Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis of chaplaincy/religious services in modern Canadian prisons[1]

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Chaplaincy in Canadian prisons is essential for incarcerated people's spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being.[2] It supports rehabilitation, reduces misconduct, and lowers recidivism.[3] According to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), chaplains are integral members of the multidisciplinary team providing spiritual care to incarcerated individuals of all faiths.[4] However, the literature on chaplaincy in Canadian prisons remains limited.[5] Most research has centred on correctional officers, the evolving role of chaplains,[6] and the impact of policy on their function.[7] Little attention has been given to how chaplains perceive their work and evaluate their contributions. This article aims to fill that gap by examining how chaplains perceive their role as spiritual leaders in Canadian prisons using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.

Chaplains do not operate in isolation from the broader prison environment, just as prisons are not entirely detached from the society beyond their walls. Prison research has evolved from viewing prisons as closed, total institutions to recognising them as permeable spaces influenced by external factors.[8 9] Technological advancements have expanded this permeability, giving rise to 'smart prisons' (p. 1214).[10] The collaboration of multidisciplinary teams within prisons, combined with their increasing interconnectedness with the outside world, allows for a more nuanced analysis of chaplains' roles as they intersect with various internal and external influences. Given this dynamic context, a SWOT analysis—examining Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats—offers a valuable framework for understanding how chaplains perceive their work in prison settings.

SWOT analysis framework

SWOT analysis is a widely recognised strategic planning tool for assessing internal and external factors

1. This article draws on research supported by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).
2. Dodson, K. D., Cabage, L. N., & Klenowski, P. M. (2011). An evidence-based assessment of faith-based programs: Do faith-based programs "work" to reduce recidivism? *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 50*(6), 367–383.
3. Duwe, G., Hallett, M., Hays, J., Jang, S. J., & Johnson, B. R. (2015). Bible college participation and prison misconduct: A preliminary analysis. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 54*(5), 371–390.
4. Correctional Service Canada. (2018). Evaluation of CSC's institutional chaplaincy services: *Summa Government of Canada.* Retrieved from: https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/
5. Akca, D., Ammar, N. H., Shoemaker, B., Cesaroni, C., & Ouellet, M. (2023). Joy, compassion, And job satisfaction: Insights into the Canadian prison chaplaincy. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 0*(0).
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7. National Council of Canadian Muslims & Islamic Family. (2021). A review of privatized prison chaplaincy services. Retrieved from: https://www.nccm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Prison-Chaplaincy-Privatization-Report-1.pdf
8. Goffman, E. (1968). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates.* Penguin Books.
9. Crewe, B., & Ievins, A. (2020). The prison is a reinventive institution. *Theoretical Criminology, 24*(4), 568–589.
10. Imandeka, E., Putra, P. O. H., Hidayanto, A. N., Mahmud, M., & Mohr, D. C. (2024). Exploring the world of innovative prisons: Barriers, trends, and sustainable solutions. *Human Behavior & Emerging, 24*(1), 615-8154.

affecting an organisation's performance.[11] Identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats provides a comprehensive understanding of an organisation's internal and external environment and aids in strategic decision-making.[12]

The Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) component examines Strengths and Weaknesses, which are aspects within an organisation's control. Strengths are internal assets or advantages contributing to success, while weaknesses are areas needing improvement due to resource limitations or inefficiencies.[13] For example, a prison chaplaincy service might benefit from experienced staff or strong community ties but struggle with limited funding or inconsistent programming. The External Factor Evaluation (EFE) focuses on Opportunities and Threats that stem from external influences beyond the organisation's direct control. Opportunities include favourable conditions such as policy changes or partnerships that can enhance growth, whereas threats encompass external risks like budget cuts, political shifts, or changing public attitudes.[14] Potential collaboration with faith-based groups could present an opportunity in a prison chaplaincy setting, while political opposition to religious services might pose a threat.

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SWOT analysis in corrections: A strategic evaluation

SWOT analysis has not been widely used in corrections to assess institutional operations, rehabilitation programmes, and strategic planning. This analytical framework provides a structured method for evaluating internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats, making it a valuable tool for shaping correctional policies and programmes.

Ross applies SWOT analysis to explore the future of Convict Criminology,[15] [16] recognising its potential to assess an organisation's status and trajectory. He acknowledges that while SWOT analysis has limitations, it remains an accessible and effective tool for fostering discussion and identifying strategic directions. Similarly, Chakamba employs a SWOT analysis to evaluate Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes in a juvenile correctional training centre in Zimbabwe, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the technical education provided to young individuals in custody.[17]

Institutional applications of SWOT analysis are also evident in policy planning. The Florida Department of Corrections integrated a SWOT assessment into its 2018-2022 strategic plan to evaluate prison operations, though pandemic-related disruptions affected its full implementation. Likewise, in Queensland, Australia, the Townsville local government incorporated a SWOT framework into its 'Intensive Case Coordination of Families and Young People' project, targeting systemic improvements in correctional interventions.[18]

Reintegration programmes have also leveraged SWOT analysis to refine their approaches. In Michigan, a programme designed to facilitate post-incarceration reintegration used this method to evaluate its process, ensuring a strategic framework for assessing the needs of individuals preparing for release.[19]

SWOT analysis has not been systematically applied to prison chaplaincy services. A literature review suggests a gap in research examining chaplains' roles and their contributions through a SWOT framework. Given the complex institutional, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of chaplaincy work, applying SWOT analysis to this field can provide critical insights into its impact, challenges, and potential for improvement. By evaluating internal factors (such as chaplains' dedication and role clarity) and external

11. Silva, C. N. (2005). SWOT analysis. In R. W. Caves (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the City* (pp. 444–445). Routledge.
12. Ghazinoory, S., Abdi, M., & Azadegan-Mehr, M. (2011). SWOT methodology: A state-of-the-art review for the past, a framework for the future. *Journal of Business Economics and Management, 12*(1), 24–48.
13. Helms, M. M., & Nixon, J. (2010). Exploring SWOT analysis – where are we now? A review of academic research from the last decade. *Journal of Strategy and Management, 3*(3), 215-251.
14. For a detailed discussion, see footnote 14: Helms & Nixon (2018).
15. Ross, J. I. (2024). Thinking Critically About the Next Decade of Convict Criminology. *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons, 33*(1).
16. Convict Criminology is a critical perspective within the field of criminology that draws on the personal experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals—many of whom are now scholars—to challenge traditional views of crime, justice, and incarceration.
17. Chakamba, J. (2019). *Towards re-visioning the technical & vocational curriculum of a selected Zimbabwean juvenile correctional training centre: A program evaluation.* [Doctoral Dissertation]. University of KwaZulu-Natal. Retrieved from: https://ukzn-dspace.ukzn.ac.za/handle/10413/17953
18. Murphy, Z., Hofmann, M., & Miles, V. (2018). Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group: Intensive case coordination of families and young people. *James Cook University Law Review, 24,* 261–275.
19. Eberth, S. D., Diaconu, M., & Koob, C. (2022). A Cautionary Tale of a Prisoner Re-entry Initiative: Lessons Learned. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social and Community Studies, 17*(2), 167-177.

influences (such as policy changes and funding constraints), SWOT analysis can help identify areas where chaplaincy services require institutional support and highlight opportunities for enhancing religious and spiritual care within correctional facilities. This approach is particularly relevant as chaplaincy often remains underfunded and overlooked in broader prison reform efforts.

Canadian prisons and chaplaincy

Canadian chaplaincy includes pastoral care as a core component. Chaplains in Canada provide spiritual, emotional, and religious support to individuals in various settings, including prisons. Their prison work encompasses several key areas: pastoral counselling, religious services, spiritual guidance, interfaith support, cultural sensitivity, and crisis and end-of-life support.[20]

Canada's justice system is divided between federal and provincial authorities.[21] Individuals in custody sentenced to two or more years fall under federal jurisdiction, while those with shorter sentences, including all incarcerated youth, are managed by provincial and territorial governments.[22] Incarcerated people are entitled to religious services under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.[23] Fluctuations in incarceration rates from 2018 to 2023 highlight the growing need for chaplaincy services.[24] The 2013 privatisation of federal chaplaincy services has raised concerns about reduced access, particularly for minority faith groups.[25] This study includes chaplains' perspectives on these changes.

> Many chaplains view their work as a calling, leading to long-term dedication despite challenges.

Method and data collection

Seven online focus groups were conducted to explore chaplains' experiences in correctional facilities across Canada. Each session lasted approximately one hour, allowing for in-depth discussions on their roles, challenges, and perspectives. The study included 25 interfaith chaplains from five Canadian provinces, ensuring a diverse representation of regional experiences. Nearly half (48 per cent) of participants were from Ontario, reflecting the province's significant role in the Canadian correctional system.

In terms of religious affiliation, most chaplains identified as Christian (76 per cent), while others represented Muslim (16 per cent), Jewish (4 per cent), and Buddhist (4 per cent) faith traditions. This interfaith composition provided insights into the varied approaches to spiritual care in correctional settings. Gender representation was predominantly male (80 per cent), with women making up 20 per cent of the participants, highlighting the gendered dynamics within chaplaincy work in these institutions.

Participants served across a range of institutional security levels, reflecting the diverse environments in which chaplains provide spiritual support: maximum-security facilities (20 per cent), medium-security facilities (4 per cent), combined medium/maximum-security facilities (24 per cent), multilevel institutions (housing incarcerated people of various security classifications; 32 per cent), and remand/detention centres (temporary holding facilities for individuals awaiting trial or sentencing; 8 per cent). The size of these facilities also varied significantly, with some chaplains serving in institutions with fewer than 100 incarcerated people. In contrast, others worked in facilities with over 400 detainees. Notably, 32 per cent of chaplains were based in the most significant institutions (i.e., larger and in provinces with larger populations), highlighting the increased demand for spiritual and emotional support in these high-capacity environments.

This broad representation across security levels, facility sizes, and religious traditions enabled a comprehensive overview of chaplains' experiences and offered valuable insights into their work within Canada's correctional system.

Data analysis

Analysing chaplains' experiences in Canadian correctional facilities began with carefully transcribing

20. Government of Canada (2024). Memorandum of Understanding Between the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy (IFC). Retrieved from: https://www.canada.ca/en/correctional-service/programs/offenders/chaplaincy/international-networks/memorandum-understanding-between-correctional-service-canada-csc-interfaith-committee-chaplaincy-ifc.html
21. Roberts, J. V., & Doob, A. N. (1997). Race, Ethnicity, and Criminal Justice in Canada. *Crime and Justice, 21,* 469–522.
22. Correctional Service Canada. (2024, October). *Quarterly financial report for the quarter ended September 30, 2024.* Government of Canada.
23. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (2024). Government of Canada. Retrieved from: https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csjsjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/
24. Statista Research Department. (2024, July 4). *Canada: Rate of adults in correctional services in provinces and territories 2001-2023.* Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/560907/rate-of-adults-in-provincial-and-territorial-correctional-services-canada/
25. Beckford, J. A., & Cairns, I. C. M. (2015). Muslim Prison Chaplains in Canada and Britain. *The Sociological Review, 63*(1), 36-56.

focus group discussions. Each session was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, ensuring that every perspective and nuance was accurately captured. The research team then reviewed the transcripts, identifying recurring themes and key discussion points.

Once familiar with the data, the researchers began a multi-stage coding process to organise and refine the emerging themes. In the first coding cycle, keywords and phrases relating to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were highlighted, using an inductive approach to allow themes to surface naturally. As patterns became more evident, a second coding round helped refine these themes, grouping similar ideas and eliminating redundancies. This iterative process ensured that the findings maintained internal consistency and analytical rigor.

With clearly defined themes, the research team applied a SWOT framework to structure the analysis. The identified themes were categorised into four key areas (see table 1): 1) Strengths highlight the factors that empower chaplains in their roles; 2) Weaknesses, outlining the institutional challenges and barriers they face, 3) Opportunities, identifying potential improvements, and innovative practices, and 4) Threats, recognising systemic risks that could undermine chaplaincy work in correctional settings.

Table 1. *SWOT analysis of a sample of Canadian prison chaplains.*

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Chaplains Dedication	Role Confusion	Prison Chaplaincy Jobs	De-funding
Resilience Under Pressure	Role Limitation	Do Good Work	Non-multi-faith Chaplaincy
Chaplains' Community	Chaplaincy Vulnerability	Tech. in Chaplaincy	Chaplains Health
Safe Space for Inmates			

While this structured approach established a solid analytical foundation, meaningfully capturing chaplains' lived experiences was equally essential. To achieve this, narrative analysis was incorporated into the study. Firsthand accounts were carefully selected from the transcripts, ensuring representation from all focus groups. These narratives not only illustrated the practical realities of chaplaincy but also reinforced the effectiveness of the SWOT framework, bridging broad trends with firsthand experiences.

Findings

Strengths

Chaplain's dedication

Chaplains exhibited strong commitment and passion for their roles, creating stability in environments fraught with uncertainty. Their ability to foster meaningful connections with incarcerated people contributed to emotional and spiritual well-being. Many chaplains view their work as a calling, leading to long-term dedication despite challenges.

> 'We have incredibly compassionate people who legitimately care, and that cuts across all the faith groups.'

Resilience under pressure

Despite limited resources, understaffing, and institutional constraints, chaplains remained adaptable and ensured continuity of services. Their ability to navigate systemic challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated their resilience.

> 'Due to a lack of chaplaincy staff, I am dealing with four hundred people, and we have only one and a half chaplains in the institution. It is not possible.'

Strong chaplaincy community

Chaplains of various faiths supported one another, forming networks that promoted collaboration, mentorship, and shared learning. These communities helped chaplains to develop best practices and create structured training programmes.

> 'Through our community of practice, we have been able to interact and collaborate, leading to some changes in education and even the development of a chaplaincy curriculum.'

Safe space for incarcerated people

Chaplains provided a unique, confidential environment where incarcerated people felt safe expressing emotions, seeking guidance, and receiving nonjudgmental support. This role was particularly significant in rigid institutional settings.

> 'We provide a kind of kindness in a harsh environment, a human touch where we can connect with people, not just incarcerated people but staff too.'

Weaknesses

Role confusion

Chaplains often operated in a grey area within correctional institutions. While their presence was acknowledged, correctional staff and administrators did not always fully understand their role, leading to a lack of clear expectations.

> 'My superintendent[26] does not fully understand what I do. We are within the system but not quite part of the system.'

Role limitations

Facilities often lacked adequate spaces for chaplaincy work, limiting the ability to conduct services, group sessions, and private discussions. Institutional policies sometimes restricted their duties, reducing their ability to offer meaningful care.

> 'We do not have the private space necessary for meaningful conversations; we often meet incarcerated people behind bars or in a cage.'

Administrative burden

Chaplains were increasingly required to oversee administrative tasks, taking time away from their primary responsibilities of providing spiritual care. Institutional bureaucracy further limited their ability to engage with the incarcerated people effectively.

> 'You spend your day just typing messages, while on the other side, many people are waiting for your visit.'

Burnout and emotional strain

The demanding nature of chaplaincy, coupled with high caseloads and exposure to incarcerated people's trauma, contributed to burnout and secondary trauma. Many chaplains struggled to find institutional support for their mental well-being.

> 'Chaplaincy involves walking a fine line between being part of the institution and fulfilling our spiritual mission. If we cannot balance that, it becomes a significant challenge.'

Opportunities

Expanding chaplaincy roles

Due to legal and institutional requirements, there is a growing demand for chaplains in correctional facilities. These positions offered competitive salaries, benefits, and job security.

> 'There is a real opportunity for chaplaincy to grow within the correctional system, given the increasing recognition of our work.'

Supporting rehabilitation and reintegration

Chaplains played a key role in rehabilitating incarcerated people, helping them to develop spiritual resilience, cope with incarceration, and prepare for reintegration into society. This offered a chance to improve perceptions of chaplaincy as an essential rehabilitative service.

> 'This is a great chance for us to help with rehabilitation and reintegration, depending on where each person is in their journey.'

We are now using government laptops to help incarcerated people attend virtual funerals and religious services, something that would have been impossible before.

Leveraging technology

Integrating technology, including video conferencing, enhanced chaplains' ability to reach incarcerated people remotely, provide faith-specific services, and connect incarcerated people with family members.

> 'We are now using government laptops to help incarcerated people attend virtual funerals and religious services, something that would have been impossible before.'

Threats

Funding cuts and staff shortages

Chronic underfunding led to chaplain shortages, making it difficult to provide adequate care. High chaplain-to-incarcerated individual ratios reduced the effectiveness of spiritual services.

26. In Canada, the superintendent or warden is the head of the prison or correctional facility. In UK prisons, this person would be called the Governing Governor.

> 'We have gone from one chaplain per 150 incarcerated people to one per 250, making it impossible to meet individual needs.'

Inconsistent hiring practices

The shift from government-employed chaplains to contract-based hiring has led to instability and loss of experienced chaplains. Minority faith groups were often underrepresented due to limited hiring policies.

> 'Over a decade ago, the federal government defunded and outsourced chaplaincy. Now, contracts are awarded to the lowest bidder, which reduces the quality of services.'

Lack of multi-faith representation

Christian chaplaincy remained dominant, leaving minority faith groups underserved. Policies that required a minimum number of incarcerated people from a specific religion before hiring a chaplain limited access to spiritual care.

> 'There is no Jewish chaplain at certain facilities because there are not 'enough' Jewish incarcerated people. This leaves many without proper religious guidance.'

Chaplains' mental and physical health

Exposure to trauma, stress, and occasional threats of violence created significant risks for chaplains, impacting their well-being and ability to perform their duties effectively.

> 'Vicarious trauma is a real concern. Chaplains are constantly exposed to stories of hardship, abuse, and violence, yet we rarely receive mental health support.'

Policy recommendations

Drawing on the findings from the SWOT analysis, the following policy recommendations aim to address systemic challenges affecting chaplaincy services in Canadian prisons. These challenges stem from institutional limitations, external opportunities for reform, and barriers that hinder chaplains' ability to provide effective spiritual care.[27] To improve service accessibility and sustainability, targeted interventions, such as increased funding, interfaith collaboration, and enhanced training programs, are necessary.[28]

Implementing these policies would align chaplaincy services with chaplains' lived experiences and the more exhaustive empirical research, enhancing their ability to support rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and uphold human rights within correctional institutions.[29] These recommendations, based on the SWOT analysis conducted as part of the current study, provide a framework for strengthening chaplaincy as a key component of holistic correctional care in Canada. Table 2 below summarises recommended policies drawn from this research study.

Table 2. *Key challenges chaplains face and proposed recommendations*

Key Challenges	Recommendation
Role confusion and institutional integration	Develop clear job descriptions that align chaplains' spiritual duties with institutional goals. Explicitly integrate chaplains into standing orders, crisis response procedures, and leadership meetings.
Professional development and recognition	Offer paid leave for training and establish formal acknowledgment programmes to highlight chaplains' contributions to rehabilitation.
Workload and burnout	Conduct Internal Factors Evaluations (IFEs) to assess chaplains' resilience, workload, and long-term well-being. Ensure chaplaincy services are adequately staffed.
Facilities and resources	Improve access to dedicated spiritual spaces rather than shared multi-use rooms. Establish policies that ensure chaplains can provide meaningful spiritual care. Address limitations in technological services due to a lack of tools and broadband.

27. Gacek, J., & Asfari, A. (2024). Islamophobia and the Benefits and Challenges for Prison Imams. *Islamophobia Studies Journal, 8*(2), 246-267.
28. O'Connor, T. S., Meakes, E., & Zhao, Z. (2024). Overview of the Evolution of Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Canadian Province of Ontario (1973–2023): A Teilhard Reflection. *Pastoral Psychology.*
29. Scallan, E., Lancaster, K., & Kouyoumdjian, F. (2021). The "Problem" of Health: An Analysis of Health Care Provision in Canada's Federal Prisons. *Health, 25*(3), 678–690.

Staffing and job security	Implement consistent hiring standards, ensuring chaplains meet qualifications like those set by the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care (CASC). Chaplains' staffing levels must account for absences due to illness, training, and leave. Facilities need more than the minimum.
Funding and multi-faith representation	Establish proportional hiring policies reflecting incarcerated individuals' demographics—advocate for provincial and federal funding to sustain chaplaincy services and support minority faith representation.
Technology integration	Develop standardised guidelines for chaplaincy technology use, ensuring secure virtual spiritual care without replacing in-person interactions. Allocate funding for infrastructure improvements (internet access, secure platforms).
Mental health and well-being staff interacting with chaplains.	Normalise mental health support by eliminating stigma, offering trauma-informed counselling, and using anonymous feedback mechanisms for chaplains.

Implementation strategies

Practical implementation strategies are essential for optimising chaplaincy services within the Canadian correctional system. Considering institutional constraints and the diverse spiritual needs of incarcerated individuals, structured approaches can improve chaplaincy's required work. Key strategies include enhancing resource allocation, promoting interfaith collaboration, and expanding professional development opportunities for chaplains. Moreover, incorporating empirical assessment tools can assist in evaluating chaplaincy's role in rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

Addressing operational challenges and adopting best practices will help to ensure that chaplaincy remains vital to correctional care.

1. Legislative and policy integration: Position chaplaincy as a core component of rehabilitation and reintegration for imprisoned people to justify sustained funding.
2. Collaboration with multi-faith organisations: Strengthen partnerships with faith-based groups to co-fund chaplaincy services and educate majority faith chaplains about minority traditions.
3. Monitoring and evaluation: Establish independent reviews of chaplain-to-incarcerated individual ratios and diversity benchmarks and ensure equitable hiring and resource distribution.
4. Data-driven advocacy: Offer grants to independent researchers to collect impact metrics (e.g., reduced recidivism and improved incarcerated individuals' behaviour) to build a compelling case for funding.

Critical reflections

The present study adopts a structured approach to examining prison chaplaincy in Canada, employing a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to assess its key dimensions systematically. This analytical framework delineates the core issues within prison chaplaincy, making the findings accessible and actionable for policymakers. By integrating qualitative methodologies, including focus groups and narrative analysis, the study effectively captures the lived experiences of chaplains, offering a nuanced understanding of their roles, challenges, and contributions within correctional institutions.

A notable strength of this research lies in its inclusion of diverse perspectives, encompassing chaplains from various provinces, security classifications, and religious traditions. This breadth of representation allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the chaplaincy landscape in Canada. Furthermore, the study recognises the inherently complex and interdisciplinary nature of chaplaincy work, situating chaplains within the broader correctional environment and examining their interactions with incarcerated individuals, institutional staff, and external faith-based organisations.

However, the study is not without its limitations. The small sample size and an over representation of chaplains from Ontario constrain the generalisability of the findings to the national context. The study's reliance on self-reported data also introduces the potential for response bias, as it does not incorporate perspectives from correctional staff or incarcerated individuals. Moreover, the absence of a comparative dimension—wherein Canadian prison chaplaincy could be evaluated against international models—precludes a more expansive understanding of best practices and alternative frameworks. The study also does not

quantify chaplaincy's impact on key correctional outcomes, such as rehabilitation and recidivism rates, limiting its capacity to inform evidence-based policy decisions.

Future research should broaden the study's scope by incorporating a larger and more geographically representative sample to address these limitations. Expanding the range of perspectives by including input from correctional officers, institutional administrators, and incarcerated persons would enrich the analysis and enhance the validity of the findings. While the present study underscores the significance of chaplaincy in the Canadian correctional system, an expanded research agenda would bolster the evidence base, supporting the development of more comprehensive and informed policy interventions.

Conclusion

This study highlights the essential role of chaplaincy in Canadian prisons, emphasising (from the perspective of chaplains) its impact on spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being and its contributions to rehabilitation, misconduct reduction, and lower recidivism rates. Chaplains provide critical support to incarcerated individuals, offering a safe space for reflection, healing, and faith-based guidance. Despite their integral role, chaplains operate within a complex institutional framework, facing significant challenges that affect their ability to provide meaningful spiritual care.

Through a SWOT analysis, this research has identified key strengths such as chaplains' dedication, resilience, professional networks, and ability to foster trust with incarcerated people. At the same time, internal weaknesses—including role confusion, administrative burdens, inadequate facilities, and burnout—highlight structural issues that hinder their effectiveness. External opportunities like job security, technological advancements, and the potential for enhanced rehabilitation efforts contrast with threats such as funding cuts, inconsistent hiring practices, lack of multi-faith representation, and chaplains' mental health risks.

Policy recommendations to address these challenges include clarifying chaplaincy roles, improving working conditions, ensuring multi-faith representation, responsibly leveraging technology, and implementing mental health support for chaplains. Strengthening collaboration between correctional institutions, faith-based organisations, and policymakers is crucial to sustaining effective, equitable, and well-resourced chaplaincy services.

Recognising chaplaincy as a core component of rehabilitation and reintegration could help secure its long-term viability. By implementing data-driven advocacy, independent monitoring, and strategic policy changes, correctional institutions can enhance chaplains' effectiveness, ensure equitable access to spiritual care, and reinforce the rehabilitative potential of Canada's prison system.

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