



One Year Out: Tracking the Experiences of Male Prisoners Returning to Houston, Texas



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About the Returning Home Study

Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry is a longitudinal study of prisoner reentry in Maryland, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas led by staff at the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center. The study explores (1) the individual reentry experience through interviews with prisoners before and after release from prison; (2) the family perspective on reentry from interviews with family members of returning prisoners; and (3) the community context of reentry based on interviews with key community stakeholders and focus groups with residents.

The JEHT Foundation, the Houston Endowment, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) provided support for *Returning Home-Texas*. Staff from NuStats, Incorporated, an Austin-based research firm, conducted the original data collection under the direction of Robert Santos.

Additional information on *Returning Home*, including other publications that present findings from Texas, can be found online at <http://www.urban.org/projects/reentry-portfolio/index.cfm>.

Prisoner reentry, the release and return of prisoners back to their communities, is an important and growing concern in states and communities across the country. In Texas, this concern is particularly acute in that the state accounts for 1 in 10 released prisoners nationally (West and Sabol 2009), amounting to over 70,000 returning male and female prisoners each year.¹ Of the 61,000 men released from Texas prisons, roughly 13,000 call Houston their home.² These men face challenges across a wide array of skill deficits and needs. While some successfully reintegrate—finding jobs, reuniting with families, and refraining from drugs and crime—others are less fortunate, inflicting harm to themselves and their victims through substance abuse and criminal behavior.

In an effort to understand the factors contributing to successful reentry and inform policies to ensure a safer return for both prisoners and the communities in which they reside, the Urban Institute conducted a study of 210 men exiting Texas prisons and returning to the Houston area. This report presents findings from three waves of interviews with these men, conducted shortly before and at two points after their release. Preprison characteristics, reentry preparation behind bars, expectations for release, postprison relationships, and engagement in both pro- and anti-social behaviors are examined in detail. Results of regression analyses identifying the individual characteristics and experiences associated with postrelease employment, substance abuse, and criminal behavior are also reported. The findings are presented with an eye toward how policies and practices can be designed to promote the successful reentry of prisoners who are returning home.

OVERVIEW OF THE REENTRY EXPERIENCE

While each man's story of reentry is unique, the broad brushstrokes are quite similar. Most exiting male prisoners are African American and/or Latino, and they are typically no strangers to the criminal justice system, with multiple prior convictions and in many cases previous stays in Texas's state prisons or jails. While they enjoy some access to programs behind bars—most often related to education and employment readiness—one in three expressed an interest in programs that were unavailable to them.

At the time of release, housing was a challenge for some men, and housing stability diminished over time for many of them. While most men were satisfied with their living arrangements and considered their neighborhoods to be safe, they also reported residing in areas where drug dealing is problematic and jobs are scarce.

Methodology

The Returning Home-Texas study entailed three waves of interviews conducted in 2005 and 2006 with male and female prisoners returning to the Houston area. The first survey was administered just prior to release (N = 676) and the remaining two surveys were administered at two to four months (N = 509) and eight to ten months after release (N = 378). Participants who were reincarcerated in state or local correctional institutions during the follow-up period remained in the study and were interviewed while in confinement. The findings presented in this report are based on analyses of only those male respondents who participated in the prerelease survey and both waves of postrelease interviews (N = 210). To increase the comparability of both our descriptive and predictive analysis findings to the entire sample of prerelease participants, we employed inverse probability weighting using a wide range of measures from the prerelease interview to adjust for sample attrition. (Information from the 142 women who completed all three waves appears in a separate report).

To predict reintegration success and failure one year after release regarding employment, substance use, and recidivism, we employed multivariate logistic regression on the 210 men who completed the prerelease and both postrelease interviews, statistically controlling for age, race (white/nonwhite), marital status (married or living as married), parental status (minor children), employment history (employed in the six months prior to their most recent incarceration), education (high school graduate or GED), criminal history (number of previous prison stays, whether or not they were incarcerated in a juvenile facility), and correctional facility type (state jail versus state prison). The amount of time in the community after release was also controlled for if the outcome variable was time-dependent. Given the small sample size, relationships reported as significant are those found to be statistically significant in multivariate models at a probability equal to or less than 0.10. Differences between state prisoners and state jail inmates are highlighted only if they are significant; otherwise findings are presented for the full male sample.

Family members were a key housing resource for most men, and they also provided cash, food, and emotional support, despite the fact that meaningful shares of men reported family members who were using drugs and/or involved in the criminal justice system themselves. This family support is likely critical in navigating the many challenges of reentry. One such challenge is refraining from drug and alcohol use, as many men reported extensive histories of substance use prior to incarceration and one in three reported substance use after release. Those with higher levels of family support, however, were less likely to engage in substance use after release. Ties to faith institutions and overall spirituality also play a role in reentry outcomes, leading to reduced substance use and lower rates of return to prison.

In terms of supporting themselves financially, men left prison with thousands of dollars of debt, and many faced challenges in seeking employment due to lack of photo identification and the existence of a criminal record. Despite these challenges, three out of five men were employed by eight to ten months out, and most of them reported that their employer was aware of their criminal record. Those who worked prior to incarceration, men with minor children, and those who participated in job training in the early months following release were more successful in finding and keeping a job, while those who engaged in postrelease substance use were less likely to be employed.

Unemployment and postrelease substance use are also key contributors to reincarceration. Those who participated in substance abuse treatment and employment programs behind bars, and those participating in all manner of community programs in the early months following release, were less likely to return to prison, suggesting that at least some types of prison and community programs are well worth the investment.

An important thread that runs through all of these findings is that of the striking difference in the reentry challenges, experiences, and outcomes between men released from state prisons and those released from state jails. In Texas, convicted felons sentenced to two or more years in prison are housed in state prisons, while lower-level offenders serve time in state jails, which primarily house drug and property offenders and probation violators. Men exiting from state jails have more extensive histories of substance use, are less likely to have received programming of any kind either before or after release, and are more likely to engage in postrelease substance use. Despite these deficits, state jail releasees are less likely to be returned to confinement in a year's time, possibly because unlike those exiting prison, they are not under any form of postrelease supervision that might serve to detect violations or new crimes.

These findings have important implications for sentencing and release policies in the state of Texas. This portrait of men returning to Houston communities illustrates the specific needs of this population and points to key factors within and outside of the institutional setting that can be identified and modified to lead to more successful outcomes for this population. We now turn to a more detailed description of who these men are and how they navigate the transition from prison to the community.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RETURNING PRISONERS

This report tells the stories of a group of 210 men who were surveyed shortly before their release from prison and interviewed two times following their release—once at two to four months after release, and a second time at eight to ten months after release.³ Three in four (75 percent) of these men were nonwhite, and one in seven (15 percent) identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino. The average age of these men at the time of release was 37 years.⁴

FAMILY STATUS

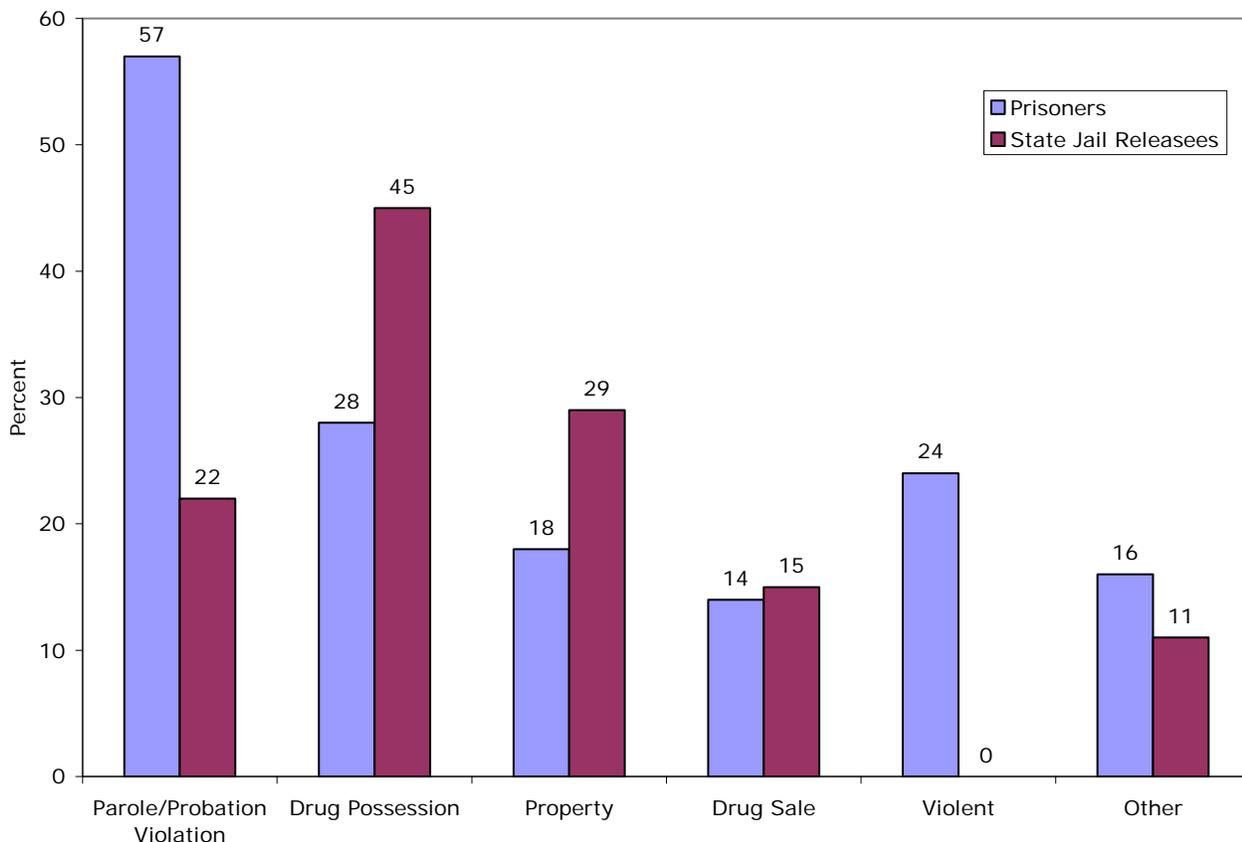
In terms of their family status, over half (54 percent) of the men had never been married when they entered prison or state jail, and about a quarter (27 percent) were married or living with a partner when they were incarcerated. Forty-three percent were fathers of minor children at the time they were incarcerated. Of

those who had children at the time they were incarcerated, most (69 percent) had more than one child. Of those with minor children, over half (59 percent) were living with their children and four in five men (86 percent) were providing financial support for their children in the months leading up to their incarceration.

PREPRISON HISTORIES

The experiences of men leading up to their most recent incarceration paint a picture of extensive drug use and criminal involvement. A large share of men had histories of substance use when they entered prison, with 61 percent reporting frequent illegal drug use in the months before prison, and a quarter (25 percent) reporting heavy drug use.⁵ The duration of drug use was often extensive: of the men who reported using illegal drugs prior to incarceration, the median length of use was nine years,⁶ with 41 percent having used for ten years or more.

Figure 1. Conviction Offense



In terms of education and employment, 60 percent of men had obtained a high school degree⁷ before entering prison or state jail, with state prisoners (52 percent) less likely than state jail inmates (68 percent) to have done so. The majority (69 percent) of men reported legal employment in the six months before entering prison or jail. Nevertheless, nearly a third (29 percent) reported receiving some income from illegal activity in the six months before incarceration, and 18 percent received most or all of their income from illegal activity during this time.⁸

Most of these men became involved in the criminal justice system at an early age, with an average age of first arrest of 18 years old. Perhaps not surprisingly, most also had prior convictions (85 percent), with state jail inmates (92 percent) more likely than state prisoners (79 percent) to have been convicted previously of at least one criminal offense. Almost half of the full group (45 percent) had served time in a Texas state facility at least once before.

IN-PRISON EXPERIENCES

Despite the similarities between state prisoners and state jail inmates regarding their previous involvement in the system, the types of offenses they were serving time for differed. Figure 1 shows the distribution of conviction offenses for each group, illustrating that state prisoners were more likely to be serving time for a parole or probation violation than were state jail inmates, while state jail inmates were more likely to be serving time for a drug offense. The median time served by state prisoners was just over three years (37 months), while the median time served by state jail inmates was seven months.

The differences in incarceration experiences between these groups are also illustrated through variations in program opportunities and participation rates. While nearly all men participated in some type of program while incarcerated, prisoners were more likely than state jail inmates to participate in all types of programs. Figure 2 shows the shares of prisoners and state jail inmates who participated in each of a range of types of in-prison programs. The most common type of program for both prisoners and

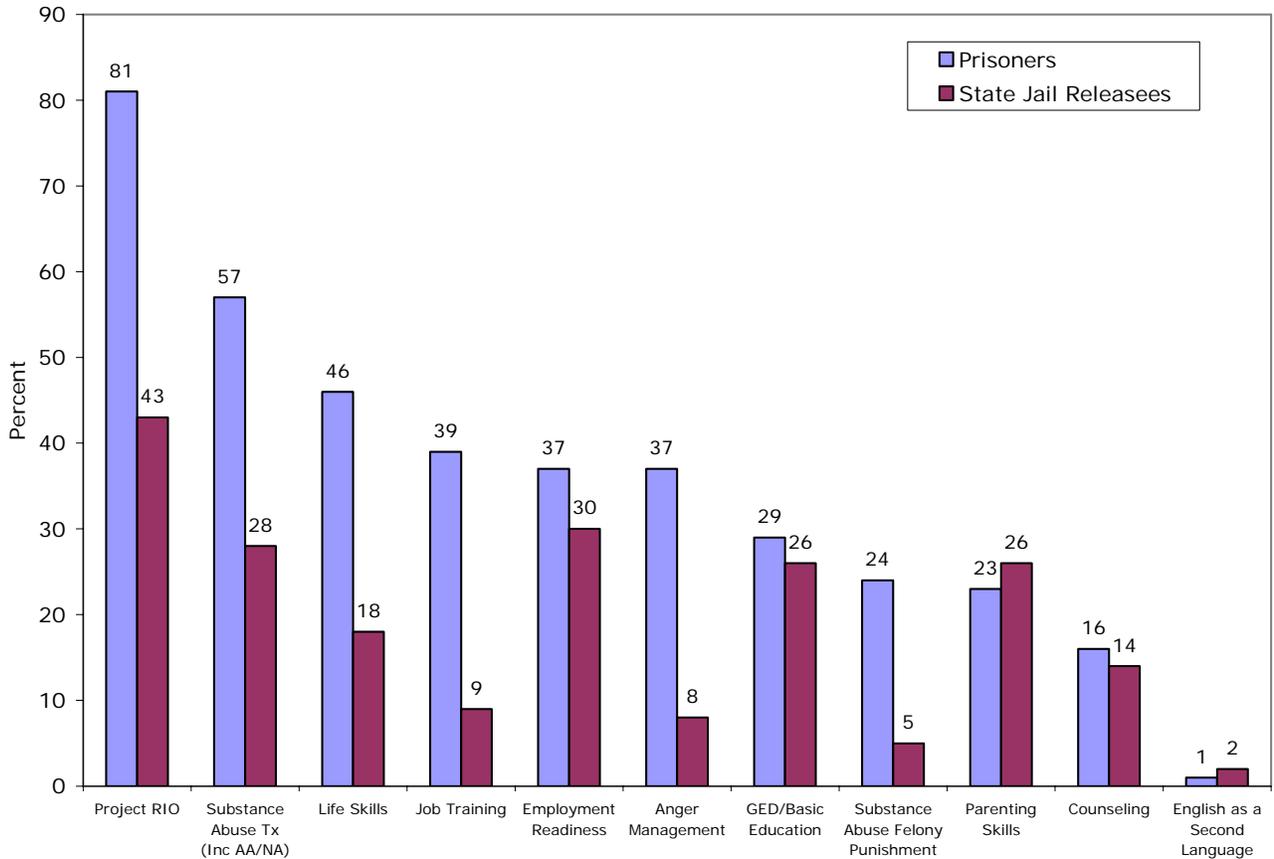
state jail inmates was Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders), a reentry program administered by the Texas Workforce Commission in collaboration with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Project RIO aims to reduce recidivism through employment by linking prisoners and state jail inmates to education, training, and employment before and after release.

In addition to the programs listed in figure 2, some men also obtained their GEDs and held jobs while incarcerated. State prisoners (17 percent) were more likely than state jail inmates (9 percent) to have earned a GED during their most recent period of confinement. State prisoners (73 percent) were also more likely than state jail inmates (43 percent) to have held in-prison jobs. The most common types of jobs held by all men were sanitation/maintenance (23 percent), kitchen/dietary (20 percent), laundry (14 percent), and trustee/clerk (12 percent). About one in fourteen men (7 percent) held work-release jobs while incarcerated, exiting the confines of the prison to work in a job in the community for some period of the day.

While behind bars, many men participated in programs designed to aid them with the challenges they would face in the community after release. Just over half (53 percent) of all men participated in a prerelease program of some kind. According to men who participated in a prerelease program, the topics most commonly covered were alcohol and drug treatment (67 percent), finding a job (64 percent), continuing education (57 percent), personal relationships (56 percent), and obtaining a non-TDCJ photo identification (55 percent). Just over half (55 percent) of those who participated said their involvement in the prerelease program was voluntary, while the remainder (45 percent) said that they were required to participate.

More than one-third of men (36 percent) reported that they had wanted to participate in a specific type of program during prison but were unable to do so. The most common reasons they offered for not participating were

Figure 2. In-Prison Programming



that the programs were full, were not offered at all, or were only open to certain types of eligible prisoners. Among those who reported they were unable to participate in a program they wanted to participate in, job training (39 percent) was the most desired type of program, followed by life skills (19 percent), employment readiness (18 percent), parenting (16 percent), and GED classes (11 percent).

MOMENT OF RELEASE

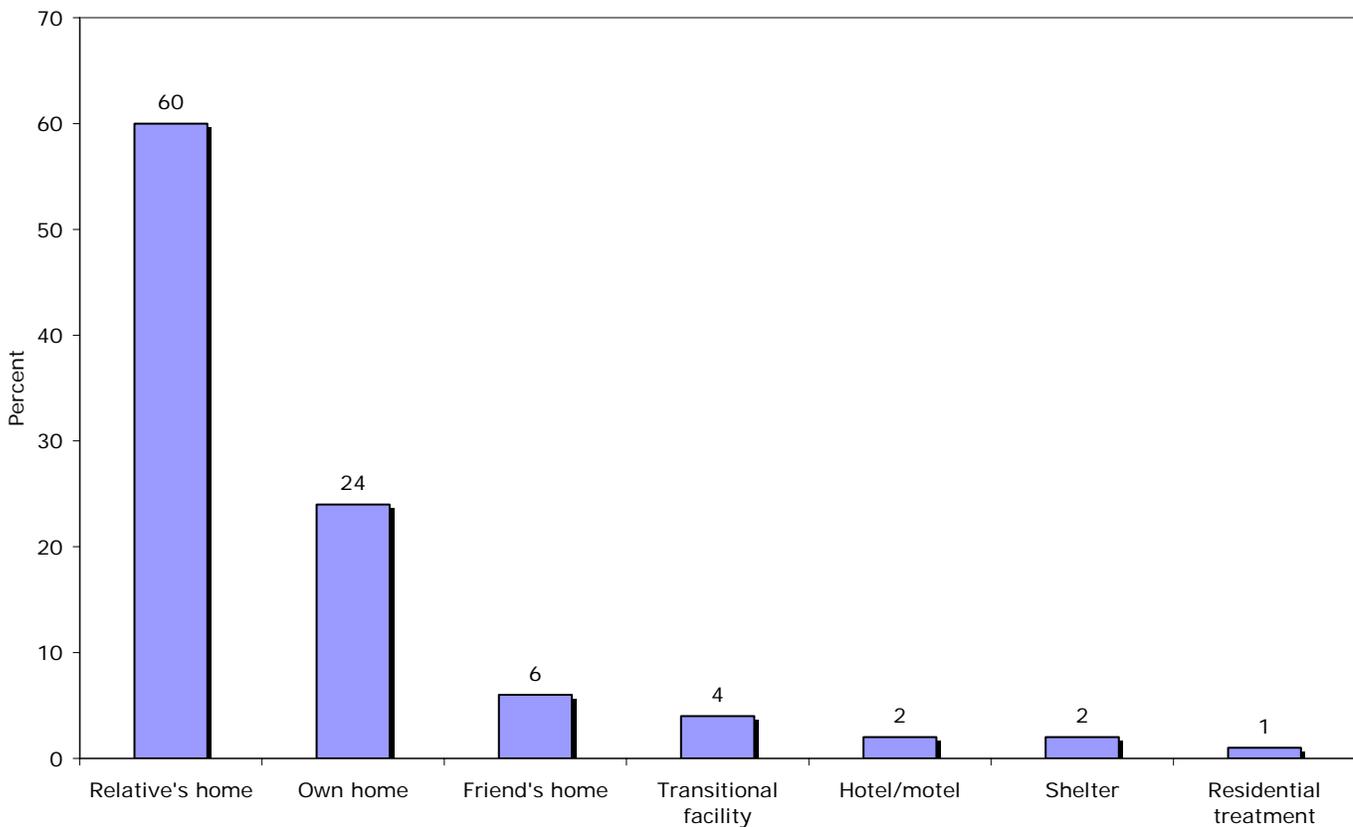
The immediate moment of release from incarceration has been identified by researchers as a critical point in the reintegration process (Vera Institute of Justice 1999). Unfortunately, the men interviewed for this study had few resources with which to navigate the challenges they faced during the first few hours after their release. Many men (73 percent) had only one set of street clothing, and fewer than two in five (37 percent) had a non-TDCJ photo identification at the time of release. Men exiting state prison left with \$50 in gate money, while those exiting state

jails were not provided with any cash assistance, relying instead on whatever funds they had in their prison accounts. The typical exiting prisoner had just \$7 in account funds, and the average state jail inmate had \$18 in account funds.

The first challenge faced by many men following their release was transportation. While exactly half of men had someone to meet them at the time of their release, the other half left the facility alone. Just over half (54 percent) reported that they had been given a bus ticket, voucher, or money for transportation on the day of their release, and roughly one in four (28 percent) traveled away from the facility by bus.

Another immediate challenge was finding a place to sleep. Figure 3 shows where former prisoners and state jail inmates slept on the first night after release. While the majority (60 percent) stayed in a family member's home, about one in four stayed in their own home. Those exiting state jail, however, were much

Figure 3. Housing on First Night Out



more likely to have spent their first night in some form of temporary housing, such as a motel, boarding house, shelter, halfway house, or treatment facility (13 percent of state jail releases versus 4 percent of state prisoners).

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY

The challenge of finding and keeping housing continued throughout the first year after release. Although most men were able to find some form of housing in the community and were satisfied with their accommodations, few considered their housing situations to be stable or permanent. In general, men released from state jail had greater difficulty finding and keeping housing and were more likely to report problems with the neighborhoods in which they were living than did men released from state prison.

The majority of men (66 percent) returned to the neighborhoods in which they had lived prior to prison or state jail. One in three (34 percent), however, did not return to his old neighborhood

after release. Among those who resided in new neighborhoods following release, some did so because their families had moved while they were incarcerated (36 percent) or because they had lost their preprison housing (14 percent). Others reported intentionally avoiding their old neighborhoods in order to keep out of trouble (22 percent), to avoid drugs (3 percent), or for some other reason (25 percent).

When interviewed at two to four months after release, most men reported that their housing situations met or exceeded their expectations prior to release. More than half of men (54 percent) reported that their current housing was about what they had expected, while 41 percent said that it was better than they had anticipated. Only 5 percent of men felt that their housing was worse than they expected it would be.

Most men were also satisfied with the level of safety in their neighborhoods and felt that their neighborhoods were good places to live. When interviewed in the early months following

release, four in five men (80 percent) reported that their neighborhood was safe. Towards the end of the year following their release, this share had risen to 96 percent. In addition, more than three in four men (76 percent) felt that their neighborhood was a good place to live at both interview times.

Despite these positive impressions, many men face problems with their neighborhoods that likely influenced their ability to reintegrate successfully. At two to four months after release, more than one in three (37 percent) reported that drug dealing was a problem in their neighborhood, and roughly half (51 percent) felt that their neighborhood was not a good place to find a job. As shown in figure 4, men released from state jail were more likely than men released from state prison to report these and other problems in their neighborhoods.

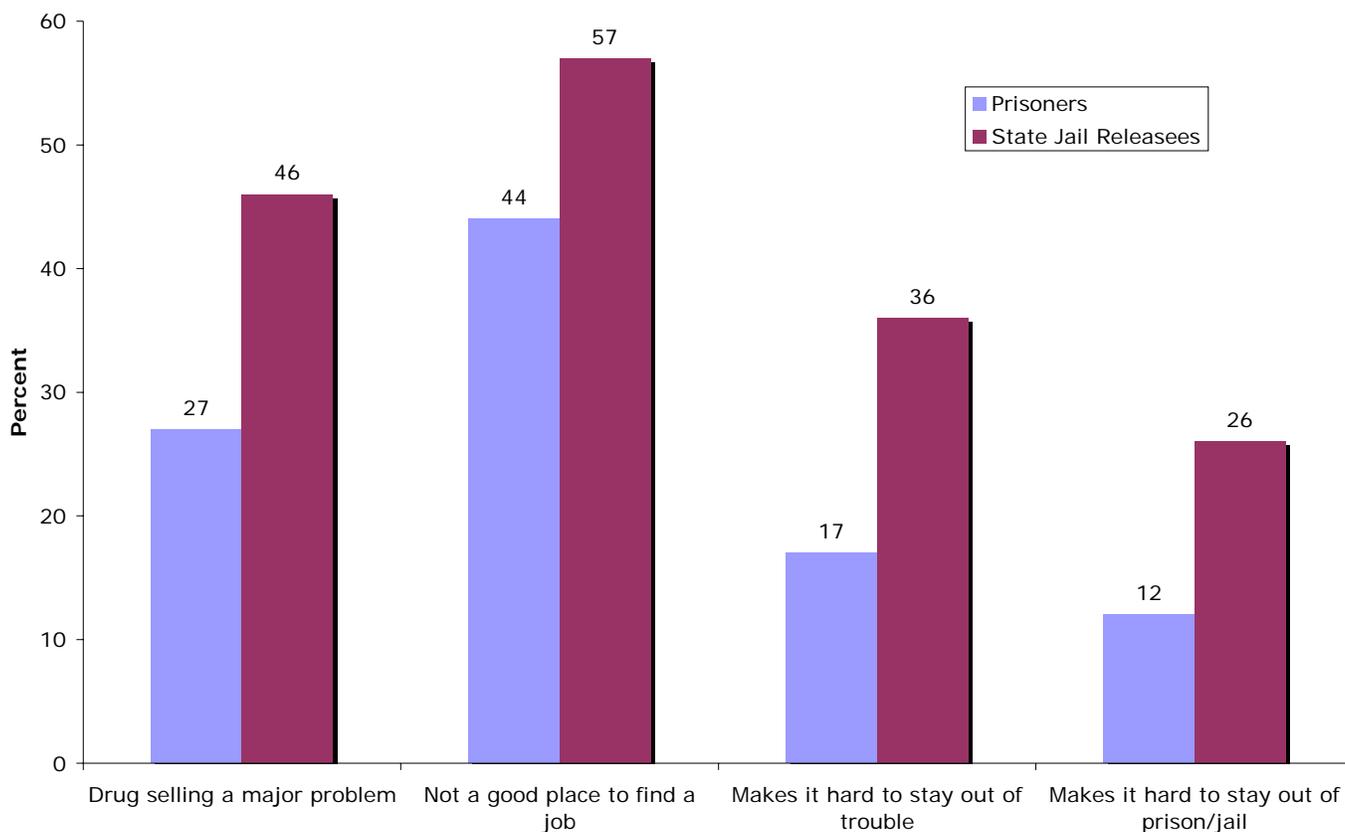
While most men were successful in securing some form of housing after their release to the community, a small but important share of men experienced homelessness. By eight to ten

months out, 3 percent of men reported having been homeless at some point since release. Interestingly, roughly the same share (4 percent) reported having been homeless during the six months prior to prison or state jail.⁹ In addition, by eight to ten months out, nearly one in five men (19 percent) reported that having a criminal record had in some way interfered with finding and keeping housing.

Even among men who were able to secure housing after release, many had difficulty finding a stable living situation. At two to four months after release, one in four men (25 percent) reported having moved at least once since release. By eight to ten months out, this share had risen to 39 percent, and expectations for future moves were high. Only about half of men (46 percent) reported that they expected to live in their current neighborhood for a long time.

In general, returning state jail inmates experienced housing instability earlier and to a greater degree than did returning prisoners.

Figure 4. Impressions of Neighborhood



When interviewed between two and four months after release, returning state jail inmates were much more likely to report having moved since release than were returning prisoners (9 percent and 40 percent, respectively). While this difference leveled off by eight to ten months, with 34 percent of released prisoners and 44 percent of released jail inmates having moved at least once, state jail releasees moved more frequently. Fifteen percent of returning state jail inmates reported having lived in three or more places by the time of the second postrelease interview, compared with only 8 percent of returning state prisoners.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT

Unlike housing, family relationships and support were consistent for most men over time, with 51 percent reporting strong family relationships at all three survey times, before and after release.¹⁰ At eight to ten months after release, more than nine in ten men (91 percent) expressed that they felt close to their families. Only one in six (16 percent) indicated that it had been difficult to renew relationships with family members since returning to the community.

Consistent with findings from interviews with male prisoners returning to Chicago and Cleveland, men returning to the Houston area reported receiving high levels of financial and emotional support from their families after release, often exceeding their prerelease expectations (La Vigne, Visher, and Castro 2004; Visher and Courtney 2006).

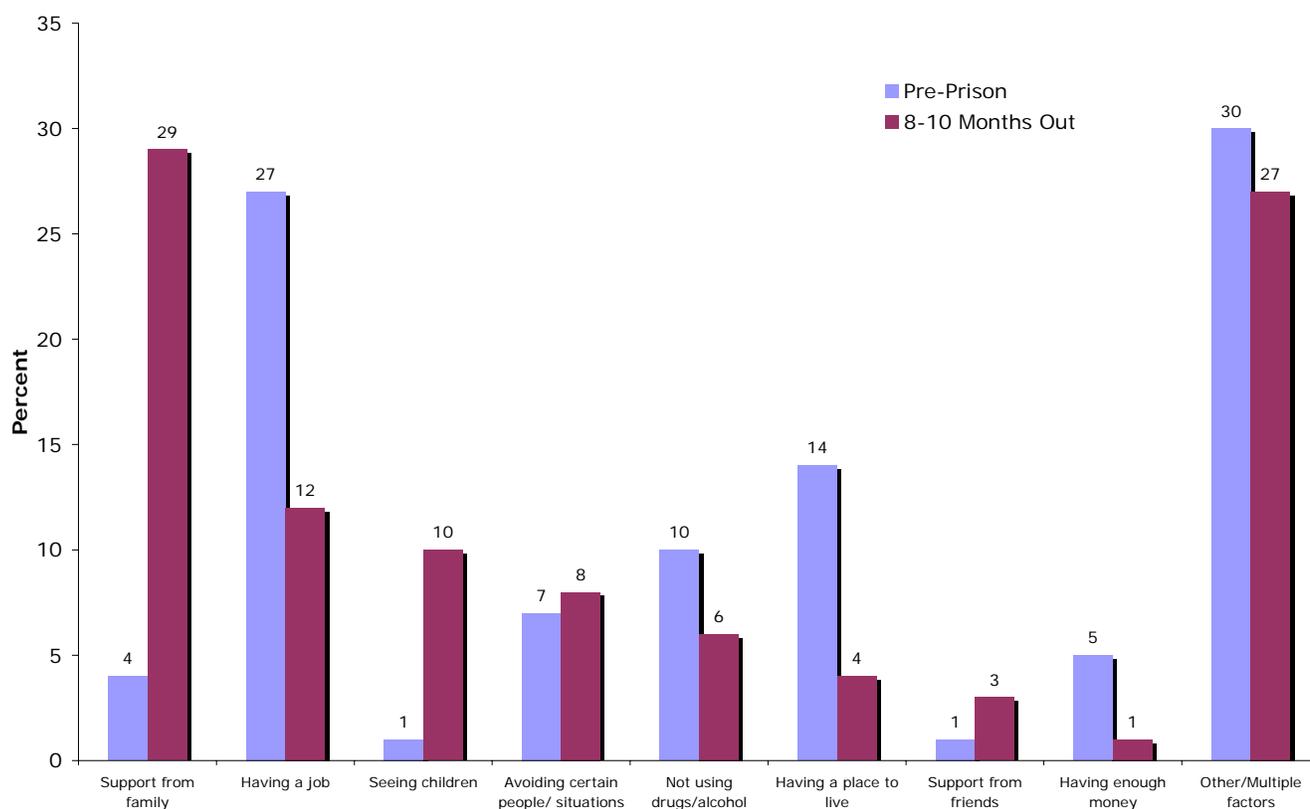
Most men relied on their families for housing on the first night out, and this trend continued for many men throughout the year after release. By the time of the second postrelease interview, two in three men (66 percent) reported having relied on their families for housing at some point since release. It should be noted that these family living arrangements may not always be positive influences, particularly for returning state jail inmates, for whom one in three (31 percent) reported living with someone who had used drugs or had been to prison (versus 9 percent of released prisoners), many of whom may well have been family.

In addition to housing, families provided a great degree of other tangible support. By eight to ten months out, more than four in five men (81 percent) reported that their families had provided them with some form of financial or in-kind support since release. The most common forms of support were cash, food, housing, and transportation. Men were more likely to receive financial support from parents (60 percent) than from other types of family members, including siblings (39 percent), intimate partners (21 percent), and adult children (5 percent). More than three in four men also reported receiving other forms of assistance from family members, such as help finding housing (88 percent) and work (76 percent), as well as overall emotional and “moral” support (88 percent).

This family support was important for postrelease success, often more important than returning men anticipated it would be prior to release. When asked shortly before release which factors would be important in keeping them out of prison, men cited employment and housing more frequently than family support. However, when asked at eight to ten months after release which factor had been most important in keeping them out of prison, men were more likely to choose family support than any other factor (see figure 5). Interestingly, although similar shares of returning state jail inmates and returning state prisoners reported receiving support from their families, returning state prisoners (38 percent) were almost twice as likely as returning state jail inmates (20 percent) to report that support from family had been the most important factor in keeping them out.

One specific form of family support of interest is the role that intimate partners play in reentry. About three in five men (61 percent) reported having an intimate partner at eight to ten months after release, and 97 percent said their partner played a positive role in their life. Half of the men said they had experienced a change in relationship status since being released from prison, the most common reason being starting a new relationship, followed by a change in decision to live with a partner (with

Figure 5. The Most Important Factor in Staying Out



equal shares of men reporting that they began living with a partner as those reporting that they had stopped living with a partner).

Children may also be a critical factor in reintegration. Over half of men (56 percent) reported having children under the age of 18. While nearly half of these fathers were in daily contact with their minor children at eight to ten months after release, only one in three (34 percent) was living with his children. Regardless of living arrangements, almost all of these fathers (91 percent) financially supported their children. Fathers of minor children showed middle-of-the-line attachment to their children according to a scale measuring the degree to which men played with, listened to, or placed limits on their children, and the degree to which they helped with homework or participated in school events.¹¹

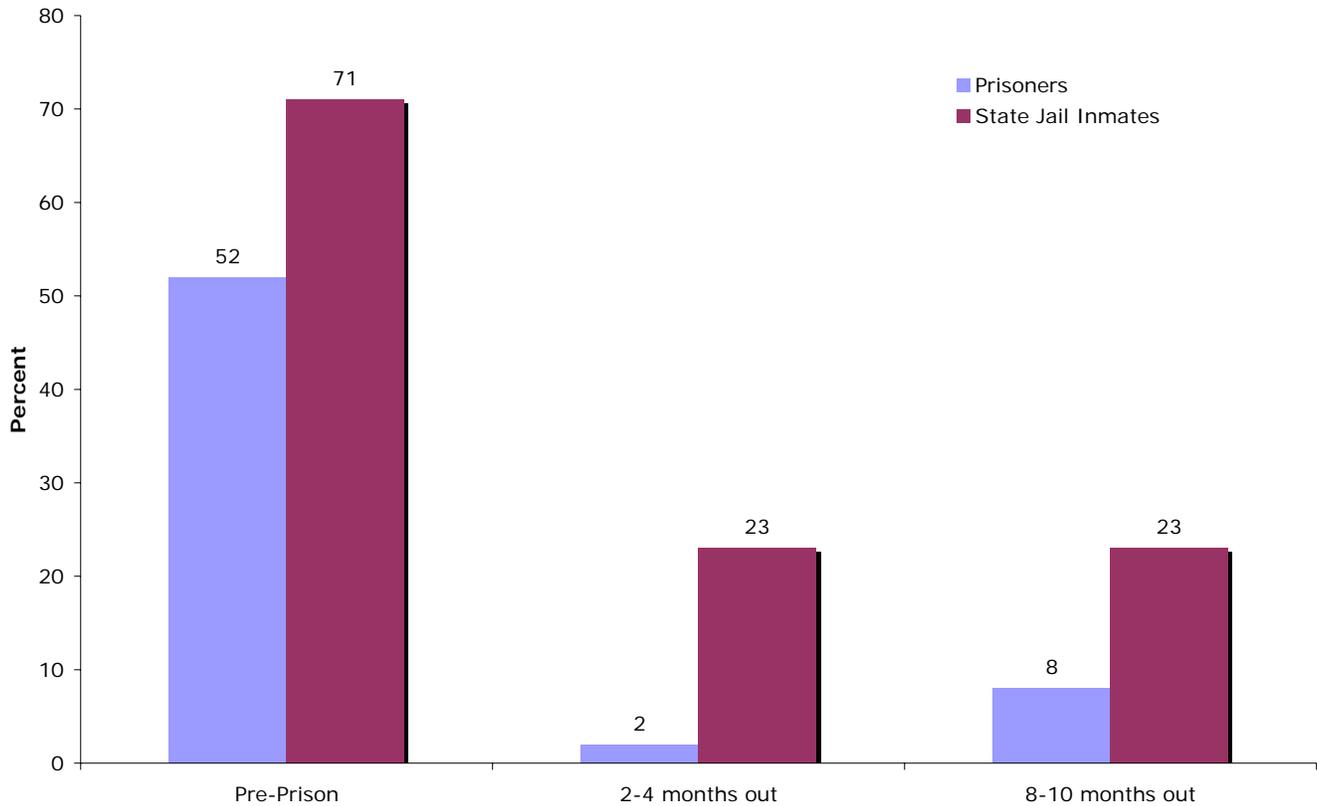
Although men typically viewed their families, including intimate partners and children, as having a positive influence on their ability to stay out of prison, some expressed that their friends and

associates have a negative influence on their behavior. At eight to ten months out, about one in four men (28 percent) felt that his friends convinced him to do wrong things. Similar shares (25 percent) reported that most or all of his friends had been to prison or state jail, and two in five men (42 percent) reported that most or all of their friends used illegal drugs.

SUBSTANCE USE

Indeed, avoiding the temptations of illegal drug use is clearly a significant challenge for this population. Substance use of returning men was measured using self-reported frequencies of use of illegal drugs and alcohol. The men in this study reported substantial rates of substance use before and after release, with returning state jail inmates reporting more extensive histories of substance use than returning state prisoners. At all three points in time, state jail inmates were more likely to use illegal drugs and were more likely to report frequent drug use than were prisoners (see figure 6).¹²

Figure 6. Frequent Illegal Drug Use



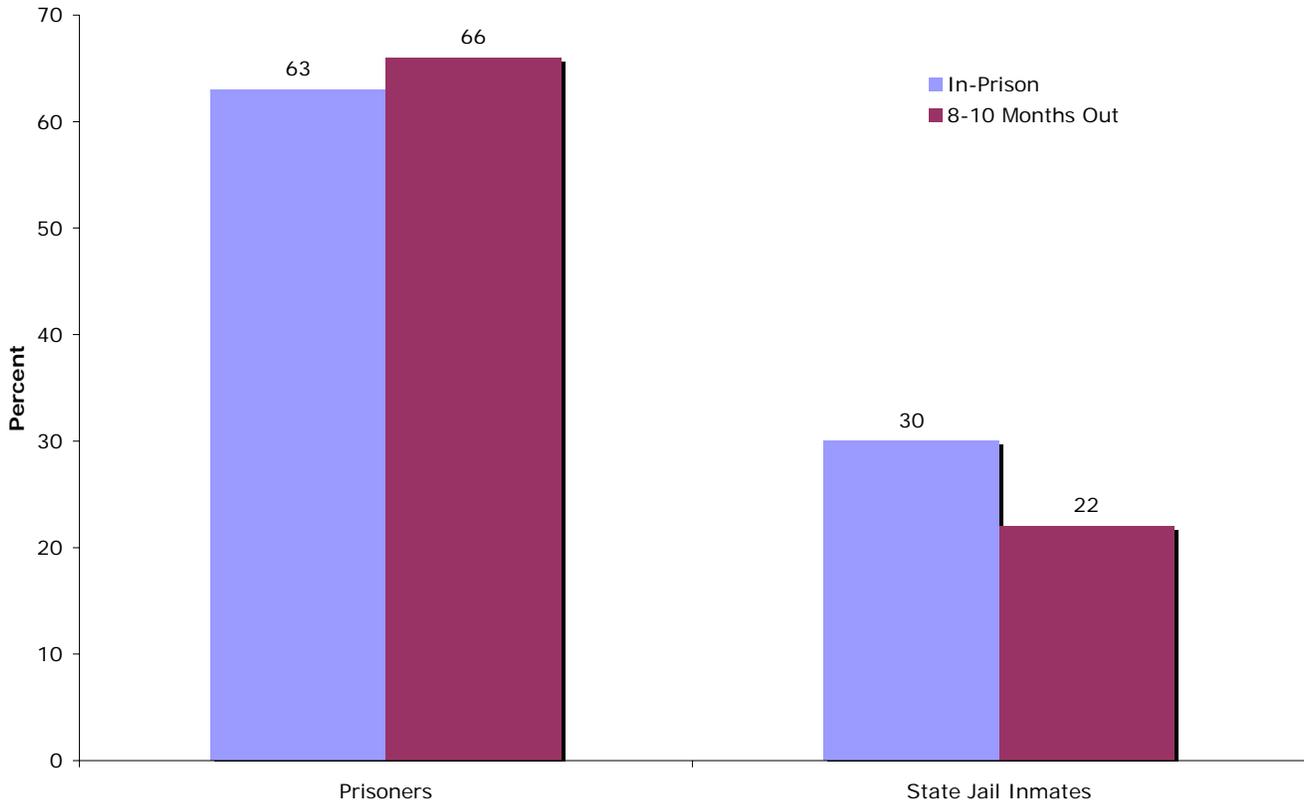
Among both state prison and state jail releasees about three in five men (61 percent) reported frequent¹³ drug use during the six months prior to their most recent prison or state jail term. This rate rose to 67 percent when frequent alcohol use was also included. In addition, more than one-third (37 percent) reported using drugs on a daily basis during that time.

Though self-reported substance use was substantially lower after prison than before prison, meaningful shares of men reported drug and alcohol use after release. Early after release, more than one in four men (26 percent) reported having used illegal drugs within the previous 30 days, and one in eight (13 percent) reported using illegal drugs frequently during that time. The most common drugs used were marijuana (18 percent) and cocaine (17 percent). Returning state jail inmates were nearly five times more likely than returning prisoners to report any illegal drug use during that time (43 percent and 9 percent, respectively) and were also much more likely to report using drugs frequently.

By eight to ten months after release, roughly three in ten men (29 percent) reported using illegal drugs in the past thirty days. Again, marijuana (21 percent) and cocaine (13 percent) were the drugs most commonly used. While returning state jail inmates reported consistent levels of frequent drug use, the share of returning prisoners who reported frequent drug use rose from two to eight percent. One in ten men (10 percent) reported using drugs on a daily basis.

Despite the fact that state jail inmates reported more frequent substance use than prisoners, state jail inmates were less likely to participate in substance abuse treatment both during their incarceration and after release. State prisoners were twice as likely as state jail inmates to receive substance abuse treatment while incarcerated, and released prisoners were three times more likely than former state jail inmates to have obtained treatment in the community by eight to ten months after release (see figure 7).

Figure 7. Participation in Substance Abuse Treatment



EMPLOYMENT, INCOME, AND DEBT

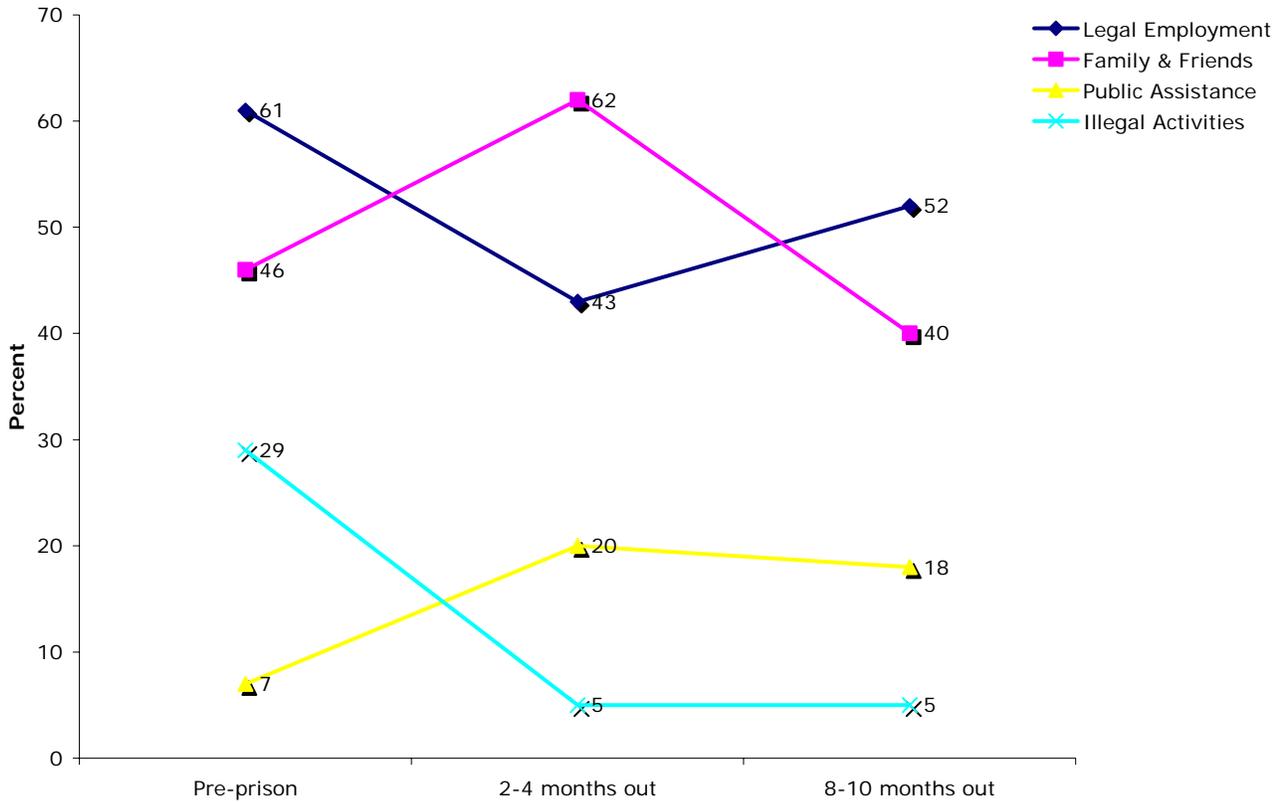
The men in this study left prison with many financial obligations, both new and old. Most (62 percent) owed at least one form of debt at the time of release, and all faced challenges in meeting their basic needs—including housing, food, clothing, and transportation. On average, state prisoners owed about \$643 and state jail inmates owed about \$3,000 in the first few months after release.¹⁴ By eight to ten months out, the average debt had increased to \$900 for state prisoners and \$8,254 for state jail inmates. These debts included fines, restitution, court costs, supervision fees, and child support, with the latter two being the most common forms of debt owed.

While many men were in need of financial assistance immediately upon exiting prison, these financial troubles were further compounded by a lack of photo identification and professional attire needed to find legal employment in the community. In addition, more than two in three (68 percent) said their criminal record had hindered their job search. Despite these

challenges, three in five men (60 percent) were able to find employment by eight to ten months after release, with state prisoners more likely to have found employment than state jail inmates (75 percent compared to 45 percent, respectively). The most common methods used to find a job were talking with friends and family, “walking in” to a potential employer, and responding to newspaper ads.

The men who were working at eight to ten months following their release from prison were employed in construction or manual labor (29 percent), driving or delivery services (12 percent), the food service industry (10 percent), or warehouse and shipping jobs (6 percent). It is interesting to note that most men (84 percent) with a job said their employers knew about their criminal record, suggesting that they were somehow able to overcome the prejudice that often accompanies a job application that indicates a prior record. This may be related to the fact that many men (73 percent of those employed) found employment through former employers or friends and family who could vouch for them.

Figure 8. Sources of Income



The majority of employed men (81 percent) worked full-time, and some (9 percent) held multiple jobs to try to meet their financial needs. The median hourly wage for all jobs held by those employed was \$10. These low wages, as well as difficulties finding employment altogether, led many men to seek out alternative means of financial support. Figure 8 shows the key sources of income reported by men before and after their release from prison or state jail. After release, men were less likely to report income from legal employment and illegal activities and more likely to report income from the government. Reliance on family and friends for financial support was high throughout all time periods but decreased substantially by eight to ten months out.

HEALTH

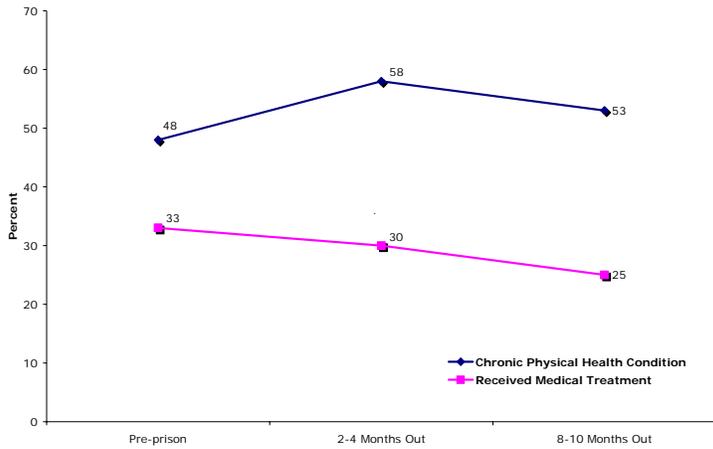
Although research has often found high rates of disease and mental illness among prisoner populations, most men in this study expressed positive opinions of their health. More than seven in ten (72 percent) reported that their health was “good” or “excellent” eight to ten months after release; however, over half (57 percent) reported

having a chronic physical or mental health condition.

The most common types of chronic health conditions reported by men while in prison were high blood pressure (43 percent), Hepatitis B or C (26 percent), and depression (21 percent). Eight to ten months after release, depression rates were similar, with 19 percent of men reporting being diagnosed with depression. However, based on a mental health scale¹⁵ which measures depression symptoms, we estimate that almost twice as many men (39 percent) were experiencing depression eight to ten months after release.

While both physical and mental health problems tended to increase after incarceration, treatment rates did not necessarily follow the same trend (see figures 9 and 10). Men reported greater access to physical health care in the correctional facility than in the community, yet those with mental health problems were more likely to obtain treatment on the outside than behind bars. Among those who were on medication while

Figure 9. Chronic Physical Health Conditions and Treatment



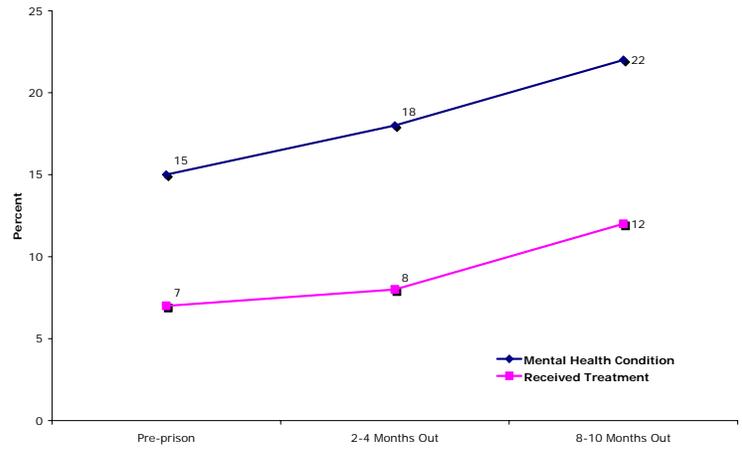
incarcerated, more than nine in ten (91 percent) received a supply of medication upon release. However, throughout the reentry process, many men did not continue to obtain medical care. This may be due, in part, to lack of health insurance: even after eight to ten months, only 39 percent held health insurance.

POSTRELEASE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Access to health treatment is only one component of a reentry strategy that should rely heavily on access to programs and services in the community. While most men (83 percent) released from state prison participated in a program or received services at some point in the eight to ten months after release, less than half of men released from state jail (44 percent) reported doing so. The most commonly accessed programs by former state prisoners were substance abuse treatment (56 percent), Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous (AA/NA) (45 percent), employment readiness classes (32 percent), general counseling (14 percent), and anger management (17 percent). In contrast, the most commonly accessed programs by former state jail inmates were employment readiness classes (23 percent), AA/NA (18 percent), substance abuse treatment (12 percent), and trade/job training (12 percent).

Thirty percent of all men stated they wanted to participate in programs in the community but were not able to do so. The most frequently cited reason for not being able to participate was being unaware of available programs. When asked whether various types of programming would be helpful after release, men most

Figure 10. Mental Health Conditions and Treatment



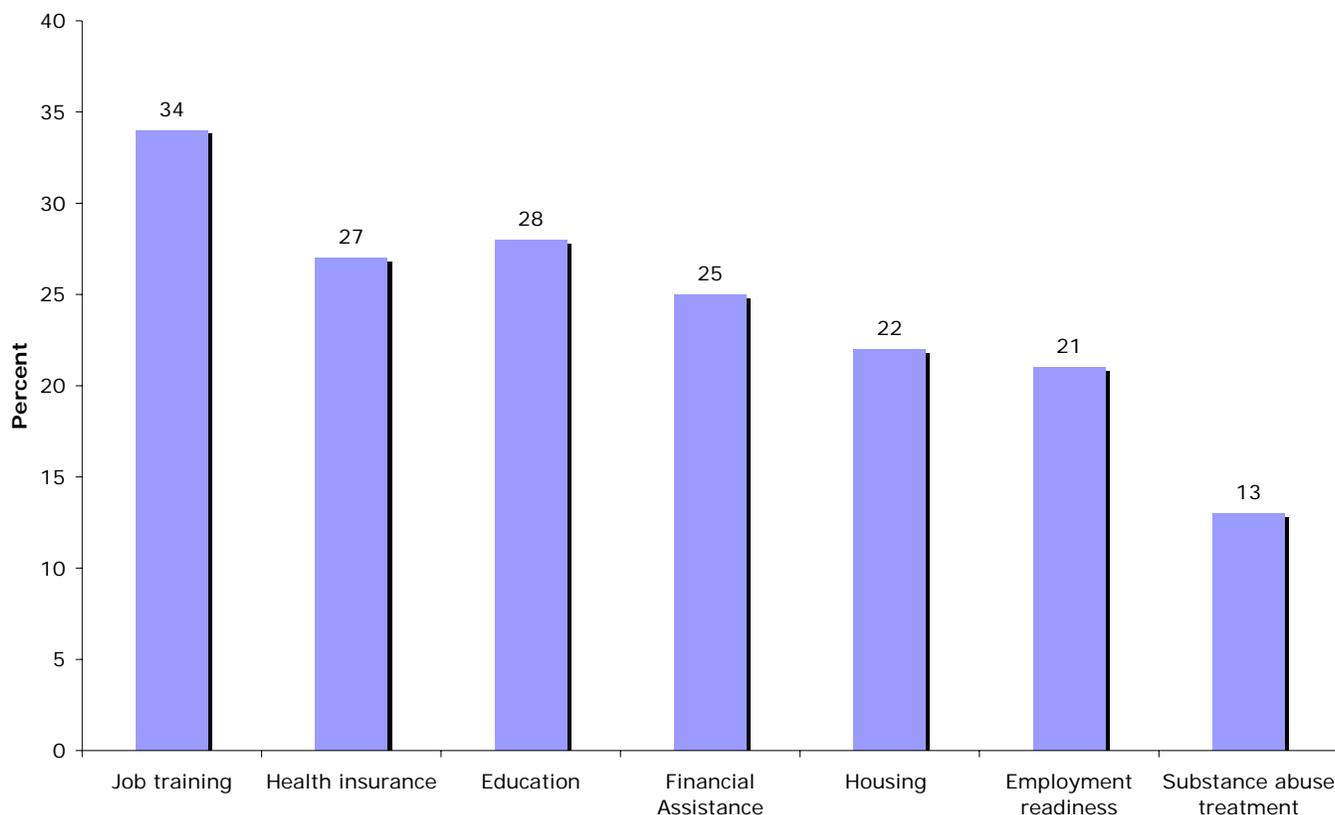
frequently reported that job training, health insurance, education, and financial assistance were the services they needed most (see figure 11).

The men in this study also found ways to become involved with their community beyond obtaining services and participating in programs. Eight to ten months following their release, half the men reported belonging to a community organization, with the most common type of organization being a religious institution (41 percent). However, involvement with religious organizations was not stable over time. Nearly one-third of men (32 percent) who reported belonging to a religious organization at the time of the first interview no longer belonged by eight to ten months out. Interestingly, belonging to a religious organization soon after release was associated with reduced substance use and lower rates of recidivism. Those who left their religious organization at a later point, however, not only lost these positive effects but also had a higher likelihood of substance use and recidivism.

PAROLE AND MANDATORY SUPERVISION

The community supervision profiles of released state prisoners and released state jail inmates are vastly different. While very few released state jail inmates are sentenced to community supervision, nearly all released state prisoners are assigned to parole or other forms of mandatory supervision. In fact, among the men interviewed for this study, no one released from state jail was under supervision, compared

Figure 11. Programs Most Needed in the Community



with 96 percent of men released from state prison.

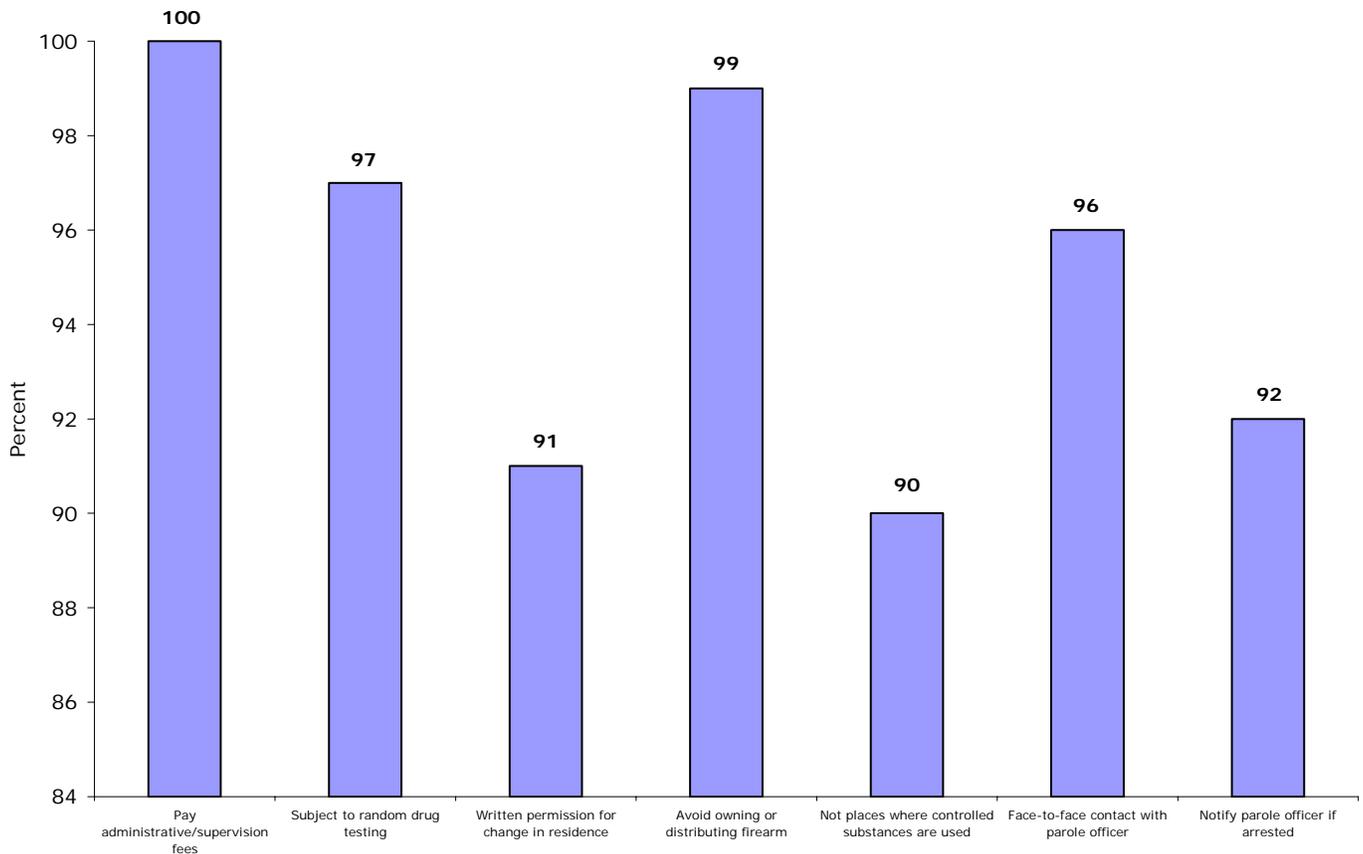
In Texas, state prisoners released to parole supervision are typically required to (1) report to their supervising officer at designated times/locations; (2) comply with the law; (3) secure the parole officer's written permission before changing residences; (4) refrain from owning or possessing a firearm; (5) avoid contact with persons with criminal records; and (6) pay monthly supervision fees and any outstanding legal fees. Other special conditions may include drug testing, program participation, counseling, or payment of restitution.¹⁶

At two to four months after release, nearly all released state prisoners (96 percent) reported being under supervision. Among those, 95 percent reported having seen their supervision officer at least once during the month prior to the interview. By eight to ten months after release, the share of returning state prisoners who reported still being under supervision decreased slightly to 88 percent, while the share who had seen their supervision officers in the

past month increased to 100 percent. Most (58 percent) reported having seen their supervision officer once in the past month; nearly two in five (38 percent) reported having seen their officer two or three times during that month; and the remaining 4 percent reported having seen their officer once a week or more during that time.

As illustrated in figure 12, among those under supervision, all were required to pay administrative and/or supervision fees, and the vast majority were subject to random drug testing. Most men were also required to obtain written permission to change residences, refrain from owning a firearm, avoid places where controlled substances are used or sold, have face-to-face contact with a parole agent, and notify his parole agent of any arrests. At two to four months after release, roughly one in four men under supervision (26 percent) reported having violated at least one condition of his supervision. By eight to ten months out, this share had risen to nearly half (47 percent). The most common violations reported by these

Figure 12. Supervision Conditions for Those On Supervision



men were associating with known offenders and failing to report for random drug testing.

Despite the fact that supervision conditions led to violations for many men, most men under supervision expressed positive views of their parole officers. More than three-quarters (77 percent) reported that their parole officer had been helpful with their transition back into the community. However, that helpfulness was largely due to moral support rather than actual assistance. When asked in what way their parole officer had been most helpful, the most common response was that the officer had been understanding (35 percent), with smaller shares reporting that they provided encouragement (11 percent), helped with his job search (10 percent), or helped finding a drug treatment program (9 percent). Perhaps the limited tangible support men received from their parole officers influenced their belief in parole as a useful reentry tool. Only about half of men under supervision felt that supervision would help them avoid future drug use and criminal involvement, with a similar share (53 percent) reporting that

they felt supervision would help them stay out of prison or state jail, and slightly smaller shares reporting that they felt supervision would help them stay crime (49 percent) and drug (43 percent) free. Regardless of the degree of tangible support from parole officers or their belief in parole as a useful support system, men’s attitudes toward their officers remained positive over time, scoring on average above 3 on a scale of 1 to 4 at both postrelease interviews.

REOFFENDING AND REINCARCERATION

Perhaps not surprisingly, many men in this study returned to criminal involvement or were reincarcerated during the year following their release from prison or state jail. According to both self-reported reoffending information and official data from TDCJ, former state jail inmates had higher levels of criminal offending and were more likely to have been rearrested or reconfined during the first year after release than former state prisoners.

In the first two to four months after release, eighteen percent of men reported engaging in criminal activity. By eight to ten months after release, roughly one in three men (32 percent) reported having committed at least one crime since release. The most common forms of criminal activity reported were drug possession (18 percent), drug dealing (9 percent), and theft (5 percent). Released state jail inmates (45 percent) were more likely to report offending than were released state prisoners (18 percent). This difference may appear to relate to a reluctance of returning state prisoners to report criminal activity to interviewers while still under parole supervision. However, self-reported arrest data suggest that this finding relates to a legitimate difference in levels of offending: men released from state jail (39 percent) were more likely than men released from state prison (23 percent) to report having been arrested during that time.

Official data from TDCJ confirm these self-reports, with one in seven men (14 percent) returned to custody within one year of his release from prison or state jail. Former state jail inmates (18 percent) were more likely than former state prisoners (10 percent) to have been reincarcerated during this time. State jail inmates were also reincarcerated more quickly than released state prisoners, at a mean of just over five months (157 days), compared with a mean of more than eight months (256 days) for returning state prisoners. Among released state prisoners who were returned to custody, three in ten (29 percent) returned due to a violation of their supervision.

UNDERSTANDING REENTRY SUCCESS AND FAILURE

In order to investigate the factors related to reentry success, we employed both linear and logistic regression analyses, including control variables¹⁷ and predictive covariates in models predicting employment, substance use, and recidivism outcomes for the 210 men.

Table 1. Predictors of Percentage of Time Employed 8-10 Months Postrelease

Men who...	Men who...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were white • worked in the six months prior to prison • earned a GED while incarcerated • participated in postrelease employment programs • had minor children^T 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were older • used any drugs early after release • had fewer previous incarcerations^T
...were employed a larger percentage of time.	...were employed a smaller percentage of time.

^T = p<.10

Employment

Multivariate regression analysis was employed to identify factors associated with men's abilities to find and keep employment after release. In order to capture men's employment experiences over time, the percentage of months worked after release was used as the dependent variable. These analyses indicated that the strongest predictor of employment success over time was avoidance of drug use early after release. In addition, men who were younger, white, had minor kids, had more prior incarcerations, and had worked prior to their incarceration tended to have greater employment success than other men. We also found promising results for education and job programs. Earning a GED while in prison and participating in a job program early after release predicted employment success (see Table 1).

Substance Use

In order to identify predictors of postrelease substance use, we ran models predicting frequent substance use (becoming drunk or using illegal drugs more than once a week) at eight to ten months out. As shown in Table 2, significant predictors of frequent substance use were having antisocial peers and engaging in any drug use (not necessarily frequent) early after release. Men who were released from state jail (as opposed to state prison), who were not white, who had been incarcerated as a juvenile, and who had more prior incarcerations were also more likely to use. Participating in

Table 2. Predictors of Frequent Substance Use 8-10 Months After Release

Men who...	Men who...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were white • exited state prison/were under postrelease supervision[†] • had minor children • had greater family tangible support • participated in postrelease substance abuse treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • had a greater number of previous incarcerations • were incarcerated as a juvenile • used any drugs early after release • had antisocial peers
...were less likely to use drugs frequently.	...were more likely to use drugs frequently.

[†] = p<.10

substance abuse treatment early after release reduced the likelihood of future frequent substance use. In addition, those who had minor children and those who reported higher degrees of support from family were less likely to use.

Reincarceration

While recidivism can be measured in many ways, we viewed the most reliable and—from a correctional policy perspective—meaningful measure of recidivism as reincarceration. Reincarceration was measured using official TDCJ data indicating whether the individual was back behind bars in a state correctional facility within the twelve months (365 days) after release. As illustrated in Table 3, we found that, controlling for all other possible measured predictors, men who were released to supervision¹⁸ had a much greater likelihood of being returned to prison, as did those with more extensive criminal histories, such as more prior incarcerations and a history of being incarcerated as a juvenile. Other factors associated with recidivism include frequent preprison substance use and a lack of preprison work history. Participating in various programs, however, helped reduce the risk of reincarceration: men who participated in job programs or substance abuse treatment behind bars, and those who took part in any community program early after release, were less likely to be returned to prison in a year’s time.

IMPLICATIONS

The research findings presented above describe a population of men who are in dire need of support and resources both behind bars and in the community. At the most basic level, men exiting Texas prisons require basic needs such as a picture ID that does not advertise the fact that they were recently released from prison, appropriate clothing with which to seek employment, and sufficient resources to thwart the temptations that crime might present as a lucrative alternative to survival.

An often overlooked reentry challenge for this population is the degree to which exiting prisoners take residence in communities where drug dealing is the norm and legal employment is scarce. While guiding the residential locations of former prisoners is not a particularly easy reentry planning goal to meet, it bears noting by discharge planners and parole officers. In fact, given the significant shares of prisoners reporting high rates of residential mobility, parole officers should take note when clients report plans to move, and do what they can to influence the choice of residence to more positive environments. Enhancing housing stability may be accomplished by increasing employment prospects for this population.

Indeed, while relatively large shares of men were able to obtain employment following their release from prison, far fewer men were able to sustain that employment over time.

Table 3. Predictors of Reincarceration One Year After Release

Men who...	Men who...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • worked in the six months prior to prison • participated in an employment program while incarcerated • participated in substance abuse treatment while incarcerated • participated in any post-release programming[†] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exited state prison/were under postrelease supervision • had a greater number of previous incarcerations • were incarcerated as a juvenile[†] • had extensive histories of substance abuse[†]
...were less likely to be reincarcerated.	...were more likely to be reincarcerated.

[†] = p<.10

Employment instability may well be related to housing instability. The fact that those who obtained a GED while behind bars and those who participated in job programs early after their release were more likely to be employed for longer periods of time suggests that these programs should be enhanced. Moreover, in the process of enhancing educational and employment programs, correctional administrators and service providers should consider expanding access to substance abuse treatment, as men who avoided substance use in the early months following release were more likely to be employed.

The challenge of drug addiction, however, is by no means a small one. Among the men returning to Houston, histories of substance abuse feature prominently, serving as the driving factor influencing postrelease employment, substance use, and return to prison. Participating in substance abuse treatment early after release, however, reduced the likelihood of later drug and alcohol use, indicating that investment in treatment programs is money well spent. Such treatment should be considered within the larger context of mental and physical health services. Men were sorely lacking in access to health services following their release, which could well hinder their ability to find and keep employment over time, opening the door to criminal behavior.

For perhaps obvious reasons, most research on prisoner reentry focuses on the challenges and needs of exiting prisoners, such as the drug addiction and employment barriers described above. However, it is equally critical to identify and build upon exiting prisoners' assets, resources, and support systems. Men experiencing postrelease success in Houston tend to be those who have minor children, who have families that are helpful in their transition home, and who have joined and maintained their affiliation with a faith institution. These family ties and support systems are critical to supporting employment and preventing postrelease substance use and reoffending. Such ties can be enhanced through increasing opportunities for communication and visitation while men are in prison, as well as by providing resources to families who are shouldering such a large burden

in aiding the successful reintegration of their returning relatives. In tapping family resources, however, correctional staff and service providers need to be mindful that not all family influences are positive ones. Thus, an important component of reentry planning should involve discussions with exiting prisoners on the positive and negative aspects of their family and peer networks, as well as strategies for enhancing the former and minimizing contact with the latter. And, for those men whom lack positive family support altogether, efforts to tie them to mentors and faith institutions in the community should be enhanced.

For all of the proposed enhancements to treatment and services cited above, the disparate experiences of those exiting from state jails versus state prisons bears emphasizing. As illustrated throughout this report, state jail inmates are more likely to suffer from extensive histories of substance abuse and are less likely to possess employment skills, and yet they are also less likely to receive substance abuse treatment or employment assistance. Simply put, state jail releasees are less prepared to meet the challenges of prisoner reentry and arguably in greater need of support and services. Focusing on supporting their reintegration and minimizing their criminal activity are in the best interests of public safety.

The burden of supporting the successful return of men from prison to Houston communities rests on many shoulders at both the state and local levels. First and foremost, the men themselves need to develop the personal resources and inner will necessary to refrain from drug use and crime. Texas correctional institutions can aid in the development of critical skills and engender an environment supportive of self-betterment through increased access to educational, employment readiness, and prerelease planning programs. They can provide more comprehensive and holistic support for men with substance abuse problems. They can also help identify supportive family members, facilitate conversations with family prior to release, and aid in the identification of alternative

community support systems for those men without family. Indeed, the community to which men return has an equally important role to play in reentry success, providing social support through faith-based and non-profit institutions and opening the doors to employment for those with minimal skills and criminal records. Clearly, efforts to support reintegration must be shared by all, as a comprehensive, collaborative approach will likely yield the greatest and most sustainable successes for this population.

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For Further Reading

The findings in this report focused on the experiences of men returning to the Houston area who completed all three waves of surveys. The larger Returning Home-Texas study also highlighted the experiences and perspectives of returning women, families of returning prisoners, and stakeholders in the community. For more information, please see the following reports:

Women on the Outside: Understanding the Experiences of Female Prisoners Returning to Houston, Texas

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=411902>

When Relatives Return: Interviews with Family Members of Returning Prisoners in Houston, Texas

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=411903>

Prisoner Reentry in Houston: Community Perspective

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=411901>

NOTES

¹ Email communication with Karen Hall, Executive Service, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, November 27, 2007.

² Email communication with Karen Hall, Executive Service, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, November 27, 2007.

³ Surveys and interviews were conducted by NuStats, Incorporated, an Austin-based survey research firm.

⁴ Both the mean and median age for the men in this study was 37 years.

⁵ “Frequent drug use” was defined as more than once a week. “Heavy drug use” was based on a 4-item substance abuse scale that measured the extent to which substance use had caused problems and behavior changes. The scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree and had a Cronbach’s reliability of 0.8 across both postrelease interview waves. Composite scores of 3 or more on a 1 to 4 were labeled as strong.

⁶ Based on the median value. The mean is 8.4 months.

⁷ This statistic includes those with Graduate Equivalency Diplomas (GEDs).

⁸ The survey did not ask what type of illegal activities generated this income.

⁹ It is interesting to note that not all of those homeless after prisoner were homeless before their incarceration: three of the six men who were homeless after release were homeless before; the other three were previously living with family.

¹⁰ Family relationship quality was measured through a scale composed of 11 survey items asking respondents to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a statement describing their family relationships (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree). Composite scores of 3 or more on a 1 to 4 were labeled as strong)

¹¹ Mean score was 1.2 on a scale ranging from 0 to 2; Cronbach’s alpha was .852.

¹² It is possible that these differences in self-reported substance use rates, with former state jail inmates reporting higher rates than former state prisoners, are due to the fact that state prisoners are more likely to be under supervision once released. Respondents who are under some form of supervision may be less likely to be truthful in reporting illegal drug use if remaining abstinent from drugs is a condition of supervision.

¹³ Frequent use was defined as more than one time per week.

¹⁴ These statistics are the median amount of debt owed for those men who reported owing debt.

¹⁵ We employed a 19-item scale borrowing from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, which yielded a Chronbach’s alpha of .886.

¹⁶ Texas Department of Corrections Parole Division Policies, <http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/policy/parole/parole-policies.htm#ch3sct2>, accessed 2/16/2009.

¹⁷ The following control variables were used in the regression models: age, race (white versus nonwhite), education (high school degree or GED), preprison employment (worked in 6 months leading up to incarceration), criminal history (incarcerated in a juvenile facility, number of previous incarcerations), substance use history (frequent drunkenness or use of illegal substances), and whether individual was convicted of a drug offense. In addition, state jail or supervision was included as a control factor. Since state jail and post-release supervision were so highly correlated, we could not include both of these variables together in a model. Instead, for each outcome, we ran two models: one with state jail as a variable and one with postrelease supervision as a variable. We also included the amount of time spent in the community since release as a control variable for the substance use model since the outcome variable was not standardized by time.

¹⁸Note that since supervision is so highly correlated with whether or not someone was incarcerated in state jail versus state prison, we are unable to determine whether this recidivism finding is due to the effectiveness of supervision, unmeasured differences in preexisting individual characteristics that cause someone to be placed in state jail or state prison, and/or differences in incarceration experiences between being housed in a state jail versus a state prison.