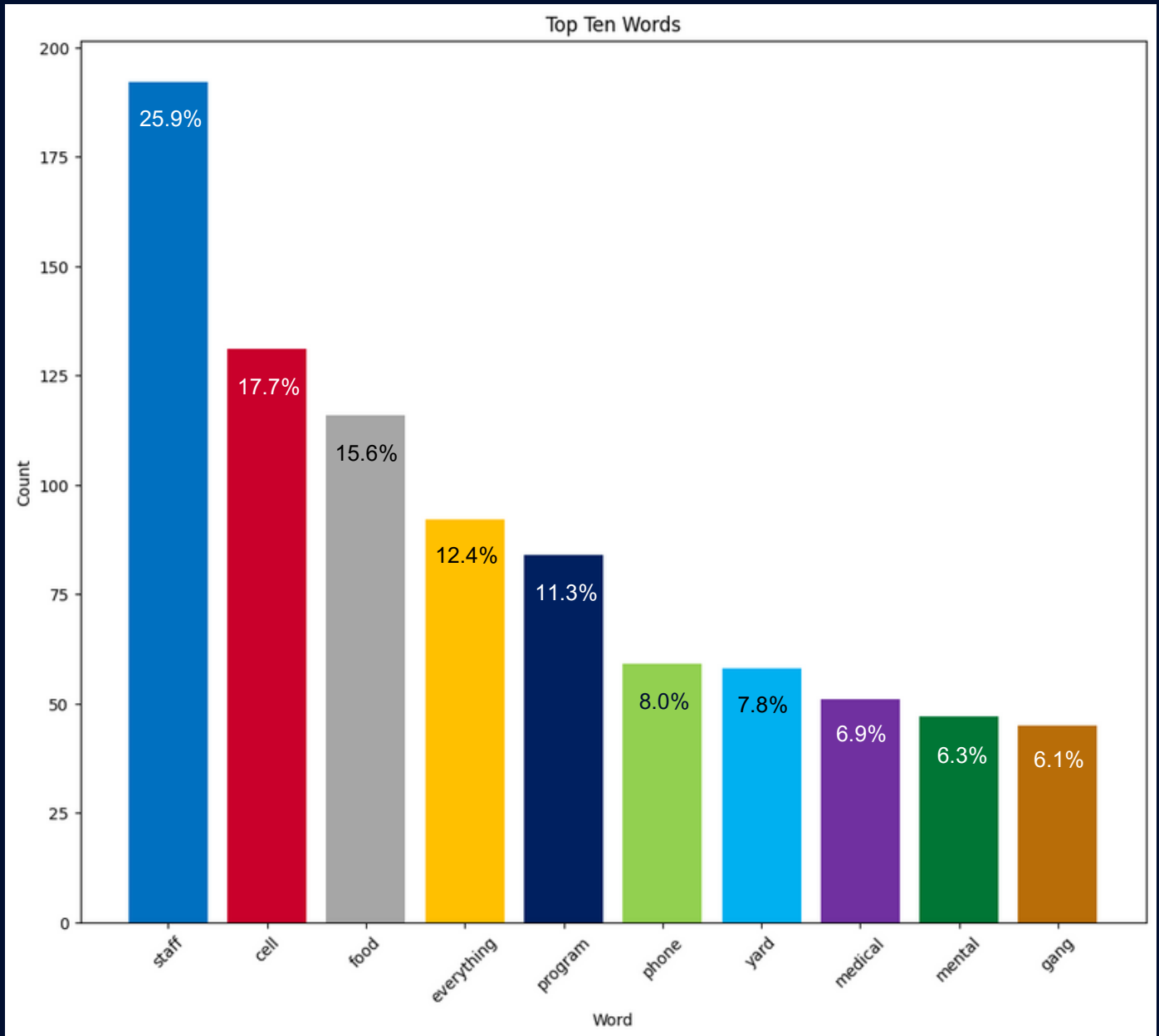
There are limitations with this method, such as sentiment analysis. For example we are unable to distinguish statements such as "The doctor is good" and "I haven't seen a doctor." However, it is reasonable to conclude that instances of "doctor" are in a negative context in response to the question. Additionally, some indicator words that were frequently applied to multiple issue categories were removed. For example, we did not include "job" under productive activity because we could not distinguish statements relevant to the issue area, like "I can't get a job," from statements relevant to other issue areas, like "Staff don't do their jobs." Nor did we include "cell" under movement, e.g. "I am in my cell 24/7," because we could not distinguish from "School is always cancelled" or "The cells are too small" under this method of counting.

This report includes quotes from survey responses that we found to be either representative of the diversity of issues raised for each category or particularly insightful. Some quotes have been abbreviated to highlight the relevant issue.

Top 10 Indicator Words

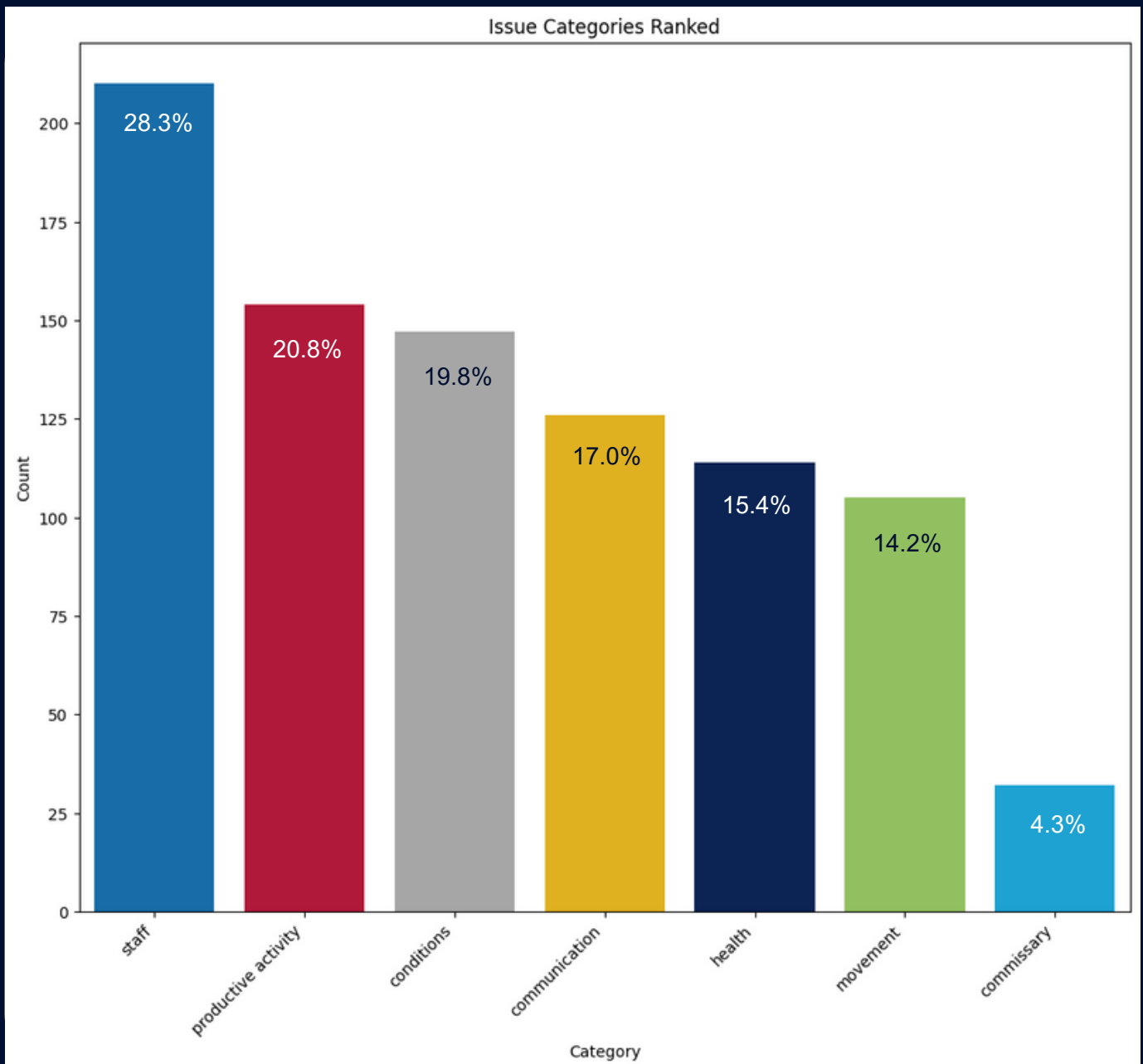
Used in responses to "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"

Percentages are of the survey responses in which the word appeared.



Issue Categories Ranked by Prevalence

Issue rankings are determined by indicator word frequency. Common words used in survey responses have been sorted into seven issue categories. When a survey response uses one of a category's indicator words, it is tallied as raising an issue in that category. For example, a survey with the words "medical," "nurse," or "COVID" is tallied as raising an issue related to health. Survey responses may include more than one issue. Percentages are of the survey responses in which an issue was raised.



Selected direct quotes from Menard survey responses

1

STAFF

Encompasses issues related to prison staff, such as lack of staff or staff conduct.

Staff assault inmates while inmates are in restraints

if you're LGBTQ+ it's even worse. The staff find out and spread the info to others just to cause chaos

Just about everything. The abuse of power by administration and staff. Neglect. The fact that all staff band together when a staff member commits a violation of their official professional duties

Some staff don't really care at all about us; even when we're doing well!

Mostly, Racial tension—meaning certain staff will look at Latinos a certain way and African American—with Dreads—a certain way.

2

PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY

Includes issues related to productive activities, such as work assignments, education, or programming.

If you are incarcerated for life Menard C.C. will not allow you to go to school, or to get a job

You can't get in school, nor get a job if you don't know someone

There is no type shape or form of reform or Rehabilitation. No programs Jobs, schooling etc. If they don't like you. you don't get nothing coming but 3 meals (cold) 3 maybe 2 shower's A week.

There is no focus on self improvement, only bare minimum of education/programs/faith/growth are offered and are all poorly run.

No programs, no drug treatment, no school

3

CONDITIONS

Encompasses issues related to living conditions, such as food, water, temperature, and sanitation.

The water is contaminated. There are birds living in the ceiling of the prison kitchen.

There's no ventilation system. Mold is in showers & rust. Rust are on desk, bunk, and bars inside cells.

locked in a cell 24-7 without water and you got to catch drips in a cup or you die of thirst and toilet is shut off so you have to shit in cartons (milk) and piss down sink hole because you can't flush.

dirty/old surroundings, air quality, poor/no temperature control

To hot in the summer and how small 6" fans sold do not move hardly any air. Someone is going to die because of it.

4

COMMUNICATION

Includes issues related to phone availability, visitation, mail, and other means of communication.

the phone system is set up to cause conflict and strife among prisoners. Not enough phones made available for over 100 inmates per wing at the MSU.

if your not in a gang your not allowed to touch the phone on the yard

The mail delivery here within the last year has deteriorated a lot. I just had two packages mailed to me by family. They have never gotten to me and I have never received a refusal of mail slip. Where is my mail disappearing to? It is not just an issue with me, it's others as well.

visits are so restrictive and confined. It's hard to get meaningful time talking to family without breaking rules.

The fact that we get 1 phone call a month (no video visits in restrictive housing).

5

HEALTH

Includes issues related to healthcare, mental health services, and COVID-19 concerns.

Health Care staff is slow to answer sick calls and it can take months to see a nurse practitioner.

It took two years to get my [REDACTED] surgery. I wasn't on any pain medication half the time and nothing is solved.

The healthcare, no Doctor here only nurse practitioners

mental health sees you every 3 months even when your SMI

mental health is poor, I haven't seen a real doctor in years

6

MOVEMENT

Includes concerns about time spent out of the cell or sleeping area and yard/dayroom availability.

only get one opportunity a wekk for yard, and no night yard allowed for the East House

We are in our cells 24/7. We get yard 2 times a week that always get cut short do to fights.

not being out more we should have more Dayroom/yard time

making you choose shower or yard, law library or yard. not enough out of cell only max of 9 hrs of yard/week.

No dayrooms, no time out of our cells.

Encompasses issues such as frequency of shopping opportunity and item availability.

fans on commissary have decreased in size
from a 10 inch to a 6 inch

Commissary does not provide adequate over the counter skin/hair/dental/sinus allergy products, nor a healthy choice of food & snack products.

THE JOB DISCRIMINATION, The commissary msu selling
outdated food, or food that has a couple of days before best
by date, and price gouging, I really think they're stealing

we can't even buy art supplies because that
go on you monthly shop so you decide if you want
to eat or buy art supplies to relax your days

we can go 2 months without commissary



This report was compiled by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at jvollen@thejha.org or 312-291-9183.

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report concerns and issues to the John Howard Association, P.O. Box 10042, Chicago, IL 60610-0042. JHA staff read every letter and track this information to monitor what is occurring behind prison walls and to advocate for humane policies and practices. Family and friends can contact JHA via our website www.thejha.org or by leaving us a voicemail at (312) 291-9183.

Since 1901, JHA has provided public oversight of Illinois' juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Every year, JHA staff and trained volunteers inspect prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the state. Based on these inspections, JHA regularly issues reports that are instrumental in improving prison conditions. JHA humbly thanks everyone who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.



Defying Injustice. Defending Humanity.