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Experiencing Imprisonment in Spain*

Europe has built a humanitarian criminal policy regarding imprisonment with three basic principles – limitation of the use of prison, normalization of prison life and reintegration as the main aim of the deprivation of freedom – and it seems relevant to assess whether single penitentiary systems in Spain achieve this European ideal. The paper analyses the reality of imprisonment in Spain by surveying a representative sample of persons who have experienced imprisonment in one of its regions. The paper reveals a more positive fulfilment of the principles of normalization and reintegration than previous literature has demonstrated. However, in both the normalization and the reintegration principles, there appear aspects of concern that require the implementation of new policies.

Keywords: imprisonment, survey, normalization, reintegration

Hafterleben in Spanien

Europa hat bezüglich des Freiheitsentzugs eine humanitäre Strafrechtspolitik mit drei Grundprinzipien aufgebaut: Begrenzung der Inhaftierung, Angleichung des Gefängnislebens und Wiedereingliederung als Hauptziel des Freiheitsentzugs. Daher erscheint es relevant zu betrachten, ob die Strafvollzugssysteme in Spanien dieses europäische Ideal erreichen. Der Aufsatz analysiert die Realität des Strafvollzugs in Spanien anhand einer Umfrage unter einer repräsentativen Stichprobe von Personen, die dort inhaftiert waren. Im Ergebnis zeigt sich eine positivere Erfüllung der Prinzipien der Angleichung und Reintegration als in der bisherigen Literatur. Sowohl beim Angleichungs- als auch beim Reintegrationsprinzip gibt es jedoch Aspekte, die Anlass zur Besorgnis geben und die Umsetzung einer neuen Politik erfordern.

Schlagwörter: Inhaftierung; Umfrage; Angleichung; Reintegration

1. Introduction

Experiencing imprisonment is one of the most serious legal deprivation of rights that a person may suffer and it seems relevant to assess whether the use of this penalty respects normative standards.

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Europe has built a humanitarian criminal policy with three main principles: first, the limitation of the use of imprisonment (i. e. prison should be used as a last resort and reduced to a reasonable length); second, normalization of prison life (i. e. the rights and quality of life of imprisoned persons should approximate as close as possible the rights and quality of life enjoyed by citizens in the free society), and third, reintegration as the principal aim of imprisonment (i. e. prisoners should be able to participate in rehabilitation programs during their prison time and be assisted with their successful transition to the community) (Cid & Andreu, 2017).

A relevant task for prison research is to assess the level at which the imprisonment practices of a single country achieve these European principles. In order to evaluate the first of the principles (limitation of the use of imprisonment) we may use the official data of the criminal justice system (see Dünkel 2017), but this kind of data may not be enough to obtain relevant knowledge on the other two principles. With regard to the principle of normalization, many of its dimensions have a relational component that may only be captured by collecting the opinion of inmates. The need for interview surveys with inmates may be less relevant concerning the principle of reintegration, given that administrative data regarding participation in rehabilitation programs and recidivism may suffice. However, some aspects that may be relevant for reintegration, such as the quality of the relationships with personnel dedicated to reintegration, may also require self-reported data from inmates.

With regard to the principles of normalization and reintegration, the knowledge we have about the experience of imprisonment in Spain¹ comes from the following sources: first, prison administration reports and supervising institutions; second, studies based on administrative data; third, studies based on surveys or interviews with inmates. We briefly comment on these sources mentioning their strengths and limitations.

Prison administration reports are published every year and they produce aggregate data on many relevant dimensions of the prison life such as the classification of inmates, health care, rehabilitation programs, work in prison, and contact with the outside world (leave, open regime, parole)². Some of this data can also be found in international sources such Space I, and in some academic papers which summarize the results of the prison data (Cid, 2005; Cutiño, 2015; Garcia-España & Díez-Ripollés, 2012; González, 2012; Navarro, 2018). According to these reports, inmates in Spain are accommodated mostly in modern institutions built during the democratic era in Spain (Cid, 2005). Prison population is composed of remand prisoners (16 %) and convicted prisoners (84 %)³. Convicted prisoners may be housed in closed units (in which prisoners spend 20-2 hours in the cell), in ordinary units (in which inmates have opportunities to participate in all prison activities), and open units (in which prisoners spend only nights, because during the day they live under community supervision). The latest data pro-

¹ Spain has two administrations that manage the prison system: the General Administration of the State (that manage the penitentiary system in the whole Spain, except Catalonia) and the Catalan administration (that manage the penitentiary system in Catalonia).

² See, for example, the 2018 Report of the Prison system, General Administration of the State [Secretaría General de Instituciones Penitenciarias. Informe General 2018] http://www.interior.gob.es/documents/642317/1202140/Informe_General_IIPP_2017_12615039X.pdf/9a3e9ad4-933d-422b9992-3a0d3686102d

³ Data of 2018 (Source: Spanish Prison Service, General Administration of the State).

vides the following figures: 2 % (closed regime); 74 % (ordinary regime) and 16 % (open regime)⁴. Normal accommodation in ordinary units is two per cell and no problems of overcrowding have occurred in the recent years in which Spain has experienced a decrease in prison population (Cid, 2020). In ordinary regime, inmates may be placed in respect units or in therapeutic units, provided that the inmates follow a code of conduct –violent behaviour and use of drugs are not accepted in these units–, where they may enjoy a higher level of autonomy. In the territory of the General Administration of the State, almost half of the inmates in ordinary regimes are placed in respect or therapeutic units⁵. The use of respect units is higher for female inmates (Navarro, 2018). Inmates classified in ordinary regime have possibilities of receiving education (including higher education through the National Distance Education University, UNED), vocational training, cognitive-behavioural programs (sexual offender, violent offender, gender violence offenders and drug-addicted offenders) and of doing paid jobs. Data on the number of offenders willing to take part in these programs and who enrolled in them is not easy to be obtained from the prison administration reports, except for inmates participating in a work program – this figure can be up to 45 % of the inmates incarcerated in ordinary prisons⁶. With regard to home leave, 40 % of the inmates may benefit from leave while they are classified in ordinary regime⁷.

All this data from the prison administration is useful to understand that the imprisonment experience may be very diverse in Spain, depending on factors such as the type of prison classification, participation in prison programs, the possibility of working, and benefiting from home leave, among others. Therefore, in order to comprehend the impact of these differences in prison conditions for the fulfilment of the principles of normalization and reintegration we need to consider the perspectives of the inmates.

Supervising institutions reports, such as the Spanish Ombudsman or the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), are another relevant source for assessing the accomplishment of these principles because their task is aimed at discovering the shortcomings of the prison system in the accomplishment of the European standards⁸. These reports have underlined some aspects in which the Spanish system is far from the European standards: the scarcity of activities for prisoners in closed regime, the excessive severity of coercion measures, the lack of accurate investigation into accusations of ill treatment, and the insufficient number of psychiatric personnel available to attend to inmates suffering from mental health problems (Cid and Andreu, 2017). Despite their relevance, these supervisory institution reports are not aimed at describing the experience of imprisonment but are aimed at revealing the bad practices of the

⁴ Data of December 2018 (Source: Spanish Prison Service, General Administration of the State). The remaining 8 % are prisoners not classified.

⁵ Source: 2018 Report of the Prison system, General Administration of the State [Secretaría General de Instituciones Penitenciarias. Informe General 2018]. Respect and therapeutic units are much less prevalent in Catalonia.

⁶ Sources: 2018 Report of the Prison system, General Administration of the State [Secretaría General de Instituciones Penitenciarias. Informe General 2018] and 2018 Report of the Ministry of Justice, Catalan Government [Generalitat de Catalunya, Consellera de Justícia, Memòria 2018]. According to the latest report, in Catalonia 60% of the prison population in ordinary regimes who are able to work are working (p. 158). According to the same report, the average salary per day is 13 € (prisoners usually work 4 hours per day).

⁷ Data from Catalonia, 2017. Source: Catalan prison administration.

⁸ See, for example, the report of the 2016 visit of the CPT to Spain CPT/Inf (2017) 34 and the 2018 Report of the Spanish Ombudsman [Defensor del Pueblo, Informe anual, 2018] <https://www.defensordelpueblo.es/informe-anual/informe-anual-2018/>

system and therefore they need to be complemented with other sources of data focused on the general population of inmates.

The second source of data about the experience of imprisonment comes from studies based on administrative data focused on some specific aspects of prison life, such as classification in open regime (Capdevila, Pares, Ferrer, Luque & Torecillas, 2005); granting of conditional release (Capdevila, 2014; Tébar, 2005); misbehaviour in prisons (Navarro, Ramos, Reynal, Líbano & Ruiz, 2011), prison visitation (Cassà, 2015), recidivism (Capdevila, 2015), effectiveness of treatment programs (Redondo, 2017), and the conditions of imprisoned mothers (Navarro, 2018). Concerning the principle of normalization, these studies reveal that most inmates receive visits during imprisonment (Cassà, 2015) and that there is more misbehaviour in juvenile institutions than in adult prisons (Navarro et al., 2011). Moreover, mothers in prison are mostly monoparental and this puts their children at risk during incarceration (Navarro, 2018). With regard to the principle of reintegration, these studies show that the risk of recidivism for violent and drug-addicted offenders is reduced when they take part in cognitive-behavioural-orientation rehabilitation programs (Redondo, 2017). It has been also demonstrated that some categories of inmates, such as those serving short sentences and foreigners, have less possibilities of benefiting from open regime and conditional release (Capdevila 2014, Tébar 2005). This is also relevant because the rates of recidivism are higher for inmates who served their entire sentence and are released without supervision (Capdevila, 2015). As already mentioned, since these studies are based on administrative data, they are unable to collect the subjective experience of imprisonment in relevant aspects such as subjective wellbeing, the quality of relationships, the perception of fair treatment, or the expectations about re-entry.

The last source of data about the experience of imprisonment in Spain are the studies that collect the opinions of persons imprisoned. A research group from the Universidad Pontificia de Comillas (Rios & Cabrera, 1998 and 2002; Gallego, Rios & Cabrera, 2010) carried out the first surveys about prison conditions in Spain. Their latest study was able to obtain a large sample (n = 1668) of inmates placed in ordinary prisons in the territory ruled by the General Administration of the State. Their findings confirm that the experience of imprisonment may be more painful for foreigners because they may have less social support than national inmates (Gallego et al., 2010, 132). On the other hand, the authors state that one third of all offenders who are experiencing drug problems might not be receiving treatment in prison (Gallego et al., 2010, 113). Finally, addressing the expectations about re-entry, even though most inmates are optimistic about work and home, there is a relevant minority that is pessimistic and 10 % foresee being homeless after release. The authors conclude that re-entry is a very a relevant problem for a part of the inmates (Gallego et al., 2010). Recent studies are devoted to analysing the quality of life in prison using the survey Measuring the Quality of Prison Life, MQPL developed by the team lead by Alison Liebling (2004). The studies have been carried out in ordinary prisons in Catalonia (Rodríguez, Larrauri & Güerri, 2018) in Andalusia (Barquín, Cano & Calvo, 2019; Pozo, Navarro, Nakahira & Cutiño, 2018), and in three prisons from different regions in Spain (Enjuanes, 2020). The main findings of these studies are that the experience of imprisonment varies in different institutions within the same region (Barquín et al., 2019; Rodríguez et al., 2018), among different units in the same prison (Pozo et al., 2018), and between similar units in different prisons (Enjuanes, 2020). According to the study of Rodríguez et al. (2018), the quality of life of inmates is mainly dependent on the quality of the prison organization, the relationships between inmates and staff, and the help given for re-entry. Confirming the findings of Gallego et al. (2010); one of the worst evaluated aspects of prison by

inmates is the possibility of drug-addicted offenders being able to receive quality treatment (Barquín et al., 2019).

Almeda (2002) carried out a study specifically concerning women inmates in an ordinary Catalan prison. The conclusions of her qualitative research (interviews with 37 incarcerated women and members of the staff) underlined that the conditions of incarceration for women were discriminative when compared to men: they were allocated in the worse part of the prison, and they had less opportunity to participate in rehabilitation programs, paid work programs, and they were considered by staff to be more conflictive than men. Some years later, a group of researchers lead by Giménez-Salinas (Giménez-Salinas, Riera & Marteache, 2006) took part in the European project, International study of women imprisonment (Dünkel, Kerstermann & Zolondeck, 2006), and administered a survey to 89 participants about prison conditions in two Catalan prisons. The study revealed that most of the prison aspects (quality of accommodation, food, prison environment, education and training opportunities, leisure activities, and re-entry preparation) were mostly assessed negatively. Only treatment by staff and possibilities of family contact were mostly assessed positively. A more recent survey in Andalusian prisons showed that the main concern for incarcerated women is their children (Mapelli, Herrera & Sordi, 2013). Almeda & Ballesteros-Pena (2015) and Ballesteros-Pena (2018) have reported research on the use of respect modules in which more incarcerated women are allocated in prisons governed by the General Administration of the State (Navarro, 2018, 28). According to Almeda & Ballesteros-Pena (2015) and Ballesteros-Pena (2018), these units are not responding to incarcerated women's needs. Finally, Jiménez-Bautista (2016) conducted a survey with a large sample of women incarcerated in Spain ($n = 538$) to test whether they felt discriminated against in comparison to incarcerated males. The results were that women do not feel discriminated against with the exception of the possibilities for work and supervised leave.

2. The Present Study

2.1. Sample

Data for the present study was collected as the main part of a research project devoted to increasing the knowledge on the relationship between imprisonment and recidivism⁹. The aim of the sampling procedure was to obtain a representative sample of prisoners who have served a prison sentence in Catalonia (Spain). Participants were recruited in 10 ordinary prisons, 6 open prisons and 4 parole offices, covering all correctional institutions of the region. The sample was obtained in four stages between April 2016 and July 2017. The prison directorate compiled a list of inmates who were going to complete their prison sentences in each of the correctional institutions within a 6-month period and we approached inmates and parolees during the final months of serving their prison sentences (4 months before the expiration of the prison sentence on average).

Prison staff distributed a letter from the research team to prisoners and parolees which explained the aim of the research. Inmates and parolees were invited to attend a meeting in which

⁹ With some theoretical and contextual adaptations, we used the survey of *Returning Home* project that was kindly facilitated to us by Professor Christie Visher (see, Visher & O'Connell, 2012).

trained researchers asked for informed consent and those consenting filled out a self-administered questionnaire with the help of the researchers when required. Questionnaires were mostly completed in the correctional facilities' (prisons and parole centers) educational rooms without the supervision of prison staff.

In total we obtained a list of 1,394 inmates and parolees. Prison staff contacted 1,072 individuals to invite them to participate in the research. The remaining 322 had been transferred to a different institution or for other reasons—illness, home leaves, work—were considered by prison staff not to be available to participate in the research. From the 1,072 that been invited to participate in the research, 538 (50.2 %) agreed to participate. The response rate was higher in ordinary prisons (57.5 %) and open prisons (58.3 %) than in parole centers (33.7 %); this different rate seems to be due to the fact that parolees needed to be contacted on an individual basis and agree on a day to attend the parole center in order to fill out the questionnaire. Questionnaires took an average of 75 minutes to be completed and participants were given 10 € as compensation for their time.

Table 1 shows the population distribution and the sample regarding sex, age, nationality and the type of release.

Table 1: Comparison between population and sample

	Population whose sentence expired in 2016		Sample		Difference
	N	%	N	%	Percent points
Sex					
Men	2,833	92.0	488	90.9	-1.1
Women	247	8.0	50	9.1	1.1
Age					
Up to 35	1,236	40.1	206	38.3	-1.8
Older than 35	1,844	59.9	332	61.7	1.8
Nationality					
Spanish	1,842	59.8	328	61.0	1.2
Foreigner ¹⁰	1,239	40.2	210	39.0	-1.2
Release					
Max/ordinary prison	1,737	56.4	337	62.6	6.2
Open regime	566	18.4	100	18.6	0.2
Parole	778	25.3	101	18.8	-6.4
Total	3,080	100.0	538	100.0	

Regarding the previous knowledge about the experience of imprisonment in Spain, which we have summarized in the Introduction section, the strength of the data is that it is based on a representative sample of the population who served a prison sentence. Previous research in

¹⁰ Non-Spanish UE citizens are also considered foreigners in this research.

Spain has been conducted with inmates incarcerated in ordinary prisons. The problem with these samples is that these inmates are not representative of the general population that serve a prison sentence. As seen in *table 1*, 56.4 % of inmates are released from ordinary prisons after having served the full sentence. Given that these inmates spend a higher percentage of their sentence in an ordinary prison than offenders that are early released, collecting a sample in ordinary prisons has the problem of underrepresenting early released inmates.

2.2. Items to Assess the Principles of Normalization and Reintegration

The principle of normalization requires that “Life in prison shall approximate as closely as possible the positive aspects of life in the community”¹¹. Given that the survey we use in this paper comes from research that was not primary directed at testing the fulfilment of the principle of normalization, we can only report data on some aspects of this principle. Some dimensions of the principle of normalization that have been underlined by researchers as relevant, such as the level of autonomy of inmates (Pratt & Erikson, 2011; Reiter, Sexton & Sumner, 2018), or the quality of services delivered to inmates (health, education, activities) (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009), have not been assessed in our study. However, we think the aspects of the principle of normalization considered in the present study: being treated fairly by staff, living in a secure environment, benefiting from working, and maintaining social bonds with family during imprisonment are very relevant aspects of the idea that life in prison should approximate community life as much as possible.

Relevant aspects of the principle of normalization consists of being treated with respect, fairness, and care by staff (van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009). Given that while in prison, inmates may only achieve some of the aims of the quality of their life (health, food, accommodation, leisure, program participation, work, and contact with the outside world, among others) through the mediation of the staff, a relevant dimension of the principle of normalization is that the prison staff carry out their tasks following the principles of respect, fairness, and care. The MQLP survey developed by Alison Liebling and colleagues (Liebling, 2004), which has been used by a number of researchers in Spain, considers the relationships between staff and inmates as one of the dimensions of the quality of prison life.

Secondly, we surveyed participants about safety in prison. Although, safety in prison is not usually considered as an element of the principle of normalization, we think this is an important dimension of this principle. Prison research has revealed that prisons may be places in which victimization and feelings of being unsafe are high (Bottoms, 1999) and the principle of normalization requires that safety in prison is not dissimilar to safety in the free society. We have measured direct victimization by other inmates and indirect victimization by inmates and staff. To construct the scale of indirect victimization we adapted the “Negative environment scale” developed by Listwan, Sullivan, Agnew, Cullen & Colvin (2011, p. 24), in which participants are asked about the frequency of violence and other offences among inmates, to include questions which reflect whether participants had perceived unfair treatment by staff.

¹¹ Recommendation Rec(2006)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Prison Rules, art. 5.

The third aspect we took into consideration to assess the level of normalization of the prison life is the possibility of having a paid job while serving prisons sentence and the level of satisfaction with the work. It is clear that work is the normal way to provide for personal and family needs and as stated by art. 26,5 of European Prison Rules: "...[work] shall be provided by prison authorities". We asked participant to report whether they worked during their sentence. Finally, the idea that imprisonment should not imply a break with the family life of inmates is a widely acknowledged dimension of the principle of normalization¹² and we examined the fulfilment of this principle by asking inmates to report on whether they had been able to maintain social bonds with the family during imprisonment.

With regard to the principle of reintegration, we first surveyed participants about whether they had taken part in rehabilitation programs which, according to criminological research, is considered to be useful for preventing recidivism (Mackenzie, 2006). We asked whether the programs had been useful for improving their life skills and if they had enhanced their quality of life during imprisonment. Given the relevance of the idea that inmates should be assisted to prepare for their release in the literature (Travis, 20059) we asked participants whether they have counted on a "key officer" to receive support for re-entry (Liebling et al, 2019) and, in this case, we asked them to report whether this key officer has been helpful in the different aspects related to preparation for re-entry. Moreover, considering the promising literature about the relevance of the continuity of care between prison and community in order to maximize the possibilities of a successful re-entry (Jonson & Cullen, 2015), we included the use of transition mechanisms (leave, open regime and conditional release) in the sample. Finally, we have taken into account the desistance literature which states that the optimism perspective about re-entry will influence the re-entry outcomes (Burnett, 1992; Doeckhie, Dirkzwager & Nieuwbeerta, 2017; Howerton, Burnett, Byng & Campbell, 2009; Marti & Cid, 2015; Visher & O'Connell, 2012) and, therefore, we used the scale developed by Visher & O'Connell (2012) in the pre-release interview of the *Returning Home* research. The scale assesses the individual's expectations about life after the expiration of their sentence in a set of 14 items, which are related to five dimensions: relationships with family, social acceptance, health, income, and deviant and illegal behaviours.

2.3. Analytical Plan

The presentation of results will be divided in three sections. In the first two sections, we deal with the principle of normalization and with the principle of reintegration. We will present the results, for all the relevant questions of the survey, making a dichotomization between the answers that reflect accomplishment of the principle of normalization and the answers that reflect a lack of achievement of this principle. Comparing the percentages, we will make conclusions about the fulfilment of this principle in our sample. We positively assess an item related to the principles of normalization and reintegration when more than 50 % of the prisoners make a positive assessment of it. Of course, we do not claim that when most inmates positively assess an item that there is an optimal situation, but we think it is a useful criterion for making a general assessment of the strengths and shortcoming of a system. Finally, in the third section,

¹² As stated by art. 24, 4 of the European Prison Rules: "The arrangements for visits shall be such as to allow prisoners to maintain and develop family relationships in as normal a manner as possible".

we will test whether, in some aspects of these dimensions, we can replicate the claim that some minorities in prison, such as women and foreigners, may suffer worse conditions concerning normalization and reintegration. In order to do that we will look for significant differences – between men and women and between foreigners and nationals- in any of the items under consideration.

3. Results

3.1. Principle of Normalization

3.1.1. Fair Treatment

We have examined whether the participants have been treated with respect, fairness and care by the correctional institutions' staff¹³. The results (*table 2*) show that most participants feel they had been treated with respect and fairness by staff and half of the participants assessed that the staff had taken care their issues. However, the item “The staff has tried to resolve my requests” is mostly assessed negatively.

Table 2: Respect, fairness and care by staff

	Always/Normally %	Rarely/Never %
I have been treated with respect by staff	70.5	29.5
I have been treated worse than other inmates	25.5	74.5
My rights have been respected by staff	64.3	35.7
It has been possible to make requests to the staff	62.5	37.5
I have received explanations for the decisions taken	53.6	46.4
It has been easy to appeal negative decisions	52.1	47.9
The staff has listened to my requests	56.5	43.5
The staff has tried to resolve my requests	46.4	53.6

3.1.2. Safety

The second aspect regards experiencing safety during their prison time. *Table 3*, reflects whether participants had been victimized during their imprisonment. The results indicate that imprisonment had been a safe experience for most participants, although there is a minority of participants who had suffered victimization.

The second measure of safety we used is indirect victimization, in which we asked participants about the environment they experienced while serving their prison sentence by reporting how often negative situations occurred. The results (*table 4*) indicate that most participants perceived imprisonment as an unsafe place, mainly because of interpersonal violence among inmates.

¹³ Staff included all the authorities of the correctional institutions (including prison officers, treatment personal and prison judges).

Table 3: Direct victimization

	<i>Often/Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely/Never</i>
1. I have been insulted or humiliated by other inmates	20.4	79.6
2. I have beaten or assaulted by other inmates	10.9	89.1
3. I have been threaten by other inmates	16.5	83.5
4. My property has been stolen by other inmates	13.4	86.6

Table 4: Indirect victimization

	<i>Often/Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely/Never</i>
Inmates are afraid of being assaulted by other inmates	74.8	25.2
Weak inmates become someone else's property	73.8	26.2
People are being threatened when they come first to prison	53.7	46.3
Inmates are being beaten up by other inmates	67.5	32.5
There are gang fights between inmates	40.7	59.3
There is lack of respect toward inmates by staff	56.8	43.2
Threats are made to inmates by staff	46	54
Assaults on inmates are committed by staff	40.7	59.3
There are unfair staff decisions	66.2	33.8

Taking both dimensions of victimization into account we may conclude that despite only a minority had been directly victimized, most participants perceive the prison environment as unsafe and this is due mainly to interpersonal violence among inmates.

3.1.3. Work

With regard to paid work, our survey indicates that most participants (74.5 %) worked during their prison sentence and for most of them the work they had done had been useful for improving their job skills¹⁴.

3.1.4. Family Relationships

We surveyed participants as to whether they had been able to maintain their relationships with family while serving their prison sentence. The results (*table 5*) indicate that most participants had maintained bonds with their families and the families had provided instrumental and expressive support.

¹⁴ The perception about the utility of the work is higher with the work done in the community (in open regime or in conditional release) (90%), than work done inside the prison (69.9%).

Table 5: Family support

	Always/Quite	Rarely/Never
I have felt accompanied by my family while serving the sentence	78.1	21.9
My family has given me financial help while serving the sentence	65	35
I have felt loved by my family while serving the sentence	83.6	16.4
My family has suffered during my sentence because of me	73.8	26.2
I feel indebted to my family for their support while serving the sentence	71.3	28.7
My family has asked me to change	71.4	28.6
My family has motivated me to participate in activities while serving the sentence	66.6	33.4

3.2. Principle of Reintegration

3.2.1. Participation in Rehabilitation Programs

We asked participants about their participation in rehabilitation programs and about their assessment of its usefulness. Specifically, we asked about five types of programs that are utilized in the Catalan correctional system: drug-addiction treatment, mental health treatment, education programs, vocational programs, and cognitive-behavioural programs for violent offenders. Almost all of the participants (98,6 %) reported that while serving their sentence they had had the opportunity to take part in programs they needed and the participation in some programs was practically universal (95,6 %) among the sample. Regarding the usefulness of the programs (table 6), most participants considered that the programs in which they had participated had been useful for both their specific aims (overcoming addiction, improving mental health, improving educational skills, improving vocational skills, and improving self-control or problem-solving skills) and for improving the overall quality of life while serving their sentence.

Table 6: Utility of rehabilitation programs

		Totally agree/agree (%)	Disagree/ Totally disagree (%)
Drug-addiction	Overcome addiction	68.7	31.3
	Improve quality of life	69.1	30.9
Mental health	Improve mental health	78	22
	Improve quality of life	76.4	23.6
Education	Improve skills	87.3	12.7
	Improve quality of life	83.9	16.1
Vocational training	Improve skills	91.8	8.2
	Improve quality of life	88.5	11.5
Violent behaviour	Improve skills	85.4	14.6
	Improve quality of life	68.5	31.5

3.2.2. Professional Support for Re-Entry

Most participants (66.9 %) reported they had had a staff member (prison officer or rehabilitation personnel) or a volunteer in the final stage of their prison sentence who had assisted with

the re-entry process. *Table 7* shows that this key re-entry person was positively assessed by participants in both the emotional and the instrumental support needed for successful re-entry. Only one dimension of the re-entry process (help with finding a home) is negatively assessed by most participants.

Table 7: Professional support for re-entry

	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1. The key person has treated me as I deserved.	85.4	14.6
2. The key person has shown interest in my re-entry process	81.4	18.6
3. The key person has shown confidence in my successful re-entry	83.2	16.8
4. The key officer has given useful advice to manage my re-entry process	78.3	21.7
5. The key officer has excessively supervised me	27.3	72.7
6. The key officer has help to improve my skills	84.2	15.8
7. The key officer has helped to improve the relationships with my family	64.4	35.6
8. The key officer has helped to improve my chances of getting work	72.7	27.7
9. The key officer has helped me to find home	27.7	72.3

3.2.3. Transitional Release

Half of the participants of the sample (51.6 %) were given home leave while they were serving their sentence in ordinary prisons and only a minority (37.4 %) were early released; serving the final part of their prison sentence in open regime or on parole.

3.2.4. Re-entry Expectations

We asked participants to report how likely it was that some negative re-entry situations would occur. As *table 8* shows, participants are quite optimistic in their expectations about successful re-entry. Even with the most problematic issues –money and work- approximately two thirds of the participants in the sample had positive expectations.

Despite being optimistic in general, most participants (66.1 %) foresaw at least one problematic situation that might occur and cause them to reoffend. *Table 9* shows the prevalence of these problems among the sample. Considering the results of *table 8* and *9*, we may conclude that participants are conscious that they may experience problems on release, but most of them are confident about overcoming these problems.

Table 8: Re-entry expectations¹⁵

	<i>Unlikely/ Very unlikely %</i>	<i>Likely/ Very likely %</i>
A family member or a person you planned to live with threatened, harassed, or physically hurt you.	95.2	4.8
That you do not have relationships with your family	89.4	10.6
That you do not have relationships with your children	87.6	12.4
That you will not be accepted after having been in prison	74.2	25.8
That you will not have financial means to provide for your needs	70.6	29.4
That you will not remain in good health	80.1	19.9
That you will not manage to make enough money to support yourself	61.7	38.3
That you will not find a place to live	86.2	13.8
That you will not find or keep a job	66.7	33.3
That you will not be able to support your children under 18	77.4	22.6
That you will not be able to pay off debts	77.6	22.4
That you will use illegal drugs	83.6	16.4
That you will reoffend	89.8	10.2
That you will return to prison	88.9	10.1

Table 9: Expectation of re-entry problems

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Prevalence (%)</i>
Relationships with antisocial peers	29.3
Lack of work	27.2
Lack of money	21.2
Drug Abuse	18.4
Lack of family support	15.6
Alcohol	13.8
Lack of a home	12.1
Depression	10.9
Lack of contact with children	10.7
Lack of friends' support	5

3.3. Minorities in Prison

In this epigraph, we aim to replicate findings of previous research about worse imprisonment conditions for some minorities, such as women and foreigners.

¹⁵ The scale contains two questions that ask about relationships with children and the responses were only included in the calculations for those participants who have children.

3.3.1. Women

With regard to the principle of normalization, in none of the aspects under consideration (staff-inmates relationships safety, work and family support) are there significant differences between women and men in the sample. Regarding family support, it is true that the average level of family support is higher for males (3.13), than for females (2.82) on a 1-4 scale, but the difference is not significant. Only in one of the questions in the scale (I feel indebted to my family for their support while serving the sentence), are there significant differences; women felt less indebted than men to the family for the support received.

Regarding the principle of reintegration, the only significant difference between men and women is that more women (84.8 %) than men (65.2 %) had had a key re-entry person to help with re-entry. In the other aspects analysed (utility of rehabilitation programs, transitional release¹⁶, and expectations about re-entry) only some significant differences emerge: in relation to program participation, women took part more than men in mental health programs and, with regard to expectations about re-entry the risk of being victimized by a family member is more problematic for women than for men.

3.3.2. Foreigners

Concerning the principle of normalization, some significant differences emerge between nationals and foreigners, although not always in the expected direction. Foreigners report a higher level of being treated with respect¹⁷ and care¹⁸ than nationals. Regarding indirect victimization, in all the items in the scale, except fights among gangs (see *table 4*), significant differences appear which show that foreigners perceive the environment to be safer environment than nationals do. Concerning family support, as expected, foreigners had felt less accompanied by families than nationals did. However, the families of foreigners demand the rehabilitation of inmates more intensively than the families of nationals. No differences appear between the two groups with regard to working during their prison sentences. In the area of the principle of reintegration some significant differences appear between foreigners and nationals. Foreigners had fewer possibilities of benefiting from a key re-entry officer and from being granted a transitional release to the community. The proportion of foreigners who benefited from a key reentry officer is 57.6 % and that of nationals is 70.7 %. Regarding transitional release, the proportion of foreigners who were granted leave is 38.2% and that of nationals is 55.2 %. Finally 30 % of foreigners completed the final part of the prison sentence in open regime or conditional release and the figure for nationals is 42.1 %. Regarding expectations about re-entry, some significant differences appear which indicate that nationals felt more worried about health, drugs and paying debts than foreigners did. No differences were reported concerning participation in treatment programs.

¹⁶ Women benefited more than men from leave (51.1 % v 48 %) and early release (46 % v 36.5 %) but the differences are not significant.

¹⁷ I have been treated with respect by staff.

¹⁸ The staff tried to resolve my requests.

4. Discussion

4.1. Conclusions

This paper used a survey of a representative sample of persons that served a prison sentence in Catalonia (Spain) to assess whether the experience of imprisonment in Spain adheres to the principles of normalization and reintegration that, besides the principle of the reduction of the use of prison, are the pillars of the European criminal policy (Cid & Andreu, 2017). From our analysis, we can propose the following conclusions.

First, we may conclude that most of the aspects of the principle of normalization we have studied are positively achieved. Relationships between staff and inmates have been considered by prison researchers as a key aspect of the quality of prison life (Liebling, 2004; Liebling et al., 2019) and our survey indicates that inmates feel to have been treated with respect, fairness and care by staff. Other dimensions of the principle of normalization are also satisfied: most inmates had the possibility of doing paid work during their sentence; increasing their quality of life during imprisonment and alleviating the costs of incarceration for their families, and most inmates received support from their families, a factor that is not only relevant for the normalization principle but it also may contribute to promoting desistance narratives (Cid & Martí, 2012; Martí & Cid, 2015). Of course, the degree in which the normalization principle is satisfied can improve, but currently fulfilment is positive.

Second, despite the positive assessment of the principle of normalization, participants in our research negatively assessed one aspect: safety in prisons. It is true that the prevalence of direct victimization by other inmates, in particular physical victimization, is probably not high in comparison to an international context (Bottoms, 1999), but inmates perceive the prison environment in which they have served the prison sentence as an unsafe place, with three quarters of the sample answering that inmates are afraid of being assaulted by other inmates (see table 4). Living in an unsafe environment is not only relevant for the normalization principle, but the strain it produces might contribute to increasing the chances of recidivism at release (Listwan et al. 2011).

Third, most aspects of the principle of reintegration are well satisfied in Spanish prisons according to the participants in our survey. Contradicting previous research (Cutiño, 2015), it seems that the right to participate in rehabilitation programs is accomplished: more than 95 % of participants had taken part in rehabilitation programs that they considered useful for meeting criminogenic needs and for increasing their quality of life in prison. Furthermore, most inmates had benefited from a key re-entry person to help in their preparation for release and this person had generally provided emotional and instrumental help. Finally, inmates end their prison sentences being aware that they face problems that may bring them to reoffend but they were optimistic about their chances of avoiding negative situations after of their prison sentence ends. We may conclude that most inmates end their prison sentences having taking part in rehabilitation programs, having some release preparation and being optimistic about their re-entry outcomes. According to the literature reviewed in the Introduction, all three aspects should contribute to low rates of recidivism and positive social integration after the prison sentence. Of course, we need to repeat here, that this positive evaluation of the achievement of this principle does not mean that its degree of accomplishment should not improve.

Fourth, despite this positive assessment of the principle of reintegration, the transition from prison to community does not warrant a positive assessment. Based on the evidence that continuity of care between prison and community is relevant for a successful re-entry (Jonson & Cullen, 2015), European regulations ask States to conceive early release as the normal way to extinguish a prison sentence¹⁹. However, only a minority of participants in the sample had benefited from a transitional and supervised release. Given that early released prisoners received more help than prisoners who served their entire sentence in ordinary prisons (Cid & Ibáñez, 2018) it seems reasonable that supervised release contributes to a lower rate of recidivism for early-released prisoners (Capdevila, 2015).

Five, confirming the results obtained by Jiménez-Bautista (2016), we do not find support for the idea that imprisoned women felt more discriminated against than imprisoned men and, on the contrary, in some aspects, such as benefiting from a key re-entry officer, they may be in a better situation. However, some significant differences such as the higher participation of women in mental health programs and the higher expectations of suffering violence by a family member may suggest that the experience of imprisonment may be more painful for women than for men (Mapelli, Herrera, Sordi, 2013; Navarro, 2018, p. 103)²⁰.

Our final point concerns foreigners. We have not found evidence of discrimination against foreigners regarding the principle of normalization and, on the contrary, foreigners may experience a better relationship with staff and feel safer than nationals. But, the survey confirms that foreigners' chances of reintegration are fewer: fewer foreigners can count on a key re-entry person to assist in the transition to the community and they are granted less leave and early release. The idea that foreigners suffer a discriminative situation concerning imprisonment has long been evidenced in research (Tébar, 2005), acknowledged by the professionals of the prison system (Ibáñez, 2019), and linked to the deportation policies of immigrants with criminal records that prevent the prison system from fulfilling its reintegration aims (Cid & Ibáñez, 2018; García-España, 2012).

4.2. Limitations

The present research has limitations. First, the survey was conducted in the correctional institutions of one Spanish Autonomous Community (Catalonia) and we cannot disregard that different findings could have emerged if the survey would have been administered to a sample in the whole Spain. However, given the commonalities (legislation, facilities, personnel and rehabilitation programs) of the two systems we do not think major differences would have appeared. Second, the system used to recruit survey participants was unable to include those who served short-term sentences²¹ in the research, mainly due to fine default, which shows that

¹⁹ Rec (2002) 22 of the Committee of Ministers on *conditional release (parole)*, art. 4 a: "In order to reduce the harmful effects of imprisonment and to promote the resettlement of prisoners under conditions that seek to guarantee the safety of the outside community, the law should make conditional release available to all sentenced prisoners, including life-sentence prisoners".

²⁰ In this paper we don't deal with this issue raised by Almeda and Ballesteros-Pena (2015) and Ballesteros-Pena (2018) about whether incarceration for women should not only be assessed taking into account equality with women but also for being responsive to the women needs.

²¹ The prisoners serving short-term sentences were allocated in prisons for pre-trial detainees, in which staff have less contact with inmates and in which the rates of consent to participate in the research were very low.

approximately 20 % of the inmates who complete their sentence do so within an average sentence of 40 days. (Capdevila, 2015, 116). This means that our research is not able to reflect the imprisonment experience of short-term prisoners. Finally, our survey was aimed at analysing the impact of the experience of imprisonment on recidivism and therefore we did not collect information on some aspects of the imprisonment experience that may be relevant for understanding the accomplishment of the principle of normalization which were not theoretically linked to recidivism. Despite these limitations, we think the main strength of our research is that we have been able to collect a representative sample in a Spanish region of those persons who have served a prison sentence and we have used a survey that is able to properly reflect the aspects analysed by the principles of normalization of reintegration.

4.3. Implications

The normalization principle asks for actions to improve the perception of safety of people serving a prison sentence, according to some recent research (Pozo et al. 2018; Enjuanes, 2020), respect modules, that exist in the territory of Spain ruled by the General Administration of the State, may accomplish the principle of normalization better than ordinary prisons. One of the characteristics of these respect units is that violence is an unacceptable behaviour and we have evidence that one of the ingredients of the quality of life in prisons is the exclusion of violence (Liebling et al, 2019). Although we are aware of the criticisms of respect units²², we think that the principle of normalization requires that an inmate can have the opportunity to live in a space in which violence is an unacceptable behaviour. In order to make this principle effective, respect units should exist in any ordinary prison and every prisoner should have a real opportunity to be assigned to these units.

Although most of the elements of the reintegration principle are well satisfied by the correctional system, only a minority of persons serving a prison sentence benefit from transitional release and the providing of the continuity of care between the prison and the community. Based on a previous analysis of the present sample, it has been suggested that amplifying the figure of the key re-entry person may be useful for increasing the number of persons who are granted early release (Pedrosa, 2019). Other suggestions for increasing the number of persons that benefit from early release refers to changing the conditional release legal framework making it automatic at some point in the sentence (Cid & Tébar, 2010).

The improvement of the system of transitional release also needs to focus on the foreign population in prisons who experience worse ratios of benefiting from a key re-entry person, and who are granted less leave, open regime and parole. The reality of deportation is that a very small percentage of foreign prisoners are deported (García-España, 2012) and this reality should be taken into account so as not to restrict the policies oriented toward the successful reintegration of foreign prisoners (Ibàñez, 2019).

²² Almeda & Ballesteros-Pena (2015) and Ballesteros-Pena (2018) object the philosophy of respect modules for women because: “...the implementation of practices of classification and responsabilisation reinforces traditional features of female treatment such as discipline, control and obedience, whilst also resting on gender, race and nationality stereotypes” (Ballesteros-Pena, 2018, 460).

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