

An Empirical Study on Social Inclusion of Ex-Offenders and their acceptance in the society with Insights from Chennai's Libraries & Community Resources

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How to cite this article: K. R. Gopalan, Abraham Stephen, Dhanush Janarthanan, Sharon Havilah (2024) An Empirical Study on Social Inclusion of Ex-Offenders and their acceptance in the society with Insights from Chennai's Libraries & Community Resources. *Library Progress International*, 44(3), 20137-20150.

ABSTRACT

The modern landscape reveals a multitude of individuals confined by the Justice System for a range of offences. These individuals are subjected to a period of rigorous confinement and rehabilitation with the aim of transforming their cognitive processes to avert future offences. They choose not to restate it. Upon their release, they seek an avenue for atonement. The individuals in question, now designated as ex-convicts or ex-offenders, seek to reintegrate into their previous lives. Individuals recognise the difficulties faced by those who experience discrimination due to the previously mentioned distinguishing characteristics. Upon conviction by the Judicial System for a crime, irrespective of its gravity, an individual, akin to any other member of society, is subject to the consequences of that judgement. Nonetheless, although they represent a minority, a notable portion of society seems to reject their previous existence due to concerns regarding the possibility of reoffending. The societal exclusion of these individuals who have previously offended, its ramifications, and the strategies that ought to be adopted. Individuals recognise the difficulties faced by those who experience discrimination due to the aforementioned distinguishing characteristics. The societal perceptions and ramifications concerning ex-offenders, along with the remedial measures implemented. This study employs an empirical research approach. A total of 208 samples were collected through a convenience sampling method. The independent variables include age, gender, marital status, and educational qualification. In contrast, the dependent variables encompass opinions regarding the public mingling of ex-offenders, shifts in perspective when the ex-offender is a family member, perceptions of role models who have previously offended, and awareness of both governmental and non-governmental organisations dedicated to the social inclusion of ex-offenders.

KEYWORDS : Ex-Offenders, Ex-Convicts, Inclusion, Exclusion, Library, India.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary world, many individuals are incarcerated by the justice system for various offenses, undergoing stringent confinement and rehabilitation aimed at altering their thinking to prevent recidivism. Upon release, these ex-convicts or ex-offenders seek opportunities for redemption and reintegration into society. However, they often face significant challenges, including discrimination and social ostracism, which impede their efforts to reclaim their former lives. This study explores the societal perceptions and impacts surrounding ex-offenders, as well as the corrective actions that can be implemented to foster their inclusion.

Libraries, as community hubs, play a crucial role in supporting the social reintegration of ex-offenders through access to resources, educational programs, and information about governmental and non-governmental

organizations focused on rehabilitation. The research utilizes an empirical approach, surveying a sample of 208 individuals through convenience sampling. Independent variables include age, gender, marital status, and educational qualifications, while dependent variables encompass opinions on public mingling with ex-offenders, shifts in perception when an ex-offender is a family member, views on role models from this demographic, and awareness of library resources and community programs aimed at promoting social inclusion. This study aims to highlight the importance of libraries and community resources in enhancing the acceptance and integration of ex-offenders into society.

Discrimination is notably common not only in our nation but globally. Individuals are elevated or marginalised based on their complexion, ethnicity, caste, religious views, etc., and despite denials, this has ingrained itself as a fundamental notion in societal consciousness. Many of these distinguishing qualities are inherent from birth, with skin colour being genetic, and caste and religion determined by one's familial background, among other factors. However, this does not apply to ex-convicts. A significant proportion of respondents are willing to reintegrate ex-offenders into society. Conversely, there is another faction that believes reintegrating ex-convicts into a social network is unwise. They maintain that their perspective would not waver, even if the individual in question were a relative. Participants offered a range of evaluations on a linear scale regarding the potential impact on their perception of their role model if it were revealed that the individual had previously been incarcerated. Individuals such as family members, celebrities, and ex-offenders deserve an opportunity for redemption and a renewed existence. This research investigates the societal exclusion of former convicts, its implications, and possible interventions. Individuals recognise the difficulties faced by those who experience discrimination due to the previously mentioned distinguishing characteristics. Upon conviction by the Judicial Justice System for a crime, an individual, akin to every other member of society, is subject to the consequences of that judgement, irrespective of the crime's severity. Upon the conclusion of their designated period, they are released from their confinement. They subsequently evolve into individuals formerly incarcerated or previously convicted. The primary issue for these ex-convicts is societal exclusion, preventing them from resuming a regular life akin to their pre-incarceration existence. The research analysis elucidates public perceptions of ex-offenders, including societal attitudes and the extent of understanding of rehabilitative procedures and the organizations that implement them. A considerable percentage of the participants express a readiness to facilitate the reintegration of ex-offenders into the community. On the other hand, there exists a perspective that contends the reintegration of ex-convicts into a social network is imprudent. They maintain that their perspective would not waver, even in the hypothetical scenario where the ex-offender was a relative. Responses varied on a linear scale regarding whether the participants' views of their role model would change upon learning that the individual had previously been incarcerated. Individuals such as family members, celebrities, and ex-offenders deserve the opportunity for redemption and a renewed existence. A multitude of individuals who now lead exemplary lives were, at one point, confined by the legal system. One person of interest is Daniel Manville, who has been convicted of manslaughter. During his time of confinement, he engaged in rigorous study, ultimately passing the bar examination. He has since emerged as a highly accomplished attorney in the USA, representing both correctional officers and inmates with distinction. Another distinguished instance is Robert Downey Jr., a celebrated figure in the realm of cinema. This illustrates that what they need is merely an opportunity for social inclusion, allowing them to thrive just as any other individual would. The reintegration of ex-offenders into society is often neglected in the quest for safer communities; however, attending to the diverse and frequently complex needs of ex-offenders upon their release from incarceration plays a significant role in reducing crime by lessening recidivism. Research indicates that 83% of freed inmates are rearrested within ten years. The recidivism rate is detrimental to society and to people ensnared in a cycle of poor choices and severe repercussions. The elevated rate of recidivism underscores the harsh reality of rejection encountered by inmates following their release from incarceration. Former inmates frequently face societal exclusion, encounter difficulties in securing employment, and are perceived as perilous individuals, a sentiment openly expressed by the public. In other terms, former inmates are ostracised from the society they seek to reintegrate into. This rejection renders post-incarceration life difficult and disheartening, and distressed, discontented ex-offenders frequently relapse into criminal behaviour.

2. Objectives

- To examine the issues inhibiting societal acceptance of ex-offenders, with a focus on perceptions influenced by stigma and discrimination.

- To evaluate the awareness of corrective actions and community resources, including library programs, implemented to enhance social inclusion for individuals with prior convictions.
- To examine the frequency of prisoner release and the ensuing societal standing of ex-offenders, emphasising the significance of community support frameworks.
- To analyze the circumstances faced by ex-offenders and identify the specific types of societal support, including educational resources available through libraries, that are crucial for their successful reintegration.
- To assess the effectiveness of societal assistance programs, including library initiatives, in fostering a supportive environment for ex-offenders.

3. Scope and Methodology

This study examines the social inclusion of ex-offenders in Chennai, investigating the obstacles to their societal acceptability and the supportive functions of community resources, especially libraries. The scope includes an examination of society perceptions, awareness of remedial measures, and the conditions affecting ex-offenders during reintegration. It seeks to evaluate the efficacy of current support systems, including educational initiatives and resources offered by libraries, in fostering a more inclusive atmosphere for ex-offenders. The results will offer significant insights for policymakers, community organisations, and library professionals aiming to improve social integration initiatives.

Methodology:

The employed research methodology is descriptive. A sample of 208 participants was obtained using a convenience sampling technique. Participants in Chennai were randomly selected and requested to complete an online questionnaire aimed at collecting quantitative data.

This study considers several independent factors, including age, gender, marital status, and educational attainment. The dependent variables that have been subjected to analysis include:

- Perspectives on societal interaction with former offenders.
- Shifts in perspective when an individual with a criminal history is a relative.
- Views on role models who have previously been convicted.
- Degree of understanding concerning governmental and non-governmental entities dedicated to the social integration of former offenders
- Awareness of library resources and community programs aimed at supporting ex-offenders

Statistical approaches were employed for data analysis, with results visually portrayed through graphs, such as bar graphs and pie charts, to elucidate major findings and patterns. This method elucidates social perceptions of ex-offenders and the function of libraries and community support networks in aiding their reintegration.

4. Literature Review

The social reintegration of ex-offenders has garnered significant attention in recent years, with numerous studies highlighting the challenges they face and the crucial role of community resources in facilitating their acceptance in society. This narrative review synthesizes key findings from the existing literature on the issues inhibiting societal acceptance, the awareness of corrective actions, and the support mechanisms necessary for the successful reintegration of ex-offenders.

Barriers to Societal Acceptance

Research consistently shows that societal stigma plays a pivotal role in inhibiting the acceptance of ex-offenders. A study by Stewart (2016) demonstrated that individuals with criminal records face substantial discrimination in employment and social interactions, often leading to social ostracism. This stigma is compounded by misconceptions about recidivism, where societal fears about reoffending overshadow the potential for rehabilitation. According to McEvoy (2002), the labeling of ex-offenders as "dangerous" or "untrustworthy" significantly impacts their ability to reintegrate into communities, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization.

Awareness of Corrective Actions

Several studies have examined the effectiveness of programs aimed at enhancing social inclusion for ex-offenders. A review by Adikari (2016) highlighted the importance of community-based interventions, emphasizing that awareness of these programs among the general public is crucial for their success. Libraries, in particular, have emerged as vital resources in this context. Research by Mamunur (2019) identified libraries as safe spaces where ex-offenders can access educational resources, support services, and information about community programs,

fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Support Mechanisms for Reintegration

The literature emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive support systems for ex-offenders to successfully reintegrate into society. According to Murdoch (2007), social capital, including family support and community connections, significantly influences the likelihood of successful reintegration. Furthermore, the role of libraries in providing educational and vocational training opportunities has been noted as a critical factor in reducing recidivism rates Queen (2014). By offering access to information and resources, libraries help bridge the gap between ex-offenders and societal acceptance.

Role of Family and Community Perceptions

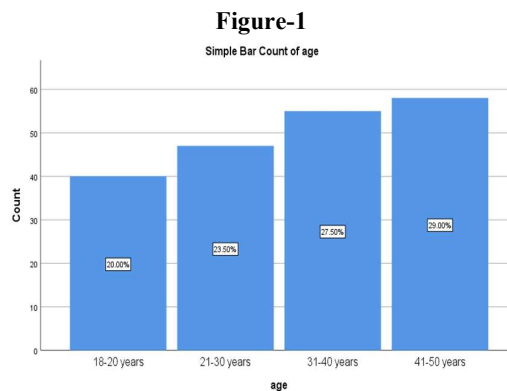
Studies have shown that perceptions shift when ex-offenders are viewed as family members. A study by Netburg (1996) found that familial ties can mitigate stigma and facilitate reintegration by providing emotional and practical support. This underscores the importance of community awareness and acceptance, as families often serve as the first line of defense against societal prejudice. Moreover, the presence of role models who have successfully reintegrated can inspire positive change in community attitudes, as demonstrated in research by Leverentz (2003).

Libraries as Supportive Environments

The emerging role of libraries as inclusive spaces for ex-offenders is supported by a growing body of literature. According to Hong *et al.* (2014), libraries can function as community hubs that promote social cohesion and support marginalized populations. The availability of programs focused on life skills, literacy, and job readiness in library settings has been linked to improved reintegration outcomes for ex-offenders Griffith and Young (2017). This highlights the potential of libraries not only to provide information but also to foster a sense of belonging and community for those seeking to rebuild their lives.

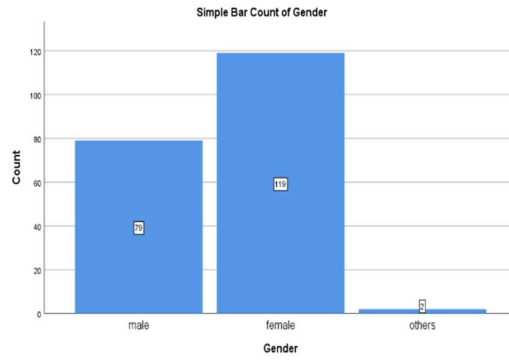
The literature reveals a complex interplay between societal perceptions, the effectiveness of corrective actions, and the support mechanisms necessary for the reintegration of ex-offenders. While significant barriers persist, the role of libraries and community resources in promoting social inclusion is increasingly recognized as vital to overcoming stigma and facilitating successful reintegration. This study aims to build on these findings by exploring the specific attitudes of individuals in Chennai and the potential of local libraries to enhance acceptance and support for ex-offenders.

5. Analysis



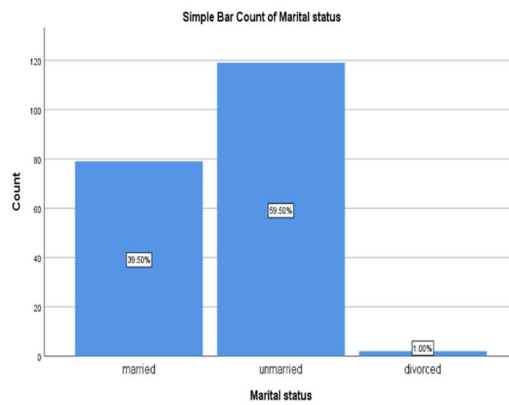
Legend: Figure 1 illustrates the respondent's age through a bar graph.

Figure-2



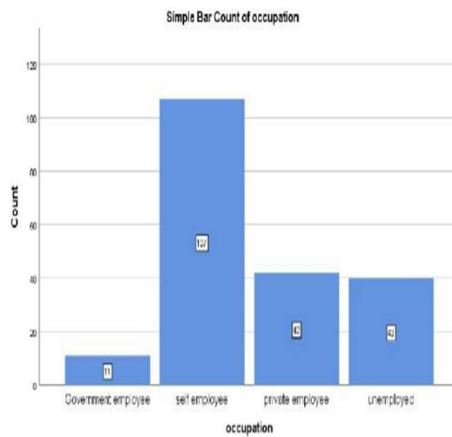
Legend: Figure 2 represents the gender of the respondent in a simple bar graph.

Figure-3



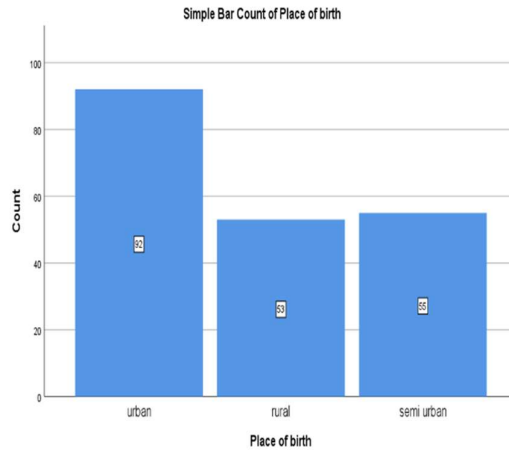
Legend: Figure 3 illustrates the marital status of the respondent through a bar graph

Figure-4



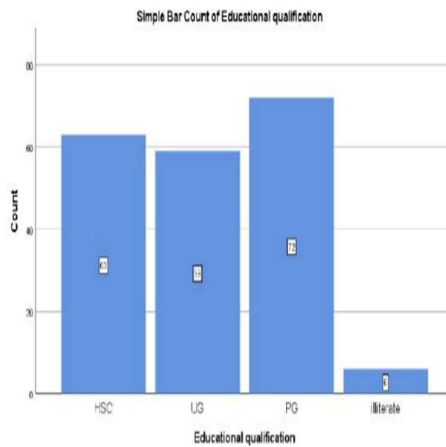
Legend: Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of respondents' occupations in a bar chart format

Figure-5



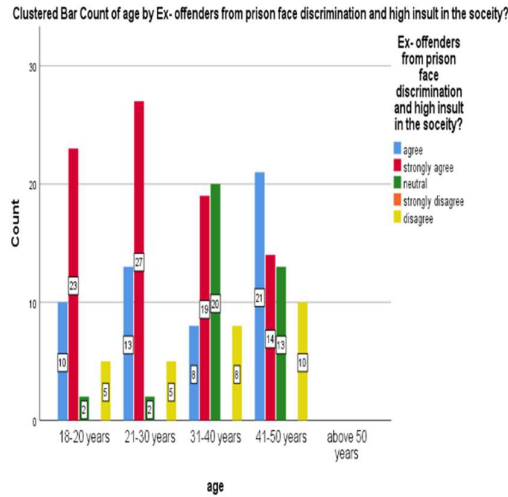
Legend- Figure 5 illustrates the respondents' places of birth through a bar chart.

Figure-6



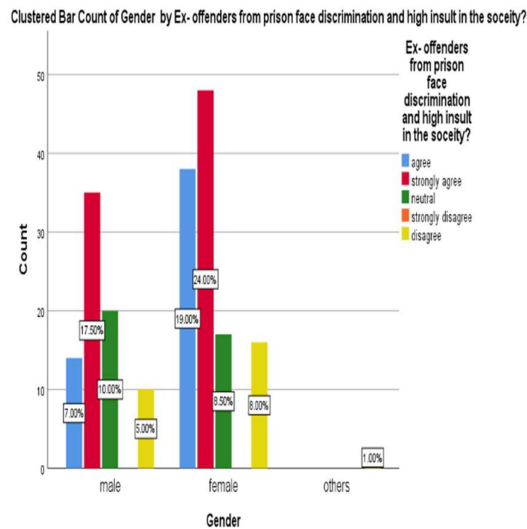
Legend: Figure 6 illustrates the educational qualifications of the respondents through a simple bar chart.

Figure-7



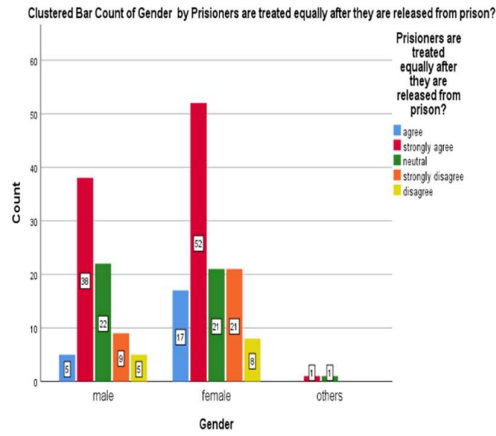
Legend: Represents a demographic and, when compared with ex-offenders from prison, highlights the discrimination and significant stigma faced within society.

Figure -8



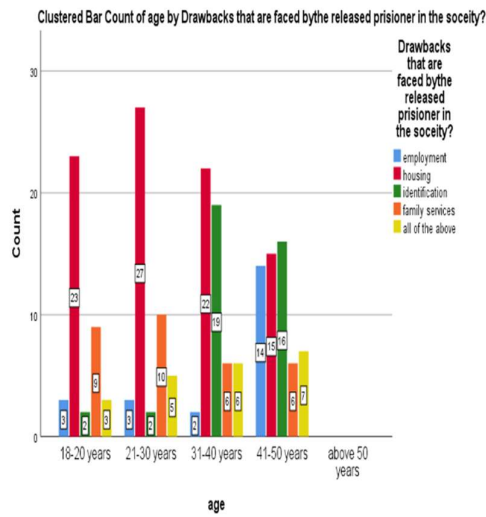
Legend: The representation Represents age and, when compared with ex-offenders from prison, highlights the discrimination and significant insults faced in society, particularly in relation to gender.

Figure-9



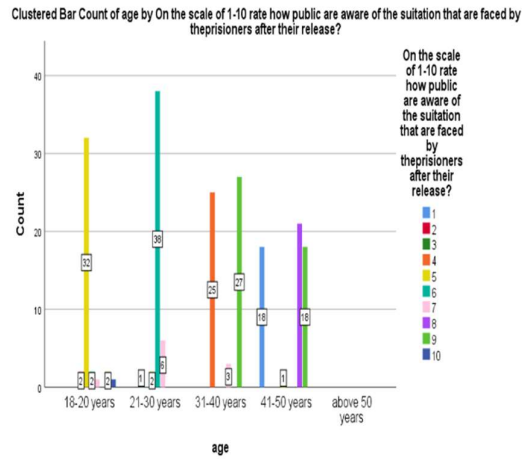
Legend: Examined the representation of gender and analyse the treatment of prisoners post-release, considering whether equality is achieved.

Figure-10



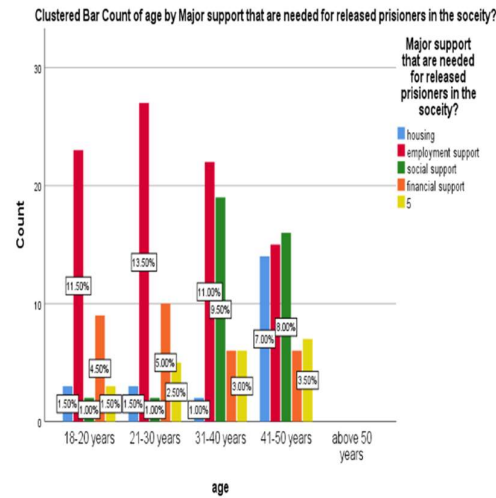
Legend: The figure illustrates the challenges encountered by individuals reintegrating into society after incarceration.

Figure-11



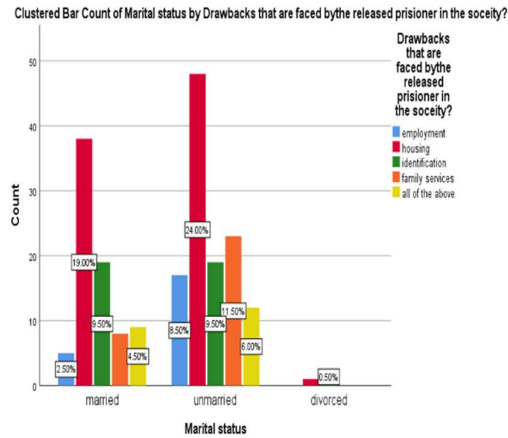
Legend: illustrates a scale from 1 to 10, reflecting the level of public awareness regarding the legal actions confronting released prisoners.

Figure-12



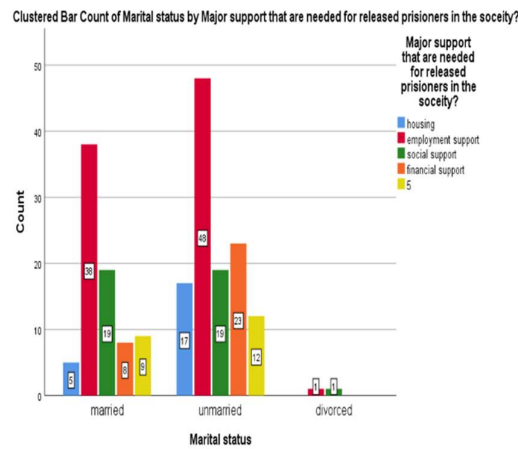
Legend: The graph illustrates the age demographics and the primary forms of support required by individuals who have been released from incarceration within society.

Figure-13



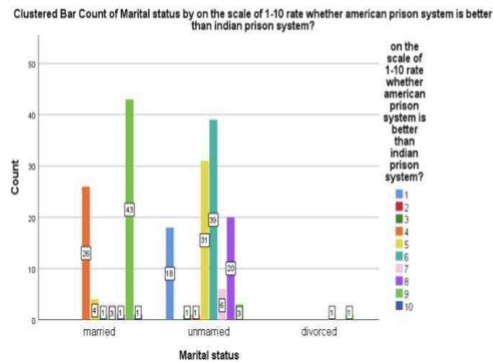
Legend: The graph illustrates the correlation between marital status and the challenges encountered by released prisoners within society.

Figure-14



Legend: The graph illustrates the correlation between marital status and the challenges encountered by released prisoners within society.

Figure-15



Legend: This illustrates a scale from 1 to 10, indicating the level of public awareness regarding the legal actions confronting released prisoners, as well as the improvements in the prison systems of both India and America.

6. Result and Discussion

The data illustrates the age distribution of respondents through a straightforward bar graph, indicating that the

predominant age group is 41-50 years. Figure 1 illustrates the gender distribution of the respondents in a straightforward bar graph, indicating that the majority of respondents are female. Figure 2 illustrates the marital status of the respondents, with the highest proportion identifying as unmarried. Figure 3 illustrates the occupations of the respondents, with the highest proportion being self-employed individuals. Figure 4 illustrates the birthplace of the respondents, with the highest proportion originating from urban areas. Figure 5 illustrates the educational qualifications of the respondents, with the highest level attained being a postgraduate qualification. Figure 6 illustrates the correlation between age and the experiences of ex-offenders from prison, who face significant discrimination and high levels of insult within society, with the majority of responses indicating strong agreement. Figure 7 illustrates the gender comparison among ex-offenders, highlighting the discrimination and significant insults they face in society, with the highest responses indicating strong agreement. Figure 8 illustrates the gender distribution and highlights that prisoners are treated equally upon their release, with a strong consensus in agreement. Figure 9 illustrates the age-related challenges encountered by released prisoners within society, highlighting that housing constitutes a significant issue faced during their reintegration post-incarceration. Figure 10 illustrates a scale from 1 to 10, indicating the level of public awareness regarding the legal actions faced by released prisoners, with a score of 6 out of 10. Figure 11 illustrates the age demographics and primary forms of support required by released prisoners reintegrating into society, with a focus on the necessity of employment opportunities. Figure 12 illustrates the marital and primary support required by released prisoners within society, with a notable emphasis on the necessity of employment opportunities. Figure 13 illustrates the marital status and the challenges encountered by released prisoners within society, highlighting that housing emerges as a significant issue faced during incarceration. Figure 14 illustrates a scale from 1 to 10, depicting the level of public awareness regarding the legal challenges encountered by released prisoners, as well as the improvements in the prison systems of both India and the United States. Figure 15.

Discussions:

The data illustrates the age distribution of respondents through a straightforward bar graph, indicating that the predominant age group is comprised of adults. Figure 1 illustrates the gender distribution of the respondents in a straightforward bar graph, indicating that the majority of respondents identify as female, while the number of male respondents is notably lower in comparison. Figure 2 illustrates the marital status of the respondents, revealing that the highest proportion is comprised of individuals who are unmarried, in contrast to those who are married. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of occupations among respondents, revealing that the highest proportion is comprised of self-employed individuals in comparison to those in the private and government sectors. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of respondents' places of birth, revealing a predominance of individuals originating from urban areas in contrast to those from rural and semi-urban locales. Figure 5 illustrates the educational qualifications of the respondents, indicating that the highest proportion holds a postgraduate qualification in comparison to those with undergraduate and doctoral qualifications. Figure 6 illustrates the correlation between age and the experiences of ex-offenders, who encounter significant discrimination and insult within society. The data indicates that the strongest responses come from those who strongly agree, with adults showing a higher level of agreement in the survey results. Figure 7 illustrates the gender comparison among ex-offenders from prison, highlighting the discrimination and significant insults they encounter in society. The highest responses come from those who strongly agree, with female respondents outnumbering their male counterparts. Figure 8 illustrates the gender distribution and indicates that prisoners are treated equally following their release, with a strong consensus in agreement. Figure 9 illustrates the age-related challenges encountered by released prisoners within society, highlighting that housing constitutes a significant issue faced during their reintegration post-incarceration. Figure 10 illustrates the extent of public awareness regarding the legal actions faced by released prisoners, indicating a higher count in the survey among those who are informed compared to others. Figure 11 illustrates the age demographics and primary support required by released prisoners reintegrating into society, with a particular emphasis on the necessity for employment facilities. Figure 12 illustrates the marital and significant support required by released prisoners within society, with a particular emphasis on the necessity for employment facilities. Figure 13 illustrates the marital status and challenges encountered by released prisoners within society, highlighting that housing emerges as a significant issue faced during their time in prison. Figure 14 illustrates the extent of public awareness regarding the legal challenges encountered by released prisoners, as well as the improvements in the prison systems of both India and America, as depicted in Figure 15.

7. Findings

This study's findings offer a thorough examination of public perceptions of ex-offenders in Chennai, informed by diverse demographic factors and respondents' understanding of the obstacles encountered by this group.

Respondent Demographics: The predominant age group of respondents is 41-50 years, with a significant female representation relative to males. This demographic insight suggests that attitudes of ex-offenders may be shaped by the life events and societal roles characteristic of this age cohort. Moreover, the majority of respondents are unmarried, indicating that perceptions of ex-offenders may vary according to marital status.

Occupational Background: A considerable segment of respondents is self-employed, potentially indicating a mindset that prioritises entrepreneurship and individual initiative. This may influence their perceptions of the likelihood for ex-offenders to effectively reintegrate into society, particularly if they regard employment as a crucial support tool.

Educational Qualifications: The apex of educational achievement among respondents is a postgraduate qualification. This indicates that responders may possess a more comprehensive awareness of social issues, thereby enhancing their educated viewpoint on the complications associated with the reintegration of ex-offenders.

Perceptions of prejudice: A robust consensus was established concerning the prejudice experienced by ex-offenders, with a substantial proportion of respondents strongly affirming that these persons endure considerable stigma and derogatory remarks upon reintegration into society. This perspective was especially evident among adult respondents, reflecting a collective recognition of the difficulties encountered by this demographic.

Equality Post-Release: Respondents indicated a robust consensus that ex-offenders do not get equitable treatment following their release, especially among female participants. This underscores a possible gendered viewpoint on society perceptions of ex-offenders.

Principal Challenges: The results indicate that housing is perceived as the foremost impediment for released inmates, underscoring the essential requirement for solid living arrangements in the reintegration process. This corresponds with extensive literature indicating that housing insecurity can substantially impede successful reintegration.

Public understanding: Participants assessed their understanding of the legal and social issues encountered by released inmates with an average score of 6 out of 10. This signifies a moderate knowledge level while indicating a necessity for enhanced education and outreach concerning the special needs and rights of ex-offenders.

Assistance Mechanisms: Employment resources were identified as the paramount assistance required by released inmates, with age and marital status affecting this viewpoint. Participants acknowledged that stable employment is essential for effective reintegration, highlighting the significance of job training and placement initiatives.

Comparative Awareness: Participants demonstrated a modest comprehension of the distinctions between the Indian and American prison systems, indicating that expanded discourse on criminal justice and rehabilitation could enhance public perceptions and attitudes.

The findings underscore the intricacies of public perceptions on ex-offenders in Chennai, demonstrating both recognition of the obstacles they encounter and the possibility for communal assistance to facilitate their reintegration. It is crucial to address the observed deficiencies in knowledge and support systems, especially regarding employment and housing, to cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere for ex-offenders. Utilising community resources, such as libraries and local organisations, society may significantly facilitate the acceptance and effective reintegration of ex-offenders.

8. Limitations and Research Gaps

The study predominantly utilises quantitative methodologies, sometimes neglecting the subtleties of individual experiences. A further disadvantage is the study's static character, which records opinions at a singular moment in time. This methodology fails to consider possible shifts in public views or the efficacy of support programs over time. Ultimately, the study inadequately examines the intersectionality of variables such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status, which can profoundly affect the lives of ex-offenders and their societal acceptance.

This study recognises the significance of libraries; however, further comprehensive research is required to investigate particular programs and their effects on stigma reduction. Furthermore, comprehending the complexities of familial relationships and community support systems may illuminate effective therapies. Future research should also examine variables such as race, gender, and socioeconomic position, in addition to the influence of technology on reintegration processes. Rectifying these limits and deficiencies will augment our comprehension of the social inclusion of ex-offenders and the function of community resources in their effective reintegration.

9. Conclusion

The research findings offer significant insights into public opinions of ex-offenders and underscore the differing levels of awareness concerning remedial efforts for their societal reintegration. A considerable number of respondents indicated a readiness to embrace ex-offenders, implying a possible openness to promoting social inclusion. Nonetheless, a significant faction remains apprehensive, contending that the reintegration of ex-convicts presents potential dangers. This study highlights the intricate processes of social exclusion faced by ex-offenders, stressing the necessity for specific interventions to address stigma and discrimination.

A considerable number of respondents acknowledged the difficulties encountered by those with criminal histories, affirming that those who have completed their terms merit an opportunity to reconstruct their lives. The research suggests that perceptions frequently remain unchanged when the ex-offender is a family member, suggesting that personal relationships may alleviate societal fears. Furthermore, the varied reactions to the status of formerly jailed role models highlight the persistent stigma associated with criminal records, even for individuals who have rehabilitated.

Examples of accomplished individuals such as Daniel Manville and Robert Downey Jr. exemplify the transforming potential of second chances. These narratives exemplify that, with help and opportunity, ex-offenders may positively contribute to society and excel in their personal and professional endeavours.

This study emphasises the essential function of community resources, like libraries and local organisations, in aiding the reintegration process. Access to educational programs, support services, and information regarding rehabilitation activities can mitigate stigma and foster societal acceptance.

The findings necessitate a unified initiative to enhance awareness regarding the prospects of rehabilitation and the significance of community support in cultivating an inclusive atmosphere for ex-offenders. By confronting the anxieties and fallacies associated with this demographic, society may establish avenues for effective reintegration, thereby benefiting all stakeholders. This study establishes a preliminary framework for promoting the acceptance and support of ex-offenders, facilitating future research and efforts focused on improving their social inclusion.

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