

## Are Former Male Inmates Excluded from Social Life?

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### ABSTRACT

*Based on Becker's conceptualization of deviance, the phenomena of labeling and stigmatization of people who commit antisocial acts will result in their social marginalization and exclusion, which may result in relapse into criminal behavior. By the means of qualitative research, this paper looks at different forms of social exclusion, as possible catalysts of male recidivism in Romania. Turning away from the perspective that the offender alone is responsible for the acts he committed and for his own rehabilitation, the authors demonstrate that social exclusion was experienced by recidivists in different ways, favouring the perpetration of antisocial acts. The identified spheres of social exclusion that mainly need to be targeted by social policies and social assistance are: employment, housing, family relationships and social networks.*

**Keywords:** Recidivism - Social exclusion – Inmates - Social reintegration

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Criminal behavior generates the constant concern of society in general and of specialists in socio-human sciences in particular, with the declared aim of its understanding and prevention. In this sense, prevention and intervention, aimed at rehabilitating different forms of criminal behavior, are declared priorities for actions undertaken by the social and penal politics of the state.

Almost two centuries ago, Nathaniel Hawthorne (quoted by Gottschalk, 2002, p.196), suggested that prisons might be a necessity, though they are not desirable institutions, describing them as “the black flower of our civilization”. Prisons were thus associated with some “resistant weeds”, which refuse to disappear. During the last three decades, these “weeds” have proliferated across the United States, given the fact that there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of such institutions. While the boom in prison population is well documented, the causes bringing about such a situation, as well as its consequences and the possibilities of its reduction, are not well understood. According to

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Mallik-Kane & Visser (2008), every year almost 700 000 men and women are released from prison and return to communities throughout the United States, but this change of situation is not always successful: two thirds of these persons are arrested within three years and a half also return to prison, either due to their violation of terms of parole or to the commitment of new crimes. Even if this phenomenon is not equally widespread in Europe, the issue of imprisonment and re-imprisonment is carefully analyzed by researchers and public institutions. It might be interesting to consider the approach of the *Social Exclusion Unit* (2002) in England and Wales, which looks at the costs of recidivism. Victims and communities bear the largest part of this burden. The social exclusion of inmates and of their families entails additional costs for society, including the costs of accommodation loss, the treatment of drug addiction, the poverty of families, child care or unemployment. The situation is further complicated by the fact that nobody has the responsibility, or the resources, to prevent such phenomena.

In Romania, the percentage of former inmates that repeat criminal acts is about 54% (Isăilă, Bădescu and Miron, 2011), which demonstrates, to a certain extent, the failure of penal politics in Romania.

Thus, the problem of recidivists is universally valid, requiring scientific approaches that might bring important contributions to understanding the causes, consequences and dynamics of the prison population.

Hutchinson (2006) has pointed out that the risk/needs approach changes the traditional rehabilitation agenda, by emphasizing the differences between the criminogenic and the non-criminogenic needs. This last category includes aspects such as poverty, health, social relations, etc., while criminogenic needs refer to aspects such as the ability to become a parent, to own a house, the need to cease drug use and so on. “The inclusion of needs in the evaluation of risk redirects efforts related to intervention and links risk management strategies with rehabilitation strategies” (page number? p. 458). Thus traditional rehabilitation, criticized for being costly and inefficient, is redirected, or directed towards offenders, taking into consideration individual risks/needs. From the perspective of risk/needs theories, the offender is made responsible for the acts committed, for his/her own program of treatment and rehabilitation.

Among the different perspectives on former convicts’ rehabilitation, there is a scientific concern (White and Sutton, 1995) for demonstrating the way in which the understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes of former inmates should be central to any plan aiming at changing the environment, with the view of reducing or preventing criminality.

The “criminal relapse” of released inmates has been analysed by LeBel, Burnett, Maruna & Bushway (2008). Thus, as former inmates leave prisons with only a small amount of money and no personal savings, they face financial difficulties and problems in finding some reasonable accommodation. Given the time spent outside the labour force and the stigma associated with incarceration, they face problems in finding and keeping a job. Former inmates also face the challenge of restoring family links, and many of them struggle with the temptation of alcohol and/or drug use. It is believed that all these problems increase the chance of reoffending. The experience of conviction – and especially that of incarceration – might increase the possibility of relapsing into crime. Prisoners no longer have access to social opportunities, being at the same time exposed to antisocial opportunities within the infamous “schools of crime” that naturally develop in prisons and juvenile correction institutions.

The main objective of this study is identifying how social exclusion leads to criminal recidivism.

## 2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical perspective that guided this study was *symbolic interactionism*, which focuses on the means of using symbolic meanings in interpersonal relations. The symbolic interactionism component that addresses the phenomenon of deviance is known as *labeling theory* by some authors and as *stigma theory* by others.

In the light of labeling theory, deviance is simply understood as “behavior thus labeled by people”. Symbolic interactionism directs us to study the labeling process itself. We should therefore ask ourselves “why would society exclude some of its members from a free and complete participation in social life? And what mechanism is used for this purpose?” (Crotty, 2005, p.395). Becker considered labeling to be at the center of the social process of deviance creation. Deviance “is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender.” The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label” (Becker, 1963, p.9).

The conclusion that emerges from the theoretical framework presented above is that the phenomena of labeling and stigmatizing those who commit antisocial acts determine their social marginalization and exclusion, which may direct them to relapse into crime.

## 3. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Paradigmatic models that explain exclusion have been described by Estivill (2003) as follows: the paradigm of *solidarity*, which explains exclusion as being “the break of social links and a weakening of relations between society as a whole and the citizen”; *the specialization model*, which argues that exclusion results from “relations among individuals with different capacities, abilities and interests in the context of exchanges that occur within society and on the market”; and *monopolist*, as named by Silver (date1994), which has its origins in the perception of society as hierarchical structure in which different classes and groups compete for “the control of resources”.

In the context of imprisonment, a report by the Social Exclusion Unit (2001 2002 earlier in tex) presents some statistical data that evoke the situation of exclusion that some groups of inmates are confronted with: 56% of them were unemployed before the punishment was established; 50% of them present a reduced capacity to read; 80% were unable to read; 67% were unable to count; 38% did not have a house upon release; 47% had debts at the time of sentencing; 66% admitted having used drugs (other than alcohol) during the year prior to incarceration; and more than 60% had been expelled from schools at some point, as compared to less than 0.2% of the population at large.

Imprisonment has socially excluding effects, visible in the sphere of the material and the social capital of convicts, as emphasized by Murray (2007). Imprisonment increases not only pre-existing disadvantages, but may also lead to the loss of material resources in the case of prisoners and their families. Surveys and experiments conducted so far (cite these studies? Pager, 2003; Holzer et al., 2004) indicate that those who have been convicted or incarcerated face employment problems. Other research has concluded that: material exclusion, as a result of incarceration, should be analyzed in the larger context of reduced social capital; legislation in some states excludes former inmates from social redistribution and public aid respectively,

from employment opportunities and personal responsibility, from medical aid and access to state housing, to benefit and from other forms of social help. Most wives of prisoners have been confronted with a deterioration in their financial situation as a result of their spouse incarceration; families of inmates encounter problems related to financial resources, as well as difficulties associated with the costs of visits to prison or for sending different objects or sums of money to imprisoned relatives; the social capital of children is threatened by their parents' incarceration as persons who become responsible for their upbringing are forced to work more; they are also confronted with increased emotional pressure; families are often forced to leave the area in which they lived, and children to change schools.

The desistance paradigm (McNeill, 2006) may be useful in this article if we start from its premises, namely taking into consideration the risks, needs and obstacles involved in desisting from criminal lifestyle, by the use and development of ex-prisoners' social capital.

Approaching the issue of total institutions, Goffman (2004, pp.25-26) states that although the institutionalized person, in this case the former inmate, might resume some roles if and when he/she returns to the outside world, it is obvious that other losses suffered remain irrevocable and the individual experiences it painfully as such. It might happen that the individual will not have, in a later stage in their life cycle, the opportunity to recover the time they did not spend perfecting their studies or career and establishing and consolidating relationships.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of our research is to test the influence of certain phenomena, related to social exclusion, upon the situation of criminal recidivism. In doing this research, criminal recidivism is the dependent variable, while factors related to social exclusion represent independent variables. It is obvious that we can not speak of a "total" relation of determination between the dependent variable and the independent variables related to the concept of social exclusion, as committing antisocial acts also includes a certain amount of rational action on the part of the author.

In formulating the research question we took into account the conclusion of a study by Padfield and Maruna (2006), according to which the system removes prisoners from their spouses, homes and families; reduces their chances of becoming legally employed again (in those cases in which they were employed at the moment of incarceration) and makes prospective new employers suspicious; limits their access to an environment consisting only of other people experiencing a similar situation; and at the moment of release inmates are sent into the outside world only with a bus ticket, 50 dollars in their pocket and a stigma. However, they are expected to avoid any illegal means of improving their situation. Padfield and Maruna (2006) refer to the opinion of Verne McArthur, presented in the book *Coming Out Cold: Community Reentry from a State Reformatory*, who argue that "the released prisoner is faced with a situation that practically ensures failure".

Given this context, the research question is: how does social exclusion contribute to the emergence of criminal recidivism?

The research approach requires the definition of the two variables and their operationalization.

In common language (*Webster's dictionary*), the word *recidivism* comes from the Latin *recidivus* and is defined as being "the act of a person repeating undesirable behavior after having performed a similar form of behavior, with negative consequences". In literature, the

historicity of the concept of criminal recidivism is presented by Israel & Chui (2006, p.184), as there is no universally accepted measure of recidivism. In some studies, recidivism has been defined as “a new arrest” or as a “new period of time spent in prison”. We shall consider recidivism as being the situation in which a person is imprisoned again, after committing a new crime. This definition of recidivism differs from the more usual one of any re-conviction.

Addressing the issue of the origin of social exclusion, Silver & Miller (2003) point out that European theorists believe that social exclusion is distinct from poverty. Poverty is a result of resource distribution, while exclusion is in a relational process of decline in participation, solidarity and access to social life.

Table 1 presents the conceptual framework of social exclusion, in accordance with the objective of this study.

Table nr.1 Conceptual framework of social exclusion

Concept	Dimension	Indicators
Exclusion	Occupational status	Occupational status
		Qualification level
		Qualification/re-qualification opportunities
		Degree of acceptance in the labor market
	Housing situation	Form of housing
		Access to social housing
		Characteristics of housing
	Family situation	Degree of acceptance within the family
		Partnership opportunities
	Interpersonal relations	Degree of acceptance on the part of neighbors
		Degree of acceptance in the group of friends
	Relations with the representatives of institutions	Degree of acceptance at the level of institutions

The analysis of the characteristics of the prison population in Oradea Penitentiary showed that inmates are generally aged between 21 and 40 years old, come mainly from urban areas and have a low schooling level.

The research method was chosen taking into account the low educational level and poor communication skills of the persons investigated.

The sample was selected taking into account the high number of ex-prisoners' convictions, their willingness to be interviewed and communication skills.

Given the nature of our research, which aims at probing some aspects that might lead to a thorough understanding of significances resulting from the relations between former inmates and different persons they encounter when restarting their lives after a period of detention, we have chosen the semi-structured interview as a research method. The interview guide was structured in relation to the following main topics: criminal history, employment situation, housing situation, family and interpersonal relationships, views about relapse and demographic data. The questions were asked by one of the authors, who works in the social reintegration section of the penitentiary. Interviews were held in a prison office, being first

recorded and then transcribed into electronic format. Thus, using a recorder, 26 interviews with recidivist offenders from Oradea penitentiary, and 3 former inmates that did not relapse into crime after more than 3 years following their release from prison, have been performed and recorded.

Given the nature of the theme, thematic analysis will predominate, where the dimensions of the exclusion concept (occupational, locative, familial, interpersonal and institutional) will represent topics for analysis. These will be interpreted taking into account the unit of data, namely that segment of communication that allows the capturing of the positive, neutral or negative orientation of information. Interviews were recorded on tape recorder and subsequently transcribed, in order to facilitate understanding and interpretation. Parts of transcripts that have relevance to the research objectives are reproduced below. We should mention first that the reproduction of fragments from interviews is intended to be as accurate as possible, and for this reason regionalisms, certain errors of expression, disjointed words and sometimes almost obsessive repetitions of words have been included. In fact these transcripts reflect a certain difficulty in expression, hesitations and limited linguistic range, reflecting some of the social particularities of respondents, namely their low schooling level, their different ethnicities and social alienation, amongst others.

## 5. FINDINGS

The processing of first data provides information about the criminal history of those interviewed. Thus, most recidivists committed crimes of theft and robbery, though homicide, attempted murder, blows causing deaths, rape and fraud are also present. Therefore antisocial acts against individuals predominate, most of them having robbery as purpose. As regards the number of imprisonments, the investigated subjects have an average of 4.5 imprisonments, from 2 up to 13. When asked to indicate the reasons for committing offenses, 22 recidivists suggested elements associated to poverty. Other reasons given were: alcohol consumption, peers and associates, the desire for entertainment, jealousy and others. The last information concerning their criminal history referred to the years of prison sentences. Thus, the shortest period of time spent in prison was of 3 years, whilst the longest was 17 years, resulting in an average of 10 years and two months.

The analysis of the *occupational exclusion* theme reveals some interesting data such as: more than half of the persons interviewed (16) had no professional qualification, while the others had skills of low complexity (tractor driver, shoemaker, carpenter, locksmith, plumber and welder); only 5 recidivists worked prior to their imprisonment, the others (21) had never been really employed (some of them being only daily workers). A rather surprising explanation for the fact that the persons interviewed never worked before committing their first crime is related to the fact that criminal activity began at an early age, even before their coming of age (14 situations), which led to the passing of custodial sentences in juvenile rehabilitation centers or even in prison. After the execution of the imprisonment penalty, 19 recidivists said they had worked, while the other 6 never did so. The time between leaving prison and finding a job varies from individual to individual, some managing to become employed immediately, others later on, even after one year. Until managing to find a job, almost all the interviewees had several attempts, on average about 4 attempts. For those who were rejected in their attempt to access a job the reasons given were: their criminal record (9 cases), lack of documents (3 cases) and of required skills (1 case). Among those who managed to find a job, half said that the employer was informed about their criminal past, either by them, or by other sources. When asked about the source of revenue for their daily lives until their first salary, respondents said they relied on the support of family and friends (13 cases), while others admitted they relied on what they could steal (7 cases). When asked about the existence of

some connection between criminal acts and the lack of employment, 19 recidivists answered affirmatively and 3 negatively.

After returning to their communities, the large majority of former inmates worked in the same field as before (13), and only 3 inmates changed their occupation. While imprisoned, 23 inmates worked sporadically, 3 did not work at all, most of them saying that work during the detention period brought various benefits such as: acquiring skills – 9 cases; getting used to work – 8 cases; earning money and days considered as executed.

In order to identify possible forms of exclusion from employment, or some processes of marginalization by the employer or colleagues, as a result of inmates' criminal history, we have selected the following representative passage from an interview:

*“I was often refused by an employer, as they were afraid I might steal from them or rob them and wherever I'd go they looked at me and when they saw I was in jail, they rejected me; so wherever I'd go I had the doors closed because of them, and when people looked at me I was regarded as different, I felt that; if I had a job and some money or I was paid accordingly maybe I wouldn't have stolen, right? I saw some difference, for I was given some harder work to do, or I was never allowed to work close to some office, I was sent further away and they never let me next to some office or shop so to say, but at a larger distance, so as I could not see what was going on there, in order not to touch, steal or something like that and when they paid me I was paid less” (case no 8, I.D., 38 years, 5 imprisonments, 15 years executed for theft and robbery)*

Such situations are presented in other studies as well (Kubrin et al., 2007), which indicates the fact that for most former inmates the existence of limited contacts with the labor market becomes a more important problem in connection with the incarceration stigma, ascribed to former prisoners.'

Lack of housing is a form of exclusion with negative implications upon the life quality of the person released from prison, which makes integration into the labor market more difficult, as well as the maintenance of health, continuation of family life, etc. *Exclusion from housing opportunities* is more limited than exclusion from the labor force, being mentioned by a third of the interviewed persons. After release, most former inmates (19) lived with their parents and few returned to their own house (4) or to other places (4). Most respondents (16) said they did not encounter housing problems, but there is a segment (7) who were confronted with such problems. However, of those respondents who needed social housing, only 2 managed to obtain such a place to live.

One of the recidivists made a shelter for himself, where he lived together with other people:

*“Until I got a house I stayed in a hut; if you have no place to live is more difficult in this life; if you have no place to stay, you live on the streets and sleep outside is very difficult; I made a hut at the size of a stable, with 20 wooden beams and boards, of about 13 square meters in which I lived with other 13-14 people in a single room without electricity, heat, or anything else.” (case no. 1, A.M., 36 years, 7 imprisonments, 11 years in prison for theft, robbery and attempted murder).*

Other inmates identified a direct causal connection between the absence of housing and committing a crime:

*“I was a kid living on the street, if I hadn’t been so I wouldn’t have been in prison today, we were poor, it rained in our home as it rained outside, we used to sleep in parks”. (case no 15, G.I., 30 years old, 4 imprisonments, 12 years spent in prison for theft, robbery and attempted murder).*

Finding a home is probably the first challenge faced by inmates after their leaving prison. According to a study that presented the results of interviewing 1100 inmates (Mallik-Kane & Visser, 2008), during the first month after release almost a third of the interviewed persons did not manage to find a home. Starting with the first night after leaving prison, the family was the main source that provided housing for former prisoners, although this situation was rather variable in the case of men as compared to the situation of women. Many respondents (about 2 of 10 men and 3 of 10 women) said they had problems in maintaining a house after release.

Analyzing the theme of *family exclusion*, we could obtain a first interesting piece of information, namely the fact that of all respondents only one is married, while all the others (25) are unmarried or live with a partner. Thus almost all interviewed persons have an uncertain marital status and a low degree of family cohesion. This marital instability was explained (Harman et al, 2007) by the fact that the separation associated with incarceration may be characterized as an ambiguous loss, in which one of the partners is physically absent, but psychologically present. However, the pain associated with detention may determine the perception of many partners as absent from the psychological point of view as well. The existence of a possible *familial exclusion* has been observed at two points particularly, one during the period of imprisonment and one immediately after liberation.

During the period of time spent in prison, most recidivists (19) said that their relationship with family members is good or very good, even if sometimes their detention has made their parents feel ashamed.

*“during the first periods of time spent in jail, to speak at first, I made my family feel ashamed, my mother and my father had to move, to change jobs because of me, but things returned to normal”. (case no.9, C.H., 30 years old, 4 imprisonments, 6 and a half years in prison for theft and robbery).*

However there are situations when the relationship with parents goes well during the period of punishment, but is not similar in the case of the partner.

*“With parents it is very good, but not with the partner because she left me and looked for another”(case no. 23, G.B., 38 years old, 10 imprisonments, 18 years in prison for theft, robbery and rape).*

And after release, the support and attachment of the family is experienced, sometimes with remarkable effort:

*“ They helped me, took money from the bank for me not to go to steal, so as I’ll try to do something” (case no. 14, F.G., 28 years old, 3 imprisonments, 9 years in prison for theft).*

The role of the family in preventing criminal recidivism is argued (Social Exclusion Unit, London, 2002) by the fact that maintaining family ties might prevent relapse and help inmates return successfully to the community. Often, however, family support after release is limited and there are moments when relationships are most likely to break. Limited help from the

families of inmates is often associated with the fact that these families face financial, emotional or health-related problems, when a family member is imprisoned.

As regards *interpersonal exclusion*, two questions were asked, the first referring to the way former inmates were accepted by neighbours and the second one regarded the relationship with the group of friends.

As regards the relationship with the neighbours, about 2/3 of the former inmates had a good reception and degree of acceptance after their “journey” through the Romanian penitentiary system, while the other third was confronted with a rather oscillating attitude.

*“They behaved as usually because I have given them all due respect, I never hurt any neighbor, yet it seemed to me that they looked somehow ... strangely, but they did not say anything, “it’s good that you have returned, be good from now on” I never hurt any neighbor, that’s why they behaved so well”. (case no.10, P.T., 37 years old, 4 imprisonments, 7 years in prison for theft and deceit)*

The group of friends generally shows the same attitude as that of neighbors. Some former inmates found reliable support in friends, especially those who did not have a family or could not rely on one.

*“Others gave us a helping hand, some food, a piece of garment, what they could, saying that “it’s nothing you were in jail, it can happen to anyone”(case no.1, A.M., 36 years old, 7 imprisonments, 11 years in prison for theft, robbery and attempted murder).*

The attitude of acceptance shown by the group of neighbors was explained (Cunha, 2008) in that the continuity of the external world is ensured by relatives, neighbors and acquaintances and weakens the symbolic border represented by prison. The stigma initially associated with incarceration is established long before the time of detention, by the belonging to disreputable environments.

The analysis of the theme of *exclusion manifested by state institutions* in relation to the former inmates indicates that more than half of the respondents (14 respondents) argue they felt marginalized by the representatives of state institutions.

*“very bad, very bad, when I resorted to them I never received a word of encouragement, well, to say so and so, nothing, nothing, we have nothing for you; at the police, at the mayor’s house, I received no word, no good word, something, go there; these people don’t understand you, they close the door in front of a convict. (case no.4, M.K., 36 years, 11 imprisonments, 12 years in prison for theft and rape)*

In order to solve their social problems with the help of state institutions, some recidivists end up raising rhetorical questions, which unfortunately are not managed properly by those who are responsible:

*“I went to the Council, again, I went to the prefect, down to the town and he wasn’t there, it was somebody else and I explained well to him, without hurting him that “Sir, I came out of jail and what should I do, where should I go to find a job, I have no place to work, no place to stay”, I explained so well and he says “I can’t dismiss another who sweeps or mows and put you there instead” and then I said “and how can I live? Do I have to commit crimes again? To commit crimes again and end up where I was in order to be able to live?” “I don’t*

*care”, he says, I did not want to tell him anything, I went out, I had nothing to say, very bad...” (case no 23, G.B. 38 years old, 10 imprisonments, 18 years in prison for theft, robbery and rape).*

The opinions of the three persons who were in prison and did not relapse into crime over more than 3 years and for whom the passage of time means a decrease in their chances to return to prison are most often consistent with those of other incarcerated recidivists. There is also a contrasting side of information provided by the two groups, especially as regards factual considerations. In this regard we note a clear difference as regards the criminal past of the respondents, meaning that if the first group (recidivists) mainly committed the crimes of theft and robbery, the second group has another kind of criminal record: fraud, tax evasion, drugs traffic, explosives traffic, car theft, counterfeiting and forgery, in other words actions less directed against a certain person, but aiming to achieve a more important financial goal. At the same time, no person from the second group ever returned to prison after the first custodial sentence. On the other hand it seems that the reasons that lead to offenses, as compared to those committed by people in the first group, are not based on aspects associated with basic needs, but are of another kind (peer group, negligence). The period of time spent in prison is also consistently different in the case of the two groups, respectively 4 years and 8 months for those outside prison, as compared to 10 years and 2 months for the recidivists in detention. The level of education and qualification of those that did not relapse into crime (accounting statistician, polymers operator) is significantly higher than that of the incarcerated recidivists. There is also an age difference between the two groups: the first includes people of 32.6 years, while the second includes people of 42.6 years (38.3 years old at the time of liberation), differences that also constitute gauges of life experience. The marital status of the two groups presents major differences, in the sense that, if in the first group (recidivists) individuals are either unmarried or cohabit with someone, the second group is made up of persons who have a legally constituted family life.

With reference to phenomena of social exclusion to which those that have left prisons are subject, the opinions in the second group are relatively similar.

*Occupational exclusion* is revealed by the second group, within about the same parameters:

*“sometimes, yes, and when the individual comes to be a so-called recidivist, the situation is already different, things are perceived differently, the persons themselves are regarded differently, and it depends on the offense that you did; as taxi driver I worked for 3 firms and among colleagues there are some who look at you .. „um, that...” not as much the owner of the company as colleagues „this is the one who was in prison”; in a certain group nobody took this into consideration, in another „um, that who was in jail, that who was there sometimes and was in prison and now here he is...” , the label of „convict” is inferred, yes, you need to know how to explain it to some people, „”yes, I was imprisoned for...” , so, in various discussions, I was told, don’t be so bold because you are the one who...” . (case no.27, G.B., 56 years old, 6 years in prison for fraud and tax evasion, released 5 years and 2 months ago)*

The individuals in the second group argue that we could talk about the existence of some *exclusion from housing opportunities*, that might lead to committing new antisocial acts.

*„now it depends on everyone’s way of thinking, what can I say, there are others who practically want to return if they have no place to live, while there are also others who do their best to build a future for themselves”. (case no.29, I.S., 40 years old, 2 years in prison for forgery and use of forgery, released 6 years and a month ago)*

*Family exclusion* was almost nonexistent in the case of those who did not return to prison, relationships with family members gaining great importance both during the sentence and after release. One respondent, however, spoke of difficulties when trying to constitute his own family.

*„so ...they stood by me, supported me every month, encouraged me all the time and I really wanted to repay all their efforts, so ... I would never think of committing some crime again, to put them again in this situation, for it would be too large a shock for them, for my parents”(case no. 28, L.H., 32 years old, 6 years and 4 months in prison for drug trafficking, explosives trafficking and car theft, released 4 years and 9 months ago)*

*Interpersonal relations* demonstrated by the group of neighbors and friends presents a similar pattern in terms of attitudes, though in one case the group of friends filtered good from bad „elements”.

*„as we live in a house and do not have as many neighbors, OK, people are watching, people gossip, „he came back”and wait and if nothing happens in a very short while it is OK, you become integrated, people expect you to relapse into crime, something to happen, something that you do, „the thief returned home, something will disappear in the neighborhood”.. as long as you don’t relapse, time makes them forget everything”(case no.28, L.H., 32 years old, 6 years and 4 months in prison for drugs trafficking, explosives trafficking and car theft, released 4 years and 9 months ago)*

As regards the behavior of the *representatives of state institutions*, the manifested exclusion has a low value due to different reasons (former inmates hide their criminal past as much as possible or avoid contact with state organizations as far as they can).

*„well, if they didn’t know I was arrested; I did not have any such case yet, I did not encounter problems, um ... with rehabilitation, Mr. prosecutor and Mr. judge were talking to me as if i were nobody, a person without a future, how to say, they told me so; I had no contact with other institutions in which people would know I was arrested and raise all kinds of obstacles”(case no.29, I.S., 40 years old, 2 years in prison for forgery and use of forgery, released 6 years and one month ago)*

The interviews revealed that poorer ex-prisoners are more vulnerable to forms of social exclusion than those who are better off, as the latter may use their resources to overcome obstacles related to social exclusion.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

A first conclusion drawn from the introductory questions allows us to build a socio-juridical profile of the Romanian recidivist offender. Thus this is a person of about 32 years old, who chiefly commits crimes of theft and robbery, has a very low level of education and qualifications and is weakly integrated from a familial point of view.

With regards to phenomena of social exclusion: three quarters of the recidivists argued that they felt excluded from finding a job, a third felt excluded from housing opportunities; a quarter experienced exclusion from their families; a third perceived an oscillatory, slightly exclusive attitude on the part of neighbors and friends; about half of them said that the representatives of state institutions displayed a form of behaviour that determines exclusion.

Using the interview method several mechanisms and forms of marginalization and exclusion of former inmates, identified in forms of behaviour displayed by people from different social groups, have been revealed.

Thus, in relation to the *attempt to find a job* we could observe attitudes of rejection both on the part of employers and of work mates, either by the rejection of former inmates or the allocation to them of more difficult jobs or of work under tight supervision, sometimes combined with biased language. Often, the process of occupational marginalization is facilitated by other unfavourable aspects of social life, such as the low degree of education and the lack of professional skills, all these increasing difficulties faced by former inmates in finding a job. In other situations the lack of documents, such as identity cards, represents a major obstacle in preparing legal forms of employment. Some recidivists managed to indicate another cause of their refusal at work, more exactly the global economic situation, characterised by unemployment and fewer opportunities to find a job. By analyzing the verbal and the non-verbal language of employers, as perceived by former inmates in search of a job, we can identify a certain attitude of defense and prevention of damage and acts that might bring damage to the respective firms. These feelings of insecurity are normal and sometimes justified and they depend on several factors related both to the personality of the employer and the profile of the firm, but also to the applicant's criminal biography. The idea of finding a job abroad is widely embraced by many recidivists, this being perceived as an opportunity to restore a life that is no longer marked by their commission of some offense.

*Housing problems*, though fewer than those related to finding a job, create difficulties in the natural development of life, as their existence is related to other aspects of social life, such as starting a family or the need to have a job in order to ensure the money needed for housing and other expenses. There were dramatic life situations, for instance when some respondents had no place to stay during the night, being forced to sleep in the street, under bridges or build illegal shelters without utilities, some openly assuming the status of homeless person. Even in cases when respondents benefited from more favorable housing situations, we can not speak of a reasonable housing status as some of them were sheltered in night shelters or in rural areas, in less than mediocre conditions. Housing problems may be encountered year after year even after the release and in the case of persons who did not relapse, as indicated by a former inmate who did not return to prison, after some nights spent in cars, in different depots, with some acquaintances and only later in a rented room. We could also perceive the frustration of former inmates who did not have the material possibility to leave their parents' home, especially in the perspective of an independent life that might allow their cohabitation with a partner with whom to start a family.

*Familial exclusion* is at the lowest rates, but by means of the interview we could understand the explanations related to family problems experienced by inmates (abandoned children, raised in state institutions, parents who died and so on). It is worth taking into consideration the sacrifices and the pain of parents who were sometimes forced to face the shame of their children's incarceration, or become indebted and borrow from banks to keep their offspring away from a group of „dubious” friends. What is reasonable in the family/inmate relationship is the fact that such relations are not distorted to such extent as to push the recidivist to commit new criminal acts again, in other words the criminal lifestyle is not a way of life that is transmitted from one generation to another. Family relationships are not damaged so as to lead to intergenerational transmission of a criminal lifestyle. We could perceive the regret of recidivists when talking about the loss of a parent, such an absence being felt acutely, as inmates are conscious of having lost not only a parent but also a form of support in rebuilding their lives after punishment. An interesting issue is that of recidivist inmates who were abandoned by parents at very early ages and were raised in orphanages, in the case of whom a

separate research would be indicated. The role of family acceptance in resuming normal family life course is highlighted by the experiences shared by those who have relapsed, both within the family in which they were born and in the newly constituted one.

*Exclusion from neighbors and the group of friends* also presents low rates, being manifested by changes in attitude both at the verbal and the non-verbal level. Relations with neighbors and the group of friends were quite diverse. In both groups there were situations of „separation”and „encouragement”. The attitudes of the group of friends were somehow different from two perspectives. The first refers to the inclination of the group to commit reprehensible acts, which probably influenced the commission of offenses for which the inmates were imprisoned, these determining two types of reaction, either of continuation of such relationships, or of „repositioning” in relation to those friends. The second perspective is a temporary one, which determined the „deformation” (weakening? yes) of the respective relations with the passage of time and the increase of material or family-related discrepancies.

*Exclusion determined by the representatives of state institutions* is generally manifested through the latter’s inability to help, their indifference or neglect, these aspects being more obvious at the level of municipalities. Former inmates complained about the absence of communication and empathy on the part of state representatives, exacerbated by the avoidance of attempts to solve the problems of former inmates. It might be possible that the relationship between *former recidivists* and *representatives of the state* was defective due to a negative preconceptions directed against any representative of the state, as it can be negatively influenced by the latter’s preconception that any former inmate is dangerous and cannot be socially reintegrated. A problem of institutions that should engage in the social rehabilitation of former inmates is the absence of legislation that would provide real opportunities for social reintegration, public officials being unable to solve the problems raised by former prisoners.

Most prisoners that repeat offences are confronted with forms of social exclusion that remove them from a normal course of social life, but instead there is a force that attracts them towards criminal associates that might provide them illegal means of living. Such realities, confirmed by this study and other research, should be considered as starting points in shaping strategies for the resettlement of prison population segments.

The theoretical framework from which we started, namely symbolic interactionism, which claims that the labeling and stigmatization of ex-prisoners may lead to relapse, is confirmed only as regards the possibility of their finding a job and obtaining housing, factors that may determine the resumption of anti-social behaviour.

The limits of this research are related to the weak inference and the study of exclusively the male population. The study acknowledges that female offending might have different dynamics of social exclusion as a criminogenic process; we only dealt here with male recidivism.

In terms of scientific validity and fidelity the study poses risks that might be generated by: the low level of credibility of information provided by people who have a repetitive criminal behavior; the desire to give socially desirable answers, in order to exonerate the acts committed; probable distortions on the part of the researcher, as a result of familiarity with the prison environment.

## 7. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Proposals to reduce criminal recidivism, by limiting phenomena of social exclusion include: efficient strategies to access employment (through fiscal facilities for the employers who hire work force from among former convicts, job fairs for such groups, organizing training courses in areas required by the labor market, etc.); identification of opportunities to ensure minimum housing conditions (counseling regarding possibilities to occupy a house, opportunities to benefit from social housing, encouraging collaboration among private-public partnerships in ensuring some housing services, etc.); evaluating the inmate's social networks and strengthening them (establishing and consolidating family, collegial, religious/spiritual and professional relations, as each of these offer a variety of emotional and economic resources); adopting legislation to facilitate the reintegration of former inmates (through the implication and the bringing together of community governmental and non governmental factors, in order to support the activity of reintegrating former prisoners); ensuring a due importance to services of probation that have competence in the evaluation of risk for relapse into crime of persons who committed offenses under criminal law, in order to inform the court of the possibility of future repetition of criminal behaviour and thus facilitate the making of decisions that are as adequate as possible in relation to offenders.

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