

Review of: "The Effectiveness of Prison Education in Reducing Criminal Recidivism: A Systematic Review"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Introduction

The topic is important, but some clarifications may be useful. For instance, in the introduction, the legal treatment of recidivism, rates of recidivism in 14 countries, and the US, suggest an average of 42%. However, the only countries named are the US and Canada. What are the other countries included in this statistic? The problem with measuring recidivism globally is that each country defines, collects, and considers recidivism differently. Additionally, the social, political, economic, and governmental practices of each country and global region implicate the outcome of recidivism. It would be helpful to note the countries or regions, given that it also implicates educational resource effectiveness and availability. Recidivism/crime is a global issue, but this intro lacks context, which minimizes the nuances that implicate recidivism rates. Of course, population does, as well. For instance, the US has the highest recidivism rate globally within 5 years of release (around 70%, U.S. Prison Population, 2019), whereas Denmark has the lowest (27%, within 5 years, <https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/sociale-forhold/kriminalitet/tilbagefald-til-kriminalitet>). The population difference is 6 million vs. 331 million, for sure.

Several sentences could use tightening up as there are a few grammatical errors which distract from the content.

The manuscript should be revised to avoid one- or two-sentence paragraphs, fragmented sentences (2nd page: end of 3rd paragraph and beginning of fourth paragraph), and awkward sentences (i.e., "Based on this theoretical basis...").

The introduction could be clearer at some parts by expanding on the several important points they make in regard to recidivism. For example, in the 3rd paragraph on page 2, readers have to infer what policy the author means. I would like the introduction to read as smoothly as the conclusion section does.

In the last sentence in the second paragraph, "countries with medium to low incomes" should be "medium to low-income countries." Also, the words "the institutionalization of social reintegration of convicts" could be made clearer. The author might benefit from more careful attention to sentence structure and word choice, with multiple grammatically informal, incomplete, and run-on sentences (e.g., run-on intro paragraph 4 sentence 2; incomplete "With a new personal identity as law-abiding citizens"). This critique is offered with understanding of the difficulty that comes with (I assume) translating a paper from a language other than English.

Focus on certain regions: In the last paragraph of this section, the authors wrote: "All this with the intention of shedding

light on the prevailing panorama at the international level in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice, with the aim of contributing to decision-making in this regard, especially in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean” (page 3, paragraph 3, lines 5-7). Is there any specific reason to focus on the “region of Latin America and the Caribbean”? The authors may want to provide some justifications in the literature review. Also, there seems to be few mentions of this specific aim in other sections of the manuscript.

Method:

I would have liked the authors to describe the narrative synthesis strategy they used.

The authors may have found more eligible articles if the first stage had consisted of skimming the entirety of the articles rather than just the abstracts.

Recency of included studies: There was an eligibility criterion “They were published in the last 5 years in English or Spanish in peer-reviewed academic journals or official repositories of international institutions” (page 3, “Eligibility Criteria” paragraph, lines 2-3). Could the authors please provide a rationale for why limiting the search to publications within the past 5 years, especially when the current search strategy did not yield a lot of studies ($k = 11$)?

In study selection, it doesn't address how quality criteria of the studies were addressed.

Sample sizes and characteristics of the studies included in the systematic review are important details. While the content of the paper is important, highlighting the need for educational approaches to combatting recidivism, it doesn't address the key findings of the papers selected. What are the results of implementing these strategies? How does it prove to the reader that this is one of the gaps in our global recidivism issue? The paper makes a case for advocating shifts in the treatment of recidivism towards a more rehabilitative and humanistic approach but fails to address if this approach is the right one. How does the reader know from this paper that this is a strategy that is worthy of implementing (obviously, there are many reasons why we would assume this is the case, but there is no evidence of this in the paper. Please include results). The studies included provide an in-depth understanding of the need for these approaches but....why? Why should we care about this approach if we do not know what the outcome could look like? Essentially, this would provide the reader concrete evidence to support the arguments presented in the papers.

As per PRISMA guidelines, consider including a flow diagram that illustrates the selection process for studies included in the review. This diagram should depict the number of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the final analysis. A flow diagram could be useful (see below—I included an example) or something similar....would provide a visual representation of the review process and facilitate more transparency/reproducibility. Also, it could help provide a clearer understanding of decision making, process, and strategy, which are a bit confusing as is.

1. Here are examples of similar literature that may be useful for organization:

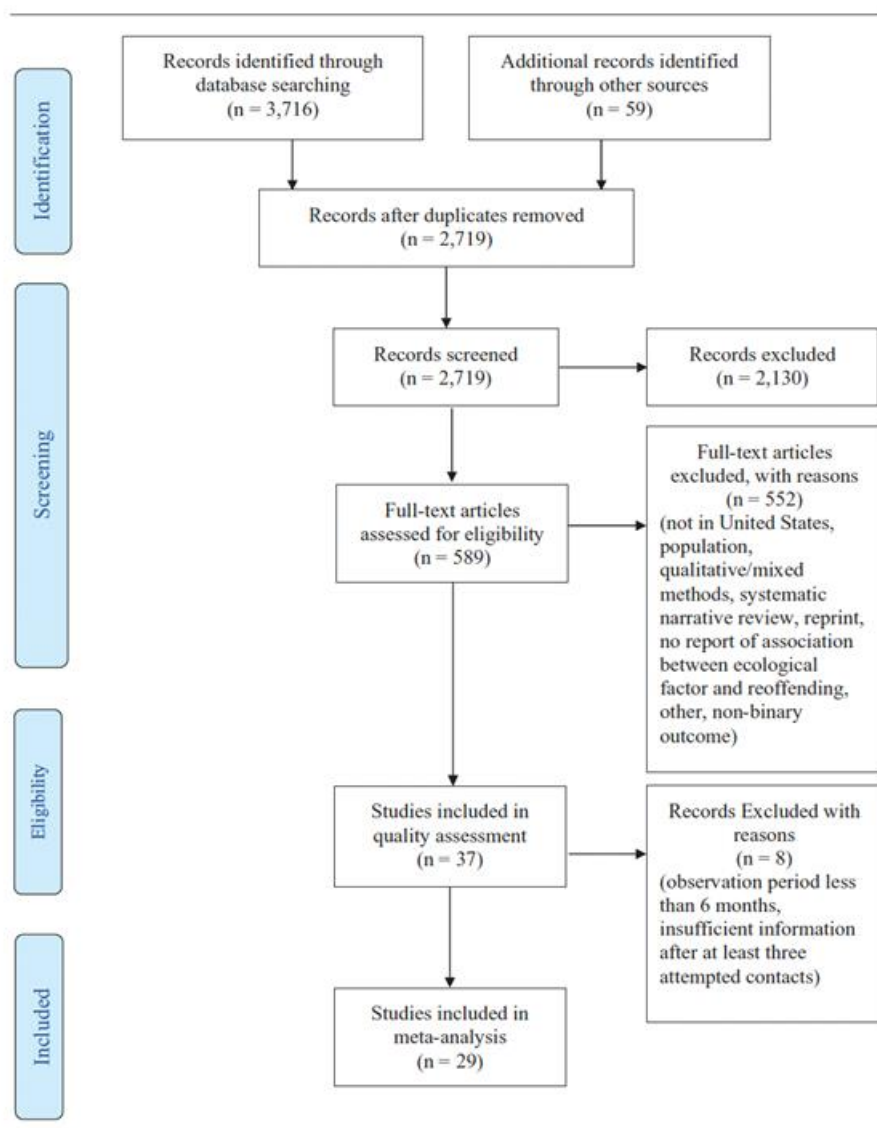


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Chart

1. Latimer, J., Dowden, C., & Muise, D. (2005). The effectiveness of restorative justice practices: A meta-analysis. *The prison journal*, 85(2), 127-144.
2. Lipsey, M. W., & Cullen, F. T. (2007). The effectiveness of correctional rehabilitation: A review of systematic reviews. *Annu. Rev. Law Soc. Sci.*, 3, 297-320.

(The format and organization of these papers could be of potential usefulness when making edits).

Provide sufficient detail to allow for replication of the review process by other researchers. This includes documentation of all steps taken, such as data extraction procedures, methods for assessing study quality, and approaches to resolving discrepancies between reviewers. Transparency in reporting will enhance the trustworthiness of the review findings.

The manuscript doesn't provide any context or interpretation of the findings of the selected studies. It is important to

discuss how the characteristics of the studies relate to the research question and what insights can be gleaned from the collective body of evidence.

Results:

It would be helpful for the author to elaborate on the studies finding positive effects of prison education on recidivism by providing examples of the academic, vocational, life skills, social support, and networking opportunities these programs included.

Discussion:

How exactly did prisoners in the (*Céspedes Magaraci, 2019*), (*Enderica Guin & Fuentes Terán, 2020*) and (*Solarte, Viveros, & Carrillo Ramírez, 2023*) studies benefit?