

## The family in the process of social reintegration of ex-inmates of the prison system

### A família no processo de reinserção social de egressos do sistema penitenciário

### La familia en proceso de reinserción social de los egresados del sistema penitenciario

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The aim of this study was to analyze the microsystem "family" as a facilitator of social reintegration, from the perspective of ex-inmates from the penitentiary system and technicians from the ex-inmates and Family Service Centers. This is a qualitative descriptive-exploratory study carried out in the first semester of 2018, in the northwest region of the State of São Paulo, Brazil. Thirteen ex-inmates and nine professionals have participated. Data collection took place through semi-structured interviews and, for data analysis, inductive thematic analysis was used. The results showed the family as a relevant facilitator in the view of ex-inmates and professionals, being a microsystem that reveals great importance for social reintegration, being able to strengthen social bonds, bring hope, self-confidence, affection and facilitate (re) entry into the healthcare marketplace. The family has a fundamental role in the reintegration process, as a microsystem with a complex relationship with the other systems involved.

**Descriptors:** Psychosocial support systems; Socialization; Prisons; Family.

O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar o microsistema "família" como facilitador de reinserção social, a partir da visão de egressos do sistema penitenciário e de técnicos das Centrais de Atendimento ao Egresso e Família. Trata-se de um estudo descritivo-exploratório qualitativo realizado no primeiro semestre de 2018, na região noroeste do Estado de São Paulo, Brasil. Participaram 13 egressos e nove profissionais. A coleta de dados ocorreu por meio de entrevista semiestruturada e, para análise dos dados, utilizou-se a análise temática indutiva. Os resultados mostraram a família como um facilitador relevante na visão dos egressos e dos profissionais, sendo um microsistema que revela grande importância para a reinserção social, podendo fortalecer laços sociais, trazer esperança, autoconfiança, afeto e facilitar o (re)ingresso no mercado de trabalho. A família tem papel fundamental no processo de reinserção, como microsistema de relação complexa com os outros sistemas implicados.

**Descritores:** Sistemas de apoio psicossocial; Socialização; Prisões; Família.

El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar el microsistema "familia" como facilitador de la reintegración social, desde la perspectiva de los egresados del sistema penitenciario y de los técnicos de los Centros de Atención al Egreso y Familia. Este es un estudio cualitativo descriptivo-exploratorio realizado en la primera mitad de 2018, en la región noroeste del estado de São Paulo, Brasil. Participaron 13 egresados y nueve profesionales. La recolección de datos se realizó a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas y, para el análisis de datos, se utilizó el análisis temático inductivo. Los resultados mostraron la familia como siendo un facilitador relevante para los egresados y profesionales, siendo un microsistema que revela una gran importancia para la reintegración social, capaz de fortalecer los lazos sociales, traer esperanza, confianza en sí mismo, afecto y facilitar la inserción laboral. La familia tiene un papel fundamental en el proceso de la inserción, como un microsistema de relación compleja con los otros sistemas involucrados.

**Descritores:** Sistemas de apoio psicossocial; Socialização; Prisões; Família.

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**he National Penitentiary Department (DEPEN in Portuguese), linked to the Ministry of Justice, revealed in an estimate registered on June 30, 2016, that there are about 726 thousand people deprived of their liberty in Brazil. In other words, those people are private or limited in terms of family life, whether they are original or current families<sup>1</sup>.

The family is a social group whose members are in constant interaction with each other and with the environment, thus, outlining their behavior<sup>2</sup>. Entering into the prison system causes a break in this constant interaction, initiated at birth, with the first social insertion, and in the first social role of "son" in which the family can provide human beings with conditions to acquire the personal identity which, developed over time, allows different ways of transmitting ethical, aesthetic, religious and cultural values.

In Brazil, the process of social reintegration within prisons is formalized with the creation of the Law of Penal Execution (LEP), which bases the rights, duties, discipline sanctions and evaluation of prisoners, focusing on social integration, seeking the crime prevention and the preparation of the prisoner for the return to social life<sup>4</sup>. The government of the State of São Paulo enacted Law 47,930, on July 7, 2003, which unified the Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration and the Department of Penitentiary Social Rehabilitation<sup>5</sup>. With this unification, the Penitentiary Social Reintegration Department was created, which should promote a careful look at resocialization, better integration of detention and post-detention services, thus sharing the responsibility for resocialization<sup>6</sup>.

This process, in the context of incarceration, has the prerogative to provide conditions for convicts to return to society in a dignified and integrated manner. Social inclusion presupposes reintegration into society, offering the offender conditions to be able to regenerate himself, preventing him to repeat the crime<sup>7</sup>.

With the need for a different look at the ex-inmates and the family in this situation, Decree n<sup>o</sup> 54.025, of February 16, 2009, which created and organized the Coordination for Social Reintegration and Citizenship, was adopted. It is a public policy with the purpose of giving direct assistance to ex-offenders in their family context and scope, aiming at autonomy and citizenship so that they can return to social life with dignity<sup>8</sup>.

In the State of São Paulo, the Centers for Attending the Ex-inmate and Family (CAEFs in Portuguese) were created. Each CAEF unit has a technical manager (social worker, psychologist or lawyer), managing the program with a view to promoting the strengthening of citizenship, autonomy and identity of users<sup>8</sup>. CAEFs is oriented by the following attributions: a) carry out specific interventions, aiming at promoting the psychosocial well-being of ex-inmates, pre-ex-inmates and their families, the systematic control of the conditions of freedom of the inmates; b) act as promoters of the maintenance of the link between the pre-ex-inmate and their family members; c) organize and keep the medical records updated in order to facilitate the monitoring of users; d) monitor the proper execution of the sentence of sentenced persons released by the Judiciary Branch who are still serving sentences; e) monitor the fulfillment of the conditions that rule the freedom of released prisoners; f) inform the competent authorities about the fulfillment of reprimands; g) perform the reception, flow control and surveillance services of users during their stay in specific service locations<sup>8</sup>.

The work with the ex-inmates has been developed based on these guidelines. Even so, the barriers in relation to resocialization are great, especially from the perspective of prisons, incarceration and social stigma<sup>6</sup>. The social reintegration of those discharged from the prison system comes up against the stigma that society imposes on them, being one of the difficulties encountered during and after imprisonment.<sup>9,10</sup>

Considering the prison system and the reintegration process, it is assumed that it is necessary to think about social reintegration from the person in a dynamic context of social relations. In such a way, to bring Bronfenbrenner's theoretical perspective<sup>11</sup>, also known as a "contextual or bioecological model", it allows us to shed light on the many interconnections that

influence the developing person, highlighting the inseparable nuclei: Person, Process, Context and Time (PPCT).

The "Person" in the ecological model is understood in relation to the subject's intrinsic characteristics for any development situation. They include demand (age, gender, ethnicity, physical appearance, among others), resource (past experiences, skills related to cognitive and emotional resources) and strength (related to motivation and perseverance). The family, whether of origin or current, interacts and influences this personal constitution in the most varied ways, therefore, the description of these characteristics was presented<sup>11</sup> in the results of this study.

The "Process" nucleus is considered one of the crucial ones for development, and the family is configured as its main representative. It is through this process that the most complex and immediate reciprocal interactions between people, objects, symbols in their immediate external environment progressively occur, which become more effective especially with regard to bidirectionality.<sup>11</sup>

In this perspective, the "Context" involves the various environments in which the individual is inserted, that is, they are concentric circuits of environmental influence where development processes take place. In this analysis, the family is viewed as a microsystem, the most intimate environment, which comprises a pattern of activities, roles and relationships experienced in a complex relationship with other systems, constituting mesosystems, for example, home-school, home-work and family-group of friends<sup>11</sup>.

The "Time" dimension includes changes in personal and social conditions throughout life, such as changes in family, residential, employment, and comprehensive cultural changes, among others.<sup>11</sup> DEPEN highlights the fragility of bonds after imprisonment and points out that one of the reasons for this reality is the length of incarceration, which makes it difficult for prisoners to return to society. Thus, with the prison situation, the networks previously established become "fractured" and are reinforced by the person's distance from social activities and from community and family life<sup>12</sup>. The difficulty in recovering family bonds and weakening the length of incarceration are targets of studies that also add weight to the reality of stigma, exclusion, lack of opportunities, all of which are associated with failures in the prison system, especially when referring to the resocialization of ex-prisoners<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, this study aims to analyze the microsystem "family" as a facilitator of social reintegration, from the perspective of ex-prisoners from the penitentiary system and technicians from the Ex-inmates and Family Service Centers.

## METHOD

This is a qualitative descriptive-exploratory study carried out in the first half of 2018 at the Centers for Assistance to ex-inmates and Families (CAEFs) in the northwest region of the State of São Paulo, Brazil<sup>13</sup>. The northwest region consists of 11 cities, each city has a CAEF unit. All units were invited to participate in the research; two CAEFs did not accept, so the interviews were conducted in nine CAEFs. Thirteen ex-inmates who were users of these plants, participated in the study. The process of including ex-inmates in the research was done for convenience until the saturation of the results.

To start the data collection, a contact was made with the CAEFs coordinator, presenting the study proposal. Then an e-mail was sent with the authorizations from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Nursing (CAEE 70890017.9.0000.5393) and from the Research Ethics Committee of the Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration (CAAE 70890017.9.3001.5563). Ex-inmates attend CAEFs once a month to sign parole. The researcher was on duty and invited them to participate in the research, presented the objectives and, when they agreed, signed the Free and Informed Consent Form. The inclusion of new in-mates was suspended when the data obtained proved to be redundant or repetitive.

As a data collection instrument, the semi-structured interview was used<sup>14</sup>. The choice for this modality was given by the possibility of asking questions about the theme studied, giving the interviewee the opportunity to share his experiences from a guiding axis. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher and identification was performed in numerical order with the nomenclature “ E ”for ex-inmates, thus E1 to E13 and “ T ”for service technicians, thus, T1 to T9.

For data analysis, the inductive thematic analysis technique was used, following the process of the six phases described by Braun and Clarke<sup>15</sup>: 1) Familiarize with the data; 2) Generate initial codes; 3) Search for themes; 4) Review themes; 5) Define and name the themes; 6) Produce the report. The discussion was held in the light of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework<sup>11</sup>.

## RESULTS

Thirteen ex-inmates from the penitentiary system in the northwest region of the State of São Paulo, participants in the survey, 11 were men (84.6%) and two women (15.4%). The age reported by them ranged from 21 to 61 years old, three (23.1%) from 21 to 24 years old, four (30.7%) from 25 to 29 years old, three (23.1%) from 30 to 34 years old years, two (15.4%) aged 35 to 45 years and one (7.7%) aged 61 years. Most of the ex-inmates (ten) were under the age of 35, that is, they are people considered young, with investment needs in education and work. As for the skin color variable, nine (69.2%) declared themselves white, three (23.1%) brown and one (7.7%) black.

Regarding marital status, seven (53.8%) ex-inmates said they were married / cohabiting/in a stable relationship, one (7.7%) was separated and five (38.5%) were single. Of the 13 inmates, seven (53.8%) have children. In the housing variable, 11 (84.6%) inmates live with the family, either the family of origin or current. Of these 11, five (38.5%) live with the family of origin - which may consist of mother, father, stepfather, siblings -, six (46.2%) live with the current family - considered spouses and/or children - and two (15.4%) live alone.

Regarding the length of imprisonment, one ex-inmate (7.7%) was imprisoned for less than six months, two (15.4%) from six months to one year, four (30.7%) from one to two years, three (23.1%) from two to four years, two (15.4%) from four to six years and one (7.7%) for more than six years. During the time of imprisonment, three inmates (23.1%) did not receive visits, ten (76.9%) received visits. Of the latter, six (60.0%) said they were visited by the family of origin (father, mother and siblings), one ex-inmate (10.0%) by the current family (spouse) and three of them (30.0% ) said they had been visited by both the family of origin and the current family. None of the them mentioned having been visited by friends.

The prison in this study appeared as a trigger for the rapprochement of the family with the person in the situation of incarceration:

*[...] when I was arrested, I saw that they were my safe haven, it's who I could always count on and gave me a real value for what I was and not for what I had. (E3)*

*[...] My family [...] It was always distant, but after I was arrested, everyone got together. Today is giving me more attention. (E4)*

*[...] my son used to go there, my wife took him every 15 days, because one week my mother went and the next week my wife went, [...] this is not for my life, not when I'm going to look for a job, work [...]. That is a lot of suffering [...] the family going there [...] (E7)*

*The main support was my sister, who encouraged me [...] I will help you if you want the opportunity you will have, for you to regenerate, for a new journey, a new trajectory to live for real [...] and it was God and then my sister who gave the greatest incentive [...] (E12)*

Family support was not restricted to the situation of incarceration. In the process of extramural social reintegration, after leaving the prison, the family appeared as a facilitating factor for social reintegration and the return to the labor market. Some ex-inmates reported a family member as a facilitator to start a job either formally or informally:

*[...] my godfather and I am already employed [...] (E1)*

*[...] my uncle helped me [...] he got me a job (E2)*

*My mother and I work. We place orders for snacks [...] (E5)*  
*[...] my mother always supported me [...] when I left I went to live with her [...]*  
*[...]support for both financial stability [...] (E3)*  
*We became more united [...] I didn't tell my mother and today I have her as a friend [...] the relationship between me and her improved 100% like this [...] (E6)*  
*[...] it improved, because I'm paying more attention, I'm dedicating more to the family [...] (E9)*  
*[...] father and mother, brother, sister and my wife yes. Of the rest, no one [...] comforted by words, to wish me well, right? they supported me in every way they could support me [...] (E10)*

Institutional logic is often cruel. One of the participating ex-inmates said that the system was negligent, leaving him far from his family, which made it difficult for family members to visit. He also reported that he made the request to be closer to his family, but was not heard:

*Also was far too, where I was [...] on the other side of the state [...] I even gave the name of the city my sister lives in [...] they didn't bring me here next to her, anyway [...] is the neglect of the prison system. [...] (E12)*

The survey also included the view of the nine technicians who participated in the research, four (44.4%) were men and five (55.5%) women. As for color/race, eight (88.8%) declared themselves white and one (11.2%) brown. The technicians, in terms of sex, presented a balance. On the question of color/race there was a white prevalence 88.8%. Regarding marital status, five (55.5%) were married/in a stable relationship, three (33.3%) were single, two (22.2%) were in a stable relationship and one (11.2%) was divorced. On the issue of children, five (55.5%) had no children, four (44.4%) had children. As for religiosity, four (44.4%) had no religion, three (33.3%) were Catholic, two (22.2%) said they were evangelicals.

As for education, eight (88.8%) had completed higher education, one (11.2%) had incomplete higher education. Regarding graduation, two (22.2%) were lawyers; four (44.4%) were psychologists, two (22.2%) were social workers, one (11.2%) was pursuing a degree in social work. Among eight (88.8%) technicians with a university degree, four (50%) had postgraduate degrees and one (12.5%) was in the process of getting it. The professional training of technicians portrays a population that is in search of knowledge, since 44.4% have already completed specialization and 11.2% are studying.

Regarding the time they performed the function, two (22.2%) technicians had been less than six months in the job, two (22.2%) of them were in the job from one to two years, two (22.2%) of them were there from two to four years, one (11.2%) of them was there from four to six years, and two (22.2%) had been there for six years or more. Only two (22.2%) technicians had been working for less than six months. The others have been working for more than a year, from which it can be inferred that they were already familiar with the theme and with doing their work.

In relation to training, upon entering the role of CAEF Technician, only one (11.2%) reported having done specific training for the role he held. The others qualified from the technical notebook manual, guidance from other technicians and the coordinator. A technician reported having participated in some lectures, but nothing specific which could be an evidence of the importance of studies on the theme for the production of technical material. The technicians reported the relevance of family support as a foundation and security, as showed in the interview clippings:

*[...] whether this ex-prisoner has a family or not. Because it is the family that will give the greatest support that will welcome him when he leaves [...] (T1)*

*[...] who has the accompaniment of the relative, who has a family who was [...] made the visits, in short that there is a bond here outside, things happen much easier. And they feel more secure. (T4)*

*[...] I think it is essential for a more complete insertion if the ex-inmate has the perception that the family is on the side, is encouraging, is supporting and so I feel the family a little more near [...] (T2)*

*In relation to ex-inmates, mainly, it has to be more structured to give much more support to receive those who leave the system (T3).*

*[...] when they have a family, a mother or a wife, they stay on their feet a lot, stay on top for them to fulfill all requirements, support to get a job. So I see that the family is very important. (T9)*

*[...] Some families participate in this process, but not all [...], but in general some mothers, parents or some relative come together to be collaborating in the reintegration, [...] there is the frequency of some family members, but it is little. (T8)*

## DISCUSSION

The legislation defines the objective of criminal execution “to provide conditions for the harmonious social integration of the convicted and the inmate”<sup>16</sup>. To this end, the maintenance of pre-prison ties is extremely important. In this study, visitation in prison appeared as a factor that contributed to maintaining the link between people in situations of incarceration and the “outside world”, as ten (76.9%) of the interviewees received visits during the period of incarceration, all performed by a family member. None of the interviewees received visits from friends or anyone from the community, which may indicate limitation of social ties due to the situation of incarceration, restricted in the period of imprisonment only to family relationships and with people linked to the prison institution (community agents, technicians, health professionals), lawyers).

The family reveals itself as a fundamental link, as its support and affection can be protective to mental health, nourishing hope, being an affection agent and cognitive guide<sup>17</sup>. To think about resocialization is to think in context, in movement, influencing and/or being influenced. The family appeared significantly as a microsystem<sup>11</sup>. The ex-prisoners described the process of incarceration as a trigger in the movement of approaching the family, causing changes in the interaction.

In the speech of ex-inmate E7, one can observe the effects of bidirectionality<sup>11</sup>, because the son's reaction, the experience shared by both of them during the visit, aroused in the ex-prisoner the desire to go out, work and have a different life. The ex-prisoner E12 also felt supported by his sister.

In a survey of female prisons, the family was seen as an important emotional support and social link, so that the abandonment of this family in the period of imprisonment can be associated with the experiences of suffering, helplessness and loneliness, which can interfere in the quality of life of women. people in a situation of incarceration, reflecting on the re-socialization process<sup>18</sup>.

The family is the first microsystem of interaction of the developing person, thus having fundamental importance in the subjective constitution. During incarceration, he remained one of the few links between prison and extramural life, no participant in the research received a visit other than a family member, highlighting its importance in this process. In addition, the arrest meant a process of rapprochement, of care. But the system often works against rapprochement. Institutional logic is often cruel. One of the participating ex-inmate said that the system was negligent, leaving him far from his family, which made it difficult for family members to visit. He also reported that he made the request to be closer to his family, but was not heard.

The lack of access to the family portrays the tendency to system closure, making any reintegration process difficult. This trend is striking in the system, and can be considered a characteristics of total institutions<sup>19</sup>, that, by “creating barriers” to social relations with the outside world, promote forms of control. According to the author, it can be considered the first “I” mutilation.

The family, in the process of post-incarceration social reintegration (freedom), appeared in the analyzes as one of the main links of the individual with society, and can be a source of resources for the person who has left the prison system. One of these resources was work. Some ex-inmates reported one of his family members as a facilitator to enter the labor market, be it formal or informal.

An individual's social network “[...] is the sum of all the relationships that the individual perceives as significant and different from the anonymous mass of society”<sup>17:41</sup>. It is possible to consider the microsystem “family” as part of the social network of ex-inmates and with active and meaningful functions, since it assists them in the process of social reintegration, giving mainly emotional and, in some cases, financial support, in addition to regulating them socially<sup>17</sup>. In this study, it was evident that the family was a facilitator for the ex-inmate in the ecological

transition, to reinsert and interact with other microsystems, for example, the “work” microsystem, being able to be an active agent in the development of the person (leaving prison).

The family is also considered as a ‘balance of power’ in this investigation, since, at the beginning of the process of freedom, they can have control over the relationship, since when leaving the prison, the person can return to their condition prior to imprisonment, a risk and vulnerability condition, and also carrying the social stigma of having been arrested. As the family gives power to the ex-inmate, here considered as the person in development, by facilitating the process of reintegration, he can gradually self-regulate which contributes to his reintegration. The ex-inmates report improvement in family relationships in relation to attention and trust. The family relationship can be considered as one of the parts of an individual’s social network, an active and reliable network that protects people and can accelerate rehabilitation processes<sup>17</sup>. In this research, technical professionals are considered as main actors, also as a “microsystem”, facilitators of social reintegration, since they are the bridge between prison and freedom, in addition to being one of those responsible for guaranteeing the rights of people in incarceration situations. According to the perception of these professionals about the importance of the family, reinsertion was of great relevance, since the family can be a great ally to their work aiming at reintegration and the technicians recognize the importance of family support in this study.

A study that sought to bring reflections on the importance of mobilizing the personal social network of the individual who was imprisoned, corroborated the relevance of the personal social network as support for individuals, enabling new alternatives and new paths of their recognition as members of society, as citizens<sup>20</sup>. The family is the microsystem<sup>11</sup> that appears most relevant, performing important functions ranging from material help to emotional support. The technicians reported the relevance of this support; of the family as a foundation and security.

A study aimed to know the perception of family members about the experience of incarceration with a focus on the return of their relative to the family environment and professional activity (social inclusion)<sup>21</sup>. Among several results that complement this research, the issue of stigma extended to the family member was highlighted, showing the systemic difficulties of reinsertion.

When the ex-inmate has a family, in addition to having a support network and meanings, this is also a motivator for reintegration. The “process of social reintegration” can be facilitated by social interactions, because with them the developing person feels part of the world.

Upon returning from prison, the ex-prisoner returns to the place to which he belongs, and recognizes himself in the world<sup>21</sup>. Thus, it is justified not only to work with ex-inmates, but the importance of working with families, as it is in this microsystem that he (when he has a family) will reinsert himself in the first place.

## CONCLUSION

The family, in terms of social reintegration, is an extremely relevant element. In general, the first context of socialization of the human being, the first facilitator of the social insertion of the person in development, either in childhood or at the moment of leaving prison. It develops in a plot that involves fundamental processes such as marriage, the birth of children, their growth, among others.

The process of incarceration breaks with family homeostatic processes, causing a reorganization in order to supply or, at least, to remedy the pain of separation caused by prison. Such movements constitute an ecological transition that provides, to those involved, changes in roles and adaptations, promoting the widening of the vision of the people involved in the process by making them do necessary changes to keep ties and hope alive, facilitating development. In the context of freedom, the family continues its course in the development,

operating as a social network for ex-inmates and may have protective functions such as emotional support and financial resources provider.

As seen in the testimonies presented, ex-inmates and technicians recognize the importance of the family in social reintegration. From the speeches of the former, the positive performance of this social nucleus is evident as relevant to the experienced process. From the professionals' perceptions, it can be inferred how much work still needs to be done so that this 'positive influence' is not restricted to when you have a family, who has family monitoring or how much families participate in this process.

The present study was limited to the location of the interviews, because although they took place in a private room, they took place in the same institution where the ex-inmates had signed for their parole. This may have influenced the emotional experiences and experiences that they had in the place. The scarcity of studies that addressed the topic of social reintegration involving various contexts also poses itself as a limited study.

Despite this, one of the most important findings of the research was to identify, in the perception of the ex-inmates from the prison system and the technicians who work in social reintegration that the family has a fundamental role in the process as a microsystem of complex relationship with other systems. Thus, further research and proposals within the theme are recommended so that there is greater approximation, involvement and appreciation of family ties in the process of social reintegration of those leaving the penitentiary system.

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## CONTRIBUTIONS

**Ana Carolina Ferreira Castanho** and **Aline Cristina Dadalte** have contributed with the conception, design, analysis, data interpretations and writing. **Zeyne Alves Pires Scherer** has participated in the conception, design, data interpretation and revision.

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