

Understanding the Challenges Facing Offenders
Upon Their Return to the Community:
Final Report
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Introduction

One of the greatest contemporary challenges for public policy is in the reintegration of offenders released from prison back into local communities. There are well over a million individuals currently incarcerated in state and federal prisons in the United States. Only 7% of prisoners are serving death or life sentences and only a small fraction of inmates die in prison, thus 93% of these individuals will be returning home. About 650,000 individuals are released from prison each year or approximately 160 per day. Perhaps even more dramatic is the fact that the current average length of prison sentence is only 2.4 years and, given that, 44% of state prisoners will be released within a year (Petersilia, 2003). In Michigan, more than 100,000 individuals are released from prison each year; 85% of whom are released under parole supervision.

Further exacerbating this situation is the fact that the rate of successful returns of offenders to the community is declining. There are an increasing number of individuals sent to prison as a result of parole violations. Parole violators now account for about a third of all prison admissions (Travis, 2000). Furthermore, the rate of “failure” among released individuals is increasing. In 1984, 70% of those discharged from parole were deemed to be “successful.” By 1996, less than half were determined to be successfully discharged (Petersilia, 2000). Similarly, Hughes and Wilson (2003) noted that of state parole discharges in 2000, less than half successfully completed their term of supervision. In Michigan, there is a similar situation with approximately 48% of offenders being returned to prison within a two year period.

With recognition of these trends and an increased understanding of the dynamics of prisoner reentry, there has been a growing movement to better prepare offenders for the situations they will face upon returning to their communities (Nelson &Trone, 2000; Travis,

2000). Currently, almost every state and federal correctional system has some form of reentry programming designed to facilitate the prisoner's transition back to society. Reentry efforts have sought to create a more systematic preparation of offenders for their return home by addressing the critical areas that research has demonstrated are related to successful community reintegration. Among these critical areas are housing, employment, substance abuse, and family (social support) (LaVigne & Cowan, 2005).

Documented reentry efforts have created extensive research on recidivism and its correlates. However, there has been relatively little research on the dynamics of the adjustment process inmates experience when they are released from prison (Petersilia, 2000, 2003; Visser & Travis, 2003). Many studies have found correlations between recidivism and factors such as finding and maintaining employment, locating stable housing, reuniting with children, family and significant social support networks and continuity of substance abuse treatment (if needed). However, there has been little research that explores the manner in which offenders personally deal with the challenges presented in each of these critical areas of reentry. To address this gap in the literature, this study involved a qualitative examination of the challenges offenders face as they make the transition from prison back to the community. The principal objective of this research was to increase our understanding of the reentry process from the perspective of offenders as they confront these challenges during their first year on parole after release from prison. It was envisioned that information from this research could produce a more comprehensive understanding of the reentry process which in turn may enable correctional agencies to better assist offenders in their adjustment to life outside of prison. Increasing this positive adjustment may produce lower recidivism rates. When recidivism rates are high, scarce economic resources that are needed elsewhere are often spent on corrections. In the United States

is costs about \$25,000 per year to incarcerate one person, and the total amount spent on corrections has risen to more than \$50 billion annually (Petersilia, 2003; Stephan, 2004). In addition, imprisonment negatively impacts many families. More than half of all male inmates are fathers of minor children, while two-thirds of female inmates are mothers (Mumola, 2000; Petersilia, 2000). Thus obtaining a better understanding the dynamics of successful as well as unsuccessful reentry outcomes has considerable potential for creating interventions to improve these programs and reduce correctional expenditures.

Data and Methods

In 2006, the Michigan Department of Corrections began the implementation of an innovative reform to reentry practices and policies known as the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI). This initiative was designed to reduce crime by implementing a seamless plan of services and supervision developed with each offender, delivered through state and local collaboration, from the time of their entry to prison through their transition, reintegration and aftercare in the community. One of the sites in which there has been the most intensive implementation of this initiative is at the Lansing Parole Office, which serves Ingham County and includes the city of Lansing. This office served as the research site for the current study. In addition to being experienced with processes associated with MPRI, the site averaged 20 parolees per month, which ensured there would be an adequate number of parolees eligible for participation in the study.

Working directly with parole agents assigned to parolees, 40 participants were identified for participation in this research. Parolees eligible for participation included those who were assessed as medium and high supervision risk. Determinations of risk were made through the use

of the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) risk assessment instrument and other internal protocols associated with criminal history and conviction offense. Medium and high risk individuals were the focus of the study since they served as the principal focus for the broader reentry initiative and services were most directly targeted at this group. In addition, these individuals have frequent in office reporting requirements for at least their first year of parole, thereby facilitating researcher access to these individuals at the parole office. All eligible offenders were identified by Department of Corrections personnel. Project scripts were used by parole agents to provide background on the research study during the routine pre-parole process. Eligible offenders were referred to research team members at the time of their initial meeting with their parole officer or contacted shortly thereafter. A member of the research team explained the study, answered questions and concerns, and obtained the consent of those willing to participate in a secure office. Interviews began immediately after consent was obtained.

Reentry is a process of transition into the community, rather than a one-time event. A longitudinal design was essential to track progress during the stressful first year of reentry. Each participant was to be interviewed four times: shortly after release, three months after the first interview, three months after the second interview, and three months after the third interview. It was hoped that by interviewing each parolee four times, changes that occur during the parolee's adjustment process would be captured.

Parolees are a transient population and the ability to utilize a prospective longitudinal design to obtain multiple interviews is often difficult. Given normal attrition (i.e., from jurisdiction transfer, parole failure, or absconding), it was anticipated that 10 participants may be unable to complete interviews associated with this research, which would reduce the complete

sample to 30 offenders. In order to maintain our ability to conduct subsequent interviews, the partnership between the research team and Michigan Department of Corrections personnel was of paramount importance. The research team formed close contacts with parole agents in order to conduct interviews after a parolee's scheduled meeting with their agent. Additionally, the research team gathered contact information for each parolee from their parole agent in the event that further correspondence is needed for scheduling purposes.

An interviewer facilitated discussions among participants centering on challenges to reintegrating into their community using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). Topics discussed during these interviews represented critical areas that affect offenders and the process of transition: housing, employment, social support, substance abuse treatment and social service participation, perceptions of progress, and outlooks towards the future. Interviews were primarily administered at the project site in a secure meeting room. Subjects were paid \$20 per interview. All of the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by research team members.

Research team members trained in qualitative research methods participated in open coding of transcribed interviews to generate themes. In turn, these pre-established themes were used to code the qualitative data for qualitative patterns and change over time (Glaser, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to ensure accuracy of the coding, two members of the research team independently coded the data. Coded information was compared and divergent classifications were discussed and reclassified or expanded into new classifications. This process helped to insure observation validity and reliability.

While the study is primarily qualitative, quantitative data were collected on each parolee. These data include demographic information, criminal history, and scores on standardized risk

instruments. These data were used to provide contextual information on the sample and document descriptive trends.¹

Results

Final Interviewee Sample

The final sample consists of 39 participants.²Table 1 presents demographic information on the sample. The average interviewee was a 37 year old non-white male who had been released after serving 5 years in prison. Participants were most likely to have been convicted of crimes against persons or property offenses for their current supervision term. Two-thirds of the interviewees were previously incarcerated. Ninety percent of the participants were determined to be high or medium risk at release and were subject to supervision schedules associated with their risk designation.

Table 1. Participant Demographics (n=39)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>
Age		36.64 (8.67)	21 – 56
Non-White	67%		
Persons Offense Term	41%		
Property Offense Term	36%		
Drug Offense Term	13%		
Sex Offense Term	10%		
Previously Incarcerated	62%		
Current Term Years Incarcerated		4.90 (3.77)	1 – 14
High Risk Supervision	46%		
Medium Risk Supervision	44%		
Low Risk Supervision	10%		

¹ The research design and associated protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University.

² One participant was removed from the sample due to tape recording difficulties that prohibited transcription.

Table 2 provides insights on the administration of interviews and participant attrition. The timing of interviews varied. The initial interview occurred within 10 days of release.³ Seventy-seven percent of the sample completed a second interview. On average, this interview was completed 265 days (approximately 9 months) after release. By the third interview, only 31% of the original sample were able to be interviewed. This interview occurred 295 days (approximately 10 months) after release. Seven participants – 18% of the original sample – were interviewed four times and completed their fourth and final interview 432 days (approximately 1 year and 2 months) after release. Each interview lasted 30 to 40 minutes.

Table 2. Interview Administration

<i>Interview</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>
Interview 1 - Days after Release (n=39)	10.15 (12.80)	0 – 56
Interview 2 - Days after Release (n=30)	265.73 (168.55)	89 – 548
Interview 3 - Days after Release (n=12)	294.58 (115.78)	194 – 542
Interview 4 - Days after Release (n=7)	431.71 (99.37)	292 – 576

The rate of transient movement among participants affected the ability to complete interviews and rate of attrition. Participants may not have been available to interview for a long period of time or at all for a variety of reasons (see Appendix B). Additionally, the research team was flexible at scheduled interviews for the convenience of a participant and the participant's parole agent. These reschedules compromised the timing of subsequent interviews, which were to follow three month intervals. Only one interviewee completed all four interviews within 9 months.⁴ Given these difficulties, the research design was reduced to the initial interview, which

³ This average was influenced by the wide range of outliers. Using median values, the average initial interview took place within 6 days of release. Thirty-eight percent (n=15) of the sample were interviewed within 48 hours of release, while 64% (n=25) were interviewed before the end of their first week in the community.

⁴ Of those who completed a second interview, 33% (n=10) were interviewed within three months (90-120 days) of their release. A quarter of those interviewed for the third time (n=3) completed the interview before the 6 month benchmark (180-210 days).

occurred shortly after release, and the second interview, which occurred 3 or more months after release. The modification remains longitudinal but only focuses upon two time points.

Pre-Release Planning

Nearly every correctional system provides some form of pre-release planning (LaVigne et al., 2008). The primary objective of pre-release planning is to identify problematic areas for offenders, provide assessment and diagnosis in these areas, and establish pathways for services to be rendered. Emphasis is placed on individual needs and strengths. Secondary foci expose offenders to broader, ecological realities of life in the community (Burns, 1998; Mellow & Dickinson, 2006). Ideally, pre-release planning is an on-going process that begins upon admission to prison and continues throughout the months following release into the community (LaVigne et al., 2008). Often, pre-release planning occurs during the months prior to release and only involves considerations of immediate needs such as civilian clothing or transportation from prison after release (LaVigne et al., 2008).

Participants largely described a consistent pre-release experience during their final few months in prison. Group orientations were provided by an assortment of community service agencies to inform participants of the resources that would be made available to them upon release. Self-questionnaires and paperwork processing followed these orientations in an effort to procure identification, medical treatment, vouchers, or other needs. Communication with parole agents was established. Classes were offered and made available to participants. Some perceived these classes to be beneficial. Thomas (age 30), among others, noted that such efforts are “what you make of it, if you put the time into it, it’s going to help you.” Participants wished there were more classes specifically catered to the release process. Many, such as Gary (age 38), viewed the

classes as being redundant. Gary previously participated in or completed classes of similar content and perceived that he was “being held back from moving forward, from doing the things you need to do.”

Pre-release plans were described as being informal, very general, and were often created in groups. Individualized assistance from institutional staff was available to some of the participants, but not all. Ample room was provided to develop self-made plans for objectives to achieve in the community. Questions regarding the release process and expectations in the community were perceived to be left unanswered as institutional staff advised participants to speak with parole agents at release and initial parole orientation.

Participants viewed the planning process as starting at initial orientation. Parole agents formalized plans and scheduled appointments. Referrals were made to local service providers. Weekly schedules were filled up quickly. For some, this structure was beneficial. For others, the designed schedule consumed a lot of time and left little room to actualize self-made plans.

Response themes to the perceived usefulness of planning were coded according to positive or negative statements. Most of the participants (56%) perceived the overall planning process to be beneficial. Table 3 presents additional thematic information and participant profiles. One of the most prominent trends observed in the data surrounds the idea of age-graded experiences. There is a pronounced difference between the reentry experiences of younger, youthful participants (under the age of 25) and older participants. Younger participants appear to have more of an educational background and are seeking direct avenues for self-development. They do not perceive pre-release or agent assisted plans to be applicable to their needs of gaining financial aid, continuing their education, and starting entrepreneurial business endeavors.

Table 3. Positive and Negative Perceived Usefulness of Planning (n=39)

<i>Positive Perceptions</i>	<i>Negative Perceptions</i>
<i>Themes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Someone is there	Lack of information
Basic needs met	Structure of pre-release planning services*
Gain employment assistance	Content of pre-release planning services
Provides daily structure	Lacks follow through
Take all the help you can get	
<i>Participant Profile</i>	<i>Participant Profile</i>
System veterans	Youthful
Lacking home placement	Highly self-motivated
Weak social networks	Employed
Physical, mental, or psychological needs	

*This theme requires additional elaboration. A number of participants were moved to different institutions to receive pre-release services and stage for release. In some instances, participants were moved from lower to higher security facilities to lower. Participants who experienced this movement in the months prior to release discussed levels of high anxiety due to the perceived danger of the new environment.

Older participants appear to be much more downtrodden about their potential for personal development. A desire to maintain and to do what one is told is a common theme among the group. These men do not expect much from corrections or the community at large in terms of assistance. This is largely due to past experiences in the criminal justice system. The effort to offer planning assistance is a welcomed change, as evidenced by Jim (age 26): “Almost every time I’ve got out, I’ve failed cause when I was let out, I was just let out. ‘The door is open, see ya!’ No help, no financial help, no real help, you know” and further elaborated by Lou (age 38): “I believe personally that if they would have had this for my prior paroles, I would have been successful in not going back because back then you paroled with nothing. Now it really gives you something to look forward to with life, somebody cares...back then didn’t nobody care, you just out of prison, there it is, do what you gotta do.”

Over time, most of the participants held views that were consistent with their initial impressions. Those with positive views expressed that plans came to fruition, while participants

with negative views continued to discuss unmet expectations. However, there were some changes in views with continued time in the community. The ability to obtain employment with assistance from community service providers and the support of a charismatic community coordinator contributed to perceptions that initial planning efforts were helpful. On the other hand, the inability to gain or recent loss of employment and loss of time associated with required participation in services led a number of participants to note that plans had not met expectations.

Housing

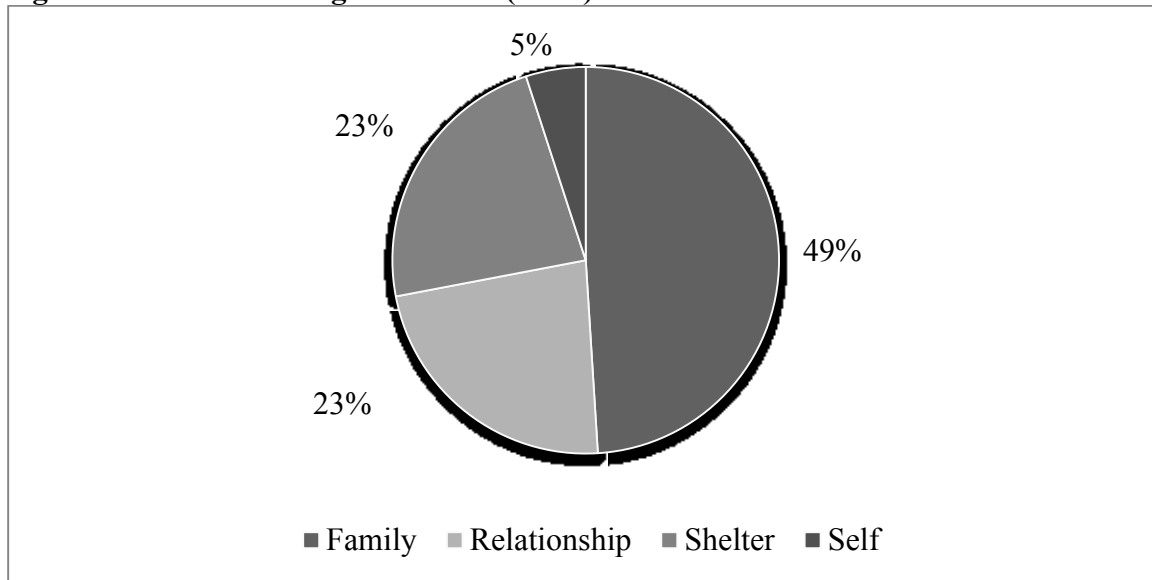
Housing is an immediate need for offenders released to the community. Offenders face numerous challenges to obtain and subsequently maintain housing. Formal and informal regulations restrict public or private housing opportunities (LaVigne et al., 2008; Nelson et al., 1999; Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). The lack of identification, financial savings, credit, and income make the private housing market inaccessible (LaVigne et al., 2008; Scally & Newman, 2003). Substance use and mental health histories are also common problems that indirectly effect housing (Scally & Newman, 2003). Housing movement is regarded as an emergent risk factor that leads to reincarceration (Metraux, Roman, & Cho, 2007).

Pre-release planning focuses resources upon housing needs and the adequacy of placements (LaVigne et al., 2008). Offenders are often placed with nuclear or extended family members upon release (LaVigne et al., 2008; LaVigne & Parsatharathy, 2005; LaVigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004). When familial avenues are not available, there are few viable alternatives. Transitional housing, halfway houses, and emergency shelters can provide temporary accommodation and delay homelessness. Research suggests that housing movement is common in the year after release, but varies across samples. In Cleveland, 63% of offenders moved at

least once (Visher& Courtney, 2007), while half of Chicago offenders moved one or more times (Visher& Farrell, 2005). LaVigne and Parthasarathy (2005) found that most (72%) of their longitudinal sample remained at one location. Despite variation, these rates of movement are high when compared to national averages. A representative sample of the general public indicates that 12% of Americans change residences in a year (Ihrke, Faber, &Koerber, 2011).

As shown in Figure A, most of the participants were initially placed with family members after release. Family was conceptualized in a traditional sense to capture hereditary members. Of those who resided with family, 53% stayed with parent(s), 26% lived with sibling(s), and 21% resided with extended family. Twenty-three percent of the participants were initially placed into the residence of an intimate, relational partner. This classification consisted of those who resided with girlfriends or partners (56%), marital partner (33%), or the mother of children (11%). An additional 23% of the participants were placed at local shelters. The remaining 5% of the participants were placed at residences by themselves. These residences were either inherited residences or were subsidized by funds made available from the Michigan legislature to assist with reentry services.

Figure A. Initial Housing Placement (n=39)



Evidence of displacement was observed as some participants could not reside in their first choice. Many of the reasons for displacement were associated with family members or relationship partners' disapproval of placement upon release (that was once approved during the pre-parole investigation). However, the majority (65%) were placed at residences they specified during pre-release. Satisfaction with the quality of initial residence was mixed. Participants based their perceptions on the experiences of others. Those who made upward social comparisons viewed their peers as being better off than themselves, which resulted in negative perceptions of quality. The common theme among those who held this view involved discussions of others who received housing subsidies. By contrast, positive discussions of housing quality were made by those who viewed their peers as being worse off than themselves. For example, Richard (age 40) noted that he does "have better things happening for me [relative to most]. I have my family. One of them is going to buy me a house...which my parole officer is approving."

The initial placement was viewed as temporary. The obtainment of employment, student loans, and other state social supports and public benefits were perceived as being the necessary forms of income to change residences. Participants also discussed their initial placement as being

a challenge to their masculinity. Dan’s (age 33) description highlights this theme: “I live at my mother’s house right now. As soon as I get a job, I can’t wait. I’d just like to be one my own, independent. I’m a grown man.”

Safety was not a concern for most of the participants, even among those who considered themselves to be residing in high crime, high drug market neighborhoods. Participants discussed their insider knowledge to navigate these areas and ability to steer clear of problems. Initial placement to a shelter was consistently viewed as being unsafe. Anxiety in these locations was heightened due to the fear of being victimized and/or surrounded by other individuals who were actively using drugs. Participants spoke of difficulties avoiding use triggers.

Most of the participants (60%) moved at least once from their initial placement. Table 4 provides indications of the levels of movement by placement type.⁵ Initial placement to shelters was associated with the highest level of movement. Participants who were placed to their own residences moved the least. Those placed with family members also appeared to move less often than most of the participants.

Table 4. Average Movement by Initial Placement (n=39)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>
Total Number of Moves	.83 (.81)
<i>By Initial Placement</i>	
Family (n=19)	.63 (.76)
Relationship (n=9)	.80 (.79)
Shelter (n=9)	1.44 (.73)
Self (n=2)	.00 (.00)

⁵ These data were quantified and calculated from participant discussions during the follow up interview. Initial placement served as the reference classification. Participants who did not move from their initial placement would have zero moves. Successive changes in residences were counted. These changes included placement in residential treatment and transfers to other jurisdictions. Movement due to non-compliance with supervision terms such as absconds, placement in jail, technical revocation centers, and returns to prison were not quantified in these calculations. For example, if a participant was “moved” to jail after initial placement, the number of moves would be zero. This explains why the full sample size is displayed.

The relative rate of movement depicted in Table 4 provides some insight into housing stability, but also simplifies the experiences of the participants (see Appendix C). Although shelter placement was observed to have the highest rate of movement, none of those initially placed in these locations were immediately non-compliant with supervision (i.e., absconded or moved to jail, technical revocation centers, or prison). All were able to secure secondary placements and move. By contrast, one third of participants initially placed with a relationship partner or a family member were unable to move due to non-compliance.

The examination of participant movement pathways reinforces findings from LaVigne and Parsatharathy (2005) that residential change may not be a reliable indicator of stability. Participants moved to perceived independence with obtainment of employment and federal and state social supports and public benefits. Some were able to make use of their familial network and moved to live with other family members, while others started or maintained relationships to move and fulfill housing needs. Steve (age 39) discussed how he just started a relationship “so rent and all that won’t be that much.” Among a number of participants who did not change residences were discussions of desperation and the feeling of not being able to move. The inability to obtain employment contributed to these perceptions.

Employment

Employment has the potential to affect the rate and timing of recidivism, increase perceptions of self-worth, and serve as a key turning point in desistance process (LaVigne et al., 2008; Tripodi et al., 2010; Uggen, 1999; Uggen, 2000). Many offenders are able to work and actively seek opportunities, but few obtain employment in the months after release (Arditti&Parkman, 2011; LaVigne et al., 2008). Individual factors such as stigma, poor

education, few acquired skills, and the inability to obtain required identification significantly reduces employment prospects (Harding, 2003; Harrison & Scher, 2004). Additionally, offenders are often released to communities with little low-skilled work options or reliable transportation infrastructure to access those jobs in surrounding communities (Nelson et al., 1999). To meet basic material needs, offenders rely on mixture of family members, peers in their social network, social services, public benefits, and sometimes crime (Arditti & Parkman, 2011; Harding et al., 2011).

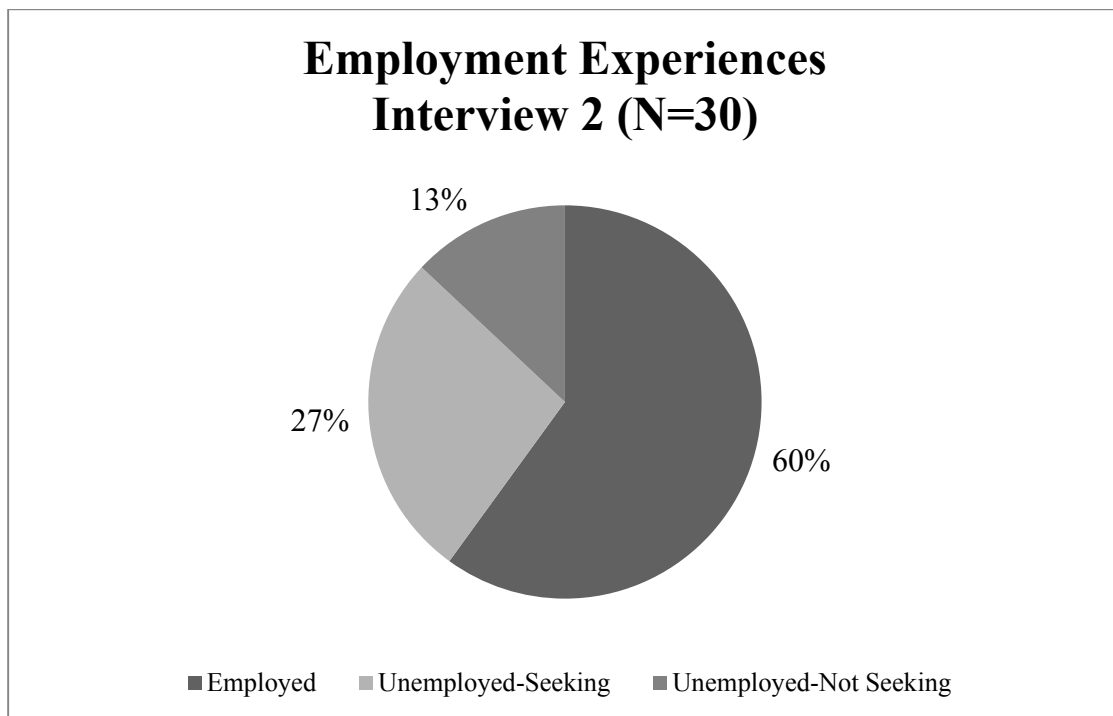
Most of the participants (82%) had a work history. Construction, manufacturing, and food service industries were the primary employers for these participants prior to incarceration. More than half of those employed prior to prison were formally paid on the employer's payroll (rather than being paid cash). Health issues and constant involvement in the criminal justice system were discussed as contributors to the lack of an employment background.

As suggested by the top panel of Figure B, few participants (13%) were employed shortly after release. Half of those employed worked in manufacturing, a third in construction, and 17% in retail-sales. Employed participants found these opportunities through leads and referrals from local social service providers, direct contact with an employer through a family member's or associate's social network, or re-established contact with an old employer. On average, the median salary received by those employed was discussed as being \$7.40 an hour.

Most of the participants (87%) were unemployed at the initial interview. Most of the unemployed were actively seeking or expected to obtain employment. Half of these participants were open to any and all options, whereas the other half identified specific types of employment or employers in the automotive, construction, maintenance, food service, manufacturing, retail, or professional service industry. Employment leads, referrals, and training from social service

providers were anticipated to lead to future employment. Use of a family member's or associate's social network was also perceived as a viable option to gain employment. Only a couple of the participants thought they could reconnect with an old employer. Participants anticipated that it would take 30 days to gain employment and, once gained, would earn \$8.00 an hour. Among those not seeking employment, half had significant physical health issues that prohibited employment and the other half wanted to fulfill specific tasks first and viewed employment as low priority.

Figure B. Employment Expectations and Experiences



The bottom panel of Figure B details whether participants obtained employment over time. Most (60%) did gain employment, but the optimism observed shortly after release

dissipated when in the community searching for options. Frustrated, Dan (age 28) (L38) exemplifies the common mindset: “[There are] no jobs, no jobs period for a felon, regardless of the fact. McDonald’s none of that. You can’t get a job with a GED. No jobs period. It was set up for failure. We were basically set up for failure coming home.” Manufacturing was the most common employer and was followed by construction, food service, cleaning, maintenance, and retail. Once again, social service providers and the social networks of others were discussed as being the primary conduits to the obtainment of employment. On average, employed participants stated a salary of \$8.40 an hour. A couple of participants who gained employment voluntarily quit, one of which gained another job. Over a quarter of those who gained employment were eventually terminated. Only a couple of those who lost employment were unable to find a new job. Employer reviews of criminal history record information and technical violations of community supervision terms were common reasons for being fired. One participant lost employment due to being under qualified.

Of the unemployed, most still sought employment. Half discussed the difficulties of not receiving callbacks or interviews from applications. Participants did not perceive criminal history issues to be the problem. Instead, it was the fact that employers and social service providers were not making direct contact to provide interviews or employment. Other participants still expected to find employment but recognized that their criminal history record was the main impediment to the application process. One participant only considered very specific positions and anticipated to gain a position once their supervision term ended. Unemployed participants not seeking employment were awaiting or on state social supports and public benefits, about to start residential treatment for substance abuse, or enrolled in higher education and received student loans.

A prominent theme across interviews relates to concentrated employment. Manufacturing was the most common industry to hire participants and there was one primary employer mentioned in the local area. Social service providers and other parolees were aware of this employment option. Many of the participants were informally told to apply or meet with case managers for the employer by these sources. Word of mouth referrals and instructions on how to strategically present themselves allowed many participants to gain a job.

The employer was in the textile manufacturing industry. Participants were initially hired as temporary production workers to produce clothing for the military. Opportunities for advancement were discussed and a number of participants were hired on full-time as production workers or provided warehouse or supervisory responsibilities.

Substance Abuse

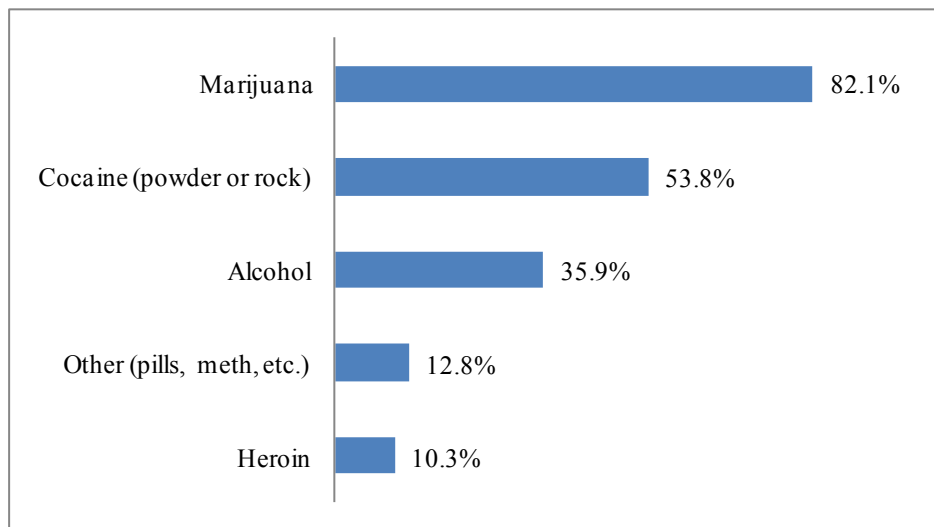
Previous research on populations leaving prison and transitioning to society has documented extensive substance abuse issues with this group and tied these issues to negative post-release outcomes. In a recent evaluation of a prisoner reentry program by Morani and colleagues (2011), almost 90 percent of program clients had a history of substance abuse dependencies, with nearly 60 percent of both the treatment and control groups scored moderate to severe substance abuse scores. Regarding a sample of offenders returning to Chicago communities, La Vigne, Visher, and Castro (2004) noted that two thirds (66%) of their sample reported substance abuse problems prior to their imprisonment. As such, histories of substance abuse are not uncommon among prisoners transitioning to the community.

Simultaneously, substance abuse issues among returning prisoners have been found to be related to negative post-release outcomes such as recidivism. A meta-analysis of recidivism

predictors by Gendreau, Little, and Goggins (1996) found substance abuse to be an effective predictor of recidivism outcomes. Similarly, among a sample of men returning from prison in Texas, La Vigne, Brooks, and Schollenberger (2007) those men with substance abuse dependencies prior to being incarcerated were four more times as likely to recidivate.

Participants displayed a widespread substance abuse history. Ninety-two percent claimed to have a history of using drugs, and the remaining 8% stated that they had no such history. To this extent, the participants showed comparable levels of substance use history with those examined in previous research. Regarding the variety of drugs used, the results are displayed in Figure C.

Figure C. Prevalence of Self-Reported Substance Use Histories (n=39)



The most prevalent drug reported in the substance abuse histories was marijuana, with 82% of participants self-reporting use of the drug in their life. The second most common drug reported in the substance abuse histories was cocaine (54%) either in powder or rock form. Alcohol was the third most prevalent drug reported (36%), but its low prevalence relative to cocaine and marijuana may be because the participants do not necessarily consider it a drug when they are asked “Do you have a history of using drugs?” Finally, the categories of Other drugs (which

included methamphetamine and pills) (13%) and heroin (10%) were the least prevalent. The age of onset of substance use varied, with some reporting smoking marijuana as young as seven, and others started as late as 27 years old. The average age of onset was 15.5 years old.

The ability to track substance abuse treatment participation proved difficult. Determining the extent of substance abuse treatment was complicated by the fact that many participants anticipated treatment (i.e., they were currently not in treatment) but were not sure if they would receive it. Other participants were enrolled in treatment during one interview but had finished by the subsequent interview. The lack of follow up further complicated the matter. With these cautions in mind, at least half of the sample reported participation in substance abuse treatment while released, while also noting varying motivations for their participation.

A common theme in the motivations for treatment participation was the recognition that addiction is a “long step”, or that one “never stops being an addict”, in other words, the motivation to participate in treatment is due to the choice to take on a long-term perspective towards their reentry. Another theme revolved around the role of treatment in helping the participants to understand themselves. Consider the following statement from Tim (age 39) regarding why he believed substance abuse treatment participation was helpful:

Because, for me personally, maybe not for everybody, but for me personally, they helped me get in touch with myself. And it worked for me because I see that's not really who I am – some dumbass who runs around doing drugs all day, and steals to support his habit. It didn't make sense, and I think I needed...I mean, it's obvious , you don't need somebody to point that out to you,, but, when you're on drugs and you come down, reality hits and you don't ...you need to go...I went deeper into who I am. They helped me do that. I couldn't have done that on my own.

For Tim and others, substance abuse treatment facilitated coming to a new understanding of themselves that was not revolving around drug use and continued offending.

Participants were asked to consider their perceptions of neighborhood drug use and whether they believed it would be a problem for their potential to succeed in the community. There was some variation in how the participants perceived drug use in the neighborhoods where they lived. Some, such as Lou (age 38) believed that there was no drug use occurring around them, “Man, my building is quiet, I love it.” Others were somewhat adamant that drug use was occurring, and was not dependent on where one lived, as expressed by Robby (age 49), “I think there’s drug use probably in all neighborhoods, whether it’s illegal drugs or prescription drugs or alcohol, I think it’s prevalent all over.”

When asked about whether the participants believed drug use in the neighborhood would be a problem, the answer was overwhelmingly “No.” Indeed, 92% expressed the opinion that drug use in the neighborhood would not negatively impact their parole. A common theme expressed by the participants reflected their belief that substance abuse was a personal choice that no one was forcing them to make, stressing personal determination to not use drugs, regardless of the behaviors of others around them. In one example, Erving (age 33) emphasized his own determination to not use drugs as stronger than the influence of those around him.

Interviewer: Does being in that neighborhood make it difficult for you to not use drugs?

Erving: Mm, not really, because...I have a strong mind. I’m not really influenced by what other people are doing. You know, I really don’t care what somebody else is doing. I mean, I have family members that smoke marijuana. Cousins, you know. They drink, and I mean, I drink occasionally. But on the marijuana, no. They come by and they smoke their weed in the car, and just whatever they do, that’s what you do. I’m going to do me.

Indeed, the participants believed that even in situations where drug use was apparent in the neighborhood, they would be able to stay clean because it was their personal choice to remain clean, as it would be their personal choice to use. However, participants did much to distance their current behavior and frame of mind from their past substance abuse histories.

Social Support

In the course of experiencing life-changing and traumatic events men and women often turn to their families and friends for support, and returning to the community from prison should not be expected to be any different (Naser & La Vigne, 2006). The social support networks of returning prisoners gains theoretical importance through the concept of social capital, or the stock of interpersonal relations that individuals have available to facilitate, or in some cases, constrain social action and obtain resources (Coleman, 1988). In other words, people can draw on their relationships with others to achieve positive goals (i.e., successfully completing parole), or stop them from pursuing negative activities (i.e., turning to crime) (Cullen, 1994). Prior studies have shown that family and friend networks are sources of shelter, food, financial assistance, and emotional support. Without human relationships to turn to for support during the transition to the community, the reentry process may become more difficult and failure may be more likely. Interview research by Nelson and colleagues (1999) and Cobbina (2009) highlighted how their respondents self-identified their relationships with friends and family as important to their success in the community, particularly in the time immediately following release. Research by Visher and Courtney (2007) in Cleveland, found that a quarter of the men they interviewed believed support from family was the most important thing that would keep them out of prison,

and that their respondents only began to truly appreciate the importance of social support once they had spent several months in the community.

These trends were no different for the participants. While pre-release and post-release reentry programming were able to address some of the basic needs of the returning offenders in our sample, many of the participants stressed the importance of their social networks in obtaining both financial and emotional support. In the course of the interviews questions related to social support networks revolved around two main areas – 1) who they received support from and what that support consisted of; and 2) whether they believed that support was important and why.

Participants received social support from a variety of different sources. Table 5 details these supports. By far, the most common source of support were members of the participant’s immediate and extended families. Ninety-two percent of the participants reported receiving support from family members. The scope of these family support networks varied. For instance, upon being released one participant reported only having a sister to turn to for help, should he need it (William, age 42). Another (Richard, age 40) has only a few cousins who help him, but they were instrumental in helping him obtain his identification once he was released.

Table 5. Self-identified sources of social support (n=39)

<i>Source of Support</i>	<i>Number of Parolees</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Family	36	92.3
Intimate partner	19	48.7
Friend(s)	11	28.2
Community (e.g., church)	5	12.8
Reentry program	3	7.7

On the other hand, some participants characterized their social support networks as having numerous contributors. When asked about who he can turn to for support, Marcus (age 21) lauded his support network:

My mom, both of my parents. They'll do whatever for me. And my brothers and sisters. My grandparents, definitely. My grandmother, I called her every week while I was locked up just for her to hear my voice. ... My fiancée, she's been in my corner the whole time. I got a good support group. I got uncles, it's... I got a real good support group.

The second most frequently cited source of support was from intimate partners, with approximately half (49%) of the participants reporting support received from partners, girlfriends, and spouses. A smaller proportion of participants cited friends as a source of support (28%). Part of the reason is that incarceration tended to cause participants to reevaluate and distance themselves from their peer networks, many of which included friends involved in crime and delinquency. When asked about whether he had been in contact with the peers he used to get into trouble with, Calvin (age 32) said, "See, like, all the friends I used to hang with, I don't know – they moved. I ain't seen them or nothing. And that's a good thing anyways." As is noted later in Figure D, more than a third (36%) of the participants believed staying away from peers as important to staying out of prison.

The social support networks of the participants also increased and decreased in size over time. These changes involved both the addition of new friends, romantic partners, reuniting with family members, as well as alienating friends, family, and partners over the course of their parole. For instance, when Mark (age 30) was released he received some support from his father and his sister, but when they began to interfere with his relationship with a woman, he stopped talking to them and began to rely solely on his girlfriend for support. Mark's case is an example of how the social support networks of participants could be in flux, but the norm was stable support from small core networks of immediate and extended family.

One theme in the forms of social support that was not entirely overt was the sort of support that the participants received from other parolees. While participants did not explicitly

cite other parolees when asked about people “they could turn to,” it was clear that other parolees provided social support in some form. Indeed, the social influence of other offenders has been a constant theme across participants and reentry dimensions examined. Participants appear to be utilizing the informal communication network among other offenders to find out information about housing programs, employment opportunities, educational assistance, and social services that are available in the community. The assorted information leads often translate to tangible opportunities that are fulfilled by participants. The social influence of others also serves an instrumental purpose of being a source of social comparison. Participants have been observed to compare their reentry experiences to others in an effort to validate or reinforce one’s own progress in the community.

Participants reported receiving a variety of support from their social networks which can be broadly grouped into financial support and emotional support. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Nelson et al., 1999), financial support was comprised of various forms of material provisions such as money, clothing, transportation, food, and shelter. Ninety percent of participants reported receiving some form of financial support from various sources. One clear trend in the financial support that participants received was that in the early interviews material assistance from friends, family, and intimate partners was crucial in meeting expenses upon release. As an example, Pedro (age 31) was asked about whether he would be able to meet his monthly expenses once he obtained a minimum wage job:

Yes, because my girl has a job, and with our combined income...I mean, right now, she’s been living with family for the last two and half years, so she can cover the expenses on her own. So my job would just help, you know what I’m saying? So yeah, it should be alright for a while.

Financial support from friends, relatives, and partners was generally strongly relied upon to supplement any personal income participants brought in, if any at all. On the other hand, a similarly large proportion of participants cited receiving emotional support from their social support networks (87%). Emotional support has been characterized in previous research as intangible benefits that can facilitate the reentry process (Wolff & Draine, 2004). Participants were most likely to portray the emotional support they received as comforting and uplifting. This sentiment is exemplified in the words of Glen (age 34) when he discussed the importance of support, even if it just emotional:

Interviewer: And do you think this support is going to be important for you as far as staying out of prison?

Glen: I think it will. It takes the edge off. I think any person coming out of prison, they need that. They need a support frame. If it is no more than emotionally or people trying to see you do good, and also let you know that they think you is doing good. I think that's a big push towards a guy staying out of prison or jail or whatever, man.

After identifying the sources that they received support from, and what form that support took, participants were asked whether they believed that support would be instrumental in staying out of prison. Overwhelmingly, participants believed that the social support they received would be important towards their success in the community. More specifically, 92% believed the support they received would be important. Conversely, 5 participants (12.8%) believed that social support would not be an important factor in staying out of prison. These men universally emphasized self-reliance, portraying their success as a matter of their own personal choices rather than a function of assistance from others.

For the participants who did believe that social support would be instrumental towards their success, there was some variation in why they believed that to be the case. The major themes of their responses are displayed in Table 6, in order of their prevalence in the data.

Table 6. Self-Identified Reasons for Importance of Social Support (n=39)

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number of Parolees</i>	<i>Percent</i>
A source of positive support	27	69.2
Do not want to let people down	13	33.3
Staves off negative influences	10	25.6
A source of financial support	5	12.8
Gives them something to lose	5	12.8
Sets an example for the parolee	3	7.7
A chance to give back to others	3	7.7
Someone to talk to	2	5.2

The participants most often cited their support networks as important because those networks provided a source of positive, pro-social support that was often contrasted with the negative influences of “the streets.” Nearly 70 percent (69%) believed social support was important for this reason. In one conversation, Tim (age 39) discusses the positive influence that his support network has on him:

Yeah, I think it’s helpful. I think when you got somebody that cares about you and says, “Hey man, maybe you shouldn’t go that route. Why don’t you come over here instead of doing that?” You know what I mean? Having people that care about you, definitely.

As such, participants who cited this aspect of social support as important also stressed the strengths of emotional support networks for men coming out of prison. Similarly, having a social support network was also cited as important because participants did not want to let them down by reoffending or being sent back to prison (33%). This notion among participants is consistent with criminological theories that emphasize social attachments and stakes in conformity as

preventative towards reoffending (Hirschi, 1969; Spohn, 2007). Consider the following exchange where Thomas (age 30) reflects on contacting his family while he was in prison:

Thomas: It's just hard when you're in prison and you call and everybody is in good spirits. You can tell when you're done talking to everybody , everybody's spirits went down because you're not there. And I'm the only child so...I can't let them down. It's a lot of people that expect good things from you.

Interviewer: You feel like you recognized that before?

Thomas: No, I took it for granted.

Looking to the Future

Towards the conclusion of the interview each participant was asked about their perspectives on the future – more specifically, what they anticipated the next three months would be like. Exploring this issue is an important task for practitioners and researchers. Influential research by Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) forwarded the notion that in order for ex-offenders to turn their lives around and desist from crime they had to have reasons to make that change in their life, be open to making that transformation, be able to realistically imagine themselves making that change comfortably, and finally be able to reevaluate their past crimes as something they no longer wished to be a part of. Similarly, Maruna (2001) found that for ex-offenders to desist from crime they needed to be able to convince themselves that they would be able to “go straight”. These forms of cognitive transformation are apparent in returning offenders’ perspectives on the future. Interview questions regarding the future focused on the respondents’ general outlook on whether they would be successful staying out of prison, and what they believed would be the most important factors keeping them out of prison.

Contrary to the findings of previous studies which found that generally returning offenders have modest expectations of success, with many expecting to fail (Hanrahan et al., 2005; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999), overwhelmingly, the participants were generally optimistic about their chances of being successful in staying out of prison. This is not unheard of in previous studies, as Irwin (1970) noted that upon first returning to the community ex-offenders are largely optimistic about their opportunities for success, if not holding blatantly unrealistic expectations about what they hoped to achieve during their reentry (Hanrahan et al., 2005). Eighty-five percent of the participants believed that they would be successful staying out of prison. In their own words, the men often expressed a vibrant optimism and a desire for what they believed to be a more conventional lifestyle. Consider the following exchanges taken from the interviews:

[Travis, age 32]

Interviewer: Alright, so are you optimistic this time? Are you optimistic about the next three months?

Travis: Very. Very optimistic. I figured, by the time, by the next time we meet I should have a better job. Things should be going as good as they are now or better, very optimistic.

[Samuel, age 44]

Interviewer: Alright, so all that, taking all that into account, are you optimistic about the next three months, or pessimistic?

Samuel: [Laughing] I'm optimistic. You gotta think about that. I always try to maximize the positive and minimize the negative. I don't like to throw nothing negative in there.

Because if you're thinking negative, you start living negative. ...I want to be positive. I wanna look forward, and I got a great support system. I got family and friends.

[Alexander, age 28]

Interviewer: Where do you see yourself in three months?

Alexander: Where do I see myself in three months? By then, hopefully, I will have meaningful employment a good relationship with parole agent, you know, and clean sense of direction in three months.

While not an exhaustive list of such responses, these men exemplified the tendency for participants to present an unhesitant, optimistic outlook in which they imagined themselves making strides in non-criminal aspects of a more conventional society. As Hanrahan and colleagues (2005) and Maruna (2001) have observed, the expectations that returning prisoners hold for themselves and their prospects of success often border on the unrealistic. Maruna notes that these optimistic perceptions play an important role in giving men and women a sense of control over their success in the community, which can in turn become a self-fulfilling prophecy influencing success or failure on parole. For instance, La Vigne, Visher, and Castro (2004) found that of the returning prisoners they interviewed, those with higher levels of self-esteem were less likely to use drugs following their release from prison.

On the other hand, while none of the participants expressed an outwardly negative outlook on their prospects for a successful reintegration, several (23%) articulated uncertainty about their future. Consistent with Irwin's (1970) progression of returning offender's attitudes towards reintegration, these expressions of uncertainty were more prevalent in follow up interviews, after the respondent had spent some time actually in the community while on parole.

More specifically, of the 9 participants reporting uncertainty about their future, only three (33%) mentioned it in their first interview. The remaining six (67%) reported uncertainty in their subsequent interview, with three of those men having been rearrested or violated following their first interview.

A common theme in the respondent's accounts of uncertainty for the future was the inability to control the behavior of other people around them and how that behavior could play a role in sending them back to prison. For instance, Paul (age 32) recounts an incident occurring between his first and second interviews:

Interviewer: Ok, so looking towards the future do you think you're going to be successful in terms of staying out of prison?

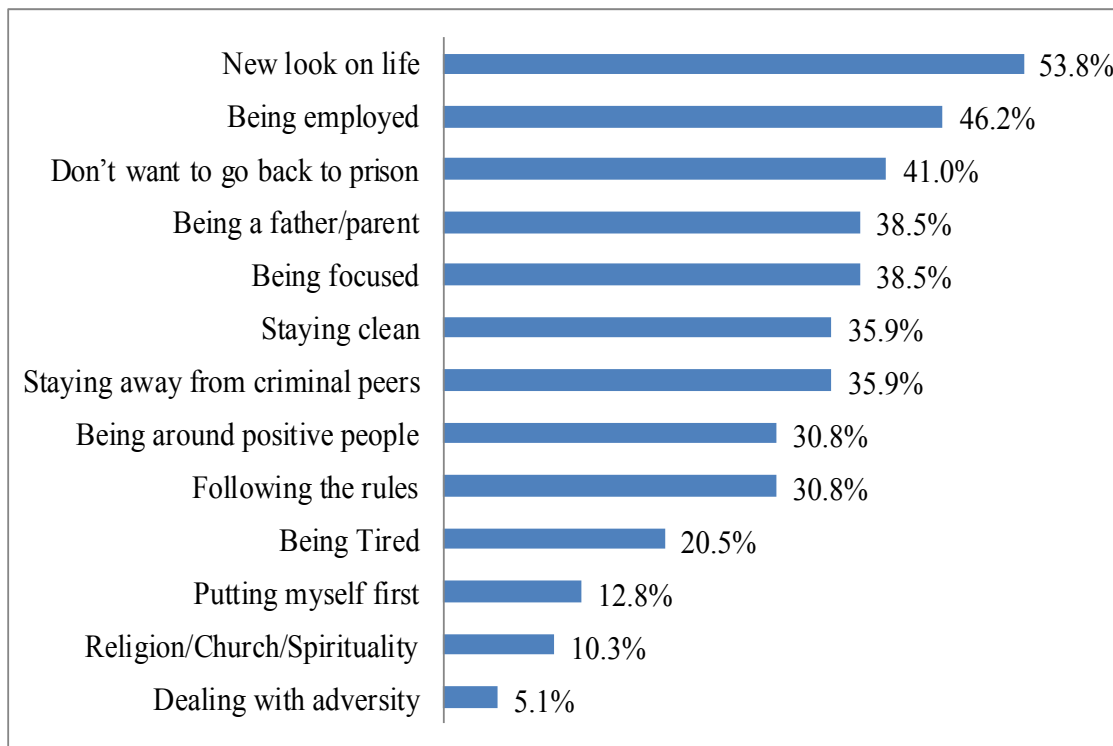
Paul: I hope so. I mean the incidents that happened even my parole officer knows about it, that an ex-girlfriend, that I have her boyfriend is trying...when I got out of jail he just came to my house and ended up pulling a gun on me and all type of stuff that just, going crazy. I thought that I would get into trouble because of course I can't be around firearms and this guy had a gun so...I, I don't call the police or nothing like that so I just let it go and my parole officer found out and we talked about it. He's just like, "well, you need to start using your resources instead of...", and I was like well I am just going to stay off the streets period because I don't need, you know. I was more worried about going back than I was him pulling the trigger.

In this particular incident, Paul's anxieties about his ability to stay out of prison supplanted his concerns for his own safety because while he could control his own behavior by staying isolated, he could not control the boyfriend or how his parole officer would react. Similar results were reported in Nelson and colleagues (1999), where the returning offenders they interviewed felt

that while they would not go back to prison based on their own actions and decisions, but rather on the decisions of the criminal justice system over which they had no control.

In addition to their general outlook, participants were asked about what they believed would be the most important things towards keeping them out of prison. Unlike the question on their general outlook on the future where there was little variation in responses, there was wide variation in what the participants believed would be important determinants of their own success. Figure D below displays the prevalence of the various factors the interviewees mentioned. Given that there were so many different factors that the parolees mentioned, only the top three will be discussed.

Figure D. Self-Identified Factors Important to Staying out of Prison (n=39)



Consistent with research detailing the importance of cognitive change, the most prevalent factor mentioned as being important to staying out of prison was the participant's acquisition of a new look on life (54%). In these cases the participant recognized that they had a new way of thinking

about the world that they planned on living up to. As an example, Dustin (age 37) believed that his spirituality would be important to staying out of prison, but acknowledged that this was not something new - he was spiritual in the past and still went to prison. When asked about what would be different on this current parole, he replied:

Dustin: I think what's different is that I have a whole different frame of mind. I have a whole different attitude and character about anything that I do and I try to think about it more than just one way, I try to look at it two or three ways. If I did go that way, what's the consequences and things of that nature? What will I lose? Because I've lost so much.

Dustin highlights how important he perceives the change in his thinking about his situation and future situations that he will face as his parole unfolds.

At the same time as participants were pointing to the importance of cognitive factors, they indicated the salience of the material dimensions of reentry as the second most prevalent self-identified factor was gaining and maintaining employment (46%). Indeed, similar to the findings of Arditti and Parkman (2011) regarding young men's reentry, employment was highly meaningful to participants. There were three primary ways in which the men felt employment was important to keeping them out of prison. First, several participants (33%) framed employment in a practical, routine activities sense, whereas by working a fulltime job time spent outside the home is occupied by labor, and time inside the home is spent resting for the next work day – there are simply no opportunities to commit crime. Second, two men (11%) pointed out that being employed would eliminate the need to commit crime as all of their previous crimes were based upon the need to have disposable income. As with the respondents in Arditti and Parkman's (2011) study, the participants believed that a legitimate income would make illegitimate income unnecessary. Third, several participants (17%) valued employment for giving themselves a sense of belonging in conventional society by being able to "hold their own."

The third most prevalent factor mentioned was the desire not to return to prison (41%). There were various reasons for why participants believed this would keep them out of prison. For several of the men (31%) they did not want to return to prison because they no longer saw it as part of who they were, or who they wanted to be. Consider the following excerpt taken from an interview that exemplifies this theme:

[Marcus, age 22]

The most important thing to keeping me out of prison, is the fact that now I don't want to go back. That lifestyle is not for me. I've told myself that's set up for losers. And I pride myself in not being a loser. So that's like, I'm saying that I am not going to go there. In place, I put goals in front of me that's realistic goals that I can accomplish that's going to take me time to get there, and it's basically taking up most of my time anyways. So I am not really falling into a lot of the negative stuff because I am focused at getting to these goals, and getting them accomplished. And it seems like the ones that I do accomplish, I'm setting up another goal, and I gotta get to this now. And I just keep, I'm pushing myself to not go back.

For Marcus not wanting to return to prison involves leaving a criminal lifestyle behind and adopting a new, goal-oriented view of life (as in Giordano et al.'s (2002) theory of cognitive transformation).

Discussion and Conclusion

The process of reentry is complex and filled with an assortment of challenges. Offenders manage these hurdles largely on their own, but are also active with community social service providers to gain assistance and fulfill needs as they arise. Additionally, where community service providers cannot meet the needs of returning prisoners, social support networks such as

families, friends, and intimate partners have been shown to make up the difference. A number of insights can be gained within specific dimensions of reentry that have direct implications for policy and practice.

Pre-release and subsequent community supervision planning was perceived to be useful. Pre-release planning appears to be most helpful to those with the most need, but there are concerns that plans may not be applicable to youthful offenders. More specifically, youthful participants and those who had already obtained housing and employment expressed their dissatisfaction with services that did not go “beyond the basics.” Perceptions of planning quality varied and were influential to future impressions and expectations. Unsatisfactory experiences with institutional pre-release planning led to lowered expectations of community planning and services. In turn, these negative worldviews have implications for motivations to change, which has become increasingly more salient dimension of the reentry and desistance process (Brown, 2004; Martin & Stermac, 2009; Maruna, 2001). It is vital to foster the legitimacy of planning and associated services prior to release.

Among the participants there appeared to be both continuity and discontinuity between pre-release planning and post-release services. Planning continuity exists to the extent that plans have been developed and are used to determine which services will be utilized. On the other hand, pre-release planning appears to be less important than the initial community supervision orientation that takes place 48 hours after release. It is at this stage that contemplated or prepared plans are acted upon, rather than simply discussed.

Overall, because housing options are most often chosen prior to the offender’s release from prison, locating housing was not a serious difficulty for the participants. Initial housing placement was seldom the only place of residence over the course of the interviews. Many men

in the sample changed residences at some point. Movement can be influenced by a variety of factors and some – such as gained independence – can be beneficial. For instance, more than half of the men who began their paroles in shelters then moved into subsidized housing, and some of these men were able to take over the rent from the state after a period of several months. Stable residences can be beneficial, but they are also viewed as frustrating reminders of economic and social hardships. The management of relationships with family members or partners is difficult and affects housing options and movement.

Employment is often not found until months after release, if at all. Social service provider leads and referrals and the use of the social networks of others can provide opportunities that translate to a position. Once an employer is identified, word spreads, and those still seeking employment are able to gain positions. Employment is not a necessity for all and calculations of unemployment rates may overlook those who choose to be without work. Mixtures of social service provider supports and public benefits can make material ends meet. The study participants most often located employment with a particular textiles manufacturer who quickly gained a reputation as a felon-friendly business. Employment among the sample was concentrated in this particular establishment and the job positions were most often minimum wage and of a temporary nature. To this extent, employment rates among the participants may have been inflated by this particular business and do not represent returning prisoners penetrating the broader labor market.

Histories of substance abuse are common within post-prison release populations and the sample participants were no different – over half had previously used hard drugs such as cocaine or heroin. Despite the little variation in substance abuse histories, participants were at different points in dealing with their addiction as approximately half attended treatment in the community

following their release from prison. For the men who were attending treatment, or desired to do so, a common outlook was to view their addiction and recovery as a long-term process that they would never completely conquer. This perspective among the sample emphasized reflexive monitoring of their own behavior and their interactions with others, indicating the way that persons on prisoner reentry take an active rather than passive perspective towards their own futures (Giddens, 1979; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001).

The interview participants were also keenly aware of substance abuse occurring in the communities that they returned to. Taken from the men's own perspectives in the interviews, the issue at hand was not whether drug use was occurring but whether they believed it was going to pose a problem for their reentry. The majority of the participants emphasized a "mind over matter" perception to which they had firmly committed themselves down a path towards a new identity and a new life free from substance abuse. The participants believed that no matter the extent of drug use in their neighborhoods, they would be capable of resisting it because they know what they need to do and while they cannot control the behavior of others, they can control themselves.

Throughout the interviews the participants utilized their social support networks for various forms of financial and emotional support. Common forms of financial support were food, money, shelter, and transportation, and participants characterized emotional support as intangible encouragement. These forms of support came from a variety of sources, the most common of which were members of immediate and extended families, followed by intimate partners. In the course of the interviews it was clear that the participants received considerable support from their social support networks, particularly in areas where pre- and post-release

reentry services were lacking. In this sense, social support networks have the capability to “pick up the slack” when reentry programming cannot meet particular needs of returning prisoners.

On the other hand, this tendency of social support networks to take on the burdens of returning prisoners may take the form of invisible costs of incarceration and reentry, with families ultimately shouldering the collateral consequences of their loved ones’ incarceration. Without talking to the family members directly, it is difficult to assess the scope of these consequences. To the extent that the participants believed their social support networks were important to their success in the community, future research and practice may find it fruitful to explore the ways that reentry programming can empower families to be key providers for their loved ones as they transition from the prison to the community.

The participants’ perspectives on the future emphasized both uniformity and variety as while nearly all men believed that they would be successful in staying out of prison, they cited many different factors they believed would be important factors towards achieving those goals. While there were numerous individual reasons that the participants cited as being important for their success in the community, common themes centered on forms of cognitive transformation (Giordano et al, 2002) and the material circumstances of prisoner reentry (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Indeed, the most frequently cited factors that the participants cited as important to staying out of prison were accepting a new look on life and obtaining employment, respectively. This finding emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to reentry services, one that is focused on facilitating new forms of thinking as well as linking returning prisoners with the resources they need to actualize those changes.

A few noteworthy research limitations exist. The first concern is associated with the reliability and validity of qualitative research. Recall errors, telescoping, reactivity to

participation in the research, and inaccurate responses all have the potential to influence findings from the current study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To reduce these biases and legitimize our observations a number of techniques were used. First, confidentiality and the lack of connection to the Department of Corrections were emphasized. Second, interviews were framed in a manner to allow participants to take on an active teaching role (Harding, 2003). Participants were engaged in their opportunity to educate research team members about their experiences. Finally, participants were interviewed at multiple points in time over repetitive questions and this prolonged engagement allowed for the establishment of rapport and checking for misinformation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Previous interviews were reviewed prior to each interview discuss trends to follow up upon or as probes of current experiences.

The time at risk is not equal among the participants. The original research design attempted to equate time at risk, by using structured follow up intervals. Upon administration, these intervals could not be maintained.⁶ As a result, the experiences discussed during the second interview may have been affected by the passage of time.

In the code and interpret process of qualitative research there is the potential to over rely on several talkative, articulate participants, ignoring the interviews lacking exorbitant detail on the issues of interest. This potential is known as elite bias (Appleton, 1995). In the course of formulating this report it was attempted to maintain utmost diversity in participants selected to develop themes and ideas, as well as those we chose as examples to be quoted in the data in the effort to minimize elite bias.

The final limitation relates to generalizability. The study site benefitted from a local manufacturing employer. This type of industry is likely to hire those with criminal history records, but is not available to all areas (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011). Moreover, partnerships

⁶ For more on the lessons learned in this research, see Appendix D.

among agencies involved in the criminal justice system at the study site may not translate to other locations. It has become increasingly apparent that local variation plays an important role to understand local problems, craft solutions, and provide assistance and responses (Klofas, Hipple, &McGarrell, 2010).

This research provides a number of insights to the situations faced by offenders after release. Major themes were discussed and presented within specific reentry dimensions. This structure provides insight but simplifies the experiences of the participants, who in fact, have managed a multifaceted mix of interrelated dimensions. Future research is needed to explore these complexities and their relations to the process of reentry and reintegration.

Appendix A

Interview Instruments

Returning Offenders: Interview Protocol (1st Interview)

Introduction

The purpose of this interview is to document the challenges you have faced as you move back into the community. Additionally, this interview will document the important things that have helped you.

Pre-Release Planning

To start, I would like to ask you about any planning for release that you may have received in prison.

1. Did you receive an introduction to MPRI while in prison? What did this introduction include? Who introduced you to the program?
2. Did you complete a reentry plan while in prison? If yes, what did this plan include? Who helped you create this plan?
Do you feel that your reentry plans were helpful? How helpful?
___YES ___NO
Did you understand your reentry plan?
___YES ___NO
3. Since you have been released, has your participation in MPRI assisted you in receiving any services (i.e. substance abuse treatment etc.)?
4. What has been **most** helpful about your participation in MPRI (or reentry plan)?
5. What has been **least** helpful about your participation in MPRI (or reentry plan)?

Employment

Next, I want to ask you some questions about your employment.

1. Before your incarceration, did you have a job? What type of work did you do?
2. How long did you work there? Were you on payroll or were you paid cash?
3. Since your release, have you located a job? Is this permanent work? What are your wages? What type of work do you do?
4. How long did it take to find a job? Did you have any help in finding this job (Probe: In-prison program or family member)?
5. Is your current employment enough to cover your monthly expenses? If not, how do you plan to pay for your additional expenses?
6. **(If they are not employed)** What are you currently doing to locate a job? Why do you think finding a job has been hard? (Probe: Lack of job training? Transportation? Negative view towards ex-offenders?)
7. Did you participate in any job programming while in prison? Can you please describe? Was this helpful? **(If no, do you feel this would have been helpful?)**

Housing

Next, I want to ask you about your current living situation.

1. Did you have difficulty locating a place to live after your release?
2. What type of place do you currently live?
 Single Family Home Shelter
 Supervised Facility Multi-Unit Home (such as apartment building, townhouse, duplex, etc.)
3. Are you currently living with someone? **If yes**, what is the nature of this relationship? Is this a permanent or temporary living arrangement?
4. **If temporary**, where do you plan to reside once this arrangement ends? Have you had help locating permanent housing? If so, from whom?
5. In your opinion, is your current neighborhood safe? Explain?
6. Do the people you are currently living with have an arrest history? Explain?

Substance Abuse Treatment

Now I want to ask you some questions about any drug/alcohol treatment you might have received.

1. Do you have a history of using drugs? Age of first use? Primary drug of use?
2. Are you currently enrolled in drug treatment? How long? In-patient/outpatient?
3. Did you receive drug treatment in prison? Have you been enrolled in treatment previously? How many times? If yes, do you think you will remain drug free this go around? Why or why not?
4. Do you live in a neighborhood where individuals are abusing drugs or alcohol? Do you think this will affect you and your ability to not use drugs? Why or why not?

Social Support (Friends or Family)

Now I want to ask you some questions about the people who have supported you in your return home.

1. Do you have a person(s) that helps you when you have a need? What is your relationship to this individual? (Probe: girlfriend/boyfriend, sibling, parent)
2. How do they help? (Probe: emotional, financial, housing)
3. Do you think this support is important to you staying out of prison? Explain?
4. Did this person(s) visit you while you were in prison? How often?
5. Did you receive any other visitors while in prison?
6. **(If no support)** Do you think having positive support from family or friends would aid in your community success? Explain? If you received support, what would this support look like? (Probe: someone to talk to, financial assistance)

Looking to the Future

Next, I am going to ask you some questions about how you see your future.

1. Do you think you will be successful in staying out of prison?
2. What do feel is the most important thing in helping you stay out of prison? (i.e. employment, family support)
3. Did you have this in the past? If so, why is it different this time?
4. Where do you see yourself in three months?
Optimistic or Pessimistic?

Criminal History/Offender Background

Next, I am going to ask you some questions about your background.

1. How long have you been out of prison? How long were you in prison?
2. Why were you in prison? Was this your first time?
3. **If no**, how many times have you been in prison? What was the age of your first time in prison?
4. Do you think this was your last time (in prison)? Why or why not (what is different)?
5. When on the street, were some of your friends involved in illegal activities? Explain?
Friends done time? In your home life growing up have your family members done time?

Demographic Information

Finally, I am to ask you a few more questions about yourself. This information will help us to be better understand ex-offenders returning to the community.

1. What is your current marital/relationship status?
2. Married Single Partnered Divorced
 Widowed Separated
3. Do you have kids? Yes No (**Complete interview**)
4. If yes, how many kids do you have? _____
5. Do you currently live with your kids? Yes No
6. Are you court ordered to pay child support for your kids?
 Yes No
7. **If no**, are you financially responsible for your kids without being ordered by the court?
 Yes No Sometimes

Returning Offenders: Interview Protocol (Successive Interviews)

Introduction

The purpose of this interview is to document the challenges you have faced as you move back into the community in the past three months. Additionally, this interview will document the important things that have helped your transition over the past three months.

Employment

To start, I want to ask you some questions about your employment situation over the past three months.

1. In the past three months, have you located a job? Is this permanent work? What are your wages? What type of work do you do?
2. How long did it take to locate a job? Did you have any help in locating this job (Probe: In-prison program or family member)?
3. Is your current employment enough to cover your monthly expenses? If not, how do you plan to pay for your additional expenses?
4. **(If they are not employed)** What are you currently doing to locate a job? Why do you think finding a job has been hard? (Probe: Lack of job training? Transportation? Negative view towards ex-offenders?)

Housing

Next, I want to ask you about your current living situation.

1. Did you have difficulty locating a place to live in the past three months?
2. What type of place do you currently live?
 Single Family Home Shelter
 Supervised Facility Multi-Unit Home (such as apartment building, townhouse, duplex, etc.)
3. Are you currently living with someone? **If yes**, what is the nature of this relationship? Is this a permanent or temporary living arrangement?
4. **If temporary**, where do you plan to reside once this arrangement ends? Have you had help locating permanent housing? If so, from whom?
5. In your opinion, is your current neighborhood safe? Explain?
6. Does the person you are currently living with have an arrest history? Explain?

Substance Abuse Treatment

Now I want to ask you some questions about any drug/alcohol treatment you might have received over the past three months.

1. Are you currently enrolled in drug treatment? How long? In-patient/outpatient?
2. Have you been enrolled in treatment over the past three months? How many times? If yes, do you think you will remain drug free this go around? Why or why not?
3. Do you live in a neighborhood where individuals are abusing drugs or alcohol? Do you think this will affect your treatment? Why or why not?

Social Support (Friends or Family)

Now I want to ask you some questions about the people who have supported you in your return home.

1. In the past three months, do you have a person(s) that helps you when you have a need? What is your relationship to this individual? (Probe: girlfriend/boyfriend, sibling, parent)
2. How do they help? (Probe: emotional, financial, housing)
3. Do you think this support is important to you staying out of prison? Explain?
4. Did this person(s) visit you while you were in prison? How often?
5. Did you receive any other visitors while in prison?
6. **(If no support)** Do you think having positive support from family or friends would aid in your community success? Explain? If you received support, what would this support look like? (Probe: someone to talk to, financial assistance)

Looking to the Future

Next, I am going to ask you some questions about how you see your future.

1. Do you think you will be successful in staying out of prison?
2. What do feel is the most important thing in helping you stay out of prison? (i.e. employment, family support)
3. Did you have this in the past? If so, why is it different this time?
4. Where do you see yourself in six months?

Demographic Information

Finally, I am to ask you a few more questions about yourself. This information will help us to be better understand ex-offenders returning to the community.

1. What is your current marital/partnership status?
2. Married Single Partnered Divorced
 Widowed Separated
3. Do you have kids? Yes No (Complete interview)
4. If yes, how many kids do you have? _____
5. Do you currently live with your kids? Yes No
6. Are you court ordered to pay child support for your kids?
 Yes No
7. **If no**, are you financially responsible for your kids without being ordered by the court?
 Yes No Sometimes

Appendix B

The Timing (in Months) of Initial and Subsequent Interviews by Participant

Table B.1. Interviews by Participant in Months (n=39)

	<i>Initial</i>	<i>Interview 2</i>	<i>Interview 3</i>	<i>Interview 4</i>
Thomas	1	3	Returned	
Glen	1	17*		
Marcus	1	4	9	18*
Kevin	1	3*	18+	
Dustin	1	14**		
William	1	3	6	Medical
Henry	1	11**		
Mike	2	13*		
Otis	1	4	7	12
Tim	1	18**		
Richard	1	Transferred		
Pedro	1	12+		
Lou	1	15*		
Wilber	1	Absconded		
Calvin	1	Transferred		
Cliff	1	3	16**	
Robby	1	3	10	Jailed
Travis	1	3	9	19*
Samuel	1	3	6	9
Brian	1	17*		
Ron	1	Returned/Withdrew		
Leslie	1	3	6	14
Paul	1	10	Employed	
Steve	1	Returned		
Reggie	1	3	7	12
Alexander	1	18*		
Gary	1	8*		
Mark	2	5	Returned	
Ken	1	Jailed		
Shaun	1	15*		
Jim	1	15	Disability	
Dave	1	Returned		
Matt	1	4	Transferred	
Thomas	1	Medical		
Dennis	1	3	7	Returned
Erving	1	9*		
Dan	1	Transferred		
Willie	1	9	12	14*
Ken	1	4	Returned	

NOTE: Table adapted from Harding, Wyse, Dobson, & Morenoff (2011).

CHARACTER KEY: *Interviewed in jail; **Interviewed after unspecified length of stay at jail, correctional center, or residential treatment; +Interviewed after re-release from return to prison.

CLASSIFICATION KEY: Absconded = Participant had been issued an absconder warrant for failure to report. Disability = Interviews could not be administered or coordinated due to difficulties with disabilities. Employed = Interviews could not be coordinated due to full time employment status. Jailed = Participant was jailed in a county facility for an arrest, investigation, or violation of community supervision terms. Interviews could not be coordinated or administered for these participants at the jail. Medical = Participant was discharged from parole due to medical problems; Returned = Community supervision status was revoked due to a new sentence or sustained technical violation and the participant was returned to prison; Transferred = Participant transferred from Lansing Parole Office to a new jurisdiction in Michigan. Interviews could not be coordinated or administered at these jurisdictions. Withdrew = Participant asked to be removed from the study.

Appendix C

Housing Movement Pathways by Initial Placement Type⁷

Figure C.A. Moving Pathways for Participants Initially Placed with Family (n=19)

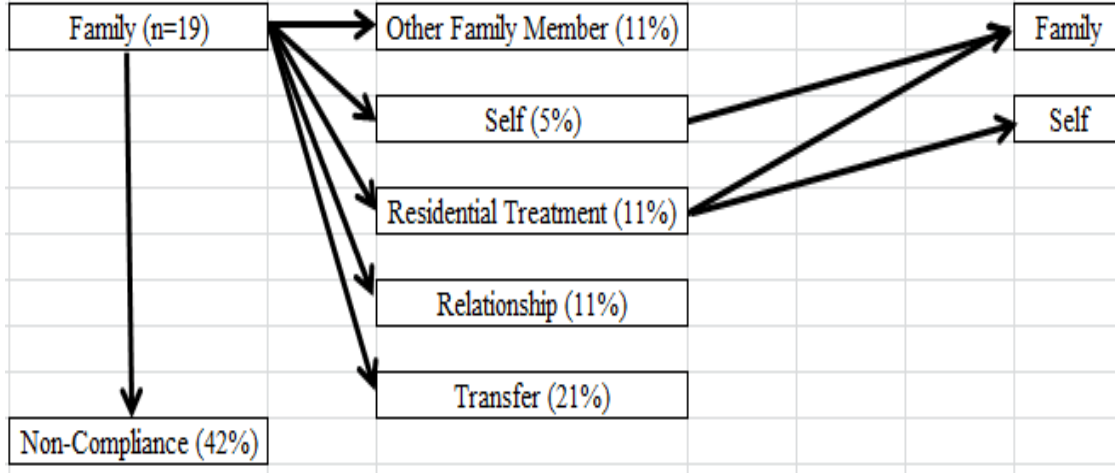
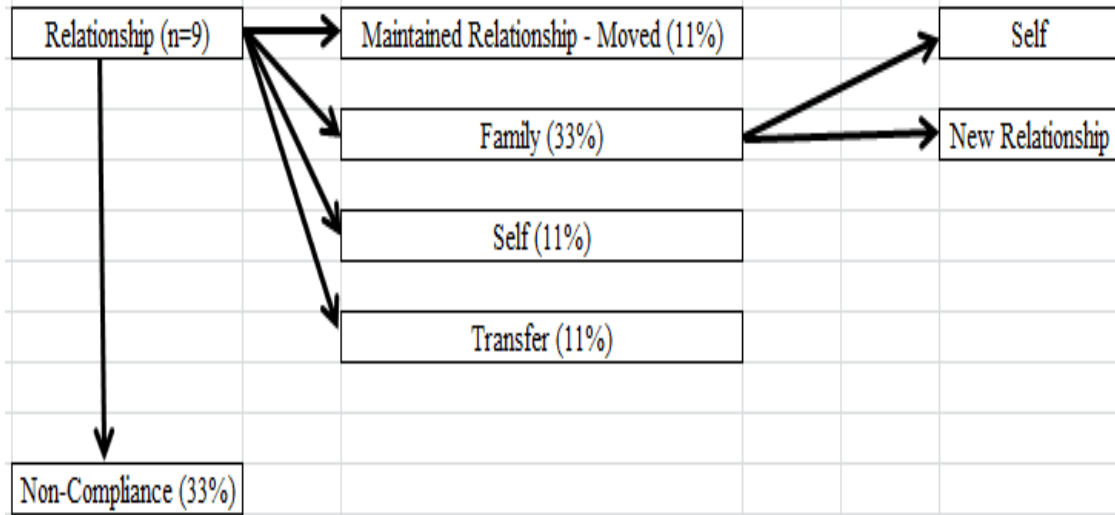
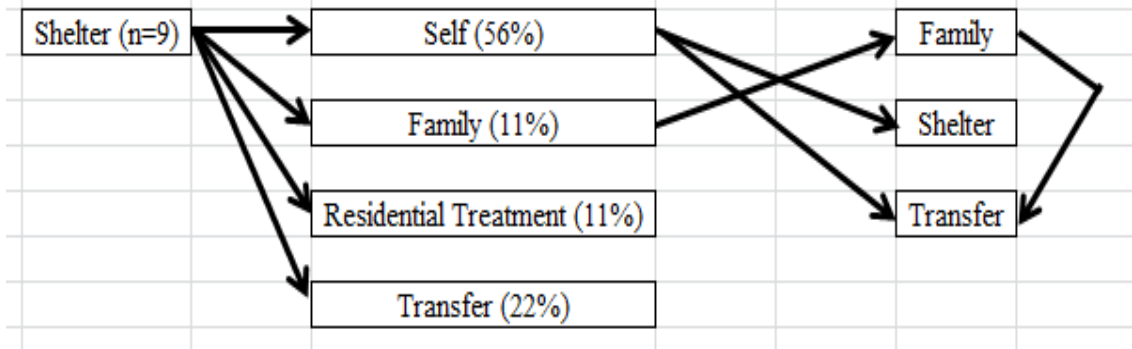


Figure C.B. Moving Pathways for Participants Initially Placed into Relationship (n=9)



⁷ Moving pathways for participants initially placed on their own (i.e., self) are not applicable. All of these participants remained at their initial placement through discharged from community supervision.

Figure C.C: Moving Pathways for Participants Initially Placed into Shelter (n=9)



Appendix D

Lessons Learned

Qualitative longitudinal panel research is difficult to administer and for this very reason is seldom used. The research team was fortunate to have worked with Lansing Parole Office. The degree of collaboration was unique. Staff were invested in the study and flexible to our needs. A few lessons have been learned that would be beneficial to future research that seeks to use this design.

Ongoing, Open Communication. The research team developed a system of communication with the parole office in an effort to ease the exchange of information. Research team members received weekly eligibility lists from staff. These lists contain information on release date, offense type, supervision status, and parole agent contact information. The list exchanges served two purposes. First, parole agents were directly contacted to schedule subsequent interviews and determine available report days. Second, agents used the lists to keep abreast of parolees in their caseloads who were participants in the research. This allowed agents to contact research team members to administer interviews on unscheduled reporting days.

Prepare for the Unexpected. The first wave of interviews began January 2009. The sample population of 40 offenders was finalized and the first wave of interviews concluded in October 2009. Secondary follow up interviews were terminated September 2010. The lag time required to finalize the sample was not expected, but did reflect the difficulties associated with conducting longitudinal research for a transient population of parolees as well as the day-to-day realities for parole agents.

An assortment of factors directly affected the anticipated sampling frame and the obtainment of initial interviews. A few were particularly salient. Agents were provided with

anticipated release date information for the offenders from institutional representatives. The dates are subject to change at any time and for any reason unbeknownst to the agent. Agent turnover or caseload turnover also contributed to the delay in sampling. Members of the research team provided multiple orientations regarding the goals and objectives of the research in response to turnover and have worked diligently to understand and respond to the needs of agents to ease the process of identifying project subjects and scheduling initial interviews.

These very same initial interview hurdles also affected the administration of subsequent follow up interviews. In-person reporting dates are a required condition of parole. These scheduled dates may be changed at any time and for any reason. Agent turnover or caseload turnover continues to complicate matters. Caseload changes often result in the loss of a point of contact with a study participant's agent that must be re-established with a new agent who may or may not be familiar with the project. The subsequent interviews are also directly influenced by the transience and attrition of the sample population. Participants may not be available for interview due to intermittent changes in supervision status (e.g., graduated sanctions, inpatient/residential treatment services, approved out of state travel, approved telephone call-in reporting), transfer to a different jurisdiction, or the loss of community supervision status.

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