

Community Reinsertion in the Criminal Justice System: The role of professionalized officers in the Costa Rican Early Release System.

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I. Introduction.

This research focuses on the programs after imprisonment in the form of supervision and guidance measures. Although the Japanese and Costa Rican criminal justice systems contemplate different practices in prisoner treatment, both countries value follow-up supervision and external support to ensure reinsertion into the community. By comparing what would appear to be two vastly different criminal justice environments, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the operation of post-carceral policies within each penitentiary system.

Therefore, as a preliminary step towards comparing the operation of penitentiary officers in both nations, this document introduces the Costa Rican penitentiary system's post carceral programs to other jurisdiction's readers. Concretely, here the author will present the findings of field interviews conducted in Costa Rica to professional Ministry of Justice and Peace officers in December of 2021. The resulting analysis of the interviews will show how penitentiary officers underscore the importance of technical and professional work in Costa Rica's penitentiary operation.

II. Research Background

Since 2010, the Costa Rican penitentiary system has suffered extended and critical periods of prison overpopulation, a problem that different governments have unsuccessfully tried to solve⁽¹⁾. From a legal perspective, prison overcrowding results in illegitimate harm to the prison population that threatens the constitutional order⁽²⁾. From a criminological perspective, overpopulation impairs the ability of the institution to provide treatment and services, which hinders recidivism rates and contributes to violence within prison walls⁽³⁾. Consequently, the penitentiary administration has concentrated its actions and resources on improving conditions in prison and building better facilities for prisoners. However, these efforts have not yet produced extensive results in dealing with recidivism⁽⁴⁾.

Costa Rica's penitentiary regulations contemplate an array of programs and

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- (1) Data from the Ministry of Justice and Peace shows that overpopulation reached an annual average of 29% in 2011, 37% in 2017, and 21.8% in 2020 nationally for all prisons. (Ministry of Justice and Peace, 2011, 2017, 2020)
 - (2) For instance, in 2015, filed under file numbered 14-01932-007-CO, the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of prisoners of “*La Reforma*” prison who turned to the court to pressure penitentiary authorities to act against the elevated levels of overpopulation in dormitories. Judges made it clear during their ruling that prisoners in Costa Rica conserve their constitutionally and internationally recognized fundamental rights during their imprisonment. Moreover, they pointed out that the authorities must guarantee access to those rights and minimize the harm prisoners suffer during imprisonment (Constitutional Court of the Supreme Court. 2015).
 - (3) A 2020 paper on prison overcrowding and violence placed a significant relationship between institutional factors and dangerous conditions of prisoners, such as the occurrence of prison violence. This paper suggests a variety of detrimental effects in other areas of prison life linked to the effectiveness of institutional treatment. (Baggio, S. et al. 2020)
 - (4) By the year 2020, overpopulation continued to be over 20% nationally, while recidivism rates from individuals released from prison facilities in that same year ranged between 13.4 and 16.8 percent, more than double those rates from other programs. (Ministry of Justice and Peace. Annual Institutional Report. 2020)

institutions that do not receive equal attention but have shown promising results in dealing with recidivism. Under the supervision and control of the Ministry of Justice and Peace⁽⁵⁾, these programs work in the community with prisoners benefitting from an early release from prison. If expanded, programs such as the Semi-Institutional Level and the Community Level could contribute both to reducing recidivism rates and prison population.⁽⁶⁾

Added to the difficulties faced by the penitentiary administration, the operation of post-carceral institutions in Costa Rica has not received enough attention outside Latin American research communities. Comparing the work of post-carceral programs with those of Japan can contribute to highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the human rights-based penitentiary laws of Costa Rica. With this goal in mind, the author conducted interviews with penitentiary officers working at the Semi-Institutional and Community levels to reveal which traits they consider most impactful in the post-carceral stage. From their shared experience, it was possible to uncover aspects of the Costa Rican penitentiary system that differentiate it from the Japanese one.

However, before moving on to the results of the interviews, a brief introduction to the Costa Rican penitentiary system and the programs evaluated here is necessary.

(5) The Ministry of Justice and Peace is the government agency in charge of the prison administration. It was created in 1982 by Law N. 6739.

(6) The recidivism rate in Costa Rica is hard to define when analyzing data from the ministry. The charts or graphics show only each year's registered events with no supporting explanations, making it difficult to assess the current effect of penitentiary treatment. However, official statistics show that recidivism from prisoners in community programs are much lower than those of other programs. (Ministry of Justice and Peace. Annual Institutional Report. 2020; Ministry of Justice and Peace. Costa Rica's Penitentiary System Statistical Compendium. 2021)

III. The Costa Rican Penitentiary Model

1. History

The current model of penitentiary administration is rooted in a series of development programs dating back to 1993. At the time, the previous model of imprisonment came under intense scrutiny and was considered to be highly ineffective in the eyes of penitentiary workers.⁽⁷⁾ Within the Ministry of Justice and Peace, officers from different backgrounds worked together to create a new model of operation for the penitentiary system, taking in from the advances of South American and Canadian systems, giving shape to the basic framework that to this day continues to operate in Costa Rica.⁽⁸⁾

The Institutional Development Plan introduced two significant changes that would shape the future of the Ministry of Justice and Peace and the administration of the prison. The first was a distinctive reformulation of the concepts of “treatment” and “evaluation,” inherited from the proponents of Clinical Criminology in the early 1970s. In their stead, professional officers would use concepts such as “assessment” and “response actions” to signal a change in the approach to imprisonment⁽⁹⁾.

(7) In the words of the then head of the Ministry of Justice and Peace, the problem had its roots in an antiquated conception of criminality and an incoherent bureaucratic apparatus that produced poor results. (Ministry of Justice and Peace. 1993)

(8) This model created an Institutional Development Plan developed within the Ministry of Justice and Peace with the cooperation of the professional areas of Social Work, Orientation, and Education. It focused on crime prevention, interinstitutional cooperation, social reinsertion, and minimization of the harms produced by imprisonment. (Id.)

(9) Professional officers develop the Response Plans or Response Actions in interdisciplinary assessment committees within each penitentiary program. They work on personal vulnerabilities and the development of desired skills. (Ministry of Justice and Peace. Penitentiary Regulations. 2018. Articles 164, 165, and 166)

According to the Institutional Development Plan, crime was a socioeconomic issue that prison could not fix, and imprisonment could not fulfill the needs of prisoners or society. Resulting from these changes, penitentiary officers transformed into collaborators to guide prisoners into reaching an understanding of the conditions that led to imprisonment and encourage them to take an active part in their recovery.⁽¹⁰⁾

The second change came in the administrative branch of penitentiary administration with the creation of distinct programs charged with distributing prisoner population according to their needs and capacity to live in community spaces. These programs were the Institutional, Semi-Institutional, and Community Programs, which to this day continue to form the core structure of the national penitentiary system. At the time, the Institutional Program would comprise institutions charged with imprisonment or detention under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice and Peace⁽¹¹⁾. The Semi-Institutional Program was initially composed of open facilities and penal farms where minimal-risk prisoners could work on the outside and spend a portion of the week in their own homes⁽¹²⁾. Lastly, the Community Program would oversee regional offices for the population under parole or other forms of alternative sentences⁽¹³⁾.

Despite transforming the penitentiary administration, changes in the political

(10) This notion took a concrete shape in Article 10 of the 2007 Penitentiary Regulations. The article declares that the development of skills and an internal comprehension of the circumstances surrounding the commission of a crime are the goals of Response Plans. (Ministry of Justice and Peace. 2007)

(11) Note: There are temporary detention facilities under the supervision of police forces for detainees awaiting transfer to prison, but these are excluded from the present study; the Annual average in 2020 was 14728, out of which 2922 were detainees. (Ministry of Justice. 2021)

(12) Annual male population average in 2020: 2578. (Id.)

(13) Annual male population average in 2020: 1565 parolees and 10934 with a suspended sentence. (Id.)

leadership diffculted the implementation of a regulatory norm. It was not until 2007 that the ministry made concrete advances in defining each level and took further steps into defining the role of technicians and other professionals via decree. It is essential to mention here that Costa Rica has not had a proper Prison Law for more than three decades. In other words, despite living through the most significant crisis in prison overpopulation in the nation’s history, consensus to develop penitentiary legislation continues to be elusive and the Ministry of Justice and Peace had to turn to ministerial decree to adapt to the worsening situation.

In late 2017 and early 2018, ministry’s political leadership developed and published a document to clarify and exemplify the nation’s penitentiary system’s goals and how it would achieve them. The document declared the need for a scientific and human rights-based system operated by highly professionalized officers⁽¹⁴⁾. Following this declaration, a new normative framework addressing the need for substantive reform plaguing the penitentiary administration: The 2018 Penitentiary Regulations. Via ministerial decree, this legal document set up a series of principles, programs, levels, rights, and benefits to modernize the penitentiary system in its entirety.

While the new regulations brought about the creation of innovative programs and institutions, the authorities placed the most considerable part of their efforts in facilities designed for confinement. The reforms did significantly improve the assessment processes necessary for prisoners to apply to community programs. However, due in part to the direction taken in legislative action and the rising trend in criminality, reforms on the Institutional Level and the creation of new prison spaces have been the preferred policies of penitentiary authorities⁽¹⁵⁾. As a result, despite the

(14) The government declared this document of public interest to support policies pushed through by the Ministry of Justice and Peace. (PGR. 2018)

Community and Semi-Institutional levels' original design and intentions, they have had to adapt to arising conditions in criminal justice reforms that favor imprisonment rather than social reinsertion⁽¹⁶⁾.

2. Post-carceral institutions in the 2018 Penitentiary Regulations

Both in Costa Rica and Japan, the institutions here studied are also accessible to population that did not spend time in prison or have received alternative punishment. In the case of Costa Rica, the Community Level supervises individuals that avoid imprisonment but for the purposes of the current study, only the processes applied to former prisoners and their integration into the community as subject of evaluation. Therefore, while it is possible to speak of post-carceral institutions as part of community programs, the latter refer to a larger group of institutions that also collaborate with former prisoners. Post-carceral here refers to the connecting processes that exist between institution and community, guided by the need for guidance and supervision.

In the Costa Rican penitentiary system there exist two programs that fit the

(15) Penitentiary regulation divides the Institutional Level into five levels, one for male adults, one for max security, one for female adults, one for the elderly, and one for the juvenile. A new level supervises a new facility model called the Specialized Treatment Units, which aims to revolutionize imprisonment in the nation. (Penitentiary Regulations. 2018)

(16) The original intention of each level has been all but abandoned. In the Community Level case, the Institutional Development Plan created it as an alternative to imprisonment for minimal-risk offenders. However, due to reforms in the Criminal Procedure Code in 1997, it has been used to supervise people with suspended sentences and parolees. As for the Semi-Institutional Level, although the program worked with temporary facilities to transition prisoners into the community, violent incidents and budget cuts in the past decade made it impossible to sustain dormitory areas with the exemption of penal farms. The Semi-Institutional Level policy now requires that "released prisoners" to go to the regional offices for interviews and follow-ups. (Sanchez, A. 2022)

description of post-carceral institutions:

- Semi-Institutional Level⁽¹⁷⁾ : This level's aims work towards developing strategies for social reinsertion and preventing recidivism. It looks to develop skills and provide professional interventions from an interdisciplinary point of view. At the same time, it builds a support network of family, community, educational, and employment resources. It operates under the same principles ruling over the Institutional Level, upholding the inherent dignity of those under its supervision, and fomenting a sense of independence and self-respect.

It works with populations transferred from the Institutional Level and other levels characterized by physical containment, basing its operation on the assessments made by professional teams in each institution. As a requisite, prisoners must have eight years left of their original sentence or receive a sentence of at least eight years of prison before being able to apply to transfer to this level. The professional assessments must show that candidates to transfer have solid external support and resources for an independent life. For instance, in 2020, only 0,2% of the population successfully transferred to this level did not have a support network, and 6% lived independently. Specialized programs accessible in this level revolve around drug abuse, domestic and sexual violence, and access by recommendation to educational institutions and private employment.

It is important to note that from the institution's perspective, the services provided are fundamental rights supported by an interdisciplinary assessment of an individual's needs and goals. While a large part of the penitentiary officers' work focuses on the individual, there are instances of group interventions with the cooperation of one or more professional areas. These areas include the Psychology,

(17) National Institute of Criminology. 2021; Penitentiary Regulations. 2018. Articles 2, 49, and 50.

Orientation, Law, and Social Work departments, but most regional offices do not have access to an entire interdisciplinary team.

- Community Level⁽¹⁸⁾ : This level supervises individuals with suspended or alternative sentences and prisoners released on parole. Its operation is a loose form of supervision and complete insertion of the individual in their social environment through the coordination with community organizations. To apply for parole, prisoners must not only have finished 50% of their original sentence but also receive a positive assessment from the National Criminology Institute and approval by a judge with special authority over penitentiary institutions.

As a part of the penitentiary system, the Community Level follows the same principles as the Semi-Institutional and Institutional Levels. On a functional level, however, it runs under the guidelines and conditions established by judges. While officers have the possibility of recommending changes to these conditions, they must submit them to the judge in charge. Beyond their role of supervision, they do not provide any programs or services unless indicated by a court order or requested by the parolee.

IV. Research Notes.

A. Setting: Puntarenas regional offices of the Semi-Institutional and Community levels. December 14th and 16th, 2021.

B. Description: Puntarenas is one of Costa Rica's seven provinces, located on the Pacific Ocean side of the nation. It is the region with the highest poverty index (29.9%) and extreme poverty index (9.8%) in the nation. The main economic

(18) Article 51, Penitentiary Regulations. 2018.; Articles 64, 65, and 66 of the Criminal Code.

activities are fishing and tourism, although a significant part of the participants in these activities are part of micro and small enterprises, with a sizable portion being self-employed. Recent studies have revealed that people engaging in fishing activities perceive lower income, have less work stability, and show lower levels of education than the average population not engaged in these activities. Other studies indicate that the population’s main concerns in recent years relate to the lack of educational and work opportunities, rising criminality and drug consumption, a perceivable increase in physical disorder, and a decreased quality of public transportation and road maintenance.

C. Activity: Open-ended interviews with officers in group interviews. The objective was to determine the challenges in day-to-day operations, the organization and distribution of labor on a local and national level, and the institutional core values. The contents of the interviews were segregated into criteria for future comparison.

D. Results:

Level/Criteria	Community Level	Semi-Institutional Level
Population	Sixty-one parolees.	Two-hundred and fifteen males.
Officers	Three social workers, one criminologist.	One psychologist, one social worker, one law specialist and two follow-up officers.
Work Model	Work model based on community integration through community organizations and individual supervision. Field visits and individual follow-ups.	Work modeled on a response plan based on family, community, and employment resources. The operation revolves around individual interviews, community follow-up, group events, periodic assessments, and monitoring of the police database.

<p>Treatment⁽¹⁹⁾</p>	<p>Follow-up of conditions detailed by a specialized judge.</p>	<p>Officers base their initial recommendations on the response plan developed at the Institutional Level.</p>
<p>Technical operation</p>	<p>Individual follow-ups scheduled once a month to ensure adherence to the conditions of parole.</p>	<p>Individual follow-ups vary depending on the individual and their risk assessment. Critical cases must show for follow-ups in the regional office twice a week. Individuals with the lowest necessity for supervision show up for follow-up every two months. The officers review the response plan as a team once a year.</p>
<p>Supervision</p>	<p>Officers share the supervision with community organizations and leaders.</p>	<p>Officers actively execute the supervision through field officers, conducting field interviews with family members and contacting people in the community and employers.</p>

(19) Here the author uses the concept of treatment here as the establishment of conditions by penitentiary authorities designed to control and delineate a person's lifestyle after their release from prison.

<p>Links with other institutions</p>	<p>The Community office works as a link with other agencies that provide healthcare services, but they are not directly involved with scheduling meetings or providing the service. Links with community organizations detailed in the conditions established by a specialized judge.</p>	<p>The Semi-Institutional level works as a link with government agencies dedicated to providing healthcare and other services, but they are not directly involved with scheduling meetings or providing the service. Cooperation with NPOs and community resources to supply external services related to the response plan or in support of community integration.</p>
<p>Coordination with central authorities</p>	<p>The relationship between regional and central offices is one of administrative coordination. The faculty to determine the completion or suspension of parole rests in the specialized judge's office.</p>	<p>The relationship between regional and central offices is one of administrative coordination. The day-to-day operation and follow-up rest in the hands of regional officers. The faculty to determine the completion or suspension of benefits is the discretion of a centralized, technical office.</p>
<p>Recidivism or cancellation of measures</p>	<p>In 2021 they only had two cases that merited a cancellation of the parole.</p>	<p>In 2021 less than five cases merited a cancellation of the benefit.</p>
<p>Main challenges for the population</p>	<p>Elevated levels of unemployment for individuals dedicated to fishing, lack of skills, and drug addiction.</p>	<p>Elevated levels of unemployment for individuals dedicated to fishing and drug addiction.</p>

V. Analysis

A. The Community Level: The Puntarenas Community Level Office has four professional officers, three social workers, and one criminologist. A police officer works as the security detail. Due to the nature of this level's operation, the central authorities considered an academic background in Social Work necessary. Not only is the national coordinator of the Community Level a social worker, but social workers also make up sizable number of professional officers in the penitentiary administration. This fact reflects the weight of social workers' skills and preparation in the Costa Rican system.

This office collaborates with community organizations to guarantee the completion of court-ordered conditions. These conditions are based on the response plans developed during imprisonment, purposed to tackle any lingering criminogenic factors. The work revolves around completing said conditions and ensuring that the person integrates their community. The Community Level office works as a link with other government agencies so that parolees gain access to medical and treatment-related services, but while they keep a direct line of communication with these agencies, they are not responsible for the services provided.

Regarding "treatment", this level has lesser degrees of intervention than the others. Response plans are mostly delineated conditions that parolees must follow, usually involving participation in voluntary associations, doing public work, and taking part special courses on drug addiction, domestic violence, and skill development.

Professional officers' day-to-day operation limits itself to follow-ups and interviews. Communication and updates about the behavior of parolees come mostly from community representatives. Officers in this level mostly work as coordinators

with the office of the specialized judge, community organizations, and the penitentiary administration. The specialized judge is part of the Execution of the Sentence Tribunal, the jurisdictional agency in charge of monitoring the conditions of prison institutions and authorizing paroles.

On an administrative level, the regional offices coordinate with the central offices on administrative matters, but beyond that, there seems to be a significant degree of discretion left to their operations. Officers indicated that the Community Level has historically lacked officers and funding. For instance, it was not until very recently that they could fill the open positions for professional officers. Until then, the office had to work with only two professional officers. Regarding the lack of funding, they mentioned that, at times, they had to use money from their salary for office equipment and continue to face cuts in funding. Speaking of the difficulties faced by parolees, officers pointed to difficulties in finding employment, drug consumption, and domestic violence. The first two connect to the general conditions of the Puntarenas province in the past decades. Most parolees work in fishing activities, an economic area in decline for the past two decades, and resort to drug addiction or drug trafficking to cope with their circumstances.

Despite the above limitations, officers continually highlight the program's success by referencing the low levels of recidivism and cancellation of measures. Out of the total cases worked in 2021, there were only two cancellations. The officers claim that this success is because, at least in the case of parolees, individuals coming out of prison have undergone an assessment and attention process. By basing the conditions of their parole on studies and continuing to work on them for the duration of the measure, together with a community-based approach to supervision (a light touch), they consider that individuals are thankful for the opportunity to live in liberty and work hard to avoid re-imprisonment.

B. Semi-Institutional Level: The Semi-Institutional Level Office in Puntarenas has

three professional and two follow-up officers. There are also two police officers as security detail. The regional director specializes in psychology, while the two other professional officers do in law and social work. The follow-up officers have received a university education in Criminology and Law. Different from the Community Level, the work of this program involves a higher degree of participation in the professional areas that integrate the technical branch of the Costa Rican penitentiary system. Since they are responsible for assessing the population under their supervision and elaborating reports for the central offices, their work relies on a multi-disciplinary cooperative approach between the different technical branches.

Every office at this level works around six key areas: Individual work, Group work, Public Communication, Internal Coordination, External Coordination, and Fieldwork. They work with family and employers, pointed out by the regional director as the pillars of the Semi-Institutional Level. The penitentiary regulations emphasize the supporting role of family members and employers before transferring prisoners to this program, but they do will also view favorably those cases when the person has sufficient resources to sustain themselves independently.

The Puntarenas office works exclusively with the population transferred from the Institutional Level that has family, community, or work links in the Puntarenas region. In December 2021, there were two-hundred and fifty-one people on this level, thirty-six of whom were women. This office distributes the workload to ensure max coverage; officers assign individual follow-up sessions every month based on response plans and the continuous assessment process. For those cases considered to be higher risk, officers order an increase in the number of follow-up interviews to up to eight times a month. For cases considered to pose less risk, officers reduce follow-up interviews to once every month or every two months. During each interview, the professional officer in charge will work on specific areas previously decided by Response Plans. Professional officers work on the technical aspects of each plan,

while follow-up officers work out on the field, interviewing family members, neighbors, and employers.

Unlike the Community Level office, the Puntarenas Semi-Institutional office is more limited in its work with community organizations. They coordinate with agencies and organizations that may help in providing services for those under their supervision, such as access to drug addiction treatment, and cooperate with a local development network. Cooperation with the Institutional Level is close since there is an obligation to continue working on Response Plans developed during imprisonment. On an administrative level, there exists a higher level of cooperation between the central technical offices. Changes made in the Semi-Institutional Level relating to the contents of Response Plans or any violations of the conditions established are communicated directly to the central offices.

The officers shared their concerns with the Community Level office regarding budgetary cuts. Lower budgets compared to that of the Institutional Level, together with fewer professionals difficult the assessment processes. These constraints mean they have a tough time filling all the open positions (The office director mentioned that a separate regional office was operating with just one professional officer). Also, a characteristic of the region chosen for evaluation, most people under their supervision suffer from elevated levels of economic instability and drug addiction. However, as pointed out by the officers themselves, the level of discretion allowed in their work means they can rapidly assess and act on critical cases, thus reducing recidivism. In cases where a new crime exists, depending on the severity of the act and the type of sanction associated, officers prefer alternative sanctions to re-imprisonment. Even when the person is not fully aligning with the conditions established in their Response Plans, the officers prefer to increase the number of interviews and intervene directly to guarantee that the person stays outside of prison walls. As a result, data on recidivism has remained significantly low, but it remains

unclear whether this data can be relied on (7.4% on a national level according to 2020 data).

VI. Conclusions

Points of note emerged from the interviews regarding the work of public officers in the post-carceral institutions of the Puntarenas province. However, due to the limitations of this paper, this section will discuss only those relating to the administrative work of the post-carceral system in place in Costa Rica.

Taken together, the Community Level and Semi-Institutional Level of the Costa Rican penitentiary system appear to run on distinct levels of administrative discretion. The former must adhere to a set of given conditions controlled by judicial authorities, while the latter has broader parameters to operate based on technical and disciplinary areas. This difference in discretion is clear by the capacity officers at the Semi-Institutional Level have to change or modify Response Plans without requiring the approval of central authorities. The difference in approach lies in the penitentiary regulations, which consider individuals transferred to this level as prisoners continuing to serve time with low-security requirements. In the case of the Community Level, it operates based on the requirements established by the Criminal Code, hence supervision and work in this level are more strongly associated with what other countries regard as parole.

Another aspect to consider is the continuity of professional and technical assessment, which starts from the moment of detention in a prison facility and continues until the completion of the criminal sentence. Officers pointed this out as one of the reasons behind the low levels of recidivism registered by both levels. Professional officers in these levels place profound respect and consideration into these assessments and base their work around them. The penitentiary regulations set

up the continuity of the assessment process, but the trust each level places on the work done by officers at other levels suggests a significant degree of confidence in the contents of each Response Plan.

The above is possible thanks to the ability penitentiary authorities have in placing professional officers throughout the entirety of the penitentiary system, making it possible for officers to have a shared understanding of the contents and continuity of the assessment process that leads to an early release. Moreover, despite the ultimate control the central authorities have over prisoner allocation within the penitentiary system, their decisions are made on the basis of assessments made by the professional officers in each prison and regional office. The assessments include a psychological evaluation of the prisoners, revolving around their perspectives on the crime committed, the victim, and the time spent in prison; skill evaluation that evidences their academic level and capacity to work on the job offer received prior release; a report on the disciplinary actions received during imprisonment; a record of participation in activities and work during imprisonment; interviews with family and community members to determine community support; and a legal assessment that includes the crime or crimes committed, and past history.

When it comes to institutional cooperation with community agencies, the Community Level has stronger links with such organizations thanks to the model of work set up in the penitentiary regulations and central administration. Their role is more active compared to the Semi-Institutional Level in this sense since they must keep communication channels with community assets to track parolees' progress. For the Semi-Institutional Level, the collaboration with community networks and NPOs is an asset for the completion of Response Plans, but the primary source of information and collaboration is the local police forces.

Data on the ratio between officers and population indicates an unbalanced workload, more so for the Semi-Institutional Level. At the Community Level, this

workload is manageable due to the lower degree of supervision needed for parolees. Both levels receive the least resources, and officers, sometimes having to use their resources to buy office supplies. As a result, officers interviewed insist that these limitations impair their ability to provide the services required by law.

On the topic of recidivism, data provided by both offices suggests positive outcomes despite the difficulties mentioned above, but an in-depth analysis of these results is still lacking. Although not mentioned earlier, the data-gathering and analysis strategies of the Ministry of Justice and Peace have varied in the past fifteen years, and doubts remain over their reliability. Nevertheless, taking the data given at face value, the evaluated programs show promising results, especially when it comes to avoiding setbacks on each level that would lead to prison re-entry. However, future research must analyze the data considering the challenges mentioned by the officers regarding the population under their care and yearly rates following permanent release.

Finally, officers from post-carceral institutions in Puntarenas state hold the inherent dignity of those under their supervision as paramount. They take this position in the services and assistance they provide and in the amount of discretion and freedom they give surveilled population. Even when a person deviates from established measures or plans, the officers prefer to approach the person directly and look to find ways to solve arising situations. The comprehensive aspect of the professional work in post-carceral institutions reflects each officer's technical preparation: A professional officer must be a university graduate in any of the areas recognized by the penitentiary administration in current regulations. As a result, the Costa Rican penitentiary system adheres to a human rights-based interdisciplinary model of work that allows them to approach each situation from a broader multisided perspective.

VII. Supporting data

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