

Summary

Third Measurement of the Monitor of Aftercare for Former Prisoners

Background, aims, and research questions

One of the methods used by the Ministry of Security and Justice to reduce the high recidivism rates among former prisoners is to already start the provision of aftercare to prisoners during imprisonment. The aim of this aftercare is to ensure that any problems encountered by prisoners in the area of identity cards, income, accommodation, debts, and care are solved, or prevented as much as possible, during imprisonment, by means of co-operation among the Ministry, the municipalities, and other co-operating organisations. The monitor of aftercare for former prisoners of the WODC (Weijters & More, 2010) has been developed to identify to what extent prisoners and former prisoners have an identity card, income, accommodation, debts and contacts with care institutions upon arrival at a Penal Institution (PI), upon release from imprisonment, and after having spent six months in free society. In addition, it is the aim of the monitor to describe how the situation in these five areas of life is developing during imprisonment and in the first six months after release from imprisonment. The third aim is to describe the relationship between problems in these areas of life and any changes in these problems during imprisonment and after release from imprisonment, on the one hand, and the socio-demographic and legal characteristics of the prisoners and former prisoners on the other hand.

This report describes the result of the third measurement of the monitor of aftercare for former prisoners, which was carried out among former prisoners who were released from a PI in the period between 1 July 2010 and 1 December 2010. As this measurement was made largely in the same manner as the first and the second measurement, the differences in the results between the three measurements were also a subject of research. This research centred on the following research questions:

- 1 To what extent did the situation regarding the five areas of life – identity card, income, accommodation, debts, and care contact – change during imprisonment and in the first six months after release from imprisonment?
- 2 To what extent did prisoners who were released from a PI in the second half of 2010 differ from prisoners who were released in the second half of 2008 and 2009 with regard to the ability to keep or obtain an identity card, income, accommodation, debts, and contact with a care institution immediately prior to imprisonment, immediately after release from imprisonment, and six months after release from imprisonment?

Compared to the first and second measurement, a few points were added to the third measurement. In this third measurement, considerable attention was given to the relationship between the situation in the five areas of life on the one hand, and the legal characteristics of the prisoners or former prisoners, on the other hand. By 'legal characteristics' we not only mean the imprisonment history (such as the age at a prisoner's first conviction, and the number of previous convictions), but also the characteristics of the current conviction (such as the term of imprisonment and the

nature of the offence for which the prisoner was convicted). This has resulted in the following research questions:

- 3.1 To what extent does a relationship exist between the problems in the five areas of life and the legal profile of former prisoners?
- 3.2 To what extent does a relationship exist between the change in the problems in the five areas of life and the legal profile of former prisoners?

Finally, we also looked at the extent to which the predicted probability of recidivism played a role in this context. It was examined whether former prisoners with a higher predicted probability of recidivism had more problems or – on the contrary – had fewer problems in the five areas of life, and whether their situation in the area of aftercare had changed more during imprisonment than the situation for former prisoners with a lower predicted probability of recidivism.

4. To what extent does a relationship exist between the predicted probability of recidivism and the problems in the five areas of life, and to what extent does a relationship exist between any change in the problems in the five areas of life and the predicted probability of recidivism of the former prisoners?

Research Method

In this third measurement of the monitor of aftercare for former prisoners, the researchers examined the situation of former prisoners who had left a PI in the period between 1 July 2010 and 1 December 2010 and who had taken up residence in a Dutch municipality afterwards. Similar to the situation in the second measurement, it was only possible to provide an overview of the situation in the five areas of life with respect to prisoners who had been in prison for more than two weeks. This is due to the fact that, in practice, it was not always possible to interview prisoners serving a short sentence about their situation in the five areas of life. In respect of this group of prisoners, it has been decided to merely report to the municipality that a prisoner is in prison and will be released soon. Out of the prisoners who belong to the target group of aftercare policy, 28.1% were in prison for less than two weeks.

The research group ultimately consisted of 9,690 prisoners and former prisoners. These were mainly men (92.9%) and more than half of the research group was younger than 34 years of age at the time of release. In addition, more than 63% of the former prisoners were born in the Netherlands and nearly 90% of the former prisoners did not have registered partners.

In order to describe the situation of the prisoners with regard to the five areas of life at the beginning of their imprisonment, we used the data kept in the Digital Platform for Alignment of Aftercare (*Digitaal Platform Aansluiting Nazorg, DPAN*). All prisoners who belong to the target group of aftercare policy are supposed to have been screened by the Social Services Employees (MMD employees) in the first two weeks of their stay in the PI. During this screening, the prisoners are asked about the situation in the five areas of life as it was before imprisonment. Upon closing the DPAN document at the end of the term of imprisonment, the MMD employee must still complete several questions about the situation as it was upon release from imprisonment. This information is used to provide an overview of the situation upon release from imprisonment.

The information about the situation in the five areas of life was, however, not available for the entire research group. In respect of 7.7% of the prisoners who had been in prison for more than two weeks, the DPAN did not include any information about the situation in the five areas of life. This percentage is lower than in the pre-

vious measurements, which means that the MMD employees had succeeded in screening more prisoners in 2010. The prisoners about whom we did not have any information had been in prison for a relatively shorter time than those about whom we did have information, and were more often females. The proportion of prisoners born in one of the CEE countries (countries in the Central and East Europe, such as Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria) was higher among the prisoners who had not been screened than among those who had been screened. Possible reasons for this may be that it is not clear to which municipality these prisoners returned, and language problems.

The registrations of eight municipalities were used for the description of the situation of former prisoners in the five areas of life six months after release from imprisonment. The relevant municipalities are Amsterdam, Assen, Breda, Emmen, Hoogeveen, Oss (and neighbouring municipalities), Purmerend, and Spijkenisse. In total, nearly 15% of the former prisoners from our research group took up residence in one of these municipalities.

Results

Situation in the five areas of life immediately prior to imprisonment and upon release from imprisonment

In the section below the situation in the five areas of life immediately prior to imprisonment and upon release from imprisonment is described point by point for prisoners belonging to the target group of aftercare policy. This will be followed by a discussion of the individual changes in the situations in the five areas of life of the prisoners about whom we have information immediately prior to imprisonment and upon release from imprisonment.

- Prior to imprisonment and upon release from imprisonment, 84.2% of the prisoners had identity cards.
- Prior to imprisonment, 71.0% of the prisoners had an income, compared to 61.7% upon release from imprisonment. Prior to imprisonment 38.1% of the prisoners had an income from work, 33.4% received social assistance benefit payments.
- Prior to imprisonment, 80.9% of the prisoners had accommodation, compared to 83.2% upon release from imprisonment. Prior to imprisonment, the majority of the former prisoners lived in a rented dwelling or with family. Upon release from imprisonment, more former prisoners lived with family and in emergency accommodation than prior to imprisonment.
- Nearly three quarters (73.1%) of the former prisoners had debts prior to imprisonment.
- More than one quarter (29.4%) of the prisoners had had contacts with care institutions prior to imprisonment. In the majority of cases, the contacts concerned care for addicts (50.8%) or psychiatric care (34.4%).

Changes in problems in the five areas of life during imprisonment

The statistics regarding individual changes in problems in the five areas of life were available with regard to having an identity card, income, and accommodation. As in the previous measurement, any changes during imprisonment in the area of debts and contacts with care institutions could not be identified, because no information was available about the situation in these areas of life upon release from imprisonment.

- Out of the group of prisoners who had had identity cards prior to imprisonment, nearly all prisoners (approximately 99%) had identity cards upon release from

- imprisonment. Out of the group of prisoners who had entered the PI without identity cards, 7.4% obtained identity cards during imprisonment.
- Out of the group of prisoners who had an income prior to imprisonment, 78.6% also had an income upon release from imprisonment. In 2010, nearly 22.0% of the prisoners who did not have any income prior to imprisonment did have an income upon release from imprisonment.
 - Out of the group of prisoners, 95.7% had accommodation both prior to imprisonment and upon release from imprisonment. Approximately 29% of the prisoners without accommodation prior to imprisonment obtained accommodation during imprisonment.

Situation of former prisoners six months after release from imprisonment

It is not possible to describe the situation six months after release from imprisonment for each former prisoner. For the purpose of the third measurement, we used information from eight municipalities, namely Amsterdam, Assen, Breda, Emmen, Hogeveen, Oss (and neighbouring municipalities), Purmerend, and Spijkenisse. Compared to former prisoners who do not originate from these eight municipalities, the former prisoners within this population were born more often outside the Netherlands and had, on average, been imprisoned more often and longer than a year. It is consequently not possible to generalise the data to the total population of former prisoners. These data do, however, provide an indication of the problems in the five areas of life six months after release from imprisonment.

- Six months after release from imprisonment, 94.0% of the former prisoners had valid identity cards.
- Nearly 90% of the former prisoners had an income six months after release from imprisonment. In approximately three quarters of the cases, this was a benefit payment.
- Out of the group of former prisoners, 80.8% had accommodation six months after release from imprisonment. Nearly half of the group of former prisoners with accommodation were living independently six months after imprisonment, and more than 20% were living with family six months after imprisonment.
- Not all debts of the prisoners were known to the municipality. In any case, out of the group of former prisoners, nearly 40% were in debt to the municipality six months after release from imprisonment.
- Out of the group of former prisoners, approximately three quarters (74.8%) had contacts with care institutions six months after release from imprisonment. This percentage is rather high due to the selective group of prisoners about whom Amsterdam was able to provide information through the Municipal Health Service.
- Six months after imprisonment, 15.8% of the former prisoners did not have any problems in the five areas of life, more than one third had problems in one area of life, and more than one third had problems in two or more areas of life.

Changes in problems in the five areas of life in the first six months after release from imprisonment

By comparing the municipal data on the situation upon release from imprisonment with the situation six months after release from imprisonment, it was found that nearly every former prisoner had kept his identity card, income, and accommodation. On the other hand, the former prisoners were also still in debt to the municipality. In the first six months after release from imprisonment, 42.9% of the former prisoners obtained identity cards, 70.2% obtained an income, 26.6% obtained accommodation, and 13.2% had contacts with a care institution.

Comparison with the results from the first two measurements of the monitor of aftercare for former prisoners

For the purpose of this research, the situation in the five areas of life prior to imprisonment and upon release from imprisonment was measured in the same manner as in the first two measurements of the monitor of aftercare for former prisoners. In general, the results of the third meeting are in line with the results from the previous measurements. The most striking differences between the three measurements regarding the situation in the five areas of life are described below.

- In the years 2008 and 2009, the problems of prisoners in the area of life regarding income prior to imprisonment were less serious than in 2010. Out of the group of former prisoners with an income, in 2010 this income was less frequently obtained from work.
- Compared to 2009, the prisoners had had slightly more contacts with care institutions prior to imprisonment in 2010.
- In 2010, the number of former prisoners who had had an identity card, income and accommodation prior to imprisonment and been successful in retaining them after their release was higher than in 2009.
- On the other hand, we observed that those prisoners who had had no accommodation prior to imprisonment succeeded relatively less often in obtaining accommodation in 2010 than in the previous years.

Relationship between the legal profile of the prisoners and the problems in the five areas of life

In the third measurement of the aftercare monitor, we added information about the legal background of the prisoners; this made it possible to provide a complete picture of the living conditions of the prisoners and former prisoners. This background information included the following characteristics: age at the prisoner's first conviction, the number of previous prison sentences, the penalty carried by an offence, and the type of offence committed.

A legal profile was available with respect to 83.3% of the research group. Within this group, approximately 20% were between 12 and 15 years of age at their first conviction, and approximately 30% were older than 15 years of age but younger than 18 years of age at their first conviction. A small portion of the research group (13.0%) was 30 years of age or older at their first conviction. In addition, the majority of former prisoners in our research group had received prison sentences previously (41.4% had not received any prison sentences previously).

Looking at the most recent conviction, we find that approximately half the research group was convicted for an offence carrying a term of imprisonment between 4 and 8 years. More than 20% was convicted for committing an offence carrying a term of imprisonment of 8 years or more. With regard to the type of offence committed, more than one third of the research group was imprisoned for a property offence without the use of violence (such as a burglary, theft or shoplifting). More than 20% committed a violent offence, while 13.5% was imprisoned for destruction or disturbance of public order. Another 13% was convicted for a drug offence.

Looking at the relationship between the legal characteristics and the situation in the five areas of life, we find a number of striking results, including the following:

- Prior to imprisonment, the legal history plays a role in the situation in the five areas of life. The prisoners who were older at their first conviction are more likely to have an income prior to the most recent term of imprisonment and are less likely to have debts. A larger number of previous prison sentences are associated with a lower probability of having an identity card and accommodation prior to imprisonment and a higher probability of having contact with a care institution.

- Violent offenders more often had an income and accommodation prior to imprisonment than offenders who had been convicted for property offences with the use of violence.
- The situation of drug offenders prior to imprisonment also looked relatively good. They had accommodation more often, and debts and contact with a care institution less often, than offenders who had been convicted for property offences.
- With regard to the changes in the problems in the five areas of life, the term of imprisonment appeared to be most important. The longer the term of imprisonment, the higher the probability of obtaining identity cards, income, and accommodation. The probability of losing one's income during imprisonment, on the other hand, increases as the term of imprisonment increases.

Relationship between the problems in the five areas of life and the probability of recidivism

The third measurement examined – on the basis of the predicted probability of recidivism – the extent to which the problems in the five areas of life differed, and the question of whether the problems had been solved. The researchers considered the issue of whether prisoners and former prisoners with a higher predicted probability of recidivism tend to encounter problems in the five areas of life – or in one area of life – more often than prisoners and former prisoners with a lower predicted probability of recidivism. In addition, the researchers checked whether more – or on the contrary less – had been arranged in the area of aftercare for prisoners and former prisoners with a higher predicted probability of recidivism than for prisoners and former prisoners with a lower predicted probability of recidivism.

- There is a clear relationship between the predicted probability of recidivism and the situation prior to imprisonment. The higher the probability of recidivism, the more serious the problems in the five areas of life. Prior to imprisonment, prisoners with a higher probability of recidivism are less likely to have an identity card and accommodation, and are more likely to have debts and contact with a care institution, than prisoners with a lower probability of recidivism.
- The probability of recidivism appeared to play hardly any role in the prisoner's ability to retain – or obtain – these facilities during imprisonment.

Limitations

This third measurement entails the recognition of a number of limitations which also played a role in the previous measurements. The first limitation is related to the use of DPAN as data source. Both the information about the situation prior to imprisonment and the information about the situation upon release from imprisonment differ from the information kept by the municipalities. It is not clear which source is more reliable in describing the situation of the prisoners prior to imprisonment. It may be assumed that the information about the situation upon release from imprisonment provided by the municipalities is more reliable than the information from DPAN. In DPAN, the problems upon release from imprisonment are overestimated, because it appears to be difficult for MMD employees to indicate whether prisoners have identity cards, income or accommodation upon release from imprisonment. On the day of release, the MMD employees often do not know whether this has been arranged. The prisoner may, however, have planned appointments for the day of release or several days later to arrange these matters with the municipality.

Another limitation with regard to the research is that it is not possible to report on all prisoners. We lack information about one group of prisoners, namely the prisoners who were in prison for less than two weeks. For this reason, the results only

relate to prisoners who were in prison for more than two weeks. We consequently cannot draw any conclusions about prisoners who were in prison for less than two weeks.

Not every prisoner who had been in prison for more than two weeks was screened by a MMD employee, nor was the DPAN document completed fully for every prisoner. At this third measurement, there was no information available with regard to 7.7% of the prisoners. Although this is still a fairly large group, this is clearly an improvement compared to the first and the second measurements.

A last reservation with regard to this research is that the situation of the former prisoners six months after their release from imprisonment could not be described for every former prisoner. In this third measurement of the monitor, the number of municipalities providing information increased somewhat again, but prudence is called for with regard to generalising the results to the total population. It is expected that more municipalities will be able to provide data for the next measurement of the monitor of aftercare for former prisoners, so that it will be possible to draw increasingly more reliable conclusions for the problems of former prisoners in the five areas of life six months after release from imprisonment.

Discussion

In this third measurement of the aftercare monitor, we also wanted to give an answer to the following questions: which groups of former prisoners encounter the most problems in the five areas of life, and which groups of former prisoners have experienced that aftercare has led to a solution of possible problems in the five areas of life. It is important to know exactly which group of prisoners encounter the most serious problems in these areas of life, as this will make it possible to respond to these problems in practice by focussing more on these groups of prisoners or by providing more individual-oriented solutions.

Our results show that, in particular, the term of imprisonment plays a role in obtaining and keeping an identity card, income, and accommodation. The longer a prisoner is in prison, the higher the probability that he will have an identity card, income, and accommodation at the end of imprisonment. This seems to be mainly the effect of the circumstances. It is easier to arrange things for a prisoner who is in prison for a longer period of time. It should be noted, however, that in the area of income, the effect of the term of imprisonment also takes a more negative turn. Prisoners who had an income prior to imprisonment are more likely to lose this income if they are in prison for a longer period of time. A possible explanation for this is that prisoners are not entitled to benefit payments. The benefit payment ceases once a prisoner has been in prison for a month. This complicates the task of the MMD employee to ensure that prisoners have an income the moment they are released from imprisonment.

The results furthermore show that the predicted probability of recidivism is strongly related to the problems prior to imprisonment. The higher the predicted probability of recidivism, the higher the probability of these prisoners having problems prior to imprisonment. This group consequently requires additional attention, in order to ensure that the aim of aftercare policy is achieved, i.e. that the prisoners' problems in the areas of aftercare have been solved at the end of their imprisonment.

As far as the methodology is concerned, the monitor once again revealed improvements on several points. For instance, in DPAN information has been collected and maintained on more prisoners than in the past years. The second methodological improvement concerns the situation six months after release from imprisonment. At the first measurement, we used data from three municipalities that could not be compared. At the second measurement for the monitor, we used data from six municipalities and at the third measurement; we used data from eight municipalities.

In 2013, the report will provide information about the fourth measurement of the monitor of aftercare for former prisoners. With regard to this fourth measurement, the situation in the five areas of life prior to imprisonment and upon release from imprisonment will be described again on the basis of data from DPAN, but this will be a new and improved version of DPAN, which was put into operation at the end of 2010. We hope to be able to use data from more municipalities for the situation of the former prisoners six months after release from imprisonment, so that an increasingly more representative picture will be provided of the problems in the five areas of living of former prisoners six month after release from imprisonment.