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# Stigma as a self-fulfilling prophecy? An experiment in the Czech prisons<sup>2</sup>

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## Summary of key issues

- Prison inmates face many problems after their release which may hinder their reintegration into society. Discrimination from the society can lead among the inmates to the creation of a stigma of an ex-inmate. In such a situation, the history of the prison sentence is a source of shame and prejudice from the side of society. It can further lead to a loss of motivation and self-confidence, and ultimately to an increase in the probability of recidivism.
- The goal of our project was to investigate whether inmates currently serving a sentence expect stigmatization from people out of prison. Another goal was to test whether a light-touch psychological intervention targeting the self-confidence can reduce the effects of stigma.
- We tested our research questions on a sample of 297 male inmates from 15 Czech prisons using methods of experimental economics. Inmates made decisions involving trust and altruism in situations which simulate interactions with the general society so that we could measure the expectations of inmates about the attitudes they have.
- Our results show that inmates do not expect stigmatization. On the contrary, they expect a similar level of trust and even a more altruistic behavior from the general society than towards non-prisoners. Since inmates do not expect to be stigmatized, the psychological intervention did change neither beliefs nor behavior.
- The fact that prisoners do not expect stigmatization can be regarded as positive for their future reintegration. On the other hand, some inmates reported overly optimistic beliefs regarding the behavior of the general society. It could be one of the reasons why they do not prepare adequately for the release and subsequently recidivate. Further research should shed light, whether overly optimistic beliefs can negatively affect prospects for reintegration.

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