

The Ecosystem Model of the Country's Prisons with an Emphasis on Prisoner Behavioral Reform (Case Study: Tehran Prisons Organization)

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ABSTRACT

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Prisoners, as a vulnerable group within society, face numerous challenges that not only affect their quality of life but also influence their successful reintegration into society. Prison conditions are recognized as a determining factor in the process of prisoner rehabilitation and reformation. In this regard, various factors, including hygiene and sanitation, security, the social environment, and educational and support programs, can play a significant role in reducing tensions and improving prisoners' quality of life. This study seeks to examine the environmental and social conditions of prisons and identify the impact of rehabilitative and educational programs on prisoners' capacity for successful reintegration into society. Furthermore, it investigates the economic and social support mechanisms that may facilitate this process. This research was conducted using a qualitative approach and employed in-depth interview content analysis methods. The study population consisted of inmates from several selected prisons, as well as staff members and specialists working in the field of correction and rehabilitation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling to ensure a comprehensive examination of diverse perspectives. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and concepts. Through ongoing data collection and continuous analysis, theoretical saturation was ultimately achieved, such that no new data contributed substantial additional information to the findings. This process enabled the generation of more precise results regarding the effects of prison conditions and rehabilitative programs on prisoner rehabilitation.

Keywords: *Ecosystem, National Prisons, Behavioral Reform, Tehran Prisons Organization*

1. Introduction

Prisons are among the most complex social institutions in modern societies, serving not only as mechanisms for punishment and social control but also as environments intended to facilitate rehabilitation, behavioral reform, and successful reintegration into society. In recent decades, scholars and policymakers have increasingly emphasized the need to move beyond traditional custodial approaches toward more comprehensive and human-centered correctional systems. Such systems recognize that prisoners' behaviors are shaped by a network of interconnected environmental, social, psychological, economic, educational, and managerial factors. Consequently, understanding prisons as dynamic ecosystems rather than isolated institutions has become an important perspective for improving correctional outcomes and reducing recidivism (Taylor, 2024; Yousefian et al., 2023).

The ecosystem perspective has gained considerable attention across various scientific disciplines because it provides a holistic framework for understanding complex systems composed of multiple actors, resources, institutions, and relationships. Ecosystems are generally characterized by interdependence, co-evolution, adaptability, and the continuous exchange of resources and information among their components (Hou & Shi, 2021; Lingens et al., 2021). Research in entrepreneurial, organizational, and policy ecosystems has demonstrated that the effectiveness of any system depends not only on the performance of individual components but also on the quality of interactions among those components (Saadabadi et al., 2022; Salari et al., 2021; Wurth et al., 2021). Similarly, prison systems can be conceptualized as ecosystems in which physical infrastructure, social relations, administrative structures, legal processes, educational opportunities, family support mechanisms, and rehabilitation programs interact to influence prisoner behavior and institutional outcomes.

The concept of ecosystems has evolved from a purely biological framework into a multidisciplinary analytical lens applicable to organizations, communities, and public institutions. Ecosystem-based approaches emphasize systemic thinking and acknowledge that sustainable outcomes emerge through coordinated interactions among diverse stakeholders and environmental conditions (Hou & Shi, 2021; Wurth et al., 2021). Studies examining ecosystem characteristics have identified collaboration, resource exchange, institutional support, adaptive governance, and stakeholder engagement as essential dimensions of

successful ecosystems (Esmailpour & Moradi Eslami, 2023; Yousefian et al., 2023). Applying this perspective to prison systems may provide valuable insights into how correctional institutions can create environments that foster behavioral reform and social reintegration rather than merely confinement.

The physical and environmental conditions of prisons constitute one of the most important dimensions affecting prisoner behavior and well-being. Research has shown that prison environments influence mental health, emotional stability, perceptions of safety, and interpersonal interactions among inmates. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, inadequate facilities, and unsafe living conditions may contribute to stress, aggression, and psychological distress, whereas supportive and well-maintained environments can promote positive behavioral outcomes (Taylor, 2024). Recent evidence indicates that prisoners' perceptions of security are significantly associated with psychological well-being and behavioral adjustment. In particular, a stronger sense of security has been linked to reduced psychological risks and improved adaptation within correctional settings (Wang et al., 2025).

Beyond physical conditions, the social organization of prisons plays a crucial role in shaping inmate experiences and behaviors. Prison communities develop their own social structures, norms, and interpersonal dynamics that can either facilitate rehabilitation or reinforce antisocial attitudes. Social relationships among inmates, interactions with correctional staff, and the broader institutional culture collectively influence prisoners' adjustment and behavioral development. Research on prison social organization has highlighted the importance of social identity, group affiliations, and interpersonal relationships in determining behavioral outcomes and institutional stability (Infante et al., 2023). Consequently, creating positive social environments characterized by mutual respect, constructive interaction, and supportive relationships is essential for achieving rehabilitation goals.

Psychological factors represent another critical component of the prison ecosystem. Prisoners frequently experience a range of emotional and psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, frustration, loneliness, anger, uncertainty, and reduced self-esteem. These challenges can negatively affect behavioral regulation and increase the likelihood of disciplinary problems and recidivism. Studies have demonstrated significant associations between social loneliness, frustration, and maladaptive emotional responses among prisoners

(Farahmand & Sharvani, 2022). Similarly, psychological well-being, family cohesion, and a sense of purpose in life have been identified as important protective factors that contribute to healthier adjustment and more constructive behavior among incarcerated individuals (Ghazanfari et al., 2023). Therefore, psychological support services, counseling interventions, and therapeutic programs constitute indispensable elements of an effective correctional ecosystem.

Behavioral reform within prisons is closely related to the development of self-regulation, emotional management, and intrinsic motivation. Research has shown that interventions aimed at enhancing emotional regulation can significantly improve behavioral control among prisoners and reduce maladaptive behavioral patterns (Razvan Moghadam et al., 2022). At the same time, motivation theories suggest that individuals are more likely to engage in positive behaviors when their psychological needs are met and when meaningful opportunities for personal growth are available. Theoretical frameworks such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory emphasize the importance of addressing both basic needs and higher-order motivational factors to facilitate positive behavioral change (Büyükebeşe et al., 2023; Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). These perspectives are particularly relevant in correctional settings where rehabilitation requires sustained engagement and internal commitment from prisoners.

Motivation has been widely recognized as a key determinant of learning, behavior, and personal development. Educational psychology research demonstrates that intrinsic motivation contributes to greater engagement, persistence, and achievement across diverse contexts (Abbasi & Gholami, 2023; Zarif et al., 2024). Similarly, organizational studies have identified intrinsic motivation as a crucial factor influencing performance, commitment, and behavioral outcomes (Hatami, 2023; Hosseini et al., 2024). Within prison environments, educational and vocational programs can enhance prisoners' motivation by providing opportunities for skill development, self-improvement, and future employment. These opportunities may foster hope, self-efficacy, and a sense of purpose, all of which contribute to behavioral reform and successful reintegration.

Educational and vocational training programs constitute essential mechanisms for rehabilitation because they equip prisoners with the competencies necessary for productive participation in society after release. Access to formal education, literacy programs, vocational training, and skill-

development courses can improve employability and increase social inclusion. Educational participation also promotes cognitive development, self-confidence, and constructive engagement during incarceration (Abbasi & Gholami, 2023; Zarif et al., 2024). Furthermore, correctional education aligns with motivational theories suggesting that opportunities for achievement and personal growth enhance intrinsic motivation and positive behavioral outcomes (Hatami, 2023; Hosseini et al., 2024).

Physical activity and sports programs have also emerged as valuable components of prison rehabilitation initiatives. Research indicates that participation in sports and physical activities is associated with improved general health, enhanced quality of life, and reduced behavioral problems among prisoners (Askari et al., 2023). In addition, sports-based interventions have been shown to facilitate rehabilitation processes, strengthen social skills, and contribute to the prevention of future criminal behavior (Amani & Betyari, 2023). These findings suggest that recreational and athletic activities should be considered important elements of a comprehensive prison ecosystem designed to promote behavioral reform.

Family relationships and social support networks are equally important in influencing prisoners' adjustment and rehabilitation. Strong family cohesion and supportive social relationships have been linked to improved psychological well-being, reduced emotional distress, and greater motivation for positive change (Ghazanfari et al., 2023). Maintaining meaningful contact with family members during incarceration helps prisoners preserve social bonds and prepare for reintegration into society. Post-release support from families and communities further enhances the likelihood of successful adaptation and reduces the risk of reoffending. Therefore, programs that facilitate family communication, strengthen relationships, and provide social support should be regarded as essential components of prison ecosystems.

Economic and employment-related factors also exert substantial influence on prisoner rehabilitation. Meaningful work opportunities during incarceration can provide structure, purpose, and opportunities for skill development. Employment-related programs enable prisoners to acquire practical competencies while fostering responsibility, discipline, and self-confidence. Theoretical and empirical studies suggest that opportunities for meaningful work contribute to motivation, satisfaction, and positive behavioral outcomes (Büyükebeşe et al., 2023; Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). Moreover, post-release employment support

plays a critical role in reducing recidivism and facilitating successful reintegration into society.

The organizational and managerial dimensions of prisons represent another important aspect of the correctional ecosystem. Organizational culture, leadership practices, decision-making processes, and institutional policies shape the daily experiences of prisoners and staff alike. A positive organizational culture characterized by fairness, transparency, and support can foster trust and cooperation, whereas dysfunctional organizational environments may contribute to conflict and resistance (Salimi & Rouhi, 2020). Management theories further suggest that assumptions about human behavior influence leadership approaches and organizational outcomes. Perspectives derived from Theory X and Theory Y emphasize the importance of adopting supportive and developmental approaches that recognize individuals' potential for growth and self-direction (Senarathne, 2020; Sumadi et al., 2022).

Legal and judicial processes also influence prisoners' perceptions of legitimacy, justice, and institutional fairness. Transparent procedures, equitable treatment, and access to legal support can strengthen trust in correctional institutions and encourage constructive behavioral engagement. Conversely, perceptions of injustice may undermine rehabilitation efforts and contribute to dissatisfaction and resistance. Effective prison ecosystems therefore require coordination between judicial, administrative, and rehabilitative functions to ensure that correctional objectives are achieved within a framework of fairness and accountability.

Despite growing recognition of the multifaceted nature of rehabilitation, many studies have focused on isolated aspects of prison life rather than examining the prison system as an integrated ecosystem. Existing research has investigated topics such as prisoner motivation, emotional regulation, family support, sports participation, psychological well-being, and recidivism independently (Amani & Betyari, 2023; Askari et al., 2023; Farahmand & Sharvani, 2022; Ghazanfari et al., 2023; Seyfoury & Dehghani Ghanatghestani, 2023). However, there remains a significant need for a comprehensive model that integrates these diverse dimensions into a coherent ecosystem framework capable of explaining how multiple factors interact to influence prisoner behavioral reform. Such a model can provide correctional administrators and policymakers with a systematic basis for designing effective interventions and improving rehabilitation outcomes.

Given the importance of adopting a holistic perspective toward correctional systems and the lack of an integrated ecosystem framework addressing prisoner behavioral reform, the present study aimed to develop an ecosystem model of the country's prisons with an emphasis on prisoner behavioral reform within the Tehran Prisons Organization.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed an applied-developmental research approach aimed at developing an ecosystem model for the country's prisons with an emphasis on prisoner behavioral reform within the Tehran Prisons Organization. From the perspective of data collection, the study was descriptive-analytical in nature and utilized an exploratory mixed-methods design. The exploratory mixed-methods approach was selected because it enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena through qualitative inquiry and subsequently utilize the findings to develop a comprehensive conceptual model. In the present study, the qualitative phase served as the primary stage for identifying the components, dimensions, and mechanisms underlying the prison ecosystem and its role in facilitating behavioral reform among prisoners.

The qualitative component was conducted using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of individuals who possess direct and substantial engagement with the phenomenon under investigation. Accordingly, the study focused on experts who had extensive professional experience and deep practical knowledge of prison environments, prisoner behavior, correctional processes, and ecosystem-related issues within the Tehran Prisons Organization.

The study population consisted of academic faculty members, senior administrators, correctional specialists, and experts actively involved in the Tehran Prisons Organization. Participants were selected based on their demonstrated expertise in prison management, behavioral rehabilitation, correctional programs, and prison ecosystem development. Eligibility criteria included possessing substantial knowledge of ecosystem-related concepts and behavioral sciences, having professional experience within the Tehran Prisons Organization and familiarity with prisoner behavioral patterns, and demonstrating an interest in scientific and research activities.

A purposive theoretical sampling strategy was employed to identify participants with the most relevant expertise and

experience. Subsequently, snowball sampling was used to recruit additional participants recommended by the initial interviewees. Data collection and participant recruitment proceeded simultaneously, allowing emerging concepts and categories to guide subsequent sampling decisions. A total of 12 participants were interviewed. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that additional interviews no longer generated new concepts, categories, or meaningful insights related to the phenomenon under investigation. The attainment of theoretical saturation indicated that the collected data were sufficiently comprehensive to support the development of the proposed prison ecosystem model.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which served as the primary instrument for exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and expert insights regarding the prison ecosystem and prisoner behavioral reform. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide a balance between consistency across interviews and flexibility to pursue emerging themes. This format enabled the researcher to investigate predetermined topics while also encouraging participants to elaborate on issues they considered significant based on their professional experiences.

The interview protocol was developed based on an extensive review of the literature related to prison management, correctional systems, prisoner rehabilitation, organizational ecosystems, and behavioral reform. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' views regarding environmental, social, managerial, educational, psychological, economic, and rehabilitative factors influencing prisoner behavior and reintegration. Additional probing questions were used to clarify responses, explore underlying meanings, and obtain more detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through virtual communication platforms, depending on participants' availability and organizational considerations. Prior to each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their voluntary participation. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Detailed field notes were also maintained throughout the data collection process to capture contextual information, nonverbal observations, and preliminary analytical insights.

The interview process emphasized flexibility and responsiveness to emerging themes. As data collection

progressed, the interview guide was refined to explore newly identified concepts and relationships. This iterative approach enhanced the richness and depth of the data and facilitated the identification of previously unexplored dimensions of the prison ecosystem and behavioral reform processes.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach was selected because it provides a systematic yet flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting meaningful patterns within qualitative data. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to explore the complex relationships among environmental, organizational, social, educational, and rehabilitative factors shaping prisoner behavior and correctional outcomes.

Data analysis began immediately after the completion of the interviews and followed an iterative process. Initially, all interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data and gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives. During this stage, preliminary notes, observations, and analytical reflections were documented to facilitate deeper engagement with the data.

Following familiarization, open coding was conducted through a detailed line-by-line examination of the interview transcripts. Meaningful statements, concepts, and key expressions were identified and assigned initial codes. These codes represented significant features of the data relevant to the research objectives. Similar codes were subsequently grouped together to form preliminary categories and conceptual clusters.

The next stage involved axial coding, during which relationships among categories were examined and refined. Related concepts were integrated into broader subthemes and themes, allowing the researcher to identify patterns and connections across participants' experiences. Through continuous comparison and refinement, overlapping categories were merged, redundant codes were removed, and thematic structures were clarified.

Subsequently, themes were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure coherence and consistency with the entire dataset. The researcher continuously compared themes against the original interview transcripts to verify their accuracy and representativeness. This process resulted in the development of a comprehensive thematic framework that captured the key dimensions of the prison ecosystem and its influence on prisoner behavioral reform.

The thematic analysis followed six major stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and

naming themes, and preparing the final report. Throughout the analytical process, movement between these stages was recursive rather than strictly linear, allowing for continuous refinement of interpretations and conceptual understanding.

To enhance the rigor and organization of the analysis, Atlas.ti Version 9 software was utilized for data management, coding, categorization, and theme development. The software facilitated systematic handling of large volumes of qualitative data while supporting transparency and traceability throughout the analytical process. The final thematic structure emerged through an inductive and interpretive analysis of participants' lived experiences and expert perspectives regarding the development of an effective prison ecosystem model aimed at promoting prisoner behavioral reform and successful social reintegration.

3. Findings and Results

Using a qualitative research method, the researcher analyzed the collected data, examined the research questions, and ultimately drew conclusions. Data analysis is a multi-stage process that includes data summarization, coding, and categorization. Through this process, a basis is provided for conducting various types of analyses and establishing relationships among data in order to evaluate the research objectives. At this stage, the data are also refined conceptually and empirically, and various analytical techniques play a significant role in drawing inferences and making generalizations. Data and information analysis, as part of the methodological process of scientific research, constitutes one of the main foundations of any study and research project. Through this process, all activities required for conducting the research are controlled and guided until a conclusion is reached. In this section, the researcher uses different methods of analysis to respond to the formulated problem or to make decisions regarding the objectives established for the research. After importing the transcribed interview texts, the researcher studied the text and, using coding principles, defined a code in the software for each quotation based on the research objective and the existing literature. Naturally, similar concepts received similar codes. After the coding stages were completed, the process led to the extraction of a model of factors affecting media consumption.

The qualitative analysis method used in this study was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis consists of a six-stage

process, which is implemented in this chapter. These six stages are described below.

Considering the foundational model in the researcher's mind and in order to obtain expert opinions regarding the influential factors, interview invitations were sent to 20 specialists to participate and cooperate in this research. Ultimately, 16 individuals accepted the research team's invitation and participated in the interview sessions. Prior to the sessions, the interview protocol was developed, and in order to prepare the interviewees, the questions and necessary explanations were sent to the volunteers before the meeting. During the interview sessions, the interview content was recorded using an audio recorder. It should be noted that the interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Finally, after reaching theoretical saturation, the data were organized and used for analysis. Theoretical saturation occurred in the interview with the thirteenth expert; however, to ensure greater confidence, the interviews continued with three additional experts, bringing the total number of experts to 16.

After the initial reading of the text and the selection of sentences relevant to the topic, an initial list of ideas present in the data and their notable points was prepared. Initial codes were considered for this stage. The codes within the coding framework had clearly defined and well-specified boundaries.

At this stage, the interview texts were carefully examined, and as shown below, the interviews were initially coded. Those parts of the interview text that were relevant to the research topic were identified and linked to the corresponding code.

At this stage of the study, the researcher used expert interviews and the reviewed literature as the main sources for analyzing and collecting the research data. After studying all interviews and reviewing the literature, it became clear that a combination of these two sections should be considered. The thematic analysis method requires repeated reading and reviewing of the data; therefore, before coding began, all data were read several times. Subsequently, while reading the text, several patterns and ideas were identified.

Given that the interviews had been recorded, at this stage the researcher first listened to each interview once, after which the recorded interviews were typed in a Word file. Then, for the second time, the written interview was read by the expert. In the third step, all typed interview texts were edited. In the fourth step, the typed and edited texts were read again.

After completing the different stages in the interview analysis process, the interview texts along with the recorded audio files were finally examined and carefully studied. At this stage, the main purpose was to review all details and information contained in the interviews so that all recorded content would be considered accurately. After ensuring the quality and accuracy of the interview content, the process of editing and refinement began. This process included the possible correction of grammatical errors, the logical ordering of sentences, and the improvement of lexical variety and richness in the text. The purpose of editing and refinement was to produce a coherent, understandable text ready for the subsequent stages of analysis. This was done because it provided a broader perspective for continuing the stages of thematic analysis. At this stage, the researcher became fully familiar with the interviews.

In the table, the data were coded, and a list of different codes was obtained. For analysis, the initial codes had to be examined, and the manner in which different codes could be combined and integrated to form concepts had to be identified. Through further review and refinement of the concepts, an attempt was made to ensure that the categories were sufficiently specific, distinct, non-repetitive, and sufficiently comprehensive. Subsequently, by merging and removing repetitive and parallel items, the main influential indicators were developed.

The following table, which is one of the software outputs, presents the codes from the coding stage and their frequency in the first stage of coding.

It should be noted that coding was performed using the software and within its environment. The initial codes of the interviews were extracted as shown in the following table.

Table 1

Initial Coding

Quotation Content	Codes	Reference
Finally, I must say that the mental health of prisoners should be placed at the center of our attention, and therapeutic and counseling programs should be pursued seriously. I hope that our efforts in this regard will help improve the psychological condition of prisoners.	Therapeutic programs for psychological problems Psychological and social counseling Individual and group counseling	12-12
Educational and therapeutic programs should be designed comprehensively. These programs should properly cover the diverse needs of prisoners and help reform their behavior. For example, skills-training and vocational courses can contribute to the promotion of positive behavior in the future.	Correctional and educational programs	3-3
Considering the importance of employment and economic activities in prisons, there are various opportunities for work in this environment that can have positive effects on the process of prisoner reform and rehabilitation. These opportunities may include productive, service-related, and educational activities that allow prisoners to acquire new skills and make positive use of their time.	Work opportunities inside prison	4-4
Paying attention to prisoners' mental health is highly important. Counseling and psychological treatment programs can help prevent more serious problems and improve the psychological condition of prisoners. Cooperation between prisons and social organizations can improve prisoners' quality of life and enhance prison conditions.	Therapeutic programs for psychological problems Psychological and social counseling	5-5
Another important item is continuous monitoring and evaluation of prison conditions, which prevents the emergence of new problems and contributes to the continuous improvement of the prison environment.	Security and supervision Monitoring prisoners' behavior and preventing security problems	6-6
To reform prisoners' behavior, coherent and continuous programs are needed that address the improvement of the physical and social conditions of the prison. Increasing positive interactions among prisoners and creating group programs can help reduce problems and improve the social atmosphere of the prison.	Security and supervision Group activity programs Interactions between staff and prisoners Physical conditions Social atmosphere and relationships among prisoners	6-6
Prisoners' mental health should be placed at the center of attention. Prisoners face many psychological and emotional challenges that require effective supportive and therapeutic programs. The development and implementation of counseling and therapeutic programs should be designed in such a way that they respond to the specific needs of each prisoner and prevent the emergence of more serious psychological problems.	Therapeutic programs for psychological problems Psychological and social counseling	1-1

Prisoners' mental health should be placed at the center of attention. Prisoners face many psychological and emotional challenges that require effective supportive and therapeutic programs. The development and implementation of counseling and therapeutic programs should be designed in such a way that they respond to the specific needs of each prisoner and prevent the emergence of more serious psychological problems.	Therapeutic programs for psychological problems Psychological and social counseling	1-1
Vocational training in prison should be designed in such a way that prisoners learn practical skills and have a better chance of entering the labor market after release.	Vocational education Skills-training and vocational courses Work opportunities inside prison	2-2
As a result, work opportunities inside prison not only help improve prison conditions and reduce related problems but also allow prisoners to enter life after release with greater hope and readiness by acquiring new skills and enhancing their level of knowledge.	Work opportunities inside prison	2-2
Educational and occupational programs should be designed in such a way that prisoners can easily adapt to society after release and make use of the skills they have learned. Continuous review and evaluation of educational programs in prison help improve the quality of these programs and increase their effectiveness. Cooperation with professional and educational organizations outside prison can improve the quality of training and vocational courses and better prepare prisoners.	Academic education Vocational education Correctional and educational programs Skills-training and vocational courses Work opportunities inside prison	10-10
The development and improvement of educational programs should be carried out continuously and in accordance with prisoners' needs in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. Designing educational programs tailored to prisoners' individual needs can improve the quality of these programs and enhance success after release. Yes, social and family support plays a very important role in improving prisoners' conditions and facilitating their rehabilitation process. Contact with family is one of the vital aspects of these forms of support. Visits and telephone calls allow prisoners to remain in contact with their loved ones and feel less lonely. These interactions can help maintain prisoners' morale and strengthen their motivation to return to society. Many prisons have special programs to facilitate visits and telephone calls. These programs include setting specific visiting times, providing suitable conditions for telephone calls, and even using modern technologies for video communication. The aim is to enable prisoners to maintain continuous contact with their families, and this contact helps reduce their psychological and emotional pressures.	Correctional and educational programs	11-14
Yes, social and family support plays a very important role in improving prisoners' conditions and facilitating their rehabilitation process. Contact with family is one of the vital aspects of these forms of support. Visits and telephone calls allow prisoners to remain in contact with their loved ones and feel less lonely. These interactions can help maintain prisoners' morale and strengthen their motivation to return to society.	Contact with family Social and family support Visits and telephone calls	12-12
Many prisons have special programs to facilitate visits and telephone calls. These programs include setting specific visiting times, providing suitable conditions for telephone calls, and even using modern technologies for video communication. The aim is to enable prisoners to maintain continuous contact with their families, and this contact helps reduce their psychological and emotional pressures.	Contact with family Family relationship reconstruction programs Visits and telephone calls	13-14
Support programs for prisoners' families are also highly important. These programs include family counseling, support groups, and training for families so that they can cope with the challenges associated with having an imprisoned family member. In addition, family relationship reconstruction programs can help improve communication between prisoners and their families and create a stronger foundation for healthy interactions after release.	Contact with family Family relationship reconstruction programs Support programs for prisoners' families	14-14
In my personal opinion, social and economic assistance plays a very important role in improving prisoners' conditions and facilitating their rehabilitation process. One key aspect of this assistance is financial and economic support. This type of support can include meeting prisoners' basic needs, such as food, clothing, and other essential necessities. Financial assistance may also be provided to prisoners' families to reduce the financial pressures caused by the imprisonment of a family member.	Social and economic assistance Financial assistance and economic support	6-6
Social services and counseling constitute another part of these supports that assist prisoners in the rehabilitation process. These services include individual and group counseling, which helps prisoners cope with their psychological and emotional challenges and learn new life skills. Social services also include the necessary guidance for accessing public resources and services, such as education and employment, which can help prisoners in the process of returning to society. In my opinion, our work is not limited to inside the prison; after release, support programs are highly important. These programs may include ongoing counseling, financial assistance for starting a new life, and social services that help prisoners successfully return to society. Furthermore, providing occupational and educational opportunities for released prisoners can help create their financial and social independence and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.	Social services and counseling Social and economic assistance	7-8
In my opinion, our work is not limited to inside the prison; after release, support programs are highly important. These programs may include ongoing counseling, financial assistance for starting a new life, and social services that help prisoners successfully return to society. Furthermore, providing occupational and educational opportunities for released prisoners can help create their financial and social independence and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.	Support programs for prisoners after release Social and economic assistance Financial assistance and economic support	8-8

Attention to prisoners' psychological and emotional needs should be continuous and coordinated with other correctional programs in order to help improve prisoners' behavior. Creating a supportive and encouraging environment in prison can help reduce prisoners' psychological and behavioral problems and provide a better living environment for them.	Therapeutic programs for psychological problems Psychological and social counseling	12-12
Attention to prisoners' psychological and emotional needs should be continuous and coordinated with other correctional programs in order to help improve prisoners' behavior. Creating a supportive and encouraging environment in prison can help reduce prisoners' psychological and behavioral problems and provide a better living environment for them.	Therapeutic programs for psychological problems Psychological and social counseling	12-12
Rehabilitation programs should be designed in such a way that prisoners can easily return to society and benefit from available opportunities. Cooperation with supportive and social organizations can help improve the psychological condition of prisoners and their families and reduce pressures. Attention to prisoners' individual needs in psychological and social programs can improve their behavior and condition and produce more positive effects. Vocational rehabilitation programs play a very important role in the process of prisoners' return to society and their success in life after release. These programs allow prisoners to acquire new skills and develop the competencies necessary to enter the labor market. One of the main components of vocational rehabilitation programs is professional training. This training may include specialized courses in various fields such as information technology, handicrafts, and equipment repair and maintenance. The purpose of these training programs is to familiarize prisoners with practical and technical skills that are necessary for finding a suitable job and succeeding in it.	Rehabilitation programs Programs for returning to society Psychological and social support after release	15-18
Vocational rehabilitation programs play a very important role in the process of prisoners' return to society and their success in life after release. These programs allow prisoners to acquire new skills and develop the competencies necessary to enter the labor market. One of the main components of vocational rehabilitation programs is professional training. This training may include specialized courses in various fields such as information technology, handicrafts, and equipment repair and maintenance. The purpose of these training programs is to familiarize prisoners with practical and technical skills that are necessary for finding a suitable job and succeeding in it.	Rehabilitation programs Vocational rehabilitation programs	16-18
One of the main components of vocational rehabilitation programs is professional training. This training may include specialized courses in various fields such as information technology, handicrafts, and equipment repair and maintenance. The purpose of these training programs is to familiarize prisoners with practical and technical skills that are necessary for finding a suitable job and succeeding in it.	Academic education Vocational education Correctional and educational programs Rehabilitation programs Vocational rehabilitation programs	17-18
Prison management and supervision should be carried out in such a way that both prisoners' security and welfare are ensured. Accurate and effective supervision can prevent the emergence of possible problems and tensions. To improve prisoners' behavior, special attention must be paid to their psychological and social health. Creating a safe and supportive environment can help reduce behavioral problems. Rehabilitation programs should include careful assessment and individual counseling so that the specific needs and problems of each prisoner are identified and properly addressed. Creating a positive social environment in prison through group programs and shared activities can help improve relationships among prisoners and reduce tensions.	Security and supervision Monitoring prisoners' behavior and preventing security problems	5-5
I believe that social and economic support for prisoners and their families plays an important role in improving prisoners' behavior and reducing their recidivism.	Social and economic assistance Financial assistance and economic support	6-6
Continuous evaluation of the performance of legal and managerial systems in prisons can help identify problems and necessary improvements.	Planning and evaluation of prison performance Managerial decision-making Appeal and reconsideration processes	11-11
Guaranteeing prisoners' rights and creating a fair environment in prison can help reduce tensions and improve prisoners' behavior.	Prisoners' legal rights and access to justice Legal and judicial processes	10-10
Legal processes should be designed in such a way that prisoners' rights are properly respected and injustice is prevented.	Prisoners' legal rights and access to justice Legal and judicial processes	12-12
Legal support should include counseling and defense of prisoners' rights at all legal stages so that their rights are properly protected.	Prisoners' legal rights and access to justice Prisoners' legal rights and responsibilities Judicial procedures	13-13
Transparency in managerial and legal decision-making in prisons helps reduce problems and tensions and improve prisoners' behavior.	Managerial decision-making	14-14

After completing the editing and refinement process, the initial codes of the interviews were extracted from the final text and placed in the table related to different topics. These codes were used as semantic and thematic indicators in the analysis of the interviews and facilitated the subsequent stages of data analysis and interpretation.

In the first stage of coding, as an intermediate step, 171 codes were obtained. At this stage, some codes that had less relevance to the research topic were removed, while another

group of codes was merged and organized. Some codes were also modified and renamed in consultation with the supervisor and research experts. After review, editing, refinement, and consultation with experts and university professors, the initial codes of the present study were converted into final codes.

Below, the three-level table for identifying themes has been organized based on the different categories provided.

Table 2

Three-Level Table for Identifying Themes Based on Different Categories

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Prison environment	Physical conditions	Hygiene and sanitation
Prison environment	Physical conditions	Quality of dormitories and sanitary facilities
Prison environment	Physical conditions	Public and private spaces
Prison environment	Security and supervision	Protective and security measures
Prison environment	Security and supervision	Monitoring prisoners' behavior and preventing security problems
Prison environment	Security and supervision	Interactions between staff and prisoners
Prison environment	Social atmosphere and relationships among prisoners	Social groups and group structures
Prison environment	Social atmosphere and relationships among prisoners	Tensions and interactions among prisoners
Prison environment	Social atmosphere and relationships among prisoners	Group activity programs
Correctional and educational programs	Vocational education	Skills-training and vocational courses
Correctional and educational programs	Vocational education	Work opportunities inside prison
Correctional and educational programs	Vocational education	Connection with the labor market and transferable skills outside prison
Correctional and educational programs	Academic education	Educational and academic courses: school, diploma, and higher education
Correctional and educational programs	Academic education	Literacy programs and basic skills development
Correctional and educational programs	Academic education	Academic counseling and guidance
Correctional and educational programs	Psychological and social counseling	Individual and group counseling
Correctional and educational programs	Psychological and social counseling	Therapeutic programs for psychological problems
Correctional and educational programs	Psychological and social counseling	Family and social counseling
Social and family support	Contact with family	Visits and telephone calls
Social and family support	Contact with family	Support programs for prisoners' families
Social and family support	Contact with family	Family relationship reconstruction programs
Social and family support	Rehabilitation programs	Programs for returning to society
Social and family support	Rehabilitation programs	Psychological and social support after release
Social and family support	Rehabilitation programs	Vocational rehabilitation programs
Social and family support	Social and economic assistance	Financial assistance and economic support
Social and family support	Social and economic assistance	Social services and counseling

Social and family support	Social and economic assistance	Support programs for prisoners after release
Economic and occupational conditions	Occupational opportunities inside prison	Jobs and economic activities inside prison
Economic and occupational conditions	Occupational opportunities inside prison	Wages and working conditions
Economic and occupational conditions	Occupational opportunities inside prison	Occupational effects on prisoners' behavior
Economic and occupational conditions	Financial support	Financial assistance for prisoners' families
Economic and occupational conditions	Financial support	Financial support for prisoners after release
Economic and occupational conditions	Financial support	Financial programs for rehabilitation
Economic and occupational conditions	Post-release programs	Occupational and educational opportunities after release
Economic and occupational conditions	Post-release programs	Post-release support and counseling programs
Economic and occupational conditions	Post-release programs	Support for prisoners in returning to society
Judicial and managerial system	Judicial procedures	Legal and trial processes
Judicial and managerial system	Judicial procedures	Dealing with violations and crimes
Judicial and managerial system	Judicial procedures	Prisoners' legal rights and responsibilities
Judicial and managerial system	Managerial decision-making	Managerial decisions and supervision of activities
Judicial and managerial system	Managerial decision-making	Planning and evaluation of prison performance
Judicial and managerial system	Managerial decision-making	Interaction with other institutions and organizations
Judicial and managerial system	Legal and judicial processes	Appeal and reconsideration processes
Judicial and managerial system	Legal and judicial processes	Prisoners' legal rights and access to justice
Judicial and managerial system	Legal and judicial processes	Legal support and counseling

The fourth step begins when the researcher proposes a set of themes and seeks to refine them. The identified themes constitute the main source for forming thematic networks. During this step, it becomes clear that some proposed themes are not, in fact, actual themes.

This stage began when a set of indicators had been identified and refined. The identified themes constituted the main source for developing the model. In this process, the indicators were refined again, and in some cases, certain indicators were combined or divided.

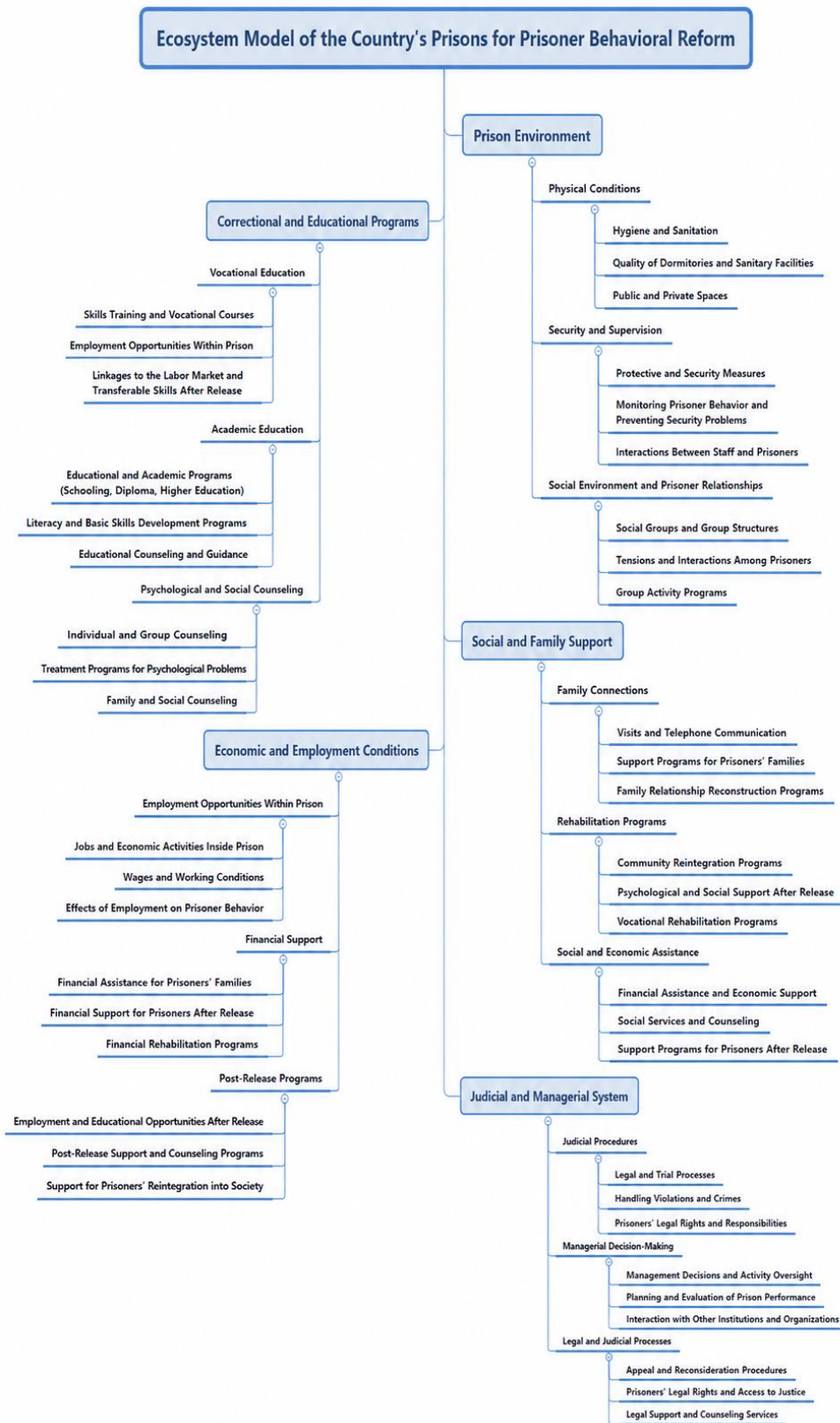
From another perspective, in the qualitative section, the information used in this study included library studies, which were discussed in detail in the second chapter. Information related to the theoretical foundations and

research literature was collected from library sources, articles, books, journals, and the internet.

Considering the literature review and research background, the related models, and the main indicators of the topic, the initial theoretical conceptual model of the research was influenced by the views of theorists, the conducted interviews as expert opinions, and finally the researcher's interpretations of the interviews on this subject. These formed the main components of the study, as well as the main dimensions and indicators of the research, as presented in the figure below. It should be stated that the final model of the qualitative section is presented in the following figure.

Figure 1

Final Research Model



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop an ecosystem model of the country's prisons with an emphasis on prisoner behavioral reform within the Tehran Prisons Organization. The findings of the qualitative analysis resulted in the identification of five major dimensions, including prison environment, correctional and educational programs, social and family support, economic and employment conditions, and the judicial and managerial system. Each dimension contained several interrelated components and indicators that collectively shape the prison ecosystem and influence the process of behavioral reform among prisoners. The findings suggest that prisoner rehabilitation is not the product of a single intervention or institutional mechanism but rather the outcome of a complex and dynamic interaction among environmental, social, psychological, educational, economic, and legal factors. This finding is consistent with ecosystem theory, which emphasizes the interconnectedness and co-evolution of multiple actors and structures within a system (Hou & Shi, 2021; Lingens et al., 2021; Wurth et al., 2021).

One of the major findings of the study was the central role of the prison environment, including physical conditions, security and supervision, and social relationships among prisoners. The results indicate that hygiene, adequate facilities, safe living conditions, and constructive social interactions contribute significantly to behavioral reform and institutional stability. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that prison environments influence inmates' psychological well-being, behavioral adjustment, and overall quality of life. Taylor emphasized that environmental conditions within correctional institutions affect both human welfare and rehabilitation outcomes (Taylor, 2024). Similarly, Wang et al. demonstrated that perceptions of security are closely associated with psychological outcomes among male prisoners, indicating that secure and supportive environments can reduce behavioral risks and improve adjustment (Wang et al., 2025). The identification of social groups, prisoner interactions, and group activities as influential components also supports the findings of Infante et al., who highlighted the significance of social organization and interpersonal relationships within prison communities (Infante et al., 2023).

Another important finding was the significance of correctional and educational programs. The ecosystem

model identified vocational education, academic education, and psychological-social counseling as core dimensions contributing to prisoner behavioral reform. Participants emphasized the importance of vocational training, literacy development, educational opportunities, and counseling services in facilitating positive behavioral change and successful reintegration into society. These findings are consistent with motivational and educational theories suggesting that individuals are more likely to engage in constructive behavior when opportunities for growth, learning, and self-development are available. Research has shown that motivation is enhanced through meaningful learning experiences and opportunities for personal achievement (Abbasi & Gholami, 2023; Zarif et al., 2024). Furthermore, intrinsic motivation has been identified as a key factor influencing engagement and behavioral improvement in various organizational and educational contexts (Hatami, 2023; Hosseini et al., 2024). Therefore, educational and vocational interventions can be understood as mechanisms that strengthen prisoners' sense of competence, self-worth, and future orientation.

The identification of psychological and social counseling as a major component of the prison ecosystem further underscores the importance of addressing prisoners' emotional and mental health needs. The findings suggest that individual counseling, group counseling, and therapeutic programs for psychological problems are essential for reducing maladaptive behaviors and promoting rehabilitation. This result is consistent with studies demonstrating the relationship between psychological well-being and adaptive functioning among prisoners. Ghazanfari et al. reported that psychological well-being, family cohesion, and purposeful living are positively associated with healthier adjustment among incarcerated individuals (Ghazanfari et al., 2023). Similarly, Farahmand and Sharvani found that social loneliness and frustration contribute to negative emotional outcomes among prisoners, highlighting the need for effective psychological interventions (Farahmand & Sharvani, 2022). Moreover, the positive role of emotion regulation identified in previous studies supports the inclusion of counseling and therapeutic services within prison rehabilitation programs (Razvan Moghadam et al., 2022).

The findings also revealed the crucial role of social and family support in promoting prisoner rehabilitation. Family communication, support programs for prisoners' families, family relationship reconstruction initiatives, and post-release support services emerged as important components

of the ecosystem model. These findings indicate that maintaining family bonds and strengthening social support networks contribute significantly to prisoners' emotional stability, motivation, and readiness for reintegration. Previous research similarly suggests that family cohesion and social support serve as protective factors against psychological distress and facilitate positive adjustment during incarceration (Ghazanfari et al., 2023). The present findings further suggest that rehabilitation should not be confined to prison walls but should extend to family systems and community networks that influence prisoners' lives before, during, and after incarceration.

The dimension of rehabilitation programs, particularly community reintegration initiatives and vocational rehabilitation programs, represents another important contribution of the study. Participants emphasized the need for structured support following release, including employment assistance, psychological support, and social services. This finding reflects contemporary rehabilitation perspectives that view reintegration as a continuous process rather than a single post-release event. The identified importance of vocational rehabilitation is also consistent with motivational theories suggesting that opportunities for achievement and productive engagement enhance self-efficacy and reduce the likelihood of returning to criminal behavior (Büyükbeye et al., 2023; Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). In addition, support during the transition from incarceration to community life may reduce uncertainty and strengthen social adaptation.

Economic and employment conditions emerged as another significant dimension within the prison ecosystem model. Employment opportunities inside prison, financial support mechanisms, and post-release occupational programs were identified as influential factors affecting prisoner behavior and rehabilitation. These findings indicate that meaningful work and economic participation contribute to behavioral reform by promoting responsibility, discipline, self-esteem, and future orientation. Such results are compatible with Herzberg's motivational framework, which highlights the importance of meaningful work and achievement as motivators for positive behavior (Büyükbeye et al., 2023). They are also supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which suggests that the satisfaction of economic and security needs provides a foundation for higher-order personal development (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). Therefore, prison employment programs should not be viewed merely as institutional labor mechanisms but rather as developmental opportunities that facilitate rehabilitation.

The inclusion of financial assistance for prisoners and their families further reflects the broader social dimensions of rehabilitation. Economic hardships frequently affect both incarcerated individuals and their family members, creating barriers to successful reintegration. The present findings suggest that financial support programs can alleviate stress, improve family stability, and facilitate rehabilitation outcomes. This perspective aligns with ecosystem thinking, which emphasizes that outcomes within a system are influenced by interactions occurring across multiple levels and contexts rather than within a single institution alone (Hou & Shi, 2021; Yousefian et al., 2023).

The judicial and managerial system was identified as the fifth major dimension influencing prisoner behavioral reform. The findings demonstrated that judicial procedures, managerial decision-making, and legal support mechanisms contribute significantly to creating an environment conducive to rehabilitation. Participants emphasized the importance of transparency, fairness, legal protection, performance evaluation, and coordination among institutions. These findings are consistent with organizational and managerial theories emphasizing the role of governance structures, institutional trust, and organizational culture in shaping behavioral outcomes (Salimi & Rouhi, 2020). Furthermore, studies based on Theory X and Theory Y suggest that management systems grounded in trust, participation, and developmental assumptions are more likely to encourage positive behavioral responses than systems based solely on control and coercion (Senarathne, 2020; Sumadi et al., 2022).

The findings related to legal rights and access to justice also underscore the importance of procedural fairness within correctional settings. When prisoners perceive that they are treated fairly and that their legal rights are respected, they may be more likely to engage constructively with rehabilitation programs and institutional processes. This finding highlights the need for correctional institutions to integrate legal support and procedural transparency into broader rehabilitation strategies. Effective governance, therefore, appears to be an essential component of a successful prison ecosystem.

A notable contribution of the present study is its integration of diverse dimensions into a comprehensive ecosystem framework. Previous studies have often examined isolated variables such as psychological well-being, family support, educational interventions, sports participation, or emotional regulation independently (Amani & Betyari, 2023; Askari et al., 2023; Farahmand & Sharvani,

2022; Razvan Moghadam et al., 2022). In contrast, the present study conceptualizes behavioral reform as the result of interactions among multiple dimensions operating simultaneously. This perspective is highly consistent with ecosystem approaches developed in organizational, entrepreneurial, and policy research, where system performance emerges through the interaction of numerous interconnected actors and structures (Esmailpour & Moradi Eslami, 2023; Saadabadi et al., 2022; Salari et al., 2021; Wurth et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that prisoner behavioral reform requires a holistic and integrated approach that addresses environmental conditions, educational opportunities, psychological support, family relationships, economic participation, and institutional governance simultaneously. The ecosystem model developed in this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex processes underlying rehabilitation and offers a foundation for designing more effective correctional policies and interventions.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted within the context of the Tehran Prisons Organization, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other correctional systems with different organizational structures, cultural contexts, or policy environments. Second, the study relied on qualitative interviews with experts and senior managers, meaning that the perspectives of prisoners themselves were not directly incorporated into the model development process. Third, the findings are based on participants' experiences and perceptions, which may be influenced by subjective interpretations and professional backgrounds. Finally, because the study employed a qualitative design, the proposed ecosystem model was not quantitatively tested, and the strength of relationships among the identified dimensions remains to be empirically examined.

Future studies should examine the proposed ecosystem model using quantitative and mixed-methods approaches to validate the identified dimensions and assess the relationships among them. Researchers may also investigate the perspectives of prisoners, correctional officers, family members, and community stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the prison ecosystem. Comparative studies across different provinces, countries, and correctional systems could help identify contextual similarities and differences in ecosystem structures. Longitudinal research is also recommended to examine how

changes in environmental, social, educational, and managerial conditions influence behavioral reform and post-release outcomes over time. In addition, future studies may explore the role of emerging technologies, digital education, and community-based partnerships in strengthening prison ecosystems and supporting successful reintegration.

Correctional policymakers and prison administrators should adopt a systemic approach to rehabilitation by recognizing the interconnected nature of environmental, educational, psychological, social, economic, and managerial factors. Efforts should be directed toward improving prison living conditions, expanding educational and vocational opportunities, strengthening counseling and mental health services, facilitating family involvement, and developing comprehensive post-release support programs. Prison management systems should emphasize transparency, fairness, performance evaluation, and interorganizational collaboration. Employment and rehabilitation initiatives should be designed to enhance prisoners' skills, self-efficacy, and readiness for reintegration into society. Finally, coordinated partnerships among prisons, educational institutions, social service agencies, employers, and community organizations can contribute to the creation of a sustainable ecosystem that supports long-term behavioral reform and reduces recidivism.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

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