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Research Article

The Shadow of Crime: Impact on Prison Experiences and Recidivism Tendency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the impact of prison experiences on recidivism. A phenomenological approach was adopted, total of 15 people were interviewed and a semi-structured interview form was used. Network connections and snowball sampling were used to reach the participants. For this reason, we first attempted to understand the meanings attributed by the participants to concepts such as crime, criminality, and guilt. Prison experiences included daily functioning, adaptation processes and communication with inmates and staff. The impact of the participants' prison experiences on their post-release lives and recidivism was analyzed. It was observed that the process of adaptation to prison differed according to the types of crimes, length of sentence and experiences. Prison experiences are not a reason for reoffending in themselves. Individual differences, familial reasons, criminal motivation and external factors related to post-prison conditions such as labeling and poverty, also play key roles in recidivism. The effect of the criminal subculture in prison on recidivism has also been observed. Prison experiences can trigger psychological problems, and after release, factors related to stigmatization, poverty, housing, employment, financial income, exclusion and official supervision make it difficult to adapt to social life.

Keywords: Sociology of Crime, Prison, Prison Experiences, Community Edaptation, Recidivism

1. Introduction

The penal system and prison experiences play a crucial role in ensuring the security and order of societal life. However, it is essential to examine the long-term effects of these experiences on incarcerated individuals and convicts, as well as their reintegration into society, or in other words, their re-entry into society, with a deep understanding. This is because the time spent in these institutions, built upon the punishment of individuals deemed a threat to society, not only influences the objectives of punishment but can also lead to traumatic experiences and psychological difficulties, especially among prisoners. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of prison experiences on inmates and comprehend their effects on recidivism. To achieve this aim, themes such as living conditions in prison, communication with staff and other inmates, the utilization of leisure time in prison, and everyday life experiences after release have been identified.

Prisons are places where individuals with a connection to crime are separated from society, and justice is administered, reflecting the classical perception of punishment. Those who are punished through incarceration and isolated from society lead a limited life in confined spaces. These institutions have the power to fundamentally alter individuals' lives and shape their futures. Therefore, do these establishments, which hold such importance over human life, prevent individuals from committing crimes again? In other words, do these institutions have any deterrent features that prompt individuals to reassess their relationship with crime, or have they become schools where different types of crimes are taught?

Undoubtedly, these questions constitute an important area of concern. While there is a rich body of literature abroad discussing these issues, focusing on topics such as recidivism, the functions of prisons, and deterrence, research on prisons in Turkey is limited (Kızmaz, 2007). This study contributes to this body of research under the title "Prison Experiences".

This qualitative study was conducted with a total of 15 participants using snowball sampling. The interview technique was used for data collection. The interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded after the participants provided consent. Two of the participants were female and 13 were male. A phenomenological design was used, and descriptive analysis technique was employed. The main findings of this research are as follows: The process of adaptation to prison varies according to the types of offenses, sentence durations and experiences. Although prison experiences are not the only reasons for recidivism, individual differences (personality traits such as impulsivity), familial reasons, criminal motivation and post-prison conditions such as labeling and poverty also play an important role in this process. The effect of prison criminal subculture on subsequent criminal behaviors was also observed. While prison experiences can trigger psychological problems; however, factors such as stigmatization, poverty, housing, employment and exclusion after release make it difficult to re-adapt to society.

2. Methodology

Rooted in profound philosophical traditions (Wilson, 2015, p. 38) and focusing on human experience and understanding (Van Manen, 2007, p. 12), phenomenology is a qualitative method employed to highlight individuals' feelings, perceptions, and perspectives toward a specific concept or phenomenon and to describe how they experience this phenomenon (Rose, Beeby & Parker, 1995, p. 1124). Considering the main theme of the study, it is believed necessary to include participants' experiences, perceptions, and emotional states to comprehend the significance of the topic. Specifically, for subjects like prison experiences and the tendency to reoffend, which are characterized by personal and emotional dimensions, the phenomenological approach within qualitative methods has been chosen for its ability to provide in-depth understanding. Therefore, the data will be interpreted by taking the phenomenological approach into account, and a descriptive analysis technique will be used.

Interviews were adopted as the research technique. A total of 15 people were interviewed via telephone using a semi-structured form.

Interview questions cover demographic information, first criminal experience, reasons for recidivism, meanings attributed to concepts such as crime, criminal guilt, reactions from peers, family, and social environment after the crime, prison experiences (education received, difficulties experienced, what was felt, etc.), the effect of the time spent in prison on recidivism, and experiences after release.

The participants consist of people who have been in prison for different periods of time , but who have re-established a relationship with crime after their release, in other words, who have committed crimes repeatedly. They were identified through snowball sampling. Due to the difficulty in accessing these individuals, the residence of the participants was not limited to a specific province/region; only the fact that the participants lived in Turkey was considered.

Thirteen participants were male and two were female. Difficulty was encountered in reaching female participants due to the predominance of male offenders and the scarcity of female offenders in their social circles. The age distribution of the participants ranged from 20 to 55 years.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Doğuş University on July 19, 2023, under Protocol Number 47247.

3. Prison Experiences: Concepts and Insights from the Literature

Punishment is a sanction imposed on an individual whose commission of a crime has been definitively established through a judicial decision, within the framework of the law and by judicial decree, with the aim of both rehabilitation (special prevention) and general deterrence" (Öztürk & Erdem, 2006, p. 50). Based on this definition, punishment involves various sanctions imposed by the state in response to a criminal act, ranging from confiscation of assets deprive liberty.

There are three fundamental theories regarding the function and role of punishment: the idea of retribution, general deterrence, and specific deterrence. While the concept of retribution employs "punishment" to impose the consequences of the crime, deterrence theories aim to prevent future occurrences of crime. Prevention actions involve rehabilitation. It is argued that correction, development, education, and rebuilding self-confidence are necessary to prevent reoffending (Esposito, 2014, p. 184).

Today, one of the most common forms of punishment for committing a crime is imprisonment. Therefore, one of the prominent institutions for preventing crime is the prison system. The oldest model of imprisonment dates back to 1596, when the Rasphuis opened in Amsterdam. This prison, which targeted beggars and young offenders, served as an inspiration for others as well (Foucault, 2015, p. 189). As seen above, the roots of deterring individuals from committing crimes through imprisonment date back to ancient times.

Foucault attributes the origins of the modern prison system to the restructuring and organization of previous forms of punishment, which date back to the late 16th century. Esposito also emphasized the changing nature of punishment systems throughout history, noting that during the Middle Ages, prisons were merely used as places where the accused awaited trial, transitioning from physical punishments to imprisonment. With the influence of the Enlightenment, punishment became more humane (Esposito, 2014, p. 184).

The number of incarcerations is significantly high both in Turkey and around the world. The high rate of recidivism plays a significant role in these numbers. For instance, in the United States (US), over 50% of prisoners return to prison within three years of release. The recidivism rate is also high in other countries: Scotland has a 50% rate, Japan 43%, Australia 39%, and in Ireland, it rises to 62% (Deady, 2014, pp. 1-2).

In Scandinavian countries, there are practices related to different imprisonment models that are considered successful. For instance, Norway, in particular, has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world, at 20%. Norwegian penal philosophy believes that punitive, traditional prisons are ineffective and that prisoners should be treated humanely to successfully reintegrate into society. Therefore, apart from the loss of freedom, all the rights of prisoners are protected, and prison life resembles the outside world. Additionally, post-release needs such as employment, education, housing, healthcare, and addiction treatment are provided for (Deady, 2014, p. 3). In summary, there is a shift toward focusing less on punishment and instead on rehabilitation.

It is known that factors such as poverty and inequality, which are among the reasons for committing crimes, are less prevalent in Scandinavian countries. Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland are among the top ten countries with the least disparity between rich and poor. Citizens of these countries receive more social services. It is believed that strong social welfare systems reduce poverty and inequality, partially mitigating the driving forces of crime (Deady, 2014, pp. 3-4). Although the United States tends to have a punitive approach toward punishment, rehabilitation efforts are predominant in Scandinavian countries. These different approaches lead to differences in findings as well.

Every prison forms its own subculture, summarizing norms, traditions, modes of communication, relationships, and behaviors that regulate the environment. Walker defined prison subculture as prisoners encouraging solidarity among themselves, learning the intricacies of different crimes, forming alliances for committing future crimes, or being emboldened to commit crimes again (1987, p. 196). This subculture significantly influences and, moreover, determines the social life within the prisons and individuals' thoughts regarding further involvement in criminal activities.

Focusing on the impact of prison subculture on recidivism has highlighted the necessity of examining the relationship between recidivism and re-entry into prison. One of the first studies on this topic was conducted by Green and Winik. A study examining the court records of 1,003 defendants accused of drug-related crimes over a period of 4 years found that randomly assigned changes in incarceration and probation had no discernible effect on re-arrest rates. In

other words, imprisonment and supervision of those facing drug-related charges do not have any deterrent effect on subsequent criminal behavior (Green & Winik, 2010, pp. 357-358).

In a study conducted by Nagin and Snodgrass (2013), the impact of incarceration on post-release offending was examined using convicted offenders from counties with high imprisonment rates in Pennsylvania. However, no evidence indicating that imprisonment influenced re-arrest was found.

Mueller-Smith (2015) revealed that post-release criminal activities increase, with formerly incarcerated individuals continuing to commit more serious crimes and becoming more prone to engaging in new types of offenses. The study also found that the adverse effects on post-release employment and income constitute significant barriers to the reintegration of prisoners, leading to persistent economic vulnerability among former offenders.

In a study conducted by Harding and Harris (2020) on 1,300 males aged 18-25 who were released from prison, it was found that housing was a significant problem after leaving prison, with family support being more pronounced in housing stability. Nearly half of the participants moved in with their parents after being released. Additionally, employment was found to be a determining factor in successful reintegration, alongside housing.

In another study investigating the impact of prison experiences on recidivism, 12 studies from the literature were examined. It was found that the deterrent effect of imprisonment on the likelihood of reoffending was limited. Rehabilitation programs were found to have a reducing effect on recidivism, and in environments where rehabilitation elements were absent, there was a positive change in attitudes toward crime (Loeffler & Nagin, 2022).

One of the studies addressing the impact of social life in prison on subsequent criminal behavior is published under the title "The Prison Community." In his study, Clemmer (1970, pp. 479-483) used the concept of "prisonization" and stated that individuals entering prison adapt to the culture there and internalize the current situation. Individuals who have adopted prison life struggle to adapt to social life after release and may become involved in crime again.

While Livingston (1996) acknowledged that individuals with longer sentences commit fewer crimes compared to those with shorter ones, he argued, based on the findings of the aforementioned studies and his own acceptance, that there is no significant relationship between imprisonment and recidivism.

Taking the literature into account, it can be said that there are disagreements regarding the effect of imprisonment on recidivism.

Therefore, if imprisonment does not reduce recidivism, what should be done? There are different approaches to developing punishment policies to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. These are (Kızmaz, 2007):

1. Intensification of penalties and prison conditions.
2. Improving prison conditions.
3. Create alternative models for imprisonment and developing institutions.
4. Only incarcerating serious and violent offenders in prison.

One remedial point is to increase the number and quality of educational programs provided in prisons, as it has been observed that these programs lead to positive outcomes. According to a study conducted by the University of Missouri in 2011, educating prisoners and preparing them for employment upon their release greatly reduced the rate of recidivism. Inmates who benefit from educational opportunities in prison have higher chances of finding employment (Esposito, 2014, p. 190). It is observed that these educational programs develop individuals, prepare them for market conditions, and thus have a preventive effect on reoffending by attempting to prevent crime due to economic reasons, such as poverty.

Based on the information in the literature and the interviews conducted, this study emphasized that traditional punishment methods do not make a distinctive difference in reducing crime. On the contrary, crime and its derivatives can be learned in prison. This research result supports the widespread view in the literature. Alternative rehabilitation methods, the necessity of identifying and preventing/improving the reasons that lead to crime, and the importance of the post-crime process are revealed.

4. Findings

4.1. Daily Life Experiences in Prison

Daily life experiences in prison have been explored through prison routines, communication between inmates and correctional officers, the process of adapting to prison life, and how leisure time is spent in prison.

4.1.1. *Prison Routines*

These routines were based on activities consistently carried out in prison. Participants highlighted activities such as counts, meals, showers, visits, phone call hours, health services, and religious activities.

Regular counts are observed in prisons. One participant remarked about the counts, stating, "Counts would start at 8:00 in the morning. I would wake up around 7:30-7:40 to make it to count. You cannot attend in shorts and pajamas. We had to dress up. They also counted us in the room at 19:00 p.m. in the evening," while another said, "I don't remember the time, but outside, my mom, and officers on all four walls didn't let me sleep. It was difficult to line up twice a day initially. I played my own games. I also counted in my head and kept counting."

Regarding meals, one participant said, "I learned to eat regularly there." Breakfast will start at around 8:00 am and lunch will be at 12:00. I wish dinner was a little later. It started at 17:00 for us. If you have money, you're lucky here. Otherwise, you will have to make do with what's provided," while another participant commented, "it was a boring place, but I was fed. When I was at home, I was so hungry that I could feel my stomach on my back."

One participant mentioned the shower routine, saying, "Back at home, we had a good time." We'd shower every day, spray on our cologne, and head out. But in prison, there's no going out. You're seeing the same people all the time. But still, I have tried to stay clean. Everyone here had their own shower time. There weren't always hot water available." Another participant commented on showering, saying, "I've never been fond of water. Just as school teaches you things, so does prison. Isn't this place a school? It taught me to love water. Isn't gold valuable because it is rare? The water was scarce here, so it was precious. We'll wait in line. We showered in 5 minutes. And now, after getting out, my showers still last 5 minutes." Another participant expressed that they continued to adhere to a quick shower routine after release with the following words: "No matter what, shower in 5 minutes at the jet speed. It was hard not to rinse out the shampoo, but I got used to it. It was like a duty, and I was completing my duties successfully. I never showered for more than 5 minutes even outside."

One participant expressed his feelings about the visits as follows: "It was my favorite, the thing I missed the most. Both open and closed visits were allowed. I eagerly awaited the visit day, especially the hour. How can one hour be enough? But you say it's better than nothing. You ask them to talk quickly so that you can learn everything." Another participant said "Visitors could come under supervision. It was uncomfortable knowing that you were being watched. But it's a rule." Another participant described the situation as follows: "They always visited us from outside, but once I went out for a visit. My father was very ill. He passed away afterwards. But they allowed me to go out in such an urgent situation, and it made me promise not to misbehave again," referring to the offense as "misbehavior."

One participant regarding phone calls stated: "When you behave well, you can call your mother or your loved one. Whatever the boss says. The administration tells us the hours we should comply. Just let us hear and listen to the words with our ears. My only complaint is the short duration. Even ten minutes is too little for a conversation of fifty words. And there's also the issue of being listened to. That's why we couldn't discuss private matters." Another participant described being able to make phone calls through a reservation system: "It's like a scheduled appointment system at the hospital... We guarantee this by specifying the hours of conversation. But thank God above. They helped in emergencies." Another participant mentioned that the duration and frequency of calls were limited, and the cost of the call was the responsibility of the inmate: "You can't talk extensively as if you were side by side. At most, 10 minutes per week. That too if you have money in your pocket. You can only make calls from inside. The cost is on us." Another participant mentioned that video calls were also possible: "It didn't exist before. This is something new. The last time I was in prison (in 2022), I had a 30-minute video call with my brother once a week."

When it comes to accessing healthcare services in prison, there are different opinions. Access to healthcare services is perceived as being taken to the doctor when necessary. More than two-thirds of the participants stated that they did not feel the need to see a doctor and did not encounter any problems accessing healthcare services whenever they wanted, whereas the remaining participants expressed that they could not easily go to the doctor when they fell ill and faced difficulties accessing healthcare services. One participant expressed their experience by saying, "I kept calling for the doctor, and eventually, they heard my voice." Another participant commented, "Perhaps they think we're joking, requesting it just for the show." Maybe they're holding a grudge against us, or maybe they want us dead. I really don't know." On the other hand, a participant who stated that they could go to the doctor whenever they wanted mentioned, "God forbid. Thankfully, I haven't been very ill. Maybe once or twice I wanted to go. They helped me with that too."

Participants did not heavily demanded or complained about health-related issues. This finding could be attributed to their relatively young age and the absence of chronic illnesses.

Nearly half of the participants mentioned that they were granted facilities to perform their religious activities. However, other participants indicated occasional difficulties in fulfilling religious practices because of factors such as

limited water access at certain times. One participant stated, "I am a devout Muslim. But I don't pray or fast. If I had done so, the environment was suitable." While one participant stated, "Prison does not prevent performing religious worship," another participant emphasized the difficulties they faced in fulfilling their religious practices by saying, "If there were no water cuts, we wouldn't struggle to perform ablution." The predominant view regarding religious activities suggests that religion has a protective effect against the challenging aspects of prison life. One participant expressed this by saying, "Feeling down?" Want to swear, or feel like hitting someone? There's no need for that. Sit down, perform your prayer and relax. Say your prayer fill yourself with peace. Fast, ward off hunger. It's not where we are, but how we feel that matters."

The majority of participants emphasized that they continued to adhere to their beliefs and views before entering prison, with only one stating, "I had no crime, no sin. Why didn't He save me when I fell into prison? What did I do wrong? Why did this happen to me? With so many bad people around, why do I have to? I could not find answers to these questions. If I find them, maybe I'll believe again," indicating that the incident they experienced led to a change in their beliefs.

It can be said that the prison did not cause a significant change in the belief level of the majority of participants. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether religiosity increased or decreased in terms of the belief dimension. Regarding the worship dimension, only one participant mentioned that they performed their religious practices during their time in prison because they had more free time, but they did not engage in any worship activities after release.

The regulations in prison are observed to be aimed at organizing time spent together and ensuring security. Activities such as taking showers, eating meals, meeting visitors, communicating with the outside world, and conducting inmate counts occur on designated days and times, becoming routine.

4.1.2. *Communication with Other Inmates and Correctional Officers*

Communication with other inmates and correctional officers needs to be evaluated separately. This is because although some participants expressed having good relations with other inmates, they may have difficulties communicating with correctional officers. Two-thirds of the participants indicated that their communication with other inmates was good, whereas the same proportion reported having poor communication with correctional officers. One participant expressing their difficulty in getting along with correctional officers stated, "Inmates like me, we've been through a lot. But the officers are not like that. You can't talk to them, share your problems." Another participant mentioned, "We're all in the same boat. We can understand each other without words. Sometimes, we could communicate by just looking. That was my favorite part. But the staff members act like they have created the world. They're stuck-up. If I didn't have to, I wouldn't even look at their faces." Another participant shared their experience, "When I first got here (to the prison), I couldn't get along with anyone. But as time went on, we understood each other's situations. The officers didn't understand us at all. Are they treating us badly? No. But you feel something from them. It's like they don't like you. They don't do anything, but you can tell they don't like you. I felt it every day."

As stated above, two-thirds of the participants indicated good communication with other inmates. One of the participants regarding this issue stated, "There's no one entering prison who doesn't conform. You have to. There is a system. Everyone gets used to it. We learn a lot from each other. For example, when I last entered, some were singing songs, while others were reciting poetry. If your voice is not good, you should narrate your life as a story. Speaking and expressing oneself were relieving. If you don't talk, you go crazy inside. Four walls, a door, and more walls." Another participant expressed the understanding that shared experiences bring forth, saying, "You're a companion in misery, sister. Who else understands the pain, yearning for home, and suffering of imprisonment, if not someone experiencing the same? It's not about the words; it's about sharing the tea, enjoying the moment, and reciting folk songs without tarnishing one's freedom." Another participant, who expressed that communication with other inmates was not good, explained his reasoning as follows: "If you talk to them, you become like them. That's a certainty. Unless necessary, I didn't talk to them."

It has been noted that there are groupings within the ward when communicating with other inmates, and sometimes this grouping has led to conflicts within the ward. When the leader of the ward is embraced by the groups, the leader's ability to ensure unity and togetherness in the ward comes to the forefront. One participant mentioned, "We had an elder brother. We would ask for his permission for even the smallest things. Without him, many people would have clashed with each other. Because he was the most senior there, everyone respected him. Those who were very close to him had their own group, and those who were not close had separate groups. The ward was divided into two, but there was never any fighting." This indicates a peaceful atmosphere in the ward. Another participant remarked on the issue of grouping, saying, "Isn't there division where there are so many people?" Of course, there is. I side with whichever

group I see as close or strong. It's like a game of throes. It could also be like a cockfight. The mentality was that the stronger one wins." Meanwhile, another participant expressed the situation as follows: "The ward was generally divided into two, but it could also be divided into three or four smaller groups. Each group had its own ideas, thoughts, and minds. It was difficult to find common ground."

Incarcerated individuals in correctional facilities can maintain their communication even after being released. One participant mentioned, "I didn't like school. I did not study. I remained uneducated. I learned many things in prison. My first teacher was a fellow inmate who had been through the same thing as me. He was like a walking encyclopedia; he knew everything. I would ask him questions and learn from him. I liked him the most. When I got out, he was the first person I contacted." Another participant stated, "Thank God, there were many good people among us." But I had a special bond with the two of them. First, I got out, and then they did too. We met in a cafe and chatted. In fact, one of them lived with me for four months."

4.1.3. *The Process of Adjusting to Prison Life and Leisure Time Utilization in Prison*

The process of adaptation to prison life was explored in terms of participation in existing programs, adherence to discipline and rules, and social interactions.

Two-thirds of the participants stated that they participated in existing prison programs. One participant stated, "If I were outside, I wouldn't go." There's nothing to do there. We are entering a different field, encountering two different people. Instead of getting bored, I'm pushing myself to improve." Another participant mentioned, "We commemorated Ataturk. We celebrated on October 29. There were courses in painting, woodworking, and ceramics. I attended the painting course. We have exhibited our oil paintings. When I received my discharge papers, I made oil paintings and sold them. I wish I had learned it earlier so that I wouldn't have come back in." The participant interpreted getting out of prison as receiving discharge papers. Another participant mentioned that participation in activities changed their perspective on prison and made it easier for them to perceive it as home: "The film screenings and poetry readings were good. Once, there was also a folk song concert. Both delighted and helped me pass the time. I think these activities have contributed to my acceptance of prisons as home."

Participants' struggle with adapting to prison life primarily stemmed from the establishment of prison regulations. More than half of the participants questioned these regulations. Here are some of the views shared on this matter:

- "Why are these rules even in place?" What difference does it make if we maintain order here? Anyway, we're constantly surrounded by guards. I'm tired of getting disciplinary sanctions all the time."
- "Someone says something, and we just follow the suit." Why should we do this? Being counted every day is primitive. Repulsive. Why should I get used to that?"
- "I've never been rewarded for following the rules. How many years have passed since? They do not give a reward or acknowledge that they should when you behave smartly and obediently, but they quickly punish you for any trouble you cause. They even banned my visitation once. I got sick of distress. They set these rules to make us sick."
- "It's like we followed the rules of the streets, but now they expect us to follow the rules of punishment. If I were able to comply with these, I wouldn't be here."
- "I don't like rules. Are you going to force me to something I don't like? I'm not going to do it, sister. But I'll face the consequences."

Those who expressed having spent a long time in prison seemed to be more willing to adapt to prison life: "If it were just for a few months, it wouldn't matter much, but I stayed and lived for a total of 14 years. You get used to it out of necessity. I used to participate in activities because time does not pass if you do not. Because time is abundant here." Another participant said, "It's not easy for me to say. 9 years and 8 months... Then 3 years... When you stay for a long time, you become the master of the place. You learn everything. If you follow the rules, you can relax. I liked having peace of mind. Whatever education or program there were, I would say, "Let's go, I'm in.'"

Prisoners who reported having good relationships with other inmates mentioned that they adhered to rules more and adapted to prison life more quickly. One participant said, "They say women like to talk, right?" It's true. We loved it too. It is hard to be liked and to adapt when you join a game late. It's not like that there. I got along with everyone and have given many years of my life. When the horizon is far, the heart welcomes every rule, everyone kindly," while another participant mentioned that having a good relationship with other prisoners had a healing effect: "If they were bad, I would have been worse. My mind and body could not take it. I have met good people. I was imprisoned three times, and each time, the people were good. They healed my soul. When they turned out good, I adapted to their order."

Participants predominantly spent their free time in prison by participating in prison activities, spending time together, and writing letters. One participant mentioned that they utilized their free time: "I wrote many letters. Most of them went unanswered. Writing letters helped me express myself when I was unable to talk. Whenever I had the opportunity, I would read a book. Not selectively, whatever I came across." Another participant stated, "I wish I had done sports. However, not many are into individual activities. We attended educational sessions and sang folk songs while playing volleyball. We spent time together. What else could we do?"

Only one participant mentioned using their free time to engage in religious activities: "You're just spinning within these four walls, looking at the air and the ceiling. You can't even see the sky. But you know Allah is there. So whenever I had the opportunity, I prayed, and I prayed to Him. Not to get out of here but not to end up here again."

4.2. Life After Release

Considering life after release, the impacts of prison experiences on later reoffending and adjustment to post-release society, as well as changing aspects of life, have emerged as significant topics.

4.2.1. *Impact of Prison Experiences on Subsequent Criminal Behavior*

Personal experiences, participation in education and rehabilitation programs, prison life, and certain conditions, such as situations and processes, affect the likelihood that individuals will commit crimes again. Therefore, the gained experience can be important and even decisive in recommitting crimes. In this study, it was observed that prison processes vary according to the personal experiences of the participants. Therefore, this individuality leads us to the conclusion that their risk of re-offending is not the same even under identical conditions.

Individuals who associate themselves with crime may have different interpretations of the concepts, which can affect the reproduction of this relationship. For example, participants who perceived crime as "a way of life" were observed to have no remorse for committing other crimes. However, participants who interpreted crime as "misfortune" described their subsequent criminal behavior as "an accident," even if they engaged in it again later on. Those who interpret guilt as "regret" have expressed that they were not happy or satisfied with their criminal behavior but rather felt that their life circumstances "led them" to it. Individuals who associate the term "criminal" with "potential danger," "illegal person," "thief," "traitor," and "corrupt" have acknowledged that crime is "bad" but stated that they "had to" engage in it. Those who view the term "criminal" as "a prisoner of fate" or "an unlucky person" perceive committing crimes as a professional field. The negative connotations attached to the words have led to a more negative interpretation of criminal actions, while the attribution of positive meanings has facilitated the perception of crime as a "job" or "profession."

The focus of the inmates who shared their experiences regarding education and rehabilitation programs in prison is that these programs are beneficial for passing the time during incarceration but failed to meet their needs after release. One participant expressed, "There were some courses offered to acquire a profession. Participating in them feels good. It broadens your mind. You won't get bored. But that won't save me. I am discouraged by poverty. Even if I work, I can't find enough money to live on. How many jobs do I need to work at, three or four, to live a decent life?" Another participant echoed similar sentiments, stating, "They don't ask us for what they taught us here when we get out. They just say goodbye bye when they see our records. So, you're only going to those courses to pass the time. There needs to be an environment where you can use the skills you learned when you get out."

Two different perspectives have emerged regarding the impact of prison life and conditions on individuals: The first is that the experience in prison leads to trauma and anxiety: One participant, who stated that an incident in prison left a mark on them, said, "After getting out, I couldn't sleep in the dark. Wherever I am, there must be light for me to sleep," and they experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. Another participant said, "When I'm in a closed space, I feel suffocated. My hands and feet were trembling. I want to throw myself out," which is an example of claustrophobic anxiety disorder. Another participant could not forget the pressure they experienced in prison and even considered suicide: "I couldn't grasp all that order. Would they argue and gossip for hours about the smallest things? I got fed up. I even thought about suicide to get away. I had a bit of fear of God, so I backed off. But when I got out, I didn't know what to do. I felt like I was in outer space. Now, I don't care about my job or marriage. When I think about these things, I forget about God. I took a lot of pills. I thought I'd die. My brother saved me. I couldn't even manage to die. I sinned for no reason." One interesting point is that despite the participants' religious beliefs in not committing suicide while in prison, they attempted suicide after release without any change in their beliefs.

The second perspective reveals a more rule-based lifestyle: "In prison, everyone did something they did. I also had mine. I was disciplined. I learned to do things by myself. My waking up and bedtime were fixed. My mother would

be proud if she saw how disciplined I was," one participant said. Another participant remarked, "In prison, everything is in order. Whether you like it or not, you learn to be decent and have patience. You find yourself teaching others the same thing," highlighting the internalization of orderliness and its reflection on others.

The effects of prison life on reoffending can be categorized under two main themes. The first theme suggests that prison does not have a deterrent effect; on the contrary, it may encourage re-offending. One participant expressed, "I'm not a bad person. Shame on the system that made me do this. Unless some things are fixed, the problem cannot be prevented. At first, I was thankful for the situation compared to others there. The second time since I was already in, I decided to play big like them. I asked around, became knowledgeable, and educated myself." Another participant stated, "I'm young. I misbehave. What does a child know about behavior? My father used to beat me. He beat me up, and I would do it again. Now, the state beats me, and I will do it again. I even meet masters inside, learning better from them." Another participant highlighted the instructional role of prison, saying, "There were big brothers and sisters. They were making sure we were seasoned. They told us everything they knew. Once out, we would help them with their jobs outside." These comments point to a concerning aspect of prison culture, where, rather than rehabilitating, the environment may serve as a learning ground for further criminal activities, thereby perpetuating a cycle of crime.

The other theme suggests that while prison may have a deterrent effect, the inevitability of re-offending is attributed to the inability to improve external factors that could lead to crime: One participant stated, "Once you fall into that hole, you'd understand why my psychology is messed up. If it's so bad, why do I risk the same thing again? What else could I do? Should I just die of hunger in the corner? The chance of being caught is possible, and death is certain." Another participant expressed, "You can't choose your family. If I had a decent family, it wouldn't have been like this. My family made me a prisoner of fate." These statements highlight how external circumstances, such as socioeconomic factors and family background, contribute to individuals feeling trapped in a cycle of crime, despite acknowledging the risks and consequences associated with reoffending.

4.2.2. *Adapting to Society and Changing Aspects of Life*

The difficulties experienced by individuals upon release vary depending on the type of crime, duration of incarceration, and level of social support. Challenges in adjusting to society include finding employment, housing issues, financial problems, social exclusion, official supervision, psychological issues, addiction, family and relationship issues, education, and skill development. Housing problems, social exclusion, official supervision, psychological issues, addiction, family relationships, and others constitute the changing aspects of life for ex-convicts after release.

The process of adapting to society varies according to the duration of the sentence, types of crimes, and experiences. A participant who received a sentence of approximately 2 years for a crime and later was convicted of murder for killing someone who attempted to rape them, after approximately 13 years, expressed the following regarding adjustment to society: "When asked, I will tell them." Those who expected me to embrace them instead of killing them could forget about it. I hold my head high, and my face is bright. I don't care about anyone. I did not do evil inside, and I will not find evil outside. It will be tough, but I'll get used to it."

A participant who spent 15 years in prison and returned to prison for theft 3 years later, serving 2 years before being released again, had this to say about the matter: "The first time it was murder, the second time it was theft. I wish it hadn't happened, but it did. I have served my sentence. I did not harm anyone. From now on, I'll act like a gentleman and do whatever I can without leaving any regrets."

A participant who had been in prison three times for assault and drug dealing said, "The outside world is worse than being inside. Sometimes I miss my four walls and me bed. My imprisonment lasts for 5.5 years. It's not that long. If they come after me again, I'll do the same things again." This indicates that he perceives his time in prison as short and suggests that he may commit crimes again, depending on the circumstances.

Nearly all participants experienced difficulties in employment after their release. One participant mentioned issues related to finding a job, education, and skill development, saying, "People start learning a trade from childhood. Who can learn a profession in just three to five months of training, especially if they lack talent? Our main problem is finding a job. They shouldn't let us remain ignorant just because we were raised in ignorance. Instead of cramming us into a place, they should teach us in the field, in our area." Another participant stated, "It's not enough to teach grasshopper breeding without knowing the market. If it had been true, we would have found jobs in the country with the education we received in prison," indicating that the education and training provided in prison did not contribute to employment opportunities.

Another significant problem experienced after release is finding housing. Approximately two-thirds of the participants mentioned experiencing housing problems due to both economic constraints and the attitudes of landlords. One

participant expressed, "I have no money and no home. I would like to live in a place where I can put my head down, even if it's dirty, and sit on a chair. A place with curtains, somewhere that belongs to me. The idea alone is nice." Another participant stated, "I wanted to rent a place to get away from both the environment and me family. I found a cheap, tiny place, but the landlord didn't want me. He said he would only rent to a family or a civil servant."

Nearly all participants experienced financial difficulties. Regarding this issue, one participant mentioned, "I needed financial support while in prison. It made me feel bad. After I got out, I still feel bad. If friends and family don't give me money, I will not survive. I don't know how much they can tolerate me, honestly." Another participant expressed, "I am a burden to my family, to myself, and to life." I am the son of a load. Maybe three or ten months later, I'll be a burden in prison again. I cannot break this cycle."

Approximately two-thirds of the participants expressed difficulty adapting to society because of their feeling excluded. This exclusion was frequently experienced in finding housing, in the employment process, and in establishing new friendships. One participant stated, "I am as good as dead. Who would entrust their daughter to a dead man?" indicating his struggle to find a suitable partner. Another participant mentioned, "I have a mark of shame on my forehead. It's preceding me everywhere. People don't want to entrust their businesses to me. Maybe they're right. I could not control myself. However, if I could not control myself again, I might do the same. In addition, his property is his property. I can't change that." This illustrates the challenges faced in finding employment.

Nearly all participants subject to probation stated that regularly going to sign-in is exhausting both financially and emotionally. One participant said, "What's with this constant signing?" Are we in a fight, or something? Where are we going on this record?" Another participant expressed, "I used to take time off work to sign when it coincided with my shift. My boss used to deduct it from my salary. I swear, I'm tired of it."

Nearly half of the participants reported experiencing psychological issues after their release. One participant mentioned, "I was already sick, but I went crazy there." They make a psychopath out of you. So many rules nowhere else." highlighting the psychologically draining aspect of prison rules. Another emphasized their experience of anxiety using these words: "Not every moment can be described. But after I got out, I couldn't sleep well for a long time. When I closed my eyes, I had very real dreams of being back inside. I had to use medication because of these dreams."

Less than a third of the participants had a relationship with addictive substances, which is typically understood through drug use. One participant stated, "We ended up here for selling drugs anyway. How would I know something I didn't use? After getting out, I started using. This time I needed money to buy it, so I had to steal." Another participant expressed, "Does punishment work?" I couldn't stop without drinking. At the treatment place they sent me, everyone was worse than me. It's all about money." indicating that rehabilitation efforts for addiction did not have a positive effect on the participants.

Only one-third of the participants stated that they continued to communicate with their families and that the family environment did not have any effect on being pushed into crime. One participant stated the importance of family in being dragged into crime: "If we had proper parents, I would not have gone through this", while another participant said "When the family was poor, I became the only hope. I died many times so that they could live" and saw the low economic income of the family as a driving force in committing crime. Another participant said, "I did it because I felt it." My family does not have any sins. Newborn babies run after me saying, "brother, brother, brother." This makes me happy. My family has nothing to do with it", emphasizing that crime motivation is more dominant than family.

It was observed that the participants only cared about education and skill development while they were in prison; they did not receive training to increase their education and improve their skills after release; and they evaluated this situation on economic grounds: "I lost count of how many times I told you about money today. If you don't have money, you cannot go to a course; let's say you can barely go. You cannot buy the materials you want. I am a person who earns a living, sister. If I am going to give some of what I earn for these courses, I cannot eat or drink." Another participant said, "If I had this opportunity, I would not resort to any other means to earn money. If the places I go to promise to find a job, I would work day and night, and I would pay. But here you are rowing in vain. It is useless".

5. General Assessment and Suggestions

The findings were evaluated under two headings: daily life experiences in prison and life after release. While the daily life experiences in prison include prison routines, the prison adaptation process and leisure time evaluation, communication with other inmates and correctional officers, two themes emerged in the post-release life section: the effect of prison experiences on subsequent criminal behavior, adaptation to society after release and changing aspects of life.

Prison routines revealed codes such as counts, eating, showering, visits, phone calls, health services, and religious activities, while the process of adaptation to prison and leisure time evaluation revealed codes such as whether they participated in existing programs, whether they behaved in accordance with discipline or rules, and social interaction.

The impact of prison experiences on recidivism was attempted to be understood from the comments of the participants, their prison experiences, rehabilitation and support activities, difficulties experienced in adapting to society and changes in their former lives.

The general findings of this study are as follows: The meanings attributed to concepts such as crime, criminality, and delinquency effectively reproduce the relationship with crime. Because those who attributed negative meanings to these concepts interpreted their repeated relationship with crime as an accident and undesirable situation. On the other hand, it was revealed that the participants who attributed positive meanings to these concepts identified this action with their identity. Although external reasons were effective in the repetition of the action, there was also a preference.

It can be seen that the process of adaptation to prison differs according to the type of crime, duration of sentence, and experience. For example, inmates who stay in prison for a long time pay more attention to prison rules, participate in programs, accept the reality of prison, and try to adapt to the situation. On the other hand, resistance to prison rules and questioning can make the adaptation of inmates difficult.

When the effect of prison experiences on recidivism is examined, the role of length of stay, communication between inmates, and religious activities can be mentioned. It was observed that those who stayed in prison for a long time were more willing to adapt to the prison. These people stated that it was more relaxing to adopt prison life and obey the rules. Those who communicate well with other inmates are more likely to follow the rules and adapt to prison more quickly. Religious activities were seen as a way of coping with difficult processes in prison.

Prison experiences are not in themselves a reason for re-offending; individual differences related to personality traits such as impulsivity, familial reasons, and criminal motivation, and external factors related to post-prison conditions such as labeling and poverty, which can be considered as the driving factors of crime, may also have a key responsibility in re-offending.

The effect of the criminal subculture in prison on recidivism was observed. To summarize, it can be said that along with the effect of variables such as the duration of incarceration on recidivism, prison ensures the normalization of crime and can also have a quality that can function as a school. Although it varies from institution to institution, the criminal subculture it contains imparts an instructive quality to crime.

It can be seen that the activities carried out in prison increase adaptation to the environment and ensure the adoption of prison as a living space. In addition, in cases of committing a crime due to an external reason, such as poverty, the effect of vocational training and rehabilitation programs in prison on recidivism is very limited. The reason the participants commit crimes is not because they lack any profession but because they do not have an income that can provide their livelihood. The fact is that they cannot find a working area suitable for their profession, and even if they do, they cannot reach the minimum standard of living, which leads them to establish a relationship with crime. However, there is also a desire for the training received in prison to be provided as an income-generating job after release. For example, convicts who participated in different courses, such as painting, tried to find ways to use what they had learned as sources of income. This did not prevent repeat offenders from re-offending per se because repeat offenders have different types of offenses rather than the same type of offense. Although poverty is the predominant reason for this finding, other factors such as the inability to control anger, the influence of the place, the effort to become popular, and the perception of crime as a profession are also possible.

However, an important point to emphasize is that participation in prison programs is a therapeutic way to spend leisure time. In fact, most of the free time is spent participating in activities/courses. Participants frequently stated that participation in the program encouraged personal development and helped them to use their time more effectively.

Repeat offending also involves learning about different types of crimes in prison. The fact that prison is coded as a school and considered a learning center for many things has enabled those who commit crimes for reasons other than individual reasons to learn the intricacies of different crimes. The fact that a person imprisoned for theft later becomes a drug smuggler, or a drug dealer starts human trafficking are typical examples of such a situation. This situation leads us to conclude that crime is a learned activity and confirms the validity of learning theorists.

Prison experiences can trigger psychological illnesses and make it difficult for people to adapt to social life. Participants stated that they experienced some psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional insensitivity and suicidal thoughts. The emotional difficulties experienced by those who stated that they had started to experience psychological problems in prison, especially with the contribution of negative effects such as anxiety and depression, increased their tendency to commit crimes. For this reason, it is necessary to develop a social

service approach that can control the psychological health of those released and provide psychological support as long as necessary.

One of the most important problems experienced by individuals with a criminal past after release is stigmatization. Stigmatization is especially experienced during the stages of finding a job and establishing family unity. People who think that they have been exposed to bad labels may be more prone to associate with crime. In addition, stigmatization can also lead to exclusion from social life.

Poverty is one of the main factors that make it difficult for people to adapt to social life after release. Many participants attributed poverty as the main reason for repeated offenses.

The other main factors affecting the socialization process of prisoners are related to finding a job, housing, financial gain, exclusion and official supervision. Family and social support also play an important role in social adaptation. The weakening or negative impact of family ties negatively affects social adaptation.

It is possible to consider social support as a facilitator for the social integration of individuals released from prison. The support of family, friends and community can help ex-prisoners build strong links to prevent recidivism.

The findings of this research support the relevant literature. Although the effect of prison experiences on subsequent offending varies depending on social adaptation and rehabilitation processes, incarceration is understood that incarceration in a place is not a sufficient reason to reduce or eliminate criminality. This situation demonstrates that it is important not only to use the punishment method in combating crime, but also to adopt the rehabilitation programs adopted in Scandinavian countries, to develop alternative models and social support. In order to improve the process of socialization, it is necessary to increase the efforts to provide prisoners with more access to employment and vocational training opportunities, to provide crime sensitization training for individuals and families, to strengthen social support systems, to eliminate the problems they face in finding housing and to expand the opportunities for psychological assistance.

In general, using innovative criteria to encourage learning in prison, planning and actively implementing a strong needs analysis system, taking measures to address poverty and social exclusion, which are seen as the biggest problems especially in post-release integration into society, are measures to reduce recidivism, in other words to rehabilitate the offender. To summarize, prisoners need to be empowered from a social work perspective because the problems experienced by this group are problems for the entire society because they affect the entire society.

6. Conclusion

In this study, which aims to examine the effects of prison experiences on post-release lives and their likelihood of recidivism in depth, the symbolic interactionism approach was used. A total of 15 people were interviewed and the focus was on their prison experiences and the processes they went through after release.

The findings revealed that daily life routines, in prison, adaptation processes and communication between inmates and correctional officers were important. It was observed that inmates who stayed in prison for a long time were more likely to comply with prison rules and participate in programs, which was associated with their acceptance of the prison reality and adaptation to the situation. However, it was observed that the adaptation of inmates who exhibited resistance to the prison became more difficult. The education received in prison and activities participated in made the prison experience more meaningful and encouraged personal development.

After release, the impact of prison experiences on the offending experience is complex. The criminal subculture and normalization of crime in prison may contribute to individuals' tendency to re-offend. However, external factors such as impulsivity, personality traits, family reasons, labeling and poverty have also been found to play a role in recidivism. In particular, poverty is one of the main factors that make it difficult for people to adapt to their social life after release. It has been stated that the time spent in prison can negatively affect the psychological state of individuals, making the process of adaptation to social life difficult. Stigmatization, difficulties in finding a job and participating in social life can lead ex-prisoners to re-engage with crime. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen social support mechanisms that facilitate the integration of prisoners into society after their release, to increase employment and vocational training opportunities, to provide psychological support and to fight against poverty.

In conclusion, the impact of prison experiences on post individuals' post-release lives and recidivism is complex and multidimensional. While experiences in prison may increase individuals' tendency to reoffend, insufficient social, economic and psychological support may also negatively affect this process. Although the trainings and programs attended in prison contribute to the personal development of individuals, recidivism may be inevitable unless basic problems such as poverty are solved. In this context, supporting post-prison rehabilitation and social adaptation processes is of critical importance for preventing crime and ensuring social cohesion.

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