

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL PROVISION AND INNER RESISTANCE – A CASE STUDY OF FAMILY SOCIALIZATION AS A DETERMINANT OF PROFESSIONAL VALUES IN CORRECTIONAL SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores the relationship between family socialization and work-related values among inmates in six Austrian prisons. Drawing on the Life Course Approach, the study examines how early socialization experiences may shape inmates' motivation to engage in vocational training.

The investigation employs a census design, capturing all 44 inmates enrolled in vocational training programs (100% participation) and 17 of 22 identified work-refusing inmates (77% response rate) across the six institutions offering VET in January 2023. This represents the complete accessible population during the study period rather than a statistical sample.

Findings reveal two distinct value orientations: a growth-oriented pattern emphasizing self-realization and competence among trainees, and a security-oriented pattern focusing on stability and compensation among work-refusing inmates. A notable association between primary socialization experiences and vocational values ($\beta = 0.71$, $p = 0.002$) suggests that biographical factors play an important role, though the cross-sectional design and limited sample size preclude causal inference.

The study advocates a biography-sensitive pedagogy in correctional education that acknowledges individual life courses. While generalizability to other institutional contexts requires replication, these findings offer hypothesis-generating insights for developing more differentiated rehabilitation strategies that account for inmates' diverse socialization backgrounds.

Keywords: Family Socialization, Prison System, Work Values, Rehabilitation, Life Course, Correctional Education

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1. Introduction

Vocational training measures in correctional institutions represent a cornerstone of Austria's resocialisation and reintegration policy, designed to equip incarcerated individuals with skills for successful reentry into society (Federal Ministry of Justice, 2020). However, practice reveals a more ambivalent reality. While such programs are offered extensively, many inmates approach them with skepticism. Empirical studies repeatedly show a lack of persistence and long-term learning motivation, with training often pursued for short-term institutional benefits such as privileges or prospects of early release rather than for sustainable professional engagement after release (Brewster, 2006, 2021).

To understand this phenomenon, the present study applies the Life Course Approach, conceptualizing inmates as "biographical subjects" (Rothe, 2015, p. 2). This perspective highlights the importance of professional values as stable, deeply internalized convictions that guide behavior and goal orientation beyond situational incentives (Brinkmann, 2020; Pöge & Seddig, 2020). The central thesis of this paper is that such values emerge during early life phases, with family socialization playing a pivotal role in shaping work-related orientations (Leenders, Buunk, & Henkens, 2017). Negative early experiences, such as neglect or emotional instability, are overrepresented in inmate biographies and often impede the development of values like perseverance and conscientiousness. Consequently, deficits arise in core professional competencies such as responsibility, frustration tolerance, and long-term goal commitment (Schwind, 2016).

While delinquency has often been studied in connection with negative socialization, the specific link between family-based value formation and the success of vocational rehabilitation remains largely neglected. Existing research tends either to emphasize a deficit-oriented view of inmates or to adopt an instrumental "what works" logic without adequately addressing the biographically conditioned developmental processes that explain interindividual differences in behavior and motivation during incarceration (Dahle, Greve, Hosser, & Bliesener, 2020).

This research gap is particularly relevant given the ambivalent nature of imprisonment itself. The legal mandate for reintegration (§20

Austrian Prison Act) stands in stark contrast to the risk of institutional desocialization (Weber, 2010). Imprisonment thus constitutes a biographical rupture, but it may also provide a potential "turning point" at which entrenched value patterns can be questioned and new orientations developed (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Against this backdrop, the present case study systematically examines the influence of primary family socialization on the professional values of both vocational trainees and training refusers in Austrian correctional institutions. By adopting a developmental psychological perspective, it aims to move beyond a deficit-oriented view and to explore the conditions under which vocational rehabilitation can meaningfully contribute to sustainable reintegration.

2. Theoretical Framework

To better understand the discrepancy between educational provision and motivation in correctional settings, this section focuses on deeply embedded professional values whose genesis lies in the life course. The overarching analytical framework is the Life Course Approach (LCA) (Elder, 1994; Heinz, 2001), which conceptualizes adult learning as biographically shaped (Rothe, 2015, p. 9). This framework is further specified by analyzing primary socialization, where the family of origin plays a central role in value formation (Häfeli, Hättich, Schellenberg, & Krauss, 2017, p. 6). Socialization is understood here as "productive processing of reality" (Bauer & Hurrelmann, 2021, p. 12), which retains the potential for resocialization.

2.1 The Life Course Approach as a Framework for Value Formation in Correctional Education

The previously discussed influence of primary socialization risks being misconstrued as purely retrospective, implying that early childhood experiences exert a static determinism. Such a linear-causal model, which attributes adult behavior solely to childhood experiences, underestimates the complexity of human development, which is marked by both continuity and change, by institutional pathways, and by individual agency.

The Life Course Approach (LCA) provides a longitudinal perspective that captures the interplay between biographical past, present life circumstances, and future orientation. It views

human action not as isolated situational choice but as the cumulative result of life trajectories shaped by familial, social, and institutional contexts. This is essential for the present study, as it allows educational participation in prison to be analyzed as the cumulative outcome of biographical experiences (Elder, 1994; Heinz, 2001).

The LCA shifts the analytical focus from “what has been done to a person?” to “how does a person interact with their biographical imprint over time and under changing circumstances?” It emphasizes principles such as linked lives (the interconnection of life trajectories), the importance of timing in lives, and the bounded yet real capacity for human agency. In doing so, it reconceptualizes adult education in correctional institutions as a potential biographical intervention rather than merely a pedagogical measure (Elder, 1994; Heinz, 2001).

Applied to prisoner biographies, the LCA reveals that their life courses are often non-normative. Age-specific developmental tasks such as building stable social ties, forming a coherent identity, or establishing a career remain unfulfilled. Developmental psychology conceptualizes these missed tasks as developmental deadlines (Dahle et al., 2020, p. 6). Postponing such tasks entails significantly higher costs and fewer societal resources. These costs include not only economic disadvantages but also psychological and social burdens, i.e., the stigma of a criminal record, the absence of supportive networks, the fear of repeated failure, and an eroded sense of self-efficacy.

For long-term inmates, this means facing the normative challenges of their cohort, such as family formation or career establishment. The restrictive conditions of incarceration, systematically deprives them of the necessary resources. The resulting perception of being “out of sync” with one’s peers can lead to profound demotivation by these inmates. Inner resistance to vocational training may be interpreted as a defensive anticipation of failure or as a coping strategy designed to protect the self from further confrontation with normative performance expectations.

At the same time, the LCA emphasizes that life courses are not linearly determined but can be redirected by critical life events. In criminological terms, this corresponds to the concept of “turning points” within Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory of informal social control (Sampson & Laub,

1993). A turning point is not merely an external event but requires cognitive and emotional reorientation, a willingness to break with old patterns, and an investment in a new identity.

Incarceration itself can serve as such a turning point. The provision of vocational training in prison, paradoxical as it may seem, constitutes a structured opportunity for inmates to acquire not only technical skills but also social and personal competencies that are essential for prosocial behavior. Empirical evidence for the viability of such change processes comes from the Berlin CRIME longitudinal study, which found that 11% of participants managed to transition to a law-abiding life after a period of intensive delinquency and long-term incarceration (Dahle et al., 2020, p. 6). Yet, such desistance does not occur randomly. It raises the central question at the heart of this study, namely which biographical resources and value orientations, rooted in primary socialization, enable some inmates to seize such opportunities while others reject them.

Answering this question requires integrating the LCA with a developmental-psychological perspective, in order to address the “explanatory gap” that arises when intended effects of correctional measures fail to materialize (Dahle et al., 2020, p. 3). Standardized resocialization programs that ignore individual biographies often fail due to the heterogeneity of participants. A developmental psychological perspective instead conceives of change as a process driven by the confrontation with challenges (Dahle et al., 2020, p. 4). These may be of normative nature, such as societal expectations of professional integration or non-normative (arrest as a biographical rupture), or arise from a discrepancy between self-selected goals and current reality, i.e., the desire for a “normal life” (Dahle et al., 2020, p. 15).

Whether an inmate engages in vocational training thus depends on whether the institutional requirement can be integrated into their biographical roadmap, personal goals, and internalized value orientations. For an individual shaped by family instability and distrust of institutions, training may appear as yet another attempt at external control. For another who has internalized values such as diligence or recognition despite adverse circumstances, the same training can be perceived as a genuine opportunity for self-realization.

This adaptive process is embedded in multiple contexts, as postulated by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1981). Decision-making is simultaneously influenced by: the microsystem of the prison training environment (rules, hierarchies, relationships with instructors); the mesosystem, where potential tensions arise between prison values (punctuality, cooperation) and family or subcultural values that persist through visits and letters; and the macrosystem of societal norms, labor market conditions, and entrenched stigmatization of ex-offenders (Dahle et al., 2020, p. 13).

The Good Lives Model (GLM) connects here, positing that offenders, like all humans, strive to fulfill primary goods such as autonomy, social connectedness, and competence (Dahle et al., 2020, p. 7). Criminal behavior results when internal and external resources (secondary goods) are lacking to satisfy these needs prosocially. These include education, employment, problem-solving abilities, emotional regulation, and supportive networks resources fundamentally shaped, i.e., by primary socialization. In this sense, prison-based vocational training is more than technical qualification. It institutionalizes the opportunity to acquire secondary goods that could not develop in earlier disintegrative life trajectories. Thus, the LCA provides the key theoretical framework to analyze the research problem. It allows professional values rooted in primary socialization to be understood not as static traits but as dynamic resources whose relevance must be interpreted across the life course. It frames vocational training in prison as a potential "turning point" whose success or failure depends on the interaction between biographical imprint, personal goals, and contextual prison conditions. This biographically sensitive perspective is vital for explaining why identical educational provisions elicit resilience and motivation in some inmates but profound resistance in others.

2.2 Primary Socialization: Family Influences on Professional Values

Professional values are deeply embedded convictions that orient individual behavior in work contexts and play a decisive role in social integration. They serve as a stable inner compass, shaping decision-making, motivation, and long-term job satisfaction (Brinkmann, 2020). Unlike situational and short-lived motives, which merely explain the immediate "why" of an action (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 177), values constitute the

fundamental architecture of professional identity. They encompass a wide spectrum of orientations that can be differentiated into several dimensions. Classical models distinguish intrinsic values, e.g., the pursuit of personal growth or engaging work, extrinsic values, e.g., financial compensation, job security, and social values such as teamwork and societal recognition (Agostini, 2021; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). More recent approaches add status-related values such as autonomy, leadership responsibility, or work-life balance (Abessolo et al., 2019). This complex value structure underpins a resilient work ethic and is, therefore, essential for both professional and personal stability.

The genesis of these values is not arbitrary, rather, they are deeply rooted in primary socialization, which occurs predominantly in the family of origin (Schwind, 2016). During this formative phase, children internalize fundamental orientations toward achievement, responsibility, and self-efficacy. They acquire early notions of work, obligation, and discipline through several mechanisms such as explicit parenting styles that demand traits such as diligence and punctuality, the unconscious modeling of parental behaviors, and implicit expectations shaped by the family's socioeconomic status and educational background (Schwind, 2016).

In the biographical contexts of many incarcerated individuals, however, this formative phase is often deficient and marked by severe strains. Research demonstrates that inmates' early family environments are disproportionately characterized by instability, weak emotional bonds, and lack of daily structure (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). To systematically categorize such disintegrative conditions, Moos' (1975) Family Environment Scale provides a useful typology. While the "normal family" marked by emotional cohesion, open communication, and promotion of personal development offers a positive environment for internalizing prosocial values, inmate biographies are more frequently aligned with the other two profiles: the performance-oriented family, characterized by high achievement pressure and elevated levels of conflict; and the high-conflict family, particularly relevant here, defined by rigid control mechanisms, low emotional warmth, and constant tension (Moos, 1975).

In such climates, trust, stability, and self-efficacy struggle to develop. Instead, inmates disproportionately report experiences of neglect,

emotional indifference, or frequent changes of caregivers during childhood (Schwind, 2016). Families burdened by chronic stress, whether due to poverty, addiction, or violence, often transmit inconsistent, contradictory, or even negative values (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). The central developmental task of childhood, building basic trust in the social world and in one's own capabilities, is systematically undermined under these conditions.

As a result of these developmental lacks, the consequences for the formation of a stable professional identity are profound. Early secure attachment experiences, clear rules, and value orientation are crucial for developing the ability to pursue long-term professional goals (Schwind, 2016). Their absence often results in deficits in core competencies such as responsibility, frustration tolerance, and perseverance. Responsibility cannot flourish when primary caregivers themselves act unreliably. Frustration tolerance remains underdeveloped when children never learn to cope with setbacks in a safe environment, instead experiencing disappointments as existential threats or confirmations of worthlessness. Perseverance, the ability to delay gratification, is eroded when life circumstances are dominated by short-term survival rather than long-term planning. An indifferent or overburdened parenting style further fosters disorientation or defensive resistance to societal performance expectations (Schwind, 2016).

This connection is theoretically reinforced by Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory, which posits that conformity does not need to be learned, rather, it is the deviation from norms that requires explanation. Such deviation results from weak or broken social bonds to society, with emotional attachment to parents representing the most critical component. Where this attachment is weak, willingness to internalize societal norms declines, including professional norms and values represented by those parents.

Thus, primary socialization lays the foundation for professional value orientation. Among many incarcerated individuals, however, this foundation proves fragile or diffuse, leading to weak adherence to established work values and a dismissive stance toward formal vocational training (De Mayer, 2001). This biographical imprint provides a key explanation for the discrepancy between institutional training programs in prisons and their heterogeneous reception among inmates.

3. Methodology

3.1 Objectives and Research Questions

This case study contrasts 44 inmates engaged in vocational training with 17 inmates who refused to work, in order to uncover biographical determinants of motivation or resistance. The investigation is guided by the following research questions:

1. How has family socialization shaped the professional value orientations of vocational trainees and work refusers in correctional institutions?
2. How can the insights gained from this case study be integrated into prison-based vocational training in order to meet reintegration objectives?

3.2 Research Design: Census Approach

A census approach is appropriate when the target population is small, clearly bounded, and fully accessible (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013). Unlike sampling-based designs that draw inferences from a subset to a larger population, complete enumeration provides definitive descriptions of the accessible population while acknowledging limited generalizability to other contexts (Sudman, 1976). This case study employs a census design rather than statistical sampling because the research captured the complete accessible population of relevant inmates across six Austrian correctional institutions (Suben, Stein, Gerasdorf, Sonnberg, Vienna-Simmering, and Graz-Karlau) where vocational training programs are offered.

Unlike studies using representative sampling, this research does not draw inferences from a sample to a larger population. Instead, it provides a complete descriptive account of all accessible cases within these specific institutional contexts during the study period. This approach offers comprehensive coverage within its scope but limits generalizability to other institutions, time periods, or cultural contexts. The findings should be interpreted as providing detailed insights into this specific population rather than as statistically representative of all Austrian or other correctional populations. The comparison of these two groups was designed to generate differentiated insights into possible differences in professional values and motivation attributable to family socialization experiences.

The study forms part of a longitudinal project that ran from January 2023 to January 2025. The present analysis is based on data collected at the beginning of the vocational training period in the six institutions in January 2023.

Participant Groups

Trainees (n = 44): All inmates who enrolled in vocational training programs (apprenticeships) in January 2023 participated in this study. Depending on the occupation, training duration ranges from 18 months to three years. Completion of the survey was a mandatory component of the training program, resulting in a 100% response rate. This represents the complete population of vocational trainees in these six institutions at that time.

Non-working inmates (NA; n = 17): Inmates classified as unwilling to work and not integrated into institutional labor processes. These individuals spent most of their incarceration time in their cells. Prison staff in the six institutions identified 22 inmates meeting these criteria (approximately half the number of trainees). Of these, 17 participated voluntarily in the survey, yielding a 77% response rate.

All participants were male. Data collection was anonymous and conducted with informed consent.

3.3 Instruments

Data were collected via a written questionnaire adapted to the German language proficiency of the target population. The questionnaire was adapted from established psychometric scales and consisted of three thematic sections:

1) Sociodemographic characteristics

Basic information was collected regarding age, country of origin, religion, duration of current incarceration, educational background, and (for trainees) selected vocational field.

2) Professional values

Professional value orientations were measured using the multidimensional questionnaire developed by Abessolo et al. (2019). Three value dimensions were assessed:

- Intrinsic values (specialization, variety, mobility, management responsibility)
- Extrinsic values (income)
- Social values (work-life balance, helping others)

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (--) to “strongly agree” (++)

3) Family socialization

Primary socialization was assessed using dimensions from Moos' (1975) Family Environment Scale. The instrument captures three core dimensions of family functioning:

- Relationship quality (cohesion, expressiveness, conflict)
- Personal growth opportunities (independence, achievement orientation, cultural-intellectual orientation)
- System maintenance (organization, control)

This typology allows classification of participants into specific socialization patterns, providing a basis for analyzing potential associations between family background and professional values.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were analyzed using the statistical software R. Descriptive analysis included calculation of means and standard deviations for Likert-scale responses, as well as frequency distributions for categorical sociodemographic variables.

To examine the relationship between professional values and family socialization experiences, simple linear regression was conducted. Given the census design, traditional inferential statistics, which assume random sampling from a larger population, are not strictly applicable. However, regression coefficients and associated p-values are reported descriptively to characterize the strength of observed associations within this population. Effect sizes (R^2) are reported to indicate the proportion of variance explained. Findings should be interpreted as descriptive patterns within this specific population rather than as generalizable population parameters.

4. Results

The contrastive design of this study enables analysis of extreme groups within the accessible population, potentially sharpening understanding of underlying mechanisms and biographical determinants of motivation and resistance. While the census approach provides comprehensive coverage within these six institutions, the limited absolute numbers, particularly in the NA group, mean findings should be interpreted as descriptive patterns specific to this population rather than as statistically generalizable parameters.

The sociodemographic data suggest divergent life courses in the sense of the Life Course Approach, evident even before incarceration. The trainees are, on average, younger (28.7 years) than the NA group (32.6 years) and were more likely to have been employed prior to incarceration (70% vs. 58%). This difference may point to distinct biographical pathways and to differing degrees of connection to normative societal structures prior to imprisonment.

The higher average age of the NA group, coupled with lower prior work experience, is consistent with a more entrenched detachment from normative developmental tasks that Heckhausen et al. (2019) conceptualize as “developmental deadlines.” For this group, acquiring basic vocational qualifications at a more advanced age may appear more challenging, both practically and psychologically. In contrast, trainees are at a life stage where vocational reorientation may seem more age-appropriate, potentially facilitating the perception of incarceration as a “turning point” (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

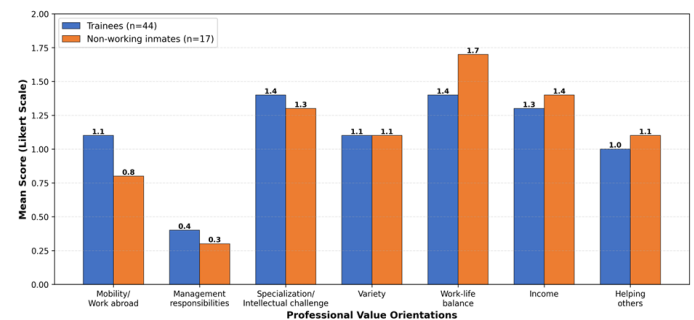
4.1 Professional Value Orientations

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of professional value orientations in both groups, measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (--) to “strongly agree” (++) .

The values profile of the NA group appears more complex than a simple rejection of work norms might suggest. This group reported substantially higher importance for certain social and extrinsic values than trainees. Particularly notable is the emphasis placed on work-life balance, with the NA group showing the highest mean score across all dimensions (M = 1.7) compared to trainees (M = 1.4). Similarly, the NA group placed greater emphasis on

earnings/income (M = 1.4 vs. M = 1.3 for trainees), reflecting the importance of extrinsic values.

Figure 1.
Mean Score for Professional Value Orientations by Groups



This pattern becomes more interpretable when considered alongside socialization experiences. The NA group disproportionately reported growing up in high-conflict families (Moos, 1975). Some 64.7% reported exposure to violent outbursts and aggressive behavior (versus 34.9% of trainees), and 70.6% described a dominant family figure (versus 53.5% of trainees). Combined with reports that 58.8% experienced severe restrictions on independence, these elements suggest a socialization profile marked by instability, external control, and emotional coldness.

The pronounced emphasis on stability and fair conditions reflected in the work-life balance scores may represent not proactive work motivation but rather a compensatory longing for what was absent in their family environments. It appears to represent a desire for work contexts that contrast with their early experiences, e.g., predictable, fair, and respectful of personal autonomy. Similarly, the emphasis on extrinsic values such as income may represent a rational focus on basic security often lacking in their families of origin. In this interpretation, their value orientation centers more on avoiding further negative experiences than on actively shaping future opportunities.

In contrast, trainees’ values suggest a more proactive, growth-oriented stance. Their ambitions align more strongly with intrinsic values. Trainees showed notably higher mean scores for mobility/willingness to work abroad (M = 1.1) compared to the NA group (M = 0.8), and for management responsibilities (M = 0.4 vs. M = 0.3 for NA), potentially indicating greater trust in their own agency and belief in social mobility. Similarly, trainees reported

higher scores for specialization/intellectual challenge (M = 1.4 vs. M = 1.3 for NA), signaling motivation extending beyond mere subsistence.

Notably, both groups showed similar mean scores for variety in work tasks (M = 1.1 for both groups) and for the value of helping others and social contribution, with trainees showing slightly lower scores (M = 1.0) compared to the NA group (M = 1.1). This suggests that the desire to contribute meaningfully transcends the two value orientations.

This forward-looking orientation among trainees correlates with their reports of more stable socialization experiences. Trainees more frequently reported receiving emotional support, opportunities for emotional expression, and intellectually stimulating environments, including exposure to conversations about culture and politics. This cultural and intellectual stimulation may have fostered curiosity and self-efficacy. These positive biographical resources, trust in caregivers, experiences of competence, and a sense of security, may equip them to perceive vocational training in prison as an authentic ‘turning point’ to actively use it for personal growth (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

4.2 Relationship Between Socialization and Values

The contrastive analysis reveals two distinct yet internally coherent value patterns, each appearing to be rooted in family socialization experiences:

A “Growth and Self-Realization” Orientation (Trainees): A proactive, intrinsically motivated pattern associated with more resource-rich socialization experiences and greater readiness for change. This orientation is “postmaterialist” (Spieß, 1987, p. 2), emphasizing self-fulfillment.

A “Security and Compensation” Orientation (NA): An adaptive pattern that may reflect biographical challenges such as violence (64.7%) and control (70.6%), characterized by defensive, materialist values (Spieß, 1987, p. 2) and elements consistent with learned helplessness.

This relationship receives statistical support from regression analysis, which reveals a notable association between the quality of socialization experiences and professional value orientations within this population ($\beta = 0.71$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = 0.192$).

Table 1.
Regression Analysis Predicting Professional Value Orientations from Family Socialization Experiences

Predictor	β	p-value
Family Socialization Quality	0.71	.002

$R^2 = 0.192$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.178$

Note. Given the census design, these statistics describe associations within the studied population rather than serving as inferential tests for the broader population. n = 61.

Table 1 indicates that family socialization experiences explain approximately 19% of the variance in professional value orientations within this population, representing a moderate effect size in line with expectations for complex social phenomena.

These divergent value orientations appear not as situational preferences but as deeply internalized adaptive patterns with logical connections to specific socialization conditions. This analysis addresses a research gap by moving beyond the established correlation between negative socialization and delinquency to reveal a specific mechanism through which family experiences may shape psychological preconditions for accepting or rejecting rehabilitation programs.

The findings provide a nuanced response to the first research question: family socialization appears to shape professional value orientations by either creating biographical resources that foster growth-oriented engagement (as observed among trainees) or by producing defensive orientations focused on security that may manifest as resistance to institutional development opportunities, as observed in the non-working group. Primary socialization may determine not whether work values exist, but rather their functional meaning in subjective experience, whether they serve as vehicles for growth or as potential sources of further failure and external control.

5. Discussion

This census study of vocational trainees and work-refusing inmates in six Austrian correctional institutions reveals a notable association between primary socialization experiences and professional value orientations ($\beta = 0.71$, $p = 0.002$). While the

cross-sectional design and institutional specificity limit causal inference and generalizability, the findings address an important gap in correctional education research by examining the specific mechanisms through which biographical factors may influence receptivity to rehabilitation programming.

The first research question asked how family socialization shapes professional value orientations among incarcerated individuals. Within this population, two distinct patterns emerged: trainees more frequently reported growth-oriented values rooted in relatively stable socialization experiences, while work-refusing inmates emphasized security-oriented values that appear to reflect compensatory responses to adverse family environments. These patterns suggest that family socialization may determine not whether work values exist, but rather their functional meaning, whether individuals experience work as an opportunity for self-realization or as a potential threat of further failure and external control.

This finding extends existing research on the socialization-delinquency relationship by illuminating how biographical experiences specifically shape inmates' psychological readiness for vocational rehabilitation. Previous research has established links between adverse family environments and delinquent behavior (Hirschi, 1969; Schwind, 2016), and between childhood trauma and criminal trajectories (Sampson & Laub, 1993). However, the specific pathway from family socialization to professional values in correctional contexts has received limited attention. The present study demonstrates that negative socialization not only increases delinquency risk but also shapes the specific nature of resistance to rehabilitation efforts.

The "Security and Compensation" orientation observed among work-refusing inmates aligns with Kasser and Ryan's (1993) research on materialistic values as compensatory responses to unmet psychological needs. Their finding that financial success becomes a central life aspiration when intrinsic needs for autonomy and relatedness remain unfulfilled parallels the present finding that work-refusing inmates emphasize extrinsic security while showing limited trust in growth opportunities. The emphasis on work-life balance among this group may reflect not rejection of work per se but rather a defensive posture shaped by experiences of exploitation and broken promises in their families of origin.

Conversely, the "Growth and Self-Realization" orientation among trainees resonates with research on intrinsic motivation and self-determination theory. Studies have consistently shown that individuals who experience supportive, autonomy-promoting environments develop more intrinsic goal orientations and greater persistence in challenging tasks (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The trainees' higher scores on mobility, management responsibility, and intellectual challenge suggest that their socialization experiences fostered the psychological resources, particularly self-efficacy and trust in others, that enable them to view vocational training as a genuine opportunity rather than as another form of institutional control.

The second research question concerned implications for prison-based vocational training. The observed heterogeneity in value orientations suggests that standardized programming may be insufficient. Previous evaluations of correctional programs have often assumed homogeneity among inmates, attributing program failures to inadequate implementation rather than to fundamental mismatches between program assumptions and participants' psychological readiness (Dahle et al., 2020). The present findings suggest that "what works" may depend critically on for whom it works.

The findings point toward the potential value of biographically sensitive pedagogy rooted in developmental psychology (Dahle et al., 2020). For inmates whose values emphasize growth and autonomy, existing training opportunities may already align well with their orientations. For those whose values center on security and risk avoidance, however, preliminary trust-building and low-threshold experiences of success may be necessary preconditions for engagement with formal training programs. This interpretation aligns with trauma-informed approaches to correctional education, which emphasize the importance of psychological safety, predictability, and collaborative rather than coercive relationships (Weber, 2010).

This interpretation also aligns with the Life Course Approach's emphasis on turning points and the Good Lives Model's focus on fulfilling primary human goods through prosocial means. The findings suggest that vocational training can serve as a biographical intervention, but only when it connects meaningfully with inmates' existing value structures and addresses the deficits produced by adverse socialization. Previous research has

shown that desistance from crime often follows the establishment of meaningful social bonds and prosocial identities (Sampson & Laub, 1993). The present study suggests that vocational education may facilitate such transformations, but only when it addresses the specific psychological barriers created by adverse early experiences.

Important caveats apply. These cross-sectional associations do not establish that modifying pedagogical approaches will improve outcomes. The observed differences between groups could reflect pre-existing selection factors rather than causal effects of socialization. Inmates who volunteer for training may possess characteristics such as higher conscientiousness or better institutional adjustment that correlate with both reporting positive socialization and succeeding in programs. Intervention research with experimental or quasi-experimental designs would be needed to test whether biography-sensitive programming increases training completion, post-release employment, or recidivism reduction. The present study generates hypotheses that warrant such testing but does not yet validate them.

Moreover, the institutional and cultural specificity of the sample limits transferability. Austrian correctional facilities operate under legal frameworks (§20 Austrian Prison Act) and cultural norms that may not apply elsewhere. The emphasis on apprenticeship-style vocational training in Austria reflects a broader vocational education tradition that differs substantially from correctional education models in other countries. Replication in other jurisdictions is needed to assess whether these patterns reflect universal developmental processes or context-specific dynamics.

Despite these limitations, the comprehensive census of the accessible population provides detailed insights into value heterogeneity within correctional settings. By moving beyond deficit-oriented characterizations to examine the functional logic underlying inmates' orientations toward work, the study contributes a theoretically grounded perspective for understanding variability in rehabilitation program engagement. This perspective conceptualizes inmates as biographical subjects whose present behavior reflects accumulated life experiences rather than simply individual pathology or rational calculation of institutional incentives.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This census study of all vocational trainees and most work-refusing inmates in six Austrian correctional institutions reveals substantial associations between family socialization experiences and professional value orientations. While methodological limitations preclude causal inference and generalization beyond this specific population, the findings generate important hypotheses for correctional education research and practice.

The analysis identified two distinct value patterns within this population: growth-oriented values among trainees, emphasizing autonomy, challenge, and self-realization, associated with more stable primary socialization; and security-oriented values among work-refusing inmates, emphasizing stability, fairness, and compensation, associated with high-conflict family backgrounds. These patterns suggest that family socialization may shape not whether individuals hold work values, but rather the functional meaning of work in their biographical self-understanding—as opportunity or threat, as path to growth or potential arena of further failure.

6.2 Implications for Practice

If these patterns reflect causal processes rather than mere correlation, they would have significant implications for correctional pedagogy. Rather than assuming all inmates respond similarly to standardized programming, a biography-sensitive approach might require: for growth-oriented inmates, challenging, autonomy-supporting programs that leverage existing prosocial values; and for security-oriented inmates, trust-building measures and low-threshold success experiences before engaging with formal training.

The empirical analysis presented compels a rethinking of the design and implementation of vocational training programs in correctional institutions. The findings refute a simplistic dichotomy of “motivated” versus “unmotivated” inmates. Instead, this recognition deconstructs the traditional deficit-oriented perspective that portrays inmates primarily as bearers of shortcomings to be corrected within a “correctional institution” (Dahle et al., 2020, p. 15).

From this perspective, “inner resistance” is not a pathological trait but an adaptive survival strategy learned over the life course. For vocational education to fulfill its legal mandate of resocialization (§ 20 Austrian Prison Act, Rathmanner, 2023, p. 12), such resistance must be understood as a biographically rooted adaptation rather than as mere unwillingness. This requires the development of biographically sensitive pedagogy aligned with Ott’s (2007) subject-oriented approach, which frames education not as mere skill transfer but as an opportunity for critical personal development (Rathmanner, 2023, p. 93). Inmates must be enabled to reflect on their own value systems, understand their genesis, and experiment with new, prosocial orientations.

The immediate implication is the need for tailored pedagogical strategies. For the group of trainees, whose values emphasize autonomy, challenge, and responsibility, vocational programs should not only be expanded but also qualitatively enriched. Their proactive orientation corresponds ideally with an anticipatory model of vocational education, which prepares learners for future action contexts (Rathmanner, 2023, p. 93). For these inmates, training is more than a pathway to skills acquisition. It becomes a central element of identity work, facilitating the transformation from offender to skilled worker and enabling the construction of a plausible, desirable vision of the future.

To fully exploit this potential, curricula should extend beyond technical skills to explicitly foster competencies that align with their values. Modules on project management, team leadership, or entrepreneurial thinking can channel their readiness for responsibility and sustainably strengthen their sense of self-efficacy. Such interventions have been shown to improve legal compliance (Suhling, 2023, p. 7) and can be further enhanced through complementary measures such as job application training or establishing contacts with prospective employers.

On the other hand, working with the NA group is far more challenging, but it is equally critical for the overall success of resocialization. Standardized training programs that demand long-term engagement for uncertain future benefits are bound to fail. They ignore central defensive values such as security, fairness, control, and work-life balance, and instead reactivate biographically ingrained mistrust of institutional promises.

The first indispensable step must, therefore, be building a reliable pedagogical relationship grounded in transparency, consistency, and participation. Only in this way can deep-seated mistrust be countered. Instead of aiming for distant full qualifications, low-threshold, meaningful projects should be prioritized, projects that tap into the strongest shared motivation across both groups: the nearly universal desire (over 95%) to help others.

Examples include workshop projects in which inmates repair toys for kindergartens, produce furniture for social institutions, or build aids for local charities. Such initiatives provide immediate, tangible success experiences, strengthen self-efficacy, and connect individual activity to prosocial meaning. They thereby operationalize the emancipatory approach (Ott, 2007; Rathmanner, 2023, p. 93), allowing inmates to experience themselves as competent and valued members of a community, an emotionally corrective experience that directly counters their histories of powerlessness and exclusion. This process can be understood as a form of basic education in the UNESCO sense, extending beyond literacy to encompass the capacity to “find and maintain one’s place in society” (Rathmanner, 2023, p. 91). For this group, regaining faith in their own agency is the prerequisite for any further educational step.

The implementation of such differentiated, biographically sensitive pedagogy, however, cannot remain confined to individual programs. This requires systemic transformation of correctional institutions into learning organizations (Rathmanner, 2023, p. 114). Here, integrated resocialization management, as outlined by Maelicke & Wein (2016), proves central. This demands interdisciplinary teams of correctional officers, social workers, psychologists, and instructors developing a shared understanding of shared goals (Rathmanner, 2023, p. 114). Within such teams, biographical information must be systematically gathered and interpreted to shift from purely deficit-oriented planning to individualized, resource-oriented development strategies.

Professionalizing staff is a crucial lever in this process (Rathmanner, 2023, p. 3). Training must extend beyond technical skills to include competencies in biographical assessment, interpreting behavior as an expression of unmet needs, and applying motivational interviewing techniques. Only then can correctional institutions

evolve into genuine learning and living environments for all participants.

Such a humanistically oriented organizational culture, which takes the resocialization mandate seriously, also could serve as the most effective protection against the danger of stagnation or regression in moral judgment capacities within the institution (Lempert, 2009; Rathmanner, 2023, p. 146). A system focused exclusively on control and discipline fosters cynicism and burnout among staff, ultimately undermining pedagogical efforts.

In conclusion, this case study demonstrates that findings have concrete, implementable transfer potential for prison-based vocational education, directly advancing the adult-education focus of the life course perspective. The answer lies in moving away from uniform, “one-size-fits-all” programs toward individualized, biographically informed pedagogy. This approach is not a “soft” alternative but a scientifically grounded and pragmatically superior strategy.

By connecting with existing ambitions and development potential in the growth-oriented group and, for the security-oriented group, first fostering trust, activating prosocial values, and building basic self-efficacy, the gap between institutional provision and inner resistance can be bridged. This recognizes that sustainable resocialization is not merely a technical qualification process but a profound journey of personal development. By learning to speak the “language of values” inscribed in inmates’ life histories, correctional systems can make a meaningful contribution to the goals of lifelong learning and durable social reintegration.

6.3 Limitations

However, these remain hypotheses requiring empirical validation. The present study describes associations within a specific population; it does not demonstrate that tailored interventions would improve outcomes. While this research employed a census approach, capturing all accessible cases within the specified institutional contexts, several important limitations must be considered when interpreting findings and assessing generalizability.

Census Design and Generalizability

This research employed a census approach, capturing all accessible cases within the specified institutional contexts rather than drawing a representative sample from a broader population.

Consequently, findings describe the complete population of interest within these six facilities during the study period but cannot be statistically generalized to other correctional settings, time periods, or cultural contexts.

The six participating institutions were selected based on their offering of apprenticeship-style vocational training programs. Austrian correctional facilities without such programs, or those with different training models, may house inmates with systematically different characteristics. Similarly, correctional systems in other countries operate under distinct legal frameworks, institutional cultures, and rehabilitation philosophies that may influence both inmate populations and their responses to programming.

Temporal factors further constrain generalizability. Data were collected in January 2023, capturing inmates’ perspectives at a specific biographical moment such as the outset of training for participants, or during an extended period of work refusal for the NA group. Whether these value orientations remain stable over time, shift during incarceration, or change following release cannot be determined from these cross-sectional data.

Sample Size and Statistical Power

While the trainee group represents a complete census ($n=44$, 100% response rate), the smaller NA group ($n=17$, 77% response) limits statistical power for detecting smaller effects and precludes meaningful subgroup analyses. The 77% response rate among work-refusing inmates, though relatively high for this hard-to-reach population, introduces potential non-response bias. The five inmates who declined participation may differ systematically from respondents in ways which cannot be assessed.

Traditional inferential statistics assume random sampling from a larger population to which results will be generalized. Because the data represent a complete census rather than a sample, p -values should be interpreted descriptively as measures of association strength within this population rather than as tests of hypotheses about broader populations. The reported regression results ($\beta=0.71$, $p=.002$) indicate a strong relationship between socialization and values within this specific group but do not license causal claims or automatic generalization to other settings.

Causality and Directionality

The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. While family socialization temporally precedes current work values, making the proposed causal direction theoretically plausible, unmeasured confounding variables may influence both. For example, genetic factors, peer influences during adolescence, neighborhood characteristics, or trauma exposure outside the family could shape both retrospective reports of family climate and current value orientations.

Moreover, retrospective self-reports of childhood experiences are subject to recall bias and may be influenced by current circumstances. Inmates' present emotional states, relationships with family members, or interpretations of their life trajectories may color memories of early socialization. Prospective longitudinal designs beginning in childhood would be needed to establish causal relationships definitively, though such designs are rarely feasible in correctional research.

Self-Report Bias and Social Desirability

All data derive from self-report questionnaires, making findings vulnerable to several biases. Social desirability effects may lead trainees to overreport prosocial values and positive family experiences, particularly given that survey completion was mandatory for program enrollment. Conversely, work-refusing inmates may have overstated negative experiences to justify their stance.

Response styles, e.g., acquiescence bias, extreme responding may differ between groups. The NA group's higher scores on some values could reflect genuine differences, or alternatively, a tendency toward more extreme responding patterns. Without external validation through behavioral observations, institutional records, or family member reports, we cannot fully assess the accuracy of self-reported information.

Alternative Explanations

The observed differences between trainees and the NA group could reflect factors beyond family socialization. Trainees are younger on average (28.7 vs. 32.6 years), suggesting they may be at different life stages with different perspectives on vocational development. The NA group's longer average incarceration history might reflect accumulated

institutional adaptation, namely "prisonization", that erodes work motivation independent of childhood experiences.

Selection effects may also operate. Inmates who volunteer for training programs may possess pre-existing characteristics, e.g., higher conscientiousness, better institutional adjustment, that also correlate with reporting more positive socialization. Without random assignment to training versus non-training conditions, which would be ethically problematic and practically infeasible, it is impossible to fully disentangle selection from treatment effects.

Implications for Interpretation

These limitations do not invalidate the findings but rather contextualize them. The study provides a comprehensive, detailed account of value orientations and socialization backgrounds within a specific institutional population. The identified patterns are theoretically coherent, empirically substantial, and practically relevant for correctional education in similar contexts.

However, the findings should be understood as hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis-confirming. They suggest that biography-sensitive approaches to correctional education warrant serious consideration and rigorous evaluation, but they do not yet prove that such approaches will succeed. Replication in other institutions, with larger samples, longitudinal designs, and ideally with experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation of tailored interventions, is needed to establish the validity and practical utility of the framework proposed here.

The strength of this research lies not in definitive answers but in opening a line of inquiry. By demonstrating substantial associations between socialization patterns and work values in this complete institutional population, the study provides a foundation for future investigations that can address these limitations through expanded samples, prospective designs, and intervention trials.

6.4 Directions for Future Research

Three research priorities emerge from this work. First, replication and extension studies are needed to establish the robustness of these findings. Such studies should include larger samples across diverse institutional contexts, encompass

multiple countries and correctional systems, validate the identified value typologies, and assess generalizability across cultural contexts.

Second, longitudinal investigation is essential to understand developmental dynamics. Prospective designs should track value changes during incarceration, while follow-up studies should examine post-release employment and desistance. Future research should also analyze critical incidents and turning points in inmates' life courses and examine whether value orientations represent stable traits or change over time.

Third, intervention research is required to test the practical utility of biography-sensitive approaches. This includes experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation of biography-sensitive programming, comparison of tailored versus standardized training approaches, mediational analyses examining mechanisms of behavior change, and cost-effectiveness assessments of differentiated versus uniform programs.

This study advances the Life Course Approach in correctional education by demonstrating that inmates' responses to rehabilitation programming may reflect deeply embedded biographical patterns rather than simply rational cost-benefit calculations or personality deficits. By identifying specific mechanisms linking socialization to work values, it provides a theoretical framework for understanding heterogeneity in program engagement.

The findings suggest that effective resocialization may require not just skill development but also biographical work, helping inmates reflect on value patterns formed in adverse circumstances and experiment with new orientations under conditions that finally provide the stability and recognition their early environments lacked. Whether this theoretical insight translates into practical improvement in rehabilitation outcomes remains an open empirical question that future research must address.

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