





## Employment and work opportunities for egressed from the prison system: a systematic review

## Oportunidades de emprego e trabalho para egressos do sistema prisional: revisão sistemática

Juliana Ferreira da Silva<sup>1</sup>   
 Luiza Gayão Araújo e Silva<sup>2</sup>   
 Maria Liz Cunha de Oliveira<sup>3</sup>   
 Maria Aparecida Penso<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1,2</sup>Universidade Católica de Brasília (Brasília). Distrito Federal, Brazil. juliana.dasilva.ucb@gmail.com, luizagayao@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup>Corresponding author. Universidade Católica de Brasília (Brasília). Distrito Federal, Brazil. lizcunhad@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup>Universidade Católica de Brasília (Brasília). Distrito Federal, Brazil. mariaaparecidapenso@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT | OBJETIVO:** To analyze the scientific and scientific literature on the social reintegration of former prisoners into the labor market. **METHOD:** A systematic review was carried out with search and selection of studies via the Portal of Periodicals of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) from 2009 to 2019, adopting availability criteria in full, language (Spanish, English, or Portuguese). The search, selection, quality assessment, and data extraction were carried out independently by two researchers. A total of 555 productions were found, being filtered based on title and summary and, subsequently, technically inventoried later, the full-text analysis of the articles selected in the previous steps was carried out. **RESULTS:** 10 articles were evaluated, of which six studied the insertion of the graduate in the labor market from the male perspective; only one article deals with both sexes. Regarding the gender perspective, we found no reference. The results of the analyzed studies had different objectives, having in common the investigation of different types of insertion of ex-prisoners in the labor market, the restriction of finding work characterizes the tendencies of these productions. **CONCLUSION:** The analysis of the articles found that the graduates of the prison system face a confluence of factors that are difficult to overcome in order to achieve some type of work, namely, the stigma that weighs on them, the low level of education, and the precariousness of work.

**KEYWORDS:** Prison. Review. Job application. Social inclusion.

**RESUMO | OBJETIVO:** Analisar a literatura científica sobre a reinserção social de egressos do sistema prisional no mercado de trabalho. **MÉTODO:** Foi realizada uma revisão sistemática com busca e seleção de estudos via Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes) de 2009 a 2019, adotando critérios de disponibilidade na íntegra, em língua espanhola, inglesa ou portuguesa. A busca, seleção, avaliação de qualidade e extração de dados foram realizadas independentemente por duas pesquisadoras. Foram encontradas 555 produções, sendo filtradas a partir de título e resumo e, na sequência, inventariados tecnicamente; posteriormente, foi realizada a análise do texto na íntegra dos artigos selecionados nas etapas anteriores. **RESULTADOS:** Foram avaliados 10 artigos, onde seis estudam a inserção do egresso no mercado de trabalho na perspectiva do sexo masculino e apenas um artigo trata dos dois sexos. Quanto à perspectiva de gênero, não foi encontrada referência. Os resultados dos estudos analisados tiveram objetivos distintos, tendo em comum a investigação de diferentes tipos de inserção de ex-detentos no mercado de trabalho e as tendências dessas produções são caracterizadas pela restrição de encontrar trabalho. **CONCLUSÃO:** A análise dos artigos verificou que os egressos do sistema prisional enfrentam uma confluência de fatores de difícil superação para alcançar algum tipo de trabalho, quais sejam, o estigma que pesa sobre eles, o baixo nível de escolaridade e a precarização do trabalho.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Revisão Sistemática. Prisão. Solicitação de Emprego. Inclusão social.

## Introduction

The current work presents a stage of the literature review of the research project entitled “Former inmates from the Prison System: Stories that Matter”, which aims to evaluate the life stories of former inmates from the prison system in the Federal District, Brazil.

The research team established a protocol for extracting data from the literature organized into five sets: trajectories before prison, trajectories during prison, trajectories after prison, life history methodology, and profiles of imprisoned people. The set of data on post-prison trajectories includes the employment opportunities and work for those released from prison, presented in this article.

As for the profile of imprisoned people, data from the National Survey on Penitentiary Information show that, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of inmates in Brazil. As a result, the country has the third-largest prison population in the world. In 2002, there were 239,345 convicted and provisional prisoners; in 2014, the number climbed to 622,202 imprisoned; in 2019, the total number was 752,277. These data show us that between 2014 and 2019, there was an increase of more than 130,000 people incarcerated in the country (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada [Ipea] & Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública [FBSP], 2019).

However, a fact that draws attention is that only 350,000 vacancies are offered in prisons, which is less than half necessary to accommodate this number of prisoners (Secco & Lima, 2018). The occupancy rate of 197.4% reveals that both the people deprived of freedom and the employees and collaborators who occupy the prison spaces live in unhealthy conditions. In the Federal District, according to a survey by Ipea and FBSP (2019), the prison population is 17,040 prisoners, while the system capacity, that is, the number of vacancies, is 7,398. It is possible to observe that the factors related to the crime rate in Brazil can be associated with social inequality and issues such as lack of schooling and job opportunities that directly drive crime rates (Fonseca & Rodrigues, 2017; Rolim, 2018). Moreover, studies conducted associate the increase in the prison population much more due to a change in Law No. 11.343 of August 23, 2006, called the Drug Law, boosting female imprisonment in the country (Braga, 2017; Dutra 2018).

In this scenario, it is already possible to observe the need for state action, whether at the state or federal level, to provide an adequate return of these prisoners to society. However, this action cannot be taken only by the public authorities but also by several organizations and social institutions with duties to the society they operate. Supporting this argument, according to Silva (2015), the efforts of various sectors, such as the state, civil society, and companies, are necessary in order to plan and execute measures that enable the social reintegration of the prison inmate.

According to Lima (2017, p. 100, our translation):

*There are Social Reaction and Crime Prevention models, one of which is Restorative, based on the Restorative Justice Policy. This prevention model is constant in the macro model of Prevention and Fight against Crime, divided into three moments: 1) Primary Prevention, 2) Secondary Prevention, and 3) Tertiary Prevention. The first of them is an incrementing core of the actual investment and effectiveness in public policies to force fundamental rights, such as education, health, public security, and work. The second has as its object the police apparatus, acting as a model after the crime, aiming to fight it at the moment of its activity. Finally, the third one aims at preventing individuals from relapsing into the world of crime; the concept of tertiary prevention is used to name projects designed for groups that have already been involved in crime.*

Given this context, it is essential to analyze the role of tertiary prevention in the social inclusion of former prison system inmates in the world of work. According to Dias and Oliveira (2014), work contributes to the resocialization process of these individuals to the extent that it puts them in contact with society, enabling them to sell their labor power for the sake of a more dignified life. According to J. E. Santos (2019), it is also possible to state that employment acts as a barrier to illegal behavior because it inhibits misconduct situations and provides access to economic and social incentives, not from crime. Explaining the importance of work, specifically for former prisoners, Rakis (2005) understands that work has centrality in the lives of individuals because, without the security of a job, a large part of the former prisoners are unable to support themselves and their families, while unemployment marks the individual with exclusion from the social process of production of goods services and wealth (Albornoz, 2008).

Considering the aspects discussed so far, the present research aims to analyze the scientific literature on the social reinsertion of former inmates of the prison system into the job market to characterize these productions' trends.

## Materials and Methods

This research is a systematic review. According to Ferreira (2002), in this research, the goal is to know what has been produced in the academic field on a specific topic and discuss this production, considering the time, place, and context. This type of research methodology has an "inventory and descriptive character of the academic and scientific productions on the subject" (Ferreira, 2002, p. 258, our translation). According to Zoltowski et al. (2014, p. 97), a systematic review is "a strategy for searching scientific productions, a critical analysis, and a synthesis of what was found." The guiding question to carry out this systematic literature review was: How does the national and international scientific literature show the insertion of former inmates of the prison system in the job market?

### Study search strategy

To identify the scientific production on ex-offenders from the prison system, the database chosen was the Periodical Portal of the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes, n.d.). The portal is a virtual library that gathers and makes available teaching and research institutions in Brazil the international scientific production. It has a collection of more than 45 thousand full-text titles, 130 reference databases, 12 databases dedicated exclusively to patents, besides books, encyclopedias and reference works, technical norms, statistics, and audiovisual content. Regarding the literature review stage, it was conducted in the period from February to June 2019.

The themes of the project area were divided into four areas, namely: social vulnerability, the prison system, cooperativism, and recycling; thus, the terms "egressed" and "cooperative" were used as primary

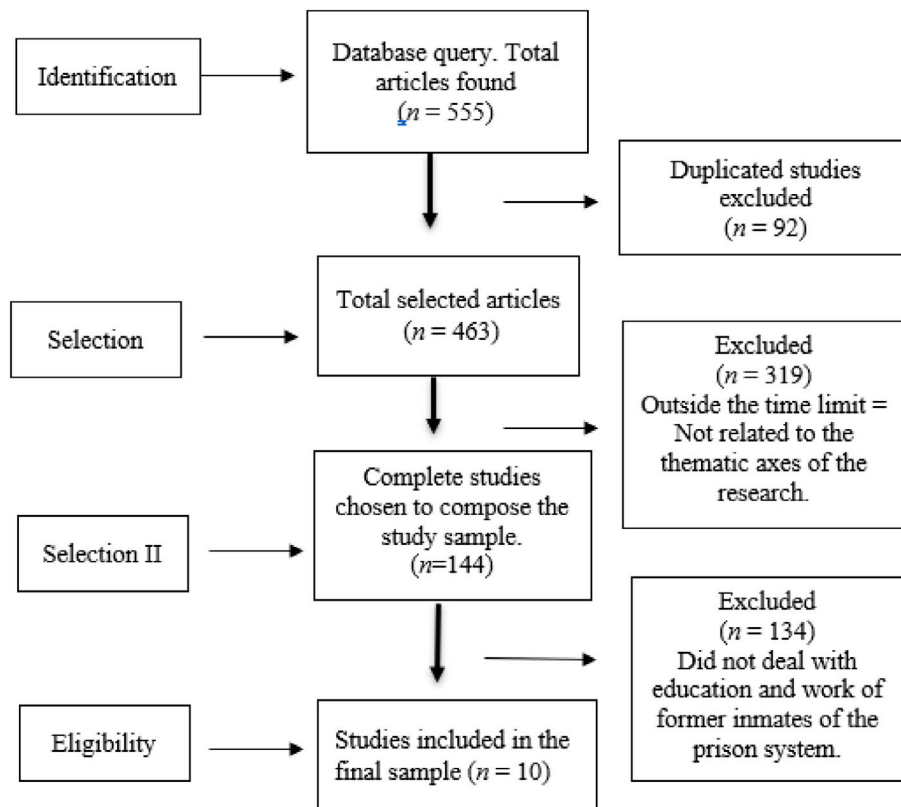
descriptors, and the terms "ex-convict" "patronage," and "recycling" as secondary descriptors. Therefore, in the databases, the searches were performed as follows: (egressed) AND (patronage) OR (prison system) OR (ex-prisoner); (cooperativism) AND (recycling) OR (prison system) OR (ex-prisoner), as well as their respective terms in Portuguese.

Original articles investigating the labor trajectories of former inmates of the prison system, articles published in Portuguese, English, or Spanish, studies with a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed approach, and full texts available online until September 15, 2019, were considered eligible for this review. Books, review articles, conference abstracts, editorials, and letters were excluded. The time limit for the search of the studies was from 2009 to 2019.

The studies were selected independently by two authors (A and B), and disagreements were resolved by consensus. After the search, the selection of studies began by analyzing the titles. In the second step, the abstracts were analyzed, and then the full text of the articles selected in the previous steps was analyzed. Finally, a specific form was built for data extraction, where information regarding the authors, year of publication, place/country, study design, data collection technique, type of analysis, sample number, and main results were recorded.

## Result

The survey resulted in 555 occurrences, of which 92 were removed for duplicity. The selection process was based on the criterion of thematic affinity with the research by reading the abstracts. In this process, the title and abstract of 463 articles were read, and 319 were excluded for not being related to the thematic areas defined in the project. The scope of the literature search was thus defined at 144 articles. The articles were also carefully analyzed and read in their entirety. Thus, ten articles were chosen to form the basis of the analysis of this study. There was consensus on the selected articles from the judges' independent analysis, and there was no need to trigger a third judge. The details of the article selection can be seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Flowchart of identification and selection of publications

All the articles analyzed were written in Portuguese, between 2009 and 2019, in Brazil, and most of the studies were conducted in the states of Minas Gerais and the Rio Grande do Sul.

To construct this study, we chose to read all the publications analyzed in their entirety. The content was organized and summarized on individual reading sheets. The information for each article in the database covered the article title, author, year of publication, place of publication, research design, data collection technique, method of analysis, number of participants, main findings. The information obtained from the ten included articles was categorized and discussed according to the following order: tertiary prevention resocialization prejudice, host entities, and redirection of the former inmate population.

As for the number of authors, it is observed that most of the studies – 8 (80%) texts – were published by up to two authors. In most research, 9 (90%) articles used the qualitative approach, 1 (10%) made use of both approaches. To address the issue, the authors used different research methods or data analysis. The main results are depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Studies on the social reintegration of former inmates into the job market published between 2009 and 2019

Author/Year	Location	Design	Data Collection Technique	Analysis	Subject/(N°) of participants	Main conclusions
Barbalho and Barros (2014)	Brazil/MG	Qualitative research	Semi-structured interviews	Ergology as a theoretical and methodological guideline	Prisoners released from the prison system adult male/ (n = 15)	Jobs offered through Return Project are in civil construction, as a hod carrier.
Faria and Barros (2011)	Brazil/MG	Qualitative research	In-Depth Interviews Life History Clinical Psychosociology	Clinical Analysis	Male (n = 1)	Those involved in trafficking consider it work. Great difficulty in getting into the regular market in financial terms crime is more profitable than average work.
Fonseca and Kamimura (2012)	Brazil/SP	Quantitative and qualitative	Case study	Semi-structured interview, non-participant observation and bibliographic research	Male (n = 418)	After the arrest, there was the aggravating factor of criminal records making it difficult to access the job market.
Lauermann and Guazina (2013)	Brazil/RS	Qualitative research	Semi-structured Face-to face interviews	Discourse Analysis	Men Over 26 years old (n = 4)	The prison institution, makes it difficult for former inmates to enter the job market and social life.
Paula et al. (2016)	Brazil/PR	Descriptive research	Case report	Description	Action	The team meets to identify the skills and abilities of the assisted checking available job openings.
Ribeiro (2017)	Brazil/MG	Qualitative research	Collection of documental	Content Analysis	Documents (n = 4)	The job market is challenging for former inmates, for women; not even in their own families, they find support.
Rolim (2018)	Brazil/RS	Qualitative research	Literature review documents.	Analysis from the life course perspective	Documents (n = 4)	Reception in a community serves to model the prospect of everyday life; it allows norms to be shared the integration preventing secondary deviations.
Rudnicki et al. (2017)	Brazil/RS	Qualitative research	Literature review/Interview	Discourse Analysis	Women/Men (n = 27)	Employment opportunities are restricted for women, or even none at all, even in a minor offense.
J. B. Santos et al. (2013).	Brazil/CE	Qualitative research	ethnographically inspired study as tools direct observation and semi-structured interviews.	Discourse Analysis	Prisoners released from the prison system/ Men	Former inmates garbage collectors precarious working conditions and conflicts with the "depot" (depot owner).
Souza e Silveira (2017)	Brazil/MG	Qualitative research	Semi-structured Face-to-face interviews	Descriptive statistics/ Perception of the former inmate	Prisoners released from the prison system (n = 1,112)	Former inmates of the prison system offer little opportunity for work. Due to the low level of education and professional qualification, in addition to the stigma.

The analyzed productions presented several methodological choices: semi-structured interview, life history, ethnography, case study, experience report, literature review, documentary, and others. Most of the productions (9.4%) used the interview technique to produce and collect the information, with both the exclusive use of interviews and the use associated with another technique. The ethnographic method and documentary research were each cited in 0.64% of the studies.

## Discussion

The results of the studies analyzed had different objectives, having in common the investigation of different types of insertion of former inmates in the job market, and point to a contingent of unemployed former inmates of the prison system; therefore, the trends of these productions are characterized by the restriction of finding work. For J. B. Santos et al. (2013), in their study on garbage collectors released from the prison system in Fortaleza, it was possible to verify the precariousness of the work before the work of collection, linked to conditions of poverty, little education, and experience and almost no professional qualifications, factors inhibiting the possibility of tertiary prevention. In tertiary prevention, projects designed for groups that have already become involved in crime are found. In Brazil, little is invested in crime and violence prevention, so it can be said that the most neglected area is precisely that of tertiary prevention (Rolim et al., 2017).

In order to lessen this impact, through a presidential decree (Decree No. 9,450, 2018), the Política Nacional de Trabalho no Âmbito do Sistema Prisional (PNAT) was instituted. The objective of PNAT is to expand and qualify the offer of job openings to entrepreneurship and professional training for prisoners and former inmates. It also regulates art. 40, §5, of Law 8.666/1993. The idea is to insert prisoners and inmates into the world of work and income generation.

The country legislation provides assistance offered by the State related to the labor aspect to prisoners and those leaving the prison system. However, being in the law is no guarantee of access to these rights. "When he leaves the prison unit, he leaves it as just another unemployed person in search of insertion

in the job market" (Fonseca & Kamimura, 2012, p. 155, our translation). Furthermore, they will have to compete for jobs with people who do not carry the stigma of criminality and will be faced with the discredit of employers concerning their condition. That is because, in society's opinion, the possibility that a criminal will commit further crimes is presumed since he has shown himself to be a person "with no respect for the law."

Another point to be considered is that the deprivation of freedom and social exclusion is extended after the sentence has been served, this time imposed by society, which, fueled by prejudice, closes off all opportunities, whether social or labor-related, preventing the prison inmate's total freedom. Society excludes former inmates when they have their "files" consulted and, automatically, discarded when applying for jobs in the job market. A survey carried out in Paraná found that for 70% of the former inmates of the prison system, prejudice is the main reason they cannot get a job (Wauters, 2003). With a criminal record that follows the ex-offender's life - a stigma that he carries forever - there is difficulty accessing work, making it impossible for him to hold public office and tax him socially, making him unprepared for resocialization.

Therefore, "resocialization," understood as "bringing someone who was not inserted into society, reinserting him, transforming him back into something (or someone) who at one time belonged to a certain social group" (Barra, 2012, p. 27, our translation), can be taken as one of the ways to develop the dignity of these individuals, as it makes it possible to create expectations about a lost future that glimpsed within the walls of a penitentiary, "detainee of an archaic system that only punishes and does not prepare him to return to life in society, besides offering degrading and inhumane survival conditions" (Brandão & Farias, 2013, p. 6, our translation).

The former inmates' priority in post-prison life is to return to the job market, considering that many families depend on their income. Work is understood as a need for personal and family survival and not a moral return to society.

As for the life expectations of these former inmates after leaving the prison system, feelings of repression and intimidation in the face of punishment

predominate, as well as fear of the consequences of getting involved in crime. However, there are reports of feelings of hope and encouragement for a better life after getting out of prison. One aspect pointed out as a motivator in this period is family support. For some, prison represents a change, an essential point in their lives, especially regarding expectations towards family (Barbalho & Barros, 2014; Fonseca & Kamimura, 2012; Lauermaann & Guazina, 2013; Rolim, 2018).

The insertion of former inmates in the job market is a complex issue that requires understanding a series of individual, social, and economic factors. The most considerable difficulties experienced by former inmates are: the adjustment to the rules of the world of work (compliance with routines, schedules, obedience to hierarchy, etc.), the concentration of jobs in manual activities, the frustration of work expectations and desired income, and the difficulty of companies in managing this workforce (Pastore, 2011).

The opportunities to work activities, according to Fonseca and Rodrigues (2017), can promote the elevation of the self-esteem of the inmate and his dignity as a form of recognition that he is no longer involved in crime, promoting his self-sufficiency, favoring his empowerment and, consequently, developing his independence in life in society (Fonseca & Rodrigues, 2017; Souza & Silveira, 2017).

Some entities are dedicated to reinserting the prisoner back into society, and they are known as institutional support networks that are important for obtaining employment and reducing recidivism rates. That is the case with the Return Project, which works on the labor insertion of former inmates in the construction industry, aiming to prevent them from returning to risky situations that can lead to crime. Findings show that with criminal prosecution, the most accessible employment is in construction, especially in the role of hod carrier (Barbalho & Barros, 2014; Pastore, 2011; Souza & Silveira, 2017).

In the view of society and the former inmates themselves, work is the most important and the scarcest tool. Therefore, programs that act in the labor insertion of former inmates of the prison system should aim to prevent these individuals from returning to situations that can lead to criminality,

experience a world different from the prison world, and offer life expectations individuals. Thus, it is indispensable that institutional support networks act in a logical way that aims at hiring the subject and the positive effects of work in other spheres of the former inmate's life, such as in family and community relations (Souza & Silveira, 2017).

These institutions act to collaborate in the reinsertion of former offenders into the job market, such as direct work with offenders, work cooperatives, training and outplacement entities, employability projects, incubators for entrepreneurs, social-religious methods, interdisciplinary work, community councils, direct action government entities, and articulation government entities (Ribeiro, 2017).

Based on honest work, social inclusion is the best way to meet the social needs of these people. Exercising the right to work provides dignity for graduates in extramural life and offers opportunities for self-realization and advancement on the social ladder. However, the expectations of these individuals concerning work are limited to accepting the first job that comes along, even if in inferior occupations with those they had before entering the system. The difficulties further reinforce this with criminal records, low education of those who leave, and the lack of professionalization.

This priority relates to survival and is not determined by one's own choices. Researches on the reality of these former inmates of the prison system access to education and work as social rights reveal their desire to rise professionally within the companies where they work, but they do not indicate concrete plans with the company or outside it (Fonseca & Kamimura, 2012; Souza & Silveira, 2017).

Because of the widespread prejudice, the criminogenic current is strengthened, and violence is fed back. In other words, the prison institution, functioning as a mechanism of marginalization and reproduction of delinquency, hinders the insertion of the former inmates in the job market and social life in general. Moreover, with the stigma of criminals, the chances of these subjects became the target of discriminatory surveillance are increased, configuring imprisonment that does not end even after serving a sentence (Lauermaann & Guazina, 2013; Ribeiro, 2017; Rolim, 2018; Rudnicki et al., 2017).

## Final Considerations

Given all that was researched, it was possible to answer the research question: How does the national and international scientific literature show the insertion of former inmates of the prison system in the job market? Considering that the publications found were about the Brazilian reality, it is understood that Brazilian ex-offenders will have more significant difficulties for a dignified reentry in terms of job opportunities and equality in society. However, it was possible to elaborate on essential points in the proposed discussion.

As one of the main topics of this research, the prison system in Brazil showed inefficiency in the field of resocialization and highlighted the predominance of studies with former male inmates. Furthermore, regarding the gender theme, no studies on the transvestite or transsexual population were found. Therefore, the production of knowledge focused on the themes of gender and work is considered necessary.

It is worth remembering the importance of a social change that breaks the prejudices about the former convicts. However, it is also necessary that these people's educational preparation, during their imprisonment period, aim, more than a technical formation, at a fuller formation. Nevertheless, despite this, it is necessary to invest in more research to produce knowledge and contextualized, coherent, and humanized information and indicators for the execution of a rights policy for this population.

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## Author contributions

Penso, M. A. participated in the conception, review, and final approval of the manuscript. Silva, J. F. participated in data collection and manuscript review. Silva, L. G. A. participated in the collection and analysis of data and writing of the manuscript. Oliveira, M. L. C. participated in the data analysis and writing of the manuscript.

## Competing interests

No financial, legal, or political conflicts involving third parties (government, private companies, and foundations, etc.) have been declared for any aspect of the submitted work (including but not limited to grants and funding, advisory board participation, study design, manuscript preparation, statistical analysis etc.).

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