

Social Exclusion, Institutional Deterioration, and Barriers After Release Among Incarcerated Individuals in Chile

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Abstract

This study analyzes how social exclusion, prison experiences and barriers after release altogether conspire against a successful re-entry of a sample of incarcerated individuals in Chile. A methodological combination of reviewing previous literature on social exclusion of the incarcerated, the analysis of administrative data and prison surveys, along with geocoded data was employed. We analyzed the data based on descriptive statistics, logistic regression models (to predict recidivism or not), and the creation of maps to examine the possible overlap between recidivism of released individuals and social disadvantaged areas of different cities in Chile. Our main findings suggest that incarcerated individuals had higher levels of social exclusion before entering to prison; once incarcerated, they experience harsh conditions that amplify initial handicaps; finally, after release, a 43.2% of incarcerated individuals in our cohort was sent to prison again, consistent with national estimates. In terms of predictors, our findings show the crucial role of prison officers and guards in reducing recidivism, especially through a well-functioning facility, and by establishing an appropriate relationship with the incarcerated. On the other hand, variables predicting recidivism were experiencing boredom inside the facility, being male, young, having been incarcerated before and having previously lived in state “protective” services. At the territorial level, there was an overlap between territorial disadvantage and recidivism, a trend that increased as the size of the city enlarged. In terms of policy implications, our findings suggest the importance of departing from an idea of individually-determined risk when attempting to manage anti-recidivism strategies, which should enhance indicators and experiences of social inclusion at different stages: strengthening diversion programs (before), enhancing program access (during incarceration), and coordinating services between prisons and local governments previous to the release (after incarceration).

Keywords: Social exclusion, Recidivism, Predictors, Chile

Introduction

Latin America is a region of the world marked by persistent inequality and social exclusion (Schardgrotsky & Freira, 2023), a phenomenon that has contributed to the difficult situation of crime and violence in the region (Bergman & Fondevila, 2021). Thus, it is not surprising that in the case of Chile, public opinion polls place crime and drug trafficking as one of the most important concerns of citizens (INE, 2024). At the same time, the phenomenon of transnational organized crime has contributed to a mutation in the characteristics and complexity of crime in the country (Alveal, 2020).

At the same time, incarcerated people tend to be among the most disadvantaged members of Western, capitalist societies (Wacquant, 2001), which is also reflected in Chile. In this regard, the study by Fundación Paz Ciudadana and Fundación San Carlos del Maipo (2016) constitutes a fundamental piece in the generation of empirical evidence of this relationship. They found that imprisoned

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individuals present—even before incarceration—handicaps in various domains including educational level, employment, access to healthcare, salaries, housing conditions, social security, among others.

Besides, with Petersilia (2011) we argue that practically all prisoners, once their sentence has been served, will return to the free environment. For this reason, it becomes relevant to examine the process of leaving prison and returning to the community, analyzing criminal recidivism and its covariates, in order to avoid the vicious circle of leaving prison, falling into poverty and reoffending (Western et al, 2014).

Nevertheless, predominant approaches to address crime in Latin America have tended to emphasize punitive measures, to the detriment of more social development or community-oriented strategies (Morales, 2012). In other words, punishment is applied upon individuals assuming that, on its own, it will be able to deter individuals from committing new crimes.

Previous works on recidivism in Latin America have not investigated much into institutional aspects of the facilities where the subjects served their sentences, such as the conditions of confinement or the influence of the prison environment on the reintegration processes (Auty & Liebling, 2020). Additionally, the territorial perspective has been scarcely incorporated in the analysis of recidivism, reaching only a regional level.

The logic result of highly disadvantaged individuals locked up for a certain time under detrimental prison conditions would be most likely an increased recidivism, as social exclusion is amplified, not reduced by mere punishment. Thus, this article, based on the concept of social exclusion (Castells, 2008), the empirical work of Fundación Paz Ciudadana (2016) and data from a Fondecyt study conducted in 2017 (Fondecyt, 2015), hopes to contribute to the debate by analyzing the prison recidivism of a cohort of individuals and its relationship with confinement conditions and the territories to which they return.

Our main research questions were, then: i) what are the levels of recidivism in the cohort of participating inmates? ii) is recidivism of the cohort linked somehow to aspects of quality of life during their incarceration? and iii) is there a relationship between territorial social exclusion and recidivism? In other words, in this article the relationship between social exclusion and recidivism is explored in a sample of incarcerated individuals, by considering previous background, prison conditions once they are incarcerated, and territorial disadvantage where they return once released from prison.

Literature Review

Social exclusion in people deprived of liberty before prison

Castells (2008) points out that social exclusion is a process that systematically does not allow the autonomous subsistence of a group of people, since the institutions and values agreed upon in a given context determine a certain social level. Thus, the excluded become vulnerable, have difficulties in accessing a good quality of life, and face various barriers to exert various cultural, educational, or labor rights.

From the University of Oxford, Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud (2002) explain that social exclusion provides a multidimensional, dynamic and multilevel approach to the nature of deprivation, emphasizing that social exclusion is not only conditioned by economic income, but is a deeper social phenomenon. Thus, exclusion is not the same as inequality, since it encompasses areas such as poor

health, geographic location, cultural identification and the discrimination that these areas may entail, where issues such as polarization and differentiation in society influence exclusion.

To understand exclusion, it is important to consider the interactions and confluences of various types of influences from people's past and present must be recognized, as well as the different levels within society - individual, family, local, national and even global. Derived from this complexity, it arises the difficulty in measuring it. In this sense, Eizaguirre and Pérez de Armiño (2000) identify some of its fundamental dimensions:

a) A structural or economic dimension, referring to the lack of material resources that affects subsistence, derived from exclusion from the labor market.

b) A contextual or social dimension, characterized by the dissociation of social ties, disaffiliation and the weakening of the relational network; in other words, the lack of integration into family life and the community to which one belongs.

c) A subjective or personal dimension, characterized by the breakdown of communication, the weakness of meaning and the erosion of vital dynamics (trust, identity, reciprocity, etc.).

Now, when speaking specifically about conditions experienced by people deprived of liberty in Chile, we have that the authors Añaños and Jiménez (2016) consider that people deprived of liberty can suffer from exclusion at three “moments”: i) the different socioeconomic disadvantages that are experienced before entering prison; ii) during imprisonment and finally, iii) when the label of ‘ex-convict’ creates difficulties at the time of release and returning to the free environment in terms of their social, work, family and personal environment.

Given this reality, two organizations “Fundación Paz Ciudadana” and “Fundación San Carlos de Maipo” conducted a study with the purpose of empirically demonstrating the handicaps experienced by people deprived of liberty in Chile (2016). In this work, strong empirical correlations were established between various indicators of social exclusion and imprisonment, where a strong bidirectional component was observed: on the one hand, there is a person who, being more exposed to social exclusion, is more likely to commit a crime and end up with a prison sentence; on the other hand, when sentenced to a prison sentence, the person's living conditions and career worsen even more, further increasing their situation of exclusion (p. 20). In this way, a rift is caused and amplified between “them” and “the society” in which they live.

In the same vein, according to a study carried out by the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) in the United Kingdom, it was found that most people who had entered the prison system already had a history of having lived during their life with at least one of the factors of social exclusion, including handicaps regarding educational absenteeism and poorer outcomes, had a history of institutional stays when they were children, or higher chances to be unemployed before entering a penitentiary.

Once these already-disadvantaged individuals are sentenced to serving prison time, they do so by entering into an overcrowded prison system, with scarce programming to offer to inmates. As a result, incarcerated individuals usually experience further deterioration and exclusion.

Serving prison time in Chile: poor prison conditions and further human deterioration

Currently, the prison system in Chile serves more than 60,000 incarcerated individuals, divided between accused (30%) and sentenced individuals (70%), with men making up 92% of the prison population (about 63% of them convicted of property crimes); women, 8% (just over half of them

convicted of drug-related crimes) (Gendarmería de Chile, 2024). Most of them also have a series of social disadvantages compared to the general population (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2016).

Amid the current situation of public insecurity (INE, 2024), Chilean prisons seem to be more stressed in terms of the growth of the prison population, increased overcrowding and greater precariousness. Part of the problem comes from a way of understanding the response to crime based on more prison (Morales, 2012), without considering that every individual who is sent to prison will eventually leave (Petersilia, 2011) and will probably do so more disadvantaged and prone to reoffending than when he entered, to the extent that he does not achieve adequate rehabilitation (INDH, 2016).

Indeed, Chilean prisons today face a series of problems related to overcrowding and overpopulation, lack of adequate legal assistance and minimum conditions to meet diverse needs (Sánchez & Piñol, 2015), poor infrastructure (Castro, 2019), violence among inmates (Sanhueza et al, 2019), institutional mistreatment of prisoners by guards (INDH, 2016), limited access to reintegration programs for persons deprived of liberty (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2016) and a precarious legal status (Arriagada & Rochow, 2015).

Furthermore, prisons and their equipment are expensive to maintain. For example, in the Budget Directorate's Quarterly Budget Execution Report for November 2020, incarceration—considering only the expenditure of the penitentiary institution—represented an annual cost to the country that exceeded 475 billion pesos in 2020. It is also estimated that this spending has been growing at an annual rate close to 8% in recent years (Dipres, 2021).

In sum, already-disadvantaged individuals put in prisons usually serve their sentences under precarious, overcrowded facilities that offer scarce possibilities in terms of meaningful treatment or programming aimed to generate an effective rehabilitation.

Life after prison: social exclusion and high recidivism

Although what constitutes a proper rehabilitation process is a matter of debate because different indicators can be established based on the criteria and definitions adopted by governments, prison authorities or academics (Travis, 2016), many argue that one of the most important criteria should be the prevention and reduction of recidivism, or a relapse into criminal activity by an ex-prisoner, as measured by a return to prison for a new offense (Latessa et al., 2020). Nevertheless, reducing recidivism has been considered a fundamental objective for maintaining public safety (Skeem & Lowenkamp, 2016) and for evaluating the success of rehabilitation efforts (Bird et al., 2017; Peirce & Marmolejo, 2016; Spivak & Sharp, 2008).

In Chile, criminal recidivism has become a problem that affects people, their safety and society in a transversal way, since there is a very limited capacity for the reintegration of people deprived of liberty. Furthermore, not only does the percentage of recidivism seem to be high [43%] (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2013), but it would also be a more complex criminality, given its exposure to criminal perfection within prison (Alveal, 2020; Dias, 2011).

Individual-level variables and recidivism

According to comparative empirical evidence, various individual-level variables have been associated with criminal recidivism, including gender, type of crime committed, age at onset of criminal career, age at entering prison, juvenile justice history, membership in criminal gangs, among others (Lindsey et al., 2017; Dooley et al., 2014; Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2006).

Likewise, finding and maintaining employment have been identified as key elements in preventing recidivism, especially when these have been encouraged in prison (Bhuller et al., 2020). Furthermore, once released, the subject not only bears the stigma of having been in prison (Pager, 2003), but is also objectively less qualified than other candidates for available positions in the labor market, increasing the chances of reoffending (Western et al., 2014). In Chile, the majority of prisoners have significant educational handicaps and serious deficiencies in terms of work skills (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2016).

Regarding health and mental health, estimates from other countries indicate that nearly half of incarcerated people would have at least one mental health problem during their incarceration, with mental illness and developmental disabilities being the most prevalent among inmates (Begun, Early & Hodge, 2016). In addition, a large proportion of them would suffer from various chronic diseases such as hypertension, asthma, depression and hepatitis (Visser et al., 2004). In Chile, it is estimated that nearly two thirds of inmates would have antisocial personality disorder and just over 10% would suffer from psychopathy (León-Mayer et al., 2014). Added to this is the phenomenon of institutional prisonization, which adds significant obstacles to post-penitentiary adjustment (Wallace & Wan, 2020).

High rates of substance abuse and mental illness are often massive problems among incarcerated people. In the United States, for example, the prevalence of these disorders is higher than in the general population and more than half of state prisoners have indicated that they had been under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of committing the crime and nearly three-quarters of released prisoners had extensive drug and/or alcohol histories (La Vigne et al., 2004). Thus, adequate and timely provision of mental health services becomes a critical factor for those leaving prison (Visser et al., 2017).

Securing a place to sleep is also crucial to avoid the possibility of recidivism (Hall et al., 2016). Although many ex-prisoners find a place to live thanks to the support of a family member, relative or partner, a significant group of them have little chance of accessing their relatives' housing as a result of their lack of contact or communication in prison, due to long-term sentences or because relatives cannot have them in their homes for various reasons (Anderson-Facile, 2009).

Prison environment and recidivism

Regarding the study of the prison environment and its influence on future recidivism, the work of Tobón (2022) is one of the few available for Latin America. One of its central findings was that a better prison environment was related to lower recidivism, through a greater availability of reintegration programs and other processes that generated an environment prone to change inside. At the same time, Harding (2014) adds that the well-implemented reintegration programs had a greater effect in prisons with a better environment. Auty and Liebling (2020) found that recidivism decreased—controlling for inmate characteristics—when prisons offered good indicators, particularly in the dimensions of “humanity” and “decency.” In the opposite direction, Butler and colleagues (2020) found a positive relationship between having been in a punishment cell and future recidivism.

Woessner and Schwedler (2014), in a follow-up of just under 100 former inmates in Germany, found preliminary empirical evidence that a positive perception of inmates regarding the prison environment would be related to positive changes in criminogenic needs and, therefore, to lower recidivism. However, the authors point out that the study of the prison environment and its influence on future recidivism is a point still pending in the literature.

The return of former inmates to local communities and territories

Once released, incarcerated individuals return to their communities, usually located in poor neighborhoods (Godoy & Sanhueza, 2022). From a territorial point of view, the prison service has a scarce network of institutional support and collaboration for the formerly incarcerated (Waissbluth, 2021). If we add to this that a large part of the prison population comes from (and returns to) neighborhoods with severe under-inclusion (Mascareño, 2017; Godoy & Sanhueza, 2022) and high territorial complexity (Urquieta et al., 2017), reintegration becomes an improbability that requires incorporating a territorial and inter-systemic perspective (Mascareño, 2014).

Nevertheless, the impact of territory on recidivism has not been empirically studied in such a strong way (Jonson & Cullen, 2015), especially in Latin America, where empirical studies on penitentiary and post-penitentiary matters are scarce (Bergman & Fondevila, 2021). To this must be added an individualistic view of recidivism, associated with the idea of individually determined risk (Drawve & McNeeley, 2021; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). In the Chilean case, for more than a decade now there has been talk of under-included or lagging areas (Mascareño, 2014; Urquieta, Mariñez and Jorquera, 2017), where there is an absence of conditions to exercise fundamental rights and it opens the possibility of accessing non-institutional avenues of inclusion, where crime is constituted as a functional alternative to institutional inclusion mechanisms, obtaining returns that, by other means, become highly unlikely.

Thus, our study tries to fill put part of the gaps in the literature and praxis of rehabilitation in Latin America by asking how individual, institutional, and territorial factors might affect recidivism in a sample of incarcerated individuals serving time in 5 large facilities in Chile, according to the following detail.

Methods

This study of recidivism and social exclusion had the following guiding questions:

- i) What are the levels of recidivism in the cohort of participating inmates?
- ii) Is the recidivism of the cohort related to aspects of quality of life during their incarceration?
- iii) Is there a relationship between territorial social exclusion and recidivism?

Participants and Procedures

To achieve the stated objectives, a fundamentally quantitative methodology of data collection and analysis was used. On the one hand, the results of the study [this information has been temporarily removed for peer review] were used, by employing the Measuring Quality of Prison Life [MQPL] questionnaire previously adapted for the Chilean reality by national researchers [information temporarily removed for peer review] and used in the United Kingdom as the central instrument to measure the quality of life in prison.

Fieldwork was conducted between 2016 and 2017 in five large prisons in the country (CP Valparaíso, CP Rancagua, CCP Biobío, CCP Colina I, CPF Santiago). A total of 1,448 people deprived of liberty in these facilities were surveyed.

For the [this information has been temporarily removed for peer review] project, convicted individuals were selected, located in one of the five selected facilities, and who were a maximum of two years away from being released due to serving their sentence. This requirement was met by just over 3,000 individuals, becoming the universe from which the samples were extracted.

From this universe, a total of 1,448 individuals deprived of liberty were randomly surveyed with the MQPL questionnaire between 2016 and 2017. Of these, 1,171 gave their name in the questionnaires (80.8% of the total sample), so that this group became the reference point with respect to which the levels of recidivism were calculated through administrative data requested from the Gendarmerie.

Instruments

- Measuring Quality of Prison Life [MQPL] (Liebling, 2004; Sanhueza, Ortúzar and Valenzuela, 2015)

Between 2016 and 2017, the perception of the sample of people deprived of liberty regarding the prison environment of the penal facility in which they were held at that time was evaluated, using the MQPL instrument (Sanhueza & Pérez, 2019). This instrument had already been validated for Chile (Sanhueza, Ortúzar & Valenzuela, 2015) and considered a variety of areas of what constitutes life in prison, such as i) socio-demographic aspects, ii) perception of prison infrastructure, iii) access to reintegration programs, iv) interpersonal relationships with gendarmes and staff, v) interpersonal relationships and treatment between inmates, vi) the prison regime, vii) the perception of the overall functioning of the prison, including two open questions. Finally, items on the personal characterization of the respondents were included (for example, attendance at centers of the National Service for Minors (Sename)).

- Administrative data from the Gendarmerie of Chile (individual characteristics of the responding inmates)

In order to analyze individual variables of the responding inmates, administrative data from the records of the Gendarmerie of Chile were used. We are working in conjunction with the Statistics Unit, dependent on the Subdirectorate of Reintegration. Among the variables consulted are the degree of criminal commitment, age, type of crime, previous recidivism, length of stay in prison, criminal commitment score (proxy for criminal history), conduct within the prison, and the gender of the individual.

- Territorial, secondary data – Priority Areas of Social Action [APAS]

Given the impetus and expansion that has taken place in recent years in Chile in relation to the existence, quality and sophistication of data at the territorial level, a survey of the existing databases (whether publicly or non-publicly accessible) related to the territories was carried out, in order to use and/or generate reliable territorial information that would serve as input for this recidivism project, in order to characterize the territories of return of former inmates. Of particular relevance in this regard will be typologies already available, such as, for example, the Priority Areas of Social Action (APAS) of the Ministry of Social Development.

Based on data from the Ministry of Social Development, the so-called priority areas for social action or APAS were identified on the regional maps, defined as disadvantaged territories from the point of view of socioeconomic indicators, social dynamics and other attributes, identifying priority areas at the communal and intra-communal level, through methods and processes of georeferencing of

quantifiable indicators contained in various sources of public information, especially in the Social Registry of Households (RSH). The purpose of the APAS is to support informed decision-making on public policies in the territory (Ministry of Social Development, 2017).

Ethics Procedures

In terms of ethics procedures, the ethical principles and responsibilities stipulated in the Singapore Declaration on Research Integrity were strictly followed. In this regard, authorization was first requested from the Prison Service Directorate for this study. At the same time, the consent of the persons deprived of liberty who were surveyed within the five facilities visited was obtained.

The nature of this longitudinal study required that the MQPL survey be confidential but not anonymous, which is why the name and surname of the participants was consulted, which was duly informed and explained to the potential participants before obtaining their informed consent. Likewise, the participants were explained in detail the purposes of the study; their rights as participants; the potential risks or inconveniences; the benefits of participating; the conditions regarding the use, handling and storage of the information collected.

To minimize risks of misuse of the data collected, measures were applied such as: i) encrypting the information related to the survey; ii) the data were stored in the University' cloud system (no physical information with individual data was kept by the Gendarmerie) iii) the individual data were de-identified (and encrypted) in order to prevent unauthorized persons from accessing the individual data.

Data analysis

The data analysis of this study included the presentation of descriptive statistics for each of the dimensions considered (characteristics of the individuals; perception of moral performance of the facilities; territorial variables where they return; and levels of recidivism).

In addition, a logistic regression model was employed to analyze the covariates of the dependent variable 'recidivism', in this case. The dependent variable was understood as a new incarceration time, and it was operationalized as a binary variable [1: yes; 0: no]. A series of predictors were also included, based on relevant literature (age, gender, type of prison, infrastructure composite, program access composite, various variables from prison regime; different variables from relationship with guards and fellow inmates, among others).

Since the MQPL survey applied in 2015 kept the names of the responding inmates in approximately 81% of the cases, it was possible to link the data from said MQPL questionnaire with administrative data present in the prison service databases of the individuals deprived of liberty who participated in the Fondecyt study. A follow-up period of 24 months was implemented after the cohort was surveyed while imprisoned.

Based on the administrative records, the dependent variable (outcome) 'recidivism' – measured as a new incarceration – could then be established for the individuals in the cohort of 1,171 named respondents. Thus, a first result of this study was to obtain the average levels of recidivism for the respondents.

Besides, based on administrative data about individuals' addresses, georeferencing techniques were used to identify (and mask) the exact address for the cohort. Later, the research team produced various maps where an approximate address of each releasee was displayed as a dot, in either blue color (for identifying the non-recidivists) or red color (for identifying those who had recidivated). At the same time, territorial polygons were marked in order to identify the APAS, as a proxy for territorial disadvantage.

Since keeping the names of the participants was critical to follow them up later and to complete this recidivism, exploratory study, we put a large amount of effort in motivating the sample of incarcerated individuals not only to participate but also to give us their names. Our response rate in general was very good, achieving approximately an 81% of response rate with names. Individuals who refused to either participate in the survey or not providing us with names were not replaced. No further estimation procedure of missing values were applied, either.

Results

Recidivism of the cohort

To measure the perception of moral performance, a version of the MQPL (Measuring Quality of Prison Life) questionnaire (Sanhueza et al., 2015) adapted to the Chilean context was used. The questionnaire consisted of 60 questions that included various dimensions: i) socio-demographic, ii) perception of infrastructure, iii) access to programs, iv) treatment between inmates, v) treatment and interpersonal relations between prisoner and inmate, vi) the prison regime, vii) the functioning of the prison, viii) giving meaning to confinement and resilience capacity. Open questions –of general evaluation—were added to these at the end of the questionnaire. Recidivism rates of the cohort.

Regarding the recidivism of the cohort analyzed, the data provided by the Gendarmerie show that of the 1,171 cases that had identifiers, a total of 506 individuals were admitted to a unit of the closed system (prison) for a new crime, which is equivalent to 43.2% of the ex-prisoners of the cohort for whom complete information was available. The details appear in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample sizes, identifiable surveys, and recidivism percentages by facility

Prison	Sample size (real)	Surveys with names	% of surveys with names	Recidivists (among those with names)	Percentage of recidivism identified individuals
CP Valparaíso	458	306	66,8%	145	47,3%
CPF Santiago	169	155	91,7%	36	23,2%
CCP Colina I	398	368	92,4%	151	41,0%
CCP Biobio	189	174	92,0%	97	55,7%
CP Rancagua	234	168	71,7%	77	45,8%
Total	1.448	1.171	80,8%	506	43,2%

Regarding the prison of origin of the 506 repeat offenders, the number of repeat offenders and the percentage of repeat offenders were distributed as follows: 151 cases for Colina I (41%); 145 from

the Valparaíso Complex (47.3%); 97 for the Biobio CCP (55.7%); 77 cases for the Rancagua Penitentiary Complex (45.8%); and 36 cases in the Santiago Women's Penitentiary Center (23.2%). Also, while in three of the five facilities the percentage of surveys with names exceeded 90%, in the two remaining prisons (CP Valparaíso and CP Rancagua), the percentages decreased to just over two thirds of respondents.

Relationship between experiences of imprisonment (moral performance of the prison) and recidivism

When the perception of inmates was analyzed in relation to future recidivism, our logistic regression model showed that several predictors were significant. This was the case, for example, with infrastructure and habitability. In this sense, the multivariate analyses showed a statistical association between a better perception of infrastructure and a lower probability of future recidivism.

However, when more variables were included in the model, the influence of infrastructure was no longer statistically significant, which suggests that other variables of prison life matter more in the long term. The results of this last model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Logistic, multivariate regression model for “recidivism”. Individual and institutional-life predictors

Logistic Regression	Observations	921				
	LR chi2(13)	118.12				
	Prob > chi2	0.000				
Log likelihood -575.024	Pseudo R2	0.0931				
Predictors for Recidivism	Odds Ratio	Std. error	Z	P>z	% or value in sample	Range
Stay in protective services in childhood	1.741	.254	3.81	0.000	46.4%	0-100%
Previous incarceration	1.620	.247	3.16	0.002	65.7%	0-100%
Gender: Male	2.107	.464	3.38	0.001	84.1%	0-100%
Infrastructure (Composite)	.988	.014	-0.75	0.451	3.55 (0.90)	1-5a
Program Access (Index)	1.011	.012	0.90	0.370	2.72 (0.91)	1-5a
In this prison I get along with other inmates	.900	.066	-1.42	0.156	3.67 (1.11)	1-5b
I get along with guards of my cellblock	.822	.055	-2.90	0.004	3.22 (1.44)	1-5b
I get help from guards or personnel if I need it	1.178	.085	2.26	0.024	2.65 (1.39)	1-5b
I am treated fairly here and My rights are respected	1.173	.085	2.19	0.028	2.51 (1.33)	1-5b
My life in this prison is Boring	1.133	.068	2.06	0.040	3.82 (1.25)	1-5b

There is so much drug consumption here	.892	.040	-2.49	0.013	3.14 (1.54)	1-5b
You're sent to punishment cell for anything	1.106	.062	1.80	0.072	3.40 (1.38)	1-5b
I feel this prison works relatively well	.849	.063	-2.20	0.028	2.54 (1.27)	1-5b
Constant	.256	.171	-2.04	0.042		

Another relevant sub-dimension was the treatment among inmates themselves. Here, the analyses showed that items such as “getting along with other inmates” was associated with less recidivism; on the contrary, “fearing for physical integrity” was positively associated with greater future recidivism. This is consistent with recent findings that show a more porous relationship between neighborhoods and prison, leading to a continuum of violence between the two (Brander & Sanhueza, 2023; Alveal, 2020).

Regarding the treatment of officers, there were several items that showed a significant association with recidivism. Thus, the variables “the officers trust me,” “I get along well with the gendarmes in my cell block,” and “I get help from guards or personnel if I need it” exhibited negative coefficients, so that a better perception for these items was related to a lower probability of reoffending.

Regarding the prison regime, variables such as “in this prison I receive fair treatment and my rights are respected” and “this prison works well” were inversely associated with the prediction of recidivism. In the opposite direction, the variable “here each gendarme makes his own rules” was shown to be directly associated with the chances of reoffending.

Regarding access to reintegration programs, when these were analyzed as the only dimension predicting recidivism, only the variable “access to paid work” proved to be significant in predicting lower recidivism. The rest of the programs (job training, social assistance, psychological care, penal school, drug workshop) did not show a significant association with recidivism.

Territorial conditions and recidivism of the cohort

For the territorial analysis, based on the administrative data of the Gendarmerie that contained the addresses of the individuals who had been in prison, a coordinate analysis was carried out and then a georeferencing of the addresses, managing to map 950 of the initial 1,179 cases (regions V, RM, VI and VIII).

In the O'Higgins region, as shown in Figure #1, although there is an association between territorial disadvantage (identified by the purple color on the map), there is an important focus of concentration in the northeast sector of the city, immediately towards the mountain range of the old route 5. However, the level of overlap between APAS and recidivism for this region will be lower compared to larger cities.

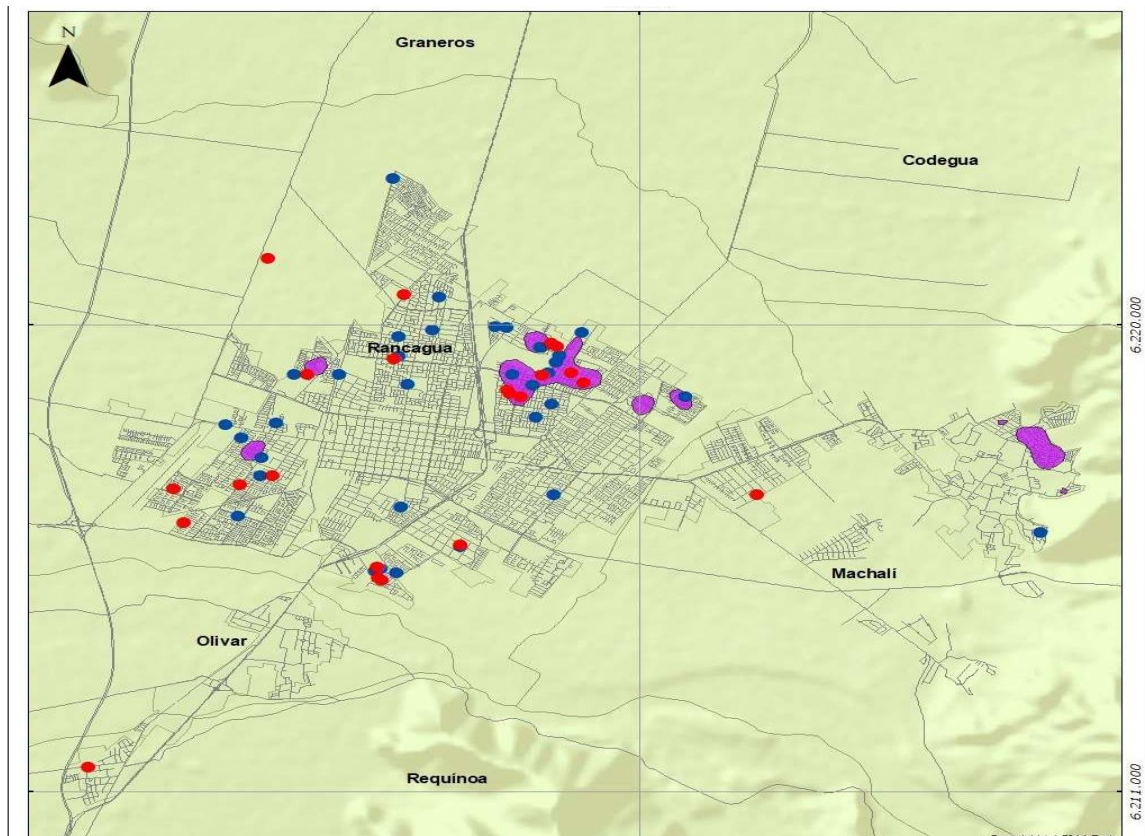
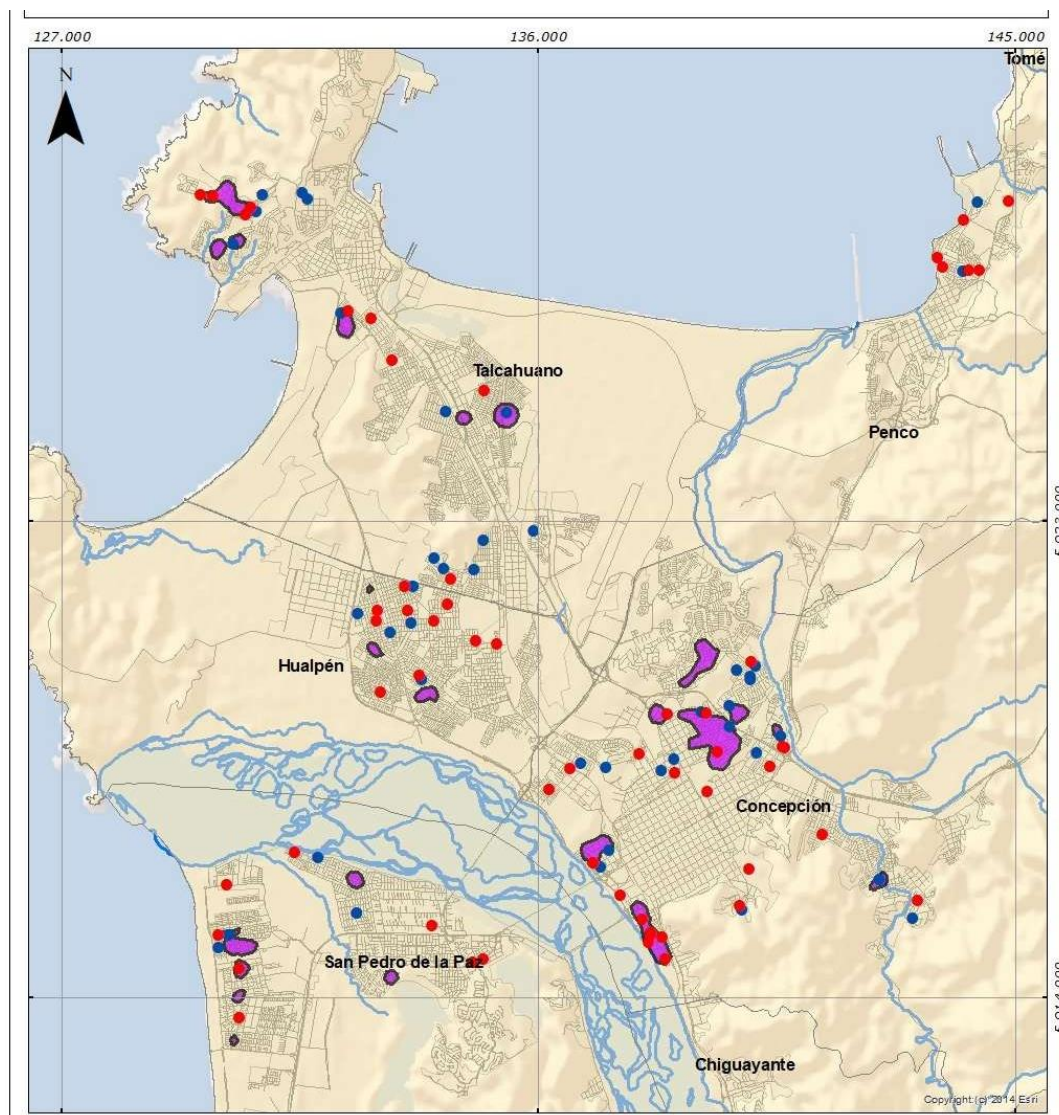
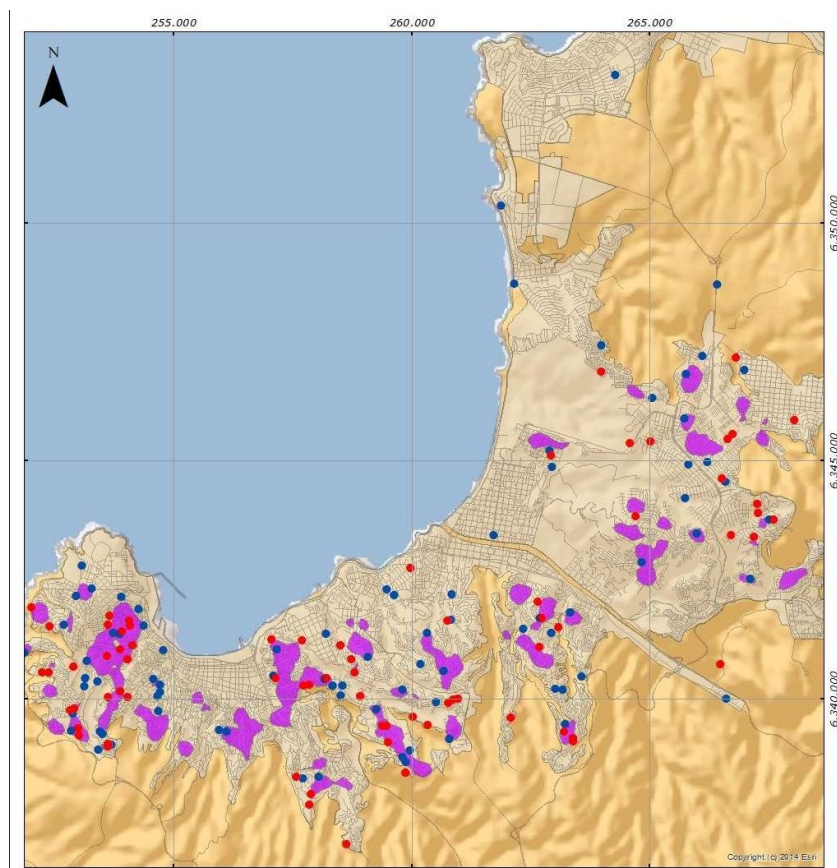
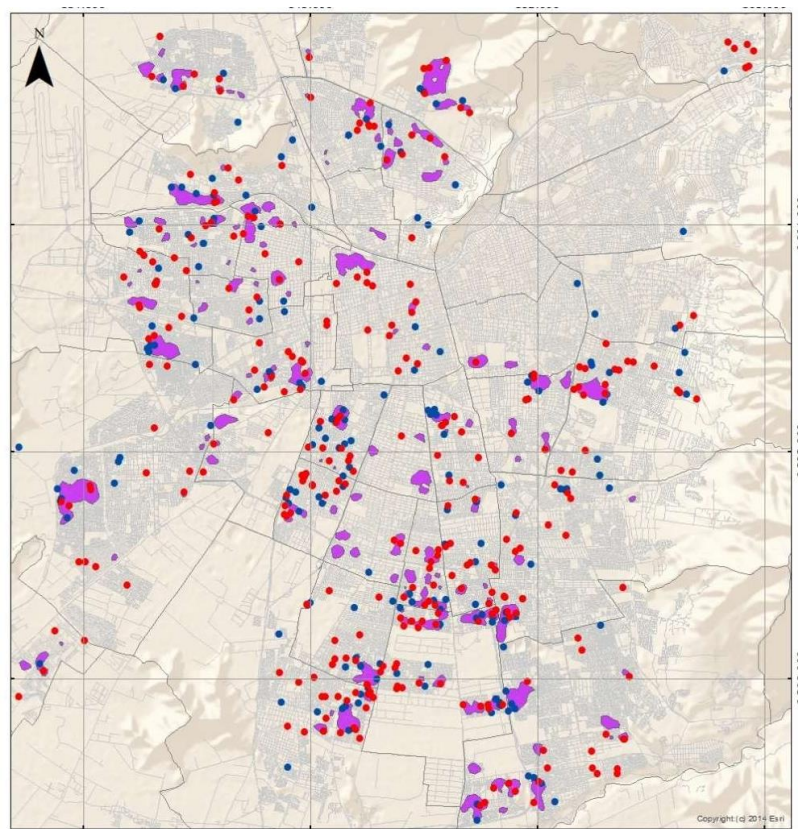
Figure 1 Return of former inmates – O'Higgins Region (urban area)

Figure 2 Return of former inmates – Biobío Region

In the case of Greater Concepción and the Biobío Region (Figure 2), the map shows a greater number of foci spread across the region. Thus, for example, it is possible to identify concentrations of ex-convicts (repeat offenders and not) spread across sectors close to the riverbank in Concepción; the commune of Hualpén; urban Talcahuano and its coastal hills; the area of Penco-Tomé; and the sector near Coronel. The overlap of APAS with repeat offenders, meanwhile, is observed a little more marked than in the VI region, especially for Coronel, Talcahuano (hills) and the Biobío River bank.

Figure 3 Return of former inmates – Valparaíso Region

In the case of Region V, especially Valparaíso and Viña del Mar (Figure #3), the map shows a stronger association between disadvantaged territory and the return of ex-convicts (purple APAS areas coinciding strongly with red and blue dots). Likewise, in the case of repeat offenders (red dots), the level of overlap with the APAS is even more marked than in Regions VI and VIII (Figures 1 and 2), especially for the commune of Valparaíso and its hills. Figure #3 in its lower left part shows two additional territorial foci of recidivism concentration: San Antonio and the Los Andes/San Felipe sector.

Figure 4 return of former inmates – Metropolitan Region (Santiago)

When the Metropolitan Region is considered, as shown in Figure #4, there is a greater tendency towards overlap between having spent time in prison (both red and blue dots) and returning to disadvantaged neighborhoods – APAS, in purple – especially in the north, northwest, south, and southwest of Greater Santiago. As for the recidivism situation, this tends to concentrate more markedly than in smaller cities – or even in Valparaíso – around the APAS territories, with special emphasis not only on certain communes, but rather on specific sectors and neighborhoods of the city.

In other words, as the city size increases, the relationship between territorial disadvantage – expressed through the APAS areas—and recidivism becomes stronger. This suggests an urgent call for a better communication and coordination between the Chilean prison service and regional, and local authorities in order to better ‘manage’ the services that individuals going out of prison will need, sharing information about incarcerated individuals’ characteristics, and their various needs (i.e. health, mental health, job training, etc.).

In sum, the main results of the multivariate, logistic regression showed that future recidivism in the cohort was related to certain individual variables such as gender (male), previous incarceration, and having stayed in a “protectional” system in childhood. In addition, from an institutional standpoint, being in a prison that works well and having good relationships with guards were predictors of less, future recidivism. When territorial characteristics are taken into account, the maps showed an overlap between disadvantaged areas of large cities and concentrations of recidivism.

Conclusion and Discussion

Our results seem to suggest the importance of intervening upon various dimensions (individual trajectories, institutional stays, and at local territories once released), trying to enhance indicators of social inclusion, so recidivism can be more effectively tackled. Mere punishment seemed to have scarce or null effect in deterring future recidivism, contradicting the ‘harsh on crime’ approaches that are prevalent in Latin America nowadays.

Although this recidivism study was not nationwide in scope, in terms of the proportion of recidivists in relation to the total observable cohort (1,179 cases), the recidivism rate of 43.3% is consistent with previous studies that have estimated it between 42-50% using similar criteria (new incarceration).

Our findings are consistent with previous studies (i.e. Bogliaccini et al, 2024; Sanhueza & Alarcón, 2023) in the sense that recidivism studies in Latin America emphasize individual variables over other meso- or macro-level variables. In short, even with their limitations, our findings suggest that recidivism is deeply linked to trajectories and territories of exclusion, generating deep, systematic and bidirectional plots that are certainly complex (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2016, p. 20). In the United Kingdom, through longitudinal studies, it has been found that the majority of people who enter the prison system already had a history of having experienced a series of overlapping social exclusion indicators.

In addition, the relationship between individual characteristics and recidivism in our study is consistent with the literature for certain variables such as gender (men, more likely to reoffend) and age (younger, more likely to reoffend). Additionally, having been in prison before and declaring a stay in child-protective centers [SENAME] were associated with a higher probability of future recidivism. Thus, in our study it was possible to find individual trajectories crossed by social exclusion, which, in turn, generates an important predictive effect of recidivism.

These last findings are problematic because they suggest that life trajectories –marked by accumulated disadvantages—are not being modified by governmental or state action, especially regarding the protection of children. They also question two important assumptions of public policies: that confinement may have a deterrent effect to prevent recidivism; and that the system of protection of vulnerable children in Chile is being effective, since there is at least a correlation between a system that not only is “feeding” prisons but also converting, in a future, the abused into perpetrators of violence and crime.

On the other hand, when institutional life (prison experiences) was analyzed, our results suggest, once again, the centrality of prison officers—especially those with direct contact—in prison life and in the possibilities of reintegration (Sanhueza & Pérez, 2019). This is observed in the inverse relationship between recidivism and the predictors “I get along well with the officers in my module” and “I feel that this prison works well,” both related to the performance of prison officers.

When the territory is incorporated into the analysis, there are two central findings. First, the time spent in prison and especially the return after leaving prison is strongly associated with disadvantaged territories. Other works (e.g. Godoy & Sanhueza, 2022) have suggested a high correlation between incarceration rates and territorial poverty. This is observed in the present work in the superposition of the purple areas (APAS) with blue and red dots. Secondly, recidivism tends to concentrate in neighborhoods that show greater social disadvantage, illustrated through the

superposition on the map of the purple areas (APAS) and the red dots (recidivists), superposition that is especially strong as the number of cases and the size of the city increase (more marked trend in Valparaíso and Santiago).

In terms of policy implications, our findings highlight the importance of enhancing indicators of social inclusion to reduce recidivism, at various levels and at different moments in time: before prison; during incarceration; and after release. For example, before incarceration—given the pernicious effects of prison over individuals and families—diversion programs should be encouraged, matching the various criminogenic needs of individuals in conflict with the penal system to an appropriate level of services for them, avoiding as much as possible a deteriorating process

In addition, for those doing incarceration time, access to meaningful programming, including health and mental health support, should be critical components of an in-prison, effective effort. These initiatives must be accompanied by a prison environment as much free of violence as possible (both from other inmates and from guards) in order to avoid that rehabilitative efforts drain in the midst of violence.

In third place, previous to release, the prison system and regional governments should work collaboratively in order to identify, prepare, and coordinate services to support soon-to-be-released individuals in the local communities and territories. This can be done by sharing data and by assuming that the return of the formerly incarcerated shall occur and can be managed as part of the local planning, as “the return of a neighbor”.

Limitations of this study and future studies

However, the findings presented in this study, despite their potential, must be interpreted in the context of some limitations. For example, this work was carried out in only five prisons and is not necessarily representative of the prison reality throughout the country. Thus, the maps and the multivariate analysis on recidivism reflect only what was found in the cases studied in the chosen cohort. Additional, regional or national studies are much needed to describe in more depth the problem of recidivism and its covariates in a larger sample.

Added to this is the possibility that recidivism is even higher at a general level if broader definitions or variables not observed in this study are considered, making it likely that observable recidivism is accompanied by a “black figure” of cases not detected by the system but who may be carrying out antisocial activities. Added to this is the fact that nearly a third of the original respondents could not be geo-referenced because they did not provide their full names, so a follow-up could not be completed for them.

Finally, this study shows correlations between recidivism and territories, but due to its design and the characteristics of the sample it is not able to establish causality. Likewise, in this study, the APAS were used as a proxy for territorial disadvantage, although this indicator could be changed in future studies based on other territorial databases currently available in the country. Nevertheless, much is still unknown regarding the mechanisms by which certain territories may increase the chances for recidivism as well as which type of recidivism is generated under certain territorial conditions (i.e. same crime or a more serious one)

Future studies may clarify under what conditions reintegration programs could best work to reduce recidivism in Latin American contexts. In this regard, it is important to notice the lack of proper infrastructure available for reintegration activities within the overcrowded, Latin American prisons, or

the possible inadequate training of key personnel who carry out these tasks, or the impact of internal, organizational culture of the prison service that makes reintegration tasks difficult, or a combination of these. Probably, a well-designed, mixed-methods strategy could bring light to some of these questions. Another study in the future could embark on a nationwide, mixed-methods, longitudinal study on recidivism that considers the three dimensions considered in this smaller study. Indeed, the question on how prison conditions, individuals characteristics, and territorial (local) conditions interact in order to generate more or less recidivism is still an open question, especially in Latin America.

Hence, a central issue has to do with the trajectories of social exclusion that feed prison and, at the same time, are exacerbated by it, generating a highly complex vicious circle. In this sense, effectively changing those trajectories that lead to crime should be one of the main tasks of the state apparatus, including the penitentiary system and society in general, so that the time spent in prison does not become a deepening of exclusion or a 'doctorate' in criminal matters.

Finally, despite the fact that this study was carried out in a small, distant country, the exploratory results of this study may also be beneficial for other contexts in the sense that, despite possible cultural and contextual differences, in most countries i) it is possible to identify certain groups of individuals at greater risk of incarceration; ii) once in prison, the effect of programs and institutional life could be monitored and tracked over time; iii) and, once released, formerly incarcerated individual return to certain communities, which may be differentially equipped to deal with the needs of the formerly incarcerated. In this regard, this exploratory study may offer a starting point for greater generalizability by offering some dimensions, variables, and models to be applied.

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