

The social and economic impacts of life after being released from incarceration, for ex-convicts

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I. Background

Life after prison is a new beginning - another chance. One would expect that convicts released from prison would experience a newfound freedom, however credible studies from the United Nations, offer factual data to show that their release is a factor likely to stand in the way of them leading a crime-free lifestyle, and can often prove to be more punishing than the prison sentence itself. Social stigma and economic challenges that ex-convicts face, require immense tenacity and support.

Social Issues

Ex-convicts face a myriad of social issues that ex-convicts face in society such as stigma, mistrust, discrimination and more.

Ex-convicts leave prison after paying the price for their wrongdoing, however strong social stigma continues to form barriers in their rehabilitation into society, and they're branded as criminals forever in the eyes of society. After release, they struggle to find friends, find acceptance and to fit in.

Decades ago, Aristotle famously declared that man is a social animal. With little or no support from friends or family, many ex-convicts lose heart and revert to a life of crime. Studies from the United States Justice Department. A credible source that provides numerical data, showing that, every year, globally over ½ a million inmates are released from prison. It estimated that around two thirds of those released in 2019, would be rearrested within three years. According to the source, the U.S.A's recidivism rate (percentage of people reincarcerated) is estimated at almost 70% and one of the key factors for returning to a life of crime is strained family and marital relations. A Russian study yields similar results, saying that about 36% of Russian convicts released, tend to face social pressures, and reoffend. Such data published on official websites of countries and their state organisations, whilst slightly outdated, can be deemed credible. Communities formed in penitentiaries can be extremely different from the real world, and many ex-prisoners find it challenging due to lack of social skills and the judgement and dehumanisation they face, to readjust to society in the real world, making them outcasts. Lack of privacy is a major issue for many previous offenders to fit into societies, as information on past offences is freely available in public record or online in most countries. Ex-convicts require support to cope with the rejection, suspicion, mistrust and discrimination they face on release. Development in technology also allows for thorough background checks, not only for jobs but also on social apps. An article in 'The Guardian', a popular, trusted publication cites statements from Tinder, the world's most popular dating app, discussing security measures they take to make it a secure space, so this claim is backed up by trustworthy evidence. Many apps even ban people previously convicted of felonies, creating barriers in successfully finding a significant other.

In India, prison administration primarily focuses on security and maintaining discipline. The reintegration and rehabilitation of the inmates remains largely neglected in India's correctional system, with a lack of post release check-ups, requirement assessment, or post release evaluations or rehabilitation programmes to determine how well the released convicts are faring in the real world. According to The Tribune, a trusted local newspaper in India, in 2019, 1,84,962 convicts were released, however only 1,827 were rehabilitated, leaving close to 99% of prisoners with no support system. Backed with sufficient statistical evidence this article is a reliable source. Prisoners' families, especially poor ones, are often reluctant to have another dependent person and reject them, creating issues in their rehabilitation. The Nervazhi programme in Kerala, is an initiative that ensures social rehabilitation of probationers and ex-convicts and is a boon for hundreds of ex-convicts in the state. As per official records, the scheme has transformed the lives of 323 convicts in the state.

Courses of action

On a global scale, programmes that teach prisoners how to survive once they're out of prison should get more funding, so ex-prisoners can smoothly integrate into society, breaking the vicious cycle of recidivism. Society-at-large can be educated to create an understanding that prisoners have completed their sentences and encourage their acceptance as productive members of society.

However, at a national level, funds should be provided to Indian jails dedicated to teaching convicts on how to reintegrate and become trusted members of society once again. India should have a system of regular check-ups with ex-cons to see how well they're adapting into society and help them in rehabilitation.

Economic Issues

Aside from social problems, ex-convicts must hurdle over numerous economic issues such as the difficulty of finding stable employment, housing, and lack of job training and more.

Economic issues are key to successful rehabilitation. According to the UN, common problems faced by former inmates include the inability to find stable housing, vocational training and access to drug and alcohol treatment. The UN is a most trustworthy source of information, with unique studies commissioned on key subjects and data collected in an impartial, reliable manner.

According to MPR News, Worldwide, the two leading issues for people leaving prison are housing and homelessness. Between 60 to 75% of former inmates find themselves unemployed and have trouble finding housing up to one year after being released. MPR news backs their claim with empirical statistical data, making them trustworthy. Alone, without support from government, family, and friends, desperate to earn enough to find stable housing, many ex-convicts are driven back to a life of crime to support themselves economically and so chart a path back to penitentiaries unable to escape the vicious cycle of this life in and out of prison. Not surprisingly, statistics shared by the Department of Justice, in the US, show rates of criminal recidivism as high as 63% in 2018 in many jurisdictions.

In India, ex-prisoners face similar challenges including rejection by villagers, no means of sustenance and lack of accommodation and transport. There are no halfway homes in India, to help reformed convicts gain self-sufficiency and most states provide no rehabilitation grant, causing many economic issues. It is just their savings from wages earned working inside penitentiaries that supports them, and those run out soon.

Many ex-convicts are uneducated and have skills only for blue collar activities, however they are still unable to find work due to societal bias and return to crime in a desperate attempt to survive. However, despite all these issues, not everyone reoffends. According to a study by India's official Ministry of Human Resource Development, a trusted and reliable source that provides sufficient statistical data and evidence, recidivism rates are quite low, lower than 8%. However, economic self-sufficiency and progress remains difficult in general for this community.

Courses of action

There is no simple solution for this issue. However, one way of tackling this issue at a global level is by international organisations such as the United Nations working to provide funding for programs being set up to educate prisoners so that they can develop vocational skills that help them to make money in entrepreneurial ventures, secure jobs and be productive. Implementing more policies like the 'Ban the Box,' which prevents employers from probing your criminal record in the initial application, provides a fairer evaluation based on merit alone and a chance at fair wages and an independent and legal lifestyle.

Another proposed course of action for the Indian government could be to fund rehabilitation for prisoners and give grants for helping the transition to regular life. Encouraging programs such as the Nervazhi programme is imperative to the success of this effort.

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