The Prison Project: A longitudinal panel study on the effects of imprisonment in the Netherlands

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The Prison Project aims to (1) describe the development of criminal behavior and life circumstances of (ex-)prisoners and their families before, during and after imprisonment, (2) examine the effects of imprisonment on further criminal behavior and post-prison life circumstances of (ex-)prisoners and their families, and (3) empirically test theoretical mechanisms assumed to explain effects of imprisonment. The Prison Project’s design is a longitudinal and nation-wide cohort study among 1,904 male participants, aged 18-65, who were born in the Netherlands and put in pre-trail detention in the period October 2010 until March 2011. Baseline interviews were held in all 32 pre-trail detention centers in the Netherlands as soon as possible after the detainees entered the remand center. Participants still in custody were approached again after 3, 9 and 18 months, and all respondents were approached for a face-to-face interview 6 and 24 months after their release from prison. During these assessments elaborate information was gathered on background characteristics, criminal behavior (pre- and post-prison), life circumstances (pre- and post-prison), detention characteristics, contacts with other Criminal Justice actors, criminal attitudes, and perceptions. The findings of the Prison Project contribute to societal and political debates on punishment and more adequate and effective treatment of offenders by the criminal justice system.