

The role of families in prison reentry

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A look to the past – What we know

- **Family bonds** as a key element to prevent recidivism, and **family** as a source of **instrumental and expressive support** (Cullen, 1994) that can promote **reentry** (Visher, La Vigne & Travis, 2004; La Vigne, Naser, Brooks & Castro, 2005).
- **New bonds**, especially **couples** and **work**, can promote **desistance** (Sampson & Laub, 1993, 2005; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006), acting as **turning points** to change.
- The concept of **returning points** (Cid & Martí, 2012), the importance of **new meanings for old bonds** that exist during imprisonment (Martí & Cid, 2015) and can **promote change**.
- Key point for **reentry**: It's important to assist the community where ex-inmates return (Travis, 2005). Family is the first step/agent of this community (Travis & Waul, 2003).
- Different **types of support** (Wills & Shinar, 2000): emotional, instrumental, informational, companionship, feedback/social comparison.

Aims of the research

1. Explore if imprisonment affects to **family relationships**.
2. Know if the type of **support** offered varies due to the type of family relationship (mother, partner or child).
3. Learn about how families face the **return** of incarcerated people.
4. Examine if this process of return generates **loads** for families (emotionally, economically, for family dynamics).
5. Know what **obstacles** have families to promote reentry, and which help they need

Quantitative Sample

538 surveys of people released from prison between July 2016 and June 2017 in Catalunya (Spain).

Questionnaire based in Visher & colleagues

Topics:

- Life path
- Prison sentence (social support, changes in personal life)
- Self-perception (morality, identity, auto-efficacy, self-esteem)
- Perspectives at release (living, support, optimism)

Qualitative Sample

(ongoing)

4 in-depth interviews.

n = 23 (informed consent)

- 4 Mothers
- 2 Fathers
- 9 Partners
- 4 Children
- 4 Siblings

Topics:

- Description (self-presentation and the relationship between interviewee and the released from prison)
- Imprisonment (feelings, changes in relationship, support)
- Release (feelings, changes in relationship, support, help received)

Method

Results

- We match our sample with data of the general population (total of imprisoned people in Catalan prisons in 2015, N= 3081) by gender, age, nationality and prison regime.
- We weigh our sample following these criteria in order to make it representative of the general population

Variable	N	% N	n	% n	%n-%N
men	2834	92,0	489	90,9	-1,1
women	247	8,0	49	9,1	1,1
Young	1237	40,1	206	38,3	-1,8
Adults	1844	59,9	332	61,7	1,8
Spanish	1842	59,8	328	61,0	1,2
Other	1239	40,2	210	39,0	-1,2
Closed regime	1737	56,4	337	62,6	6,2
Open regime	566	18,4	100	18,6	0,2
Parole	778	25,3	101	18,8	-6,5
Total	3081	100%	538	100%	

Descriptives

➤ **Socio-demographic**

- 92,2% men
- Mean age of 39,5
- 40% foreign (5,4 from other EU countries)
- 26,9% undocumented
- 61,3% with children (mean of 1,3)

➤ **Criminal Background**

- Mainly condemned by drug offences (23,9%), robbery (18,5%) and burglary (12,1%).
- 33.1% arrested before 18
- 2,3 prison sentences of average

Results

➤ FAMILY UNITS

- Composition of families of origin tend to be reproduced as adults, with a predominance of nuclear (both parents + sons) and extensive families (+ other relatives as grandparents).
- We see changes of the family units of destination after imprisonment: 31,9% of the relationships broke up (this affects specially instable relations) and 19,1% of the people found a new couple during this period.
- We observe around 10-15% of the sample without personal ties.

Results

➤ FAMILY SUPPORT

- Data shows that the majority of people received emotional and instrumental support from their families both in their youth and before imprisonment, with the exception of around a 10-15% of people that didn't count with that support.
- We create 3 scales to measure perceptions of family support pre/during/post sentence (from 1 to 4, alpha scores of .95 and .83). Mean scores of family support are, in order: 3,18, 3,14 and 3,46.
- This implies that expectations of support at the end of the sentence are higher than the perceptions of support received before imprisonment. Further research is needed in order to address if this is a consequence of a re-evaluation of the importance of family bonds (Returning points), or if it's consequence of an actual increment of support offered by families.
- At an emotional level, even if the majority of people belongs to extensive families, they feel bonded to a small group of relatives (mean of 4) being mothers (28%) and couples (25%) the more mentioned relatives.

What we find – Interviews

- a. Imprisonment
- b. Changes in relationship
- c. Difficulties in reentry
- d. Who helps families?

What we find – Interviews

a. IMPRISONMENT

- Shock experience
- Some problems appear (alcohol addiction / depression / economical problems)
- Contact with inmates is maintained: visits, telephone calls, letters.
- Lack of help from other relatives: they take care of all.
- Instrumental support (money) and emotional support (encourage). They take commitment and encourage themselves to go to prison and visit the person.

“I was clean for a while, but I fall again to drink”

“I fell in a depression, I felt bad, I wasn’t me, I felt that I was another person”

“We encourage him: come on, it’s almost over”

“Many expenses: in every visit I have to give money [...] and buy things like clothes and books”

What we find – Interviews

b. CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIP

- We observe little or no change in relationships, nor break of bonds.
- Where changes occur, relationships improve.
- Increase of informal control: over friends, over actions, over daily life.

“The relationship... Better than ever, yes”

“I always try to share moments and things with her, we go around together”

“Now I tell him a lot: behave well, you know what isn’t good for you and for us because we also suffered from this”

“I keep an eye on him: don’t do that, do this, don’t see this friends...”

What we find – Interviews

c. DIFFICULTIES IN REENTRY

- Provision of support continues after prison: instrumental (money and employment), emotional (courage) and feedback/social comparison (informal control).
- The experience of imprisonment also affects family.
- However, the provision of support is not seen as a load. Support is offered without doubts, especially in necessary things (housing, care, subsistence, grandchildren) because of her/his role: PARTNER, MOTHER, SIBLING.

“If he needs to come to lunch, to dinner or to sleep, anyway, we have done our best”

“I feel more anticipating, attentive, watching him to know if he is already ready”

“I’m focused on him. I am here to help him and I won’t permit him to get depressed”

“Mummy handle everything, always do, is your children”

What we find – Interviews

d. WHO HELPS FAMILIES?

- No preparation for reentry.
- No help of anyone.
- No contact with any institution.
- Great compensation and reciprocity for the given support.
- They only need one type of support: emotional: talk to someone, be heard.

“[And who helps you?] No one, myself. If don’t cheer up myself..”

“I felt lonely, so lonely”

*“Of course she’s grateful: I was father and mother of my children,
my daughter loves me”*

*“I would need someone to talk with. Tell to someone what happens
to me, how I feel”*

*“It would be great: get together and talk and support mutually. For me this is so
nice, means a lot”*

Conclusions

➤ **Importance of family institution**

Quantitative and qualitative data form a picture: Role of care and support to promote reentry still falls on families, that keep giving emotional and instrumental support during the whole process. At the same time, this central role of nuclear and extensive families as a source of support match with the notion of Mediterranean welfare state

➤ **Role of woman (mother / partner) focused on care and control**

She helps without questions pre/during/post imprisonment, and are a control agent to prevent recidivism. Woman has a central role for the inmate and the entire family. They don't receive any help (nor institutional), and don't search for it neither.

➤ **Give support by her own**

All family members interviewed manages reentry by themselves. Only other family members (closer ones) seems that play a (minimum) role by giving support to the family member. Their only demand is more emotional and informational support, professional or support group, to talk with

Thank you for your attention

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