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Attitudes Toward Ex-Prisoners (ATEP) Scale: A Scale Development and Validation Study¹

Eski Hükümlülere Yönelik Tutumlar (EHYT) Ölçeği: Ölçek Geliştirme ve Geçerlik Çalışması

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to develop a reliable and valid assessment tool, the Attitudes Toward Ex-prisoners (ATEP) scale, to measure individuals' attitudes toward ex-prisoners. A total of 276 women and 166 men (*Age* = 24.36, *SD* = 4.90) participated in the study. Participants completed an 80-item questionnaire designed to gauge attitudes toward ex-prisoners. Through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, a 4-factor, 26-item model emerged as the best representation of the ATEP scale. The identified factors were labeled as Social Interaction (9 items), Compassion (6 items), Social Support (6 items), and Condemnation (5 items). To assess the internal consistency of each subscale, Cronbach alpha coefficients were computed, demonstrating satisfactory reliability with values of .90 for Social Interaction, .78 for Compassion, .76 for Social Support, and .75 for Condemnation. The results of the study confirmed the reliability and validity of the ATEP scale. The scale demonstrated robust psychometric properties, allowing researchers to effectively measure and understand attitudes toward ex-prisoners.

Keywords: Ex-prisoners, Ex-prisoner reentry, Attitude scale, Validity, Reliability.

ÖZET

Çalışmanın amacı, bireylerin eski hükümlülere yönelik tutumlarını ölçmek için güvenilir ve geçerli bir değerlendirme aracı olan "Eski Hükümlülere Yönelik Tutumlar" (EHYT) ölçeğini geliştirmektir. Çalışmaya toplam 276 kadın ve 166 erkek (Yaş ortalaması = 24.36, SS = 4.90) katılmıştır. Katılımcılar, eski hükümlülere yönelik tutumları ölçmek için tasarlanmış 80 maddelik bir anketi tamamlamışlardır. Keşfedici ve doğrulayıcı faktör analizleri aracılığıyla, 4 faktörlü, 26 madde içeren bir ölçek modeli ortaya çıkmıştır. Belirlenen faktörler Sosyal Etkileşim (9 madde), Şefkat (6 madde), Sosyal Destek (6 madde) ve Kınama (5 madde) olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Her alt ölçeğin iç tutarlılığını değerlendirmek için Cronbach alfa katsayıları hesaplanmıştır: Sosyal Etkileşim = .90, Şefkat .78, Sosyal Destek için = .76 ve Kınama = .75 değerleriyle tatmin edici güvenilirlik göstermektedir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, EHYT ölçeğinin güvenilirliğini ve geçerliğini doğrulamaktadır. Ölçeğin, araştırmacıların eski hükümlülere yönelik tutumları etkili bir şekilde ölçmelerine ve anlamalarına olanak tanıyan psikometrik özelliklere sahip olduğu ortaya konmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eski hükümlüler, Eski hükümlülerin hayata katılımı, Tutum ölçeği, Geçerlik, Güvenirlilik.

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, criminal activities are prevalent, evident from the frequent reports in newspapers and news bulletins. Each day, new individuals are incarcerated, while others are released. An ex-prisoner is defined as an individual who has completed their designated prison sentence as determined by a trial and has subsequently been granted release (Yin, 2020). Nonetheless, upon reentering society, ex-prisoners often encounter a dearth of support and numerous challenges. Many of them suffer from a lack of education, confront societal stigmatization, and experience a profound sense of isolation (Petersilia, 2003). The process of rebuilding their lives and reintegrating into society after serving time in prison presents significant difficulties for ex-prisoners, particularly due to the interpersonal issues they must navigate during this phase (Bales & Mears, 2008). These challenges encompass familial and societal rejection,

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difficulties in securing employment, struggles with readjustment to life outside of prison after a prolonged sentence, feelings of inferiority that adversely affect mental health, and limited access to after-care services (Besin-Mengla, 2020; Borzycki, 2005; Canton, 2022; Chikadzi, 2017; Chui & Cheng, 2013; Kyprianides et al., 2019; Martinez & Christian, 2009). These factors substantially impede the successful reintegration of offenders and elevate the risk of recidivism (Chikadzi, 2017). Therefore, understanding society's attitudes towards ex-prisoners assumes critical importance, serving as the main aim of this study. We seek to develop the "Attitudes toward Ex-prisoners" (ATEP) scale, that can measure public attitudes toward ex-prisoners.

1.1. Attitudes toward Ex-prisoners

Attitudes toward ex-prisoners refer to the beliefs, opinions, and feelings individuals possess concerning individuals who have undergone incarceration and later been released from correctional facilities (Mosser, 2022). These attitudes can vary widely among members of society and are influenced by various factors, including cultural norms, personal experiences, media portrayals, and government policies (Rade et al., 2016).

Positive attitudes towards ex-prisoners may include beliefs in the potential for rehabilitation, second chances, and the importance of supporting individuals in their efforts to reintegrate into society (Christensen & Larsen, 2020). People with positive attitudes may advocate for policies and programs that aim to provide education, employment opportunities, and social support, all geared toward helping ex-prisoners in their successful reintegration into society (Kjelsberg et al., 2007). On the other hand, negative attitudes towards ex-prisoners may involve perceptions of individuals as dangerous, untrustworthy, or undeserving of social assistance (Rade et al., 2016). People with negative attitudes may support punitive measures, limited access to resources, and barriers to reintegration, driven by the notion that former prisoners should confront the outcomes of their actions independently, without assistance.

The societal attitude towards formerly incarcerated individuals is gradually evolving, as they are now being more warmly welcomed and successfully reintegrated into communities (Leverentz, 2011). Once vilified and shunned, ex-convicts are slowly gaining acceptance. However, it is important to acknowledge that resentment towards former convicts still persists within society (Leverentz, 2006). While this transformation towards acceptance is in progress, it will undoubtedly take time to fully materialize. Nevertheless, the fact that society is currently divided in its feelings towards ex-offenders suggests that the process of change is already underway and demands immediate attention (Pansag et al., 2016).

Andrews (2015) conducted a study examining how community attitudes are influenced by various factors, such as age, income, and education. The results revealed interesting variations in attitudes towards ex-offenders. Young adults, specifically those between 18 and 24 years old, displayed a greater level of ease with residing in close proximity to someone with a previous criminal record. Additionally, individuals possessing greater levels of education were more inclined to provide their support for the reintegration of ex-offenders, while those with significantly higher weekly incomes were also more likely to back reintegration efforts, compared to those with lower incomes. These findings highlight the importance of considering diverse factors that shape attitudes towards ex-convicts within different segments of society.

Research by Park (2009) conducted with college students provides further support for the claim that attitudes towards ex-offenders vary and may still be marked by some reluctance. In this study, 41.8% of the participants expressed general acceptance of ex-offenders as neighbors. However, the number decreased to 35.9% when asked if they would be open to renting their homes to formerly incarcerated individuals. The study also examined perceptions related to public safety and legal barriers. While half of the participants disagreed that ex-prisoners would pose a threat to the security of the community, 28.6% of respondents still held the belief that they might. On a more positive note, over half of the participants agreed that ex-prisoners should have their voting rights and drivers' licenses restored. Interestingly, the study also found that participants revealed more favorable views regarding the reintegration of ex-offenders into society when indirect involvement was required, as opposed to direct involvement. This suggests that while some individuals may be more accepting of ex-offenders in general, they may still exhibit reservations when it comes to direct personal interactions or commitments.

Indeed, research has consistently demonstrated that negative attitudes towards ex-prisoners within society present significant obstacles to their successful reentry efforts (Petersilia, 2003). Interestingly, a study by Cullen et al. (1988) investigating society's perspectives on punishment and rehabilitation revealed a unique duality in attitudes. Participants in the study expressed support for both punishment and rehabilitation of

criminals. They believed that offenders should serve their sentences, but they should also be provided with opportunities for rehabilitation following their punishment.

This duality in societal attitudes towards punishment and rehabilitation highlights the complexity of public perceptions surrounding ex-prisoners. By conducting a study that measures attitudes towards ex-prisoners, we can gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics and identify effective rehabilitation components. Such research can contribute valuable insights towards developing interventions and policies that foster a more supportive and accepting environment for ex-prisoners as they seek to reintegrate into society.

1.2. Social Implications

Attitudes towards ex-prisoners can have significant implications for the successful reintegration of individuals into society. Positive attitudes and supportive environments can enhance an ex-prisoner's ability to find stable employment, maintain positive relationships, and lead a fulfilling life after serving time in prison (Fahmy, 2021; Gwynne et al., 2020; SEU, 2002). Conversely, negative attitudes and stigmatization can hinder reintegration efforts, leading to difficulties in finding housing, employment, and social support, and increasing the risk of recidivism (Borg, 1997; Burgess-Allen et al., 2006; SEU, 2002).

Understanding and addressing attitudes toward ex-prisoners is essential for promoting a fair and just society. It requires examining the root causes of negative attitudes and implementing policies and interventions that challenge stigmatization and support successful reintegration (Chui & Cheng, 2013). Research on attitudes toward ex-prisoners can contribute to evidence-based approaches that aim to break the cycle of incarceration, reduce recidivism, and foster a more inclusive and supportive community for all individuals, including those who have served their time in prison (Benson et al., 2011; Chiricos et al., 2007; Fahmy, 2021).

Policymakers have increasingly recognized the critical importance of facilitating the successful reintegration of former prisoners into society for the sake of the security of the community (Travis & Visser, 2005). As a result, numerous campaigns, projects, and policies have been developed worldwide to address this issue and provide support to individuals transitioning from incarceration back into the community. For example, in Turkey, acknowledging the significance of effective reentry measures, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) officially accepted the probation system in 2012, marking a significant step towards promoting successful rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-prisoners (<http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k6291.html>). This approach aligns with the growing global awareness that investing in successful reentry efforts benefits not only the individuals involved but also contributes to public safety and community well-being as a whole.

1.3. Current Study

The current study seeks to address the pressing issue of reentry challenges faced by individuals released from prison on a daily basis, along with their high recidivism rates. Understanding society's attitudes towards ex-prisoners is of utmost importance in this context, as it can significantly impact their successful reintegration into society. To fulfill this aim, the study endeavors to develop a comprehensive scale that can effectively measure the various dimensions of society's attitudes toward ex-prisoners. This scale will provide valuable insights into the factors influencing these attitudes, enabling researchers to explore this topic across different groups, circumstances, and experimental designs. Despite ongoing research efforts into attitudes towards ex-prisoners, there remains insufficient information, especially considering the context of the Turkish sample. Thus, this study aims to delve deep into this subject to shed light on the current state of societal attitudes in Turkey. By gaining insight into this area, the study hopes to contribute valuable data for future research endeavors in this field.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

The study involved a total of 443 participants, comprising 276 women, 166 men, and one participant who did not report their gender. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 62 years, with a mean age of 24.36 and a standard deviation of 4.90. The majority of the participants were from Ankara (61%) and İstanbul (19%). Among them, 64% identified as students, while the rest were engaged in various occupations. A significant portion of the student participants were from different departments at [blinded] and participated in the study in exchange for partial course credit.

Regarding their personal connections to the topic, 25% of the participants reported having an ex-prisoner family member, friend, or relative, and 33% stated they knew an ex-prisoner. Additionally, 41% of the participants declared that they had been victims of some form of crime in their lives.

2.2. Procedure

Upon receiving permission from the Human Research Ethics Committee of [blinded], the research team conducted a literature review to identify the fundamental dimensions of attitudes towards ex-prisoners. The findings were subsequently presented and discussed with colleagues in a classroom setting. Based on this collaborative effort, a pool of 118 items was generated by graduate students and a professor specializing in social psychology. Afterwards, the Attitudes Toward Ex-prisoners (ATEP) scale was made available online, and the link to the survey was shared with potential participants. Additionally, permission was sought from lecturers to apply paper-based scales in their classroom. The data collection phase was carried out using both online and paper-based mediums, accommodating participants' preferences. Throughout the data collection process, all participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study and invited to participate voluntarily.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Demographic Information Form

The participants in the study were asked to provide essential demographic information, including their gender, age, education level, and occupation. Additionally, they were prompted to indicate whether they had an ex-prisoner family member, friend, or relative, which was categorized as being in the "inner circle." Similarly, they were asked if they had an ex-prisoner acquaintance, referred to as the "great circle." Moreover, participants were inquired about their personal experiences with criminal activities, encompassing incidents such as burglary, physical offenses, or purse snatching. They were asked to indicate if they had been victims of any kind of criminal activity in the past.

2.3.2. Attitudes Toward Ex-prisoner (ATEP) Scale

The item pool for the scale was initially developed with 118 items, taking into account various aspects related to ex-prisoners, including labels, social difficulties they face, and factors contributing to successful reentry. The items underwent a rigorous evaluation process, considering factors such as scope validity, ambiguity, repetitiveness, integrity of meaning, sentence smoothness, and the balance of negative-positive items. After careful analysis, 38 items were removed due to failing to meet the criteria set during the elimination process. The final scale consisted of 80 items, 39 of which were reverse-scored items. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the remaining 80 items, revealing a valid and reliable scale with 26 items, 11 of which were reversed. This final version of the ATEP scale encompasses a range of attitudes towards ex-prisoners, offering a comprehensive assessment of participants' perspectives. Some sample items from the ATEP scale are as follows: "I do not wish to have a romantic partner who has a past as an ex-prisoner." (reverse item)" and "I believe that ex-prisoners should be reintegrated into society". Participants were requested to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a 6-point Likert-type scale, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 6 represented "strongly agree." Higher scores on the scale indicated a more positive attitude toward ex-prisoners.

2.3.3. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) – Forgiveness of Others Subscale

To establish construct validity for the Attitudes Toward Ex-prisoners (ATEP) scale, the study utilized the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) - Forgiveness of Others Subscale ($\alpha = .93$). This subscale, consisting of 6 items, assesses dispositional forgiveness, which focuses on a general inclination to forgive, rather than forgiveness directed towards a specific event or individual (Thompson et al., 2005). The HFS itself comprises three distinct subscales, each consisting of six items: Forgiveness of Self, Forgiveness of Others, and Forgiveness of Situations. For the purpose of the present study, only the Forgiveness of Others subscale was employed. A sample item is as follows: "When someone disappoints me, I can eventually move past it". The process of adapting the HFS into the Turkish language was undertaken by Bugay and Demir (2010), who performed the necessary translation and cultural adaptation to ensure the scale's relevance and applicability to the Turkish-speaking participants.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Reliability and Validity of Attitudes toward Ex-prisoners (ATEP) Scale

3.1.1. Factor Structure

An exploratory factor analysis was performed on the 80-item ATEP scale, employing the varimax rotation method. Prior to the analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were conducted, demonstrating that the data was suitable for factor analysis, with a KMO value of .91 and a significant Bartlett's Test, $\chi^2(325) = 4654.87$, $p < .001$, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007).

In the first analysis, a 14-factor model was initially identified, based on Kaiser's criterion, which stipulates retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. This initial model accounted for 62.57% of the variance. However, upon examining the scree plot, deviations were observed around components 2 and 4, prompting a closer examination of these models in terms of explained variance, factor loadings of indicator variables, and reliability. After careful consideration, it was determined that the 4-factor model offered a better fit for the data.

To confirm this factor structure, a parallel analysis was conducted with varimax rotation, leading to the elimination of 54 items that did not load onto any factors or showed loadings on multiple factors. The remaining 26 items (11 of which were reverse-scored) formed the 4-factor solution, which accounted for 53.28% of the variance and displayed communalities greater than .36. The factors were identified and named based on the characteristics of the items they encompassed: Social interaction (9 items), Compassion (6 items), Social support (6 items), and Condemnation (5 items).

The scale items, along with their respective factor loadings, eigenvalues, explained variances, item-total correlations, and internal reliabilities, were summarized in Table 1. The factor analysis successfully revealed the underlying structure of the observed items and their relationship with the latent factors. These results were indicative of the construct validity of the ATEP scale, demonstrating the scale's ability to accurately measure attitudes toward ex-prisoners and the distinct dimensions underlying these attitudes.

Table 1. Factor Loadings, Item-Total Correlations, Explained Variances, Eigenvalues, Cronbach Alphas, and Items' Means Per Factor

Factor / Item	Factor Loadings	Item-Total Correlations
Factor 1: Social Relations		
1. I am unwilling to enter into a marriage with an individual who has a history of being an ex-prisoner.	.753	.73
2. I am open to forming friendships with individuals who have a background as ex-prisoners.	.744	.72
3. I do not wish to have a romantic partner who has a past as an ex-prisoner.	.741	.72
4. The knowledge that my neighbor is an ex-prisoner does not disturb me.	.730	.70
5. If I owned a house, I would not hesitate to rent it out to someone with a history as an ex-prisoner.	.701	.63
6. Being in the presence of someone known to be an ex-prisoner does not cause discomfort.	.696	.72
7. I prefer not to reside in a neighborhood with a high concentration of ex-prisoners.	.694	.64
8. If I had a child, it would concern me to discover that their teacher has a history as an ex-prisoner.	.684	.67
9. Knowing that I am traveling on the same bus with an ex-prisoner would make me feel uneasy.	.606	.50
(Explained variance = 20.01 %; Eigenvalue = 5.20; $\alpha = .90$; $M = 3.44$)		
Factor 2: Compassion		
10. I approach individuals with a history as ex-prisoners with understanding and empathy.	.662	.65
11. Most ex-prisoners are victims of circumstances and deserve to be helped.	.638	.55
12. Ex-prisoners are not inherently bad people.	.617	.55
13. I do not look down on individuals with a history as ex-prisoners.	.584	.48
14. I do not treat individuals with a history as ex-prisoners rudely.	.569	.47
15. I do not hesitate to help an ex-prisoner in need of assistance.	.474	.49
(Explained variance = 15.59 %; Eigenvalue = 3.01; $\alpha = .78$; $M = 4.75$)		
Factor 3: Social Support		
16. I can support programs aimed at reintegrating ex-prisoners into society.	.740	.54
17. I believe that ex-prisoners should be reintegrated into society.	.717	.60
18. Social support should be provided to individuals with a criminal record.	.706	.51
19. Ex-prisoners should be offered vocational training courses.	.637	.57
20. Trying to reintegrate ex-prisoners into society is a waste of time and money.	.528	.43
21. It would be appropriate to subject ex-prisoners to specific training for their reintegration into society.	.479	.37
(Explained variance = 11.15 %; Eigenvalue = 2.90; $\alpha = .76$; $M = 5.19$)		
Factor 4: Condemnation		
22. I think that individuals with a criminal record have underdeveloped personalities.	.734	.59
23. I believe that ex-prisoners disregard societal values.	.723	.61
24. I consider most ex-prisoners to be lazy.	.699	.55
25. I believe that ex-prisoners lack moral values.	.510	.40
26. I think ex-prisoners set a bad example for others.	.454	.40
(Explained variance = 10.54 %; Eigenvalue = 2.74; $\alpha = .75$; $M = 4.77$)		

3.1.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To assess the four-dimensional structural design of the ATEP scale, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted through AMOS 27 Graphics. The Maximum Likelihood Estimation Method was utilized, and the covariance matrix was employed for analysis. Using standard fit criteria, the results from the confirmatory factor analysis, with the four-factor model, indicated that the model's fit was generally acceptable, with GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) exceeding the recommended threshold of .90, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) surpassing the recommended threshold of .90, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) below the suggested threshold of .08, and the χ^2 :df ratio meeting the acceptable threshold of 3. Specifically, the results showed: $\chi^2(293) = 888.43$, $p < .001$, GFI = .86, AGFI = .83, CFI = .87, and RMSEA = .07. The χ^2 :df ratio was close to an acceptable level (3.03). However, upon further examination of the modification indexes, it was revealed that a considerable improvement in the model's fit could be achieved by introducing error covariance between items 1 and 3; items 2 and 6; items 25 and 26; items 1 and 8; items 16 and 18; and items 2 and 8. Thus, the suggested modifications were implemented, and the model was re-estimated. Following the modifications, the subsequent results demonstrated a better fit to the data: $\chi^2(282) = 575.10$, $p < .001$, GFI = .91, AGFI = .89, CFI = .94, and RMSEA = .05. Moreover, the χ^2 :df ratio improved and met the acceptable threshold (2.04). Overall, the refined confirmatory factor analysis supported the validity of the four-factor model for the ATEP scale.

3.1.3. Item-total Correlations

The results of the study indicated strong correlations between the factors and their respective items. Specifically, for the first factor, the correlation ranged from .50 to .73; for the second factor, it ranged from .49 to .65; for the third factor, it ranged from .37 to .60; and for the last factor, it ranged from .40 to .61. These correlation values met the established criterion of at least .30, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), thereby demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency and validity for the ATEP scale.

3.1.4. Reliability

The internal consistency of the ATEP scale was assessed using the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The results revealed that the overall Cronbach alpha for the entire scale was .88. As this value exceeds the recommended criterion of .70, as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), it can be inferred that the ATEP scale demonstrates very good internal consistency.

Moreover, when examining the reliability of each individual factor, it was found that the first factor exhibited a Cronbach alpha of .90, the second factor had a value of .78, the third factor showed a coefficient of .76, and the last factor obtained a value of .75 (see Table 1). These results indicate that each of the factors within the ATEP scale also demonstrated sufficient internal consistency. The high Cronbach alpha values for both the overall scale and each factor suggest that the ATEP scale is a reliable measure for assessing attitudes toward ex-prisoners.

3.2. The relationship between the ATEP Scale and the Heartland Forgiveness Scale

To further establish the construct validity of the ATEP scale, the study included an assessment of the 'Forgiveness of Others' subscale from the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) developed by Thompson et al. (2005). The analysis failed to show a significant association between the ATEP scale and the 'Forgiveness of Others' subscale from the HFS ($r = .03$, $p = .742$, ns.). Similarly, when investigating the correlations between the 'Forgiveness of Others' subscale and each of the factors within the ATEP scale, all correlations were non-significant. These findings suggest that the constructs measured by the ATEP scale and the 'Forgiveness of Others' subscale from the HFS are not similar to each other. The lack of significant correlations indicates that the ATEP scale captures attitudes toward ex-prisoners as a distinct construct, separate from the concept of forgiveness of others as measured by the HFS subscale.

3.3. Further Analyses

After establishing the validity and reliability of the ATEP scale, further analyses were conducted to explore potential differences in attitudes toward ex-prisoners based on gender and participants' personal experiences.

Table 2. T-Test Scores for Independent Variables in The Study

	Gender			Inner Circle			Great Circle			Victimization		
	Women	Men	<i>p</i>	Yes	No	<i>p</i>	Yes	No	<i>p</i>	Yes	No	<i>p</i>
Factor 1	3.35	3.59	*	3.94	3.28	**	3.87	3.21	**	3.68	3.27	**
Factor 2	4.82	4.60	*	4.90	4.69	*	4.88	4.66	*	4.85	4.66	*
Factor 3	5.26	5.02	**	5.16	5.18	ns	5.15	5.18	ns	5.22	5.14	ns
Factor 4	4.80	4.69	ns	5.00	4.67	*	4.89	4.68	*	4.85	4.69	ns
Total	4.41	4.36	ns	4.65	4.31	**	4.60	4.28	**	4.53	4.29	**

Note. Factor 1 = Social interaction, Factor 2 = Compassion, Factor 3 = Social support, Factor 4 = Condemnation

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, ns. non-significant

An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the total ATEP scores of women and men. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between women's and men's total scores ($p = .469$, ns). However, when the individual factors were examined, significant differences emerged (see Table 2). Specifically, men ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.09$) had higher scores than women ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.08$) on the social interaction factor, $t(440) = 2.22$, $p = .027$. On the other hand, women ($M = 4.82$, $SD = .80$) had higher scores than males ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .80$) on the compassion factor $t(440) = 2.87$, $p = .004$. Similarly, women ($M = 5.26$, $SD = .67$) had higher scores than males ($M = 5.02$, $SD = .75$) on the social support factor $t(440) = 3.54$, $p < .001$. There was no significant difference between females and males on the condemnation factor ($p = .207$, ns).

Subsequently, another independent-samples t-test was performed to assess the total ATEP scores of participants who have an individual with a history of incarceration in their close social circle. The results revealed a significant difference in the scores of participants who have an ex-prisoner in their immediate surroundings ($M = 4.65$, $SD = .67$) and those who do not ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .67$, $t(438) = 4.58$, $p < .001$). This means that participants who have an ex-prisoner in their close social circle exhibit more positive attitudes toward ex-prisoners than those who do not. Similarly, a significant difference was observed in the scores of participants an individual with a prior record of incarceration in their broader network ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .71$) and those who do not ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .64$, $t(439) = 4.64$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that participants who have an individual with a history of incarceration in their extended social network also exhibit more favorable attitudes towards ex-prisoners compared to those who lack such connections.

Notably, a significant difference emerged between participants who had experienced victimization and those who hadn't. Individuals who had been victims of crime ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.69$) exhibited more favorable attitudes toward ex-prisoners compared to those who hadn't been ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.66$) been victims of crime ($t(440) = 3.59$, $p < 0.001$).

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the present study demonstrate that the Attitudes Toward Ex-Prisoners (ATEP) scale is a valid and reliable tool for measuring attitudes toward individuals with a history of incarceration. The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the four-factor model of the ATEP scale showed an acceptable fit to the data, indicating that the scale measures distinct dimensions of attitudes toward ex-prisoners effectively.

Upon examining the factor structure of the ATEP Scale, it becomes evident that the scale encompasses various pertinent dimensions, including attitudes toward close relationships with ex-prisoners, negative perceptions about them, and the presence of social support. As observed in the present study, individuals may simultaneously express a desire to see ex-prisoners rehabilitated and display some level of tolerance toward them. However, this willingness to support rehabilitation efforts coexists with reservations about certain forms of interaction with ex-prisoners, such as forming marital relationships or being neighbors with them. Additionally, some participants even held outright condemnatory attitudes toward ex-prisoners. The detection of such a paradoxical approach in the way the public approaches punishment and rehabilitation (McCorkle, 1993) is considered a significant obstacle in the reentry efforts of ex-prisoners (Reynolds et al., 2013). This duality underscores the multifactorial structure of attitudes toward ex-prisoners and the complexity of public perceptions.

The findings of the study also showed that the constructs measured by the ATEP scale and the 'Forgiveness of Others' subscale from the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005) are distinct and not interchangeable. This suggests that attitudes toward ex-prisoners are not merely an aspect of general forgiveness tendencies but rather represent a unique set of attitudes specific to individuals with a criminal history. The differentiation between forgiveness and attitudes toward ex-prisoners highlights the need for specific assessments that capture the complexity of attitudes toward these individuals.

In line with the established body of research (e.g., Lambert, 2004), it was initially expected that women would display more favorable attitudes toward ex-prisoners due to their greater inclination towards supporting rehabilitation compared to men. However, the total scores derived from the ATEP Scale failed to provide support for this prediction. Specifically, men and women have similar scores on their overall ATEP scores. This observation can be attributed to the presence of a paradoxical approach concerning punishment and rehabilitation. Notably, prior research conducted by Spratt (1999) demonstrated that women tended to adopt a more punitive stance compared to men. Consequently, if the conceptualization of attitudes toward ex-prisoners is considered unidimensional, it would lead to inconsistent findings with regard to gender differences.

Nonetheless, the present study indicates that gender effects manifest differently across various factors of the scale. Specifically, men exhibited higher scores on the social interaction factor, indicating a greater tendency for social distance and avoidance toward ex-prisoners. Conversely, women displayed greater ratings on the compassion factor, reflecting an increased degree of benevolence and understanding toward this group. Addressing the divergence in the manner of men and women, Haghighi and Lopez (1998) postulated that such differences might emanate from factors such as ethnicity, education, income, and other sociodemographic variables. In a similar vein, these gender-based differences in attitudes may be influenced by social and cultural factors, as previous research has suggested that gender norms and stereotypes can shape perceptions of individuals with criminal records (Fiske, 2011). Understanding these variations can inform targeted interventions to promote more positive attitudes among specific demographic groups.

Moreover, the study highlighted the role of social context in shaping attitudes toward ex-prisoners. Participants who had an ex-prisoner in their immediate or extended social circle exhibited more positive attitudes toward ex-prisoners as opposed to those who did not have such associations. This finding aligns with the "mere exposure" effect, which suggests that familiarity with a stigmatized group can reduce prejudice and discrimination (Zajonc, 1968). In this context, social contact with ex-prisoners may contribute to greater empathy and understanding, leading to more positive attitudes.

Furthermore, the study revealed an intriguing finding concerning individuals who were victims of crime, as they exhibited more positive attitudes toward ex-prisoners compared to non-victims, which contrasts with prior research findings (Borg, 1997). This unexpected result warrants exploration and offers insights into the complex dynamics shaping attitudes toward ex-prisoners. One possible explanation for this phenomenon could be attributed to the concept of procedural justice, where individuals who perceive fair and respectful treatment from the criminal justice system tend to be more prone to develop positive attitudes toward offenders (Tyler, 2006). Victims who perceive the reentry process as just and rehabilitative may be more inclined to endorse the reintegration of former prisoners into society. Thus, positive encounters with the justice system may influence their perspectives and foster a greater sense of understanding and empathy toward ex-prisoners.

Alternatively, this finding could also be related to the fear of crime concept (Lavrakas, 1982), wherein the imaginative victimization resulting from experiences of friends, relatives, or neighbors can significantly shape attitudes. According to this view, individuals who have not experienced personal victimization may harbor a greater fear of potential victimization, leading to more negative attitudes toward those associated with criminality. In contrast, victims of crime may possess a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding ex-prisoners' circumstances, prompting them to adopt a more compassionate and supportive stance.

4.1. Limitations and Future Research

One notable limitation of the ongoing research is the lack of measurement for social desirability bias. Given that the study involves attitudes towards a stigmatized group, respondents may have been inclined to provide socially desirable responses, leading to potential bias in their answers. Additionally, the absence of a "neither agree nor disagree" option in the presented six-level scale may have further influenced participants' responses, potentially leading to forced choices and impacting the accuracy of the results. While this strategy has been employed in other studies (e.g., Işık and Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2009) to manage potential social desirability issues, future research can explore alternative approaches to mitigate the influence of social desirability bias effectively.

Another limitation of the study is the use of convenience sampling, primarily recruiting student participants. This sampling method may lead to a non-representative sample and limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. To improve the external validity of future research, it is crucial to adopt more diverse and representative sampling methods. Researchers should strive to recruit participants from various backgrounds, age groups, socioeconomic statuses, and cultural contexts. By doing so, the study's findings can better reflect the attitudes of a wider range of individuals, and the results can be more applicable to real-world scenarios.

Furthermore, future research can delve into the underlying factors that shape attitudes toward ex-prisoners, such as media influence, community perceptions, and individual beliefs. By investigating these factors, researchers can identify potential targets for intervention and develop evidence-based strategies to promote more positive attitudes toward ex-prisoners.

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