

Social Research Call

Title: Beyond Bars: Needs and Challenges of Ex-Prisoners in Their Return to Society



Acronym: BeyondBARS

Project leader: Olga Cunha

Host organisation: Universidade do Minho – Centro de Investigação em Psicologia

Main purpose of the project: This project seeks to understand the specific needs of male and female ex-prisoners during their reintegration into society. The study aims to identify key barriers and facilitators to reintegration, examine how factors like gender, age, ethnicity, and sentence length influence reentry experiences, and gather perspectives from both ex-prisoners and probation workers on post-release needs and challenges.

Design/methodology/approach: This project employs a mixed-methods design, combining a quantitative cross-sectional study with a qualitative component. The quantitative study will involve male and female ex-prisoners on conditional release, who will complete a set of self-report measures. The qualitative study will include focus groups with both male and female ex-prisoners in conditional release, as well as probation workers.

Potential results: Male and female ex-prisoners face reintegration needs across multiple ecological levels, including personal, social, community, institutional, and political domains. These needs can act as either barriers or facilitators to successful reentry. Age, gender, ethnicity, and sentence length are expected to significantly influence reintegration experiences.

Social relevance of the research: This project addresses the urgent need for effective reintegration of ex-prisoners in Portugal, where recidivism is estimated at 60%. By identifying the key needs and barriers to successful social reintegration, it aims to inform the development of targeted, evidence-based interventions that reduce reoffending and break the cycle of imprisonment through more inclusive and sustainable strategies.

Originality/value of the project: This is the first study in Portugal to examine ex-prisoners' reintegration through an ecological systemic lens. It combines cross-sectional and qualitative methods to explore the key needs, barriers, and facilitators of successful reintegration, moving beyond recidivism as the sole indicator of reintegration. The findings will inform more effective and targeted rehabilitation policies and practices.