

# Pre-release Characteristics and Service Receipt among Adult Male Participants in the SVORI Multi-site Evaluation

## THE MULTI-SITE EVALUATION OF THE SERIOUS AND VIOLENT OFFENDER REENTRY INITIATIVE

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## Executive Summary

The Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) funded agencies in 2003 to develop programs to improve criminal justice, employment, education, health, and housing outcomes for released prisoners. Sixty-nine agencies received federal funds (\$500,000 to \$2,000,000 over 3 years) to develop 89 programs. The SVORI multi-site evaluation was funded by the National Institute of Justice in the spring of 2003 and included prerelease and follow-up interviews with nearly 2400 returning prisoners. Sixteen programs are included in the impact evaluation, comprising 12 adult programs and 4 juvenile programs located in 14 states: Colorado (juveniles only), Florida (juveniles only), Indiana, Iowa, Kansas (adults and juveniles), Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina (adults and juveniles), and Washington.

This report presents findings from the pre-release interviews conducted with adult males in the 12 adult impact sites. The sample includes 863 men who were enrolled in SVORI programs and 834 comparison men who did not receive SVORI programming. The data presented in this report are primarily descriptive and convey characteristics of the respondents, as well as their pre-prison and incarceration experiences. Differences between SVORI and non-SVORI respondents are presented for the purpose of assessing pre-release comparability between groups.

### Characteristics of the SVORI and non-SVORI Comparison Respondents

- The average age of the respondents was 29 years, and about half were black and one-third were white.
- About 60% had a high school diploma or GED.

- Prior to incarceration, most respondents reported living in a house or apartment that belonged to someone else, and nearly all reported having family members and friends who had been convicted of a crime or had problems with drugs or alcohol.

#### *Substance Use and Physical and Mental Health*

- Nearly all respondents reported having used alcohol and marijuana, whereas more than half reported cocaine use.
- Of those who had ever used drugs, about two-thirds reported having used one or more illicit drugs during the 30 days prior to their incarceration.
- Most respondents reported few physical health problems, and most described their mental health status at the time of the pre-release interview as excellent or very good.

#### *Employment History and Financial Support*

- Most study participants reported having worked at some point during their lifetimes, and about two-thirds reported working during the 6 months prior to prison.
- Of those working during the 6 months prior to prison, about three-quarters described their most recent job as a permanent job for which they received formal pay.
- Nearly half of the respondents reported supplementing their legal income with income from illegal activities, with those who had no job prior to prison more likely to report illegal income.

#### *Criminal History*

- The respondents reported an average age at first arrest of 16 and an average of 12 arrests.
- Most respondents had been previously incarcerated and about half had been detained in a juvenile facility.
- At the time of the interview, respondents reported an average length of incarceration of more than 2 years.
- Most respondents indicated that family members had served as an important source of support during their incarceration.

Although the SVORI and comparison respondents were similar on many of several hundred measures, they differed on a few measures:

- SVORI respondents were more likely to be black and less likely to be white than comparison respondents.
- Non-SVORI respondents were significantly more likely than SVORI respondents to indicate symptoms of hostility and psychosis on the mental health subscales.
- Self-reports on “ever using” drugs indicated somewhat higher usage among the non-SVORI respondents.
- SVORI respondents were somewhat less likely to have been employed prior to incarceration.
- On some indicators, SVORI respondents were less involved in pre-prison substance use.
- SVORI respondents were less likely to be in prison for a parole violation.
- SVORI respondents were more likely to be serving time for a drug crime.
- SVORI respondents had spent more time in prison during the current incarceration.
- SVORI respondents reported more disciplinary infractions and administrative segregations than were reported by the non-SVORI respondents, which may be associated with their longer lengths of stay.

#### **Levels of Service Needs**

- Respondents reported high levels of service needs across the spectrum of 28 services included in the interview; on average, respondents reported needing more than half of the services.

- The most common needs reported by SVORI respondents were education (94%), financial assistance (86%), a driver's license (83%), job training (82%), and employment (80%).
- SVORI and non-SVORI respondents were similar on most measures, but non-SVORI respondents were significantly less likely than SVORI respondents to report needing financial assistance or access to clothing and food banks and more likely than SVORI respondents to report needing mental health or substance abuse treatment, domestic violence support groups, or a change in their criminal attitudes.

### **Levels of Service Receipt**

- SVORI programs were successful in greatly increasing access to a wide range of services and programming. The SVORI respondents were much more likely than the non-SVORI respondents to report receiving most of the services we asked about.
- The most common services SVORI respondents reported receiving were participating in programs to prepare for release, meeting with a case manager, working with someone to plan for release, taking a class specifically for release, and receiving a needs assessment.
- There were only four services for which the difference in service receipt between SVORI and non-SVORI respondents was not significant: assistance modifying custody agreements, batterer intervention programs, medical treatment, and assistance accessing public financial assistance.
- Overall, SVORI respondents reported receiving about one-third of the service items—in contrast to the one-fifth of items that non-SVORI respondents reported receiving.

The results from these interviews show that our SVORI and non-SVORI groups are similar on most characteristics and that those who participated in SVORI programs were more likely to receive pre-release programming and services. These findings set the stage for future examinations of outcomes.

**To access the full report or for more information about the SVORI Multi-site Evaluation, please visit our website at <http://www.svori-evaluation.org/>.**