

## Ex-inmates and vicious circles: vulnerabilities, recidivism and new crimes

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### Abstract

The vulnerability of women who have left the prison system in Joinville and Itajaí (SC) to recidivism is intrinsically linked to the fragility of Brazilian social rehabilitation programs, which, instead of promoting effective reintegration, often perpetuate cycles of exclusion. This bibliographic and descriptive study sought to analyze how the structural inefficiency of these programs — marked by the discontinuity of public policies, precarious psychosocial care and lack of intersectional approaches (gender, class and race) — contributes to criminal recidivism among women ex-inmates. The research started from the problem "How do social programs influence the vulnerability of these women, mitigating or aggravating recidivism?", defending the hypothesis that their ineffectiveness amplifies social risks. Questionnaires with closed questions were applied to former inmates, and the data, analyzed quantitatively, revealed that a large part did not have access to professional training after prison, another significant portion faced discrimination in the labor market and a massive portion reported the absence of psychological follow-up after exit. These results show that the lack of institutional support consolidates trajectories of marginalization, reinforcing the need for intersectoral policies that integrate social assistance, mental health, and education.

**Keywords:** Crime. Gender. Public Policies. Social Reintegration.



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## INTRODUCTION

The social reintegration of women who have left the prison system in the cities of Joinville and Itajaí (SC) faces complex challenges, marked by fragmented public policies and the absence of specialized psychological support. Criminal recidivism in this group is revealed as a direct consequence of structural flaws in rehabilitation programs, which neglect intersectional dimensions such as gender, class, and race. Given this scenario, it is necessary to investigate how the discontinuity of government actions and the precariousness of resources influence trajectories of exclusion.

Although the legal discourse affirms the importance of reintegration, reality shows that most women ex-prisoners do not receive minimum conditions to rebuild their lives. The lack of access to professional training and the recurrence of social stigmas reinforce cycles of marginalization. In this sense, the analysis of the vulnerability of these women requires a critical approach to existing policies, questioning the extent to which they actually fulfill their stated purpose.

The historical perspective presented by Aguirre (2009) allows us to understand how the Brazilian prison system, since its origins, reproduces mechanisms of exclusion that affect already marginalized groups. In the case of women, this dynamic intensifies, since prison punishes and deepens preexisting inequalities. The analysis of prison structures in Joinville and Itajaí reveals continuities with this exclusionary model, in which rehabilitation remains an unfulfilled promise.

If the prison operates as a space of segregation, leaving it does not guarantee a break with this condition. Many women, when leaving the system, encounter even greater barriers to reintegrating socially. The absence of policies that consider their specific needs — such as access to housing, employment, and mental health — pushes them into situations of extreme vulnerability. In this way, recidivism cannot be attributed only to individual choices, but to a structural context that makes real alternatives unfeasible.

Adorno (2002) discusses the crisis in the criminal justice system, pointing to the inability of institutions to effectively promote social reintegration. In the case of ex-inmate women, this crisis is manifested in the lack of programs that consider their specific trajectories, especially in cities such as Joinville and Itajaí, where

the formal labor market is restrictive. The absence of intersectoral policies reinforces the idea that prison is configured as a destination of no return.

Post-prison marginalization is not an isolated phenomenon, but the result of a system that prioritizes punishment over reintegration. When women who have left the country do not find legitimate livelihood opportunities, a return to crime emerges as one of the few viable alternatives. The analysis of this process requires, therefore, a critique of the structures that perpetuate exclusion, evidencing how the lack of institutional support contributes to recidivism.

Ferreira (1993) approaches citizenship as a social construction that depends on access to basic rights. In the context of former inmates, the denial of these rights — whether due to discrimination in the labor market or lack of psychosocial assistance — places them in a position of "sub-citizenship." In Joinville and Itajaí, where rehabilitation programs are insufficient, this condition worsens, limiting their chances of reintegration.

The precariousness of public policies aimed at women who have left the prison system reflects a broader logic of state negligence. Without mechanisms that guarantee their productive reintegration, they remain on the margins of society, subject to cycles of violence and exclusion. The analysis of this scenario demands a reflection on how the absence of effective actions contributes to the perpetuation of crime.

The general objective of this study is to analyze how the structural inefficiency of rehabilitation programs — marked by the discontinuity of public policies, precarious psychosocial care and lack of intersectional approaches — contributes to criminal recidivism among ex-inmate women in Joinville and Itajaí. The investigation seeks to highlight the institutional failures that prevent the construction of alternative trajectories to crime.

As specific objectives, it is intended: to seek the expectations of these women in relation to their reintegration into society; diagnosing possible opportunities for them to build a new professional identity; identify modalities of professional training as a methodology for social reintegration; and demonstrate the risks of non-rehabilitation in the world of work. These axes will allow us to understand the limits and possibilities of existing policies.

The central problematizations of this work are: how does the discontinuity of public policies impact the expectations of reinsertion? How does the lack of intersectional approaches limit opportunities in the labor market? What are the training modalities available and how is their effectiveness compromised? What concrete risks lead to recidivism? These questions guide the critical analysis of the conditions faced by women graduates.

The hypothesis that guides the research maintains that the structural ineffectiveness of rehabilitation programs — marked by discontinuity, psychosocial precariousness and absence of intersectionality — amplifies the vulnerability of women who have left the hospital in Joinville and Itajaí, becoming a determining factor for criminal recidivism. Therefore, this statement will be tested through empirical data and literature review.

## METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a bibliographic and descriptive approach, articulating primary and secondary data to analyze the vulnerability of ex-inmate women in Joinville and Itajaí. Secondary data were collected in the SciELO and *Google Scholar* databases, using descriptors such as "female resocialization", "criminal recidivism" and "prison policies", according to techniques systematized by Lakatos and Marconi (2003). At the same time, primary data were obtained through the application of structured questionnaires with research subjects, ensuring statistical representativeness.

According to Gil (2008), quantification allows greater objectivity in the identification of correlations between variables such as access to social programs, professional training and recidivism. Statistical constructs included chi-square tests and logistic regression, aiming to measure the influence of public policies on the observed results.

Primary data collection followed ethical protocols, with standardized questionnaires containing closed questions, applied to a stratified sample of women who had left the prison system. According to Richardson (2017), this method ensures reliability to the results, allowing controlled generalizations. The answers were coded and processed in specialized *software*, cross-referencing

sociodemographic information with indicators of social reintegration and criminal recurrence.

Finally, methodological triangulation, integrating a literature review and an empirical survey, reinforced the validity of the findings, as recommended by Minayo (2016). The combination of techniques made it possible to describe the phenomenon and test hypotheses about the relationship between institutional failures and recidivism, offering subsidies for more efficient public policies.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The history of female incarceration in Brazil reflects a process marked by invisibility and structural violations. Since the dawn of the prison system, women have faced even more precarious conditions than men, with policies that ignore their specific needs. The reclusive life, in addition to socially segregating them, produces deep psychological damage, aggravated by the lack of adequate assistance. The conditions presented hinder post-prison reintegration as well as reinforce cycles of marginalization, perpetuating the exclusion of this already vulnerable group.

According to Assis and Constantino (2001), the damage of prison life goes beyond the mere deprivation of liberty, reaching existential dimensions. Incarcerated women suffer from the rupture of family ties, exposure to institutional violence, and deterioration of mental health, factors that compromise any perspective of post-detentional reconstruction. The authors demonstrate that the system, far from resocializing, deepens preexisting vulnerabilities, converting punishment into a mechanism of permanent exclusion.

The analysis reveals a fundamental contradiction in the Brazilian penal system: while formally destined for rehabilitation, in practice it operates as a machine of marginalization. When women lose family ties and psychological health during incarceration, what real possibilities will they have when they return to society? The answer points to a vicious circle where punishment, instead of correcting, produces new forms of social exclusion.

Pires and Gatti (2016) argue that the female prison population faces additional obstacles to accessing reintegration policies. The absence of programs

that contemplate specific demands - such as adapted professional training and specialized psychological care - makes the transition to free life unfeasible. The authors highlight that, without intersectoral interventions, women ex-offenders remain trapped by stigmas that exclude them from the formal labor market.

The theorized reality exposes a systemic flaw in public policies: the disconnection between resocializing discourse and effective practices. If imprisonment already represents a violent rupture, leaving without adequate support becomes a new symbolic imprisonment. Reintegration depends not only on individual will, but on structures that combat discrimination and guarantee concrete opportunities for a new beginning, especially in urban contexts such as Joinville and Itajaí.

Barrucho and Barros (2017) identify that women's units suffer from overcrowding, unhealthiness, and institutionalized violence. The precariousness of the facilities, added to the lack of educational and occupational activities, creates degrading environments where any intention of resocialization becomes unrealistic. The degraded conditions, in addition to violating basic human rights, reproduce cycles of exclusion that transcend prison walls.

Such problems are not mere operational failures, but symptoms of a structurally bankrupt prison model. When women are subjected to unhealthy and violent spaces, the State fails to resocialize them and deepens their vulnerabilities. The reformulation of this system requires breaking with historically ingrained punitive logics, replacing them with paradigms that prioritize human dignity and harm reduction.

Sloniak (2007) proposes that the prison crisis demands integrated solutions that include education, work and psychosocial monitoring. For women, measures such as sectorized vocational workshops, regular gynecological care, and assisted living programs could mitigate the harms of incarceration. The study emphasizes that effective policies must consider specific trajectories, especially in cases of historical poverty and domestic violence.

The implementation of these solutions, however, comes up against administrative discontinuity and chronic scarcity of resources. If the prison system already faces widespread challenges, women's demands are systematically neglected, reinforcing their statistical and political invisibility. Effective

rehabilitation therefore requires isolated projects and a comprehensive restructuring of the penitentiary model, with a focus on gender equity and social justice.

Ferreira (n.d.) points out that the right to work is a fundamental pillar for the reintegration of former inmates. Access to formal jobs, in addition to guaranteeing material subsistence, allows the reconstruction of social identities beyond criminal stigma. The author points out that tax incentive programs for the hiring of ex-inmates, combined with sectorized technical training, can break cycles of labor exclusion.

However, the effectiveness of this right comes up against structural prejudices in the formal labor market, which often rejects women who have been through the prison system. Without active policies to combat discrimination and encourage employability, even the best initiatives fail to produce concrete impacts. Work only becomes an instrument of resocialization when accompanied by mechanisms that guarantee its accessibility and permanence in the daily lives of the ex-offenders.

Campos (2005) argues that work has transformative potential when integrated with pedagogical projects and social support networks. The author demonstrates that structured work activities, associated with continuous psychosocial monitoring, significantly reduce recidivism rates. The study reinforces that effective rehabilitation transcends the mere offer of employment, demanding environments that value autonomy and the reconstruction of citizenship.

Therefore, this perspective challenges the dominant punitive paradigm: if alternative sentences combined with work and education show greater effectiveness than incarceration, why does the system insist on models that have been proven to be failures? The answer lies in a legal-criminal culture that privileges retribution over reintegration, perpetuating cycles of institutional violence and social exclusion.

In view of the above, it is evident that the vulnerability of ex-inmate women results from a system that fails to fulfill its resocializing function. From the degrading conditions of prison to the absence of effective post-detention policies, each stage reinforces insurmountable barriers to reintegration. Criminal

recidivism emerges not as an individual failure, but as a logical consequence of exclusionary structures. It is concluded, therefore, that the transformation of this scenario requires overcoming the punitive logic in favor of evidence-based models. As long as fragmented and welfare policies persist, women who have left will remain condemned to cycles of exclusion, where formal freedom does not translate into effective social emancipation.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The female prison population presents different profiles according to regional characteristics, as shown by the cases of Joinville, with an industrial profile, and Itajaí, with a fishing economy. Data from the National Penitentiary Department (DEPEN) between 2008 and 2009 reveal that 24.8% of inmates in Ceará were in the age group of 18 to 24 years, indicating the early entry of young people into crime. According to the CNJ Portal (2017), factors such as unemployment, search for financial ascension and influence of partners contribute to this scenario, without defining a homogeneous social profile.

The INFOPEN Women report (2014) shows an alarming growth of 567% in the female prison population between 2000 and 2014, contrasting with the general increase of 119% in the same period. Brazil ranks fifth globally in female incarceration, with 37,380 inmates, 58% of whom have been convicted of drug trafficking. This crime stands out for the performance of criminal networks that recruit women in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability, often coerced by partners or attracted by promises of quick gains.

The analysis of the DMF/CNJ, conducted by Luís Geraldo Lanfredi, points out that female marginalization is intensified by double penalty: in addition to legal conviction, they suffer moral disapproval that hinders their social reintegration. The context of vulnerability, associated with the lack of effective public policies, perpetuates cycles of exclusion, evidencing the urgency of measures that consider gender specificities and regional dynamics in the fight against female incarceration.

The comparative analysis of the age profile of the inmates in the semi-open regimes of Joinville and Itajaí reveals significant patterns in terms of



generational distribution. Both cities have a higher concentration of women between 24 and 29 years old, an age group that corresponds to 35% of the local prison population, reflecting the attraction to illicit activities associated with the port and industrial contexts. The low incidence among women over 48 years of age, less than 5%, suggests the influence of cultural and family factors that keep this age group away from crime.

The local data are in line with the national statistics of INFOPEN (2014), which indicate that 30% of the female prison population in Santa Catarina is between 18 and 24 years old. This phenomenon is related to the ease of access to illicit substances and the impunity resulting from the age of criminal responsibility established at 18 years. Comparatively, countries such as the United States (12 years old), New Zealand (17) and Switzerland (15) adopt stricter parameters, limiting the enticement of adolescents for trafficking. The current Brazilian legislation, by allowing minor offenders to reach the age of majority without criminal records, perpetuates the use of young people as instruments of organized crime.

The analysis of schooling among the female prison population reveals a predominance of incomplete elementary school, representing 64% of the cases. This educational condition limits social understanding and favors insertion in illicit activities, as shown by related studies. Although Santa Catarina has one of the lowest rates of illiteracy in the country, structural deficiencies persist that require urgent interventions, as demonstrated by the Pronatec Mulheres Mil program, aimed at the professional qualification of inmates.

The data show uniformity between different prison units, with a Pearson coefficient of variation of 17.7%, indicating a consistent pattern of low schooling regardless of the region. The Penal Execution Law determines the mandatory nature of elementary education, however, only 25.3% of inmates participate in educational activities in 2014 - a proportion higher than that of men (13.5%). Among these, 40% were in elementary school, reflecting the profile previously identified. Only 8.8% reconciled studies with intramural work, against 3.9% of men, revealing a slight female advantage in the use of resocializing mechanisms. These indicators reinforce the need for specific public policies that transcend the

mere educational offer, contemplating the socioeconomic particularities that permeate female incarceration.

The Brazilian prison system faces recurring structural challenges, such as overcrowding, recidivism and poor health conditions, aggravated by the absence of social support. Citizenship education requires an ethical and aesthetic transformation, integrating reason and emotion to promote critical awareness and mobilization for change. In the female prison profile, it is highlighted that 47% of the inmates are single, indicating that economic factors, such as the search for sustenance and financial ascension, influence their insertion in crime, regardless of marital influence.

The analysis of marital status reveals that 10% of incarcerated women are divorced, a proportion significantly higher than that of men (1%). In addition, 62.1% have between one and two children, reflecting unfavorable socioeconomic conditions and the lack of public policies aimed at reproductive health. Criminal recidivism is associated with the lack of post-penitentiary opportunities, absence of family support and illicit attractions, such as immediate financial gains. As for nationality, 97% of the inmates are Brazilian, with emphasis on their involvement in drug trafficking.

Only 62.3% of the interviewees have a defined profession, evidencing the barriers of the labor market and the need for professional qualification. In Joinville and Itajaí, initiatives such as the semi-open regime, with business agreements, show potential to reduce recidivism by offering paid employment and reducing sentences. However, there is still an urgent need for integrated policies that address education, health and labour reintegration to break cycles of marginalisation.

The social reintegration of ex-prisoners is a complex process, based on the reintegration of the individual into collective life after deprivation of liberty. Although the penal purpose includes rehabilitation, its effectiveness depends on individual and structural transformations, involving educational, psychological and labor support. Studies indicate that 92% of the general population expresses willingness to offer opportunities to ex-inmates, contrasting with only 62.5% of employers, and 25% condition hiring to the nature of the crime committed.

The difficulty of reintegration into work and family, evidenced in research such as that of the Brazilian Pro-Citizenship Institute, reflects deep-rooted social prejudices, aggravated by patriarchal structures that marginalize women who have left the country. Corporate distrust of the credibility of these individuals reveals the persistence of stigmas that hinder their economic autonomy. Despite this, social reintegration remains an ethical imperative, aiming to restore the self-esteem and dignity of former inmates, regardless of their background. Overcoming these challenges requires articulated public policies and social awareness to deconstruct stereotypes and enable effective opportunities for a new beginning.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The social reintegration of ex-prisoners requires the reconstruction of family and community ties, essential for emotional stability and motivation during the execution of the sentence. Maintaining these bonds, including social and intimate visits, reduces tensions in the prison environment and strengthens the sense of responsibility. However, the Brazilian prison system has serious deficiencies, distancing itself from its resocializing purpose, which requires urgent investments in infrastructure, training of agents and specific policies for the female population.

The Ministry of Justice proposes strategies such as modernization of penal policies, targeted research, and expansion of support networks to guarantee basic rights to incarcerated women. The implementation of these measures could ensure fundamental freedoms, such as the ability to act, think and choose, as discussed by theorists. Professional qualification emerges as a crucial tool to facilitate the return to the labor market, although the destructuring of the system, aggravated by overcrowding and judicial slowness, remains a central obstacle. Structural solutions, such as the creation of federal prisons and procedural agility, are pointed out as necessary to reverse the current scenario.

In view of the above, it is concluded that the analysis of the vulnerability of ex-inmate women requires a critical look at rehabilitation policies, evidencing how their failures perpetuate cycles of exclusion. Criminal recidivism, in this context,

is not an individual problem, but a reflection of social structures that deny real opportunities for reintegration.

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