



Cahier 2024-13

Seventh edition of the aftercare monitor for formerly incarcerated individuals

*Problems concerning the basic conditions
necessary to reintegration and their relation
to imprisonment length and recidivism*

Summary

Cahier 2024-13

Seventh edition of the aftercare monitor for formerly incarcerated individuals

*Problems concerning the basic conditions
necessary to reintegration and their relation
to imprisonment length and recidivism*

Summary

M.L. Berghuis
S. Boschman
G. Weijters

Cahier

De reeks Cahier omvat de rapporten van onderzoek dat door en in opdracht van het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum is verricht. Opname in de reeks betekent niet dat de inhoud van de rapporten het standpunt van de Minister van Justitie en Veiligheid weergeeft.

Summary

Seventh edition of the aftercare monitor for formerly incarcerated individuals

Problems concerning the basic conditions necessary to reintegration and their relation to imprisonment length and recidivism

Approximately 23,000 adults are released from a correctional institution in the Netherlands every year. Since recidivism rates are high in the period immediately after release, individuals receive help with five basic conditions generally known to be important for a successful reintegration during their imprisonment and after release. These five basic conditions (valid ID, work and income, housing, help with debts, and suitable healthcare) have been a central part of aftercare policies in the Netherlands since 2004. The aim of these policies is to have these basic conditions met before individuals are released from prison (i.e., obtaining a valid identity card; finding employment and a source of income; acquiring accommodation; taking an inventory of outstanding debts and strategies for how to deal with these debts; and receiving suitable physical and psychological healthcare). Since 2019, aftercare policies also recognize that building and strengthening a supportive social network is an important protective factor for post-release success.

To monitor these aftercare policies, the Dutch Research and Data Centre (*Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum, WODC*) conducts the aftercare monitor every two years. Each monitor describes the extent to which (formerly) incarcerated individuals meet the five basic conditions necessary for reintegration before and after their time in prison. Prior aftercare monitors have made it clear that individuals released from Dutch prisons experience many problems with meeting these conditions, both prior to imprisonment and after release, and that such problems are related to recidivism risks.

The current aftercare monitor (7th edition) describes the situation of all (formerly) incarcerated adults who were released from a Dutch prison in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Following prior monitors, a description of the basic conditions is given, as well as, the extent to which meeting these conditions relates to recidivism using large administrative datasets. Additionally, we investigate how imprisonment length impacts individuals' prospects on meeting these basic conditions after release. Unfortunately, information was not available for all five basic conditions for all formerly incarcerated individuals. For the cohorts in this study, no data was available on whether individuals had a valid ID or had received suitable healthcare prior to, during, or after incarceration. These two basic conditions were therefore not included in this study. Since having a supportive social network is seen as an important protective factor for reentry success, we control for whether individuals lived with a partner and/or child(ren) after release, however, it was not possible to determine whether these social ties are supportive since no data was available about the *quality* of these relationships.

Research questions

Following prior aftercare monitors, we first describe the extent to which formerly incarcerated individuals meet the basic conditions work, income, and housing before and after incarceration. In doing so, we consider not only whether individuals have work, income or housing, but provide information on specific qualities of their jobs, income, and housing. Then, we investigate the extent to which meeting these conditions, as well as job, income, and housing qualities, is related to recidivism.

- 1.1 *To what extent do individuals experience problems regarding work, income, and housing prior to imprisonment and up to one year after release?*
- 1.2 *To what extent is work, income, and housing (and their qualities) related to recidivism?*

In the current aftercare monitor we use newly available data on problematic debts. These data provide more insights into potential problems with debts than prior monitors. Therefore, two research questions concerning this basic condition were added:

- 2.1 *To what extent do formerly incarcerated individuals have problematic debts?*
- 2.2 *To what extent are problematic debts related to recidivism?*

Finally, in light of current societal, political, and scientific debates about the economic and social impacts of short terms of confinement, we also investigate the extent to which problems regarding the basic conditions varies across individuals who have short versus long(er) prison stays, and the effect of imprisonment length on meeting these conditions after release.

- 3.1 *What is the effect of imprisonment length on the prospects of having work, income, housing, and problematic debts after release?*

Method

The current report answers these research questions using data from all adults released from a Dutch prison in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Only those individuals released to a Dutch municipality were included as this is the target group of the aftercare policies. The Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (*Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen*) provided a list of all releasees in their target group. Data was then used from Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek*) about the basic conditions and from the Research and Policy Database for Judicial Documentation (*Onderzoek-, en beleidsdatabase Justitiële Documentatie, OBJD*) about criminal history and recidivism. Using these data we first describe the extent to which individuals have work, income, housing, and problematic debts prior to incarceration and after release. Then, using Cox regression models and negative binomial models we investigate the extent to which these basic conditions relate to the prevalence and frequency of recidivism (defined as reconviction) up to two years after release. Lastly, using propensity score stratification methods we examine the dose-response relationship between imprisonment length and outcomes on these basic conditions after release. In this way we are able to test the effect of imprisonment length on the prospects of having work,

income, housing, and problematic debts after release, while controlling for known differences between individuals with varying sentencing lengths (such as criminal history and problems on these conditions prior to incarceration).

Results

Formerly incarcerated individuals experience many problems concerning work, income, and housing

In the month prior to incarceration and following release, approximately 80% of formerly incarcerated individuals is neither working nor following an educational program, 30% has no registered income, and 30% has no registered address. Even individuals who entered prison with employment, income, or housing, experience (new) problems after release. 36% of individuals who had work prior to incarceration, were no longer employed one month after release.

Job and housing stability are related to lower recidivism rates

Formerly incarcerated individuals who find employment after release are less likely to be reconvicted, especially when they work more hours and are able to maintain a job for a longer period of time. Also, individuals who have a registered address are less likely to be reconvicted, particularly when they are able to return to the same address they had prior to incarceration and when they live together with a partner, parents or others family or friends. Individuals who were homeless or lived in an institution (such as addiction clinics) are more likely to be reconvicted when compared to individuals who had an address. These results seem consistent with social control theories as they suggest that stable (i.e., being able to return to a pre-prison address, longer job duration) and intensive social relationships (i.e., living together with others, working more hours) are related to lower reconviction rates.

Many formerly incarcerated individuals have problematic debts

Approximately 60% of formerly incarceration individuals have registered problematic debts. Since the available data did not include credit debts (such as debts with telecommunication companies) nor informal debts (meaning personal debts with family or friends), it is possible that the actual number of individuals with debts may be even higher than the estimates here.

Problematic debts are related to recidivism

Individuals who have problematic debts are more likely to be reconvicted than individuals who do not have problematic debts, even when we control for important differences in background characteristics and problems on the other basic conditions (work, income, and housing).

Imprisonment length has little to no effect on the prospects of having work, income, housing, and debts after release

When we control for differences in background characteristics and whether individuals met the basic conditions prior to incarceration, little to no differences exist between individuals experience varying lengths of stay in prison on the prospects of having work, income, housing, and debts after release. Also, few differences were found concerning specific job and housing qualities. These findings indicate that length of imprisonment exerts an overall null effect on the prospects of having work, income, housing, and debts after release. This suggests that very short prison stays do not lead to additional problems concerning these basic conditions (as there is little to no

time to help individuals during their time in prison, even though individuals can lose their work or housing while incarcerated), however, the results demonstrate that prison stays of less than 10 days have just as much (or little) impact on the prospects of meeting these basic conditions as a prison stay of one to two years.

Limitations

Although this study used rich administrative data on several basic conditions, we were not able to examine all five basic conditions since no data was available on whether individuals had valid ID or suitable healthcare upon entry into prison or after release. Even though all individuals are supposed to receive a standard screening on these conditions upon entry into prison, this information was not available for the cohorts in this study. The available data from Statistics Netherlands does provide a good overview of three of the five basic conditions for a large group of formerly incarcerated individuals, but also have their limitations. For example, no information was available about whether individuals had a registered address for nearly a quarter of the study population. Even when data was available about housing, it was not always clear whether this was a place where someone actually resided. Data about debts was also not available for all individuals. In addition, we do not have any information about credit debts nor informal debts which means we might be underestimating the number of individuals with problematic debts. More generally, by using administrative data we are only able to report on sources of legal, registered work and income, however formerly incarcerated individuals often work in informal sectors or have income from undeclared work, of which we have no data.

Finally, by using a propensity score stratification method, we were able to test the effect of imprisonment length on the basic conditions while controlling for a comprehensive array of pre-prison covariates on multiple life domains, however, we still were unable to control for other potentially relevant covariates such as substance use, personality characteristics, or motivation to change. While additional analyses using different groups of incarcerated individuals (with differing backgrounds) did yield similar conclusions, this remains a limitation nonetheless.

Conclusion and recommendations for research, practice and policy

Many formerly incarcerated individuals have problems meeting the basic conditions generally known to be important for a successful reintegration. The cohorts studied in this seventh edition of the aftercare monitor (adults released in 2017, 2018, and 2019 from a Dutch prison) seemed to experience just as many problems meeting these conditions as those in prior monitors. Despite the rather favorable labor market conditions and challenges in the housing market that these cohorts faced, it appears a relatively stable number of individuals enter and leave prison without work or a place to live, which is related to recidivism rates. Moreover, a number of individuals leave prison with (new) problems (i.e., as they lost their job or housing while incarcerated). The results of this study demonstrate that job and housing stability are related to lower reconviction rates. Therefore, aftercare policies which hope to reduce recidivism rates, ought to invest in ways to ensure that problems do not arise nor worsen while individuals are incarcerated. This requires strong cooperation between prison-based and community-based professionals who provide aftercare services. Since many individuals have relatively short stays in prison in the Netherlands, it is especially

important to have quick screenings upon entry into prison to make an inventory of the problems and reintegration needs of individuals *and* adequately share this information with relevant agencies. The importance of screenings and information sharing is highlighted by the fact that we find that prison stays of less than 10 days can have just as much (or little) effect on meeting these basic conditions as much longer prison stays. Increasing the cooperation between the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency, the municipalities, and probation services by way of the administrative act 'Providing Opportunities for Reentry' (*het bestuurlijk akkoord, Kansen bieden voor reïntegratie*, JenV et al., 2019) seems therefore promising. Since this act only was signed in 2019, the cohorts in this monitor were not able to profit from any potential benefits stemming from this closer collaboration. Even so, first evaluations from the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Justice and Security (2023) suggest some improvements in the cooperation between these agencies have been made as a result of this act, but there is a lot of room for improvement.

To gain more insight into the complex processes surrounding aftercare services and reintegration success, more in-depth research is needed. The Dutch Research and Data Centre has been monitoring Dutch aftercare policies since 2010 and has consistently found that a large number of formerly incarcerated individuals have problems meeting the basic conditions for a successful reintegration and that these conditions are related to recidivism. To further our knowledge, it is essential to consider not only whether these conditions are met, but also to investigate ways to solve these problems or prevent problems from arising or worsening while individuals are incarcerated, and to understand under which circumstances aftercare policies contribute to a safer society. This requires a mixed-method approach involving incarcerated individuals and the multiple actors involved with aftercare which combines data on reentry experiences gathered through interviews as well as case studies to determine the pitfalls and success of the reentry process. Moreover, it is essential that information about the problems and needs concerning the basic conditions are registered and made available for research purposes. Only then can future aftercare monitors further our knowledge on the necessary conditions for a successful reentry and determine whether Dutch aftercare policies – as a whole – are successful in achieving their objectives.

Het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum (WODC), Kennisinstituut voor de rechtsstaat, is een onafhankelijk kennisinstituut dat valt onder het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. Het WODC draagt bij aan behoud en verbetering van de rechtsstaat via het (laten) uitvoeren van kwalitatief hoog wetenschappelijk onderzoek. En door het aanbieden van gevraagde en ongevraagde kennis, verbeterpunten en (waar mogelijk) denkrichtingen.

Meer informatie:

www.wodc.nl