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Reentry Preparedness among Soon-to-be-Released Inmates and the Role of Time Served

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Abstract

Purpose—While reentry funding is flowing into states, its target efficiency and effectiveness depends on whether it goes to the right people in the right ways. The purpose of this study was to examine whether and how the amount of time incarcerated affects reentry readiness.

Materials and Methods—A population-based survey was conducted. Approximately 4000 soon-to-be-released male inmates were drawn from a state correctional system. Readiness is described in terms of feeling ready and material, social, and treatment resources available for reentry by time served on current conviction (episode effect) and since age 18 (cumulative effect). Generalized hierarchical linear models were used to estimate the effects of demographic, criminological, and time served variables on reentry readiness outcomes.

Results—Reentry vulnerability increased with time served since turning 18 (cumulative effect) but not with time served on the current conviction (episode effect). Inmates serving more than 10 years since turning 18 were at greatest reentry risk.

Conclusions—The findings indicate that inmates who have served more prison time over their lifetime have more pronounced needs and risks suggesting that reentry funding be targeted towards those who have served more time over the course of their lifetime.

Keywords

reentry; time incarcerated; male inmates; efficiency

Introduction

America is the “land of second chances” heralded President Bush when announcing, during his 2004 State of Union address, the first federal initiative to assist people leaving prison to settle back in the community (Bush, 2004). Since then, prisoner reentry as a philosophy, policy, and practice has gained momentum, with increased federal funding and targeted state initiatives (Petersilia, 2009). More recently, this trend has accelerated with the fiscal distress within states across the country, creating pressure to reduce correctional budgets (Scott-Hayward, 2009). The confluence of federal funding and state fiscal distress has reignited the

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moribund rehabilitative effort of correctional policy under the moniker of “prisoner reentry.” Indeed, contemporary fiscal pressures have been strong enough to reverse the tide created in 1974 with release of the Martinson Report (Martinson, 1974), suggesting wrongly that “nothing works” to rehabilitate prisoners (Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990; Gendreau & Ross, 1979; 1987; Palmer, 1975; Ross & Gendreau, 1980).

Prisoner reentry funding supports two types of reentry initiatives that differ by setting and emphasis (Council of State Governments, 2002; Taxman, Young, & Byrne, 2002). The first type of initiative, situated in correctional settings, emphasizes social and vocational skill building, identification documentation, and reentry planning. Corrections-based initiatives generally espouse a philosophy of reentry planning that begins on the first day of incarceration and continues until the day of release (see: Wilkinson, 2002). The second type of reentry initiative is transitional in its orientation and is activated upon the person’s release to the community, where services and supports are provided. Community-based initiatives, supported by federal or state funding, may be delivered by private or local agencies and may or may not be provided in collaboration with or coordinated by state departments of corrections or parole. While reentry-related funding is flowing into states for reentry initiatives, its target efficiency and ultimate effectiveness depend on whether it goes to the right people in the right ways (Taxman, Young, & Byrne, 2002). Matching needs to services is a central requirement for the efficient use of reentry resources. In recent years, a variety of reports have described the general characteristics of soon-to-be-released inmates by state (LaVigne, Mamalian, Travis, & Visser, 2003; Travis, Keegan, Cadora, Solomon, & Swartz, 2003) and their reentry needs (Austin, Hardyman, & Irwin, 2002; Visser & Lattimore, 2007). These reports illustrate the varied and extreme needs of people leaving prison and the risks factors that challenge their successful reentry. Their needs include: education, financial assistance, job training, employment assistance, and community living skills, such as management of anger, attitudes, and money; and their noted risks are inclusive of violent convictions, employment instability, housing instability, and drug-related problems and activities.

None of these studies, however, explored the impact of time served on reentry readiness. One of the most extensive studies of reentry, *Returning Home*, followed samples of prison inmates released to the community in four states (Illinois, Maryland, Ohio, and Texas). The inmates participating in this study had relatively short current sentences (less than two years) and most had prior incarcerations but the amount of time served over the adult lifetime was not measured (Visser, Debus, & Yahner, 2008; Visser, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). Similarly, the Multi-site Evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) followed inmates who, on average, had served two to three years and had multiple prior incarcerations (Lattimore, Steffey, & Visser, 2009). In reviewing the various publications from these two studies, time served was not used as an explanatory variable in the predictive or descriptive analyses of reentry preparedness or outcomes.

Overall, in describing the needs and risks of the soon-to-be-released population, limited attention has focused on the effect of the amount of time in prison on reentry needs and risks. It is well known that incarceration weakens social ties and causes the deterioration of employment and social functioning skills (Wolff & Draine, 2004; Tonry, 2004) of inmates, with these effects increasing with the time incarcerated. Austin and colleagues (2002) note that “incarceration can serve to sharply disrupt whatever positive (as well as negative) ties may have existed in the offender’s life and replace them with the routine of doing time... [and] serves to worsen these tenuous ties” (p. 56). Time in prison can be expected to influence reentry needs because community-related skills depreciate with time, culminating in the greatest losses for those serving the longest sentences on a current conviction (episode effect) and over the adult life course (cumulative effect).

The “portraits” of the soon-to-be-released population provided by the extant research have been illustrative of reentry needs but not sufficiently detailed to inform a strategy for identifying *absolute* and *relative* reentry needs and matching them to appropriate services in a holistic fashion. Population-based assessments of needs and risks at the system-level are vital for designing effective reentry initiatives and matching these services to the needs of the population. Matching strategies require the ability to identify within the population who has the greatest relative needs, which are often associated with the age, health, disability of the inmate, and time incarcerated (Austin, Hardyman, & Irwin, 2002).

The goal of this paper is to assess the perceived and tangible reentry readiness of a representative sample of male inmates scheduled to be released within 24-months or less from a single state correctional system, and to explore whether time incarcerated affects reentry readiness. Survey data from approximately 4000 inmates are used to describe the general state of readiness of soon-to-be-released inmates and to focus attention on how the perceived readiness and resources vary by time served. Time served is measured in two ways: time served on the current conviction and time served since turning age 18. Our time served measures were constructed to delineate whether the immediate (time served on the current conviction) and cumulative effects (time served since turning age 18) of time served have similar or different impacts on reentry perceptions and readiness. Multivariate and descriptive analyses are conducted. Population-based surveys describing the reentry preparedness of soon-to-be-released inmates provide a blueprint for reentry initiatives situated in correctional and community settings.

Methods

Setting

The study population was drawn from the adult prisons for men under the auspices of the New Jersey Department of Corrections, which houses approximately 24,000 men in 12 facilities (10 maximum to medium secure facilities that release inmates to the community; one super-maximum facility, and one reception facility). The study population included inmates housed at 10 adult prisons for men who were within 24 months or less of their parole eligibility or maximum sentence date. Excluded from the eligible population were inmates housed in the hospital, administrative segregation, halfway houses, or residential treatment units. Also excluded were individuals off-site on the day of the survey due to court, medical appointments, or work assignments. In addition, individuals were excluded if they were being deported, had detainers for new charges, or otherwise had release eligibility dates that were outside the 24-month window based on recent parole hearings. Roughly 25% of the population was ineligible for these reasons. In all, 7207 male inmates (three-quarters of the soon-to-be-released population) were eligible to participate. All inmates who met the eligibility criteria ($n=7207$) were invited to participate in a survey about readiness for reentry. The principal investigator provided a 10-minute study orientation to groups of approximately 30 eligible subjects. At the conclusion of the orientation, those interested in participating were consented. Written consent was required to participate in the survey. Subjects were not compensated for participating. Response rates across all facilities ranged from 46.0% to 64.9%, with a mean response rate of 58.4% (SD: 7.3). The consent procedures were approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board and the Research Committee of the Department of Corrections.

Instrument

The survey was divided into six parts: reentry readiness, personal well being, prison time, prison programs, employment experience, and background information. The reentry

readiness questions included self-rated readiness, resources available in the community, health problems and other obstacles related to reentry, and prior employment experiences.

Procedures

The survey was administered using audio computer-assisted self interviews (A-CASI) and was available in English and Spanish. Subjects responded to a computer-administered questionnaire by using a mouse and followed instructions shown on the screen or provided by audio instructions delivered via headphones. Thirty-three computer stations were available and research assistants were on-site to assist participants as needed. On average, subjects completed the survey within 60 minutes. Data were collected from June 2009 through August 2009.

Participants

A total of 3986 male (mean age = 33.3, SD = 10.1) aged 18 or older participated in the study. Among the 3986 male respondents, 2004 (50.3%) were African American, 596 (15.0%) non-Hispanic White, 986 (24.7%) Hispanic, 312 (7.8%) other race or ethnicity, and 88 (2.2%) did not report their race and ethnicity. A total of 35 and 43 respondents were excluded from sub-group analysis because they did not report time served for current conviction or since age 18, respectively. For all variables used in this analysis, missing data is less than 2.3%. Missing data are treated as missing completely at random (MCAR) and all percentages are based on valid numbers.

Analysis

Dependent Variables—Dependent variables for our models are self-reported feelings about ability to reenter the community successfully and reentry readiness indices. Respondents were asked which word “best describes how you feel about your ability to succeed on the outside,” with the following options: anxious, confident, overwhelmed, enthusiastic, bitter, or hopeful. A positive response (responding as confident, enthusiastic, or hopeful) was coded as 1, with a negative response (responding as anxious, overwhelmed, or bitter) coded as 0. The reentry readiness index was constructed from yes or no responses to questions regarding the following: Will you have upon release 1) photo identification; 2) a safe place to live; 3) a job paying a living wage; 4) at least \$500; 5) reliable transportation; 6) family and friends to help you; 7) someone you trust to talk with; 8) a one-month supply of your prescription medications; and 9) treatment appointments scheduled for any chronic conditions. Questions that did not apply to the respondent were coded as “yes.” Three reentry readiness indices were created: Material (sum of 1 through 5); Material and Social (sum of 1 through 7) and Material, Social, and Medical (sum of 1 through 9). See appendix for the properties of the dependent variables.

Independent Variables—The independent variables are organized according to demographic, crime types, and time in prison and their properties are shown in the appendix.

Demographic variables: These variables include age (continuous variable starting at *age 18*); race/ethnicity (coded categorically with *White, Black, Latino, and other*; White omitted for comparison); and education (coded categorically with 1 indicating high school graduate/GED or higher and 0 indicating less than high school education).

Crime type variables: Three variables were constructed for the offense leading to the current incarceration. They include: drug-related crime (1=yes), sex offense (1=yes if any of the following: rape, sexual assault or molestation), and violent crime (1=yes if any of the following: battery, assault, murder, or manslaughter).

Time in prison variables: Two continuous variables were constructed for time in prison: time in prison on this conviction (episode measure of time incarcerated) and time in prison since age 18 measured in years (cumulative measure of time incarcerated).

Weighting—Weights were constructed to adjust the sampled population to the full population for different probabilities of selection due to different response rates among facilities and non-response bias. Final weights were rescaled to reflect the actual sample size. Weighted and un-weighted analyses were conducted and because the results were similar, only weighted results are presented.

Descriptive Analysis—Mean and percentages were estimated based on weighted valid numbers. Respondents were classified into groups according to time served in prison on the current conviction (“stay” groups) and since turning age 18 (“time” groups): three or less years, more than three to 10 years, and more than 10 years. These cut-off points reflect both the distribution of the data and the classification scheme used by Thompson and Loper (2005). Tables using a finer granulated time served grouping scheme (<1, 1-2, 2-3, 3-5, 5-8, and 8+ years) are available from the author. The predictive analyses described below use a continuous measure of time served. (SAS 9.2 was used for all the analysis and Proc survey-means, t-test, or chi-square test was used to construct all statistics. The significance level used to assess the validity of the null hypotheses is $p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.003$ (Bonferroni adjustment p-value to control for type 1 error).

Hierarchical (Generalized) Linear Models—HLM 6.02 software was used to perform weighted hierarchical (generalized) linear model (HLM) analysis for ‘reentry readiness’ dependent variables and with a logit link function for ‘feel about the ability to succeed’ dependent variable. Subjects in our sample are nested within a facility requiring that we account for the dependence among subjects within the same facility. Not adjusting for the dependence among observations would underestimate the standard error, inflating the significance of the estimators. HLM adjusts for the clustering within the sample by treating the facility effect as random. The dependent variables are “feel about ability to make it in the community” (binary) and reentry readiness index (continuous). In our preliminary analysis, the level-1 predictors tended to have similar impacts on the outcome variables across facilities. The intercept is the only level-1 coefficient treated as random and modeled at level-2. Since there are 10 prisons, only one level-2 predictor was possible (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). The level-2 variable was the mean age of inmates in the facility. Level-1 coefficients were entered step-wise: demographics; demographics plus crime type; and demographics, crime type, and time in prison variables. All continuous level-1 variables enter the model group-centered (centered on their respective facility mean). Dichotomous predictors are entered in the original format (e.g. Black).

Most of the variables were highly correlated both because of their binary measurement and the nature of the independent variables. We examined the effect of multicollinearity by using weighted least squares regression. All the independent variables have tolerance values greater than 0.6, which suggests that multicollinearity does not bias the estimation of individual level parameters in our models. Given that we are testing multiple dependent variables, alpha levels are inflated, which require a Bonferroni adjustment for confirmatory testing. We report both unadjusted (for exploratory testing $p < 0.05$) and adjusted (for confirmatory testing) $p < 0.003$ (altogether there are 16 outcome models, and $p=0.05/16=0.003$) values in Tables 3 and 4. Only the final models for reentry readiness indexes are presented in Table 4. Other stepwise models are available upon request from the author.

Results

Respondents' Characteristics

As shown in Table 1, age and racial composition of male respondents varied by time served. Male inmates who served 10 years or more on their current conviction ("stay" group) or since turning age 18 ("time" group) were significantly older than their counterparts serving three years or less. The racial/ethnic distributions among the "stay" groups were roughly equal. By contrast, nearly 60% of male inmates incarcerated for more than 10 years since turning age 18 ("long time" group) were African American. For all time-served groups, roughly 60% or more of male inmates reported that they graduated from high school or had their GED.

Reentry Readiness

General sense of readiness: The bivariate comparisons of reentry readiness by the episode and cumulative measures of time served show that inmates with the shortest time served were, on average, better prepared for reentry (see Table 2). In most instances, they were more likely to have instrumental resources for reentry (e.g., picture identification, housing, job prospects, reliable transportation, social support) compared to their counterparts with more time served. The inmate group serving more than 10 years since turning age 18 (long time group) was least prepared and perceived their readiness less positively (i.e., report feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or bitter) than the shorter duration groups. The long time group had the lowest rates of readiness on all characteristics measured. Compared to short time inmates, long time inmates were significantly less likely to have the instrumental resources necessary for stable community living. They were also less likely to report having access to medical resources in the community to ensure continuous management of health-related problems currently under treatment while incarcerated. Less than 40% of inmates in the long time group reported having prospects for a job paying a living wage, access to \$500 during their first month in the community, and reliable transportation. Less consistent patterns were found among the stay groups (time on current conviction).

Role of Time Served: Bivariate associations between time served measures and reentry readiness may be conflated with other factors affecting time served such as offense type. For this reason, multivariate analyses were conducted and are shown in Tables 3 through 6. Each reentry readiness model was estimated sequentially with independent variables entered in the following order: demographic, crime types, and time served in prison.

Perceived readiness: Results for the perceived readiness model appear in Table 3. The self-reported "feeling about ability to succeed" did not vary across facilities with populations with different mean ages (level-2 predictor). Most of the demographic variables affect perceived readiness. Older inmates felt more positive about their ability to make it on the outside. Black inmates, compared to their white counterparts, were more than twice as likely to feel positively about their reentry readiness. Inmates with GED or higher education also felt more positive about their reentry readiness. The effects of the demographic characteristics of the sample were sustained when crime types and time in prison variables were added into the model. Inmates who committed a violent crime tended to feel less positive about their reentry readiness; however, after adding the time in prison variable, the violent crime variable lost its significance. Overall, the longer inmates spent time in prison since age of 18, the less likely they were to feel positive about their ability to make it outside. By contrast, time served for current conviction did not significantly affect perceptions of readiness.

Resource readiness: Table 4 examined readiness in terms of material, social, and medical resources upon reentry. At the facility level, resource readiness varied significantly among facilities, with prison populations with older inmates being less reentry ready. At the individual level, older inmates, in general, were less ready in all areas of resources. Inmates with GED or higher education and convictions related to drug or sex offenses reported having more resources to support reentry. The effects of these characteristics were sustained in all models. Inmates who spent more time in prison since age of 18 had lower reentry readiness scores for resource preparedness. By contrast, time served on current conviction did not affect resource readiness (not shown in final models, but results available upon request).

Discussion

Although much has been written about reentry and its planning, no objective standards have been developed that indicate when a person released from prison is sufficiently prepared to have a better than even chance of succeeding pro-socially in the community. Common sense standards would argue for the inclusion of the following: stable and safe housing and social support, reliable transportation, enough money to pay for food, clothing, transportation, and related incidentals for at least one month, reliable and timely access to medical treatment and medications as needed, and vocational skills that translate into a living wage job. Using these standards, it is clear that, on average, the soon-to-be-released inmates represented in our sample lack the preparation and resources to reenter the community successfully.

According to our findings, it is not a long prison sentence alone that negatively impacts reentry readiness. Our data suggests that the effect of time served on reentry readiness is more pronounced with the accumulation of time incarcerated and in facilities with older inmates. Controlling for demographic and criminal history characteristics, our data indicate that the more time spent in prison over the adult lifetime (cumulative measure of time served since turning age 18) predicts reentry vulnerability in terms of perceived ability to succeed in the community and instrumental resources (material, social, and medical treatment) for reentry. This effect was not found for time served on the current conviction (episode measure of time served). From the descriptive analyses, it was clear that reentry vulnerability increased between inmate groups with three to 10 and more than 10 years since turning age 18, compared to the group with less than three years served time since turning 18. Vulnerability, however, was greatest for those serving more than 10 years in prison over their lifetime. Inmates who had served 10 or more years on multiple convictions or a single conviction were older, had weaker social ties and job prospects, lacked personal identification, had limited financial resources, and were less positive about their ability to succeed in the community.

Not surprisingly, incarcerated persons who have been away from the community longer would be more institutionalized and have fewer community-based connections, as time in prison depreciates human, social and financial capital (Wolff & Draine, 2004). Between the two measures of time served in this study, cumulative time is a better measure of the effects of prison on the depreciation of human, social, and financial capital, which increases reentry vulnerability. This makes sense given that, everything else equal, a person serving three years in prison prior to release has a shorter depreciation period than someone who also served three years but who also served five years on a previous conviction. Our findings suggest that multiple short “episodes” in prison combine to have a long cumulative effect on time away from the community. And, as such, inmates with multiple short episodes appear more similar to inmates with long prison episodes in terms of the effect of prison time on the stock of resources available to them upon reentry. Austin and colleagues (2002) note that “...after having served many years in prison, most [long termers] are good risks for crime

free, productive lives after release. However, when they serve excessively long sentences, the deterioration and ‘prisonization’ that inevitably accompanies long imprisonment, outweighs these benefits and their chances of establishing themselves in a viable, conventional, relatively productive and satisfying life after prison are greatly reduced” (p. 73).

Noteworthy is the significant prison effect (level 2) on reentry readiness. The mean age of inmates at the facility negatively predicted reentry readiness, indicating that facilities with a younger inmate population were more likely to have inmates who reported higher levels of “resource” readiness. This relationship may reflect that facilities housing younger inmates, on average, have a general population of inmates with more social resources (family members ready to help) or less health risks (generally healthier and with less medical needs). Or alternatively, the prison effect might indicate that facilities holding a younger inmate population have more extensive rehabilitation programs, such as more education and employment programs geared towards building reentry readiness. Most likely, both the needs of and programs for younger inmates combine to explain this finding. Further research is warranted to fully explain this association.

This study has several limitations in addition to all the usual methodological limitations of cross-sectional and self-report research. First, the current study only includes male inmates and findings may not generalize to female inmates. While there is no reason to believe that life and vocational skills or social networks depreciate in gender-specific ways during incarceration, female inmates may have more intact family relationships because of their childcare responsibilities and receive more programming inside prison for that reason. This is an empirical issue that warrants future research. Second, self-report histories are subject to a variety of errors and respondent biases that include faulty recall. There was no evidence within the data or during the data collection process suggesting that these errors are systematic in ways that would invalidate our findings. Another limitation is that these findings describe a single state correctional system. In theory, the depreciation effects of incarceration on life and vocational skills, as well as social networks, are a consequence of time away from normal living, working, and socializing opportunities. These effects, however, may be mitigated by work, education, and skill-building programming investments that are unique to the correctional system, making rates of depreciation for and patterns of needs, risks, and resources endogenous to the correctional system. Replicating this study would help to better understand how correctional programming investments impact the relative needs, risks, and resources of soon-to-be-released inmates.

Conclusions

Severe fiscal deficits among state governments are drawing increased scrutiny to the size of correctional budgets and the efficiency of their expenditures. There is growing pressure to “do corrections” more efficiently and effectively and in ways that ultimately reduce recidivism. Towards this goal, reentry preparation has become the *sine qua non* of correctional policy. While reentry funding has been increasing across correctional systems, there is little strategy guiding the focus and allocation of these funds in part because correctional systems lack a comprehensive assessment of the reentry needs and risks of their soon-to-be-released inmates.

Recommendation 1

Funding for reentry should require a comprehensive assessment of the needs and risks of inmates within three years of their expected release dates.

Reentry funding is motivated in part by public safety. Indeed, it is reasonable for the public to expect that a person released from prison is prepared enough to have a better than even chance of succeeding pro-socially in the community. As such, taxpayers have an interest in knowing the standards that guide the reentry preparedness strategy of the correctional policies and that are used to inform the allocation of reentry funds towards specific programs and objectives. These standards also inform incarcerated people of what is expected of them as they approach their release date.

Recommendation 2

Reentry funding should require objective and numeric reentry standards in areas of personal identification, education, vocation, money management, social supports, and housing.

Recommendation 3

These reentry standards should be used to evaluate readiness annually and performance numerics reported publically for all inmates released from prison that year and expected to be released in the next year.

Reentry funding can be viewed as a potential expenditure or an investment. As an expenditure, the goal is to spend reentry funding on a particular set of services within a defined period of time. Alternatively, as an investment, reentry funding is expected to yield a return on the investment. Leading to evaluative questions like: What expenditures will yield the greatest return? Does investing in job training yield a greater return than GED education? Does investing equally in all inmates yield a greater return than targeting levels of investment in groups with different risks and needs? An investment framework for reentry spending fosters a strategy of systematically allocating reentry funds according to principles of cost-effectiveness. Currently, we do not know whether reentry funds are being used in cost-effective ways or whether they could be used more effectively if reallocated in strategic ways to services focusing on different outcomes (e.g., vocational training) or particular groups.

Recommendation 4

Match services to groups in ways that maximize the yield on reentry investments. Develop methodologies to identify risks/need groups and to target resources that yield equal reentry preparedness across inmate risk/need groups.

This recommendation is consistent with our findings of different relative need and risks across inmates with different levels of prison time served since age 18, as well as with recommendations by Austin and colleagues (2002) that correctional systems "...offer longer terms individualized and direct assistance in making the difficult transition from prison to the outside society" (p. 74).

Reentry preparedness has potentially individual and collective benefits, but these benefits will be unrealized in part or in full if reentry funding is spent, not invested. Investing these funds in services most predictive of successful community reintegration and groups of inmates with the greatest relative need and risk are consistent with economic principles, which, in turn, yield the outcomes that benefit the public most – less crime and more taxpayers.

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Appendix

Descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables, adult male respondents

Variables	Range	M(SD)
Dependent		
Feeling about ability to succeed	0,1(Y)	0.80 (0.40)
Reentry readiness: Material	0-5	2.9 (1.7)
Reentry readiness: Material & Social	0-7	4.5 (2.1)
Reentry readiness: Material, Social, & Medical	0-9	5.8 (2.6)
Independent		
Level-2, mean age	23-44	34(7.2)
Age	18-79	33(10.1)
White (reference level)	0,1 (Y)	0.15 (0.36)
Black	0,1 (Y)	0.51(0.50)
Latino	0,1 (Y)	0.25(0.43)
Other Race	0,1 (Y)	0.08 (0.27)
Education/GED	0,1 (Y)	0.61 (0.49)
Current offense: Drug-related	0,1 (Y)	0.46 (0.50)
Current offense: Sex offense	0,1 (Y)	0.05 (0.22)
Current offense: Violent offense	0,1 (Y)	0.24 (0.43)
Years served in prison on current conviction	0-54	3.7 (4.5)
Years served in prison since age 18	0-60	7.6 (6.7)

Biography

Nancy Wolff, Ph.D., an economist, is a professor and the director of the Program in Public Policy in the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her research focuses on the interactions between the mental health and criminal justice systems, and the public policies that influence those interactions. She currently directs an NIMH-funded Center for Behavioral Health Services & Criminal Justice Research and a post-doctoral training program on behavioral health and criminal justice research.

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Highlights

- ▶ Study examined whether and how time incarcerated affects reentry readiness.
- ▶ Population-based survey completed by nearly 4000 male inmates.
- ▶ Results indicate reentry vulnerability increases with time served since age 18.
- ▶ Reentry readiness was not related to time served on the current conviction.
- ▶ Targeting cumulative time served is expected to yield better reentry outcomes.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of soon-to-be-released male inmates by prison time served

Characteristic	Full Sample N= 3898	Prison Time Served					
		On Current Conviction (Episode) N = 3892			Since Age 18 (Cumulative) N = 3885		
		Short Stay Group (3 years) N = 2396	Medium Stay Group (>3-10 years) N = 1244	Long Stay Group (>10 years) N = 252	Short Time Group (3 years) N = 1137	Medium Time Group (>3-10 years) N = 1775	Long Time Group (>10 years) N = 973
Age, mean	33.7	32.7	34.0 **	41.6 **	29.6	32.2 **	40.8 **
Black, %	51.5	51.5	51.8	49.8	41.4	52.9 **	59.7 **
Hispanic, %	25.2	25.8	24.3	24.3	32.5	23.3 **	20.8 **
White, %	15.4	15.1	15.6	17.4	17.1	15.7	13.2 *
High school diploma or equivalent, %	61.5	61.7	62.2	56.6	60.6	62.8	60.0

Statistically significant comparing medium and long stay/time groups to short stay/time group, t or chi-square test,

*
p< 0.05;**
p<0.003.

Table 2

Self-assessed reentry readiness of soon-to-be-released male inmates by prison time served, adult male respondents

Characteristic	Full Sample N=3982	Prison Time Served					
		On Current Conviction (Episode) N = 3951			Since Age 18 (Cumulative) N = 3943		
		Short Stay Group (3 years) N = 2432	Medium Stay Group (>3-5 years) N = 1261	Long Stay Group (>10 years) N = 258	Short Time Group (3 years) N = 1156	Medium Time Group (>3-10 years) N = 1796	Long Time Group (>10 years) N = 991
Feel about ability to make it Confident, Enthusiastic, Hopeful Anxious, Overwhelmed, Bitter	79.5 20.5	80.5 19.5	77.9 22.1	78.4 21.6	83.6 16.4	78.0** 22.0**	78.0** 22.0**
Picture ID, %	63.3	67.2	58.3**	53.0**	75.8	62.4**	51.7**
Safe place to live, %	76.9	78.6	75.3*	70.1**	87.8	76.7**	66.1**
Job paying living wage, %	43.4	45.0	40.4*	41.5	54.1	41.2**	35.1**
\$500 in first month, %	47.9	47.9	46.5	53.7	59.5	46.6**	37.6**
Reliable transportation, %	51.3	55.2	45.7**	43.8**	67.4	50.1**	36.0**
Supportive family,%	82.8	84.2	80.8*	80.8	90.9	82.7**	74.5**
Trusted person to talk with, %	82.1	83.6	79.7*	81.1	88.1	81.2**	77.6**
Month-supply of meds, %	67.3	68.0	67.0	64.8	72.9	70.0	57.1**
Treatment appointments, %	64.0	65.2	63.3	57.1*	68.7	66.8	54.2**

Statistically significant comparing medium and long stay/time groups to short stay/time group, chi-square test,

*
p< 0.05;

**
p<0.003

Table 3

Feeling about ability to succeed by demographic, crime type, and time served, adult male respondents using generalized hierarchical linear model (HLM)

Characteristic	Dependent Variable: Feeling about Ability to Succeed			
	Model 1 (n=3893)	Model 2 (n=3893)	Model 3 (n=3887)	Model 4 (n=3880)
Feelings to succeed (% positive ^a)	79.5	79.5	79.5	79.5
Level 2 Predictor				
Mean age of Inmates	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99
Level 1 Predictors				
Age	1.02 **	1.02 *	1.02 *	1.02 **
Black (omitted White)	2.37 **	2.35 **	2.35 **	2.48 **
Latino	1.88 **	1.86 **	1.87 **	1.92 **
Other race	1.43 *	1.42 *	1.44 *	1.51 *
Education/GED	1.28 **	1.28 *	1.28 *	1.27 *
Drug Crime		1.05	1.05	1.05
Sex Crime		1.14	1.15	1.12
Violent Crime		0.81 *	0.82	0.84
Time on Current Conviction			0.99	
Time in Prison Since 18				0.98 **

^aDependent variable of positive feelings to succeed include 'confident,' 'enthusiastic,' and 'hopeful,' while negative feelings to succeed include 'anxious,' 'overwhelmed,' and 'bitter'.

*
p<0.05;

**
p<0.003

Table 4

Reentry readiness indexes by demographic, crime type, and time served, adult male respondents using HLM

Characteristic	Dependent Variable: Reentry Readiness Indexes		
	Model 1 “Material ^a ” (n=3880)	Model 2 “Material ^a ” + “social ^b ” (n=3880)	Model 3 “Material ^a ” + “social ^b ” + “medical ^c ” (n=3880)
Reentry readiness (mean, range)	2.85 0-5	4.51 0-7	5.83 0-9
Level 2 Predictor			
Mean age of Inmates	−0.04 *	−0.04 *	−0.06 *
Level 1 Predictors			
Age	0.01	0.004	−0.01 *
Black (omitted White)	−0.03	0.08	0.21
Latino	0.09	0.20	0.15
Other race	0.09	0.12	0.19
Education/GED	0.22 **	0.29 **	0.33 **
Drug Crime	0.12 *	0.15 *	0.12
Sex Crime	0.33 *	0.37 *	0.47 *
Violent Crime	0.05	0.09	0.14
Time in Prison since 18	−0.05 **	−0.06 **	−0.07 **

^a ‘Material’ readiness includes that the soon-to-be-released person reports having ‘photo identification,’ ‘a safe place to live for at least six months after release,’ ‘a job paying living wage,’ ‘\$500 for the first month,’ and ‘reliable transportation’.

^b ‘Social’ readiness includes having ‘family or friends to help in supportive ways’ and ‘someone trusted to talk to when feel sad, hurt, disappointed, frustrated, or angry’.

^c ‘Medical’ readiness includes having ‘one-month supply of all prescription medications’ and ‘treatment appointments scheduled for any chronic medical, mental health or addiction’.

*
p<0.05;

**
p<0.003