



## CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF FORMER PRISONERS AFTER RELEASE THROUGH CITIZENSHIP RELATIONS

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### **Abstract**

This article examines how social acceptance of former prisoners after release is constructed through the interplay of social labeling, community norms, and lived citizenship in everyday relations. The discussion develops a conceptual account of acceptance as a process rather than a fixed status, emphasizing how credibility is granted, withheld, and renegotiated across family life, neighborhood interaction, and workplaces. Labeling operates as a shortcut that shapes first impressions and frames subsequent interpretation of conduct. Community norms then set informal thresholds for trust, participation, and moral worth, often through subtle signals that regulate distance and access to shared spaces. Experiences of citizenship within public services and administrative encounters provide institutional cues that can either affirm equal standing or reinforce suspicion. These elements form a relational mechanism in which restricted opportunities can produce withdrawal, and withdrawal can be read as proof of unfitness, sustaining a self-reinforcing cycle. The article argues that fair acceptance depends on procedural decency in daily interaction, coherent signals from institutions, and community practices that distinguish reasonable caution from enduring exclusion. The proposed framework clarifies pathways by which recognition may gradually emerge without ignoring collective safety concerns.

**Keywords:** social acceptance, stigma, citizenship, community norms, former prisoners, post release life, social exclusion.

## Introduction

The reunion of an inmate with social space after release is often understood as a simple homecoming, when in fact it is a process of reorganizing relationships, identity, and a life structure that has changed during the period of incarceration. At this stage, an individual faces the basic need to be accepted, trusted, and recognized as a dignified subject capable of fulfilling social obligations. Social acceptance is not a state that exists on its own, but rather the result of ongoing social evaluations through daily interactions. The dynamics of this perception are often influenced by the extent of citizens' political participation and civil society movements in interpreting justice in the public sphere (Rojak et al., 2021). These evaluations can be influenced by collective memory of the criminal event, community norms regarding propriety, and moral expectations attached to the status of a former inmate. Therefore, the restoration of social relations must be understood as social work that demands the negotiation of meaning, behavioral adjustment, and the ability to read social situations. When these negotiations fail, former inmates risk experiencing a disconnection of relationships that leads to isolation, dependency, or re-involvement in lifestyle patterns that are detrimental to themselves and society.

Social life post-release is also influenced by the way social institutions position individuals who have served a sentence (Faried & Nashori, 2013). Families, residential environments, religious institutions, and work communities possess sets of values that determine who is considered safe, worthy, and trustworthy. The status of a former inmate is often treated as a permanent marker, such that the space for self-proof becomes narrow. Social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups within such social structures often reinforce these interactional boundaries (Hartono, 2021). At the interactional level, this label can manifest in the form of avoidance, excessive surveillance, whispering, or restrictions on participation in community activities. At the structural level, it can appear as strict administrative requirements, internal organizational policies, or selection practices that reject criminal history without considering behavioral changes. This situation turns the process of returning to society into a series of social trials that are not always proportional to the individual's ability to reform (Sari, 2021). Consequently, former inmates often reorganize their

communication methods and choose survival strategies that prioritize personal security over openness.

Release also means re-entering an economic space characterized by competition, productivity standards, and reputation demands. Work functions as a source of livelihood as well as a pillar of social identity, as it provides routine, networks, and a sense of usefulness. When access to employment is closed, former inmates face uncertainty that erodes self-confidence and lowers their bargaining position within the family. Efforts to navigate social mobility through the reintegration of individuals involved in crime become crucial for the success of this transition process (Dirgantara et al., 2022). In many situations, repeated experiences of rejection cause individuals to internalize stigma, eventually viewing themselves as unworthy of certain opportunities. At the same time, the environment may interpret economic hardship as evidence of moral failure, thereby strengthening negative assessments. This tension creates psychosocial pressure that influences how a person makes decisions, including those related to relationships, emotional management, and social circles. Thus, post-release livelihood cannot be separated from the social reading of the criminal history attached to a person's body and name.

Beyond work and social acceptance, the dimension of citizenship also determines the quality of life post-release (Faried & Nashori, 2013). Citizenship is not merely a legal status, but an experience of being recognized as a member of a community who possesses rights and obligations. In social practice, former inmates may feel a distance from public services, administrative procedures, and spaces for civic participation. This fragmentation of the sense of belonging often arises when social integration does not go hand in hand with the full recognition of identity (Marzuki et al., 2023). This sense of distance can stem from experiences of being treated with suspicion when handling documents, dealing with authorities, or participating in formal social activities. At the same time, newly released individuals are often in a vulnerable position because they do not yet have stability in housing, income, or strong support networks. Such vulnerability makes them dependent on others to access basic rights, thereby reducing personal autonomy. If the experience of citizenship is colored by rejection, individuals may withdraw from social processes that should ideally

strengthen community bonds. Such withdrawal weakens the opportunity to repair one's reputation through consistent, concrete actions.

The relational dimension within the family often becomes the first arena that determines the direction of life post-release. The family can be a source of empowerment, but it can also be a space of conflict due to old wounds, shame, and distrust. Parents, spouses, and children have different experiences of the criminal event, so their expectations of the returning individual are not uniform. Improving psychological well-being through emotional management in daily life is essential to maintain the stability of these domestic relations (Irfan & Darmawan, 2021). In many households, emerging issues include the division of responsibility, financial management, social boundaries, and child-rearing methods. While the individual tries to assert personal change, the family may demand proof in the form of strict compliance, whereas the individual needs space to build independence. Imbalanced negotiations can lead to friction, feelings of being cornered, and emotional outbursts. At certain points, fragile family relations can drive a person to seek acceptance outside the home through networks that are not always healthy. Therefore, the restructuring of family relationships is a vital part of the process of returning to society.

The primary problem in this topic lies in the tension between a legal status that has been fully served and a social status that is often considered unfinished. Sentencing has a time limit, whereas social evaluation often persists without clear boundaries. This tension gives rise to a situation where an individual is asked to demonstrate change, yet the access to demonstrate that change is restricted by social rejection. The attached stigma often even extends into the domestic sphere, affecting private legal protection for families who have members with negative social labels (Zahid et al., 2022). In such circumstances, the process of identity restoration becomes complicated because the individual must constantly negotiate who they are in the face of the label attached to them. When that label becomes society's primary lens, good deeds may be viewed as mere image-building, while small mistakes may be treated as justification for old prejudices. Such a situation creates psychological and social uncertainty that affects an individual's capacity to plan for the future. Consequently, life post-release often moves

in a rhythm of being on guard, weighing risks, and avoiding the spotlight, which ultimately reduces opportunities for healthy social participation.

Another problem arises from the asynchrony between the demand for rapid adaptation and the need for gradual recovery. Society often expects former inmates to immediately stabilize, work, and behave according to norms, while the individual may still be dealing with mental pressure, limited skills, and changes in relationship structures. Manifestations of social stigma like this are often the main inhibitors in the process of individual recovery within society (Aisyah & Issalillah, 2022). Demands that are too rapid can push individuals to take shortcuts to meet imposed social standards. On the other hand, social institutions that should serve as bridges often lack consistent mechanisms to assist the process of social recovery. As a result, the individual carries a double burden: recovering themselves while simultaneously proving social worthiness, without adequate support. When this burden accumulates, social relationships become fragile and easily collapse due to minor conflicts, trust issues, or misunderstandings. This complexity shows that release is not synonymous with the automatic return of social function.

Scientific writing regarding social reintegration after release is important because it highlights the meeting point between legal norms, social morals, and individual life experiences. A clear understanding of this process can help reduce the gap between the objectives of sentencing, which emphasize reform, and social reality, which often perpetuates stigma. The management of well-being through certain lifestyles indirectly provides positive social and economic implications for work productivity (Hardyansah et al., 2022). Normative studies based on written sources allow for the mapping of concepts, the formulation of explanatory categories, and the strengthening of arguments regarding how society should position former inmates as subjects capable of growth. At the institutional level, this writing is relevant for assessing the alignment of human rights principles with social practices occurring in labor relations, public services, and community life. At the community level, scientific descriptions can clarify the reasonable boundary between social vigilance and discrimination. Thus, the urgency of the study lies in the need to build a conceptual foundation that can be used to assess policies and social practices responsibly.

The problem formulation in this writing is as follows: how the construction of social acceptance toward former inmates post-release is formed through the interaction between social labels, community norms, and citizenship experiences in daily life. This question focuses attention on the formation of social acceptance as a process rather than a static state. The ideal choices of individuals under this social pressure often reflect how they respond to the normative expectations of their environment (Fajar et al., 2021). Social acceptance is understood as the result of the interaction between how society evaluates, how the individual presents themselves, and how social institutions open or close access to participation. Through this question, the writing is directed to outline the mechanisms of social evaluation formation, the normative sources used by society, and the ethical consequences of prolonged labeling practices. With this focus, the discussion can unravel how social relations are formed, maintained, or weakened in the initial period after release.

The purpose of this writing is to formulate a conceptual explanation regarding the formation of social acceptance toward former inmates post-release through the relationship between social labels, community norms, and citizenship experiences. The description is directed toward constructing an argumentative framework that helps assess social practices ethically and juridically, as well as clarifying the prerequisites for reasonable social participation for individuals who have completed their sentence. This writing is expected to provide a theoretical contribution in the form of a categorization of social acceptance mechanisms and forms of veiled rejection. Practically, this writing can serve as a conceptual reference for policymakers, social service managers, and community stakeholders in formulating assistance steps that respect human dignity.

## Method

This writing employs a qualitative literature study with interpretive reasoning that positions the text as the primary source for understanding the formation of social acceptance post-release. Materials were determined through a targeted search of scientific works on sentencing, stigma, citizenship, social relations, and the sociology of law, then selected based on conceptual relevance and clarity of definition. The data collection process

was limited to academically accountable documents such as books, journal articles, and policy manuscripts, which were then organized into a thematic map to facilitate cross-disciplinary reading. This approach aligns with the emphasis of Lampard and Pole (2015) regarding social investigation, which demands precision in selecting sources, interpreting meaning, and maintaining argumentative coherence without relying on numerical measurements for conclusions.

The processing stage was conducted through iterative reading to identify key terms, normative assumptions, and inter-conceptual relationships that direct how society evaluates former inmates. Each major theme such as labeling, social trust, livelihood, and the experience of citizenship was deconstructed into sub-themes to reveal the explanatory flow and points of normative tension. In the methodological section, the reference to De Vaus and De Vaus (2013) is used in a limited capacity to reinforce scientific reasoning discipline in formulating questions, defining scope, and maintaining consistency between objectives, materials, and conclusions, even though this research does not utilize surveys. The principle of caution in inference remains applied so that every proposition has a clear argumentative basis within the written sources.

A socio-legal framework is utilized to interpret the intersection between legal norms and social practices that shape the post-release experience, ensuring the discussion does not stop at formal rules. Irianto (2011) emphasizes the importance of viewing law as a social practice living within interaction, language, and power relations; thus, this study interprets legal texts and social discourse as intertwined entities. Because this research is normative, validity is maintained through transparency of the argumentative flow, consistency of definitions, and the comparison of ideas between authors to avoid claims that exceed the source material. Synthesis is performed by weaving together equivalent concepts, positioning differences as material for critical reading, and producing conceptual formulations that address the research problem with focus.

## Result and Discussion

The correctional system in Indonesia has undergone a fundamental paradigm transformation, shifting from a punitive model toward a restorative approach focused on the concept of social reintegration. Inmates are no longer viewed merely as objects of punishment, but as fostered citizens prepared to reunite with society. Efforts to navigate social mobility through the reintegration of individuals involved in crime become crucial for the success of this transition process (Dirgantara et al., 2022). Normatively, this process is a systematic effort to restore the life, livelihood, and living relationships of inmates so they can be re-accepted by their social environment without the stigmatization that hinders their productivity post-detention.

The reintegration stages begin through the assimilation process, which serves as the initial bridge for inmates to blend into society under the strict supervision of Correctional Institutions (LAPAS). In this phase, inmates are given the opportunity to interact with the outside world, both through social work activities and other community development programs, to erode social anxiety and rebuild self-confidence. This assimilation functions as a behavioral evaluation instrument for correctional authorities to determine the mental and social readiness of inmates before moving to broader and more independent integration stages (Joseph, 2018).

Procedurally, the state provides mechanisms for Parole (PB) and Conditional Leave (CB) as incentives for positive behavioral changes during the training period. Parole can be granted to inmates who have served at least two-thirds of their sentence with a minimum provision of nine months, while Conditional Leave is intended for inmates with short sentences under one year and six months. This legal instrument is not an automatic right, but a conditional right that demands continuous compliance with the norms established during the transition from incarceration toward full freedom.

Post-release, regulations emphasize that inmates are not immediately released without supervision; instead, they transition under the auspices of the Correctional Center (BAPAS), which plays a crucial role in mitigating the risk of recidivism (Furqan & Sidiq, 2019). Through the Community Research (Litmas) function, community counselors conduct in-depth assessments to evaluate the suitability of the living environment and the family's readiness to receive the inmate back. This objective evaluation in Litmas is the primary

determinant of whether the social ecosystem surrounding the inmate is supportive enough to prevent future legal violations.

The continuity of the inmate's life in society is then guaranteed through guidance and supervision programs conducted simultaneously by BAPAS. Guidance includes providing practical skills training and psychological counseling aimed at strengthening the individual's economic and mental resilience, while supervision is carried out to ensure that the subject does not violate the agreed-upon integration requirements. Efforts to navigate social mobility through the reintegration of individuals involved in crime become crucial for the success of the program (Dirgantara et al., 2022). Through the synergy between strict regulations and structured social support, the correctional system seeks to create stable legal compliance to achieve the ultimate goal of a sustainable social reintegration process.

Social acceptance of former inmates post-release can be understood as the result of a social construction formed through the exchange of meaning among individuals, communities, and institutions. This construction works by assessing whether someone is viewed as safe, trustworthy, and worthy of being within a particular interactional space. Such evaluations are rarely neutral, as they are guided by norms regarding propriety and the social memory attached to the criminal event. The dynamics of this perception are often influenced by the extent of citizens' political participation and civil society movements in interpreting justice in the public sphere (Rojak et al., 2021). In that process, the identity of a former inmate often fluctuates between two positions: as a subject who has fulfilled legal consequences and as an object of long-lasting social suspicion. This tension ensures that social acceptance does not manifest as a single final decision, but rather as a series of repeated trials. In every trial, the individual is faced with the demand to display change, while the community holds the informal right to withhold recognition. Thus, social acceptance is a negotiation process influenced by who holds the authority to judge, the language used to label, and the opportunities available for the individual to demonstrate behavioral consistency.

The construction of social acceptance also operates through labeling mechanisms that attach moral categories to individuals. Labels function as cognitive shortcuts, allowing the community to feel it is unnecessary to know a full life history before maintaining distance. At the interactional level,

labels can emerge as forms of address, demeaning jokes, or interrogative questions, all of which signal that the individual occupies a lower social position. Social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups within such social structures often reinforce these interactional boundaries (Hartono, 2021). At the institutional level, labels appear as administrative records, additional requirements, or repeated checks, asserting that the status of a former inmate is regarded as an inherent risk. Consequently, individuals can become trapped in a social paradox: the need to be open to gain trust, yet openness itself triggers rejection. In this state, social acceptance is often shaped by the individual's ability to manage information about themselves, including when to disclose criminal history and how to explain the changes they have undergone. This information management is not an act of deception, but rather an adaptive response to the structure of social evaluation.

Community norms play a vital role in shaping the boundaries of acceptance, as norms dictate the standards of eligibility applicable within specific social spaces. Norms often exist as unwritten agreements governing social distance who is worthy of employment opportunities, who can be trusted to manage money, or who is fit to be involved in children's and youth activities. These boundaries may vary between communities, but they are always influenced by how a community assesses threats to social order. The ideal choices of individuals under this social pressure often reflect how they respond to the normative expectations of their environment (Fajar et al., 2021). When norms emphasize moral purity and reputation, the space for acceptance tends to narrow because a criminal record is seen as tainting the collective reputation. Conversely, when norms emphasize recovery and responsibility, opportunities for acceptance can open through reasonable mechanisms of proof. These normative evaluations are often supported by informal leaders, such as community elders or figures regarded as authoritative, whose words can direct public opinion. Thus, social acceptance is not merely a relationship between individuals, but also the result of community values that structure the way people perceive mistakes and change.

The experience of citizenship post-release contributes to the construction of social acceptance because it determines whether an individual feels treated as an equal citizen (Faried & Nashori, 2013).

Citizenship experienced positively is usually characterized by reasonable access to public services, clear procedures, and the respectful attitude of authorities toward human dignity. When that experience transforms into a series of disproportionate checks or unexplained rejections, the individual receives the message that their status remains in doubt. This fragmentation of the sense of belonging often arises when social integration does not go hand in hand with the full recognition of identity (Marzuki et al., 2023). This message is then carried into other social interaction spaces, such as the workplace and residential environments, resulting in diminished self-confidence and an increased tendency to withdraw. In many situations, individuals choose to reduce formal participation to avoid shame and exposure to stigma. However, this reduced participation can be interpreted by the community as a sign of being uncooperative, thereby strengthening negative assessments. Here, a binding social circle is visible, where an unwelcoming experience of citizenship narrows participation, and narrowed participation is then regarded as proof that the individual is not yet worthy of acceptance. This cycle demonstrates that social acceptance depends on the institutional experiences encountered by the individual after release.

The construction of social acceptance is also influenced by the moral language used by the community to explain the crime. Moral language can emphasize the mistake as a permanent stain or emphasize it as an event that can be accounted for and resolved. This difference in language determines whether the community provides space for a narrative of change. If the dominant narrative is one of a permanent stain, then the individual's efforts to improve themselves will be viewed with suspicion. Manifestations of social stigma like this are often the main inhibitors in the process of individual recovery within society (Aisyah & Issalillah, 2022). If the dominant narrative is one of responsibility, then the individual can be judged based on current actions. This moral language is often tied to religious understanding, local traditions, and the community's experience in facing crime. Therefore, social acceptance is not always decided by the facts of the criminal event, but rather by how that event is retold in community conversations. These retellings can simplify, add dramatic elements, or highlight specific parts, thereby building an image that is difficult to change. For former inmates, the ability to build a

consistent and responsible self-narrative becomes vital in facing the social stories that have already circulated.

Family relationships serve as the primary space for the formation of social acceptance, as the family often functions as an intermediary between the individual and the community. Family support can reduce the suspicion of neighbors, because the family provides an informal guarantee regarding the individual's behavior and intentions. However, the family itself can be torn between the desire to protect its reputation and the desire to support the returning family member. This tension ensures that acceptance at home is not always stable. Improving psychological well-being through emotional management in daily life is essential to maintain the stability of these domestic relations (Irfan & Darmawan, 2021). In certain situations, families provide conditional support through strict supervision, movement restrictions, or the regulation of daily activities deemed safe. While this form of support can help avoid conflict with neighbors, it can also create a sense of infantilization in the individual and hinder the development of autonomy. When an individual feels controlled, they may react with resistance, which the family then interprets as evidence that change has not yet occurred. This pattern demonstrates that social acceptance within the family is also a negotiated construction, not a final gift. The quality of this negotiation is heavily influenced by communication, the acknowledgment of past wounds, and the family's ability to distinguish between caution and exclusion.

Social acceptance is also closely related to trust, namely the conviction that the individual will comply with norms without continuous supervision. Trust is not formed through declarations, but through repeated experiences perceived as consistent. However, former inmates often have to build trust under a burden of prejudice that makes evidence of consistency difficult to recognize. In such circumstances, the standards of proof become unbalanced. The attached stigma often even extends into the domestic sphere, affecting private legal protection for families who have members with negative social labels (Zahid et al., 2022). The community may demand excessive proof, while the individual is not given sufficient opportunity to demonstrate good behavior. This imbalance produces a situation where trust becomes an expensive social commodity. For the individual, every small mistake can be viewed as a betrayal, while every good deed is

considered a duty that was expected anyway. Consequently, the individual may experience moral fatigue and choose to avoid intense interaction. This avoidance then reduces the opportunity to build trust through social proximity. Thus, the construction of social acceptance can stall because trust is treated as a prerequisite, when in most social relations, trust is usually a result that grows gradually.

The workplace often serves as the primary arena that determines whether social acceptance can shift from symbolic to tangible. In the workspace, an individual is evaluated through discipline, ability, and relationships with colleagues. However, the stigma of a criminal record can cause evaluations to be based not solely on performance, but on risk assumptions. At the organizational level, reputational concerns can drive unwritten policies to reject applicants with a criminal history. The management of well-being through certain lifestyles indirectly provides positive social and economic implications for work productivity (Hardyansah et al., 2022). At the coworker level, whispering can place the individual in an alienated position, even if they are capable of performing well. This condition forces the individual to face a dilemma: whether to hide their history to obtain opportunities or to disclose it at the risk of being rejected. This dilemma demonstrates that social acceptance in the workplace is shaped by organizational norms regarding security, loyalty, and image. When an organization lacks clear ethical guidelines, acceptance decisions may depend on the personal perceptions of supervisors. Thus, social acceptance in the workplace is often fragile, easily changed by rumors, minor conflicts, or leadership shifts. This vulnerability affects the stability of an individual's life post-release.

In the residential environment, social acceptance is related to access to shared spaces and collective security. The community establishes social boundaries through informal rules, such as who is allowed to join the neighborhood watch, who is trusted to hold facility keys, or who is invited to community meetings. Former inmates can be placed on the periphery through subtle arrangements, such as not being informed of activities or being avoided in conversation. This form of subtle exclusion is often more effective than open rejection because it is difficult to protest. This structural inequality is often intertwined with broader social vulnerabilities amidst

environmental changes (Gani, 2022). Individuals experiencing subtle exclusion may feel alienation without clear evidence to pinpoint its source. At the same time, the community may regard such actions as legitimate vigilance. This tension highlights the need to distinguish between community protection and discrimination that erodes dignity. Social acceptance in the living environment is also influenced by who serves as a guarantor, such as a well-known family or a trusted figure. When such a guarantor possesses social legitimacy, the space for acceptance may open, yet it remains conditional and easily revoked.

The symbolic aspect of social acceptance is evident in practices of respect, greetings, and the recognition of an individual's social standing. Simple things, such as being addressed by a proper name, being given the opportunity to speak, or being involved in collective decisions, can serve as markers that a person is viewed as an equal. Conversely, repeated neglect signals that the individual is still considered an outsider. These symbols form a psychological experience that influences an individual's motivation to maintain pro-social behavior. When symbols of respect are absent, the individual may feel that their efforts are meaningless. However, when symbols of respect are present, the individual receives social feedback that strengthens their new identity. Social acceptance, therefore, operates through body language, eye contact, and conversational styles, rather than solely through formal decisions. In a society that prioritizes harmony, rejection is often expressed subtly, forcing the individual to interpret faint social cues. This process of interpretation demands emotional energy and can trigger social anxiety (Putrie & Prasetya, 2021). Thus, the construction of social acceptance includes an emotional dimension that affects an individual's capacity to build stable relationships.

The construction of social acceptance is also related to how the community perceives the punishment itself. If punishment is understood as a means of retribution, then release does not erase suspicion because the community feels that justice has not been fully served. If punishment is understood as a means of accountability and reform, then release can be viewed as the legitimate conclusion of a cycle. These perceptions can differ between groups, even within the same community. The dynamics of this perception are often influenced by the extent of citizens' political

participation and civil society movements in interpreting justice in the public sphere (Rojak et al., 2021). As a result, the individual faces inconsistent evaluations. A person may be accepted by some residents but rejected by other groups. This situation divides the social space into safe zones and vulnerable zones for the individual. This zoning affects social mobility, social circles, and daily routines. The individual learns to read this social map to avoid conflict. While reading the social map is adaptive, it can reduce spontaneity and narrow one's network. Here, it is evident that social acceptance is not a holistic condition, but rather one that is segmented according to group perceptions regarding the meaning of punishment and release.

The role of formal social institutions in shaping social acceptance lies in how they signal legitimacy. When institutions such as social services, educational bodies, or religious organizations treat former inmates fairly, these signals can reduce community prejudice. However, if institutions participate in applying restrictions without a clear basis, they reinforce stigma and make social rejection feel legitimate. Signals of legitimacy can take the form of welcoming procedures, equal access, or public statements emphasizing human dignity. Conversely, signals of rejection may manifest as convoluted bureaucracy, suspicious glares, or degrading treatment. Former inmates often gauge whether society will accept them through small experiences within formal institutions (Sari, 2021). These experiences then influence how they approach fellow citizens, whether with confidence or with fear. Therefore, social acceptance is not merely the result of public opinion, but also the result of institutional governance that regulates the encounter between citizens and the state. The construction of social acceptance can change if institutions improve their interaction methods and uphold the principles of equality.

The experience of citizenship is also linked to an individual's ability to fulfill the social obligations expected by citizens. These obligations include participation in community activities, compliance with local rules, and contributions to public order. However, former inmates often face participation barriers because access to community activities is restricted or because they choose to distance themselves to avoid the spotlight. When participation is low, residents may judge the individual as lacking

commitment to communal life. This dynamic reflects the tension between individual freedom and collective responsibility in maintaining social solidarity in an era of individualism (Saputra & Darmawan, 2021). Such judgments weaken social acceptance, even though the low participation is actually a consequence of rejection or fear. Thus, the construction of social acceptance can be self-fulfilling, as initial rejection drives withdrawal, and that withdrawal is then read as a reason to reject. Unraveling this pattern is essential so that social interpretations become more just. Healthy social acceptance requires realistic participation opportunities, space to make minor mistakes without excessive social punishment, and communication mechanisms that reduce misinterpretation. Without these, citizenship transforms into a moral standard that is impossible to meet for an individual recently returned from a correctional institution.

The construction of social acceptance can be influenced by the media and public conversations that shape images of criminality. When public discourse emphasizes fear and threats, the community tends to view former inmates as permanent risks. When public discourse emphasizes recovery, the community can open space for change. This discourse enters daily conversations through news, stories, and comments that simplify the complexity of human experience. Former inmates live under the shadow of these public images, requiring them to work extra hard to convince people that they differ from the stereotype. This extra work is often invisible, yet it consumes energy and can lead to frustration. Manifestations of social stigma like this are often the main inhibitors in the process of individual recovery within society (Aisyah & Issalillah, 2022). In social relations, stereotypes can influence how people interpret expressions of emotion, ways of speaking, or ways of dressing. Neutral actions can be perceived as threatening. Therefore, social acceptance is also a process of social education—a process of forming a perspective that does not fall into generalizations. This social education can occur through direct positive interaction experiences, but such direct experiences are often blocked by initial fear. Here, the construction of social acceptance reveals its susceptibility to the prevailing grand narratives.

The moral dimension of social acceptance relates to the question of who deserves a second chance. Some communities hold the principle that humans can change, but change must be proven through long-term

compliance. This principle seems reasonable, but it can turn into a disproportionate demand if the evidence of change is always deemed insufficient. Other communities hold the principle that certain violations permanently damage trust. This principle provides a sense of security but can ignore the purpose of sentencing, which positions release as an acknowledgment of the fulfillment of legal responsibility. This moral tension is present in daily decisions, such as whether someone is permitted to be involved in community activities or whether they are given job opportunities. The attached stigma often even extends into the domestic sphere, affecting private legal protection for families who have members with negative social labels (Zahid et al., 2022). Thus, the construction of social acceptance is an arena of value conflict between social forgiveness and community protection. Establishing fair boundaries requires ethical considerations that recognize human dignity while respecting the experience of victims and the security of citizens. Just social acceptance avoids endless social punishment while still acknowledging the need for rational caution (Nindialoka, 2021). Here, social justice meets the ethics of civic interaction.

The construction of social acceptance is also influenced by an individual's capacity to display agency, namely the ability to make decisions and take responsibility. Agency is often evaluated through discipline, communication style, and willingness to follow rules. However, post-release agency does not stand alone, as it is shaped by access to resources, social support, and economic opportunities. When access is limited, the individual may appear powerless, even though they are actually facing a structure of rejection. The formation of social networks through communities with shared interests in urban areas becomes one of the keys to strengthening such agency (Rejeki, 2021). Communities that do not understand this structure may place the blame solely on the individual, making social acceptance increasingly difficult. At the same time, an individual who experiences constant rejection may develop a cynical and defensive attitude, which then worsens interactions. This process shows that social acceptance is a two-way interaction, where community actions shape individual responses, and individual responses shape community evaluations. Understanding this two-way interaction helps explain why some individuals are able to rebuild social relations while others remain trapped in alienation.

This difference is not merely a matter of character but a matter of the quality of social relations available. Therefore, social acceptance must be understood as a relational product.

Relationships with authorities and the post-release supervision system can shape social acceptance through symbolic effects. When an individual is frequently seen interacting with authorities, residents may interpret this to mean the individual still holds a suspicious status. This interpretation can occur even when the interaction is administrative and routine. This symbolic effect reinforces the label and reduces the space for the individual to appear as an ordinary citizen. This instrumental supervision is part of modern power dynamics that can impact individual autonomy (Rojak & Gardi, 2022). On the other hand, if the supervision system is conducted in a manner that respects dignity and remains proportional, the symbolic effect can be minimized. This shows that the method of supervision, not just its existence, is important for the construction of social acceptance. Prominent supervision can trigger gossip, while professional supervision can maintain the balance between security and respect. For the individual, the experience of being treated with respect by authorities can provide a sense that the state recognizes their status as a citizen. This sense of recognition can strengthen self-confidence in interacting with other citizens. Conversely, the experience of being treated as a perpetual suspect can foster feelings of shame and anger, which interfere with the ability to build relationships. Thus, this institutional experience is intertwined with the construction of social acceptance at the community level.

Social acceptance often moves through mechanisms of space and distance. There are spaces considered appropriate for former inmates and spaces considered forbidden. Appropriate spaces may consist of specific jobs deemed low-risk, certain social circles that do not demand high levels of trust, or community activities that do not involve shared resources. Forbidden spaces may include leadership positions, fund management, or activities involving children. The arrangement of these spaces is not always announced, but it can be sensed through signals of rejection or redirection. This mechanism forms a social map that determines an individual's movement. While such a social map may preserve the community's sense of security, it can also freeze social mobility and lock individuals into low-status

roles. This condition is exacerbated by negative labeling, where the role of social stereotypes in shaping opportunities and inequality in society has a significant impact on access to both education and employment (Sajjapong et al., 2022). When an individual is constantly placed in low-status spaces, they find it difficult to build a recognized new identity. Social acceptance limited to low-status spaces becomes a pseudo-acceptance, as it permits presence but denies equality. Understanding the mechanisms of space and distance helps explain why some individuals feel present yet are not truly considered part of the community. Physical presence does not always equate to social recognition.

The construction of social acceptance is also influenced by time specifically, how long a community is willing to wait before changing its evaluation. Some communities view time as evidence, so the longer an individual demonstrates orderly behavior, the greater the chance of being accepted. However, if the individual is not given opportunities throughout that duration, time becomes a burden that prolongs uncertainty. On the individual's side, the post-release period is often felt as a fragile time, because economic and psychological needs are urgent. If social acceptance is delayed too long, the individual faces the risk of losing hope. Therefore, time can become a source of pressure rather than just an opportunity. At the community level, a change in evaluation also requires social moments that allow new stories to form, such as the individual's involvement in activities visible to residents. This is closely related to how public perception toward certain groups is influenced by the stigma attached to their identity (Zahid & Darmawan, 2022). Without such moments, the old story remains dominant. Thus, time works alongside social events that serve as markers of change. Social acceptance is more likely to occur when the community witnesses consistent behavior in meaningful situations. However, the opportunity to present meaningful situations is often restricted by stigma. This is where the paradox of social acceptance re-emerges.

In the construction of social acceptance, there is a distinction between interpersonal acceptance and institutional acceptance. Interpersonal acceptance occurs when an individual has close relationships that view them as a person rather than a label. These relationships can provide emotional protection and open access to social networks. However, interpersonal

acceptance does not necessarily change institutional attitudes, such as job requirements or specific services. Conversely, institutional acceptance may grant formal access but does not necessarily erase the stigma within community conversations. This fragmentation of the sense of belonging often arises when social integration does not go hand in hand with the full recognition of identity (Marzuki et al., 2023). When both are aligned, the individual gains real opportunities to build a stable life. When they conflict, the individual undergoes a fractured experience accepted in one space but rejected in another. This fractured experience can cause identity confusion and disrupt the sense of security. Understanding this difference is vital so that the formation of social acceptance is not reduced to a matter of citizen attitudes alone. Social acceptance requires coherence between dignified interpersonal relations and fair institutional procedures (Nindialoka, 2021). Such coherence is a prerequisite for a citizenship that can be truly lived. Without coherence, the individual continues to move from temporary acceptance to veiled rejection.

The construction of social acceptance also involves the dimension of procedural justice specifically, whether an individual feels that the evaluation of themselves is conducted in a fair manner. Procedural justice is present when citizens provide the opportunity to speak, listen to explanations, and judge based on actual behavior. This aspect of justice is crucial, considering that cultural differences influence perceptions of fairness and the acceptance of outcomes in problem-solving within multicultural societies (Saputra et al., 2022). Procedural justice weakens when citizens decide based on rumors, generalizations, or unexamined old impressions. For the individual, the experience of being treated fairly can foster a commitment to comply with community norms. Conversely, the experience of being treated unfairly can create a sense of not belonging to the community. This lack of belonging is dangerous because it reduces the motivation to participate. In social relationships, people tend to follow rules when they feel respected. Therefore, social acceptance is linked to the quality of social procedures in daily life. These social procedures are unwritten but are visible in how community meetings are conducted, how conflicts are resolved, and how gossip is managed. If a community has a habit of resolving issues openly and politely, the chances of acceptance increase. If the

community relies on exclusion and whispering, stigma strengthens. Thus, the formation of social acceptance is also a reflection of the community's culture of deliberation.

The primary mechanism is evident in the intersection of social labels, community norms, and citizenship experiences. Labels provide quick categories that guide initial reactions. Community norms provide standards of propriety that determine the boundaries of participation space. Citizenship experiences provide signals regarding whether the state and institutions treat the individual as an equal citizen. These three interact dynamically. The stigma and discrimination experienced by individuals have a direct impact on both their psychological well-being and their social involvement within society (Pakpahan et al., 2022). When labels are strong, norms tend to be harsher, and citizenship experiences tend to restrict access. When labels weaken through positive interpersonal relationships, norms can shift to be more accommodating, and citizenship experiences can be perceived as friendlier. Thus, the construction of social acceptance is not the result of a single factor. It is a network of causes that either mutually reinforce or weaken one another. Understanding this network helps to allocate responsibility more fairly, as the burden of change is not placed entirely on the individual. Communities and institutions also shape the field of possibilities. Therefore, social acceptance can be understood as a collective effort requiring public norms that respect dignity and reasonable social procedures.

The construction of social acceptance is related to how society defines security. Security is often equated with exclusion, even though social security can be built through the orderliness of relationships, transparency of procedures, and clarity of expectations. If security is understood as permanent rejection, society may feel a false sense of safety but lose the opportunity to build social cohesion. If security is understood as rational risk management, society can maintain order without erasing the opportunity for change. This definition of security influences the informal policies of citizens, such as restrictions on activities or surveillance. Sustainable policies are ideally formulated by considering local cultural values so that they are relevant and accepted by the community (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2023). This definition also influences how the individual views themselves whether they feel they remain under

suspicion or feel they are given the opportunity to be an ordinary citizen. This moral project reflects the quality of a society's humanity, as it tests the citizens' ability to balance protection and the recognition of dignity. From this point, the answer to the problem formulation leads to the conceptual conclusion that social acceptance is formed through an evaluation mechanism guided by labels, reinforced by norms, and confirmed or corrected by citizenship experiences. It is this mechanism that determines the direction of life post-release.

## Conclusion

Social acceptance of former inmates post-release is a social construction formed through the intersection of social labels, community norms, and citizenship experiences in daily relationships. Social labels function as initial assessment categories that tend to persist, community norms regulate the boundaries of appropriateness that determine spaces for participation, while citizenship experiences signal whether an individual is recognized as an equal citizen by institutions. These three elements form a network of mechanisms that can either mutually reinforce one another, making covert rejection feel natural, or mutually weaken one another, allowing spaces for recognition to grow through interpersonal relationships and fair procedures. Therefore, social acceptance cannot be understood solely as a result of individual morality. It is a relational outcome that depends on the quality of social interaction, the culture of community deliberation, and the way institutions treat citizens after release. This understanding provides a conceptual basis for interpreting why legal release does not always align with the restoration of social standing.

The implications and suggestions that can be drawn highlight the need to refine the boundary between rational social vigilance and dignity-eroding discrimination through clearer public norms and fairer social procedures. Communities need to foster habits of assessment based on actual behavior and reasonable participation opportunities, so that the post-release period does not transform into prolonged social punishment. Public institutions and work organizations must ensure that service and selection procedures do not reinforce stigma through disproportionate scrutiny, while also prioritizing respectful communication. At the family level,

communication spaces are required that balance support and autonomy, ensuring that supervision does not shift into exclusion. Academically, further normative research could enrich the conceptual distinction between interpersonal acceptance and institutional acceptance, including how both can be harmonized through principles of procedural justice. These suggestions rest on the objective of building social relations that are orderly, safe, and dignified for all citizens.

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