

Recommendations for Restructuring Prison Reentry to Ensure Offenders are Successful Upon
Release

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Release

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Abstract

Recommendations for Restructuring Prison Reentry to Ensure Offenders are Successful Upon Release

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Michael Klemp-North

Statement of the Problem

Prisoner reentry is the use of programs geared to promote successful reintegration of offenders back into the community upon release from prison. Each year there are approximately 650,000 people released from state and federal prison who rejoin the community. Yet, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) study of 15 states, more than two-thirds of state prisoners released from incarceration were re-arrested and more than half returned to prison within three years of their release. The same study found that, on average, these same offenders commit at least two additional crimes before they are re-arrested, re-sentenced, and re-incarcerated (Office of Justice Programs, 2011). For decades now there has been a massive increase in the number of people sent to prison. As a result, this has increased the number of people who are released from prison each year and return to the community. Ultimately, reentry goals are not being achieved with such high recidivism rates (Travis, 2000). According to the Urban Institute (2011) there are five main obstacles that offenders face as they return to the community: housing, employment, health, substance abuse, and barriers from the community itself.

Methods of Approach

The main source of data collection was secondary research, through criminal justice textbooks and valid, reputable Internet websites, such as the Urban Institute, and databases, such

as, NCJRS. Based on the researched information from these sources, appropriate recommendations were made to ensure that offenders are successful upon their release from the institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper was to examine key elements that will help offenders become successful in the community upon release from prison and ensure that they become productive members of society. Prisoner reentry is crucial to the community as a whole. If an offender learns to be self-sufficient the economic burden will be lessened on taxpayers, recidivism rates will drop, and the community will be a safer place for its citizens.

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I. Introduction

In the past 20 years there has been a massive increase in the incarceration of offenders. While approximately five percent of offenders are imprisoned for life approximately 95 percent of offenders will be released back into the community after being incarcerated for a period of time (Travis, Solomon, &Waul, 2001). When prisoners return home communities face problems with reintegrating offenders back into the community, including public safety. Upon release from prison most prisoners are released with nothing more than the property they had with them in prison. Many have little or no money and do not have the means to support themselves (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). As a result more than half of the prisoners reentering the community will end up back in prison within three years (BJS, 2011). Offenders are simply unprepared to reintegrate back into the community and are not given the tools needed to succeed in life on the outside of the prison walls.

Due to sentencing reforms, such as determinate sentencing laws, release discretion from parole boards have been eliminated. As a result prisoners are only serving about two-thirds of their original sentences, which averages two years, and are released back into the community (Alarid et al., 2008). Many of the needs of the prisoners, such as drug treatment or behavioral therapy, are not being addressed due to the short length of the prison sentence. Once released the transition from prison life back to community living can be challenging for some due to numerous hardships they can face. Low levels of education, substance abuse issues, mental health issues, unemployment, housing and strained relationships with friends, families, and communities are factors that determine if reentry is successful or not.

While successful reentry practices are still being identified research has shown that effective programs include those that are tied to rehabilitation (Lambert et al., 2008). Preparing offenders for reentry should begin during the prison sentence and continue long after the release from prison. Promoting pro-social programs, such as, work and vocational programs, educational programs, and drug treatment programs are strategies that have been proven to be effective in reducing recidivism.

Indeterminate sentencing by parole board should determine the readiness of a prisoner to return to the community. Determinate sentencing eliminates the discretion of a parole board. A parole board assesses risk factors, such as, community ties, remorse for the original crime and behavior while incarcerated. Indeterminate sentencing acknowledges that not everyone is the same. Sentences are tailored to reflect the severity of the original crime and holds each offender accountable.

Following the release from prison parolees should be placed on supervision that is not intensive. It was found that recidivism rates do not decrease just because an offender is placed on supervision (Travis, 2009). A community based approach centering on treatment and intermediate sanctions for violators has been found to be the most effective in decreasing recidivism rates. By taking a community based approach to supervision community members can play a role in the reentry process. This can eliminate feelings of negativity from community members. Negative feelings from community members can create stress and an unwelcoming environment, ultimately hindering the reentry process.

Removing obstacles is the biggest challenge in reentry, but through a successfully implemented program obstacles can be eliminated. By removing obstacles not only with

recidivism rates go down, but parolees can become productive members of society, which is the ultimate goal of reentry.

II. Literature Review

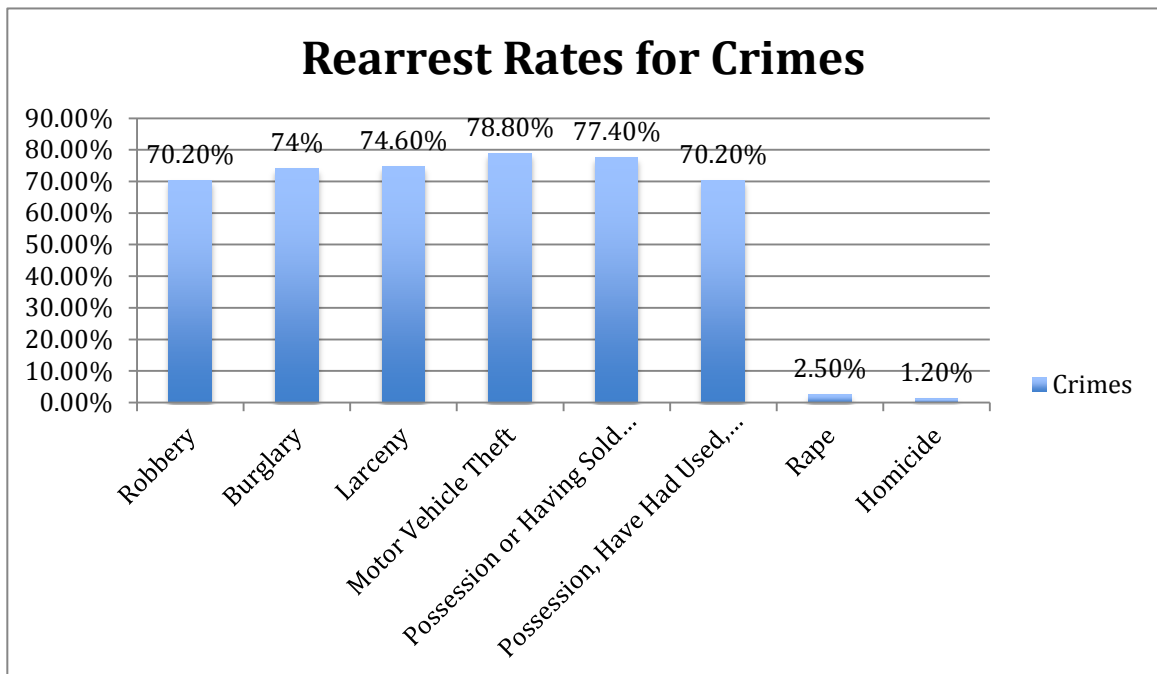
Each day there are approximately 1,600 people who are released from prison and return to communities (Travis et al., 2001). Many of these prisoners are returning home unprepared to reintegrate back into society and receive minimal assistance with transitioning. As a result, difficulties emerge in obtaining employment, finding suitable housing, reconnecting with family, and, possibly, remaining sober and maintaining mental health stability. Many of those released will be rearrested and sent back to prison for a new crime or for too many parole violations. The following section will highlight some of the key issues associated with prisoner reentry.

a) Current Recidivism Statistics

With an increase in incarceration in the US in recent years attention has been given to the consequences of releasing large numbers of prisoners back into the community. It is estimated that that approximately two-thirds of the newly released prisoners will re-offend and return to prison within three years (Recidivism, 2011). Although there is not a single reason why parolees recidivate there is strong evidence suggesting that upon their return home many ex-prisoners simply do not have the resources available to cope with life outside prison walls and integrate back into society properly.

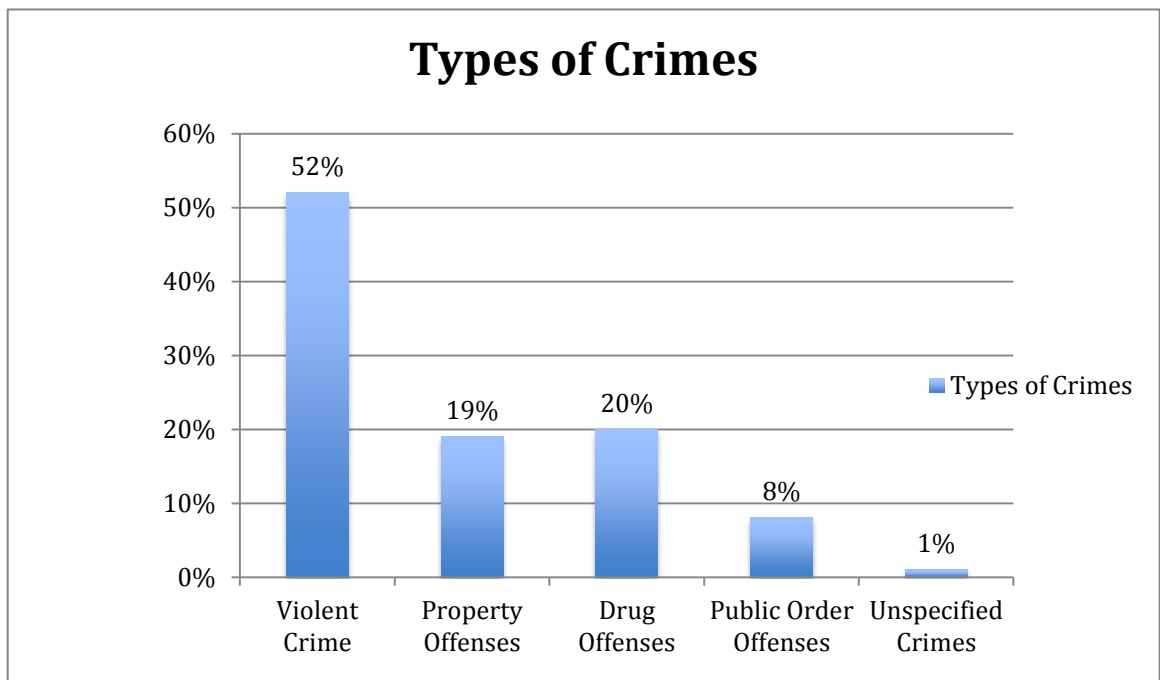
According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), recidivism is defined as criminal acts that result in the re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release (Recidivism, 2011). Currently, approximately two-thirds of the parolee population are re-offending and returning to prison within three years. These high recidivism rates affect the

individual, their families and neighborhoods, the communities, public safety, and the economy. The following statistics have been collected by the BJS (Recidivism, 2011) and paint an accurate picture of current recidivism trends in the US today. In 2007, there were 1,180,469 parolees that were at risk of re-offending, of these parolees, approximately 16 percent were, in fact, returned to prison in 2007; in approximately 300,000 prisoners released in 15 states in 1994, 67.5 percent were rearrested within 3 years, while a study conducted 11 years earlier in 1983 revealed the estimates of those rearrested to be around 62.5 percent; of the 272,111 people released from prisons in 15 states in 1994, approximately 67.5 percent were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years, 46.9 percent were reconvicted, and 25.4 percent resentedenced to prison for a new crime. The following chart shows the parolees with the highest re-arrest rates and their crimes (Recidivism, 2011):



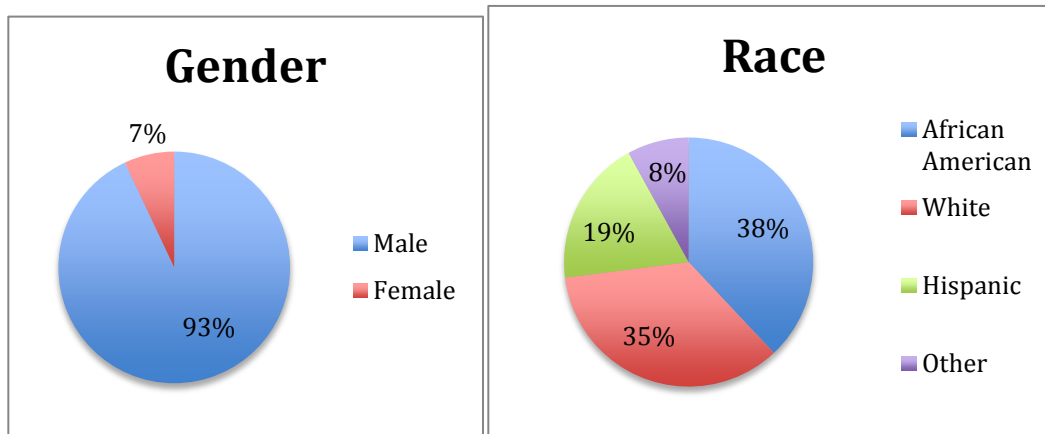
b) A Brief Overview of the Incarcerated Population

In order to understand recidivism and the issues with reentry it is important to review the statistics regarding the types of crimes that result in the incarceration of offenders in the first place. According to the BJS the U.S. prison population reached 1,331,100 prisoners by the end of 2006 (Prison Inmate Characteristics, 2010). The following chart shows the types of crimes for which prisoners were incarcerated:



Violent crimes include murder, manslaughter, rape, sexual assault, assault, and criminal endangerment. Property offenses include burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and fraud. Drug offenses include possession, manufacturing, and trafficking. Public order offenses include drinking and driving offenses, escape/flight to avoid prosecution, court offenses, and obstruction. The following charts display the genders and races of

those incarcerated (Prison Inmate Characteristics, 2010):



Due to sentencing reforms in the recent past, which include mandatory minimum laws and truth-in-sentencing laws, prisoners are serving longer sentencing, averaging 2.5 years (Petersilia, 2003). About 93 percent of all prison inmates will eventually be released back into the community and transition from prison life to free living in a process called reentry (Petersilia, 2003).

c) The Reentry Process

Prior to the sentencing reforms mentioned above, whether or not a prisoner was released was at the discretion of a parole board that based the decision of release on an assessment of individual risk, including remorse for the original crime, good behavior while incarcerated, and positive ties to the community upon release (Alarid et al., 2008). In the early 1990's these indeterminate sentencing policies were replaced with truth-in-sentencing laws, essentially eliminating release discretion and the need for parole boards. Due to such changes prisoners are released after serving about two-thirds of their original sentence and are automatically released back into society, regardless of their risk factors. Some are released and on supervision while others are released with no supervision

whatsoever due to sentence expirations (Schmalleger, 2007).

Immediately after release, offenders transition from a very structured setting to very low levels of supervision or, in some cases, no supervision at all (Lynch and Sabol, 2001). Those that are on parole, or post-prison supervision, on average serve about two years. The increase in the number of prisoners released has resulted in larger caseloads for parole officers, which translates into a minimum amount of supervision. This means parolees see their parole officer for as little as 15 minutes once or twice a month (Alarid et al., 2008).

Requirements of supervision vary from state to state, but are typically very similar. Most post-release case plans include abstaining from drugs and alcohol, avoiding high-risk places and high-risk people, securing employment, maintaining adequate housing, complying with random drug testing, and avoiding recidivating. Some offenders are also required to wear surveillance equipment, such as a Global Position System, (GPS) or Electronic Monitoring Programs (EMP). These types of surveillances practices are usually reserved for high-risk offenders, such as sex offenders. Should parolees violate one or more of these supervision requirements they run the risk of having their parole revoked and returning to prison.

Nationally, parole violators account for about one-third of new prison admissions annually. Of the returning parolees, one-third return to prison due to a completely new conviction and the remaining two-thirds return due to violations while on parole (Alarid et al., 2008). Those on parole are supervised in the community by a probation and parole officer. They must abide by certain requirements and not commit a new crime while on supervision. Requirements vary person to person, but often include submitting to random

drug tests, meeting with the probation officer at scheduled times, participating in treatment groups, notifying the probation office of any change in employment or living arrangements, performing community service, and not contacting any victims. When an offender violates probation requirements, known as technical violations, the probation officer must decide what steps to take next in order to sanction the offender (Lawrence , 2008).

d) Reviewing Key Challenges for Reentry

With an overwhelming number of people returning to prison new research has begun to measure the effects of reentry (Urban Institute, 2001; Gideon and Sung, 2011; MacKenzie, 2006; etc). When offenders enter prison they often times enter with a wide range of problems that, unfortunately, are not addressed while incarcerated. Common problems that persist during reentry include, low marketable employment skills, low levels of education, and health issues. After prison these issues linger, which affect families and communities. Recognizing the needs of the returning prisoners and providing assistance with these barriers should be taken into consideration when formulating reform policies.

The value of education is immeasurable. Although low levels of education are not directly related to criminality those with little education are found disproportionately in prisons (Petersilia, 2003). First, higher education increases individual income. According to the US Census Bureau adults age 18 and over with a bachelor's degree earned an average of \$51,554 in 2004, while those with only a high school diploma earned \$28,645, and those without a high school diploma at all earned an average of \$19,169 (Education, 2006) Second, punishment is much more costly for the highly

educated. Being incarcerated means being out of the workplace, which is a major loss for high earners. Additionally, studies show that the stigma of being labeled a ‘criminal’ is greater for white-collar workers than blue-collar workers, as the criminal conviction would lessen earnings for highly educated workers after being released from prison (Lochner & Moretti, 2003). Third, school attendance may have long-lasting effects on criminal activity due to being preoccupied by schoolwork during the day (Lochner & Moretti, 2003).

While low levels of education are not necessarily directly related to criminality those who do have a minimal amount of education are found in the masses in prisons. In state prisons about 19 percent of inmates are totally illiterate and about 40 percent are functionally illiterate compared to the public with 4 percent and 21 percent, respectively (Petersilia, 2003). Recent statistics have shown that there is a larger number of inmates who do complete their General Educational Development (GED) test while incarcerated (Petersilia, 2003).

Substance abuse has proven to be a major challenge to reentry. About 80 percent of inmates reported to having a drug and/or alcohol problem. About half of prisoners reported to being under the influence of some type of drug or alcohol at the time of the offense that led to their imprisonment. However, only about 18 percent of drug users and 22 percent of alcohol users will receive treatment for their substance abuse issues (Petersilia, 2003). Transitioning from prison back into the community for substance abusers who did not receive adequate treatment in prison has significant ramifications. Studies have found that relapse rates are alarmingly high for newly released prisoners in the absence of treatment. Approximately two-thirds of untreated heroin users return to

using drugs and recidivate within three months of their release (Travis, 2001). Many prisoners that are released are placed as a high risk for relapse due to the falling back into familiar routines, including, old friends and neighborhoods that will trigger the brain, and virtually no coping skills to help them deal with cravings (Travis et al., 2001). Since the American Psychological Association's Diagnostic Statistical Manual categorizes addiction as a brain disorder it is argued whether prison really is the best answer for drug users. Many believe that behavioral and cognitive therapy is the best way to treat drug addiction as it addicts learn new ways to think and behave (Genetic Science Learning Center, 2011).

Mental disorders and other diseases are greater in prisons than in the general population. While general health care is more readily available, access to mental health services is much more limited. It is estimated that mental illnesses are twice (some estimates range as high as four times as high) as common in prisons as compared to the national rate (Travis et al., 2001). Common mental health issues in prison include schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Offenders with mental illness are usually high risk for several reasons. A large number also have issues with substance abuse—a combination that is strong precursor of recidivism. When returned back to the community parolees often times have issues with their medication. Some simply cannot afford to buy any more when they run out. Studies have also found that when parolees feel as if they are better they discontinue use of their medication (Petersilia, 2003). When the medications leave their systems the symptoms return and old behaviors manifest. Due to the fact that there are so few mental health facilities involuntary commitment requirements are much more strict. As a result

many parolees end up back in prison.

Employment remains one of the largest hurdles for newly released prisoners. The Urban Institute on Employment and Reentry conducted a study entitled *Returning Home* (2003), which identified key problems related to employment and reentry. Many prisoners believe that employment was an important factor in staying out of prison, but few had jobs lined up for their release; even though there is a need for employment assistance, few prisoners received vocational training in prison; participation in work release programs in prison may have a positive impact in finding full-time employment after release; reentry services have a positive impact in finding and maintaining employment after release from prison; parolees who do find work after release may not be working full-time or working consistently; transportation is a significant barrier to employment; and finding and maintaining employment may reduce recidivism. Despite findings like these there are significant barriers for newly released parolees. They often struggle to find legitimate work. First, employers may be reluctant to hire ex-prisoners, as they may question their trustworthiness and reliability. Secondly, the nature of the crime may prohibit them to work in certain fields. For example, in some states ex-offenders are banned from working in public employment, real estate, medicine or education. Also, time out of the work place equates to the inability to foster employment skills (Travis et al., 2001).

Housing is often overlooked as a barrier to successful reentry. It is, though, a barrier very similar to finding employment. Without proper housing parolees end up homeless and they run the risk of recidivating and returning to prison. Many parolees do not have the funds or references to secure adequate housing. Many laws allow landlords

to inquire about past criminal involvement and financial history. Just as with employment, landlords question the trustworthiness and reliability of parolees and choose to not lease to them. Even public housing, such as Section 8, excludes those who have engaged in certain types of crimes (Travis et al., 2001). Returning to live with friends or families may not be an option either as the relationship may be strained or it may be a factor in falling back into old habits and recidivating.

Lastly, relationships with families are often strained due to incarceration. Most prisoners are parents. About half of male inmates and about two-thirds of female inmates have at least one child when they begin serving their prison sentence (Gideon and Sung, 2011). While sometimes in prison is for the best, due to violence in the home or financial strain to support expensive drug habits, it does have a profound effect on those left behind, especially for children (Gideon and Sung, 2011). While in prison about 40 percent of fathers report having even weekly contact with their children. About half of both fathers and mothers report never having a visit with their child while they are incarcerated. About 60 percent of mothers reported weekly contact with their children (Gideon & Sung, 2011). Children with an incarcerated parent report low levels of self-esteem, high levels of depression, are emotionally withdrawn at school and display negative and disruptive behavior. Several studies have shown that children with an incarcerated parent are more likely to commit crimes themselves and go to prison (Travis et al., 2001). According to Petersilia (2003) males who maintain strong, positive ties to their families while incarcerated have high rates of success following release and men who take on parenting and husband roles following release have high success rates than those who do not.

In conclusion, with high rates of substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness, unemployment, and family issues it is important to examine the important roles these factors play in successful reentry. If offenders do not have a realistic plan upon release from prison these barriers will present a serious risk to communities and families. Although the needs of some of prisoners can be very challenging being proactive and addressing these issues head on will greatly reduce the likelihood of future offending or relapsing.

e) Reviewing Unsuccessful Reentry Practices

Even though governmental agencies are still struggling to identify what works in reentry, there is consensus that the way the current criminal justice system works is not working, which is reflected in such high recidivism rates (Petersilia, 2003; MacKenzie, 2006; Travis et al., 2001). There are currently several practices that are ineffective in reducing recidivism. While no single explanation can be given as to why programs do not succeed possible reasons include: that they have little or no theoretical basis, they are badly implemented, or that they focus too much on deterrence and not enough on rehabilitation (MacKenzie, 2006).

Positive additions to treatment include programs that are based on behavioral or cognitive perspectives; not programs based on a theoretical basis. These types of programs would include certain types of sex offender treatments. Other types of practices that have proven ineffective are programs such as, Scared Straight and boot camps. These programs do not offer any kind of human services aspect that has been associated with lower recidivism rates. However, it was shown in studies that human services programs mixed with some type of strenuous physical component is effective in

successful reentry (MacKenzie, 2006). Several studies (Travis, 2009) have shown that one practice that is not working is supervision. The Urban Institute found that intensive supervision by itself does not reduce recidivism (Travis, 2009).

A program that focuses too much on punishment is correctional boot camps. Boot camps are prison-based programs that use military style techniques that emphasize vigorous physical activity, drill, and other military inspired activities. Strict rules govern every aspect of inmates' lives. Correctional officers serve as the drill instructors, using intense verbal assault designed to break them down in order to build them back up in an attempt to spark a positive change in behavior (Parent, 2003). The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funded research to determine the effectiveness of boot camps in a correctional setting over a ten-year period beginning in the late 1980's. The results of this study concluded that while boot camps had short-term positive effects on the attitudes, perceptions, behavior, and skills of inmates during their confinement, it did not reduced recidivism rates (Parent, 2003). Further research from the National Institute of Justice into boot camps revealed that inadequate focus on reentry into community and a lack of a boot camp model was to blame for its failure (Parent, 2003).

An example of a program that is poorly implemented is electronic monitoring (EM). Technological advances have made monitoring offenders electronically possible. An offender wears a bracelet around the ankle, which sends an electric signal that tracks the offender. The purpose of this is to restrict the accessibility to the community from the offender. According to MacKenzie (2006) EM was initially reserved for low risk offenders, but was soon implemented on parolees. MacKenzie states that EM programs suffer from poor research design and a lack of program integrity (MacKenzie, 2006).

Such an increase in surveillance may actually result in an accrual of more technical violations. MacKenzie (2006) found that those on EM did recidivate just as often as those who do not receive as much surveillance.

f) Reviewing Successful Reentry Practices

Research has shown that reentry practices associated with rehabilitation are much more successful than practices whose goal was punishment (Lambert et al., 2008). As effective programs to address the issues of prisoner reentry are formulated, it is important to keep two objectives in mind: to promote public safety, through the reduction of recidivism, and to promote prisoner reintegration, by integrating returning prisoners back into the community, including finding work, reconnecting with family and other positive social groups.

One of the biggest barriers to reentry is finding gainful employment for parolees. According to Seiter and Kadela (2003) various work and vocational programs are effective in reducing recidivism. Several programs were evaluated and compared in Seattle, Washington. This study from Seiter and Kadela compared recidivism of 218 offenders. Half of these offenders participated in a work release program and the other half finished their sentences in prison. The main objective in the work release program was to prepare inmates for release. Not only were the work release programs effective in reducing recidivism, but they also assisted with job readiness skills. Additional studies completed by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that vocational education and training programs can reduce recidivism by 12.6 percent and that employment training and job assistance in the community can reduce recidivism by 4.8 percent (Travis, 2009).

With overwhelming numbers of offenders with histories of substance abuse another effective approach to reducing recidivism is drug rehabilitation. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that in-prison drug treatment programs, especially those with a community component, could reduce recidivism by about 6.9 percent and that drug treatment in jail could reduce recidivism by 6 percent. Drug treatment in the community can reduce recidivism by as much as 12.4 percent (Travis, 2009). A prevalent treatment practice is cognitive/behavioral programs, which maintains that behavior is learned and, therefore, can be re-taught appropriate behavior. Cognitive behavioral therapy can reduce recidivism by 8.2 percent (Travis, 2009). Another effective practice is in-prison residential treatment. In this practice participants are separated from the general prison population while undergoing treatment. This type of treatment found to decrease recidivism rates between 9 and 18 percent (Travis, 2001).

Another practice that has proven success is the use of halfway houses. Halfway house programs are designed for those who are on supervision. It provides shelter, a structured environment, job placement, the opportunity to consult a counselor/case manager should the need arise and educational support (Wilson, 1985). It offers a gradual reentry, which eases the burden of reintegrating back into society. Parolees are generally also provided treatment. Studies from Seiter, Travis, and Cullen have shown that these residential programs are more effective in reducing recidivism than traditional prison release practices (Wilson, 1985).

With new research being conducted on the impact that reentry has on communities the US Department of Justice along with the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Labor

developed a reentry initiative that addresses high-risk juveniles and adults. It provides funding to develop, implement, and evaluate reentry practices that are intended to reduce violent crime, thereby keeping communities safer. The goal is to prepare these high-risk offenders to return home after a stay in a state training school, juvenile or adult correctional facility, or other secure institution (Learn About Reentry, 2011). This initiative follows recommendations suggested to continue treatment in the community after the release from prison. There are three phases in this initiative. Phase one begins in prison and prepares prisoners for release through education, substance abuse treatment, and job training. Phase two occurs after release and continues with substance abuse treatment and education. Phase three provides ongoing services after the term of supervision is complete (Learn About Reentry, 2011).

Overall, if a reentry program is going to be successful the risk factors should be assessed on an individual basis. Each program should be assessed to determine if the program is a success or a failure. Successful programs should have education, substance abuse treatment, and job training components. Finally, easing offenders back into the community equates to easier transitioning back into the community. Successful programs should then be implemented and unsuccessful programs should no longer be used. This will make for safer communities and lower crime rates.

In conclusion, there are many correctional interventions, management strategies, and treatment programs that have been proven to be effective in reducing recidivism among recently released offenders. The programs that work focus on changing the individual's cognitive behavior to teach them how to cope with high stress situations. There has not been an intervention based on punishment, control, or deterrence that was

found to reduce recidivism (MacKenzie, 2006). In addition to cognitive behavior therapy key factors, such as employment, substance abuse treatment, and housing, have been identified that positively assists offenders in transitioning from prison life to community life resulting in lower recidivism rates and safer communities.

III. Theoretical Framework

There are many different theories or schools of thought that try to explain the reasoning as to why people commit crime. Although no single reason can be given due to the complex nature of crime theories are important in helping to understand criminology. Three theories that will be discussed in this paper are the social structure and anomie, crime and the American dream, and general strain theory. All three of these theories are widely accepted and will help to develop reasonable recommendations in reentry programs.

a) General Strain Theory

Robert Merton's social structure and anomie theory (Cullen and Agnew, 2006) was first presented in 1938 in two parts. The first part stated the 'anomie', which tries to explain why some societies have higher crime rates than others. This part of the theory places emphasis on cultural goals and the lengths people go to achieve those goals. Cultures that place a greater emphasis on goals and a lower emphasis on rules for achieving these goals have higher crime rates. These types of societies are an anomie, or normlessness, and little regard is paid to how individuals achieve their goals. As a result, individuals will take the quickest and most advantageous route even if it means committing crimes to achieve their goals. The United States is considered to be such a society (Cullen and Agnew, 2006). The second part to this theory is the 'strain.' Merton states that certain individuals or groups within a society have more pressure placed upon them. For example, everyone strives to make more money, but certain individuals cannot achieve this goal legitimately, leaving them feeling strained or pressured.

Merton developed a paradigm of five modes of adaptation to the social structure, which identifies ways that individuals in different social settings adapt to cultural goals and what society deems appropriate to reaching those goals (Conklin, 2007). The first paradigm is conformity, which is the most common mode of adaptation. Conformity is goals, purposes, and interests and how they are defined by society.

The second mode of adaptation is innovation (Conklin, 2007). Innovation is the most relevant way to evaluate criminal behavior. Innovation maintains that goals are acceptable, but that the ways to go about achieving the goals are unacceptable, especially when strong emotion is coupled with goal. In the US individual material wealth is a sign of individual worth, which produces an emotional investment in a goal. As a result individuals are willing to commit crimes if the acceptable means are no longer available (Conklin, 2007). Lower classes appear to be the most susceptible to innovation as they are the most distant from substantial financial gain and have limited legitimate means of achieving the financial gain.

The third mode of adaptation is ritualism (Conklin, 2007). Ritualism is the least significant adaptation in terms of criminal behavior. Ritualists take appropriate pathways to reach societal goals and simply accept the fact that they are not materially wealthy. Ritualists keep legitimate employment and maintain an income, but do not succumb to the temptations that monetary wealth offers.

The fourth and least common mode of adaptation is retreatism (Cullen and Agnew, 2006). Retreatists have abandoned the societal goals and have, therefore, also rejected the means of achieving the goals. Retreatism arises when the moral code of adopting societal means conflicts with resorting to illegal acts to achieve the means.

Often times the conflict is resolved by eliminating both the goals and the means. Some of the people in this category include homeless chronic alcoholics and drug addicts and those with mental health issues. Due to the fact that their goals are the opposite of what society has deemed appropriate they are labeled a challenge. Sometimes the challenge translates into criminal behavior.

The final mode of adaptation is rebellion (Cullen and Agnew, 2006). The goal of a rebel is to restructure social goals to match what the rebel deems appropriate. Rebels seek to implement a humanitarian treatment approach to each member of society in lieu of furthering the interests of the wealthy. The motivation of rebels to commit crime stems from altruistic approach rather than an egocentric one. Acts of rebellion often include vandalism, arson, and murder. Often these crimes are labeled as terrorism or politically motivated.

b) Social Structure and Anomie, Crime and the American Dream

An extension of Merton's theory of social structure and anomie is Richard Rosenfeld and Steven Messner's crime and the American Dream (2001). Rosenfeld and Messner attempt to explain why crime rates are so much higher in the US and point to the 'American dream' as the reason. Rosenfeld and Messner state that societal goals of attaining wealth correlates with the fact that the economy governs major institutions, such as family, schools, and politics. They argue that the driving force of the economy interferes with the functioning of the aforementioned institutions. Due to the dominance of the economy, the institutions are not able to properly socialize or train individuals and punish criminality, which adds to the high crime rates. If more emphasis were placed on the other institutions crime rates might not be so high (Cote, 2002).

The essential elements of the American dream that promote material wealth stem from the economy. In our competitive economy those workers who cannot keep up with the changing skill requirements are likely to be let go, which only perpetuates the notion that monetary success is how society measures achievement. Social anomie is more concerned with social regulation of the means people use to obtain material goals. In a school setting, education is regarded as the avenue to take in achieving monetary success, but little value is actually placed on the attainment of knowledge for the sake of personal enrichment. In a family institution little appreciation is paid to the homemaker, who is often responsible for nurturing children and offering emotional support to the family, and more admiration is given to the breadwinner. Thus, the American dream contributes to high levels of crime by establishing an anomic order. It also contributes to crime by preventing the intervention of any outside social control methods because it creates a balance of power (Cullen and Agnew, 2006). Merton describes the strain toward anomie by the lack of an emphasis on societal norms that dictate the legitimate avenues for becoming successful. Certain roadblocks, such as access to suitable housing and gainful employment, limits access to the legitimate means for many offenders, which contributes to anomie.

Robert Agnew's general strain theory (Conklin, 2007) states that individuals engage in crime because they experience strains or stressors. Agnew's theory presents a very broad version of the strain theory, which was first presented by Merton. General strain theory can be measured three different ways. First, the major types of strain are defined. Second, the links between strain and crime are defined. Lastly, coping strategies to crime and strain are identified. Whether or not individuals turn to crime as a

way to alleviate stressors or strains in their life depends on several factors, including social control and whether or not the individuals associates with others who commit crime.

The three measures of the general strain theory can all be applied to prisoner reentry. The first measure is how strains are defined. Strains are referred to as events or conditions that are unfavorable to the individual. There are three types of strains individuals can face: losing something valuable; being treated poorly by others; and being unable to achieve goals. Once a prisoner is released back into the community they face hardships in obtaining employment and finding suitable housing. Often times they will also feel the backlash of the stigma that comes with being labeled a 'criminal' from society. In an economy with an average of 9.1 percent unemployment rate (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011) it is difficult for those without a criminal history to find gainful employment, let alone for those who have recently been released from prison. Agnew states that there are certain characteristics that are more likely to result in crime including, criminal victimization and homelessness. Frustrations for being unsuccessful at thriving through legitimate channels ensue, which can cause offenders to revert back to criminal ways (Cullen and Agnew, 2006).

The second measure explains why certain strains increase the likelihood of crime. Strains cause individuals to feel a range of negative emotions, such as, anger, depressions, fear, frustration, and jealousy, which increase the likelihood for committing crime because it creates pressure to correct the emotions (Cullen and Agnew, 2006). Negative emotions can lessen the ability to cope legitimately making the benefit for committing crime outweigh the cost, therefore creating a propensity for committing a

new crime. Some studies suggest that certain persistent strains cause coping mechanisms to be lowered increasing crime (Cullen and Agnew, 2006).

The third measure explains why some people are more likely than others to cope with strains through crime while others do not. Agnew (Cullen and Agnew, 2006) maintains that influence coping with crime include lacking the ability to cope with strains through legal ways, low criminal coping costs, and a disposition to crime. These influences vary from person to person and largely depend on such factors as personality traits, financial resources, intelligence, social skills, and problem solving skills (Cullen and Agnew, 2006).

All three of these measures can be reduced when applied to reentry if programs are implemented properly. Programs should include instructions on how to reduce the negative relationships of an individual's social environment. Next, it would be beneficial to alter the way that individuals respond to a negative environment. This would decrease the chance that they will elicit a negative reaction from others. Also, more social support should be made available to help the individual cope with the strain. Finally, individuals should be taught how to cope with the strain without the aid of outside sources (Agnew, 2011).

In conclusion, though there is not a single theory that can explain why individuals commit crime there are several theories that are general enough to present reasonable explanations for criminal behavior. Merton's social structure and anomie (Cullen and Agnew, 2006) theory can be applied to prisoner reentry. Our society places an emphasis on attaining material wealth. The most commonly accepted way to reach the goal of material wealth is through gainful employment. However, barriers, such as issues with

housing, substance abuse, and mental illness stand in the way of finding and staying gainfully employed. As a result, offenders resort to returning to a life of crime.

Rosenfeld and Messner's crime and the American dream (2001) theory goes a step further and argue that the basic values and organization of our society are responsible for such high crime rates. This can be applied to prisoner reentry by calling attention to the societal differences in crime rates. If an ex-offender returns home from prison and is encouraged by society to pursue the goal of material wealth, that individual may have a difficult time living up the standards of the 'American dream' and engage in criminal behavior to compensate (Cullen and Agnew, 2006).

Robert Agnew's general strain theory states that individuals commit crime under stress as a way to deal with negative emotions and negative relationships with others. He argues that people are pressured into crime by negative emotions, such as anger, resulting in negative relationships. So many negative feelings leads to pressure, which then leads to illegal ways to achieving goals.

IV. Recommendations

Preparing prisoners to transition from prison life back into the community is not easy and it needs to begin early on in the prison stay. The main goal of reentry is to return an individual to the community who has fulfilled his or her legal obligation to society by serving their sentence in prison and to also demonstrate an ability to live by society's rules. The following section will review some of the reintegration practices listed above and apply the theories to make recommendations, which will allow for an easier transition from prison back into the community.

In this section there will be four major aspects that will be addressed in order for reentry to be more successful, with the first beginning during incarceration. The first aspect is readdressing prison policies on rehabilitation. While incarcerated prison administrators hold little responsibility for what happens to the prisoners after they are released. Ideally, reentry should be a collective focus and start upon entering prison and finishing upon completion of being on supervision (Petersilia, 2003). As stated above once prisoners are released back into the community they lack resources that support healthy reentry. By supporting the ultimate goal of reentry and linking the correctional agencies involved together this will allow for more focused release planning. To achieve this prisons would need to shift their focus from punishment to rehabilitation, which would include the implementing various treatment, work, and education plans. An overwhelming body of research (Petersilia, 2003; Seiter and Kadlea, 2011; Urban Institute, 2003) conclude how valuable rehabilitation programs are in reducing recidivism. These rehabilitative programs include academics that teach reading, writing, and how to utilize arithmetic. In a study conducted by the Washington State Institute for

Public Policy it was found that education while in prison could reduce recidivism by 12.6 percent (Travis, 2009). Work programs, which could reduce recidivism by as much as 4.8 percent, teach how to maintain employment and fulfill financial obligations (Travis, 2009). Different treatment programs, such as cognitive treatment or drug treatment programs help with developing more pro-social values, which would help to eliminate anomie in society (Petersilia, 2003). In prison drug treatment programs could reduce recidivism by as much as 6.9 percent and cognitive behavioral therapy could reduce recidivism rates by as much as 8.2 percent (Travis, 2009).

The next aspect to address is to eliminate determinate sentencing and return to parole boards for determining a prisoner's release. According to Tonry (1999) indeterminate sentencing acknowledges that each person is different. Sentences are appropriate when the punishment is tailored to reflect the nature and the severity of the crime. Indeterminate sentencing views people as redeemable and offers room for improvement while incarcerated. Indeterminate sentencing allows judges, corrections officials, or parole boards to take public safety into account when discussing release for offenders. Risk factors, behaviors exhibited while in prison and release plans are all taken into consideration on an individual basis when deciding if an offender truly is ready for returning to the community. If a prisoner cannot obey the rules while in prison it is likely he or she will not follow the rules in the community once released. According to Petersilia, (2003) each offender is held accountable for his or her own actions this way, which will ultimately help determine whether or not they are ready for the task of reentry. By remaining incarcerated for as long as needed offenders could also benefit from other treatment options: thereby making them better equipped to cope with life and stress

factors once released. By ensuring each offender individually is ready for release can help eliminate any strain presented by the community.

The third aspect to address is the role of post-incarceration supervision. The Urban Institute conducted a study that found that intensive supervision does not reduce recidivism rates and that those placed on supervision after prison are no less likely to be rearrested than those released with no supervision at all (Travis, 2009). According to Petersilia (2003) a new model of parole is needed that incorporates a community-based approach centering on intensive treatment and intermediate sanctions for violators. Current parole practices place an emphasis on surveillance not on services. Many community members are not welcoming when an ex-prisoner returns home. This, too, places a strain on parolees as this may develop into feelings of negativity towards their social environment. Research conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that supervision based on treatment programs can reduce recidivism by as much as 21.9 percent than that seen supervision based on surveillance (Travis, 2009).

Lastly, there is a need to involve members of the community by providing partnerships that support the reintegration back into society. In response to concerns about public safety new initiatives, including offender notification forums, have been established. This engages the public to take an active role in assisting with reentry (Petersilia, 2003). Participants in offender notification forums include those recently released on parole, who had a history of gun violence and gang participation. During the forums, offenders would sit with representatives from state and local law enforcement agencies, community representatives, and service providers. The first part of the meeting discusses the consequences of gun crimes for the individual and for the community. The

second segment features a discussion by an ex-offender who had turned his life around and stressed the impact of violence on the community. The third segment focuses on opportunities offenders have based on available alternatives, such as, employment training, educational programs, and drug treatment (Travis, 2009). As a result of the forums they were found to have a positive effect on reducing recidivism. There was a 37 percent reduction in homicide rates in the target neighborhood after the program was implemented (Travis, 2009). By incorporating community members into the reentry process parolees foster new relationships, make connections and can address any legitimate concerns raised by the public. By getting to know the parolees personally the strain of being treated poorly by others can be reduced or possibly eliminated and lower the stigma of being labeled a ‘criminal.’

In conclusion, by altering current reentry practices recidivism after the release from prison could be drastically reduced. By creating a coalition of support for offenders returning from prisons, bringing together law enforcement and community leaders, and placing a strong emphasis on effective treatment programs this can pave the way of success. It will eliminate many of the obstacles that currently stand in the way of successful reintegration.

V. Conclusion

Prisoner reentry is much different now than it was twenty years ago. With skyrocketing recidivism rates public attention has been given to the negative consequences of releasing prisoners back into society. Community resources have not kept up with the increase in the parole population and as a result parolees are less likely to successfully reintegrate back into the community. Current reentry practices rely heavily on intense supervision, which, alone, has been proven to be an ineffective tool in combating recidivism (Travis, 2009).

There are many aspects that stand out when differentiating unsuccessful reentry practices from successful reentry practices. Successful reentry programs begin while the offender is still incarcerated by providing treatment for such issues as mental health, substance abuse, and cognitive and behavioral therapy. There is solid evidence that suggests prison based treatment programs have a positive influence on prisoners (Seiter & Kadela, 2011). Professionals should determine reentry readiness of each offender. Reentry should not be determined by an expired prison sentence. The reentry program should then support parolees long after the release back into the community. Support would include assistance in finding suitable housing, gainful employment, access to higher education or vocational programs, continued mental health and substance abuse treatment and assistance in maintaining positive relationships with family and friends. All of these support tactics have been shown to reduce recidivism (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001).

By investing in reentry programs that have been proven to be successful recidivism rates can be reduced. Programs should be implemented properly, supported

and continuously evaluated for effectiveness. These programs also need to be able to handle the growing number of offenders who are returning to the community.

Ultimately, as a result of successful implementation, this will support the broad goal of reintegrating parolees into the community and also reduce crime rates making communities safer.

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