

The Intricacies of Social Reintegration – a Viewpoint from a Sustainable Development Goal 16 Perspective

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Abstract. *The research is a full-scale bibliometric mapping of scientific publications about the impact of social reintegration of the offender on achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16—peace, justice and strong institutions. The study employs scientometric tools such as Dimensions and VOSviewer to analyze thematic evolution in this area and the collaborative network of authors.*

This analysis focuses on the most prolific lines of research, reference authors, as well as academic journals contributing to the connection correctional practices, crime reduction, and the development of effective institutions. Visualising these bibliometrically, the paper maps the relationship between studies, revealing clusters of themes (e.g., recidivism, correctional programs and crime prevention), active authors and specialized journals.

The results indicate the importance of corrective practices for the durable securities and just equities and the progress of public safety that is a cornerstone of SDG 16. Furthermore, the analysis reveals trend lines that are the focus of research and suggests that interdisciplinary efforts should be encouraged to build better and sustainable correctional policies.

The paper therefore lays the base for policy-makers, researchers, and practitioners who are interested in the amelioration of the justice system and correctional institutions in the context of the values and objectives of sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainable development, social reintegration, SDG 16, prison.

Introduction

The broad issue of peace, poverty reduction and preservation of the planet have been taken up in different formats over the years for global well-being. A comprehensive view of these challenges is offered by the global plan agreed upon in 2015 by all member states of the United Nations: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprising a collection of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015).

The SDGs should be seen as an indivisible whole and there is a lot of value in this concept (Lawrence et al., 2020). SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) addresses violence, rule of law, access to justice, and the responsibilities of and inclusiveness in the institutions (UN, 2024). It advances globally the shared world of respect for human rights, avoidance of conflict, and professional institutions. This is an imperative for a fairer, safer, and more prosperous world (UNDP, 2023). It is highly interrelated to three other goals with respective mutual influences: SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

This research aims to measure progress on SDG 16 since 2015, with special reference to social reintegration. 2015 was chosen up to the present as the year the sustainable development plan was accepted, so that action directions could be set to reach the goal by the deadline of 2030.

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In order to accomplish the research purpose, we seek to address the following research questions:
 Q1: What are the primary research fields on social reintegration in the context of SDG 16?
 Q2: What is the link between prison and SDG 16 as derived from keyword searches?
 Q3: What are the relevant development pathways that are most salient for advancing peace, justice, and strong institutions?

Literature review

In this manuscript, social reintegration is considered from the point of view of SDG 16 and is defined as the support for exoffenders who had been in prison (UNODC, 2018). This is in order to avoid discharging it and reserve means to guarantee successful reentry and post conviction rehabilitation for a fruitful life. According to the Nelson Mandela Rules (United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners), competent bodies should provide prisoners with social reintegration including in the role of education, work and vocational training (UNODC, 2015).

Social reintegration added the assistance of the criminal after his release and alternative measures to prevent new offending as, for example, restorative justice or specific treatments. Over the past several years, there has been increased focus on ongoing efforts to help offenders throughout their incarceration and reentry. Pre-reintegration work starts prior to release and extends beyond release to assist in the smooth transition and integration to the community (Griffiths et al., 2007).

The correction of deviant and delinquent behavior can be defined as a process of addressing behavioral traits that deviate from socially acceptable norms. The content of corrective educational activity includes a complex set of forms, methods, approaches, and resources designed to develop competencies in all structural components of the educational process, with the aim of correcting a person's behavior "in a pro-social direction" (Polihronov, 2024). The goal of this process is "re-education through correcting negative behavior patterns while simultaneously acquiring basic skills for the full functioning of the individual in society" (Polihronov, 2024).

Institutions are human-made buildings to secure 'the necessary' of peace and justice in society through putting rules and laws that preserve order. They include both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights, and legal rights) (Singh & Singh, 2024). To this end, it is important that prison staff receive training for an effective social rehabilitation system, as well as that special counseling programs are set up and that alternative measures to detention are encouraged. Reform of penitentiary policy in the countries of the European Union, there are strategic guidelines (Spataru & Falca, 2019).

Curative activity in penitentiaries, which includes psychological, social, and educational interventions, is an indispensable liberty interest at the completion of a jail term. For these reasons, prison facilities have the responsibility to carry out activities (such as education, information, early releases, etc.) that lead to the reintegration of former offenders in society (NAP, 2015). Prison system policy should be arranged in such a way that those who have been incarcerated, after they served their sentence, should be in the capacity to live socially responsible and be prepared for this through social, medical and judicial services (UNODC, 2018).

It also appears that those countries in southern and eastern Europe have more trouble but that may bear at least equally links to political instability; corruption or institutional weakness. Northern European nations do better, an expression of strong governance traditions, of the rule of law, of social justice. Intermediate results are obtained for Central and Western Europe that reveal a partial progress and a partial failure. Northern European countries might offer best-practice examples for the improvement of justice (UN 2024).

In the course of the literature review, attention was given to the relationship between social reintegration and SDG 16, summarizing key theoretical and empirical insights in recent years. Taking into account the 11 million individuals imprisoned worldwide who require correction activities, we can examine their contribution to SDG 16 considering their multiple needs attributable to governmental, economic, environmental, social, and lifestyle reasons before imprisonment (Ismail et al., 2021).

Halfway to 2030 the progress on SDG 16 is frustratingly, in some aspects even regressing slowly. Confidence in institutions is being eroded as national architectures fail to deliver what citizens want in a world of accelerating uncertainty and interdependent risks. Illegitimate power transfers undermine the rule of law and human rights and lead to forced migration and the degeneration of governance (UNDP, 2024).

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research technique which provides indicators to assess the impact, visibility and trends of the selected research field. It is currently under the conditions of bibliometric analysis and uses indicators like the number of citations or impact factor of the journals (Momete, 2024). Through this citation analysis, we can realize the influence sphere and the main fields of interest. A field's overall structure can be captured through co-citation analysis and a semantic map of terms. In that context, the present study examines the mapping word as well as citation and co-citation analysis aiming to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of the dynamics of the field.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions and select an original collection of works in the field of SDG 16, in December 2024, the Dimensions database (Digital Science, 2018) was used. Dimensions was selected because of its broad coverage and open access, which offers broad coverage of academic literature in multiple disciplines and enables researchers to delve deep into literature and to assess the progression of research.

To identify the most relevant articles covering themes related to SDG 16, key words that capture its skills were considered: “prison” AND “social reintegration” (applicable for all full texts on English languages). These words were combined through the logic connective AND to get relevant items. To narrow down the search results, we additionally filtered them by "16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, Sustainable Development Goals." Moreover, as the sustainable development strategic we analyze was approved in 2015, we restricted the search period to 2015-2024 in order to take into consideration the actual evolution from the approval of the 2030 Agenda until nowadays.

By using Dimensions, we gathered knowledge about the co-citations and citations of the identified research in the field and further assessed relations between authors and subdomains. This method consisted in the analysis of author and institutional co-relationships, in co-citation mapping to identify main research concerns.

The search retrieved 6,999 documents, which were also processed in VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) (Waltman et al., 2010; van Eck & Waltman, 2023) to produce semantic maps showing the most common terms and primary themes in the literature pertaining to SDG 16. The following analyzes were conducted:

- term map analysis: key concepts use across the articles and their relationships while reciprocal percentages were used to rank each co-occurrence term according to subarea.

- citation analysis: visualizing the most cited publication and mapping how they influence each other on this topic.
- journal, and Topic analysis: identification of clusters works that cite together, indication of the main thematic directions.
- author network analysis: mapping of the collaboration between authors and institutions.

Results and discussions

According to the dynamic of studies of social reintegration over the last 10 years period, the in force trend of increase is approximately 68% until 2023. As the present year was not terminated the number of the 2024 papers is not final but the available ones were included in further evaluation in order to include issues with all articles. As can be seen in Figure 1, we observed a substantial growth in the volume of publications, from 508 in 2015, which has grown to 780 in 2018, with little stabilization in the period 2019 (727 articles) to 2023 (749 articles).

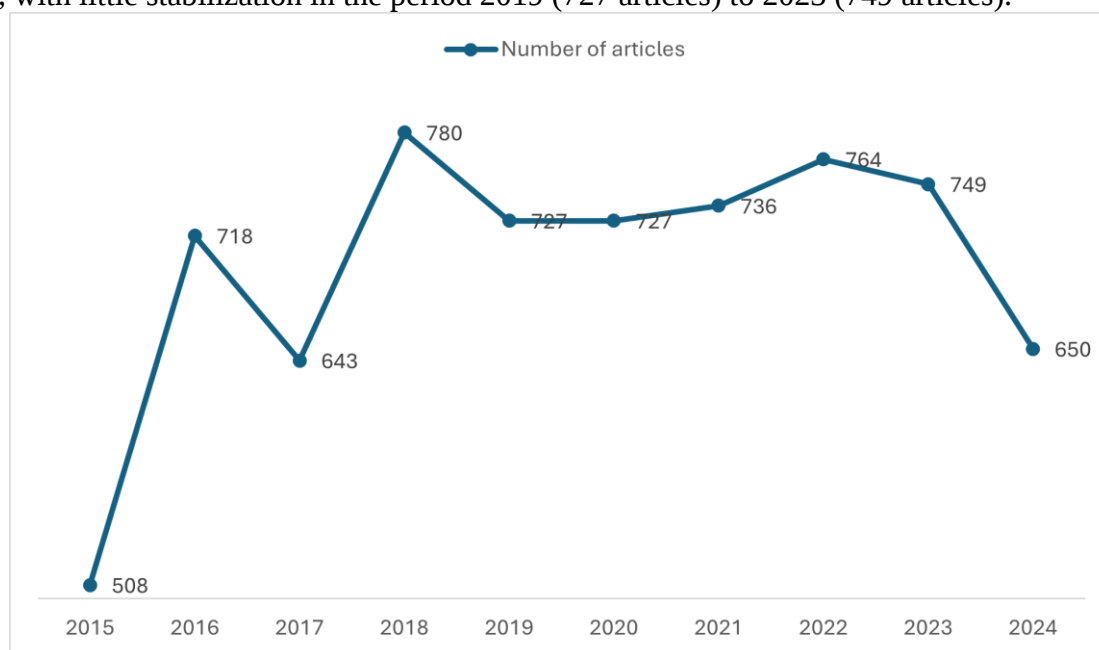


Figure 1. The evolution of the number of publications for social reintegration

Source: processed from the query performed on Dimensions database.

With the aid of VOSviewer, the development process of SDG 16-related research was adequately depicted, and major directions of the development landscape were presented, as well as academic collaborations. It gives a 'flavour' and appreciation of the complex level of the field and informs directions for future research.

Out of the 7,002 publications that were added to VOSviewer in order to generate the keyword map, we extracted 41,270 terms. From terms that occurred ten or more times, we took 1,353 terms. The remaining terms were selected by relevance (60%), which left 812 terms. After that, a manual selection was performed based on the relationship to the research question resulting in 93 terms, where 90 were related to each other. These 90 most relevant terms formed the keyword map, with seven clusters and a total of 1,010 connections (see Figure 2).

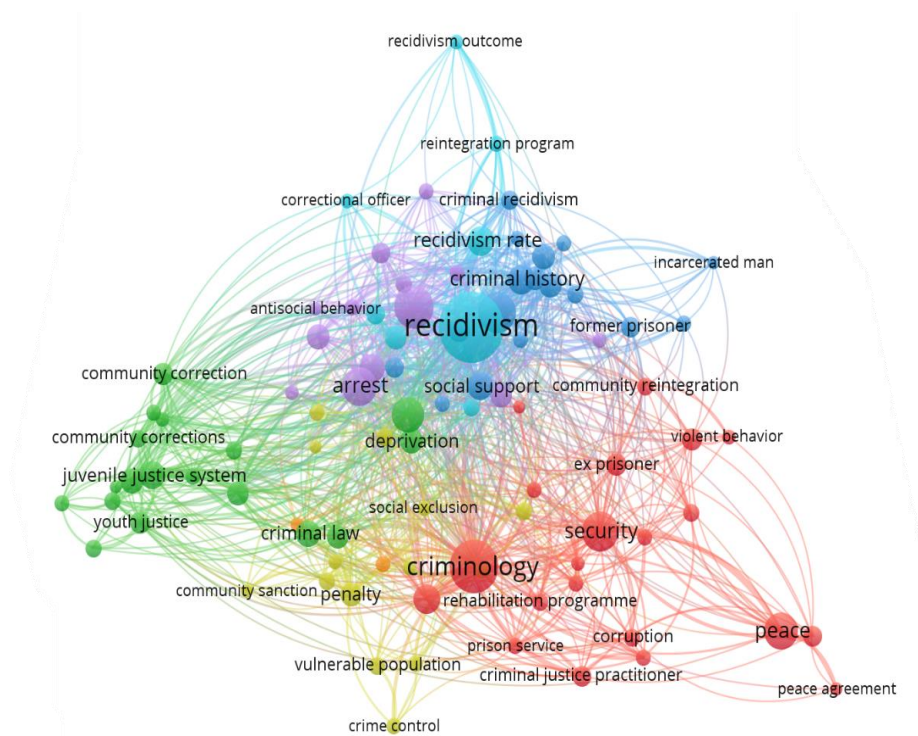


Figure 2. Co-occurrence map term analysis (Source: data retrieved from VOSviewer)

In terms of corrective intervention, this visualization can be read as a model that depicts the relationship between domains and concepts related to interventions for individuals who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

The sizable nodes in figure 4 stand for the concepts widely discussed in the professional literature. For example, “recidivism” is one of the most common terms. The nodes are color-coded to represent different themes, illustrated by clusters of interconnected terms. The clusters represent a concentration of research in the field and also indicate an area where future investigations may be addressed. The largest clusters were:

- blue cluster: recidivism and related aspects (criminal history, recidivism rates, community reintegration).
- red cluster: composed of terms that refer to security, corruption, criminology, and peace.
- green cluster: juvenile justice and community correction.
- yellow cluster: links criminology with criminal law and the minorities.

Recidivism seems a recurring theme in the process, related to issues of social support, social exclusion, and antisocial behavior.

The value obtained for the citation analysis is slightly larger than the other ones in order to avoid excessive filtering and to emphasize the interest paid to the topic. Thus, we began with 2490 citations and chose the ones that appeared at least 1 once, arriving at a total of 945 after this selection. From these we removed the anonymous citations, leaving 766 of which 554 were interconnections. The resulting graph (Figure 3) has 554 nodes, seven clusters and 83,694 edges.

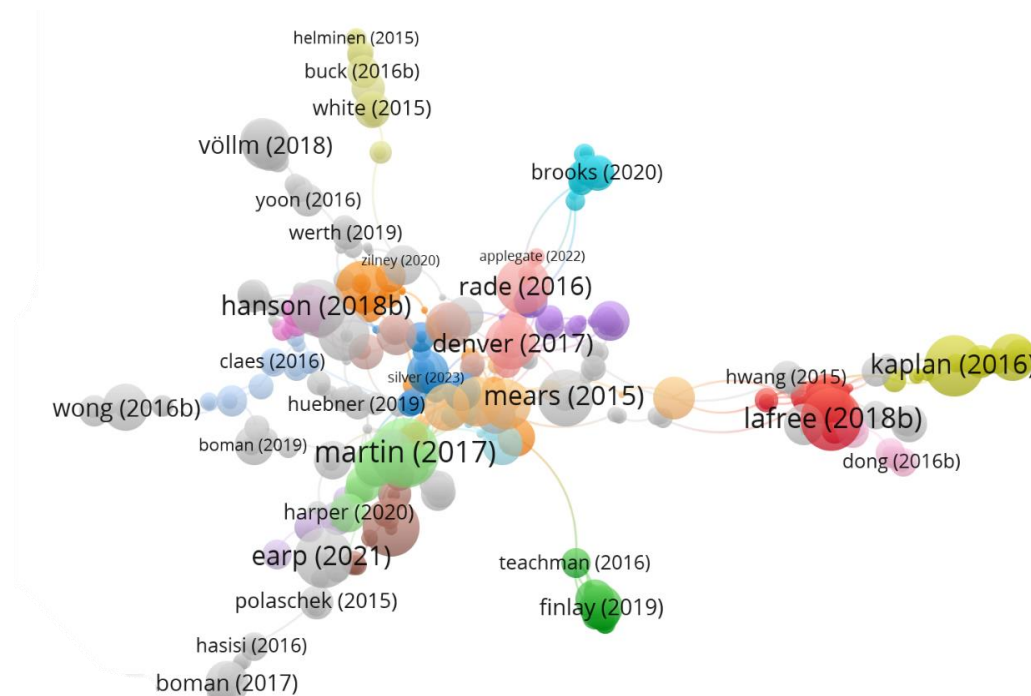


Figure 3. Citation Analysis map (Source: data retrieved from VOSviewer)

The node size reflects how many times this author or work is cited. e.g., Hanson (2018) Long-Term Recidivism Studies Show that Desistance is the Norm (Hanson, 2018) as well as Martin (2017) Sri Lanka's Ex-Combatant Rehabilitation Programme: Reconstructing Gendered Identities (Martin, 2017) among others are most cited. The nodes color indicates thematic groups, so authors within the same color are cited together or address similar topics.

Edges between nodes correspond to citation links. Sources sharing a line link indicates that they are cited more times together in the studies. The thickness of the lines indicates how closely these authors or works are connected. The most interesting clusters and their colors are:

- yellow-green cluster: authors around the rehabilitation of offender or criminal justice papers (Kaplan, 2016; Teachman, 2016; Finlay, 2019).
- red cluster: centered on crime, security, and social implications of justice (Lafree, 2018; Hwang & Kim, 2015; Dong, & Krohn, 2016).
- blue and gray clusters) were studies focusing on recidivism and reentry into community (Wong et al., 2016; Huebner, 2019; Claes, 2016).
- orange-brown cluster: more recent writers making contributions to the area of interest (Earp, 2021; Gover et al., 2020; Silver, 2023).

This bibliometric network confirms that there is a central core of key authors (Martin, 2017; Hanson, 2018; Mears, 2015) who have become quite interconnected with other research. This means that these authors are of high influence in the field.

To build the most relevant graph in terms of the cited journals, using the same search in Dimensions, we have started with 7,738 citations in VOSviewer. Once a minimum of 20 citations per document had been selected, and following a manual specific filter (the withremoval charts to

"anonymous" citations were discarded) a total number of 580 papers were obtained as a final result. The five clusters and the 19,025 associations of the final output are given (Figure 4).

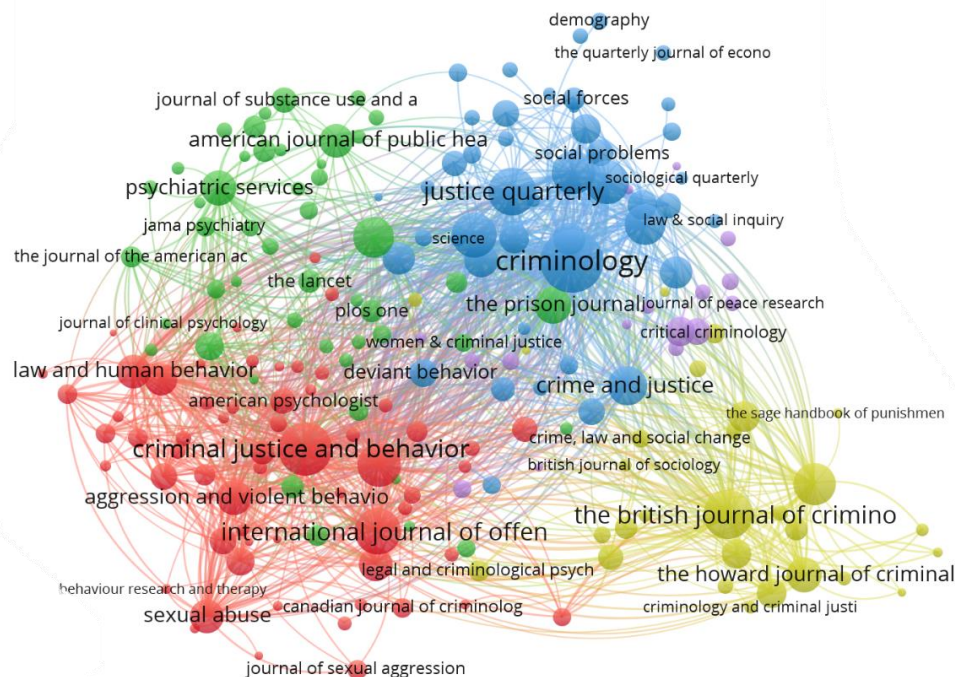


Figure 4. Journals Analysis map (Source: data retrieved from VOSviewer)

The stronger connections (thicker lines or more connections between each) between journals often pair together according to being cited together, indicating overlapping topics or perspective. Journals that are near each other in Figure 4 are more likely to be co-cited. For instance, Criminology and Justice Quarterly are closer words that may indicate a high citation relationship between these two journals. The most interesting clusters include the aforementioned ones using their colour:

- red cluster: Journals that are primarily centered on criminal psychology and deviant behaviour (such as Criminal Justice and Behavior, Law and Human Behavior).
- blue cluster: criminology and criminal-justice journals (e.g. Criminology, Justice Quarterly).
- green cluster: primarily journals in mental health and psychology (e.g. Psychiatric Services, American Journal of Public Health).
- yellow group: British criminology and sociology journals (e.g. The British Journal of Criminology).

Closer journals are cited together more often and have similar topics.

The co-citation map offers a straightforward depiction of the heterogeneity of criminology and justice. The three main clusters represent different subdomains and the links between them show their interdependence. This map is useful for anyone wishing to understand the connections between the journals in criminology, criminal psychology, and sociology. Key journals such as Criminology, Justice Quarterly, and Criminal Justice and Behavior are needed to help disseminate research findings regarding corrective activity and reform of justice.

A bibliometric analysis that is also relevant for mapping author networks and further identifying top list of authors for reviewing the most relevant research in the field is also presented.

A search in Dimensions revealed 4,555 authors, and upon scanning it in VOSviewer, which isolated 602 based on the number of works they published and interactions with other authors. The final network comprises 55 linked authors with 183 links, depicted in Fig 5.

From figure 5, authors are clustered in different colored bands, which correspond to researchers collaborating with each other frequently.

- red cluster (bottom left): writers such as Thomas J. Mowen, Nathan W. Link, Michael Ostermann.
- blue company (center and bottom right): comprising members Megan Denver, Jennifer E. Johnson and Alex Breno.
- yellow cluster (right): Faye S. Taxman, James M. Byrne.
- green cluster (top center): contains David J. Harding, Christopher Uggen.
- pink cluster (upper right): featuring June P. Tangney, Johanna B. Folk.

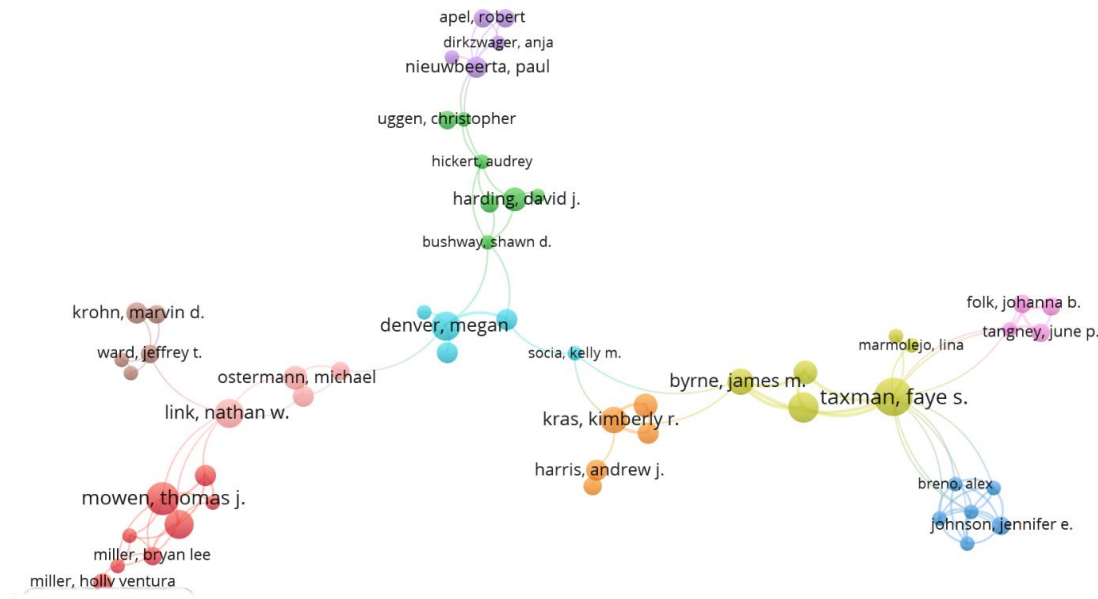


Figure 5. Author Network Analysis map (Source: data retrieved from VOSviewer)

Some researchers seem to be key players in the literature on criminal justice and correctional system reform, including Faye S. Taxman and James M. Byrne. The academic collaboration network among authors in a particular field of study (criminology, sociology, or criminal justice) is depicted in this visualisation. A group of researchers working together is represented by each cluster, and the strength of collaboration is indicated by the thickness of the connections. The aforementioned writers are experts in the field of SDG16. Although the researchers' collaborations are spread out a little, each cluster's authors exhibit a high degree of interdependence, indicating that these fields are related.

The current study provides evidence of the complexities involved in the study of social reintegration and its interdisciplinary design may lead to the development of more effective and sustainable correctional policies. The analysis offers insight into the future of research in this area but also some limitations in the present context. This database was restricted to Dimensions, and therefore, other databases were not included in comparison and analysis, but the database already contained enough data to answer the research questions. The VOSviewer graphs represent objective categorization yet originate from subjective searches because our keyword selection

reflects personal perspectives. The data becomes subjectively tinted through personal filters yet still delivers sufficient information to address research questions focused on exploring the social reintegration of former offenders.

Conclusion

This examination uncovered the intricate and interrelated aspects of issues associated with SDG 16, especially regarding recidivism reduction, crime prevention, and the importance of rehabilitation programs in social reintegration and justice.

The study highlighted works that significantly influenced research in the areas of peace, justice, and robust institutions. These offer important viewpoints on issues like preventing corruption, safeguarding human rights, and enhancing institutional transparency. Additionally, the article emphasized the scientific communities that play a role in advancing knowledge related to SDG 16. This has enabled a greater comprehension of how ongoing research aids in the attainment of SDG 16.

Using Dimensions established a strong basis for pinpointing pertinent works, thereby aiding in the discovery of new directions and prospective research avenues.

The results show a significant link among criminology, criminal justice, psychology, and public policy, implying that realizing SDG 16 necessitates a multidisciplinary strategy.

The connection between criminology and psychology indicates that aspects like mental wellness, rehabilitation, and community assistance are vital for lowering recidivism.

The research findings indicate that the social reintegration of former offenders is essential for decreasing recidivism and promoting safe, equitable communities. The analysis has shown that a multidisciplinary strategy, integrating criminology, psychology, and public policies, is essential for the effectiveness of these processes. Additionally, the research emphasizes the significance of successful rehabilitation initiatives and community assistance, which aid the reintegration of former inmates into society, thus promoting the attainment of SDG 16 goals.

SDG 16 encourages just, effective, and transparent judicial systems, with corrective action being a crucial component in realizing this objective. The research examined indicates that lowering recidivism and reintegrating previous offenders into society are crucial for creating safer neighborhoods and more efficient institutions.

The study will proceed with investigating and assessing various types of support for ensuring the necessary social reintegration of ex-offenders to help foster a safer community.

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