

PROBATION SERVICES AND THE SOCIAL REINTEGRATION OF OFFENDERS FROM PIERRE BOURDIEU'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. This study examines the social reintegration of individuals under probation supervision through the theoretical lens of Pierre Bourdieu. His concepts of *field* (social space), *habitus* and *capital* provide highly functional analytical tools for understanding society. Bourdieu's sociological methodology enables the analysis of power relations between individuals and social structures. In particular, the notions of field, habitus and especially *social capital* prove useful for interpreting how offenders adapt to their social environment and reintegrate into society. From this perspective, people under probation supervision strive not only to change their behaviour, but also to gain social acceptance. Bourdieu's framework supports both the analysis of reintegration processes and the identification of necessary steps for more effective practice in this area.

Keywords: Pierre Bourdieu, *field*, *habitus*, *capital*, probation supervision, adaptation, social integration, crime, punishment.

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Received: 26 September 2025; **Accepted:** 23 November 2025; **Published:** 3 February 2026.

1. Introduction

The social approach is an important theoretical framework for understanding the reciprocal influences between society and the individual. It is used to explain how people adapt to social structures and norms, as well as to interpret relationships and interactions among social groups. Within this framework, individuals under probation supervision seek not only to transform their personal behaviour but also to alter society's attitudes toward them. Pierre Bourdieu's theory enables a deeper understanding of this process.

Bourdieu proposed several concepts to explain how social relations and structures shape individual lives and how social power is distributed. The central pillars of his methodology are the concepts of *field*, *habitus* and *capital*. When used together, these concepts allow for a broader and more systematic analysis of social realities.

Among Bourdieu's key contributions are the notions of *social capital* and *social networks*. Social capital refers to the system of resources and opportunities that an individual or group obtains through social relations. It depends on both the quantity and quality of ties: the stronger and more stable individuals' connections are within society, the more social capital they possess. Social networks, in turn, refer to the organization and formation of these relationships.

Bourdieu's sociological methodology is particularly important for understanding the adaptation and reintegration of individuals under probation supervision. The purpose of this study is to analyze, through Bourdieu's framework, how the return of supervised

individuals to society can be made possible and how the key problems emerging in this context might be addressed.

2. Methodology

This article is based on a qualitative research approach. The study draws on both primary and secondary sources relevant to the topic. First, works authored by Pierre Bourdieu were examined, followed by books, dissertations and scholarly articles addressing his methodology. In addition, primary and secondary sources concerning probation services were consulted.

3. Pierre Bourdieu's sociological methodology

Bourdieu's sociological methodology is structured around the concepts of field, habitus and capital. To understand these ideas more clearly, it is useful to briefly outline how his intellectual approach developed. Bourdieu completed his undergraduate education in philosophy. Between 1955 and 1960, he performed compulsory military service in the Kabylia region of Algeria, where he produced ethnographic work on Berber communities. This experience played a decisive role in his shift from philosophy to sociology (Jourdain & Naulin, 2016).

In developing his methodology, Bourdieu engaged with the theories of earlier philosophers and sociologists. The ideas of Gaston Bachelard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim played a foundational role in shaping his theoretical framework (Swartz, 2018). He initially adopted Bachelard's dialectical model of thinking as a basis for his theoretical development. In this model, one theory does not simply replace another; rather, the limitations of earlier theories are addressed and integrated into a broader framework (Swartz, 2018).

Bourdieu also drew on Sartre's subjectivism and Lévi-Strauss's objectivism while formulating his own methodological approach. Using Bachelard's method, he combined these apparently opposing perspectives and incorporated them into a wider analytical spectrum (Maharramov, 2023). Likewise, he approached the sociological theories of Marx, Weber and Durkheim in a framework that both encompasses and transcends them.

Bourdieu explained the concept of field through the metaphor of a game (Kaplan & Yardımcıoğlu, 2020). By establishing an analogy between a game and a field, he argued that individuals in a given field - like players in a game - accept the rules operating within it. In interpreting the field, he employed the concepts of *illusio* and *doxa*. For Bourdieu, *illusio* refers to the sense that the game is worth playing and to the investments players make in it, while *doxa* refers to belief in the game and its stakes (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2021). Thus, entering the game implies accepting its value and rules (Maharramov & Fildiş, 2023).

The concept of *habitus* in Bourdieu's methodology refers to the knowledge, dispositions and competences individuals acquire from the cultures and subcultures within which they live (Palabıyık, 2020). In other words, habitus includes everything that enables an individual to "know what to do" within a field on the basis of family background, environment, education and accumulated experience (Maharramov, 2023).

Bourdieu distinguishes three main forms of capital: economic, cultural and social. **Economic capital** represents material power and can be directly converted into money or property rights; it is also a form of capital that can be preserved (Baki, 2021). **Cultural**

capital includes knowledge learned from parents and teachers, educational credentials and the individual's level of schooling. Bourdieu emphasizes that this form of capital covers a wide range of capacities such as verbal skills, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, knowledge of the school system and education (Swartz, 2018). **Social capital** refers to the groups an individual belongs to and the networks formed through these affiliations; it captures the individual's reciprocal relations with others within the group (Maharramov & Fildiş, 2023).

Taken together, these concepts constitute Bourdieu's sociological methodology. According to him, individuals' habitus is shaped in relation to the fields they inhabit and they struggle within these fields through the forms of capital they possess.

4. The reintegration process of individuals under probation supervision

Within contemporary criminal justice systems, the notion of combating crime and imposing punishment increasingly includes the idea that sanctions should be implemented through measures consistent with human dignity. The primary aim is the rehabilitation of the offender and ultimately, their return to society as an adapted and socially integrated individual (Sieh, 2006).

Society has a complex structure in which multiple variables affect individual lives. Just as societies differ in structure, individuals within those societies also vary. Throughout history, crime has existed in all societies, prompting extensive research and the development of solutions within the framework of criminal justice. The causes of criminal behaviour are diverse; differences related to offenders' physical characteristics, psychological factors and the features of their social environment also shape variations in criminal propensity (Arrigo, 2006).

Because criminal behaviour is influenced by both individual and social factors, the need to individualize interventions has become increasingly significant. The probation service emerged in response to this need, aiming to rehabilitate offenders and reintegrate them into society.

As an alternative sanctioning system, probation allows offenders to serve their sentences within the community under supervision rather than receiving a custodial sentence. Until the rehabilitation process is completed and the individual is reintegrated, offenders receive support from specialized professionals. Typically, those who have committed minor offences are placed in probation programs, allowing them to serve their sentence without entering prison.

During this period, the individual continues to live within society but must assume certain responsibilities. They are expected to meet regularly with probation officers, receive psychological support, engage in socially beneficial activities and maintain employment. Individuals who accept these conditions may benefit from probation. Continuing rehabilitative activities while serving a sentence in the community is crucial for reintegration. In general, probation is a socially oriented system designed to reform offenders and facilitate their return to society (Porsuk, 2017).

This process also requires social work professionals. In recent years, the growth of preventive efforts against criminal acts has led to greater integration of social work with the criminal justice system (Klaus, 1998). Social workers monitor the process closely, intervene when necessary and provide guidance to support reintegration.

At the initial stage, the social worker's task is to conduct an individual assessment to understand the nature of the offence and the underlying causes. This involves

examining psychological, sociological and environmental factors that may have contributed to the individual's tendency toward crime.

Such assessment plays a critical role in identifying why the individual engaged in criminal behaviour and what kinds of plans should be developed during rehabilitation. When rehabilitation is implemented effectively, the factors driving criminal behaviour can be identified and solutions can be developed accordingly (İçli, 2002).

From this perspective, the importance of social work professionals becomes especially evident. Within probation services, social workers occupy a central position in rehabilitating individuals under conditional release and supporting their reintegration into society. In this context, sociologists, psychologists and social workers are regarded as key specialists in both the release process and subsequent social adaptation.

The reintegration of offenders released under conditional measures is of major significance. First, both individual and social causes underlying criminal acts should be examined. In this respect, the theory of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers a functional approach for explaining the social foundations of crime.

Bourdieu's theory provides insights into both the reasons behind individuals' involvement in crime and the pathways through which they may adapt and integrate into society during probation. According to Bourdieu, every individual is born into a particular field; they develop a habitus aligned with that field (a way of living, thinking and behaving) and struggle within it through the forms of capital they possess. Through this framework, it becomes possible to explain why a person becomes crime-prone and how they might reintegrate during conditional release, as well as to propose alternative solutions.

To understand why a person under conditional release becomes involved in crime and to identify alternative solutions for reintegration during probation, turning to Bourdieu's theory is appropriate. Analyzing an illustrative case through the individual's personal, familial and social development may help clarify the issue.

5. Illustrative case: Murad

Murad is a 24-year-old man living in one of Istanbul's *gecekondu* (informal settlement) neighbourhoods. He belongs to a family of eight and is the eldest of six brothers. The family has experienced chronic financial hardship. Murad's father is unemployed and has an alcohol addiction, while his mother is a homemaker. After completing primary education, both Murad and his brothers were forced to leave school. Murad and his younger brothers worked in daily jobs to support the family. At times, when they could not find work, they drifted into crime and began committing small-scale theft.

Murad and his brothers, who engaged in minor theft as a means of survival, were never caught and were not involved in legal proceedings - until Murad was directly apprehended by the police during one incident and legal action was initiated. Considering the nature of the offence and the fact that Murad had no prior criminal record, the court assessed his sentence within the framework of conditional release. His expression of remorse in court also played an important role in this decision. The court sentenced Murad to two years, deciding that 12 months would be served under conditional release. After completing his first year in prison, Murad was released under conditional supervision.

As part of his reintegration process, it was decided that Murad would meet once a week with professionals affiliated with the conditional release office. During this period,

Murad would discuss his actions and their consequences with a specialist and receive support. First, a social work professional would plan the steps to be taken, including:

- Confronting the offence and remorse,
- Analysis of risks and needs,
- Family relationships,
- Employment and educational status,
- Psychosocial support,
- Social integration,
- Goal-setting.

At the initial stage, the nature of Murad's offence and its consequences are examined and his remorse is assessed. Next, a risk analysis is conducted to evaluate the likelihood of reoffending. Basic needs - such as education, housing and employment - are considered and initiatives aimed at resolving these problems are implemented. Subsequently, Murad's family relationships are reviewed, since family-related problems contributed to his criminal trajectory. His educational status is assessed, literacy is evaluated and he is guided toward education. If he has vocational skills, support is provided to help him find work. In addition, psychosocial support is essential: assistance should be offered in areas such as stress management, anxiety problems and anger control. Finally, future-oriented goals are set through achievable short-term targets to support integration.

During conditional release, Murad is also expected to work in community service. Such work may include cleaning parks and public spaces in municipalities, assisting with animal welfare activities, organizing shelves or supporting maintenance in school and university libraries or performing archival and document-related tasks in public hospitals. Other socially beneficial activities may also be assigned. The aim is to prevent social isolation and support reintegration through socially useful participation.

6. Bourdieu-based interpretation of the case

Analyzing this case through Bourdieu's concepts makes it possible to identify both the causes of criminal behaviour and the practical steps needed to support reintegration from an alternative perspective. Murad interacts with several fields: the family field, the educational field, the crime and court field, the labour field and the field of conditional release/probation.

A closer examination of each field reveals key drivers of Murad's criminal tendency. Within the family field, material deprivation, parental neglect, the father's alcohol addiction and the burden of early responsibility are prominent. Within the educational field, Murad's low level of schooling is evident; due to the pressures of the family field, he was forced to leave school early and seek income, significantly hindering healthy development. In the labour field, he occupies a low position, relying on unstable jobs and at times illegal income - factors that increased his propensity toward crime. The crime and court field reflects his involvement in theft and his encounter with state coercive institutions. The final field - the probation/conditional release field - is where he engages with professionals and attempts to reintegrate.

From the perspective of habitus, Murad's role within the family, his upbringing in poverty, his interactions in the gecekondu environment and the conditions he repeatedly experienced shaped his patterns of thought and behaviour. His inclination toward crime,

his disengagement from education and his later remorse may be interpreted as external manifestations of an internalized habitus.

From the perspective of capital, multiple dimensions emerge. In terms of economic capital, Murad's family is clearly disadvantaged: living in an informal settlement, leaving school early, an unemployed father with addiction and a homemaker mother all reflect severe material deprivation. The involvement of Murad and his brothers in minor theft further reinforces this point.

Regarding cultural capital, Murad and his family appear to possess limited cultural resources. Parental illiteracy suggests the absence of transmitted cultural inheritance, while Murad's early withdrawal from school and lack of intellectual engagement indicate weak cultural capital.

Murad's social capital also appears constrained. His ties are primarily within a socioeconomically disadvantaged environment, providing limited support while simultaneously reinforcing criminal tendencies.

Overall, Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital allow for a systematic evaluation of Murad's reintegration under probation. Being embedded in a disadvantaged field increased his risk of criminal involvement. The habitus shaped within that field - characterized by social exclusion and survival struggle - made criminal activity a normalized practice. His weak economic, cultural and social capital further intensified vulnerability. However, probation enables a transition, supported by professional intervention, from a high-risk field to a rehabilitative and supportive one. Through community service and structured support, Murad may strengthen his cultural and social capital, while employment opportunities may improve his economic capital. As he enters a new social field and consolidates these forms of capital, his habitus can gradually transform in a positive direction, supporting stable reintegration into society.

7. Conclusion

In this study, the integration of individuals under probation into society is examined through Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital. The constructed case study illustrates how an individual growing up in a disadvantaged environment may be inclined toward crime and how this tendency is reflected in their actions through internal rationalizations. It was highlighted that the field in which Murad lives, the habitus he develops within that field and the types of capital he possesses are highly determinative in his propensity for crime and his process of social adaptation. Growing up and living in a gecekondü neighborhood led Murad to develop a habitus in which criminal behavior became normalized. In addition, his limited accumulation of economic, cultural and social capital reinforced this tendency. On the other hand, the probation process facilitates the transition of at-risk individuals from high-risk fields to rehabilitative ones, providing opportunities to strengthen their distribution of capital. During Murad's probation, being guided by social service professionals and directed toward community-beneficial activities allowed his habitus to change positively while enhancing his economic, cultural and social capital. This process enables Murad and by extension, other individuals in probation - to achieve lasting social integration. In conclusion, Bourdieu's sociological methodology offers a highly functional framework for understanding probation and similar rehabilitation processes, both at the individual and societal level and for developing appropriate strategic interventions.

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