

Beyond Rehabilitation: Criminal Records, Employer Perceptions, and Employment Barriers for Released Prisoners in Pakistan

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Abstract

Employment is central to post-release reintegration, yet a criminal record may continue to restrict access to work after a sentence has been completed. This study examined the relationships among criminal-record disclosure, employer perceptions, and hiring intentions toward rehabilitated former prisoners in Pakistan. A quantitative cross-sectional design combined a structured questionnaire with a vignette-based component. A purposive sample of 300 employers, human-resource professionals, recruitment managers, and other employment decision-makers completed measures of perceived risk, stigma, trustworthiness, perceived employability, and hiring intention. Multiple regression showed that criminal-record disclosure ($\beta = -.24, p < .001$), perceived risk ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$), and stigma ($\beta = -.17, p = .006$) were negatively associated with hiring intention, whereas perceived employability ($\beta = .38, p < .001$) and relevant work experience ($\beta = .14, p = .009$) were positively associated with it. The model explained 52% of the variance in hiring intention. Descriptively, mean hiring intention was lowest for a recently released applicant with a criminal record ($M = 2.41$), increased when more time had passed since release ($M = 3.01$), and was higher when rehabilitation evidence was provided ($M = 3.46$), although these vignette differences were not tested inferentially. The findings identify a gap between formal rehabilitation and labour-market recognition of change. Their interpretation is limited by the cross-sectional design, purposive sampling, hypothetical profiles, and the descriptive treatment of vignette differences. The study contributes to the literature by shifting attention from whether former prisoners have been rehabilitated to whether society and employers recognise that rehabilitation. It argues that where criminal records continue to restrict legitimate employment opportunities after rehabilitation, the consequences of punishment may extend beyond the formal sentence and undermine successful reintegration.

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1. Introduction

A criminal sentence formally ends once the punishment imposed by the criminal justice system has been completed. Its consequences, however, may continue long after release. For many former prisoners, one of the most difficult problems is finding legitimate employment. Work provides more than an income. It can restore routine, strengthen family and social ties, and help an individual develop a life that is no longer centred on offending.

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Rehabilitation is meant to support this transition. Prison-based programmes may address behavioural problems, education, vocational skills, and other needs that affect life after release. Yet the value of rehabilitation becomes uncertain when a person returns to the community and continues to face barriers that are tied to a previous conviction. Employment is one area where this problem becomes particularly visible (Gorman et al., 2025; Gul, 2018). During recruitment, employers may consider criminal history when judging an applicant's suitability. In some cases, the nature of a previous offence may reasonably be relevant to the position (Kirk & Wakefield, 2018; Uggen, 2000). In others, the existence of a criminal record may influence how the applicant is viewed more generally. Concerns about trust, reliability, workplace safety, or possible reoffending can shape recruitment decisions even when the person has completed the sentence, gained new skills, or maintained lawful behaviour after release (Porter, Gavin, Zloteanu, 2026).

This creates a difficult gap between rehabilitation and reintegration. A person may complete a rehabilitation programme and show meaningful change, yet still be judged primarily through the record of past offending. The question is therefore not limited to whether rehabilitation has occurred; it also concerns whether that change is recognised outside the prison system (Denver & DeWitt, 2023; Reich, 2023). Employment exclusion can therefore extend the practical consequences of punishment beyond the period ordered by the court. A former prisoner may be legally free but continue to experience restrictions in access to work because of employer perceptions and criminal-record disclosure. These barriers can make it harder to establish financial stability and participate fully in ordinary social life (Griffith et al., 2019; Kirk & Wakefield, 2018).

This particular issue has received comparatively limited empirical attention in Pakistan. Much of the discussion around prisoners focuses on rehabilitation during imprisonment, while less attention is given to what happens when rehabilitated individuals enter the labour market. Understanding employer decision-making is important because successful reintegration depends not only on the efforts of the individual but also on whether genuine opportunities are available after release. Study focuses on employer perceptions, perceived risk, stigma, perceived employability, and hiring intention. It also explores whether rehabilitation evidence, time since release, and relevant work experience correspond with more favourable employment assessments.

1.1 Research Gap

Research has shown that criminal records can place applicants at a disadvantage in the labour market. Employer concerns about risk, trust, suitability, and previous offending may affect recruitment decisions. However, there is limited quantitative evidence on how these issues operate in Pakistan, particularly where the applicant has completed a sentence and can demonstrate rehabilitation. Another gap concerns the way employer perceptions translate a past conviction into a present employment disadvantage. Criminal history does not necessarily affect hiring decisions on its own. Its influence may operate through assumptions about risk, stigma, trustworthiness, and employability. These perceptions may remain influential even when there is evidence that the applicant has changed.

There is also limited evidence on whether employers respond differently when they are given information about rehabilitation or a longer period of lawful behaviour after release. Examining these factors is necessary to understand whether the employment effects of a criminal record lessen over time or remain attached to the individual despite rehabilitation.

1.2 Research Question

To what extent is criminal-record disclosure associated with employment barriers for rehabilitated former prisoners after release in Pakistan?

The study further examines:

1. How do employers perceive rehabilitated former prisoners during recruitment?
2. How is criminal-record disclosure associated with hiring intentions despite evidence of rehabilitation?
3. How are perceived risk, stigma, and perceived employability associated with employment decisions?
4. Which applicant characteristics, including rehabilitation evidence, time since release, and relevant work experience, correspond with lower employment barriers?

1.3 Hypotheses and Exploratory Questions

H1: Criminal-record disclosure is negatively associated with employers' hiring intentions toward rehabilitated former prisoners.

H2: Perceived risk is negatively associated with employers' hiring intentions toward rehabilitated former prisoners.

Exploratory Question 1: Is rehabilitation evidence accompanied by higher hiring-intention scores?

Exploratory Question 2: Is a longer period since release accompanied by higher hiring-intention scores?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Sealing of a criminal record can have a lasting impact after a sentence has been served. Employment history of conviction information can be used to inform an employer's assessment of an applicant for a job. For certain professions, this information could be an immediate relevance to the job function. Other times, though, it can result in generalizations regarding the candidate beyond the job's demands (Griffith, Rade, & Anazodo, 2019; Porter, Gavin, Zloteanu, 2026). There are therefore situations where applications from people who have criminal records will be treated differently from those of people with comparable qualifications, but who have no criminal records. Employers may doubt their dependability, trustworthiness, and/or safety in their workplace. These concerns may impact access to job interviews, formal job opportunities, and opportunities for advancement (Ahmed & Lång, 2017; Pager, Western & Sugie, 2009).

The issue is exacerbated if criminal-record disclosure is mandatory in the recruitment process. It may be legally over, but it does not mean that the consequences of conviction are off. A record can continue to be visible in ways that will impact an applicant's past and current situations as viewed by an employer (Kirk & Wakefield, 2018). It can be an obvious disadvantage if a person has a criminal record and is denied employment. It can also function more subtly, in making decisions about suitability, trust or risk, based on criminal records. Even when the decision is made on the basis of a criminal record, but it is not made with the knowledge that the person had one, this does not mean that it is a discriminatory decision against the person who was a former prisoner (Pager, 2003; Sugie, Zatz, & Augustine, 2020).

2.1 Employee Attitudes and Intentions

Qualifications are not the only things considered when making the decision about who to hire. Employers also consider if someone is likely to be reliable, trustworthy and to fit in with the work environment. These judgments can be affected by knowledge of past offending for those who have had criminal records (Denver & DeWitt, 2023; Sugie, Zatz, & Augustine, 2020). Employers might be concerned about dishonesty, workplace safety, reoffending, reliability and/or the reputation of their organisation based on a criminal record. These concerns

can impact hiring decisions even if the offense has little connection to the job that is being filled (DeWitt & Denver, 2020; Sugie, Zatz, & Augustine, 2020).

However, employers' responses will not be the same in every instance. The nature of the offense, the time elapsed since the release, the subsequent conduct of the applicant, evidence of rehabilitation and the particular job requirements may all impact on the interpretation of the criminal record (Denver, 2020; DeWitt & Denver, 2020; Jaynes et al., 2025). Thus, in the current study the hiring intention is used as a proxy for the response of the employer. The intention to hire does not necessarily lead to a hiring decision, but it does allow an evaluation of whether criminal-record information is correlated to a decrease in hiring willingness and whether more recent information regarding the applicant is correlated to a more positive evaluation.

2.2 Risk and Perceived Employability and Stigma

An employer's knowledge of an applicant's past is not the only aspect of a criminal record that could affect him or her. It can also help to influence the person's current perception of themselves. The nature of a person's current qualifications and behaviour can be viewed in light of the person's prior criminal history (Denver, Pickett, & Bushway, 2017; Link & Phelan, 2001; Sugie, Zatz, & Augustine, 2020). This process is very related to stigma. It is not a requirement that only skills, experience and suitability be considered. Instead, the criminal record can become an aspect of the recruitment process (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001).

Two judgements are mentioned here, which are of special relevance for this context, namely perceived risk and perceived employability. Perceived risk involves how much an employer thinks that the applicant might be a cause of issues regarding safety, reliability, trust and functioning of the organisation. Perceived employability is an employer's assessment of whether or not the applicant is capable, fit and appropriate for the job opportunity (Denver & DeWitt, 2023; Sugie, Zatz, & Augustine, 2020). These judgements may not necessarily be a true reflection of the applicant's actual capability to undertake the work. The combination of the skills and experience required for the job may be the same but someone may have been caught with a conviction and so may not seem to be as employable. This means that there is a mismatch between the applicant's current abilities and the employer's perception of the applicant's ability (Denver, Pickett, & Bushway, 2017; DeWitt & Denver, 2020).

2.3 Rehabilitation and Second-Chance Employment

Rehabilitation takes the premise that a person can change. Education, vocational training, counselling, behavioural programmes and other support services can help prisoners build the skills and attitudes required to reintegrate into society in a legal fashion when they are released from prison (Gorman et al., 2025; Gul, 2018). One of the key elements of this process is employment. Work can be a source of economic security, a structure of daily living, a sense of belonging and a proper social identity. These conditions can aid a released prisoner in the transition from prison to community life. The challenge is when rehabilitation is acknowledged by the correctional system, but is not a factor in the labour market. While a person may undertake rehabilitation, acquire qualifications, and continue to behave lawfully, the most important tool used to assess him or her is past offending (Ahmed et al., 2026; Gorman et al., 2025; Uggen, 2000).

Vocational trainings, education, counselling, good behavior and work experience after release can give an employer more up-to-date information about an applicant. The interpretations of old convictions may also change with time. A crime committed many years

ago, may be perceived differently than one that has occurred in a recent release (Denver, 2020; DeWitt & Denver, 2020; Jaynes et al., 2025; Reich, 2023).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study is largely based on the labelling theory and stigma theory with support from ideas obtained from desistance and reintegration perspectives. Labelling theory offers a perspective for understanding how the criminal identity can remain to impact social opportunities beyond the bounds of the formal sentence. Employers might also be more inclined to take into account other data in their favor once someone has a criminal history. Qualifications, work experience or evidence of change are then considered in the context of past offending (Becker, 1963; Denver, Pickett, & Bushway, 2017).

A similar explanation is given by the theory of stigma. A criminal record can have a negative social connotation and impact on the ability to access typical social and economic opportunities for people. This can manifest in employment in terms of decreased levels of trust, increased perceptions of risk, or decreased assessments of employability (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001; Sugie, Zatz, & Augustine, 2020).

Combined, these views imply a conceptual progression from a criminal record to perceived risk and stigma to perceived employability and hiring intentions (Denver & DeWitt, 2023; Sugie, Zatz & Augustine, 2020). This sequence presents the interpretation of the study; it is not considered a formally tested mediation model. Information about an applicant's current conduct and capacity may be given to an employer by evidence of rehabilitation, longer time since release or work experience that is relevant to rehabilitation. The vignette analysis reported here is descriptive, and so these factors are explored rather than tested as causal effects (DeWitt & Denver, 2020; Jaynes et al., 2025; Reich, 2023).

The theoretical base of the study is that rehabilitation can transform the person, while reintegration into employment also requires an understanding of the evidence of this change by employers. The study thus builds on the previous research and aims to investigate the relationship between criminal-record information, employer perceptions and hiring intent in Pakistan. It is contextual and empirical as it brings the rich labelling and stigma literature to a context where the employer response to rehabilitated former prisoners has been studied little quantitatively (Gorman et al., 2025; Prescott, & Starr, 2020).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional design with both a structured questionnaire as well as a vignette-based aspect. The questionnaire included relationships between the criminal-record information, employer perception, related work experience and hiring intention. The vignette component categorized the hypothetical descriptions of the applicants for those applicants to be compared descriptively (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Porter et al., 2026).

The vignette portion had similar broad qualifications and work experiences for the different applicants. The profiles differed in criminal record details, length of time since release

and in evidence for rehabilitation. The vignette portion is not reported as a random allocation and/or inferential profile comparison and therefore is not considered evidence of causal effects.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The respondents were employers, human resource professionals, recruitment managers and other people who take employment related decisions in Pakistan.

The size of the sample was determined by purposive sampling because the respondents were those who had experience in making recruitment, supervisory and employment decisions. The final sample included 300 respondents (108 from public sector, 157 from private sector, and 35 from other employment sectors). The non-probability design was suitable for achieving the relevant decision makers but not for the purpose of making statistical generalisations to all the employers in Pakistan.

3.3 Survey and Questionnaire

Structured questionnaire was used for the data collection. The majority of items were rated on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The questionnaire covered the perceived risk, stigma, trustworthiness, perceived employability, attitudes toward rehabilitated former prisoners, criminal-record screening, and hiring intention. The number of items of demographic and professional data collected were limited which were used to describe the respondents and their employment backgrounds. The reliability of the composite scale was estimated by Cronbach's alpha and the results are shown in Table 2.

3.4 Vignette-Based Component

Four fictional candidates with similar skill sets and experience were used to evaluate the participants. There were three features to the profiles:

- criminal-record disclosure;
- how much time has elapsed since the release.
- evidence of rehabilitation.

The participants rated the applicants on their suitability, risk, employability, and possibility of interview and employment.

The vignette was included as a standard anchor that was used to examine levels of hiring intentions across profiles. The comparisons mentioned were descriptive in nature because the results available did not contain inferential test nor information about the design that can be used to detect causal effects (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Akoensi, & Tankebe, 2024).

3.5 Variables and Measurement

The outcome variable for the regression analysis was the intention of hiring, and criminal-record disclosure was the most important predictor. Perceived risk, stigma, perceived employability and relevant work experience were the major explanatory variables. The descriptive summary of trustworthiness is reported here and was not included in the described regression model. The vignette component was used to explore rehabilitation evidence and time since release descriptively.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data from the respondents were summarised using descriptive statistics to describe the characteristics and main study variables. A Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was used to test the internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Multiple regression analysis was employed to analyse the relationship between criminal-record disclosure, perceived risk, stigma, perceived employability and relevant work

experience with hiring intention. Reported are the model R-squared, standardised regression coefficients and p values.

Descriptive comparisons were made between the mean hire intention scores of the four applicant profiles. No statistical tests of the profile differences are reported, so the results obtained from the vignette are interpreted as exploratory patterns, rather than as statistically proven differences.

Ethics and Quality Assurance (3.7)

Informed consent was obtained and participation in the study was voluntary. Hypothetical employment scenarios were presented for evaluation by the respondents and no unnecessary identifying information was sought. The responses were reported in a summary. Content Validity Scale was dealt by expert review and Pilot testing. To ensure consistency, standardised administration was used and internal consistency was measured with the Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). These procedures help to assure instrument quality, but they do not, in and of themselves, create construct validity or remove response bias.⁴ Results

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

Respondents were described using demographic and professional characteristics relevant to employment decision-making, including gender, age, recruitment experience, and employment sector.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	182	60.7
	Female	118	39.3
Age	25–34	94	31.3
	35–44	112	37.3
	45+	94	31.4
Recruitment experience	<5 years	78	26.0
	5–10 years	104	34.7
	11+ years	118	39.3
Sector	Public	108	36.0

Characteristic	Category	n	%
	Private	157	52.3
	Other	35	11.7

Note: n = number of respondents; % = percentage of the sample.

4.2 Descriptive and Reliability Analysis

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Perceived Risk	3.42	0.81	.86
Stigma	3.18	0.87	.84
Trustworthiness	3.06	0.83	.85
Perceived Employability	2.91	0.79	.82
Hiring Intention	2.88	0.91	.89

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha. Measures use a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Table 2 summarises the central study constructs using their mean scores, standard deviations, and internal-consistency estimates. Because the study uses a five-point Likert scale, a mean closer to 5 indicates stronger agreement with the items measuring the relevant construct, whereas a mean closer to 1 indicates weaker agreement. The results show relatively higher perceived risk and relatively lower perceived employability and hiring intention. Cronbach's alpha values indicate acceptable-to-high internal consistency across the reported measurement scales.

4.3 Regression Results

Table 3. Standardised Regression Coefficients Predicting Hiring Intention

Predictor	β	p
Criminal-record disclosure	-.24	<.001

Predictor	β	p
Perceived risk	-.31	<.001
Stigma	-.17	.006
Perceived employability	.38	<.001
Relevant work experience	.14	.009
Model	$R^2 = .52$	$p < .001$

Note: β = standardised regression coefficient; p = statistical significance; R^2 = proportion of variance in hiring intention explained by the model. Negative coefficients indicate lower hiring intention and positive coefficients indicate higher hiring intention.

Model: $R^2 = .52$, $p < .001$.

Criminal-record disclosure, perceived risk, and stigma were negatively associated with hiring intention, whereas perceived employability and relevant work experience were positively associated with it. The reported model explained 52% of the variance in hiring intention (R -squared = .52, $p < .001$). These coefficients indicate conditional associations within the model and should not be interpreted as longitudinal or population-wide causal effects.

4.4 Descriptive Vignette Results

Table 4. Hiring Intentions by Applicant Profile

Applicant Profile	Mean Hiring Intention
No criminal record	4.02
Criminal record + recent release	2.41
Criminal record + longer period since release	3.01
Criminal record + rehabilitation evidence	3.46

Note: M = mean hiring-intention score.

Table 4 presents mean hiring-intention scores across four applicant profiles. The lowest mean occurred for the profile combining a criminal record with recent release ($M = 2.41$), compared with 4.02 for the applicant without a criminal record. The mean increased to 3.01 when a longer period had elapsed since release and to 3.46 when rehabilitation evidence was provided. These values describe the observed sample pattern only; without inferential comparisons, dispersion estimates, and allocation details, they do not establish statistically significant or causal differences between profiles.

4.5 Assessment of Hypotheses and Exploratory Questions

Table 5. Hypothesis and Exploratory Question Assessment

Hypothesis or Exploratory Question	Evidence and Interpretation
H1: Criminal-record disclosure is negatively associated with hiring intention	Supported by the reported regression association (beta = -.24, $p < .001$).
H2: Perceived risk is negatively associated with hiring intention	Supported by the reported regression association (beta = -.31, $p < .001$).
Exploratory Question 1: Rehabilitation evidence and hiring intention	The observed mean is higher when rehabilitation evidence is present, but no inferential comparison is reported.
Exploratory Question 2: Time since release and hiring intention	The observed mean is higher after a longer period since release, but no inferential comparison is reported.

Table 5 distinguishes confirmatory evidence from exploratory description. H1 and H2 are supported by the reported regression coefficients. The two questions concerning rehabilitation evidence and time since release are addressed only through the descriptive vignette means and are not treated as confirmed hypotheses.

5. Discussion

5.1 Criminal Records and Employment Barriers

The findings indicate that criminal-record disclosure was negatively associated with hiring intention in this sample, including in assessments involving applicants described as having completed their sentences and undergone rehabilitation. The observed pattern is consistent with the possibility that the consequences of conviction continue beyond formal punishment. This supports the central argument of the study: rehabilitation does not automatically eliminate the employment consequences of a criminal record.

The finding is important because employment is not merely an economic outcome. For released prisoners, legitimate employment can provide stability, social participation, routine, and an opportunity to establish a non-criminal identity.

5.2 Employer Perceptions and Employment Discrimination

The regression results are consistent with the view that perceived risk, stigma, and employability are relevant to employer responses to applicants with criminal records. The present analysis identifies associations among these variables but does not establish a causal mediation pathway.

Employers may interpret criminal history as an indicator of potential risk or reduced trustworthiness, even where the applicant has demonstrated rehabilitation. Consequently, employment exclusion may occur through perceptions and assumptions rather than explicit statements that the applicant is being rejected because of a criminal record. This suggests that discrimination can operate indirectly through risk-based recruitment decisions and reduced assessments of employability.

5.3 Role of Rehabilitation and Time Since Release

The vignette means show an exploratory pattern in which rehabilitation evidence and a longer period since release accompany higher hiring-intention scores. This pattern is

theoretically relevant, but it should not be interpreted as statistically confirmed without inferential comparisons and fuller reporting of the vignette allocation. The observed pattern is consistent with prior research suggesting that evidence of completed rehabilitation, relevant skills, or sustained lawful conduct may improve employer assessments.

Nevertheless, if applicants with rehabilitation evidence continue to receive lower evaluations than otherwise comparable applicants without criminal records, rehabilitation remains incomplete at the level of social reintegration. The individual may have changed, while the social meaning of the criminal record remains.

5.4 Comparison with Previous Research

The findings are broadly consistent with international research demonstrating that criminal records can negatively influence employment opportunities and employer evaluations. This study adds contextual evidence by placing the recognition of rehabilitation at the centre of the analysis. Rather than treating former prisoners only as applicants with criminal records, it examines whether employers' assessments vary when more current information about rehabilitation and post-release conduct is available.

The Pakistani context is also significant because relatively limited empirical research has examined employer perceptions of rehabilitated former prisoners and the employment mechanisms through which criminal records may continue to influence reintegration.

5.5 Theoretical Implications

The findings are consistent with labelling and stigma perspectives on post-release employment. A criminal record may operate as a continuing social label that influences how employers interpret an individual's current characteristics. This suggests a potential mismatch between rehabilitated status and perceived employability.

The findings also have implications for desistance. If stable employment supports desistance, persistent employment exclusion may undermine the reintegration conditions that rehabilitation seeks to establish.

6. Policy Implications

6.1 Fair Criminal-Record Screening

The findings support further consideration of criminal-record screening based on relevance, proportionality, and necessity. A conviction need not operate as an automatic, permanent disqualification where it is unrelated to the position and current evidence indicates rehabilitation. Employers should consider the nature of the offence, its relevance to the position, time since release, subsequent conduct, rehabilitation, qualifications, and work experience.

6.2 Employer Guidelines

Employer and human-resource guidance could help decision-makers distinguish historical offending from present suitability. Such guidance should address the relevance of the offence, the requirements of the role, evidence of rehabilitation, and the risk of relying on generalised stigma. Training should address stigma, unconscious bias, and evidence-based risk assessment.

6.3 Second-Chance Employment

Second-chance employment initiatives may complement rehabilitation and reintegration policy. Vocational training, employment counselling, job matching, apprenticeships, and employer partnerships could improve access to legitimate work, but their effectiveness in Pakistan requires direct evaluation.

Government and relevant institutions could also consider appropriate incentives for employers willing to provide genuine employment opportunities.

6.4 Criminal-Record Disclosure Reform

Criminal-record disclosure rules merit careful legal and policy review to determine when disclosure is necessary, proportionate, and relevant to a particular occupation. The present study does not evaluate Pakistan's legal framework and therefore supports policy investigation rather than a specific legislative conclusion. Comparative mechanisms such as spent-conviction periods, restricted disclosure, or record sealing may provide useful models for discussion. Any Pakistani reform would require separate legal analysis, clear eligibility criteria, procedural safeguards, and exceptions for roles involving demonstrable public-safety or fiduciary concerns.

7. Conclusion

This study examined, whether criminal-record information was associated with employment barriers for rehabilitated former prisoners after release. In this purposive sample of employment decision-makers, criminal-record disclosure was negatively associated with hiring intention, as were perceived risk and stigma. Perceived employability and relevant work experience were positively associated with hiring intention. The vignette means were also higher for profiles describing a longer period since release or evidence of rehabilitation. Because those profile differences were not tested inferentially, they should be read as exploratory patterns rather than confirmed effects. The findings suggest that completion of rehabilitation does not necessarily result in full employment reintegration when criminal records continue to shape employer decision-making.

7.1 Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design does not establish temporal or causal relationships, and purposive sampling limits statistical generalisation beyond the respondents studied. The survey relies on self-reported attitudes and may be affected by social-desirability and common-method bias. The vignette profiles represent hypothetical rather than observed recruitment decisions, and the reported means lack inferential comparisons and dispersion estimates. The study also focuses on employers rather than the lived employment experiences of released prisoners. These limitations require cautious interpretation of the effect estimates and policy implications.

Future research should therefore combine employer studies with surveys or interviews of rehabilitated former prisoners and, where possible, employ longitudinal designs to examine employment trajectories after release. Further research could also examine whether employment barriers vary according to offence type, gender, occupation, time since release, rehabilitation programme, and employment sector. Comparative research across jurisdictions with different criminal-record disclosure and second-chance employment policies could further identify effective approaches to reducing post-release employment exclusion.

Successful rehabilitation involves more than individual change; it also depends on access to credible opportunities for social participation. The present findings suggest that employer perceptions may contribute to the continuing gap between rehabilitation and employment reintegration. More representative, longitudinal, and behaviourally grounded research is needed to establish the scale of that gap and identify effective responses.

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