

THE STRUCTURE OF PRISON SENTENCING AS A MECHANISM FOR ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WOMEN'S RESOCIALIZATION¹

Talandy BISENOVA

PhD student, Kostanay Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the
Republic of Kazakhstan named after Sh. Kabyrbayev, Kostanay, Republic of
Kazakhstan
E-mail: bisenova.t@mail.ru

Akynkali DARMENOV

Candidate of Juridical Sciences, Associate Professor, Head of the Kostanay
Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan
named after Sh. Kabyrbayev, Kostanay, Republic of Kazakhstan
E-mail: odo@qpa.edu.kz

Natalya KIM

Professor of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, Academy of the
Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan named after Sh.
Kabyrbayev, Kostanay, Republic of Kazakhstan
E-mail: n-kim@yandex.ru

Abstract

This study examines how the organization of daily activities and leisure time in women's penitentiary institutions can enhance their rehabilitation and preparation for reintegration into family and societal life. The research argues that structured time management in correctional facilities, when properly implemented by institutional staff, serves as a crucial factor in successful resocialization of female inmates. Through qualitative methods including open-ended interviews with 31 incarcerated women and expert evaluations with 40 correctional professionals, the study identifies five primary activity domains: vocational work (weight coefficient 0.39), peer socialization (0.26), educational programming (0.17), family communication (0.11), and sports/skill development (0.07). The analysis reveals significant

¹ The translation was completed in collaboration with the language specialists at Roctra Translation & Proofreading Agency.

institutional barriers to effective rehabilitation, particularly inadequate recreational facilities (identified as the most pressing issue with 0.41 weight), insufficient health considerations (0.28), and poor compliance with rehabilitation-focused legislation (0.19). The findings demonstrate that current penitentiary practices in Kazakhstan frequently fail to meet international standards for female offender rehabilitation, particularly regarding proximity to family locations and implementation of vocational training programs. The study concludes with specific recommendations for improving correctional programming, emphasizing the need for enhanced educational opportunities, family visitation policies, and structured leisure activities that collectively support post-release social integration.

Keywords: *incarcerated women, time management in prisons, female offender rehabilitation, correctional facility programming, social reintegration, Kazakhstan*

1. Introduction

Issues of female criminality affect every nation regardless of its developmental stage. Historically, penitentiary systems have been primarily designed for male offenders (Međedović, 2024). This stems partly from women's distinct societal roles as moral guardians, family caretakers, and primary child-rearers. Consequently, incarcerated women become unable to fulfill these vital social functions, creating detrimental consequences both for the women themselves and their families.

Researchers document that examining the distinctive characteristics of female criminality proves essential for the development of an inclusive criminal justice system, enhanced crime prevention strategies, and improved rehabilitation protocols ensuring equitable treatment of female offenders in correctional facilities (Međedović, 2024). Female prisoners constitute a unique demographic with specific needs for overcoming the negative consequences of incarceration and achieving rehabilitation goals. Criminological studies demonstrate that, post-release, many formerly incarcerated women face severe social maladjustment, including isolation, homelessness, unemployment, severed family ties, and lost hope for the future, factors that frequently lead to criminal recidivism (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022). Institutional rehabilitation approaches often exacerbate these challenges, potentially damaging women's psychological wellbeing and severing critical social connections (Moles-López & Añaños, 2021). Paradoxically, such correctional failures may engender increased aggression and unrepentant reoffending behaviors. These findings underscore the imperative to systematically examine how female prisoners structure their daily routines during incarceration as a prerequisite for reforming rehabilitation systems.

Penitentiary institutions operate through standardized regimes that, while ensuring operational predictability and behavioral control through codified regulations, frequently employ homogenizing frameworks ill-suited to women's specific needs. This institutional objectification transforms leisure activities into monotonous routines that foster inmate apathy and frustration. Such conditions actively impede personal growth and rehabilitation outcomes. Consequently, developing tailored time-management frameworks for incarcerated women emerges as both a theoretical necessity and practical intervention point for meaningful penal reform.

2. Literature review

Academic scholarship has consistently examined how prisoner leisure activities contribute to resocialization (Onyango, 2023; Sulejmanović, 2023). Research confirms that structured recreational programs significantly aid rehabilitation (Coupland & Olver, 2020; Ternavska et al., 2020), mental wellbeing (Ternavska et al., 2020), and social reintegration for incarcerated women (Barak & Stebbins, 2021; Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020). However, numerous institutional constraints (Segeren et al., 2020) and gender-specific barriers (van der Put et al., 2020) hinder effective program implementation.

Scholarly research delineates that incarcerated individuals' daily routines comprise two distinct temporal categories: (1) time allocated to fulfilling institutional obligations inherent to penitentiary confinement, and (2) discretionary personal time under prisoners' autonomous management (de Carvalho & Ossorio, 2021; Hausam et al., 2020). For women in carceral isolation, ineffective utilization of this discretionary time often precipitates significant organizational challenges that may exacerbate existing rehabilitative difficulties (Hodgson, 2020). The qualitative impact of leisure time manifests differentially across the inmate population. While serving as a valuable source of cognitive enrichment for some, it functions as either an unproductive or psychologically detrimental factor in personal development for others (Balafoutas et al., 2020). Existing literature categorizes prisoner activities into four primary domains: work assignments (Muthee, 2020), rest, entertainment, and self-improvement (Ross & Muro, 2020). Many women's prisons struggle with overcrowding (Testoni et al., 2021) that severely limits access to educational and recreational programs, exacerbating stress, depression, and recidivism rates (Goodrum et al., 2022).

This study focuses specifically on time management and leisure organization in women's correctional facilities across Kazakhstan. According to the Committee on Legal Statistics and Special Records of the General Prosecutor's Office (2019-2024 data), Kazakhstani courts convicted 17,111 women, with 4,209 receiving prison sentences, 905 given suspended sentences, 890 granted deferred punishment (per Criminal Code Article 74), and 169 released through amnesty (Kiikov, 2024). According to data from the Committee on Legal Statistics and Special Records of the General Prosecutor's

Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan, women account for only 12% of all recorded crimes in Kazakhstan. However, even this comparatively low percentage represents a significant negative social indicator that warrants serious consideration.

Kazakhstan's correctional system currently fails to meet UN standards that recommend that female inmates serve sentences near their homes or rehabilitation centers, particularly for those with parenting responsibilities. Geographical isolation from families, poor facility conditions (including outdated buildings lacking basic hygiene infrastructure), and absence of specialized mental health units create significant barriers to effective rehabilitation. Most concerning, neither penal system administrators nor academic researchers have sufficiently examined how improved activity programming could enhance sentencing outcomes.

In Kazakhstan, the issue of pastime organization in women's prisons remains critically important yet frequently overlooked due to logistical and infrastructural challenges within the penal system. Notably, UN guidelines stipulate that female inmates should serve sentences in facilities located near their permanent residence or social rehabilitation sites (accounting for parental responsibilities), and consideration should be given to individual preferences and specialized programming. Kazakhstan currently fails to meet these standards. The geographical isolation from family members and restricted visitation rights hinder rehabilitation efforts, often resulting in severed familial ties, homelessness post-release, and consequently, either extended stays in rehabilitation centers or reoffending. Furthermore, Kazakhstani prisons often occupy outdated facilities lacking proper hygiene infrastructure, with cells typically containing only a sink and toilet without hot water. The absence of specialized prison hospitals for mentally ill female inmates compounds these systemic deficiencies. These multifaceted challenges demonstrate how the potential of improved pastime organization as a factor in enhancing sentencing effectiveness remains largely unaddressed by both penal system administrators and academic researchers in Kazakhstan.

This study aims to identify opportunities for improving the organization of prison sentencing processes as a means to enhance women's resocialization effectiveness. This leads to the following research questions:

- How do incarcerated women spend their time in correctional facilities?
- What significance do various pastime activities hold for female inmates?
- What challenges exist in developing pastime and leisure programs for incarcerated women?

3. Methodology and research methods

In accordance with the study's objectives and research questions, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining analysis of scholarly literature, open-ended interviews, and expert surveys.

3.1 Data collection

The first research stage employed open-ended interviews as a sensitive and effective method for documenting lived experiences. This approach allowed incarcerated women to describe their daily routines from their own perspectives, with particular attention to their social status as a contextual factor in the interviews.

The study population comprised 31 women serving sentences at the Petropavlovsk Women's Colony (North Kazakhstan Region), including: 25 women aged 25-50 years and 6 women over 50 years.

Participants were recruited through the deputy warden during designated personal time periods, following established protocols for ethical prison research (Gideon & Sung, 2011). All participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as research participants, consistent with recommendations for correctional settings. Interviews were conducted privately in the facility's standardized visitation room to ensure both security protocols and participant comfort.

The study implemented multiple safeguards for vulnerable populations: voluntary participation without institutional incentives, right to withdraw without penalty, confidentiality protocols for sensitive data (UNODC, 2014). This methodology complied with Kazakhstan's penal regulations on research access.

3.2 Interview procedure

At the initial stage of the interview, respondents were asked to describe how they spend their time in the correctional facility. This question served as a conversation starter. Subsequently, at the next interview stage, the incarcerated women were asked about the significance of various time-use activities for them. Key issues and interpretations were developed based on respondents' answers to the questions.

3.3 Analysis method

The research procedure took the form of content analysis of respondents' statements, ultimately leading to the creation of thematically homogeneous semantic clusters representing their time-use patterns.

3.4 Expert survey stage

The study's second phase employed an expert survey method with a sample of 40 experts. These participants received emailed invitations to participate in ranking the thematically homogeneous semantic clusters of time-use methods obtained through interviews with convicted women. The expert

pool selection criterion was a minimum of 5 years of work experience in Kazakhstan's penitentiary system institutions.

3.5 Data processing

During subsequent results processing:

- Weight coefficients were determined for the primary time-use methods among women sentenced to imprisonment.
- To ensure more objective analysis of the data obtained through expert ranking, the degree of consensus among expert opinions was measured using Kendall's coefficient of concordance.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative analysis of research findings

Table 1 presents the primary time-use activities of incarcerated women identified through interview analysis.

Table 1. Primary time-use activities of women serving prison sentences

| No. | Primary time-use activities | Rank | Weight |
|-----|---|------|--------|
| 1 | Work | 1 | 0.39 |
| 2 | Interaction with cellmates | 2 | 0.26 |
| 3 | Educational activities (TV watching, reading) and scheduled outdoor walks | 3 | 0.17 |
| 4 | Family communication | 4 | 0.11 |
| 5 | Education/sports/hobbies | 5 | 0.07 |

Source: Compiled from open interviews and expert ranking; Kendall's $W = 0.71$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating strong expert consensus.

Table 2 shows the main obstacles to developing diverse leisure activities for female inmates identified through interview analysis.

Table 2. Primary obstacles to developing leisure activities for incarcerated women

| No. | Primary Obstacles | Rank | Weight |
|-----|---|------|--------|
| 1 | Lack of facilities for recreational activities | 1 | 0.41 |
| 2 | Insufficient consideration of physical and mental health | 2 | 0.28 |
| 3 | Strict compliance with national and international legislation | 3 | 0.19 |
| 4 | Ineffective organization of mandatory educational/recreational activities | 4 | 0.12 |

Source: Compiled from open interviews and expert ranking; Kendall's $W = 0.73$ ($p < .01$), indicating strong expert consensus

4.2 Qualitative analysis of research findings

(1) Work as a Primary Dimension of Time Use

For the majority of incarcerated women, work constitutes the primary form of time use. According to respondents, the opportunity to work is considered a privilege that makes their time in the colony more bearable. What might be considered a privilege in freedom, such as having free time, can become a source of personal challenges in the context of penitentiary confinement.

One interviewee (Inna R.) stated: "From the very beginning, since I arrived here, I've been working—that's how time passes." It appears that the compensation this inmate receives holds less significance compared to the benefits derived from work as a means of occupying time. She expressed satisfaction simply in being able to perform the work assigned to her. This suggests that the reality of incarceration alters how prisoners perceive and cognitively process their free time. Another inmate (Danara S.) described her work routine: "I work as a seamstress. Actually, it's good because it gives me something to do. I work from 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM, five days a week. So essentially, it's just as normal as how people work outside."

Not all incarcerated women engage in paid labor. Some perform unpaid institutional work organized by the penitentiary administration. Moreover, prisoners sometimes undertake informal work beyond the prison administration's oversight, receiving material benefits in exchange for their services.

For example, landscaping activities: "I enjoy spending time outdoors. What interests me most is gardening. I like digging in the soil, even though most people don't. Watching plants grow gives me such a pleasant feeling inside" (Gulshyat P.). Another inmate (Zhanna P.) shared: "I'm from a rural area, so I'm used to working the land. When I was free, I had enough of it, but now that my options are limited, I enjoy it like a child." These two women were able to pursue gardening because the correctional facility had a small garden plot near their housing unit, accessible during spring and summer. They planted vegetables and flowers and tended to them themselves. Notably, activities these women found burdensome in freedom became sources of pleasure in confinement. The gardening group consisted primarily of women over fifty, united by this shared interest. The colony provided them with basic gardening tools.

(2) Interaction with Cellmates

Socializing with cellmates ranks as the second most significant time-use activity. Despite lacking formal organization by the administration, such interactions show potential for enhancing resocialization when combined with socially beneficial activities. For instance, one inmate (Olga N.) used her free time to practice her former profession: "I like styling my friends' hair because I used to be a hairdresser. When I have nothing else to do, I give them nice hairstyles."

(3) Educational Activities (TV Watching, Reading) and Scheduled Outdoor Time

Every penitentiary institution maintains a library and provides television access. However, most female inmates, like their male counterparts, limit their educational activities to daily TV viewing. Other activities like book and newspaper reading occur less frequently. Those who did read commented: "I read a lot and am interested in many things. A good book relaxes me" (Anna S.), and "I read quite a bit because there's nothing interesting to do here. All those TV shows are so stupid they're not worth watching, though the younger girls don't understand that" (Olga P.). Notably, both respondents were over fifty with at least secondary education.

However, many inmates frequently read tabloids and gossip magazines, as evidenced by statements like: "I enjoy reading gossip" (Zhaina Z.), "Actually, I prefer reading about celebrities—their lives seem so interesting" (Vera I.), and "If I have to read something, I'd rather read about stars than politicians" (Maria M.). These women used celebrity stories as escapism from their monotonous routines, deriving pleasure and temporary relief from their "gray reality."

(4) Family Communication

In addition to visitation rights permitted by the Internal Regulations of the Penal System institutions (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2014), incarcerated individuals dedicate a significant portion of their free time to maintaining family connections through letter writing and phone calls. As expressed by the inmates:

"I spend most of my free time writing to my daughter because I want to know how she's doing. In fact, I write letters every day. Sometimes I don't even send them, but putting my thoughts on paper somehow makes me feel better" (Zhanna P.).

Another inmate shared: "I got married shortly before coming here. Now I write to my husband telling him I'm fine so he won't worry about me - why should he bother himself?" (Nina P.).

Telephone communication holds particular significance for prisoners, as one woman detailed: "I spend considerable time preparing what to say before making calls. I either make notes or carefully plan my conversation beforehand because otherwise I'd forget important things to ask or share" (Olga N.).

However, in-person visits remain relatively infrequent due to practical challenges. As one inmate explained: "My family can't visit often because the journey is too far and expensive" (Vera I.). Another added pragmatically: "I tell them to send me the money instead of spending it on travel expenses" (Maria M.).

These accounts poignantly demonstrate the paramount importance inmates place on maintaining familial bonds, as evidenced by the substantial time and emotional energy they devote to correspondence and contemplation of their loved ones. The interviews reveal how these connections serve as crucial psychological anchors during incarceration, while simultaneously highlighting the systemic barriers that limit meaningful contact.

(5) Education, Sports, and Hobbies

The penitentiary system of Kazakhstan provides educational opportunities for inmates through secondary schools, vocational training colleges, higher education institutions, and professional courses.

One interviewed female inmate, Oksana G., stated: "Actually, I have things to keep me occupied here because I attend school. I mean, I'm currently in my first year at a vocational college studying to become a seamstress, which might help me find work later. But only after I get out of here." She added: "I'm actually lucky because I've heard other prisons don't offer this opportunity."

Education serves as one of the most important tools for social rehabilitation. As evidenced above, some incarcerated women utilize their free time to prepare for future professional activities after release. Moreover, access to education represents a crucial component in organizing meaningful leisure time for prisoners.

At the time of the interview, one inmate, Zhaina Z., was 25 years old. She recognized the value of obtaining an education during her incarceration as a means to facilitate job searches after release. As she noted, it also helped structure her time: "I have classes every day from 7:30 to 12:30, and when I return, I have assignments to complete. I'm too old for these elementary exercises, but since I didn't want to study before, now I'm attending school here. It's good because at least I'll gain something from this prison experience." The inmate clearly perceived tangible benefits from her education that would prove valuable in securing and maintaining employment after leaving the correctional facility.

Many inmates expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of professional courses and training programs that could help them acquire new knowledge and skills for different occupations. Such opportunities would better prepare them for life after prison. Representative comments included: "There was a computer course offered once. That would have been useful because computer skills are essential nowadays, but I'm older and don't know how to use them" (Elena N.), and "I would take any course, like how to find a job after release. That would actually be helpful" (Ella D.).

In addition to mandatory physical exercises scheduled as part of the colony's daily routine, some inmates independently organize physical activities: "I'm interested in all kinds of sports. The only problem is the small space, but my friends and I still do aerobics" (Oksana G.). Another inmate, Valentina D., remarked: "Actually, we all exercise because just sitting around makes you gain weight, and it helps pass the time." Interview results showed that nearly half of respondents (primarily aged 25-33) regularly engaged in sports, while older inmates demonstrated less interest in physical activity: "I'm 56 and can barely climb stairs. The younger women should have activities now, or they'll end up like me" (Gulshyat P.).

The inmates clearly understood the importance of maintaining good physical condition for post-release employment: "Many people here just sit idle, but when they get out, they'll need to look for work and should be healthy. I won't get an office job—at best, I'll be a cleaner, what they call manual labor. So I need my health and strength" (Nina P.).

5. Discussion

As the study results demonstrate, labor in Kazakhstani women's correctional facilities serves as one of the most important methods of social rehabilitation for convicts. Work is crucial for maintaining prisoners' mental hygiene, improving their material conditions, and enabling them to provide financial support to their families. Moreover, employment helps fill inmates' time, gives them a sense of being needed, and allows them to acquire new skills - findings that align with previous research (Kiikov, 2024). The statements obtained from incarcerated women show their strong interest in work opportunities. It is critically important to instill in convicts the belief that work, rather than crime, should constitute their way of life.

The interviewees' statements regarding education in correctional facilities find support in research (Balafoutas et al., 2020), which analyzed the motivation of incarcerated Black women to pursue education during their sentences. According to this study, in 29% of cases incarcerated women state that education is worthwhile because it allows them to "establish themselves" after release; in 28% of cases they assert that a person's value is determined more by knowledge than by cunning; and 24% of respondents believe it is never too late to learn. The lack of education and social and professional skills relevant to the modern labor market means many of these individuals risk returning to criminal activity after leaving the correctional facility.

Regarding the organization of educational programming in correctional facilities, we maintain that it must be carefully designed to meet inmates' needs and psychophysical capabilities while achieving social rehabilitation objectives. Under conditions of incarceration, educational programming serves as an important tool for aesthetic development and moral formation. This proves particularly crucial for inmates who, due to antisocial personality traits, struggle with distinguishing between good and evil and properly evaluating social phenomena.

At the same time, it is important to place women in correctional facilities as close as possible to their homes or social rehabilitation centers to facilitate family contact. This circumstance would undoubtedly have a positive impact on the resocialization of female inmates while simultaneously complying with modern international legal standards.

The principle of serving sentences near one's place of residence is based on international standards, including:

- Rules 17.1, 17.2, and 17.3 of Recommendation Rec(2006)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states of the Council of Europe on the European Prison Rules
- Rule 59 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)

Furthermore, Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states of the Council of Europe concerning children with imprisoned parents emphasizes that special attention should be paid to placing incarcerated parents in facilities as close as possible to their children's location.

Additionally, the Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) stress that female inmates should be placed, whenever possible, in prisons closest to their homes or rehabilitation locations, taking into account their caregiving responsibilities, individual preferences, and the availability of appropriate programs and services (UNODC, 2014).

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) notes that prisoners generally maintain relatively good contact with the outside world. The CPT emphasizes the need for flexibility in applying visitation and telephone communication rules for prisoners whose families live far from the prison. Such inmates might be allowed to combine visitation periods and/or be granted additional opportunities for phone calls with family members.

Unfortunately, current Kazakhstani legislation does not provide for serving sentences near inmates' places of residence. Currently, the Penal Execution Code states that convicts serve their sentences in correctional facilities corresponding to the type, category, system of sentence execution, or regime of the institution. In practice, most prisoners serve their sentences in facilities located far from their homes.

The situation is particularly difficult for women in this regard. The frequent placement of female inmates in facilities far from their places of residence significantly hinders their ability to maintain family ties, especially with their children. In their responses, incarcerated women repeatedly raised several critical issues: the denial of requests to be placed closer to home, being housed approximately 600 kilometers away from their families, the consequent inability to visit elderly or ailing parents, the family's lack of financial means for travel expenses, and the complete loss of contact with sons placed in childcare institutions due to the extreme distance between facilities. Being incarcerated far from home also creates additional challenges, such as the practical difficulties of arranging day trips to visit young children.

Under these circumstances, it becomes difficult to claim that imprisonment serves the goals of resocialization. Research indicates that when implementing sentences for convicted individuals who have permanent custody of children under 15 years old, special attention must be paid to establishing, maintaining, and strengthening their emotional bonds with their children. This includes fulfilling their child support obligations, providing material assistance, and cooperating with the childcare institutions where their children reside. Therefore, in our opinion, convicted individuals with permanent custody of children in care institutions should, whenever possible, be placed in appropriate correctional facilities located as close as possible to their children's place of residence.

Serving sentences far from one's place of residence may also hinder the social readaptation of convicted women - that is, their preparation for conscious life in society through adopting socially accepted roles. Consequently, we believe that the six-month period preceding potential parole or sentence completion constitutes the necessary timeframe for preparing female inmates for post-release life. During this period, whenever possible, the convicted

woman should serve her sentence in a correctional facility located closest to her intended permanent residence after release.

One of the key factors facilitating prisoners' social reintegration is their ability to maintain family connections. The best way to preserve such connections is through maintaining frequent contact with relatives. Government authorities must make special efforts to ensure women serve their sentences near their places of residence. The selection of a prison facility should occur after consultation with the inmate and consideration of her personal circumstances, including any history of domestic violence or other forms of abuse. Some women may prefer not to be located near their homes, choosing instead to maintain distance from husbands, partners, or other individuals who may have committed such violence against them.

For women with first-time convictions and short sentences, the availability of vocational training courses in correctional facilities holds particular importance. Consequently, greater attention must be paid to providing incarcerated women with opportunities to acquire new professional skills they may not have been able to obtain previously while living in small towns with limited educational opportunities.

The lack of education and professional qualifications often leaves individuals unable to secure and maintain employment, thereby depriving them of means to support themselves. The absence of knowledge and skills necessary for obtaining and keeping satisfactory employment has frequently led incarcerated women to seek alternative income sources and, consequently, come into conflict with the law. This is why correctional staff involved in resocialization efforts must place significant emphasis on vocational skills training. Professional courses represent one of the most accessible forms of education for inmates serving prison sentences.

We maintain that participation in such courses should be mandatory for incarcerated women approaching the end of their sentences (with no more than two years remaining) or those within two years of obtaining formal qualifications that would make them eligible for parole applications, provided they demonstrate educational deficits and express interest in acquiring, improving, or changing their existing professional qualifications. An additional educational component could involve training inmates in active job search methods.

Empirical data unequivocally confirms the necessity of expanding vocational training programs in correctional facilities, particularly for women with limited access to education and employment prior to conviction. According to a study by Tyler and Kling (2006), participation in GED prison education programs in Florida was associated with a 15% increase in post-release quarterly earnings among racial and ethnic minority inmates compared to those who did not participate in any training. While the GED certificate itself proved to have limited value as an "employer signal," the primary driver of income growth was the acquisition of specific skills through training—directly confirming the effectiveness of vocational courses.

Notably, the analysis revealed that individuals without a high school diploma who received training in prison were significantly more likely to secure legal employment within the first two years after release—unlike those who received no education at all. Although the economic impact diminished over time, the authors emphasized that early labor market integration is critical for preventing recidivism. Given that many women enter correctional facilities with no prior work experience and come from rural or disadvantaged areas with limited educational opportunities, vocational training becomes not just a source of skills but also their first real opportunity to enter the labor market.

These findings highlight the importance of targeted vocational training for women nearing the end of their sentences who lack qualifications. Equipping them with practical, marketable skills and job-search strategies significantly improves their post-release employment prospects and reduces the risk of reoffending. After acquiring comprehensive knowledge and practical skills through these programs, female inmates will gain employment opportunities following their release, enabling them to earn lawful livelihoods and avoid returning to criminal activity.

The organization of leisure activities, including sports programs, holds equal importance for the resocialization of incarcerated women. Developing and implementing leisure programs for incarcerated individuals should aim to highlight culture's role in human life and promote proper value systems. This involves fostering respect for national culture and traditions, developing open, creative, and prosocial attitudes, raising awareness and awakening cultural needs and interests, facilitating socially acceptable ways of spending free time, and nurturing creative potential.

A diverse range of recreational and sporting activities organized by prison administration both within and outside the correctional facility will enable incarcerated women to actively utilize their free time while developing personal interests. Among the proposed recreational activities, we suggest the following:

- 1) Establishing a prison radio station that would broadcast news updates, thematic programs tailored to inmates' needs and interests, as well as announcements regarding current events, regulations, rule changes and other important matters concerning daily operations. The radio station could also promote reading by introducing new library acquisitions and other interesting books.

- 2) The prison library should facilitate reading habits and personal development by providing access to its book collection.

- 3) An art studio could be established where inmates might develop artistic and handicraft skills by creating artworks and crafts for charitable purposes or various prison art exhibitions.

- 4) Sports activities not only improve the physical health and fitness of incarcerated women but also positively influence their mood, wellbeing and self-esteem. Sports events within correctional institutions, along with recreational activities during cultural-educational programs, provide excellent opportunities for female inmates to obtain necessary physical exercise.

The implementation of programs promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles among incarcerated individuals has demonstrated positive results in this regard. Within the broader context of resocialization efforts for persons deprived of liberty, therapeutic-recreational activities and sports play a crucial role alongside vocational training. One of the primary objectives of sports programming is to help incarcerated women understand and embrace the value of athletic competition and proper psychophysical development. Furthermore, by adhering to sports competition rules, inmates enhance their ability to function appropriately within groups and social relationships.

One of the most significant research topics in the field of female prisoner resocialization in recent decades has been the urgent need for penitentiary systems to develop a distinct, gender-sensitive physical activity strategy for incarcerated women. This necessity arises because universal, "gender-neutral" sports programs fail to address women's specific barriers and needs related to bodily vulnerability, traumatic experiences, stigmatization, and psychoemotional disorders. As highlighted by Meek (2018) and Van Hout & Mhlanga-Gunda (2019), effective resocialization of women cannot be achieved without creating a safe, rehabilitative, and supportive environment where sports serve not only as a means of improving physical health but also as a tool for restoring dignity, self-esteem, and social skills. Such a strategy must incorporate several key elements: adapted training formats, female mentors, consideration of menstrual cycles, stress factors, reproductive and mental health needs, along with full integration into comprehensive wellness, education, and psychosocial support programs.

Sport serves as a powerful and universal rehabilitation instrument for incarcerated women, particularly in contexts where their fundamental rights are systematically violated and their physical, psycho-emotional, and social needs remain unmet. As Van Hout & Mhlanga-Gunda (2019) emphasize, women in prisons—especially in resource-limited countries—face conditions of extreme deprivation: lack of access to sanitation, medical treatment, prenatal and postnatal care, adequate nutrition, and basic safety leads to severe physical and mental health impairments. These conditions not only deteriorate health outcomes but also contribute to social degradation and the isolation of incarcerated women (Van Hout & Mhlanga-Gunda, 2019). Against this backdrop, the implementation of sports programs, as demonstrated in Meek's (2018) research, emerges as a crucial compensatory mechanism. Within correctional facilities, sports not only enhance physical health but also facilitate the restoration of lost identity, boost self-esteem, foster a sense of purpose and belonging, and help inmates feel part of a team. Moreover, sports strengthen self-control, discipline, and cooperation skills. Particularly significant is the correlation between participation in sports initiatives and reduced recidivism rates, indicating long-term benefits for successful post-release resocialization of women (Meek, 2018). Thus, within the broader context of resource shortages and systemic rights violations documented by Van Hout & Mhlanga-Gunda, sports should not be viewed as a secondary supplement but rather as a vital component of resocialization programs—one that simultaneously restores

health, reinforces dignity, and establishes a sustainable foundation for reintegration into society beyond prison walls.

We endorse Professor Rosie Meek's thesis that sport represents not merely a leisure activity, but a vital instrument for reducing recidivism, improving health, and fostering social integration among incarcerated individuals. Regular sports tournaments should be organized, including competitions in table tennis, board games, chess and running events.

However, realizing this potential requires systemic reforms encompassing increased funding, staff training, and institutional partnerships. The report *A Sporting Chance An Independent Review of Sport in Youth and Adult Prisons* by Meek (2018) serves as a valuable blueprint for reforming penal systems with an emphasis on rehabilitation through sports programming.

One of the key conditions for the successful resocialization of first-time female offenders serving short sentences is providing them with access to high-quality vocational training programs. As emphasized by Professor Rosie Meek (2023), modern penitentiary institutions remain places where educational opportunities are "still woefully poor," (p. 11) despite the recognized role of education as a transformative resource. Female prisoners are particularly vulnerable in this regard: while they make up less than 4% of the total prison population in the UK, they are the least engaged group—both in sports and education. This is not due to a lack of interest: research shows that incarcerated women want to learn and grow but face unique barriers, ranging from a lack of access to sports attire to competing for basic resources like phone calls to their children or gym time (Meek, 2023).

Professor Meek (2023) highlights that the practical value of sports-based initiatives lies not only in physical activity but also in their potential to open doors to real professional growth. Women inspired by physical activity often develop an interest in training as fitness instructors, volunteer referees, personal trainers, and similar roles. This interest must be harnessed and structured into mandatory vocational courses for women in the final stages of their sentences. It is during this period that they are most motivated for change and seek the stability that a new profession can provide.

Crucially, these courses must not be merely formal: the effectiveness of educational and vocational pathways depends on the "quality of human connections and support," as Meek (2023) stresses. Trust-based relationships with mentors, instructors, and prison fitness coaches become catalysts for change, enabling women to believe in themselves and complete courses that would otherwise have been inaccessible due to their background or social status.

Thus, introducing mandatory vocational programs for women nearing release—especially those with limited education but a strong desire to turn their lives around—not only reduces the risk of recidivism but also gives them a real chance at employment, economic independence, and reintegration into society with a new role—one they have chosen and worked to achieve.

Well-structured educational, recreational and sports programs yield significant benefits, effectively complementing other resocialization efforts.

However, providing sentenced women with meaningful rehabilitation opportunities through structured time management imposes several operational demands on Kazakhstani correctional staff. This requires thorough preparation of activities, provision of necessary facilities and resources, staff coordination, maintenance of order and discipline, as well as careful scheduling between mandatory and recreational programs.

Proper time management can serve as a valuable tool in personality reformation. From a social rehabilitation perspective, it is essential to train inmates in effective time organization and help them analyze its rationality. Activity scheduling should account for both health considerations and psychological recovery needs. For many incarcerated women, learning to use time productively represents an important habit that will prepare them for independent functioning in Kazakhstani society after their release from the correctional facility.

6. Conclusion

The organization of time use and leisure activities for women in penitentiary institutions must serve as a fundamental component of their preparation for reintegration into family life and society, while fostering meaningful participation in professional and community spheres. Correctional staff bear significant responsibility for cultivating appropriate models of time management for incarcerated women through structured programming and adequate resource provision.

This study's primary limitations stem from its relatively small sample size of interviewed female inmates and the singular focus on Petropavlovsk Women's Colony in North Kazakhstan Region. These methodological constraints necessarily limit the generalizability of findings across Kazakhstan's diverse correctional system.

Future research efforts should concentrate on developing practical solutions to overcome the documented barriers to effective leisure programming identified in this study. The research should particularly address the implementation challenges surrounding vocational training programs, educational initiatives, and family communication systems that emerged as significant factors in inmate rehabilitation.

Building upon the empirical findings regarding activity preferences and institutional constraints, subsequent investigations might productively examine the practical application of international correctional standards within the Kazakhstani context. Special attention should be given to studying optimal systems for resource distribution that could enhance program delivery in areas such as vocational training, educational resources, and recreational facilities.

The demonstrated effectiveness of structured routines, particularly work programs, combined with the untapped potential in educational and family connectivity domains, suggests concrete pathways for improving rehabilitation outcomes. Future studies would benefit from maintaining the current mixed-methods approach while expanding both the demographic

diversity of participants and the range of institutions included in the research sample.

References

- Balafoutas, L., García-Gallego, A., Georgantzis, N., Jaber-Lopez, T., & Mitrokostas, E. (2020). Rehabilitation and social behavior: Experiments in prison. *Games and Economic Behavior*, 119(C), 148-171. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geb.2019.10.009>
- Barak, A., & Stebbins, A. (2021). Anticipated alienation and critical social work: Exoffenders' perspectives on re-entry. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 51(1), 38-56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa069>
- Coupland, R. B. A., & Olver, M. E. (2020). Assessing protective factors in treated violent offenders: Associations with recidivism reduction and positive community outcomes. *Psychological Assessment*, 32(5), 493-508. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000807>
- de Carvalho, J. D., & Ossorio, F. M. (2021). A comprehensive analysis of social learning theory linked to criminal and deviant behavior. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 11(2), 11-21.
- Gideon, L. & Sung, H.-E. (2011). Rethinking Corrections: Rehabilitation, Reentry, and Reintegration. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230474>
- Goodrum, N. M., Bernard, D. L., & Moreland, A. D. (2022). Interpersonal violence, PTSD, and substance use types among women receiving substance use treatment. *Journal of Dual Diagnosis*, 18(3), 123-134. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15504263.2022.2090649>
- Hausam, J., Lehmann, R. J., & Dahle, K. P. (2020). A person-centered approach to prison behavior based on officers' observations: Relations to risk, prison misconduct, and recidivism. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 241.
- Hodgson, J. (2020). Offending girls and restorative justice: A critical analysis. *Youth Justice*, 22(2), 166-188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473225420967751>
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0032885520916820>
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.00241>
- Kiikov, Zh. (2024, November 22). *Za pyat' let v Kazakhstane osudili boleye 17 tysyach zhenshchin* [Over 17 thousand women have been convicted in Kazakhstan in five years]. Retrieved from <https://ulysmedia.kz/news/41762-za-pyat-let-v-kazakhstane-osudili-bolee-17-tysiach-zhenshchin/>
- Mededović, J. (2024). Adapting to prison environments: Dark tetrad traits, coping mechanisms, and resocialization progress in prisoners. In M. Milićević, I. Stevanović, & Lj. Ilijić (Eds.), *Proceedings of the International scientific conference "Life in prison: Criminological, penological, psychological, sociological, legal, security, and medical*

- issues” (pp. 417-439). Belgrade: Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research. <https://doi.org/10.47152/PrisonLIFE2024.04>
- Meek, R. (2018). *A sporting chance: An independent review of sport in youth and adult prisons*. Ministry of Justice of UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-sporting-chance-an-independent-review-of-sport-in-justice>
- Meek, R. (2023). *The importance of sport and physical activity in supporting education and rehabilitation in our prisons* [Lecture transcript]. The Portal Trust. <https://www.portaltrust.org/news/the-portal-trust-lecture-2022-23>
- Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. (2014). *Prikaz Ministra vnutrennikh del Respubliki Kazakhstan ot 17 noyabrya 2014 goda No. 819 "Ob utverzhdenii Pravil vnutrennego rasporyadka uchrezhdeniy ugolovno-ispolnitel'noy sistemy"* (v redaktsii ot: 07.11.2023) [Order of the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan of November 17, 2014, No. 819 "On approval of the Rules of internal regulations of the institutions of the penal system" (as amended on 07.11.2023)]. Retrieved from <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V14C0009984#3>
- Moles-López, E., & Añaños, F. T. (2021). Factors of prison recidivism in women: A socioeducational and sustainable development analysis. *Sustainability*, 13(11), 5822. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13115822>
- Muthee, J. M. (2020). *Challenges facing reentry and reintegration of women ex-offenders into the community in Nyeri County, Kenya*: Doctoral dissertation. Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2022). *The limits of recidivism: Measuring success after prison*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26459>
- Onyango, O. J. (2023). Curse or blessing in reformation of convicts? An analysis of imprisonment as a form of punishment. *London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 23(3), 9-18.
- Ross, K., & Muro, D. (2020). Possibilities of prison-based restorative justice: Transformation beyond recidivism. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 23(3), 291-313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2020.1783258>
- Segeren, M., Fassaert, T., de Wit, M., & Popma, A. (2020). Constellations of youth criminogenic factors associated with young adult violent criminal behavior. *Crime Science*, 9, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40163-020-0111-2>
- Sulejmanović, D. (2023). Gender differences in criminal recidivism. *NBP. Nauka, bezbednost, policija*, 29(3), 247-260. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5937/nabepo29-52561>
- Ternavska, T., Shaumian, O., Mishenina, T., Voloshchuk, I., Raievska, Y., & Hrys, A. (2020). Socio-psychological directions of resocialization of persons, who are located in places of imprisonment. *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 11(3), 54-71. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18662/brain/11.3/109>

- Testoni, I., Nencioni, I., Arbien, M., Iacona, E., Marrella, F., Gorzegno, V., Selmi, C., Vianello, F., Nava, A., Zamperini, A., & Wieser, M. A. (2021). Mental health in prison: Integrating the perspectives of prison staff. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(21), 11254. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182111254>
- Tyler, J. H., & Kling, J. R. (2006). *Prison-based education and re-entry into the mainstream labor market* (NBER Working Paper No. 12114). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w12114>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2014). *Handbook on Women and Imprisonment*. New York: United Nations Publication.
- van der Put, C. E., Assink, M., & Gubbels, J. (2020). Differences in risk factors for violent, nonviolent, and sexual offending. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Research and Practice*, 20(4), 341-361. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/24732850.2020.1735248>
- Van Hout, M. C., & Mhlanga-Gunda, R. (2018). Contemporary women prisoners health experiences, unique prison health care needs and health care outcomes in sub Saharan Africa: a scoping review of extant literature. *BMC international health and human rights*, 18(1), 31. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-018-0170-6>
- Weimann-Saks, D., & Peleg-Koriat, I. (2020). Promoting inmates' positive attitudes toward participating in a restorative justice process: The effects of a victim awareness process. *The Prison Journal*, 100(3), 381-398.

