



Perspectives on Reoffenders: The Views of Detainees, the General Public and Those Working with Offenders

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Abstract

The literature has offered significant data on reoffending: for example, the relationship with drug taking, addiction, mental illness and security. However, research directly involving the voices of detainees and those intervening in the prevention of reoffending appears to be less developed. The present research aims to observe how reoffending is approached by the various players involved: the detainees (whether reoffenders or not), educators and ordinary people. In particular we endeavour to determine how reoffending is perceived, interpreted and managed. The ultimate aim is to assist those involved in the improvement of social reintegration. Interviews revealed substantial differences in how reoffending is interpreted and perceived, and this influences both the management of the risk of reoffending and the process of rehabilitation into society. Furthermore, the results showed some improvements, such as in the teamwork by all players involved, in education for the detainees, and in the implementation of social reintegration projects as alternatives to imprisonment.

Keywords

Reoffending; rehabilitation; social reintegration; social change; qualitative research.

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Introduction

Although there can be significant differences in the details of the definition, reoffending is defined as someone committing a crime that is of the same category for which that person was previously convicted (Henslin et al. 2015; McKean and Ransford 2004). Reoffending is multifaceted (MacKenzie 2000; Warren 2008) like the phenomenon of crime in general and, like crime, is considered a form of social deviance, the understanding of which depends on various interpretations of deviance, and on how these are translated into legislation by different countries. Within the field of penal law, its significance depends on aggravating factors influencing the offender who, after being convicted of a crime, commits another similar offence (Scardaccione 2014; Sette 2016).

In this case, the reoffending depends on the behaviour of the guilty party. Historically, recidivism is determined by a previous detention, a previous sentence or a previous arrest. These three features point to a recidivist as a passive subject; in fact, there is no reference to the actual criminal activity. So what qualifies a subject as a recidivist is not what he did, but past experiences of detention, sentence and/or arrest within the criminal justice system (Gomes and De Molina 2000; Mannheim 2013; Unit 2002). This definition has conditioned prison systems, legislation relating to them, rehabilitation programmes and research into this field, as we shall soon see.

Historically, research has concentrated on the detainee's personal conditions (use of substances, types of crime, psychiatric problems, and so on) and less from the detainee's perspective. Starting with their perceptions is fundamentally important to the planning of effective interventions. This is why research now needs to concentrate on studies directly involving the detainee, noting their beliefs relating to reoffending. Taking these studies as a starting point, the present research aims to discover how reoffending is perceived by the various players involved: the detainees (whether reoffenders or not), legal staff and educators working within the prisons, and ordinary people. In particular we endeavour to determine whether there are different theories about the definition, perception and management of processes that can help reduce reoffending. The present work aims to determine beliefs and theories that can cause reoffending, with the ultimate goal of allowing educators to garner the implications of such theories and to consider detainees' viewpoints on this subject.

Literature studies

In the existing literature, works specifically about reoffending are relatively limited, mainly due to methodological difficulties which make it arduous to complete empirical studies. Information on the actual scale of the phenomenon is scarce.

In the academic literature, research into reoffending can be broken into a number of categories: studies which have analysed the medical causes of reoffending, especially drugs and addiction (Arends, De Haan and Van'T Hoff 2009; Fazel, Bains and Doll 2006; Saucier et al. 2010; Sun et al. 2009; Zhang et al. 2015); studies of detainees with psychiatric problems (Cowell, Broner and Dupont 2004; Morrissey et al. 2006; Steadman et al. 1999); studies which have looked at the relationship with security (DeCou and Pfister 2005; Dute 2011; Gaes and Camp 2009; Zahars and Stivrenieks 2014); and studies which have highlighted the personal characteristics of detainees (Mandraccchia et al. 2007). There are also studies which have investigated the relationship between reoffending and social reintegration, which is the area which interests the present research.

Within this area, several studies have shown how detainees are exposed to reoffending largely because of their social exclusion and economic uncertainty, whereas access to a social support network promotes successful reintegration (Joy Tong and Farrington 2008; Santoro and Tucci 2006). Studies seem to confirm the efficacy of reducing prison time in lessening the probability of reoffending (Joy Tong and Farrington 2006; MacGuire 1995; Sbicca 2016; van der Linden

2015), whereas encounters with the reality of prison have the opposite effect (Drago, Galbiati and Vertova 2011; Jonson 2010; MacKenzie 2005; Nagin, Cullen and Jonson 2009). According to the Italian Department of Penitentiary Administration (Leonardi 2009), reoffending amongst those who are imprisoned for the whole of their sentence is three times that of those who undergo alternatives to detention: 68.5 per cent for the former, as against 19 per cent for the latter.

A study by the Center for Employment Opportunities (Redcross et al. 2012) in New York City involved a controlled experiment on a population of almost 1,000 ex-detainees to draw attention to the effectiveness of interventions which enable prisoners to build up work experience prior to their release, thus helping them reintegrate into society. The study brought to light a 5.7 per cent drop in reoffending and returns to prison for those with access to this form of intervention. Further to this, McIvor (1998) discovered that detainees are less likely to reoffend if social reintegration is seen as a reward rather than a punishment. The difficulty of finding long-term employment after release from prison is one reason for repeat offending, and it was clear that intervention of this type is more effective if it occurs immediately after release from prison.

These studies show the importance of detainees' active involvement in research, noting, for example, the beliefs, theories and expectations of prison leavers and using this information to create interventions to combat reoffending and foster reintegration into the community (Duwe and Clark 2014). This need has been recognised by many studies which allow an understanding of the phenomenon of reoffending by going directly to the words of those who are experiencing the penal system (Ashkar and Kenny 2008; Chui and Cheng 2013; Miner-Romanoff 2012; Ogilvie 2001; Soyler 2014).

Another highly significant study of reoffending by Baccaro and Mosconi (2002), explored the problematical areas and concrete needs at the time of release from prison. Examination of the expectations and needs of prison leavers showed that a predisposition towards reoffending is already being set up inside prison, with alienation from reality explaining the almost total absence of planning for a future of freedom. Although some studies have explored the relationship between the perceptions of detainees and those of the other players involved (Baccaro and Mosconi 2002; Brown 2004), until now there has not been a substantial in-depth analysis of reoffending. The present study examines the relationship between the perceptions of detainees (whether reoffenders or not) and those of the other players (prison officers, social workers and the general population) regarding reoffending.

Method

Theoretical background

The interactionist perspective (Salvini 1998) is characterised by a general theory of knowledge, derived especially from the studies of Mead (1934) and Blumer (1986). This perspective is based on anthropomorphic assumptions: human behaviour is built around continuous interactive processes, and we need to understand their meanings for the person who lives them, together with the pragmatic effects that they produce. Reality is created by the continuous interaction between individuals, involved in giving meanings to events using the interpretative filters in the relevant sociocultural context. The interaction can be considered symbolic in that the individual immersed in a society learns, over time, the rules, roles and interpretative filters of that society, and interacts with others through the use of symbols. The 'interactionist' theoretical approach deals with the problem of deviant behaviour with a unitary approach which sees reoffending, with some differences from case to case, as the result of specific interactions between people, who create their own identity through a process of negotiation. According to this perspective, reoffending is not 'caused' by individual psychological characteristics but is, instead, generated by reasoning and intentions (whether explicit or implicit) expressed by the detainees placed in a certain sociocultural context. Consequently, the identity of the reoffender is defined as a dynamic

process which can continuously change as a result of the interaction between people and/or external phenomena.

This perspective focuses particularly on the importance of capturing the viewpoint of detainees (whether reoffenders or not) towards reoffending and its management, especially by analysing their arguments which explain their choices, whether deviant or not (Salvini and Dondoni 2011). This viewpoint can be influenced by that the other players involved in the prevention of reoffending, such as educators in the prisons, but also ordinary people involved in the process of social reintegration.

Research questions

In view of the theoretical points set out above, we believe that a different way of seeing reoffending can involve different resources and actions, which may or may not jeopardise intervention in prison and rehabilitation. We are interested in understanding how reoffending and non-reoffending detainees view recidivism. Specifically, how do they see it, and what beliefs do they have about it? How do they hope to avoid it? How can they manage the risks? At the same time we are attempting to verify whether there is a difference between the theories of detainees, professionals and ordinary people, so as to highlight critical aspects of a possible theoretical convergence or divergence. What do detainees expect of the community outside, and what does that community expect of them? In what way do officials and detainees have a shared idea of reoffending and the management of its risks?

Objectives

Taking our review of the literature as a starting point, the present research aims to observe the theories on recidivism held by reoffending and non-reoffending detainees, prison workers and ordinary people. The semi-structured interview appeared the most logical way to discover the interviewees' viewpoints on specific subjects. Further, this research describes personal theories connected with the management of reoffending, and factors helping and hindering reintegration. Our objectives are to improve the process of social reintegration and to allow the prison staff and legal and educational professionals to achieve more effective intervention in terms of treatment and rehabilitation.

Sample survey

This study was carried out in 2015 at the prison Due Palazzi in Padova, Italy. The Padova prison is one of the largest penitentiaries in the north-east of Italy, where one section has capacity for about 60 detainees, including prisoners with probation, prisoners working outdoors and inmates, and where there are 370 detention rooms for 600 to 900 detainees. Within this facility is a sports field, a tennis court, a green area equipped for outdoor interviews, a gymnasium, all day medical care and a clinic for specific diagnostics.

The group surveyed consists of:

- 22 reoffending detainees
- 22 non-reoffending detainees
- 22 prison workers
- 22 ordinary people

'Reoffenders' are defined as having had at least one previous period in detention for a minimum of one month; whilst 'non-reoffenders' are people being detained for the first time. The 'prison workers' group consisted of those working within the prisons: psychologists, legal and educational professionals and prison officers. In the 'ordinary people' group we find people with different levels of education working in different environments, and not directly involved with the prisons itself. Detainees were selected with assistance from the educators; prison officers and

educators were brought in with a specific request for their collaboration; whilst ‘ordinary people’ (students, bar staff, office workers) were chosen on the basis of their degree of interest in the topic of this research.

Survey instrument: The semi-structured interview

The instrument employed was the semi-structured interview, which is typically used in qualitative research (Cohen and Crabtree 2004; Patton 2005). The objective of the qualitative interview is to access the perspective of the subjects studied: to capture their personal theories, their interpretations, their feelings and the reasons for their actions. The semi-structured interviewer provides an ‘outline’, which indicates the topics the interview must touch upon (Flick 2009; Wengraf 2001). The interviewer is left free to decide the order in which these topics are dealt with and the ways in which the questions are formulated (Charmaz 2004). These methods allow interviewer and interviewee substantial leeway, whilst guaranteeing that all selected topics are discussed and that all necessary information is gathered (Corbetta 2003; Fylan 2005; Smith 1995).

For our research, each participant was interviewed separately. Each was given an introduction to the project and guaranteed anonymity and privacy. Additionally, informed consent was obtained in writing from every participant. All work was validated by the Ethics Committee of the University of Padova. Participants were not limited in the time allowed for their response to each question and, where necessary, queries were clarified and questions were reformulated. Responses were recorded with a voice recorder and were then transcribed verbatim.

The interview protocol was organised around four dimensions (see Table 1):

1. Description of the reoffending process
2. Definition of reoffending
3. Relationship between reoffending and reintegration
4. Survey of theories about the management of reoffending

Table 1: Description of survey areas

<i>Survey dimension</i>	<i>Description</i>
Description of the reoffending process	This dimension aims to describe the beliefs of detainees, prison workers and ordinary people about the reasons that lead an individual to reoffend and consequently be considered deviant. The questions assist the respondent’s narrative process as they talk about reoffending.
Definition of reoffending	This dimension aims to describe how the various respondents (detainees, prison workers and ordinary people) define and see reoffending, and show what differences there are between the various sample groups identified.
Relationship reoffending-reintegration	This dimension aims to describe the beliefs of detainees, prison workers and ordinary people regarding the critical aspects to tackle during reintegration, and the possible factors which can assist this process.
Theories about the management of reoffending	This dimension aims to describe the beliefs of detainees, prison workers and ordinary people regarding ways of managing reoffending, or rather ways which are used or can be used in the face of such an event.

For each of these dimensions, pinpointed through study of the literature and theoretical samples, a number of questions were identified, which were later analysed in discussion with the groups involved in the study. Table 2 sets out the interview questions for the four dimensions investigated.

Table 2: Survey areas and questions

<i>Dimensions investigated</i>	<i>Interview questions</i>
Description of the reoffending process	1) What are the reasons that lead a person to commit further crimes after the first one? 2) What are the reasons that stop a person reoffending?
Definition of reoffending	1) How would you describe a person who reoffends? 2) How would you describe a person who doesn't reoffend? 3) In your opinion, how does society describe reoffending?
Relationship reoffending-reintegration	1) Describe the difficulties that the detainee has in getting reintegrated. 2) Is there a relationship between reoffending and reintegration? 3) What could help a detainee get reintegrated? 4) How would you describe successful reintegration? What about unsuccessful reintegration?
Theories about the management of reoffending	1) After a period of detention, how can reoffending be managed? 2) How would you describe successful management of reoffending? 3) How would you describe unsuccessful management of reoffending?

Data Encoding

For the data encoding, the method of content analysis was used, which is a process of acquisition, synthesis and reconstitution of the information into written texts (Downe-Wamboldt 1992; Flick 2009; Krippendorff 2012; Tuzzi 2003). This involves breaking down any type of message—verbal and/or non-verbal—into simpler constituent elements called categories. This has an interpretative as well as a descriptive value, in that inferences can be drawn from a text. The categories are identified through an encoding process that is descriptive in the initial phases of research (Stemler 2001) and, as research proceeds, produces categories anchored in the data and context (Elo and Kyngäs 2008).

Results and discussion

How reoffending is perceived

Three different perceptions of reoffending emerge from the groups interviewed. Non-reoffending detainees and some prison workers consider reoffending to be born of necessity or the desire to make quick money: 'In certain cases you reoffend because it's a way to make money quicker'; 'You do it again because you decide to take shortcuts'. So there was substantial agreement that reoffending is seen as a self-aware and intentional act. The second approach saw reoffending as the consequence of lack of work and family support: a viewpoint that is supported in the literature (Redcross et al. 2012): 'The problem is that when you can't find work, you're almost forced to use the old ways'; 'Even though you know very well you run the risk of returning to prison, sometimes just to eat you fall back into old habits'. The third approach is found in the replies of ordinary people and other prison workers, who described the action of reoffending as caused by a psychological or psychiatric disturbance which prevents the reoffender from understanding the situation. Ordinary people did not believe the detainees were able to avoid reoffending, in that the problem was attributed to their 'disturbed' personality: 'They're sick people with

psychological disturbances, who cannot find the strength to get over the problem'; 'If you have already gone wrong and you do it again, it means that you have psychological problems'; 'They're disturbed people who can't change'.

In contrast, almost all detainees dismissed the idea of reoffending as being caused by some form of disturbance: 'Such a person is convinced about the road they have chosen'; 'Some people lose heart but to my mind there's always a way out of it all, but this person hasn't found the strength ...'; 'A person who hasn't had a chance or hasn't had any alternatives'.

It can be seen from this that ordinary people understood reoffending more from a psychological or psychiatric perspective, whereas the reoffenders themselves saw greater intentionality involved. From this emerges the need for care over how the detainee coming out of prison can manage the image of 'disturbed' person attributed by ordinary people and some prison workers. We further believe that the different perspectives of ordinary people and detainees can affect the reintegration process, in that a 'disturbed' view of reoffenders can lead to the setting up of care services (inside and outside prison) for detainees that the latter may not recognise. Whenever the care is accepted, it could reinforce the idea that the problem is 'innate' in them, and that they are not responsible for their own actions if they reoffend. At the same time, though, there are detainees who do not believe they have any psychological problems and thus may be dismissive of the value of the psychological support services that are available in prison.

How the reoffender and non-reoffender are perceived

All detainees and ordinary people considered reoffenders to be conditioned by their environment (weak people, disadvantaged by their environment, dangerous because of their environment), whilst prison workers saw reoffending as a deliberate choice. More specifically, reoffenders were seen by non-reoffenders as weak, persons who were unable to think for themselves and were conditioned by others: 'A person who doesn't understand what he has done, or who lets himself be conditioned by others, is a weak person'; 'If a person repeats the same thing, even more than once, it means they haven't understood anything about life'. Reoffenders saw themselves as disadvantaged by the environment they have lived in, in that they have not had alternatives or the opportunity to tackle life in another way. 'If someone comes out of here, he tries to make do using what he knows how to do...' or as another detainee describes: 'A person who hasn't had any opportunities, hasn't had any alternatives'. Another detainee claims 'A reoffender is a person who has had some chances in life, and has been stupid enough to think they can get really wealthy'. In fact they attribute their situation to lack of support from others.

Ordinary people describe reoffenders as dangerous, victims of circumstance, and lacking awareness: 'A person who in any case should not be a victim of prejudice, but should be helped with appropriate action from the various professionals involved ...'. Additionally they are seen as persons with psychological disturbances and consequently as dangerous individuals because of their deviant personalities: 'They are unable to appreciate the real values in life, and are lost causes'.

Conversely, for prison workers, reoffenders are aware of what they are doing and of their deviant lifestyles, and are not interested in changing, despite the educational opportunities in prison: 'A person who knows what he wants, he wants to commit crimes, he has that aim and doesn't want to improve himself'. So the reoffender is perceived differently by the various groups. It is interesting to note that, when prison workers describe reoffending, they point to intentionality and psychological problems and yet, when describing the reoffender, they point only to intentionality.

In their descriptions of reoffenders, the various groups stress the importance of deep reflection on their own pasts. Non-reoffenders see themselves as mature individuals, intelligent and aware

of the error made, who have taken the second chance offered by education during their prison term: 'You always try to have a nice life and you go into the tunnel, but then you find out it doesn't belong to you ...'; '... A person who works and obeys the rules doesn't go to prison. But if you want to make easy money, you come here more than once, but then you understand that this isn't your road'. The prison workers and ordinary people identify awareness of the error made, the importance of family support and positive reintegration into society as crucial: 'A sufficiently healthy family which is there and supports him. This gives you a chance to understand where you've gone wrong and not reoffend'; 'If they really want it, I strongly believe in the possibility of giving these people the chance to present themselves as people who don't commit crimes'; 'He has found a way to reintegrate himself into the world of the law-abiding'.

The reoffenders think that change can come fortuitously: 'A strong person who has had some luck and the courage to reintegrate and believe there's a life that isn't connected to prison ...'. As for factors that are influential in avoiding reoffending, we conclude that non-reoffenders are noted for intentional actions whereas reoffenders are generally perceived as weak, victims of circumstance and dangerous.

To summarise our study of the four groups, reoffending detainees are differentiated from non-reoffending detainees in not being perceived in just one way; in fact, each group sees them differently. Consequently, we believe there is some ambiguity if one group thinks the reoffender is 'lucky', has certain personal characteristics, or is disturbed or dangerous. The different perceptions would need different intervention strategies. For example, if it is believed the detainee has a psychological disturbance, this would suggest the need to organise psychological support; if it is believed detainee problems are linked with admitting mistakes made, intervention could be educational; and so on.

Reoffending and reintegration

It is interesting to note that, amongst the detainees (whether reoffending or not), the reasons given for successful reintegration were almost exclusively 'external'. In other words, reintegration was attributed to the presence of alternative measures including support from the family and a social network, and getting a job: '... getting the first reintegration into the workplace helps you experiment and take responsibility. If we're given the opportunity, we can return to society as better people'. In terms of importance, this places the materialistic aspect above the educational or psychological aspects in the eyes of the detainee.

The ordinary people and some of the prison workers were convinced that, despite the variety of help and opportunities on offer—education courses and courses of psychological treatment—the detainee will, nevertheless, return to crime: 'We work for the reintegration of all, but it's up to the individual to make the changes!'; 'Even if given the best opportunities, I think he'll fall at the first hurdle ...'.

Alternatively, other prison workers consider the detainee's will to change to be the main factor against reoffending: '... Then just because a person declares he wants to change, it doesn't follow that he really means it. Sometimes I think in order to get out, people are ready to say the right things, to others and to themselves'; 'Some detainees declare they want to change, but then often we realise they hadn't changed at all!' The diversity of opinion amongst prison workers is probably the result of the different work experiences they have had.

As for the possible difficulties that have to be managed, we note that the non-reoffending detainees generally maintain that the first obstacle to overcome is society's diffidence. 'The detainee feels like a court case. He will be marginalised by many, and no-one will look at what he did in prison, to find out if he did something.' This opinion is confirmed by the 'ordinary people'

group, because they admit that it is very difficult to give a second chance to those who have been in prison. 'He's a criminal ... and will remain one ...'.

The prison workers group indicated that the principal obstacle to reintegration was the lack of emotional, social and economic support. Moreover, the same difficulty was identified by the other three groups, although with different argumentation. In addition to this, the workers consider it important that reintegration be done gradually to get the detainee used to a new reality: 'It's difficult having to deal with a different rhythm of life. For example, people greatly underestimate the fact that in prison everything is slowed down, and individuals are severely tested when they leave'. In this case, the prison workers see reintegration as a slow process of socialisation, as confirmed in other research (see, for example, Baccaro and Mosconi 2002). After noting the difficulties of reintegration, those in the prison workers group went on to identify the possible support that a detainee needs for this process. All groups believed that the support of the family and a social network are decisive: '... The family mainly helps you a lot, good friendships and society itself ... if they give you a hand, you can get out of it!'. This shows that the detainees themselves felt the need to use a social network to begin a new way; in fact, they almost expected it. This factor was also found in the literature (McNeill and Whyte 2013; Santoro and Tucci 2006). What seems contradictory is the opinion of the ordinary people, in that: 'Society is the first to be influenced by prejudices and stereotypes'. At the same time, nevertheless, they believed that the fundamental help must come from the family and the social network around the detainee: '... Having a normal life with a job, family and friends who help you is the first thing', Consequently inconsistencies between the detainees' expectations of society and the prejudices attributed to that society possibly exist, which indicates a relationship of non-sharing or, indeed, contrast.

Another significant aspect is the education project as a possible resource so that a detainee can be welcomed by society. There are contrasting opinions on this point. The non-reoffending detainees and the prison workers maintain that the educational route is effective when the detainee has a capacity for reflection: 'The deprivation of freedom, it seems terrible, but in fact the suffering they go through in here makes them change, because they realise it wasn't worth straying'. These two groups specified that the education project must be personalised and not generic, always remembering that the people they work with 'are not court cases, but people with their own problems and emotions.'

This belief is not shared by the other groups (reoffenders and ordinary people), who do not believe in the value of education: 'They aren't very useful, because when you get out it's all different'; 'If you've done it over and over again, the most important thing is to get psychological treatment, not to make plans with educators'.

Management of reoffending

It is important to note the difficulty of getting replies from reoffending detainees, since many of them were unable to supply an opinion on this because they had no thoughts to communicate. Initially they showed interest, tried to think of a possible reply, but in the end we obtained limited responses.

In fact, some in this group were convinced that there is no chance of changing your own behaviour, in that you are aware of having taken a 'deviant road' and, consequently, there is no alternative life: 'This is how I am, I've had my problems, and if they really want to help me they should give me a secure job'; 'How can I change at 50? This is how it's gone, I can't do anything about it. When you take this road you can't turn back'. The position seemed ingrained in many detainees' replies. Furthermore, they saw effective management of reoffending as 'miraculous', a chance event which cannot be planned and pursued through alternative support strategies. From these results, we can deduce that some prisoner respondents can 'justify' their possible

reoffending, in that they attribute their actions not to their intentionality and reflection, but exclusively to 'luck', their 'illness' and their deviance.

Even the non-reoffenders mentioned some difficulties thinking in 'management' terms, but for different reasons. They admitted to concentrating their energies on day-to-day matters while in prison, and not thinking yet about what awaits them outside. They believed that reintegration only occurs outside prison, and not during their time inside with the help of the educational courses on offer: 'Logically if he finds a job and has his things, looks after his own ... he doesn't reoffend. He must think about building his road'. Some described prison reality as being too far removed from outside reality, but did not see this as a problem: 'When I get out, I'll decide what to do. No point in thinking about it now'; 'Right now I've just got to hang on, then we'll see what happens when I get out'. These difficulties showed that few prisoner participants considered they can effectively manage the risk of reoffending through personal reflection about themselves or future relationships.

As already seen, some prison workers believed that management of reoffending is based on the detainees' willpower. Other workers maintained, though, that willpower is not enough to manage reoffending; rather, the detainee needs support when reintegrating into society: 'We should consider halfway structures that make links with the outside world'. The workers' divided views lead to the risk of ambiguity in any interventions.

The ordinary people group believed that psychological help is a priority, sometimes referring to it in punitive terms ('They must get help.') but followed by support from family and society. For ordinary people respondents, reoffending is a symptom of an 'illness' requiring treatment, as one interviewee commented: 'You can't understand a person who commits crimes... a person without hope or future'.

Conclusion

Reoffending is perceived in different ways by the subjects interviewed. It is perceived as intentional by the detainees (whether reoffending or non-reoffending) and by some prison workers—in other words, an aware action within a certain lifestyle—but as an action caused by a psychological disturbance by ordinary people and by other prison workers. Although the detainees consider reoffending intentional, they all see the reoffender as conditioned by 'others' (society, deviance, sociocultural context). It needs to be stressed that, although the action is considered intentional, the detainees justify such an action as caused by the context (poor environment, society, and so on). This is confirmed by the reoffending detainees who believe that those who do not reoffend have essentially been lucky. In contrast, non-reoffenders maintain that detainees who do not reoffend are mature, thinking people, redefining the change in terms of intentionality.

The self-justifying and 'not my fault' attitude is also to be found on the subject of social reintegration, which for all the detainees is strictly linked to what new opportunities society offers for integration. It has been surprising to note how much difficulty detainees have talking about the management of reoffending. Although understanding the questions, many of them did not give a reasoned response. Some of them said they did not know and had not yet thought about it; others thought that it was difficult to change their behaviour. We note from this that they find it difficult to see themselves changing. Indeed, their responses indicate a picture of handing over responsibility to society, to by now well-established deviance and to luck, and in general they see a change in their situation as being 'miraculous' and not plannable. On this subject, the non-reoffenders find it difficult to talk about management, in that their experience is mainly of the day-to-day, and they justify not thinking about management by believing that there is no point in thinking about reintegration until they actually get out. These results may explain why those who stay in prison confinement are only one third as likely to reintegrate successfully as those who

participate in 'prison-territory' integration plans (housing and employment schemes allowing for work release), as shown in the literature (see, for example, Hodges et al. 2011; Zweig Yahner and Redcross 2010); in other words giving them the opportunity to try out integration situations outside prison before they leave. This shows the need to deal with reintegration during their incarceration, perhaps with practical assistance—a point only considered by the prison workers—and not just to wait for the end of their prison term. These outcomes have been also identified by other research (Bales and Mears 2008; Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004; Leonardi 2007; McNeill and Whyte 2013).

The only respondents who did not justify the 'wait and see' attitude were the prison workers who were, nevertheless, convinced that reoffending detainees are aware of what they are doing. Despite this, the prison workers saw the act of reoffending in two different ways: on the one hand, it is perceived as an intentional act; and, on the other hand, it is associated with psychological problems. These different ideas can lead to a different prison worker approach towards detainees and, consequently, an ambiguity in the implementation of educational projects. Hence we note the need to think about consistency in the way prison workers do their job, by means of discussions or training courses aimed at reducing ambiguities (Iudici and Renzi, 2015). Prison workers consistently believe that people who do not reoffend are people who have thought about the error they made. In the opinion of some prison workers, detainee awareness of their error and their willpower are the reasons for successful social reintegration. Other prison workers, however, consider that reoffending detainees choose to continue down a deviant road, and that there is no hope for them. On this point, too, there are contrasting worker views: some believe that the central aspect is will power; others believe that the reoffending detainee will fall again. This ambiguity is food for thought and should lead to monitoring more closely the ways in which detainees are treated.

For the purposes of reintegration, the prison workers, unlike all the other groups, believe gradual help back into society to be crucial, in that a period of preparation for society is necessary; otherwise, failure is likely. This focused our attention on concrete methods that could assist reintegration. Clearly there are divergent views on the role of education projects: the non-reoffenders and prison workers consider them fundamental for awakening awareness of mistakes made and for social reintegration; whilst the reoffenders and ordinary people do not consider such schemes as essential, in that they see reoffending as the result of a clear disturbance or irreversibly deviant path.

Indeed, ordinary people associate reoffending with a psychological disturbance, describing the individual as a 'sick' person who is, therefore, unable to process past actions, and unlikely to reintegrate successfully into a society full of prejudices. In addition to this, the ordinary people perceive the reoffender as a dangerous person. Consequently, they believe that psychological and family support, described both as help and punishment, are necessary. In line with this, the ordinary people consider that those do not reoffend are the ones who have been helped, especially by their own families. So the ordinary people do not consider the detainees to be responsible, seeing reoffending as caused by a psychological problem, seeing reoffenders as dangerous or disturbed, and believing that non-reoffending is to be attributed to family resources. This thinking seems ambiguous, though, in that the ordinary people believe, on the one hand, that society is influenced by prejudice and stereotypes but, on the other hand, that help must come from the detainee's family and social network (Clancey 2015; Johns 2014; Maxwell and Morris 2001).

On the basis of the results obtained, we propose some possible interventions with the aim of making a specific contribution towards social reintegration, and reducing the phenomenon of reoffending. It would be possible to introduce educational projects aimed at the community or prison workers: for example, workgroups for those working in prisons to share their views about each detainee. The aim would be not to arrive at a single uniform view but, rather, to foster a

shared idea of the user to which reports would be added daily in order to define a common and personalised line of intervention. The education courses could be aimed particularly at helping detainees to think about their abilities and the consequences of things they have done. Such activities could be chosen to overcome prejudices and/or stereotypes and to identify common strategies between the place of detention and the community outside with the view of working towards social reintegration (Gelsthorpe and Rex 2004; Iudici, Alborghetti and Ferri 2017; Iudici and Maiocchi 2014; Scott and Gosling 2016; Seiter and Kadela 2003). In keeping with this, we stress the importance of legislation, particularly the use of alternative measures, or the creation of interventions which could build bridges between work in prison and release, or the creation of halfway structures so that the detainee can deal successfully with release from prison and possible reoffending (Clear 2009; Dembo et al. 2008; Faccio and Costa 2013; Hancock and Raeside 2009; Iudici et al. 2015; Smith 2015; Wodahl and Garland 2009). In line with this, psychology courses for detainees aimed at developing skills to manage the prejudice which society still directs at those who have committed crimes might be advisable.

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