**Difficulties and Barriers to Reentry:**

**Between Rehabilitation Providers and Rehabilitation Recipients**

**Abstract**

The empirical literature on the reentry process points to several obstacles former prisoners face upon being released. These include finding legitimate employment, coping with physical and mental health problems, high rates of drug and alcohol addiction, social stigma, and more. The purpose of this study is to address the difficulties faced by released license prisoners in Israel. The research focuses on the subjective perceptions of licensed released prisoners in regards to the difficulties they face and compares these to the perceptions of Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority (PRA) workers. In addition, the study investigates whether there is a difference between Jewish and Arab former prisoners in terms of the significance they attribute to these difficulties. This mixed-method study involved the participation of 346 former prisoners who were under the supervision of the PRA and 75 PRA workers. The findings reveal significant gaps between the two groups in terms of their perception of the significance of the difficulties. While the rehabilitation workers attributed great importance to most of the reentry difficulties, the former prisoners focused on the parole conditions, employment difficulties, and the accumulation of fines and debts as the main obstacles to reentry. Contrary to expectations, no significant differences were found between Jewish and Arab former prisoners in terms of the importance they attributed to the reentry difficulties. The current paper offers several possible explanations for the gaps found between the perceptions of the PRA workers and those of the former prisoners regarding the significance of the difficulties that accompany the reintegration process.

**Introduction**

One of the most difficult challenges welfare and enforcement system around the world have had to deal with in recent decades is the growing number of prisoners being released from prisons (Avery & Kinner, 2015; Garland & Hass; 2015; Smith et al., 2018). The professional literature describes an array of problems and difficulties former prisoners face (Augustyn & Sample, 2017; Ostermann, 2011; Ostermann, 2012) and specifies what prisoners require as they reenter the community (Nally et al., 2014; Reynolds, et. al, 2020; Taylor, 2016).

In Israel, about 7,000 prisoners are released from prison every year after having served their sentence (Vaknin & Ben-Zvi, 2021). A comprehensive study of recidivism among released prisoners in Israel found that after five years from the time of release the recidivism rate stood at 39.2%, with a little more than a third of former prisoners returning to prison within a year of being released (Vaknin & Ben-Zvi). The Committee for Reviewing the Policy regarding the Punishment and Treatment of Criminals (2015) has recommended making more use of early release as a means for reducing the imprisonment of nonviolent criminals. In addition, the High Court of Justice has ruled that the living area of prisoners must be increased to 4.5 m2 within a year and a half (HCJ 1892/14 The Association for Civil Rights in Israel v. The Minister of Public Security). The combination of the two has led to a reduction in the number of incarcerated individuals in Israel, which has been made possible, among other things, through the expansion of solutions that enable early release of more prisoners and their reentry into society (Efodi & Malikson, 2017).

The purpose of the current study is dual:

1. In light of the fact that this is a pilot study in Israel that focuses on the perspectives of the former prisoners themselves, the current study attempts to identify and characterize the degree of importance licensed released prisoners attribute to the range of difficulties and barriers they face, while comparing between the perceptions of Jewish and Arab released prisoners in this regard.
2. In addition, the study investigates the extent to which the released prisoners’ perceptions and descriptions of the difficulties they face and the components that would support their reentry match those of the rehabilitation workers overseeing their reentry process (Gunnioson & Helfgott, 2011).

**Limitations and difficulties experienced by released prisoners**

According to the research literature dealing with personal and personality variables of prisoners and released prisoners, this group is characterized by health, physical, and mental problems, which include, among other things, high levels of drug and alcohol use (Makkai & Payne, 2003). The released prisoner group is significantly inferior in terms of education compared to the general normative population, and is characterized by a low number of study years, various types of vocational training, and the development of basic skills (Reynolds et al., 2020).

In addition, many of the released prisoners deal with complex problems that can hinder them in many fields of life, including reentering the workforce (Batastini et al., 2019; Peled-Laskov et al., 2018). As mentioned, high rates of released prisoners have to cope with psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and psychotic disorders. Additional difficulties are related to learning impairments such as difficulty with reading and writing and dyslexia (Ostermann, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2020). These difficulties, coupled with the social stigma, can make the process of fitting into a workplace even more difficult than it already is.

Aside from these hardships, released prisoners also face severe housing problems. This often leads them to find temporary accommodation and/or accommodation that does not meet the requirements, to the point of staying in a criminal environment that influences them and hinders them from becoming integrated in the workforce in particular, and in the community in general (Niven & Stewart, 2005; Reynolds et al., 2020).

Conceptually, Shinkfield and Graffam (2009) propose distinguishing between three groups of primary variables that may be related to how released prisoners reintegrate into the community. These are the interpersonal variables, which include the released prisoner’s physical and mental health, addiction problems, education, emotional state, and personal skills; subsistence variables, which include the released prisoner’s financial, employment, and housing situation; and variables related to the support the released prisoner receives, including social support, formal, and institutional support.

The theoretical literature tends to refer to a released prisoner’s “social capital,” which includes their social and family ties, as capital that can be of great assistance to them in their reentry process and in finding and keeping employment. Undoubtedly, support from family members is critical to the success of a former prisoner’s reintegration process and strengthening family ties and preserving positive, supportive relationships can improve reentry outcomes (Nally et al., 2014; Taylor, 2016). Many released prisoners in Israel (68%) are unmarried (Vaknin & Ben-Tsvi, 2021) and many of them have extremely limited social ties and networks. Moreover, some have negative relationships with family members, making them particularly vulnerable to recidivism (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017).

To understands which of the prisoners’ needs should be satisfied during the reentry process, Lattimore et al. (2009) interviewed prisoners in the United States who were about to be released in 30 days. In the interviews, the researchers checked the degree to which the released prisoners required various services. The findings revealed that education (94%), a driving license (83%), vocational training (82%), and employment (80%) were the highest rated needs. These were followed by various needs related to the healthcare system, such as help from the mental health system and drug rehabilitation. In addition, about two thirds of the prisoners expressed a need for access to transportation, 60% expressed needs related to help with clothing and food, and 49% expressed the need to find housing. Furthermore, the study findings revealed that 64% of the prisoners expressed a need for various services to help them change their criminal behavior, or to help improve their parenting skills. About half requested financial aid and assistance with child support payments and 39% raised the need for assistance with childcare after their release (for a description of the needs of the prisoners in Australia, see for example Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009).

The complex needs of released prisoners do not cease to exist even after the initial period of their reentry. Even nine months and 15 months after their release, released prisoners expressed the need for help with employment and education. However, over time it is possible to see a declining trend in the consumption of these services, which could indicate that released prisoners have a healthy ability to gradually adapt (Lattimore et al., 2009).

In the State of Israel, the PRA, a governmental authority, is in charge of creating supervised rehabilitation programs before a prisoner’s early release and for implementing these programs after the release. The Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority Law (1983) specifies the PRA’s roles, which include among other things forming a prisoner rehabilitation policy; preparing rehabilitation plans for prisoners about to be released and implementing these plans after they are released; absorbing prisoners and rehabilitating them in the community, including in the fields of employment, vocational training, guaranteed minimal income, housing, healthcare services, and more (Iluz-Ilon et al., 2021). The assistance released prisoners receive is generally provided in their community of residence. However, in some cases, released prisoners are referred to hostels or a therapeutic community that provide an inclusive environment offering comprehensive treatment. During the rehabilitation process, released prisoners participate in individual therapy at a predetermined frequency (usually once a week) and in most cases participate in group therapy for released prisoners as well. In addition, prisoners receive assistance and are accompanied throughout the process of obtaining employment and vocational training as well as with dealing with government ministries and handling debts and fines. Most of the prisoners the PRA treats are released under supervisory conditions when they are released early on license (Walk & Malikson, 2021).

In the context of the research literature, which describes an array of subsistence needs that should be met as part of the reentry process, the current study seeks to investigate, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the significance licensed released prisoners attribute to the barriers and difficulties they have to deal with. The study examines the degree of correlation between the way the released prisoners perceive and describe these barriers and difficulties and how these are perceived by PRA workers. As almost half of the criminal prisoners incarcerated in prisons in Israel are Arab, which is more than double their share of the general population (Sha’ar-Efodi & Ka’adan, 2021), the study also attempts to investigate whether a relationship exists between ethnic affiliation and the degree of significance Jewish as opposed to Arab released prisoners attribute to reentry barriers and difficulties.

**Method**

To investigate the reentry difficulties and barriers released prisoners face, questionnaires were given to 384 released prisoners participating in PRA-supervised therapy programs, of which 96% were men and 4% were women. The released prisoners participating in the study had been sentenced for various criminal offenses and were released on license, meaning were released on parole by a parole board. Their participation in therapy and securing employment were part of the parole conditions.

Of the participants, 57% were Muslim - more than their share of the criminal prisoner population, which stands at about 45%; 37% of the participants were Jewish and the rest were Christian or under a different definition of nationality. 44% of the participants were single, 47% were married, and 9% were divorced. The respondents ages ranged between 17­­–72 and the average age was 34.5 (SD=12.3). Out of the respondents, 66.3% were parents to children, and the average number of children they had was 2.6 (SD=3.1).

The average number of arrests among the participants stood at 1.64 (SD=1.6). For 66% of the participants this was their first imprisonment, 24% of them had been imprisoned for the second time or more, and for 10% of the participants the number of times they had been imprisoned was unknown.

The released prisoners were asked to rank the barriers they perceived as posing the greatest difficulty to their rehabilitation and reentry, out of a long list we composed based on the research literature. At the same time, identical questionnaires were given to PRA workers who deal directly with the treatment, accompaniment, rehabilitation, and supervision of released prisoners. This part of the study involved the participation of 75 therapy and rehabilitation workers, of which 28% were men and 72% were women, 71% were Jewish, 16% were Muslim, and the rest were Christian or “other.” The number of years of professional experience they had ranged from 1–42 years, with the average number of years being 12.8 (SD=9.7).

**Research tool:**

The released prisoners and PRA workers were given a long list of reentry difficulties and asked to rank how significant they perceived each to be and to what extent they could hinder the reintegration process. In addition, the released prisoners were asked to describe in their own words what they perceived would help them reintegrate and what would make the process more difficult. They were also asked to describe what they wanted most after their release in their own words.

To that end, as mentioned, we used a structured reentry difficulty and barrier questionnaire. The questionnaire included a list of 17 items describing difficulties or limitations a released prisoner might face. The list of reentry difficulties included the following: housing problems; dealing with debts and fines; addiction issues (drugs, alcohol, gambling); social stigma and lack of support from friends and family; difficulty in finding employment; difficulty in keeping employment; low earning capacity; health problems; insecurity; difficulty with making lifestyle changes; coping with temptation; limitations related to the parole conditions; pending cases; restoring relationships with significant others; difficulty with exercising parental authority; and mobility limitations.

The participants were asked to rank each of the items on the research questionnaire from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest level of difficulty (“none at all”) and 5 representing the highest level of difficulty (“extremely difficult”). We then grouped the difficulties into three main categories: emotional difficulties, difficulties with making lifestyle changes, and instrumental difficulties.

The questionnaire also included a chapter dealing with personal details: age, nationality, area of residence (by regions: the North of Israel, the Center, the South, and Jerusalem), family status, number of children, and number of imprisonments.

**Research procedure:**

Research questionnaires were given to PRA therapists, who were asked to pass them on to the released prisoners under their care to be filled out. The questionnaires were given to released prisoners treated in closed therapeutic communities (hostels) and to those treated in their community of residence, and the therapists were instructed to help respondents who had difficulty with the Hebrew language. After these questionnaires were collected, an identical digital questionnaire was sent to the PRA workers. Within a few months, a total of 384 questionnaires had been filled in.

**Findings**

In the first stage, we sought to investigate the degree of importance Jewish and Arab released prisoners attributed to the various reentry difficulties, and compare these perceptions to those of the PRA workers who treat and supervise released prisoners.

**Table no. 1: Perceptions of reentry difficulties among licensed released prisoners and PRA workers [number (percent) and comparison]**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | | | | | | | | | | | |  |  |
| **Prisoners** | | | | | | **Workers** | | | | | |  |  |
| Very little | | A medium amount | | A lot | | Very little | | A medium amount | | A lot | |  |  |
| % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |  | Cramer’s V |
| I will have difficulty finding a workplace that’s right for me | 41.8% | 155 | 19.7% | 73 | 38.5% | 143 | 2.7% | 2 | 17.3% | 13 | 80.0% | 60 | 50.85\*\* | .338 |
| I will have difficulty changing my lifestyle | 35.2% | 133 | 25.1% | 95 | 39.7% | 150 | 4.0% | 3 | 25.3% | 19 | 70.7% | 53 | 33.68\*\* | .273 |
| I will have difficulty handling my debts and fines | 28.2% | 105 | 15.8% | 59 | 56.0% | 209 | 6.7% | 5 | 14.7% | 11 | 78.7% | 59 | 17.14\*\* | .196 |
| I will have difficulty getting from place to place (mobility) | 39.9% | 150 | 20.5% | 77 | 39.6% | 149 | 18.7% | 14 | 46.7% | 35 | 34.7% | 26 | 25.41\*\* | .237 |
| I will have difficulty finding a place to live | 74.2% | 276 | 8.3% | 31 | 17.5% | 65 | 34.7% | 26 | 34.7% | 26 | 30.7% | 23 | 53.89\*\* | .347 |
| I will have difficulty dealing with temptations and friends from the past | 55.7% | 210 | 22.5% | 85 | 21.8% | 82 | 9.3% | 7 | 33.3% | 25 | 57.3% | 43 | 59.65\*\* | .363 |
| I felt insecure and had difficulty coping in society after my release | 49.6% | 189 | 24.4% | 93 | 26.0% | 99 | 5.3% | 4 | 26.7% | 20 | 68.0% | 51 | 62.78\*\* | .371 |
| I will have difficulty exercising parental authority over my children | 67.0% | 201 | 14.7% | 44 | 18.3% | 55 | 9.6% | 7 | 31.5% | 23 | 58.9% | 43 | 80.76\*\* | .465 |
| I will have difficulty working for low wages | 34.0% | 128 | 16.2% | 61 | 49.7% | 187 | 4.0% | 3 | 20.0% | 15 | 76.0% | 57 | 27.93\*\* | .249 |
| I will have difficulty keeping my job | 60.2% | 225 | 15.0% | 56 | 24.9% | 93 | 21.3% | 16 | 33.3% | 25 | 45.3% | 34 | 38.47\*\* | .293 |
| The way I am labeled by society makes things difficult for me | 46.3% | 171 | 23.8% | 88 | 29.8% | 110 | 6.7% | 5 | 18.7% | 14 | 74.7% | 56 | 59.03\*\* | .365 |
| Health problems | 73.8% | 276 | 13.6% | 51 | 12.6% | 47 | 45.9% | 34 | 43.2% | 32 | 10.8% | 8 | 36.31\*\* | .285 |
| Lack of social support | 65.1% | 246 | 15.9% | 60 | 19.0% | 72 | 12.0% | 9 | 38.7% | 29 | 49.3% | 37 | 71.73\*\* | .398 |
| It will be difficult for me to restore my relationship with my significant other | 59.9% | 208 | 12.1% | 42 | 28.0% | 97 | 8.2% | 6 | 47.9% | 35 | 43.8% | 32 | 78.88\*\* | .433 |
| My parole conditions (night arrest, signatures, prohibition on leaving the country) make things difficult for me | 22.6% | 84 | 20.2% | 75 | 57.3% | 213 | 16.0% | 12 | 29.3% | 22 | 54.7% | 41 | 3.75 | .092 |
| I have difficulty managing pending cases | 74.3% | 246 | 7.3% | 24 | 18.4% | 61 | 40.5% | 30 | 28.4% | 21 | 31.1% | 23 | 39.09\*\* | .311 |
| I have difficulty dealing with addition and staying clean | 77.8% | 260 | 4.8% | 16 | 17.4% | 58 | 5.4% | 4 | 29.7% | 22 | 64.9% | 48 | 142.19\*\* | .590 |

p<.01**\*\***

Table 1 demonstrates that over half the released prisoners participating in the study (56%) perceived the issue of debts and fines to be an obstacle that could significantly hinder their ability to integrate back into normative society. In addition, over half of them (57%) consider the restrictive parole conditions to be a significant obstacle to reentry. In addition, while half of them (49.7%) are worried about having to work for low wages, 70% of them are not concerned about being placed in a workplace that is not right for them.

Among the released prisoner population, most of the subjects (74%) reported that they were not very worried about finding a place to live, their ability to exercise parental authority over their children (67%), or their chances of keeping a job (60%). The released prisoners were also not particularly concerned about a lack of social support. Table 1 demonstrates that the PRA workers perceived all the reentry difficulties gathered from the research literature as being a lot more significant than the released prisoners they were supervising did. Furthermore, Table 1indicates a significant difference in the importance attributed to each of the reentry difficulties mentioned in the questionnaire.

The salient differences between the released prisoner’s perceptions and those of the PRA workers are mainly reflected in regards to coping with addiction: 65% of the PRA workers attributed great importance to this difficulty, compared to only 17% of the released prisoners (*X2* (2)=142.19, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.590). Considerable differences were also found in regards to finding a place to live: this issue was important to only 18% of the released prisoners, compared to 31% of the PRA workers who considered the issue to be of high importance (*X2*(2)=53.89, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.347). In addition, while 57% of the PRA workers believed the released prisoners would have difficulty dealing with temptations and friends from the past, only 22% of the released prisoners thought this would be the case (*X2*(2)=59.65, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.363). The released prisoners were also a lot less concerned about restoring their relationships with significant others (28%) compared to 44% of the PRA workers, who were very concerned about this issue (*X2*(2)=78.885, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.433).

Furthermore, the ability to exercise parental authority raised a lot of concern among 59% of the PRA works, compared to only 18% of the released prisoners themselves who were concerned about this issue (*X2*(2)=80.76, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.465). In addition, PRA workers (68%) perceived dealing with social stigma to be a major difficulty, while the released prisoners themselves were a lot less concerned about it (26%) (*X2*(2)=62.78, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.371).

Following is a ranking of the average weight attributed to each of the reentry difficulties released prisoners face. Graph no. 1 presents the average ranking of difficulties among the released prisoners and Graph no. 2 presents the difficulties as perceived by the PRA workers.

**Graph no. 1: Average ranking of difficulties among prisoners released on parole**

As Graph no. 1 demonstrates, released prisoners were mainly concerned about instrumental issues, first and foremost the restrictive parole conditions, paying debts and fines, and finding a job with proper working conditions. Subjects such as health problems, addictions, parental authority, and finding a place to live were of less concern to them. Out of the list of difficulties, the prisoners themselves attributed the least importance to addiction problems, health problems, finding a place to live, and managing pending cases.

**Graph no. 2: Average ranking of difficulties among PRA workers**

Graph 2, which examines the ranking of difficulties as perceived by the treatment and rehabilitation workers, indicates that this group was mainly concerned with the anticipated reentry difficulty of finding appropriate employment, social difficulties the released prisoners might have to deal with upon release, the difficulty of dealing with temptations, and addiction problems. At the same time, they also perceived the other factors to be highly significant, much more so than the released prisoners themselves did.

**Ethnic affiliation and the significance attributed to reentry difficulties**

In the second stage of analysis, we sought to investigate whether there was a significant difference in the weight Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners attributed to the various reentry difficulties.

**Table no. 2: Perceptions of reentry difficulties among Jewish and non-Jewish released prisoners [number (percent) and comparison]**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | | | | | | | | | | | |  |  |
| **Jewish prisoners** | | | | | | **Non-Jewish prisoners** | | | | | |  |  |
| Very little | | A medium amount | | A lot | | Very little | | A medium amount | | A lot | |  |  |
| % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |  | Cramer’s V |
| Finding a workplace that’s right for me | 36.3% | 45 | 22.6% | 28 | 41.1% | 51 | 45.4% | 98 | 18.5% | 40 | 36.1% | 78 | 2.72 | .089 |
| Changing my lifestyle | 36.0% | 45 | 21.6% | 27 | 42.4% | 53 | 35.9% | 80 | 27.8% | 62 | 36.3% | 81 | 1.97 | .075 |
| Taking care of debts and fines | 32.0% | 39 | 17.2% | 21 | 50.8% | 62 | 26.1% | 58 | 16.2% | 36 | 57.7% | 128 | 1.67 | .070 |
| Getting around from place to place (mobility) | 42.1% | 53 | 17.5% | 22 | 40.5% | 51 | 38.0% | 84 | 22.6% | 50 | 39.4% | 87 | 1.39 | .063 |
| Finding a place to live | 74.2% | 92 | 9.7% | 12 | 16.1% | 20 | 75.2% | 164 | 7.8% | 17 | 17.0% | 37 | 0.37 | .033 |
| Dealing with temptations and friends from the past | 59.4% | 76 | 14.1% | 18 | 26.6% | 34 | 53.2% | 116 | 28.9% | 63 | 17.9% | 39 | 11.01\*\* | .178 |
| I felt insecure and had difficulty coping in society after being released | 50.0% | 64 | 24.2% | 31 | 25.8% | 33 | 49.5% | 110 | 24.3% | 54 | 26.1% | 58 | 0.01 | .005 |
| Exercising parental authority over my children | 73.7% | 70 | 11.6% | 11 | 14.7% | 14 | 62.5% | 110 | 17.6% | 31 | 19.9% | 35 | 3.52 | .114 |
| Working at a low-paying job | 34.4% | 43 | 20.8% | 26 | 44.8% | 56 | 33.2% | 73 | 13.2% | 29 | 53.6% | 118 | 4.17 | .110 |
| Keeping a job | 61.6% | 77 | 12.0% | 15 | 26.4% | 33 | 60.6% | 132 | 16.1% | 35 | 23.4% | 51 | 1.20 | .059 |
| The way society labels me | 48.0% | 59 | 25.2% | 31 | 26.8% | 33 | 44.0% | 96 | 22.9% | 50 | 33.0% | 72 | 1.42 | .064 |
| Health problems | 74.6% | 94 | 14.3% | 18 | 11.1% | 14 | 74.0% | 162 | 13.2% | 29 | 12.8% | 28 | 0.25 | .027 |
| Lack of social support | 69.6% | 87 | 14.4% | 18 | 16.0% | 20 | 61.3% | 136 | 16.7% | 37 | 22.1% | 49 | 2.61 | .087 |
| Restoring my relationship with my significant other | 56.8% | 67 | 11.0% | 13 | 32.2% | 38 | 63.7% | 128 | 12.9% | 26 | 23.4% | 47 | 2.97 | .097 |
| My parole conditions (night arrest, signatures, being prohibited from leaving the country) | 31.7% | 40 | 11.9% | 15 | 56.3% | 71 | 17.1% | 37 | 24.5% | 53 | 58.3% | 126 | 13.99\*\* | .202 |
| Managing pending cases | 77.8% | 84 | 12.0% | 13 | 10.2% | 11 | 75.8% | 147 | 3.6% | 7 | 20.6% | 40 | 11.95\*\* | .199 |
| Dealing with addiction and staying clean | 74.4% | 87 | 5.1% | 6 | 20.5% | 24 | 81.5% | 154 | 4.8% | 9 | 13.8% | 26 | 2.50 | .090 |

Despite the fact that the research literature dealing with reentry difficulties among released prisoners points to a relationship between ethnic affiliation and the weight attributed to the various difficulties (Sha’ar-Efodi & Ka’adan, 2020), Table 2 demonstrates that the importance the Jewish and Arab released prisoners attributed to most of the difficulties examined in the study was largely similar. Significant differences were found only in relation to three issues. The first was the difficulty of dealing with temptations and friends from the past, a difficulty which was highly worrying to 27% of the Jewish prisoners, compared to only 18% of the Arab prisoners (*X2*(2)=11.01, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.178). The second was the difficulty of managing pending cases, which was of great concern to more Arab released prisoners (21%) compared to only 10% of the Jewish released prisoners (*X2*(2)=11.95, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.199). The third was dealing with the limiting parole conditions, which 32% of the Jewish released prisoners perceived as presenting little difficulty, compared to only 25% of the Arab released prisoners (*X2*(2)=13.99, *p*<.01, *Cramer’s V****=***.202).

**Classifying the types of reentry difficulties**

In the third stage of analysis, we grouped all the difficulties mentioned in the questionnaire into three central categories.

**Table no. 3: Three dimensions (subcategories) of the reentry difficulties questionnaire**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Emotional needs | Making lifestyle changes | Instrumental difficulties |
|  | I felt insecure and had difficulty coping in society after being released | Changing my lifestyle | Finding a workplace that’s right for me |
|  | Exercising parental authority over my children | Dealing with temptations and friends from the past | Taking care of debts and fines |
|  | The way society labels me | Keeping a job | Getting around from place to place (mobility) |
|  | Lack of social support | Dealing with addiction and staying clean | Working at a low-paying job |
|  | Restoring my relationship with my significant other |  | Finding a place to live |
|  | Health problems |  | Managing pending cases |
|  |  |  | My parole conditions (night arrest, signatures, being prohibited from leaving the country) |
| Cronbach’s alpha | .783 | .727 | .664 |

To check to what extent dividing the items on the questionnaire into these three subcategories was consistent with the data, we used a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We tested the model’s goodness of fit based on several parameters: with a result smaller than 3 indicating a good fit between the model and the data. While the CFI (.864) and the TLI (.840) indexes were slightly lower than a good fit (>.90 would constitute a good fit), the RMSEA (.074) and SRMR (0.61) indexes indicate a good fit between the model and the data (it is customary to refer to RMSEA<.08 and SRMR<.08 values).

To investigate the difference between Jewish prisoners, Arab prisoners, and PRA workers across the three aspects of difficulties, we conducted a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The independent variable was the groups of Jewish prisoners, Arab prisoners, and PRA workers, the dependent variables were emotional needs, lifestyle changes, and instrumental difficulties.

In the first stage we examined the relationship between the dependent variables and found significant correlations in the range of .469–.533. This range enables analysis of the data using a MANOVA. The results of the analysis pointed to differences between the groups in a simultaneous test of the three categories of difficulties (F(6,844)=24.49, p<.01, Pillai’s Trace=.297, =.148).

In a single-variable follow-up analysis with a Bonferroni correction for multiple equations (a significant result being p<0.17=.05/3) a difference was found between all the groups across all three categories of barriers and difficulties: in regards to emotional needs (F(2,423)=62.27, p<.003, changing lifestyle (F(2,423)=57.98, p<.003, , and instrumental difficulties (F(2,423)=27.44, p<.003, .

Graph no. 3 demonstrates that in all three categories, PRA workers rank the difficulties higher than the prisoners did (both Jewish and Arab) (p<.01). No significant difference was found between Jewish prisoners and Arab prisoners (p<.05).

**Graph no. 3: Average ranking of difficulties by group (Jewish prisoners / Arab prisoners / PRA workers) and the three categories of reentry needs and difficulties**

In addition to comparing between released prisoners and PRA workers in terms of the importance they attributed to the various reentry difficulties, we also sought to investigate a possible relationship between the released prisoners’ sociodemographic variables: age, number of children, and number of incarcerations at the time the study and the three categories of reentry difficulties and barriers.

**Table no. 4: Correlations between the three categories of difficulties and age, number of children and number of incarcerations**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Emotional needs | Making lifestyle changes | Instrumental needs |
| Age | .105\* | -.201\*\* | -.087 |
| Number of children | .047 | -.060 | -.010 |
| Number of incarcerations | .042 | .116\* | -.041 |

Table no. 4 points to a significant positive correlation between age and emotional needs, in other words, the older the person, the more importance they attributed to emotional needs. In addition, a negative correlation was found between age and making lifestyle changes, in other words, younger released prisoners appear to have reported having greater difficulty with making lifestyle changes.

As expected, a significant positive correlation was also found between the number of incarcerations and making lifestyle changes – the more times a prisoner had been incarcerated, the more difficult it was for them to change their lifestyle. No relationship was found between the number of children and reentry needs and difficulties.

**The qualitative part**

In addition to the quantitative research we also conducted qualitative research, as part of which the prisoners were asked to describe in their own words the difficulties and needs they experienced upon being released on parole. Here we seek to present the voices and perceptions of the released prisoners, as reflected in their answers to the open-ended questions on the questionnaire. In the current study, the subjects were asked to answer several open-ended questions: What could get in the way of my rehabilitation? What would support my rehabilitation? And what would I want more than anything?

An analysis of the findings reveals that the answers given to the first two questions (“What could get in the way of my rehabilitation?” And “What would support my rehabilitation?”) were very similar to the findings of quantitative analysis and add no further value to the findings that have already been presented. Therefore, we have chosen to present only answers to the question that addressed the released prisoners’ perception of their future: “What would I want more than anything?”

While the quantitative data analysis attempted to answer the questions: “What are the barriers that make the release process difficult and what are the difficulties that characterize the release from prison?” the qualitative data analysis attempted to discover what released prisoners wish for themselves, what they dream of, and what their aspirations are, openly and not based on a closed list of subjects.

The answers were analyzed and are presented using quantitative content analysis as the text analysis research method. This method bridges between the formal statistical approach and qualitative methods of analyzing materials (Bauer & Gaskell, 2011).

As part of this process, we extracted 421 statements from the released prisoners’ answers to the open-ended question: “What would I want more than anything?” We then conducted a categorization and cross-referencing process to group the statements into three central themes, which can be positioned along a logical sequence of release and rehabilitation stages: to be done with; to make amends; and to get ahead.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| To be done with:  “To turn over a new leaf.” | To make amends:  “To become rehabilitated and make amends.” | To get ahead:  “To succeed and fulfill my dreams.” |
| This theme includes statements that express the desire to be done with the imprisonment part and the limitations of their release, to “turn over a new leaf” and disconnect from the world of crime and their former lifestyle. | This theme includes the statements that convey the released prisoners wish to go deeper and further on their path to rehabilitation and their longing to make amends to their family members for the pain and injury they have caused them. | This theme includes statements reflecting a desire to achieve peace of mind, to get ahead in life, to be successful, and to start a family. |

In general, it is possible to say that when the released prisoners were asked about their hopes for the future very few materialistic narratives came up; most of the narratives were emotional and expressed authentic aspirations for both physical and mental liberation, peace of mind, warmth, and acceptance.

1. **To be done with: “To turn over a new leaf”**

This theme includes a large number of statements (148) grouped under a type of “phoenix rising from the ashes” umbrella: I went into prison one person; I survived and will emerge a changed individual - a different person. These statements express an explicit longing to leave the past behind, become free, and be liberated from the shackles of the past:

*To be done with the license period and start my life over (Subject no. 3)… To be free like everyone else (Subject no. 42)… To be done with the licensed prisoner period because of the difficulties during the release (Subject no. 112)… To be done with all my court debts and my debts to society (Subject no. 205)… To get back to my routine, where I’m in charge of myself without having to answer to the system (Subject no. 266)… To live a normative, debt-free life without any restrictions (Subject no. 369).*

Other statements describe the released prisoners’ aspiration of turning over a new leaf and leading what they referred to as a “normal” lifestyle:

*For all my past to be erased, also from the internet (Subject no. 55)… I would like to forget the past, that I was in prison, and to forget that whole period (Subject no. 223)… I would like to go 20 years back with the same awareness and not make the same mistakes (Subject no. 277)… To get out of the criminal world, to go back to living a normative life (Subject no. 158)… To have all my pending cases and debts to the state closed (Subject no. 225)… To get out of debt and be completely liberated from all the suffering, to be a citizen of the state who wants to benefit society (Subject no. 250)… To turn over a new leaf in terms of financial problems, bank debts, this is a huge need and it’s extremely important to provide help with this issue (Subject no. 307).*

1. **To make amends: To become rehabilitated and make restitution**

A total of 82 statements were found under this theme. Of them, 40 deal with the released prisoners’ desire to continue on their path of rehabilitation:

*That the PRA will continue to accompany prisoners also after the parole period (Subject no. 49)… To learn new things that will help me stay out of crime, to learn about the effects of drugs and that way I won’t think about committing drug-related crimes (Subject no. 173)… To be rehabilitated on the inside, to set goals for myself, to have more clarity, for life to be easier (Subject no. 190)… I want to keep getting to know more and more parts of myself (Subject no. 291)… I want to see myself living a good life with boundaries and having the ability to cope with life and handle the past and all the things I’ve repressed about it (Subject no. 357).*

Another 44 statements in this theme deal with the released prisoners’ desire to make amends to their family for the suffering and damage they caused:

*More than anything, I want to go back and unite my family (Subject no. 175)… To give my family everything I can (Subject no. 179)… To make amends to my family for my past (Subject no. 191)…To make amends to my wife and kids for having wronged them (Subject no. 258)… To make my mother and father happy after causing them so much suffering all these years (Subject no. 351)… For my girls to grow up to lead good lives and get a higher education. I want them to walk the straight and narrow (Subject no. 187).*

It is interesting to note in this context that none of the released prisoners expressed a desire to make amends to the direct or indirect victims of their crimes.

1. **To get ahead: “To succeed and fulfill my dreams”**

This theme comprised 160 statements. 107 statements express the released prisoners’ aspirations of getting ahead in life and succeeding in their endeavors:

*To learn plumbing, to have a profession under my belt (Subject no. 60)…I wanted to get ahead in life, to continue studying and earn more advanced degrees, to get better jobs (Subject no. 245)… To make my dreams come true (Subject no. 19)… To succeed in life in all areas: wife, kids, work, religion (Subject no. 83)… I’d like to fulfill my ambitions, to open a business, to be like everyone else in society, not to feel persecuted deep inside (Subject no. 85)… To get ahead in life and move up. To build things for myself in life that I will be able to look back on in the future (Subject no. 146)… I want to be a respectable person and far from any kind of mistake (Subject no. 313)… To take all my failures and turn them into good things. To help many people stay safe and cope (Subject no. 359).*

25 participants expressed a desire to start a family:

*To be lucky enough to find a new partner who will make both our lives happy (Subject no. 12)…To get married and have children, to feel loved, to be in a good relationship (Subject no. 49)… A wife and a house and a flower garden (Subject no. 79)… I want to get married and start a family and have kids and raise my kids to do the right thing and positive things (Subject no. 311)… To be surrounded by family (Subject no. 26).*

Other statements under this theme deal with the released prisoners’ desire for peace of mind and serenity (30):

*To be happy and content (Subject no. 4)…Serenity and peace of mind (Subject no. 5)… To live in dignity, without fear, without stress, to feel calm inside (Subject no. 58)... To be satisfied with what I have, to be happy, to find a direction in life (Subject no. 124)… To sleep well, to be calm without the problems I used to have, to be a good and happy person (Subject no. 172)… I want to continue living my life in peace and quiet, to be financially secure and not get distracted by insignificant matters (Subject no. 177)… Quiet and peace of mind, to improve my social relationships, and to be free of the shame (Subject no. 371)… To be close to God (Subject no. 142).*

Six of the participants stated that they wished for robust and improved health and 15 statements dealt with the desire to acquire a driving license and to improve their degree of mobility. It is interesting to note that only 10 of the subjects stated that their dream was to acquire wealth or improve their financial situation.

**Discussion**

The initial period after being released from prison can be confusing and ambivalent: on the one hand, release is accompanied by a sense of freedom and euphoria, hope and relief from the pains of imprisonment, and anticipation of things to come. On the other hand, released prisoners generally encounter many difficulties and barriers that significantly hinder their reentry process.

The main goal of this study was to identify the main difficulties and barriers faced by released prisoners in Israel, as perceived by released prisoners participating in rehabilitation programs and by those in charge of providing rehabilitation services in the community. In addition, the study attempted to examine whether ethnic affiliation was related to how these barriers and difficulties were described by Jewish as opposed to Arab released prisoners.

The study findings indicate a significant gap between the perceptions of PRA workers and those of the released prisoners themselves in regards to reentry barriers and difficulties. While the released prisoners’ answers presented a cascading range of difficulties, PRA workers made hardly any distinctions between the various difficulties in terms of their importance, so that almost every reentry difficulty on the questionnaire was ranked as being highly significant on the prisoners’ path to rehabilitation. This finding emerged in regards to all three aspects of the questionnaire: emotional needs, making lifestyle changes, and instrumental difficulties.

In contrast to the findings of other studies in Israel and around the world that point to interpersonal difficulties, unmet subsistence needs, and insufficient support (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009), analysis of the released prisoners’ answers in the current study reveals that they perceived the **restricting parole conditions** as posing the greatest difficulty to reentry. This finding is interesting, and we believe related to the central role parole conditions play in the decisions of parole boards in Israel. The Israeli Parole Law (2001) gives a lot of weight to the supervisory aspect and specifies the conditions for licensed parole, which include conditions that apply by default. Among these are the duty to make appearances at the police station, the duty to notify the authorities of any change in residence, and a prohibition on leaving the country. Additional conditions have begun to appear recently in parole board decisions, such as the duty to remain under nightly house arrest, and a new rule was instated according to which if a parolee commits a criminal offense while on parole their parole must be revoked and the prisoner must be placed back in prison (Dagan & Sha’ar-Efodi, 2021). The toughening of the supervisory conditions for released prisoners has not yet been discussed in-depth in Israel. However, it has been widely discussed in world literature, where the concern has been raised that the toughening of parole conditions may cause recidivism rates to rise, as rigid conditions are more likely to be violated (Padfield & Maruna, 2006; Reitz & Rhine, 2020).

The main motive emerging from the licensed released prisoners’ answers was their desire to put the past behind them and redefine their personal and social identity. They expressed a desire to live as ordinary normative people, whose new identity was based on their family or occupational ties and not on any kind of affinity to the world of crime or the law-enforcement system (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019; Ward, 2002). In this context, it is important to note that the rehabilitation program itself constitutes one of the mandatory parole conditions and thereby preserves the “released prisoner” label. Therefore, it is possible that the parole conditions that pose difficulties for released prisoners also include their participation in the rehabilitation program, individual therapy, group therapy, urine tests, and finding employment that meets the strict conditions set by the parole board (Shoham & Peled-Laskov, 2020).

The employment difficulties experienced by released prisoners are somewhat puzzling in light of the fact that in contrast to other countries, the attitude toward released prisoners in Israel tends to be more humanitarian and inclusive and their reintegration into normative society generally receives support (Shoham & Timor, 2014). The Crime Register and Rehabilitation of Offenders Law (1981) prevents employers from receiving information about a person’s criminal background and thereby supposedly prevents discrimination against released prisoners in the hiring process. However, **licensed** released prisoners are often limited in terms of employment due to the parole conditions set by the parole boards. For example, released prisoners cannot be hired by relatives or by employers with a criminal background. In addition, other than in rare cases, released prisoners must work as salaried employees even if they were self-employed before their imprisonment. A third example of these restrictions is that the employer must give their signed consent to employ the released prisoner and send in their details to be checked and approved by the authorities. In light of these restrictions, it seems safe to assume the employment difficulties reported by the study participants stemmed, at least partially, from the restrictive parole conditions, which unfortunately were added to the employment difficulties generally encountered by released prisoners (Peled-Laskov et al., 2018).

Support for the quantitative study findings can also be found in the study’s qualitative part, which included a central theme dealing with the released prisoners’ desire to “turn over a new leaf” and be done with the stage they were in, i.e. that of being licensed released prisoners. This very desire, expressed by prisoners who in effect had already been released, could indicate that they did not perceive themselves as having completed their sentence and being free from the shackles of imprisonment, but rather as being in the middle of a process. That being the case, it appears that in addition to the pains of imprisonment that are well known in the literature (Shoham, 2010), attention should be given to understanding the pains caused by restrictive parole conditions, which create an experience that is very far from the public image associated with the concept of “release.” The study findings in fact corroborate the picture emerging from other studies around the world, according to which release on parole is rife with pains and difficulties (Padfield & Maruna, 2006; Reitz & Rhine, 2020) and therefore should essentially be considered as one of the stages of punishment.

As anticipated, subsistence and instrumental difficulties emerged as being very troubling to released prisoners in Israel. These mainly included dealing with debts and fines that often accumulate over many years, coping in workplaces that offer low wages, mobility restrictions, and more. Naturally, rehabilitation workers also viewed these issues as posing great difficulties. In addition, and in line with the literature (Schneider & McKim, 2003; Shoham & Timur, 2014), the difficulty inherent in coping with social stigma was expressed by both the released prisoners and the PRA workers. It appears that in light of the broad range of reentry difficulties released prisoners encounter, social stigma should also be viewed in broader contexts, such as in the context of employment and family, and in terms of how these difficulties impact the released prisoners’ emotional state, their sense of self-efficacy, and their self-esteem.

It is interesting to note that the released prisoners perceived the issue of addiction as posing the least difficulty in their subjective experience. While 65% of the PRA workers ranked this difficulty as being very significant, only 18% of the released prisoners felt the same way. It light of these findings and the comprehensive knowledge found in the literature attesting to high addiction rates among released prisoners (EMCDDA, 2012; Stafford & Breen, 2017) these gaps merit discussion. Firstly, it is possible that released prisoners tend to underestimate the importance of the issue because they are repressing the difficulty or fail to recognize the depth of their addiction problem. Another possible explanation is the sense of omnipotence that arises in some released prisoners at times, causing them to think they will have no difficulty resisting the temptation of drugs (for a description of these perceptions, see Gideon et al., 2010). It is possible to assume, therefore, that released prisoners perceive the sporadic use of psychoactive substances to be harmless and even acceptable, especially if consumed in social situations. However, PRA workers, who have broad professional knowledge on the issue, are concerned about the consequences of consuming these substances and the development of an addiction problem. Secondly, it is possible that addiction is not as common among prisoners who have been released early as it is among prisoners in general, which could explain the gaps in perception.

The salient gap between the prisoners’ perceptions and those of their supervisors and rehabilitators might possibly be explained by the tendency existing among rehabilitation and therapy workers to adopt perspectives that could be considered generalizing and paternalistic. These perspectives could lead them to overlook the needs of the individual patient, over diagnose issues, and a tendency to be overprotective of those under their care. Furthermore, treatment workers truly care and are concerned for the wellbeing of released prisoners, which leads them to want to envelope the released prisoners with support throughout the rehabilitation process. Another possible explanation may be rooted in the released prisoners’ misconception of their situation, as they are still under the system’s warm embrace, and tend to be in denial of the array of difficulties they will have to deal with once the supervision period ends.

When we examined the perceptions of reentry difficulties from a cultural and social perspective, no significant differences were found between Jewish and Arab released prisoners. This is in contrast to the research literature, which indicates more restrictions and double exclusion. It is possible to assume that paradoxically, members of the minority group receive broader and deeper support from their community and family members (Sha’ar-Efodi & Ka’adan, 2020), while other released prisoners, who have no support from their family and do not belong to a community, do not receive similar support.

Very emotional motives emerged from the thematic analysis of the released prisoners’ texts, as they described their dreams in the best and most authentic way. In general, it was interesting to find that when asked about their dreams, despite their criminal background, which may have been indicative of a materialistic focus and expectations of turning a quick profit, practically no materialistic narratives or aspirations to amass wealth emerged. On the contrary, most of the motives dealt with the desire for peace of mind, finding warmth and acceptance, freedom, and being liberated from the shackles surrounding them from the day they were released. In addition, a longing for family in its many and broad aspects emerged, including the desire to be in an intimate relationship and start a family and the desire to make amends to family members and gain their acceptance and love.

Most treatment and rehabilitation programs operated by the prison system focus on taking personal responsibility and understanding the nature and severity of the harm inflicted on the other (Shoham et al., 2017). However, in the current study, the released prisoners barely addressed their victims’ experience or the role they themselves might play in reducing the negative impact of the criminal act they committed, as can be done through various practices that are based on the principles of restorative justice. When they did express regret or a desire to make amends, this was directed at the members of their family and not toward the direct victim of their crime or their social environment (Gal, 2016).

In light of the theoretical literature review and the findings of the current study, the need to understand the factors posing difficulties to released prisoners on their path to rehabilitation and hindering their reintegration into society as they are perceived by released prisoners themselves becomes even clearer. The study findings may help rehabilitation workers create solutions that are better adapted to the needs of those undergoing rehabilitation who are about to be reintegrated into the community. This refers to their emotional, interpersonal, instrumental, and employment-related needs, as well as the development of rehabilitation and treatment programs suited to the characteristics and needs of the prisoners after their release from prison. We also recommend re-examining the components of supervision over licensed released prisoners, in light of the study findings that attest to the great difficulty these present.

In light of the PRA worker’s answers, which showed a tendency toward generalization, we recommend the PRA consider the importance of conducting individual evaluations of the specific needs of each released prisoner, while providing separate inputs and using customized coping practices. Similar follow-up studies should be conducted at various junctures before and after release to understand the difficulties characterizing each stage and examine the released prisoner’s condition in various chapters of their release.

It is important to note that this study focused on perceptions of licensed released prisoners under the supervision conditions of the PRA, and this is its main limitation. This unique characteristic of the research population may have led to a double deviation. On the one hand, prisoners under supervision in the rehabilitation program may have reduced and minimized the nature and scope of difficulties they expected to encounter in order to strengthen the system’s perception of them as able and worthy of standing on their own two feet, so they would be released early. On the other hand, because these were licensed prisoners still operating within a protective and supervising framework, their answers do not necessarily reflect the reentry difficulties of prisoners who have served the entire term of their sentence and are released without any further accompaniment from any other treatment or rehabilitation agency. Furthermore, as all the study participants were licensed released prisoners, it is possible to assume that this is a relatively high-functioning population, in contrast to other released prisoners, who may encounter other or additional difficulties.

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