

# No Family, No Friends: An Instrumental Variable Analysis to Revisit the Reintegration Model in Mexico

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**Gustavo Fondevila<sup>1</sup>,  
Leandro Gastón<sup>2</sup>,  
and Ricardo Massa<sup>3</sup>**

## Abstract

Literature on recidivism and desistance has acquired increasing relevance in the criminological discussions of recent years. This study seeks to contribute to this discourse by implementing an instrumental variable analysis to examine inmates' expectations regarding the factors that play a central role in their perceptions of factors for successful social reintegration. Results indicate that education is perceived as a key factor, while the support of family and friends exerts a limited influence over incarcerated persons' perceptions of social reintegration possibilities in Mexico. These results serve as a basis for discussing barriers to social reintegration and for exploring public policy modifications in Latin America.

## Keywords

social reintegration, recidivism, education, familial social support, instrumental variable analysis

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<sup>1</sup>Autonomous University of Barcelona, Bellaterra, Spain

<sup>2</sup>University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

<sup>3</sup>Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Mexico City, Mexico

## Corresponding Author:

Ricardo Massa, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Department of Public Administration, Carretera Mexico-Toluca, 3655, Mexico City, Mexico.

Email: ricardo.massa@cide.edu

## Introduction

In general, the reintegration prison model focuses on strengthening the link between incarcerated persons and the social structures that are the bases for their successful return to society by promoting desistance and reducing recidivism (Rhine & Paparozzi, 1999). Its goal is to provide inmates with the necessary skills and coping mechanisms to navigate the social reintegration process (Turner & Petersilia, 1996). The implementation of this prison model is based on inmate participation in a variety of programs that emphasize and integrate factors theoretically associated with desistance and reducing recidivism. These factors are commonly associated with *education* (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012), *social and life skills* (Bouffard & Bergeron, 2006), *behavioral problems and substance abuse* (Seiter & Kadela, 2003), *religion* (O'Connor & Perreyclear, 2013) and *employment* (Richmond, 2014). Although not all factors are of equal importance, each plays a crucial and vital role in the success of reintegration.

Beyond the particular focus of each one, the programs overlap regarding one fundamental concept: the building of community through family and social support. Family and friends have been identified as a crucial aspect that contributes to the success of reintegration (Gordon, 1999; Homer, 1979; Jorgensen et al., 1986; Kazura, 2001; Klein et al., 2002). In fact, its role in aiding inmates' return to society appears to be of such importance that some reintegration programs are based exclusively on models aimed at impacting issues related to inmates' families and social circles.

Moreover, programs based on the risk-need-responsivity model seek to identify and reduce specific individual criminogenic needs through structured re-entry programs that revolve around family and marital relationships to ultimately decrease the risk of recidivism (Brooks Holliday et al., 2012). On the other hand, models based on social strain theory seek to specify certain tensions or situations that are perceived as unjust or beyond the control of an individual, inciting them to commit crimes (Listwan et al., 2013). In both cases, the importance of positive family relationships for successful inmate reintegration is stressed, either through social support or alleviation of community tension.

The vast body of literature that places emphasis on recidivism includes studies that examine processes of reintegration and desistance following imprisonment (Cobbina, 2010; Healy & O'Donnell, 2008; Hedderman et al., 2011; Steen & Opsal, 2007). In contrast, others, as highlighted by Andersen et al. (2020, p. 490), have emphasized the perception of inmates themselves regarding their own transition (Morani et al., 2011; Visher et al., 2007) and the perceptions of those released from prison (Denney et al., 2014). In this sense, the study of incarcerated persons' perspectives is fundamental as, beyond the support of friends,

family, community organizations, and institutions, reintegration success is ultimately shaped by the actions of released offenders, hinging on their capacity and willingness to overcome the barriers already cited. To this end, LeBel et al. (2017) note that pre-release attitudes are useful for forecasting the commission of new crimes. This suggests a possible relationship between inmates' perception of their capacity to desist subsequent criminal behavior (Burnett & Maruna, 2006).

For this reason, some research has centered on motivational factors associated with the success of reintegration in disciplines like positive psychology (Valera et al., 2015) or narrative criminology (Maruna, 2004; Wright, 2017). At the same time, understanding the important variables that impact social reintegration is crucial, given that improving programs for inmate social reintegration is urgent and widely recognized by both scholars and corrections administrators (MacKenzie, 2000; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). As can be seen, there are a variety of variables related to the reduction of recidivism, and, at the same time, certain underlying mechanisms that support a successful reinsertion into society. The link between these two has not been studied in depth, and may explain their mutual influence by providing an integrated understanding of the social reintegration process (Mathlin et al., 2022). As indicated by Andersen et al. (2020, p. 491), few studies have given voice to former offenders, and even less so to incarcerated individuals regarding the perception of their needs, desires, and aspirations for their reintegration.

Within this context, this study seeks to contribute to the debate on the factors associated with the perception of recidivism that may ultimately lead to re-imprisonment. Considering the general acceptance of the importance of family and social support as a factor for a successful reintegration process, the current study investigates whether expectations of support from family and friends play a crucial role in inmate perceptions of recidivism. While the connection between inmates' perceptions and their family and friends (Mowen et al., 2019), their faith and devotion (Hlavka et al., 2015) or the role of employment (Andersen et al., 2020) and education (Brock, 2017) for successful reintegration into communities has been studied, the analyses are generally qualitative and do not focus on Latin America.

Thus, the novelty of this research lies in its implementation of a relatively underused quantitative analysis to analyze the variables perceived to play a key role in the possibility of recidivating, within the context of the principles of social reintegration programs. This examination aims to explore how inmates perceive their chances of recidivism related to relationships (family and friends), employment, or education (Davis et al., 2013; Doherty et al., 2014; Enache et al., 2009). Further, the goal is to apply the findings to assess the degree to which reintegration programs are in line with these perceptions. The study's focus is on Mexico, although findings may be extrapolated to the Latin American context.

The empirical strategy consists of implementing an instrumental variable analysis (IV), using information from the most recent survey regarding inmates' conditions in Mexican prisons: *Encuesta Nacional de Población Privada de la Libertad* (ENPOLbyits Spanish acronym) undertaken by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía* (INEGI – the National Institute for Statistics and Geography). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study with this focus and research design conducted in any Latin American country.

Overall, the results indicate a positive relationship between the expectation of encountering barriers in entering the labor market and anticipation of prison re-entry, controlling for age. The same direction of association was observed between the expectation of obstacles related to familial support and prison re-entry, controlling for education level. When the effect of anticipation of encountering barriers was estimated concerning education and prison re-entry expectations, the effect was positive, independent of the instrumental variable considered. Finally, no instrumental variable was found to condition the effect of expectancy of barriers for reconnecting with friends on the expectation of prison re-entry.

The findings here show that inmates perceive that the most important factor for their reintegration, and particularly for not recidivating, is the possibility of continuing their education, followed by obtaining a job. These results agree with previous studies that have focused on finding a job as marking a turning point in the life of criminal offenders (Uggen, 2000; Uggen & Staff, 2001), or even as a means to providing a sense of purpose to restart and rebuild a personal biography (Maruna, 2001). However, they differ in terms of the inclusion in the assessment the variables of work, education, family, and friends in developing expectations regarding recidivism. This is important for the design or redesign of correctional reintegration policies that feature a capacity-building focus, rather than one emphasizing the support of family and friends.

### ***Reintegration Programs Focusing on Family and Friends***

A variety of projects have aimed at strengthening family and community bonds to reduce recidivism (Adams & Fischer, 1976). They feature the enhancement of community ties as a way of easing the transition from prison to the community, addressing a particularly vulnerable moment when recently-released individuals may be susceptible to the influence of deviant peers and/or criminal settings (Agnew, 2005). Since Cullen's first study (1994) on the role of social context as a mechanism of crime prevention and rehabilitation - instrumental and emotional support from primary relationships - and social and community networks, the study of this "protection" factor has advanced (McLewin & Muller, 2006).

In this sense, social support theory was integrated into the process of reintegration with programs oriented toward strengthening inmates' bonds with their families and close social circles (Hanson & Scott, 1996). The theory thus centers on the reintegration needs of ex-inmates that extend beyond the simple search for financial support once they return to their communities (Westervelt & Cook, 2012). As social support components include affection, understanding, compassion, and patience, this emotional circle serves to stave off depression and societal distrust (Grounds & Jamieson, 2003). Therefore, through reconnection with family and friends, such emotional support may be the vehicle that facilitates a successful return to society in general.

Support from families thus began to play a key role in the design of prison programming, both to improve life in carceral settings (Jiang et al., 2005; Jiang & Winfree, 2006), and to boost desistance (Farrell, 2000; Reisig et al., 2002). In this regard, Laub and Sampson (2006) argue that the development of strong family ties may discourage involvement with deviant peers and a return to criminal activities (Bahr et al., 2010; Morizot & Le Blanc, 2007). Intimate partners, parents, and children may serve to prevent such associations and increase motivation to remain within the law (Davis et al., 2013, p. 452). In general, the literature appears to accept and document the association between family support and lower rates of recidivism (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009).

Similarly, another important issue concerning inmates' intimate circles that impacts reintegration is related to friends or peers. One of the most consistent findings in the literature is that friends exert a strong influence on the initiation and persistence of criminal behavior (Rebellon et al., 2008). For example, research has confirmed that distance from friends involved in criminal activities is a fundamental factor in the desistance process (Byrne & Trew, 2008). Friends who respect the law tend to model such behavior, reinforcing socially acceptable behavior and discouraging illegal attitudes and activities (Laub & Sampson, 2006; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011).

Related to this, research has shown that the relationship between a person and their community is related to recidivism (Folk et al., 2016), and that positive social links encourage desistance (Kay, 2022; Walker et al., 2013). However, a central problem with this perspective is precisely that incarceration often affects the bonds with family and friends. Without permanent contact, an emotional break could occur, creating a sense of loss (Apel et al., 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Pierce, 2015), similar to emotions experienced with divorce or death (Miller, 2006). As well, the severing of intimate emotional ties is generally associated with stress, low academic performance, violent behavior, substance abuse, social rejection, and entry into criminality, among others (Braman, 2003; Hoffman et al., 2010; Wildeman, 2014).

In addition, Ricordeau's (2008) research suggests that incarcerated persons' experience of stigma, both within and outside of their families, tends to contribute to familial separation, as family members (or friend groups) distance themselves to protect and preserve their own identities, separate from that of the inmate. As well, incarceration may also be a financial burden for families, especially in countries like Mexico, where an incarcerated person is frequently the principal or sole provider of the family (Bergman & Fondevila, 2021). In some cases, not only has one or the only source of income been lost, but given the correctional system's resource shortages, the family may need to provide financial support to ensure adequate prison living conditions and prevent violence for their incarcerated relative (Bergman & Fondevila, 2021; Hannem, 2019).

In this regard, Visser and Travis (2003) highlight the complexity of reinserting inmates into society and the need for public policies that provide a holistic approach to the transition of released inmates into the community. To this end, reintegration programs need to consider complementary mechanisms – for example, those related to building job skills – and those that enhance the development of social skills that reflect community objectives and values (Hass & Saxon, 2012).

### *Social Reintegration in Mexico and Latin America*

Until the 1917 Constitution, prisons in Mexico were dominated by a punitive model of incarceration. With the new legal structure, the notion of criminal regeneration was incorporated. The "readaptation" of criminals functioned, mostly, through education, psychological therapies, and the teaching of values, under a quasi-medical or therapeutic perspective of crime (Haney, 2006). The model of readaptation continued until almost 1999 when it was abandoned and replaced with the social reintegration model (Cunjama et al., 2012). However, for some authors, these changes ultimately refer to a name change, from readaptation to reintegration in Constitutional Article 18, but were not accompanied by a change in public policies (García Ramírez, 2008). In practice, this meant the coexistence of both models.

To this end, the 2008 reform established the new objective of the penitentiary system: the reintegration of the offender into society, seeking to ensure that they do not re-commit crime. In the text, social reintegration is understood as the restitution of the full exercise of freedoms following compliance with a sanction or measure executed with respect for human rights. More than replacing a model, treatments concentrated on social issues related to the re-entry of inmates to society, to the detriment of individual treatments oriented toward inmate behaviors. The new definition also broadened the concept of social reintegration to include training and education, as well as

post-prison services, such as continuing addiction treatment (Hubert & Bravo, 2018). Yet, despite this change in definition and focus, social reintegration in Mexico appears to be inefficient, calling for a debate to assess which further modifications are needed for this policy to work.

This assessment applies not only to Mexico. In fact, there has been an intense debate regarding social reintegration in Latin America as to the integration of its concepts with existing prison policies. To a large degree, the discussion has drawn on empirical evidence from qualitative studies, case studies, and other non-systematic methodologies (Sanhueza, 2019). Further, there have been significant reviews by public institutions and civil society organizations on evaluations of the impact of reintegration programs (Morales et al., 2013; Navarro et al., 2012; Portuguese & Arriagada, 2018). Generally, this discourse has emphasized the objectives of compliance, rather than the final goal of reducing recidivism and increasing the crime desistance of released people. Another variant of this type of investigation has examined reintegration programs based on analyzing specific prison policies those calling for prison reforms (Córdova Sánchez, 2016; Leal & García, 2007; Vargas, 2021). The lack of systematic studies of the impact of the various reintegration programs in the region is probably due to the absence of institutional quantitative data and the difficulty of drawing on data and information from released incarcerated.

Further, on an academic level, the extant literature has dealt with the issue of social reintegration and desistance from various perspectives, such as correctional staff perceptions of reintegration rather than that of incarcerated persons (Ahumada & Grandón, 2015), the difficulty of reintegration in cases of addiction (Padilla et al., 2023), and the moral performance of prisons (Sanhueza & Pérez, 2019). In all cases, the studies are based on field-work undertaken in correctional settings. There is practically no literature that explores the challenge of social reintegration based on the perspectives of inmates. The present work therefore seeks to understand reintegration in Mexico and to encourage further debate in the region.

## Method and Data

The study's empirical strategy involved the use of the results of the latest version of the *Encuesta Nacional de Población Privada de la Libertad* (ENPOL - National Survey of the Incarcerated Population) conducted by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI- National Institute of Statistics and Geography), containing 61,449 reported cases. This survey, representative on a national level, contains socio-demographic data of the nation's incarcerated population, as well as their perceptions regarding

prison life and expectations for life once released. After cleaning the data to remove cases without complete answers, a final database was compiled containing 59,915 observations.

Mathlin and colleagues (2022) used directed acyclic graphs (DAG) to explore factors associated with successful reintegration and suggest (p. 19) the use of tools that consider the impact of confounding variables to test their validity. To do so, the study implemented an instrumental variables (IV) analysis – a method useful for studying the causal effects of some form of intervention or treatment, especially in cases with high quantities of information from surveys (Pokropek, 2016). In particular, there was a focus on addressing the omitted variable bias, error-in-variables bias, and simultaneous causality bias (Cunningham, 2021). In sum, this is an appropriate tool for analyzing causal phenomena when the source of information is composed of answers to a survey or questionnaire.

To clarify, an instrument  $I$  is a random variable, related to an endogenous variable  $X$ , whose presence helps to control or modulate the association between  $X$  and a dependent variable  $Y$ . As a result, estimators describing the causal association of  $X \rightarrow Y$  will be unbiased and consistent. Within the causality analysis context, an instrument is used to address the problem of endogeneity (correlation between  $X$  and the random term of the behavior of  $Y$ ) to properly identify the causal association between  $X$  and  $Y$ . That is, the following causal path  $I \rightarrow X \rightarrow Y$  could be established, which would suggest that the effect of  $I$  on  $Y$  could only be understood through  $X$ .

The implementation of IV analysis is detailed in Greene (2018, pp. 245–255) and consists of two main steps. The first is to find a suitable instrument to incorporate into the analysis. The criterion for this is based on the principles of relevance (degree of correlation between  $I$  and  $X$ ) and exogeneity (non-correlation with the term of the random behavior of  $Y$ ). An instrument is said to be strong if it presents a high level of both relevance and exogeneity. In other words, if  $I$  is a strong instrument, it is useful as a control for the causal association between  $X$  and  $Y$ .

The second step consists of estimating said associations using models such as two-stage least squares (2SLS), the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM), or the Bayesian IV. The main tool for this step is usually the 2SLS model, which consists of the estimation of an initial first regression of  $I$  over  $X$  to obtain the estimated values  $\hat{X}$  that are subsequently used as an independent variable in a secondary regression with  $Y$  as the dependent variable, that is,  $\hat{X}$  over  $Y$ . If  $I$  is a strong instrument, endogeneity effects will be controlled in the first regression, so the estimators of the second regression can be interpreted as the causal effect between  $X$  and  $Y$ .

Based on how the questions in the survey are constructed, the goal was to explore whether a causal effect exists between the expectation of

encountering barriers after leaving prison, distinguished into four types (work/employment, education, family, and friends), and the expectation of returning to prison. That is, whether the perception of an adverse environment in each of the four possible sources of obstruction is associated with a perception of the unlikelihood of successful reintegration, measured as an expected probability of prison re-entry.

In the context of the IV analysis, the sources of obstruction are the endogenous variables  $X$ . These variables are used to reflect the expectancy of encountering barriers regarding their insertion in the labor market, the continuation of educational studies, family coexistence, and reconnection with friends. In all cases, these were operationalized as dichotomous variables where 1 indicated that inmates expected barriers to hinder said dimension of reintegration, and 0 that they did not.

In this sense, the dependent variable  $Y$  is the expectation of prison re-entry, operationalized as a dichotomous variable where 1 indicates the perception of a high probability of returning to prison, while 0 indicates that such a return was perceived as improbable. Control variables for the implementation of the IV method consisted of entity, sex, type of offense, incarceration time, and marital status. In addition, three instrumental variables  $I$  were considered: age, education level, and whether inmates had worked before entering prison. The first two were operationalized as discrete numerical variables while the third as a dichotomous variable, with 1 indicating that incarcerated had worked before entering prison, and 0 that they had not. These instruments were selected as they represent transversal characteristics of the four possible barriers considered.

Twelve models were estimated. In Model 1, the endogenous variable was the expectancy of barrier encounters for insertion into the labor market, with age constituting the IV. For model 2, the same endogenous variable was used but considers education level as the IV, while model 3 uses previous work as the IV. Models 4 to 6 followed this structure but used the expectancy of barriers regarding continuing to study as the endogenous variable. Similarly, Models 7 to 9 used the expectancy of barriers regarding reintegration into the family while 10 to 12 used the expectancy of barriers for reconnecting with friends as the endogenous variable.

## Results

The results for the IV estimated models are shown in Table 1. It can be noted that no instrumental variable considered was found to condition the effect of expectancy of barriers for reconnecting with friends on the expectation of prison re-entry (Models 10 to 12), as the null hypothesis of the weak

Table 1. Estimated Models Using IV Method.

|                     | Work               |                                  |                   |                    |                                  |                           | Studies |  |     |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|--|-----|
|                     | Model 1            | Model 2                          | Model 3           | Model 4            | Model 5                          | Model 6                   |         |  |     |
| Expectation         | 0.2173<br>Yes      | ***<br>-1.1826<br>No             | -2.9360<br>No     | 0.4496<br>Yes      | ***<br>0.2282<br>Yes             | ***<br>1.6792<br>Yes      |         |  | *   |
| State effect        |                    |                                  |                   |                    |                                  |                           |         |  |     |
| Sex                 | -0.0493<br>0.0110  | ***<br>***<br>0.0358<br>-0.0528  | 0.1423<br>-0.1328 | -0.0414<br>-0.0114 | ***<br>***<br>-0.0388<br>-0.0052 | ***<br>-0.0560<br>-0.0456 |         |  | *** |
| Crime               |                    |                                  |                   |                    |                                  |                           |         |  |     |
| Time Served         | -0.0054            | ***<br>0.0076                    | 0.0240            | -0.0085            | ***<br>-0.0060                   | ***<br>-0.0226            |         |  | *   |
| Civil Status effect |                    |                                  |                   |                    |                                  |                           |         |  |     |
| (1)                 | Yes                | No                               | No                | Yes                | Yes                              | No                        |         |  |     |
| (2)                 | -0.0015<br>-0.0336 | ***<br>***<br>-0.0074<br>-0.0187 | 0.0019<br>-0.0167 | .0012<br>-0.0229   | **<br>***<br>-0.0006<br>-0.0271  | 0.0080<br>0.0032          |         |  |     |
| Weak instruments    | 6822               | ***<br>10                        | 07                | 2224               | ***<br>387                       | 30                        |         |  | *   |
| Wu-Hausman          | 1797               | ***<br>90                        | ***<br>368        | ***<br>1858        | ***<br>79                        | 360                       |         |  | *** |

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

|                     | Family  |         |         | Friends  |          |          |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|
|                     | Model 7 | Model 8 | Model 9 | Model 10 | Model 11 | Model 12 |
| Expectation         | -7.2593 | 0.1283  | ***     | 6.6692   | -1.1785  | -6.9986  |
| State effect        | No      | Yes     |         | No       | No       | No       |
| Sex                 | -0.0381 | -0.0361 | ***     | -0.2392  | -0.0002  | 0.1771   |
| Crime               | 0.3071  | -0.004  |         | 0.1108   | -0.0183  | -0.1140  |
| Time Served         | 0.0622  | -0.0045 | *       | -0.0978  | 0.0133   | 0.0957   |
| Civil Status effect | No      | Yes     | No      | No       | Yes      | No       |
| (1)                 | -0.0725 | -0.0012 | ***     | -0.0084  | -0.0014  | 0.0062   |
| (2)                 | -0.1720 | -0.0288 | ***     | -0.0612  | -0.0260  | -0.0024  |
| Weak instruments    | 08      | 1090    | ***     | 09       | 12       | 01       |
| Wu-Hausman          | 1986    | *** 62  | ** 357  | *** 1965 | *** 90   | *** 367  |

Notes:

For models: 1,4,7,10 (1) is Educational level and (2) is Previous work

For models: 2,5,8,11 (1) is Age and (2) is Previous work

For models: 3,6,9,12 (1) is Educational level and (2) is Age

\* Denotes significance at 10%, \*\* at 5%, and \*\*\* at 1%

instruments test fails to be rejected. Similarly, neither education level nor previous employment appears to be appropriate instruments to condition the effect of expectancy of barriers regarding labor market insertion on the expectancy of prison re-entry (Models 12 and 3). Finally, age also does not appear to be an appropriate IV for conditioning the expectation of barriers around family reintegration on the expectancy of prison re-entry (Model 7). In summary, none of the above-mentioned models are appropriate for conditioning the association between expectations of prison re-entry and those of encountering barriers of said types.

Regarding the control variables, in the six remaining models (Models 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9), a longer time spent in prison is associated with a lower expectation of prison re-entry, while different effects in prison re-entry expectancy were captured, associated with the state in which offenders were detained. Interestingly, for all the models, the expectation of prison re-entry is consistently lower when the offender is a woman. This may suggest a different effect in the perception of re-entry, based on gender. Furthermore, in Models 6 and 9, where previous employment was considered as the IV, no different effects between marital status and prison re-entry expectancy were captured. Finally, the association between the type of offense and prison re-entry expectancy is inconclusive, as it is positive in Model 1, negative in Model 4, and not significant for the rest.

On the other hand, regarding the IV, the association between education level, work before detention, and age, is predominantly negative (except in Model 4) regarding the expectancy of prison re-entry. That is, higher education levels and age are associated with a lower probability of prison re-entry, as was having worked previously in comparison with not having been employed.

Considering the previous effects, the focus was placed on the association of interest: expectancy of barriers once released with prison re-entry expectations. Of the three estimated models, Model 1 is the only one in which the IV (Age) was appropriate to condition the effect of the expectancy of barriers regarding finding work on prison re-entry expectancy. The estimated effect is positive; that is, a perception of greater barriers to entering the labor market is associated with an increase in the perceived probability of prison re-entry.

On the other hand, while Models 8 and 9 were also adequate for conditioning the effect of expectancy of barriers regarding family reintegration on prison re-entry expectancy, the association was only significant for Model 8. Interestingly, this model uses education level as the IV, and has a positive association. The three IVs used appear to appropriately condition the association between the expectancy of barriers related to continuing to study and prison re-entry. In the three models, the association is also positive.

Finally, in terms of the comparativeness of the magnitude of association, Models 1 and 4 are directly comparable, as are Models 5 and 8. The effect of the expectancy of barriers to continuing to study on prison re-entry expectancy (0.4496) is greater than that of encountering barriers to labor insertion (0.2173). Similarly, the effect of the expectancy of encountering barriers for continuing to study on re-entry expectations (0.2282) is greater than that of encountering barriers to family reintegration (0.1283). Although the estimates of Models 1 and 8 are not directly comparable, the magnitude of their effect may suggest a greater effect than anticipated of re-entry expectancy when considering barriers to the labor market (Model 1) than with those related to family (Model 8).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings show that the most robust effect of the instrumental variables considered in the analysis is the positive association between the expectancy of encountering barriers to education and prison re-entry expectancy. Moreover, this effect appeared to be stronger than that of the other barrier expectations. This can be interpreted as a greater focus on acquiring skills to avoid prison re-entrance. That is, incarcerated individuals view themselves as reintegrating into society through continued study preparation to better fit into the labor market. This is in line with the finding of a positive effect between the expectancy of barriers for incorporation into the labor market and prison re-entry expectancy (Andersen et al., 2020; Mathlin et al., 2022).

The results provide a better understanding of incarcerated persons' perception of the social reintegration process in Mexico. This may enable the penitentiary system and post-prison services to evaluate current practices and implement the necessary public policy modifications to support the adaptation of released inmates, their reconnection with the community, and, in particular, with criminal desistance. As has been observed in Mexico, following the reforms to the penal system in 2008, intra-penitentiary treatments and post-prison services have emphasized social issues – families and communities (Hubert & Bravo, 2018). So, the upshot has been the design of risk-need-responsiveness programs that aim to reduce criminogenic needs through a re-entry based on family and partner relationships (Brooks Holliday et al., 2012). That is, family and friendship relationships are understood to decrease the risk of recidivism. Yet, this programming does not appear to consider the perspectives of inmates who, in this case (Mexico), minimize the functionality of these bonds for their own re-entry and desistance process.

The study's conclusions suggest that, from the perspective of incarcerated persons in Mexico, expectations are highest regarding obtaining educational

training to acquire job skills as a means for their successful return to society. This means that inmates consider labor-related reintegration as the most important determinant to not reoffending. This finding is important on an institutional level as, despite the general association of reintegration and desistance with family and community supports in Mexico, individuals exiting its correctional institutions are, rather, focused on securing the means to work. While family and friends may alleviate the emotional, social, and economic stress of reintegration (Visser et al., 2010), this research highlights that inmates value work-related factors more than family and friends in terms of their own desistance.

In light of these results, it is desirable to shift the reintegration approach (at least in its application to Mexico, and perhaps Latin-America) towards strategies based on acquiring tools for employment or education (Davis et al., 2013; Doherty et al., 2014; Enache et al., 2009; Mathlin et al., 2022), as these are the preferred pathways to reentry (Brooks Holliday et al., 2012), not those that center on family, friends, and networks of social support (Cole et al., 2018; Kazura, 2001; Klein et al., 2002). Within this context, a call is made for the development of more specific and refined reintegration public policies. In particular, the current study may provide a basis on which to design support and educational training programs that foster the development of work and professional skills for incarcerated persons. More importantly, they may help in the development of appropriate programming to address a variety of inmate skills deficits. In general terms, the findings here could be applied to expand programs based on a “labor-related” model of inmate reintegration, with intermediate reception institutions (non-family members) and incorporation agreements with companies.

This does not imply abandoning correctional programs based on the connections between inmates and the social structure (Cole et al., 2018). Inmate interactions with their families and communities are crucial, and even more so when such ties have been eroded or severed completely (Kazura, 2001; Klein et al., 2002). A solution should perhaps also include incorporating programs with greater emphasis on labor reinsertion, particularly as related to the major reentry obstacles—employment, housing, and health care (Harm & Phillips, 2001; Travis et al., 2001; Visser & Travis, 2003). At any rate, it is necessary to develop a treatment perspective for those inmates who have no expectations to reconnect with their families and friends. Finally, the results may be applied to the debate about the application of the social reintegration model across Latin America.

### *Limitations*

It is acknowledged that the current study has an important limitation. Beyond identifying variables that appear to impact the success of inmate reentry based

on their perceptions and expectations, the investigation does not detail the motives that inmates ascribe for the possible success of their reinsertion experience. Furthermore, given that the research utilized a national survey with formatted questions, it does not provide information regarding the relationships between inmates and their family or friends that could provide other instrumental variables for testing that impact inmate perceptions of social reintegration. It is, therefore, suggested that future studies incorporate measures for understanding and examining the desires, expectations, and social relations of incarcerated persons.

Based on the previous body of qualitative studies on social reintegration, it is desirable to create more in-depth qualitative research designs to explore further the reasons behind the identified inmate perceptions of factors determining desistance. Moreover, any follow-up research should address and correlate socio-demographic antecedents and the type of visits inmates receive. Inclusion of the latter would contribute to understanding whether inmates have in effect been abandoned by their families or other friends' networks, so that their reentry expectations are placed almost exclusively on employment-related factors. Equally, where incarcerated persons have had no visitors, it would be useful to explore inmate issues of family abandonment and the severing of family ties.

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### Author Biographies

**Gustavo Fondevila**, PhD, is professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Law, Serra Hunter Program, Autonomous University of Barcelona. He is the author of several articles in international scientific journals and the books, *Political Models of Social Integration; Institutions, Legality and the Rule of Law; Criminal Profile I and II*; and *Prisons and Crime in Latin America*.

**Leandro Gastón**, Esq., is a criminal lawyer in Argentina's Federal Public Defense System and an assistant professor of Criminal Law at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. He is a PhD candidate at the University of Lausanne, and his research interests are related to criminal records and drug policy.

**Ricardo Massa**, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Public Administration at *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas* (CIDE). Specializing in econometric methods applied to criminal studies, he is the author of articles in *Crime & Delinquency*, *Deviant Behavior*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *International Criminology*, *International Journal of Law, Crime, and Justice*, *Global Crime*, and *Policing, An International Journal*.