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Perspectives concerning the future when time is suspended: Analysing inmates' discourse

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Abstract

Research has shown the importance of prospective thinking in the understanding of individual behaviour across different contexts. However, there has not been extensive attention paid to individuals' future time perspective in non-normative contexts, such as prison, especially using qualitative research methods. In this study, we qualitatively analyse the future time perspective of 16 Portuguese male prisoners, ranging in age from 24 to 51 years ($M = 35.19$, $SD = 8.32$) and serving sentences from one to 25 years ($M = 8.6$, $SD = 7.3$). Through content analysis of data obtained in semi-structured interviews, four main categories emerged: life prior to prison, adaptation to prison, activities in prison, and perspectives concerning the future. Considering the primary features of future time perspective (content, extension, valence), we determined that prisoners develop future time perspectives in different life domains. However, the extension and emotional valence of their future time perspectives were influenced by the sentence time and perceived social support. The results are discussed regarding the importance of counselling and of the construction of future plans in the context of prison as relevant factors for individual adaptability.

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Keywords

Future time perspective, adaptability, prison, male inmates, qualitative methodology

Introduction

The situation of imprisonment corresponds to a stressful life experience, which influences the way that prisoners experience reality and perceive time. The structure of time in prison is very different from that of everyday life (Meisenhelder, 1985) because it not only involves the suspension of free life in society but also incorporates endless repetition, constant vigilance, interdictions, and rigid schedules. Experiencing time and developing prospective thinking while in confinement thus corresponds to a significant challenge for prisoners, given that it involves the destruction of temporal autonomy along with a simultaneous personal awareness of a changing body and identity (Medlicott, 1999). In other words, despite the fact that the eventlessness of prison life may lead to enforced passivity (Medlicott, 1999), prisoners' subjective perception of time and the notion of a future still exist.

Considering the importance of time perception and attitudes towards time for individual experiences, in this study, we implement a qualitative approach to explore the ways prisoners perceive their future, as well as to discuss to what extent their perspectives concerning the future are adaptive. From the uniqueness of inmates' experiences, we examine their prospective thinking – in terms of goals or projects they might have or have had before incarceration, for example – and debate the implications of prison-based practices. Given the scarcity of prior studies that explored future time perspectives (FTPs) in specific non-normative contexts, such as prison, and because many of those studies were conducted decades ago, we address an understudied topic through this exploratory approach.

FTP and behaviour

FTP corresponds to a subjective phenomenon through which individuals relate to future time and attribute meaning to experience (Boyd and Zimbardo, 2005; Carvalho, 2015). FTP involves not only an orientation towards the future, but mostly the definition of meaningful and personal goals in different life domains (*content*), such as personal and social life, work/career, or leisure, which are actively persecuted, even if they are situated distantly. FTP therefore involves *extension* because individuals may have longer or shorter perspectives, and also *emotional valence*, according to the emotional involvement and degree of optimism/pessimism that is

associated with how individuals perceive the future and define plans to achieve their goals (Carvalho et al., 2010; Lens et al., 2012; Nuttin and Lens, 1985). Thus, FTP is not just a fantasy concerning the future or the mere development of thoughts about the future, but involves a sense of continuity (Savickas, 1997) and the valorization and projection of personal achievements throughout time (Locatelli et al., 2007).

One of the main features of FTP that has a considerable impact on individuals' motivation and adaptation to different contexts is the connection between future goals and the present cognition and behaviours that it involves (Carvalho, 2015). Specifically, there is an instrumentality of present behaviour for the achievement of future goals (Lens et al., 2012), as well as an ability to delay gratification and cope with adversity in the present as a result of the definition of those goals (Carvalho and Novo, 2015). To this end, individuals' FTP tends to be related to their engagement in positive behaviours, such as increased motivation, persistence in tasks, and involvement in significant activities in the present, which ultimately leads to different adaptive pathways (Carvalho and Novo, 2015; Carvalho et al., 2010; Lens et al., 2012; Nuttin and Lens, 1985; Peetsma and van der Veen, 2011).

Time and imprisonment

The development of the individuals' FTPs occurs through the interaction with the environment because future plans and goals are constantly adjusted to the perceived reality. However, the characteristics of imprisonment make this experience of environment exploration extremely limited, which may lead to a risk of the development of FTPs that are not founded in commonplace social situations and are ultimately unrealistic or unfunded (Tavares and Menandro, 2008). Despite the importance of temporality during imprisonment and the relationship between FTP and problem behaviour reduction, including its role in moderating the influence of other variables, such as impulsiveness (Carvalho and Novo, 2015; Pan and Vazsonyi, 2011), little recent research has specifically addressed FTP in this non-normative context. Trommsdorff and Lamm (1980) showed that the FTP of institutionalized delinquents is related to the date of release; until then, the time is perceived as suspended. However, FTP might be influenced by events during incarceration, as well as by the time of sentence and the inmates' age (Marques, 2013; Trommsdorff and Lamm, 1980). Accordingly, the higher the sentence time and the inmates' age, the less extended their FTP (Marques, 2013; Snyder et al., 2009).

The types of activities performed while in confinement seem to play a relevant role in the way prisoners develop their prospective thinking. One of those activities is working in prison, which allows individuals to occupy

their time and most importantly to develop skills, especially considering that, after release, employment and means of subsistence will be required. In a study with Portuguese former inmates, Silva (2012) identified individuals' optimism regarding the future as being related to the implementation of plans relating labour, closer social relationships, compensation of education/qualifications, and involvement in the development of offspring. These results corroborate other studies showing inmates' motivation and optimism concerning the future to be related to the renewal of family ties and to the desire to be a good father/mother, along with finding housing, stable employment to be financially independent, avoiding the risk of recurrence, and to be globally perceived as a person with value (Giordano et al., 2007; Visher and O'Connell, 2012).

Incarceration corresponds to a significant non-normative experience in an individual's life that affects the decisions, ambitions, and lifestyle he/she had before imprisonment. Incarceration may thus facilitate a change from previous projects or the development of new future projects (Silva, 2012), which may influence the level of participation in activities in prison and also the attitudes and behaviours after release (Visher and O'Connell, 2012). Positive expectations and future prospects, along with a sense of hope, relate to the engagement in activities in prison, greater contact with family, and increased potential to cope with reality after release, including lower likelihood of recurrence (Burnett and Maruna, 2004; LeBel et al., 2008; Visher and O'Connell, 2012). Maruna (2001) found that individuals who abandoned crime after release had an optimistic and positive attitude, a notion of control over their future, and strong beliefs about their personal value. Because the levels of optimism and hope tend to fall with the length of the sentence (Dhami et al., 2007; Visher and O'Connell, 2012), this length of time thus corresponds to a risk factor for adaptation to prison.

Present study

Despite the fact that prison time may be considered futureless (Meisenhelder, 1985) and incarceration is described as a suspended period of individual social life, the relationship between FTP and adaptive behaviour explored in research promotes the importance of this construct in prison context. Given that prisoners' perception of the future remains, albeit limited by the circumstance of incarceration, it is important to understand how inmates' FTPs are characterized, and also to discuss whether the development of FTPs while in confinement can be a protective factor, contributing to present resiliency and potential ulterior adaptive pathways. Starting from the overall objective of characterizing prisoners' FTP, we intend to understand the extension of prisoners' FTP, which domains

(content) are most represented when they talk about their future, and finally, the degree of optimism (emotional valence) of those FTPs. To achieve these goals, we implemented an exploratory and qualitative approach through the analysis of the uniqueness of prisoners' personal experiences. We adopted an inductive line of reasoning, considering the natural context as a direct source of data and aiming to describe the meaning that individuals provide to reality (Yin, 2009). An instrumental collective case study was performed, in which several individuals in the same institution were studied (Stake, 2000).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 16 male prisoners, ranging in age from 24 to 51 years ($M=35.19$, $SD=8.32$), incarcerated in a prison in Madeira Island, Portugal. At data collection, this prison was functioning near the limit of its capacity, with 290 inmates of a capacity of 304. Inmates in this prison were offered the ability to participate in cultural (e.g. theatre group and cultural week) and training and learning activities (e.g. formal education classes, gardening, construction, electricity, and mechanics courses). Some of these activities could be performed outside the prison through different agreements with local institutions. The participants that composed this study sample were originally from different regions of the country, namely the Madeira Islands, Azores Islands, and mainland Portugal; one was from Brazil. The majority had academic qualifications between fifth and ninth grade, the latter corresponding to mandatory school; three had lower qualifications (fourth grade) and one had a college degree. Most inmates ($N=14$) had a permanent job prior to incarceration. They were serving sentences from one to 25 years ($M=8.6$, $SD=7.3$), according to the crime committed: four inmates had sentences of less than five years (three of these under two years; condemned for arson, driving without a license, and robbery), three were sentenced to 5–10 years (robbery and qualified theft), four were sentenced to between 10–15 years (condemned for fraud, robbery, drug traffic, murder), and the remaining five prisoners were sentenced to more than 15 years (condemned for murder). Half of the participants ($N=8$) were recidivists.

Instrument

Data collection was performed through a semi-structured interview, which was created for this research. The interview script included a group of

15 questions to be managed in a flexible manner, depending on the progress of the interaction. These questions involved different events and time periods, including the *path leading to prison* ('How was your life before prison?' 'What did you do before being sentenced?' 'What is the reason for your stay in prison?' 'How did your imprisonment occur?' 'What was your sentence?'), *current reality in prison* ('Could you describe how you felt upon imprisonment?' 'How are you dealing with the current situation of confinement?' 'How do you relate to others in prison, such as other inmates or guards?' 'What does it mean for you to be in prison?' 'In what sort of activities do you participate here?'), and *perspectives concerning the period after leaving prison* ('Do you usually think about your life after release?' 'What do you think is going to happen when you leave prison?' 'How do you feel when you think about your life in the future?' 'What are the things that most matter to you after release?' 'What do you want to do after you leave prison?'). Considering the study goal, emphasis was placed on the last category of questions.

Procedures

Data collection. After the authorization of the prison warden, participants were contacted in the premises of the prison re-education and social reinsertion service (SRS), which includes professionals, such as psychologists and social workers. Participants were told that a study on how inmates perceive their future was being performed and that those interested in participating should enrol for an individual session. Beyond personal availability, the selection of participants considered a process of maximum variety sampling (Öhman, 2005) because participants had a wide range of characteristics, including age, schooling, geographical origin, crime committed, and sentence time. After defining a list of 16 inmates, individual sessions were booked to occur in private offices, where only the researcher and the participant would be present. In each session, a strategy of disciplined empathy was followed, in which the researcher was not judgmental about inmates' previous offences and status as prisoners (Medlicott, 1999). Informed consent was provided, including that for audio recording, after assurance of confidentiality. Given the study context, it was emphasized that data collected would only be used for research purposes and that the interview was neither a test nor an institutional evaluation, but an interaction in which they would be talking about their thoughts about the future. The interviews took 15–60 min each and were audio recorded and transcribed afterward.

Data analysis. The analytical method for this study consisted of content analysis, which involves a wide set of techniques to make the content of the

messages systematized and explicit, facilitating logical deductions related to their origin (Bardin, 2008). This study implemented a categorical strategy because the content of the text was organized in units and the latent content of interviews was identified (Minayo, 2000; Schilling, 2006). Concerning categorization, words corresponded to code units and complete sentences to context units. To assure construct validity, we used the FTP theoretical framework to interpret data and also considered the discussion with other researchers in this domain (Creswell, 1998). Moreover, there was significant involvement of the researcher in the social context of the study to understand better the nature of the collected data (Öhman, 2005).

Results

Data analysis led to the emergence of four major content categories, namely prisoners' life prior to prison, adaptation to prison life, activities performed in prison, and FTPs, according to content, extension, and emotional valence.

Life prior to prison

Certain factors of a social nature, including poverty, unemployment, or discrimination, are usually associated with a higher likelihood of disruptive behaviour (Agnew, 1999; Bushway and Reuter, 2002; MacKenzie, 2006). However, in this study, most participants had a permanent job before being sentenced. As several participants mention: 'My life outside was productive. I always worked in construction' (35-year-old inmate); 'I always worked. I started in construction, but when that sector was down, I moved to the hotel business, worked as a cook. . .' (24-year-old inmate); 'My life was very agitated, I was very busy. I worked as a guide-interpreter, loved what I was doing, travelled a lot' (41-year-old inmate). Thus, other factors emerged as main causes for illicit behaviour, including problematic leisure situations and drug-related behaviour (Andrews and Bonta, 2003). Most inmates' discourse exhibited an association between crime-related behaviour and drug consumption and trafficking: 'I involved myself in drugs, did some thefts, and came to jail for the first time. Seven months. Later, I left (..) but continued always like this, in drugs' (26-year-old prisoner);

The prison was outside. I woke up to consume (..) that self-love of taking care of ourselves was gone. Then, friends and family disappear... it's like drugs covered everything (..) you only live to consume and you just consume to survive. (27-year-old prisoner)

'I was alone, had an addiction, consumed, had to pay for a room, food, my car, and I didn't have family (...) I had to live my life' (43-year-old prisoner).

Adaptation to prison life

Dealing with a new reality. As prison is a stressful context, in which each individual's reality is changed considerably, the need for adaptation to a new intra-wall reality (Cunha, 2008) is of uttermost importance. The initial moment of entry into prison is one of the most critical in the process of confinement (Moreira, 2008), as it is a phase of emotional arousal and pessimistic cognitions concerning the self and the future. This initial experience is reinforced by the features of the prison context, such as inflexibility and structured rules (Gonçalves, 2008; Picken, 2012). As the participants of this study mention, 'I didn't cry just because I was ashamed to show it. I've never been here, it's my first time' (48-year-old inmate); 'I felt an enormous revolt (...). In my head I couldn't experience the same again' (27-year-old inmate); 'My world plunged' (41-year-old inmate). Moreover, prisoners tended to feel an absence of autonomy and deprivation of social relations, as they are in considerable social isolation (Tscharf, 2009): '(...) it's the total loss of autonomy, wanting to resolve everything and not getting anything' (24-year-old inmate). Nevertheless, the negative emotionality appeared to decrease as time passed and each inmate dealt with the institution's routines and reflections on the reasons that brought him there (Moreira, 2009): '(...) a person is here doing his duty...' (24 year-old inmate); '(...) I think it was fair (...) because no year in jail pays for a life taken' (35-year-old inmate, condemned for murder). Many inmates also refer to prison time as an opportunity for reflection about potential change to a more organized life after serving the sentence: 'This is somehow ironic, but I gained freedom here inside. Thinking with our own head and without chemicals inside telling you what to do' (24-year-old inmate); 'I started to think of my life in another way (...) I started to find those mistakes that in that time I couldn't see' (31-year-old inmate); 'This is an opportunity that I have to grab strongly so I cannot fall into the same temptation' (27-year-old inmate).

The role of social and family support. The prisoners' routine consists of rules, schedules, organized interaction spaces, isolation, several interdictions, and constant surveillance. These features suggest that there is a great discrepancy and a significant difficulty for each individual to adapt to the future in the outside environment (Barreto, 2006). In this context, the perception of family support and the possibility to return to a united family

background arose as a relevant target for personal effort towards behavioural change (Visher and O'Connell, 2012). This support outside prison leads to a perception of a more promising future concerning rehabilitation and social reinsertion, in which the family has positive expectations for the inmate (Pinto and Hirdes, 2006). Therefore, the visits and phone calls of relatives and friends create favourable conditions for greater inmates' adjustment to prison, due to the existence of close relationships (Visher and O'Connell, 2012): 'I love my family (...) it's my greatest life project' (41-year-old prisoner); 'The only support I got was from my mom (...) she always visited me and helped me' (26-year-old prisoner); '(...) I have my family that supports me, I love my family, they are spectacular' (27-year-old prisoner).

Activities in prison

Learning, occupational, and leisure activities while in prison are perceived as essential for each individual's ability to handle distress. As inmates report: 'In the first year, I had depression, but in the second year I enrolled myself in school, started to participate in the prison activities and that helped me improve' (27-year-old inmate); '(...) I try to occupy my mind (...). During free time I often go to library to read a book' (27-year-old inmate); 'For a while I was somehow turned off, my head was away, but afterwards I started reading a book and that help me occupy my time' (24-year-old inmate). Many inmates also opt to receive formal qualifications, as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice have a protocol to provide formal education to inmates: 'I'm in the 9th grade. Since I've got to be here inside, I can study' (27-year-old inmate); 'I'll keep myself in school, using computers' (26-year-old inmate); 'I'm in school. Currently, I'm learning the eco-schools program, which is about recycling' (27-year-old inmate). Work occupations are also relevant opportunities in prison: 'I've been working as a barber for four years' (26-year-old inmate); 'I worked in the cafeteria for more than two years' (35-year-old inmate). The existence of an occupation inside prison was also perceived by inmates as a positive aspect, considering the potential opportunities in life after prison (Visher and O'Connell, 2012): 'Now, I'm working as a cook... Maybe outside this might be an advantage' (47-year-old inmate).

Perspectives concerning the future

When does the future start (the extension of prisoners' FTP). When individuals are imprisoned, their notion of time changes because they tend to perceive time as 'suspended' until the day they leave prison.

Therefore, inmates' FTP is significantly related to the release date. As a 31-year-old prisoner mentioned, 'In this moment, I'm always thinking about the future, what it is going to be, how it will be when I leave here'. A 48-year-old inmate stated, 'I'm thinking of the day I'll leave and continue my life (...) continuing doing what I used to do and to forget the mistakes I made'. Nevertheless, participants anticipate future problems as a result of their current situation of incarceration: 'Every day I think, when I will leave this, what I'm going to do outside under this crisis (...) ' (27-year-old prisoner). However, some inmates do not project plans, even from a hypothetical point of view, as they are focused on their current situation of incarceration: 'I cannot promise that I will reach the outside and not do anything. I prefer not to promise. I'd rather put my feet on the ground and see what's around me' (27-year-old inmate). 'I don't know... here inside we cannot think too much of the future. We have to think in the present' (31-year-old inmate). Moreover, inmates' FTP appears to change according to their age, sentence time, and to events during incarceration. Thus, the longer the sentence time, the less extended FTP seems to be (Marques, 2013). For instance, inmates with a sentence above 15 years were focused on doing their time and not developing significant projects: 'For now, I cannot make plans for the future... It's still a long sentence to fulfil and the only thing I have to think about is doing my time' (35-year-old inmate); 'My time is still long and I have to think about each day. I don't like to make many plans' (31-year-old inmate).

Content of prisoners' FTP. Prisoners tend to elaborate on future prospects in several life domains, including work or education and social relationships, especially involving being present in offspring's developmental milestones (Silva, 2012). The results show that, though the extension of individuals' FTP is related to the moment of release, several life domains were mentioned in participants' discourse, including their personal and professional life, as well as family and social relationships. Regarding *personal life*, comprising actions, thoughts, and personal needs, one aspect involves the ambition of not reoffending. As inmates mention, 'I do not want to enter this gate again' (27-year-old), or 'I want to keep clean, avoid problems, fights, avoid all of this' (26-year-old). The need to be perceived in a positive way, both by others and themselves also arose in convicts' discourse: 'I want to feel proud of myself... and my family to be proud of me now' (27-year-old prisoner). Finally, changing the environment is mentioned as an important aspect because there is pessimism in having opportunities in a proximal context: 'The first thing I want to do is to leave Madeira. I don't have more opportunities here' (47-year-old inmate); 'I want to sell my car and leave the country' (32-year-old inmate).

Because convictions for crimes related to drug abuse and trafficking were very common in this sample, in this first subcategory, it is also relevant to mention the prospects of drug cessation, so there is a positive change in life outside prison: 'I don't want to be involved with drugs again, and if I stay like I've been, without drugs, I think I'll have some success outside' (27-year-old, condemned for qualified theft); 'My only goal is to forget consuming drugs' (32-year-old, condemned for drug trafficking).

Concerning *work*, participants' discourse exhibited aspirations and desire for specific opportunities for labour or professional training. Individuals are aware of the need to find a job: 'First thing I will do is to find a job, and recover the lost time' (35-year-old); 'I want to start working, whether in my area or in another' (32-year-old); 'I'll look for a job, something on which I can count every month with a pay check' (27-year-old). In some cases, an ambition for specific job opportunities was present: 'My brother already got me a job in London. I just have to leave this place' (32-year-old); 'I'm a tourist guide-interpreter, I'm quite good at that, so certainly some operators will want me to work for them' (41-year-old). Other inmates mentioned their desire to create their own job: 'I want to see if I can open a small barber shop, so I can support my daughter' (26-year-old); 'I'll open a saloon. I don't need much money, I just have to get my ideas organized' (27-year-old).

Regarding *family life*, 16 content units were identified, involving raising a new family or the reconciliation or strengthening of existing family bonds: 'I'm going to hug my family when I leave. I'll ask them for forgiveness, say I'm sorry for the harm I did' (27-year-old); 'I'll think about my son when I leave (...) I want to be near him and help him in whatever he needs' (27-year-old); 'I need to see my daughters to feel good' (51-year-old). The prospects of raising a new family was also on the participants' minds: 'I want to get a wife and organize my life because I'm still young' (26-year-old); '(...) I want to have a family and have kids, a little couple' (32-year-old); 'I want to be a parent when I'm forty, to marry and have kids' (32-year-old); 'I'll build a relationship based on what I've learned from my mistakes... have a family and see if I still can have kids' (31-year-old). The remaining *relationships and overall social integration* were also very important for individual well-being. One of the most relevant aspects in participants' discourse was their awareness of the potential label of 'convict'. Label creation tends to abash individuals, and therefore can create a social identity problem (Barreto, 2006): 'People will say: look at that junkie... this and that. We lose respect' (27-year-old); 'My first thought is that I won't be well-received. I think that all of us, inmates, will be labelled forever' (27-year-old); 'People will be always suspicious of us' (41-year-old); 'Many companies today, if a person was already in jail for

any reason, they don't give you a job (...) A person always gets that discrimination' (35-year-old). For this reason, participants underlined the importance of adopting new life styles, along with obtaining forgiveness from their families and victims: 'I have to show to society that I'm not that person they expect me to be, I want to show I'm better than that' (27-year-old); 'My role now is to talk to everyone and look them in the eyes and say I'm sorry for what I did' (41-year-old); 'I need to get courage to ask for forgiveness from her family, at least from the sons, because I had no intention of that happening' (26-year-old). On the other hand, some inmates reveal a sense of being 'even' with society: 'I'll be on my own and they'll be on their own... I'm like that. No one knows me' (47-year-old); 'I'm already paying for my crime' (32-year-old); 'I think no one has anything to condemn me. I can be here as I will because I have nothing to fear' (24-year-old).

Discussion

In this study, we implemented a qualitative analysis of prisoners' discourse to understand the way they experience prison life and put their future into perspective. We resorted to the theoretical framework of FTP to interpret data and understand individual experiences in a non-normative context, such as prison. Given the consistent results in the literature regarding the relationship of FTP with adaptive behaviour, FTP can be understood as a relevant construct to analyse behaviour across different contexts, including prison, and to inform the intervention that aims to address motivational processes related to rehabilitation and social reinsertion.

Considering the exploratory and unrepresentative nature of the approach in this study, the results showed that, when prisoners were asked about the future, several domains arose as relevant, including work and personal and social development. Among the most significant goals, an awareness of the need for personal change and to be perceived as a person with value, finding work, raising a new family, or re-establishing or strengthening existing family ties, along with an overall desire for social integration, emerged (Giordano et al., 2007; Silva, 2012; Visher and O'Connell, 2012). On the other hand, the moment of release played a crucial role in prisoners' cognitive elaborations, for the extension of their FTP was related to this moment of transition (Trommsdorff and Lamm, 1980) and their high expectations about how their lives will be different 'this time' (Visher and Travis, 2003). However, prisoners with longer sentences, such as those sentenced to more than 15 years, seemed to have more present-oriented attitudes, that is a predominant 'each day at a time' point of view. Regarding the emotional valence of prisoners' FTP, simultaneous optimism

and pessimism were noted, depending on the perception of social support and sentence time. Accordingly, prisoners that reported the existence of social networks and social support from their families and close relatives had more positive views concerning the future and were more motivated (Visher and Travis, 2003). Nevertheless, the sentence time seems to moderate this relationship because longer sentences introduce more negative views of the future (Dhami et al., 2007; Marques, 2013; Snyder et al., 2009; Visher and O'Connell, 2012). Furthermore, the perception of a social stigma (Cunha, 2008), along with limitations in the labour market resulting from the economic crisis, stood out as relevant factors contributing to the prisoners' degree of positivity or negativity regarding the future.

Beyond the prisoners' prospective thinking, the results also emphasized several other dimensions related to current prison life and the previous experience leading to it. Among these dimensions is the frequency with which criminal behaviour related to drugs was reported as a factor contributing to incarceration – most of the participants' offences, including traffic, robbery, and qualified thefts, were actually related to drugs. In a framework of the promotion of rehabilitation, this result withdraws attention from the importance of the implementation of prison-based programmes related to substance abuse (Visher and Travis, 2003). Regarding the way individuals address imprisonment, the moment of entry was the most emotionally significant, when individuals struggled to adjust, and should be considered by SRS. Regarding this initial period, one participant made a particular relevant statement about being diagnosed with depression, which raises attention to the question of mental health and psychopathology in prisons, especially when higher rates of mental illness exist among incarcerated individuals relative to the population (Diamond et al., 2001). On the other hand, the perception of social support and the types of activities performed in confinement seem to favour prison adjustment. Moreover, these factors have an extended influence beyond release, given that several inmates noted the connection between current activities in prison (acquiring or developing skills, getting formal qualifications, being involved in leisure situations) and potential future roles in society. That is, not only do these occupational and educational activities contribute to filling the emptiness of prison time, but they are also perceived as being useful for future adaptation (Chubick et al., 1999; Dhami et al., 2007; Medicott, 1999; Visher and Travis, 2003). These results also emphasize the sense of continuity and inter-connection between the present experience and future life as one of the core features of FTP (Carvalho, 2015; Lens et al., 2012; Savickas, 1997).

Taken together, the results of this study emphasise the importance of the time dimension when the prison context is analysed. Particularly, they provide evidence of the importance of the way individuals handle the cyclical

nature of prison time (Medlicott, 1999) and integrate that experience with the development of perspectives concerning the future. In this sense, FTP, as a personality characteristic with cognitive and motivational components (Carvalho and Novo, 2015), proves to be relevant to the understanding of human behaviour in the context of prison; this therefore should be taken into consideration in interventions that aim to promote social rehabilitation and the effectiveness of interventions in prison (Chubick et al., 1999). The weight given by inmates to the participation in activities in prison and future goals, along with its relationship with adaptive outcomes, values the role of SRS and encourages prison-based interventions that not only promote an individual's ability to cope and make the best use of personal time (Medlicott, 1999) but also reflect on their experience and develop plans concerning the future in different dimensions (Visher and Travis, 2003). This latter aspect is particularly relevant because the existence of future goals relates to present-motivated behaviour, contingent on the existence of instrumental plans to achieve them (Nuttin and Lens, 1985). Given the importance of the moment of release, it is also important to mention the role of prison-based programmes that take into account release and ulterior integration and the implementation of plans in different life dimensions, particularly when combined with post-release services, in the reduction of recidivism (Dhami et al., 2007; Visher and Travis, 2003).

Final considerations

By performing this research, we intended to contribute to the understanding of individuals' FTP in a non-normative context, such as prison, especially given the scarce literature examining this topic. Despite these encouraging results, several limitations have to be taken into consideration, as they may have an influence on the nature of the results and conclusions. One of the main limitations is the potential influence of the effects of social desirability on prisoners' responses. Given the specificities of this context, there may have been a wish, conscientious or not, of prisoners to present themselves under a more favourable light or at least avoiding mentioning negative thoughts or attitudes, that is saying the 'right things' to the researcher. Another pertinent aspect is that the data gathered, though significant, only corresponds to an incomplete picture of the complexity of prison life and prisoners' individual pathways. To this end, further research is necessary, considering different designs and other variables. Particularly, longitudinal studies will be of great value to better understanding individual pathways, such as the pathway of reintegration, or to follow-up on the effects of potential prison-based interventions (Visher and Travis, 2003). These analyses assume great usefulness given that re-entry in society can

be stressful in several dimensions, including health (e.g. increased risk of death or low access to health care), financial/employment, housing, and social and community relationships (Binswanger et al., 2007). Moreover, given the particular features of this prison (not crowded, low rates of internal violence reported), it is important to replicate studies of the same nature in different institutions. Also, because only limited information was collected regarding life prior to prison, and concerning the relationship between FTP and specific crimes committed and their respective sentences, more research should be performed on these topics to determine how individual differences in FTP are related to patterns of delinquent behaviour.

Conflict of interest

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