

THE ROLE OF WORK IN PRISON AND ITS IMPACT ON THE REHABILITATION IN MODERN PENITENTIARY SYSTEMS

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Abstract: This article analyzes the role of prison work as a criminological mechanism in the rehabilitation of inmates and the reduction of recidivism in modern penitentiary systems. Drawing on contemporary criminological literature and evidence-based models, the study examines the interaction between structured activities, psychological interventions, and institutional factors. Through a theoretical analysis and a case study at IEPV Peqin, as well as an empirical survey of 80 inmates, the paper highlights that the effectiveness of prison work depends on implementation, staff training, and the structure of rehabilitation programs.

Keywords: Rehabilitation; prison work; recidivism; correctional programs

1. Introduction

Historically, prisons have been conceived as institutions of isolation, where the primary goal has been the punishment and neutralization of the individual who committed a criminal act. However, empirical evidence and criminological studies have shown that physical isolation, in the absence of structured interventions, does not bring about lasting changes in criminal behavior and, in many cases, may even reinforce it.¹

In this context, rehabilitation has taken a central role in modern penitentiary systems. It is not limited to treating the individual while serving the sentence, but aims to transform the factors that influence criminal behavior, including the individual's social, psychological, and economic aspects.

One of the most widely used instruments in this regard is prison work. On the one hand, it is seen as a means for developing professional skills and preparing for the labor market after release.

¹ Cullen, F. T., & Gendreau, P. (2000). *Assessing Correctional Rehabilitation: Policy, Practice, and Prospects*. In J. Horney (Ed.), *Criminal Justice 2000, Vol. 3*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, pp. 109–175.

On the other hand, it carries an important structural and socializing dimension, contributing to the development of discipline, responsibility, and respect for rules.²

However, the role of work in rehabilitation is not automatic. Work, considered in isolation, does not guarantee sustainable changes in behavior. Its effectiveness depends on integration with other interventions, especially those aimed at changing thought patterns and criminogenic factors.³

In this context, theoretical models such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model have contributed to the development of an evidence-based approach, emphasizing that interventions must be targeted, structured, and tailored to the individual profile of the offender. This model places rehabilitation within a clear methodological and operational framework, directly linking it to reducing recidivism.

Along the same lines, psychological interventions, particularly Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, have shown high effectiveness in changing criminal behavior by aiming to identify and correct deviant thought patterns that often underlie criminal acts.⁴

From an institutional perspective, European standards and Albanian legislation clearly stipulate that the treatment of inmates should be oriented toward rehabilitation and reintegration into society. This includes the development of individualized programs, participation in work and educational activities, as well as the provision of psychosocial support during and after serving the sentence⁵.

However, one of the main problems evident in practice is the gap between the normative framework and its implementation. While rehabilitation and prison work are consolidated concepts at the theoretical and legal level, in practice they are often not fully implemented due to institutional constraints, lack of resources, and organizational challenges.

In this context, this paper aims to analyze the role of prison work not only at the theoretical level but also at the practical level, focusing on the mechanisms that determine its effectiveness. Special attention is paid to the role of staff training, program structure, and institutional conditions in transforming work from a formal activity into a genuine instrument of rehabilitation.

² McGuire, J. (2002). *Offender Rehabilitation and Treatment: Effective Programmes and Policies to Reduce Re-offending*. Chichester: Wiley, pp. 15–40.

³ Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (5th ed.). New Providence, NJ: LexisNexis, pp. 43–78.

⁴,pp. 19–52.

⁵ Law No. 81/2020 "On the Rights and Treatment of Prisoners and Detainees," Republic of Albania.

For this purpose, the study combines theoretical analysis with an empirical approach, including a case study at IEVP Peqin and a survey of persons deprived of their liberty, aiming to identify the link between policies, practice, and outcomes in the rehabilitation process.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Rehabilitation represents one of the most important concepts in contemporary criminology and is directly linked to the function of the penal system in modern societies. Unlike traditional approaches that viewed punishment as an end in itself, current approaches consider rehabilitation the primary means of sustainably reducing crime⁶.

Essentially, rehabilitation implies a process of intervening on the individual and social factors that influence criminal behavior. This process is not limited to the period of serving the sentence but encompasses a broader transformation of the individual, aiming to change the attitudes, behaviors, and skills related to criminality. In this sense, rehabilitation is a dynamic and multidimensional process that requires coordinated interventions on multiple levels simultaneously.

Empirical studies have repeatedly shown that incarceration alone, without structured rehabilitative interventions, not only fails to reduce recidivism but in some cases can have the opposite effect⁷. This is linked to the fact that physical isolation does not address the underlying causes of criminal behavior and can reinforce ties to criminal subcultures within correctional institutions. In this context, modern criminology has identified a series of so-called "criminogenic factors" that directly influence the likelihood of returning to crime. These factors include:

- attitudes and beliefs that justify criminal behavior
- lack of professional skills and unemployment
- ties to criminal social networks
- impulsivity and lack of self-control

In this relation, prison work plays an important role, as it is directly linked to some of these factors, particularly unemployment and the lack of professional skills. Participation in work activities contributes to developing practical skills, establishing a structured routine, and increasing

⁶Gendreau, P., Little, T., & Goggin, C. (1996). A meta-analysis of predictors of adult offender recidivism. *Criminology*, 34(4), pp. 575–607.

⁷ Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J., & Hoge, R. D. (1990). *Classification for effective rehabilitation*, pp. 25–45.

a sense of individual responsibility. These elements are closely linked to reducing the likelihood of reoffending.

However, according to Andrews and Bonta, interventions that succeed in reducing recidivism are those that combine practical activities with interventions aimed at changing an individual's thinking and decision-making⁸. In this regard, work should be viewed as part of a broader system of interventions and not as a standalone solution.

Another important element is the link between work experience during the sentence and reintegration into the labor market after release. Lack of employment has been identified as one of the strongest factors associated with recidivism. Individuals who fail to integrate economically after release have a higher probability of returning to criminal activities. In this sense, , prison work can serve as a transition bridge between life inside the institution and life in the community.

However, as the empirical analysis of this study also highlights, the main problem does not lie in the theoretical role of work in rehabilitation, but in the limited level of access and in the way it is implemented in practice. A low percentage of inmates have real opportunities to participate in work activities, which significantly reduces its potential as a rehabilitation mechanism.

In conclusion, rehabilitation should be understood as an integrated, evidence-based process that requires multiple, coordinated interventions. Prison work constitutes an important component of this process, but its effectiveness depends on integration with other programs, on the quality of implementation, and on institutional capacities to sustain it.

3. The Principle of Responsiveness (Responsivity Principle)

This principle emphasizes the importance of tailoring interventions to the individual characteristics of the offender, including:

- educational level
- cognitive abilities
- motivation
- personal history

Interventions that do not take these elements into account are less likely to be effective⁴.

⁸ Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*, pp. 419–450.

In practice, this means that rehabilitative programs, including prison work, must be individualized and tailored to each individual's profile. For example, a work activity that does not match the individual's skills or interests may not have a rehabilitative effect.

However, this model in practice faces a number of challenges. In the case of IEVP Peqin, work participation is limited and is not always based on a structured assessment of individual risk and needs. This situation reveals a mismatch between the theoretical framework and practical implementation.

Another problem relates to the lack of institutional resources and capacities, which limits the ability to offer individualized programs. In the absence of trained staff and adequate structures, the implementation of the RNR model's principles remains partial.

A key element for the successful implementation of the RNR model is the role of the staff. Prison staff are not only responsible for maintaining order and security but also for implementing rehabilitative programs. Staff training in risk assessment, identifying criminogenic needs, and applying appropriate interventions is a necessary condition for rehabilitation effectiveness.

In the absence of this training, there is a risk that programs will be implemented in a formal way without addressing the real factors that influence criminal behavior. This situation leads to a reduction in the effectiveness of interventions and to an inefficient use of institutional resources.

The RNR model represents one of the most advanced and evidence-based approaches to the rehabilitation of offenders. It provides a clear framework for designing and implementing effective interventions.

4. Methodology

This study is based on a combined methodological approach, integrating theoretical analysis with empirical data collected in the field. The approach used is primarily exploratory and analytical, aiming to identify the mechanisms that link prison work with the rehabilitation process and the reduction of recidivism.

The study was conducted at the Peqin Institution for the Execution of Penal Sentences, which represents a high-security facility in the Albanian penitentiary system. The sample consists of 80 persons deprived of liberty, selected through purposive (non-probability) sampling, aiming to include individuals with diverse experiences within the institution. The sample includes both

sentenced inmates and pretrial detainees with varying lengths of stay, allowing a broader overview of the institutional reality.

Although the sample is not representative in a statistical sense, it is sufficient for the study's exploratory purposes and for identifying the main trends related to rehabilitation.

The main instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire, divided into several thematic sections that are directly related to the study objectives:

- employment involvement and nature of activity
- participation in educational and training programs
- access to psychological interventions
- perception of the staff's role in rehabilitation
- assessment of readiness for reintegration after release

The questionnaire includes closed- and semi-open-ended questions, which allow for both quantitative analysis through percentages and a qualitative interpretation of the responses.

The data were collected anonymously and on a voluntary basis, ensuring the confidentiality of the participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that the data would be used solely for research purposes.

The use of anonymity aims to reduce the influence of subjective factors and increase the sincerity of responses, especially in a sensitive context such as the penitentiary.

An important methodological element is comparing the questionnaire results with data from institutional reports, particularly those of the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture (NMPT), to enhance the reliability and validity of the analysis.

This study presents several methodological limitations that should be taken into consideration:

- the use of self-reported data, which may be influenced by participants' subjective perceptions
- the absence of a statistically representative sample
- the study's limitation to a single institution

For these reasons, the study's findings should be interpreted with caution and cannot be absolutely generalized to the entire penitentiary system. However, the combination of empirical analysis with institutional evidence and the theoretical framework contributes to increasing the reliability of the conclusions.

5. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a clear contrast between the theoretical potential of work and its implementation in practice. As highlighted in the questionnaire analysis only a limited percentage of inmates are engaged in work activities. This situation significantly reduces its impact at the institutional level, since a mechanism that is not accessible to the majority of inmates cannot produce a broad rehabilitative effect.

On the other hand, the data show that individuals who are involved in work report significant improvements in discipline, professional skills, and behavior. This reinforces the argument that the problem does not lie in the effectiveness of work as a concept, but in the limited extent to which it is applied in practice.

In the Albanian context, this problem is linked to a series of institutional factors, including lack of resources, limited capacities, and the organization of programs within penitentiary institutions. As highlighted by institutional monitoring reports, opportunities for employment are limited and do not cover a significant portion of the prison population.

The analysis of prison work as a rehabilitation mechanism leads to a significant conclusion: there is a gap between the theoretical role of work and its practical implementation. This gap significantly limits its effectiveness in reducing recidivism and in achieving the rehabilitative goals of the penal system.

The empirical findings of this study show that the impact of work on criminogenic factors is limited due to the low level of prisoners' participation in work activities.

Results show that only a small proportion of respondents are engaged in work, which significantly limits its impact at the institutional level.

On the other hand, individuals who are engaged in work report noticeable improvements in discipline, skills, and behavior. This shows that work has real potential to influence criminogenic factors, but this potential is not fully utilized due to implementation constraints.

Another important aspect is that prison work is often not directly linked to the external labor market. Activities that do not develop transferable skills have a limited impact on an individual's reintegration and, consequently, on reducing recidivism. This shows that the quality of work is just as important as its mere existence.

In conclusion, the analysis of the impact of work on criminogenic factors shows that it can be an effective intervention in rehabilitation, but only if certain basic conditions are met: broad

access, structured content, and a connection to the real needs of the individual and the labor market. In the absence of these elements, its impact remains limited and fails to produce sustainable results in reducing recidivism.

In prison staff are no longer regarded solely as a security structure but as active actors in the rehabilitation process. They represent the primary interface between criminal policies and their implementation in practice.

From the perspective of the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model, staff play a direct role in:

- assessing the individual's risk
- identifying criminogenic needs
- adapting interventions according to the individual profile

In this sense, the effectiveness of any rehabilitative program depends on the professional capacity of the staff to implement these principles accurately and consistently.

A key element is staff training. Staff who are not trained in rehabilitative interventions tend to reduce their role to administrative or security functions, leaving the rehabilitative dimension of criminal treatment in a secondary position. This creates a gap between the theoretical framework and institutional practice.

On the other hand, adequately trained staff are able to:

- build professional relationships with inmates
- motivate participation in programs
- support behavioral change

In this regard, the relationship between staff and inmates is a key factor influencing the success of rehabilitative interventions.

The empirical findings of this study reinforce this argument. A significant percentage of respondents perceive the staff as a factor that directly influences their rehabilitation. However, at the same time, a limited level of support is also evident, which is linked to a lack of human resources and staff overload.

This contrast shows that the staff's potential as a rehabilitation mechanism exists but is not fully utilized due to structural constraints.

In addition to the staff's role, another essential element is the structure of the rehabilitation programs. Effective programs are characterized by several key elements: are structured and planned; are based on scientific evidence; are continuous rather than sporadic; integrate different

dimensions (work, education, psychology). In the absence of these elements, programs risk remaining formal and failing to produce real behavioral change⁹.

In this framework, prison work should be part of a broader programmatic structure. It should be linked to: vocational training; education; psychological interventions.

However, as highlighted in the empirical analysis, a large proportion of inmates do not have access to structured rehabilitation programs. Participation in educational and psychological programs remains limited, which significantly reduces the overall effectiveness of the system.

A critical aspect in analyzing rehabilitation mechanisms is the interconnection between staff and program structure. Even the best programs in theory cannot yield results without a trained staff to implement them.

On the other hand, even a trained staff cannot be effective in the absence of structured programs and the necessary resources.

This interdependence shows that rehabilitation is a systemic process in which all components must function in a coordinated manner. Any weakness in one of these components directly affects the overall effectiveness of the interventions.

In the Albanian context, an analysis of rehabilitation mechanisms reveals a mismatch between the regulatory framework and practical implementation. While legislation and criminal policies envisage a rehabilitation-oriented approach, in practice there are limitations related to: lack of staff; institutional capacities; organization of programs.

These limitations directly affect the effectiveness of work as a rehabilitation mechanism and the achievement of the criminal justice system's objectives.

Analysis of rehabilitation mechanisms shows that the role of staff and the structure of programs are the most important factors in determining the effectiveness of interventions. Incarceration can be a powerful instrument of rehabilitation, but only if it is implemented within an organized system supported by trained staff.

In this context, the main problem does not lie in the lack of programs or theoretical framework, but in how these elements are implemented in practice. This conclusion reinforces the main thesis of this study and lays the foundation for the empirical analysis presented in the following section.

⁹ Ombudsman (MKPT). (2022). *Inspection report at IEVP Peqin*, sections on activities and treatment.

6. Case Study: IEVP Peqin

The Peqin Penitentiary Institution for the Execution of Criminal Sentences is one of the main high-security institutions in the Albanian penitentiary system. Built to contemporary standards and with a substantial accommodation capacity, the institution includes a functional structure that theoretically enables the implementation of rehabilitative programs in accordance with modern standards of criminal treatment.

The institution's structure includes accommodations for housing, educational activities, social and health services, as well as spaces for sports and cultural activities. These elements constitute important components of an environment that can support rehabilitation, creating conditions for the development of skills and social inclusion of the inmates.

The empirical research shows that participation in work is not widespread in this institution. Only a small portion of the institution's population has access to such activities, which significantly limits the impact of work as a rehabilitation mechanism.

In addition to work, the institution offers other rehabilitative activities, including sports, educational, and cultural programs. These activities help structure time and reduce social isolation, but their effectiveness depends on the level of organization and the involvement of the inmates.

The case analysis of IEVP Peqin clearly highlights the existence of a gap between the normative framework and the practical implementation of rehabilitation. While at the legal and institutional level programs aimed at reintegrating inmates are provided for, in practice these programs are not evenly applied and fail to include a significant portion of the institution's population.

This gap is reflected in: the low level of employment participation; limited access to rehabilitative programs; limited staff capacities.

This situation also aligns with the empirical findings, reinforcing the argument that the main problem in the penitentiary system is not a lack of theoretical or legal framework, but its implementation in practice.

From a criminological perspective, the case of IEVP Peqin illustrates a structural problem that characterizes many penitentiary systems: the existence of a rehabilitative model at the theoretical and normative level, but with partial and limited implementation in practice.

This phenomenon has direct implications for the effectiveness of the penal system, as it limits the impact of interventions on reducing recidivism. In the absence of broad and structured

implementation, even interventions with high rehabilitative potential, such as prison work, fail to produce sustainable results.

The case study of IEVP Peqin shows that there is an institutional and structural foundation that can support the rehabilitation of inmates. However, the effectiveness of this foundation depends on how it is applied in practice.

In this context, the case confirms the main thesis of this study: the problem does not lie in the lack of concepts or a normative framework, but in their limited implementation. Prison work and rehabilitative programs can only be effective if they are implemented in a structured, sustainable, and accessible manner for a broad segment of inmates.

7. Questionnaire Analysis

As part of this study, a survey was conducted with a sample of 80 persons deprived of liberty at IEVP Peqin. The sample includes both sentenced inmates and pretrial detainees, reflecting a broad range of experiences within the institution.

The sample structure is presented as follows:

- 62.5% (50 persons) sentenced;
- 37.5% (30 persons) pretrial detainees.

This distribution enables the analysis of perceptions in a combined institutional context, where elements of treatment and pretrial detention intertwine.

Results show a limited level of participation in work activities – only 25% (20 persons) employed. This finding is consistent with the findings of the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture¹⁰, which highlights the limited availability of work in penitentiary institutions.

From a criminological perspective, this low level of participation poses a serious obstacle to the effectiveness of work as a rehabilitation mechanism. An intervention that fails to engage the majority of the population cannot produce broad impact in reducing recidivism.

Among individuals involved in work, analysis of data shows a clear positive impact:

- 70% report improved discipline
- 65% report development of professional skills
- 60% report improved behavior

¹⁰ Ombudsman (MKPT). (2022). *Inspection report at IEVP Peqin*, section on prisoners' work engagement.

However, this impact remains limited at the institutional level due to low engagement in work. This creates a clear contrast between individual effectiveness and overall impact.

Next, the results show a moderate to low level of program involvement – only 40% (32 people) participate in education/training programs. Meanwhile, and only 35% report access to psychological interventions.

These data show that a significant portion of inmates do not benefit from interventions considered essential for rehabilitation.

The respondents' perception of the staff's role is one of the most significant elements of the analysis: 45% rate the staff's support as good; 35% - as average and 20% - as weak

Meanwhile, 68% of respondents believe that the staff directly influences their rehabilitation.

These data show that staff are perceived as a key factor in the rehabilitation process.

However, the relatively low level of positive evaluation indicates that this potential is not fully realized in practice, which is linked to a lack of resources and institutional capacities.

The findings show a considerable uncertainty regarding reintegration: 55% of respondents believe that work will help them after release; 45% do not see it as useful. Meanwhile, only 42% feel prepared for life after release

This result shows a gap between the experience inside the institution and expectations for life outside it. In the absence of comprehensive and integrated preparation, the likelihood of returning to crime remains high.

Analysis of the data reveals three key findings:

1. Work has a rehabilitative effect, but its reach is limited

The results show that individuals who participate in work do benefit, but their numbers are limited. This indicates that the problem does not lie in the effectiveness of work, but in access to it.

2. Rehabilitative interventions are partial

Low participation in educational and psychological programs indicates a lack of an integrated rehabilitative approach. This contradicts the principles of the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model.

3. Staff are a key factor, but their impact is limited

The staff's perception as a rehabilitation factor is high, but its effectiveness is limited by institutional conditions and a lack of capacity.

The results of the empirical analysis show internal consistency regarding the level of job involvement, access to rehabilitation programs, and the staff's role in practice. These findings reflect clear trends within the studied sample and provide a direct overview of how rehabilitative mechanisms operate within the institution.

In this context, comparing these results with existing institutional evidence, including reports from the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, serves as a supporting element that reinforces the interpretation of the data and enhances the credibility of the analysis.

This alignment does not constitute a data source but rather a form of external validation, confirming the existence of a gap between the normative framework and the practical implementation of rehabilitative programs.

The empirical analysis confirms that prison work and rehabilitative programs have real potential to influence behavioral change and reduce recidivism. However, this potential remains untapped due to implementation constraints.

In this context, the empirical findings reinforce the main thesis of this study: the problem does not lie in the lack of interventions, but in the limited and unstructured manner in which they are implemented in practice.

8. Conclusions

This study analyzed the role of prison work in the rehabilitation process of inmates, combining theoretical approaches with empirical evidence and institutional analysis in the Albanian context. The study's findings show that prison work constitutes a mechanism with high rehabilitative potential, but its effectiveness in practice remains limited.

However, the empirical analysis conducted at IEVP Peqin reveals a clear contrast between the theoretical potential of work and its implementation in practice. Only a limited number of inmates are involved in work activities, which significantly limits its impact at the institutional level. At the same time, individuals who are involved in work report noticeable improvements in discipline, professional skills, and behavior, confirming its effectiveness at the individual level.

This situation shows that the main problem does not lie in the concept of work as a rehabilitation mechanism itself, but in the limited level of access and in the way it is implemented. An intervention that fails to include the majority of the prison population cannot produce a broad effect in reducing recidivism.

Another important finding concerns the lack of an integrated rehabilitative approach. The low level of participation in educational programs and psychological interventions indicates that rehabilitation is not being fully implemented. As emphasized in the literature, effective interventions are those that combine practical activities, such as work, with interventions aimed at changing ways of thinking and behavior.

In this context, the role of the staff emerges as one of the most critical factors in the rehabilitation process. Empirical findings show that staff are perceived as a factor with a direct impact on rehabilitation, but at the same time their effectiveness is limited by a lack of resources and institutional capacities. This reinforces the argument that staff training and professionalization are necessary conditions for the effective implementation of rehabilitation programs.

The analysis of the I EVP Peqin case study confirms the existence of a gap between the normative framework and practical implementation. While criminal legislation and policies envision rehabilitation and employment as key elements, in practice these mechanisms are not fully and systematically implemented. This gap constitutes one of the main challenges of the penitentiary system and directly affects its effectiveness.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of prison work does not depend on its mere existence as an activity, but on how it is integrated into a structured system of rehabilitation. Work can contribute significantly to reducing recidivism only if:

- access to work activities for inmates is expanded
- work activities are linked to the development of real, transferable skills
- work interventions are combined with educational and psychological programs
- staff capacities and training are strengthened
- institutional organization and implementation are improved

Only through an integrated, evidence-based approach can effective rehabilitation and a sustainable reduction in recidivism be achieved. Otherwise, there is a risk that prison work will remain a formal activity, without a real impact on changing criminal behavior and on the individual's reintegration into society.

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