RETURNING HOME: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM A PILOT STUDY OF SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED PRISONERS IN MARYLAND

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Abstract

In 2001, researchers at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., launched a pilot study in the state of Maryland for a four-state, longitudinal research project examining prisoner reentry. The first stage of the pilot involved self-administered surveys with 324 prisoners in the 30 to 90 days prior to their expected release. These surveys presented many research challenges, including designing a self-administered instrument that would be accessible to the prison population, developing appropriate sampling and recruiting methods, and conducting research in a prison setting. This paper describes the research procedures that were employed to obtain this baseline data and presents some preliminary findings from our survey of soon-to-be-released prisoners. The results presented include descriptive information on prisoner demographics, criminal histories, substance use, and family relationships, as well as correlation analyses of prisoner attitudes and expectations for life after release. Implications of these preliminary findings and recommendations to researchers interested in conducting similar research are also discussed.

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Most research on prisoners or former prisoners has focused primarily on studying recidivism, or the failure to desist from crime. Recidivism is usually identified through rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration (see Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986; Langan & Levin, 2002; Wolfgang, Thornberry, & Figlio, 1987). Recidivism studies typically concentrate on identifying the factors that predict the reoccurrence of criminal activity. Such research generally does not examine the process by which an individual continues to be involved in crime or desists from crime, nor does it focus on a former prisoner's reintegration into society; rather, it focuses on one narrow outcome (e.g., rearrest or not).

Recently, scholars have recognized that the study of prisoner reentry and reintegration is similar to research on criminal desistance, which requires a broader focus on a longitudinal process, rather than on a discrete outcome (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman, & Mazerolle, 2001; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996; Visher & Travis, 2003; Zamble & Quinsey, 1997). Such a research approach would permit a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges of prisoner reentry and pathways to subsequent success or failure, which is critically important to reducing the costs associated with high rates of reincarceration.

In 2001, a team of researchers at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., launched a longitudinal study to provide systematic knowledge about the process of reintegration using a large sample of prisoners across neighborhoods, communities, and states. This project, called *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*, aims to answer two broad research questions: what is the experience of those being released from prison and returning home, and what factors influence a released prisoner's propensity to reoffend? *Returning Home* is a multistate, three-year study of the challenges facing prisoners being released from prison and returning home along five dimensions: (1) the individual trajectory of postprison adjustment; (2) the family context both before prison and after prisoners return; (3) the individual's relationships with peers both in prison and postrelease; (4) the community context to which prisoners return; and (5) the state-level context of reentry regulations and policies and other social and economic influences. *Returning Home* is being implemented in two phases. Phase I is a pilot study in Maryland. Phase II will involve implementation of the full research study in three additional states: Illinois, Ohio, and Texas.

This paper reports on the implementation of the initial phase of the *Returning Home* research design, a survey of soon-to-be-released prisoners, in the pilot state of Maryland. This paper has three objectives: (1) to describe the research procedures that were developed to obtain baseline data from a sample of soon-to-be-released prisoners; (2) to report preliminary findings from the prerelease surveys; and (3) to discuss future plans for this project and make recommendations to researchers interested in conducting similar research.

Previous Research on Prisoner Reentry

The transition experienced by men and women as they leave prison and return home to their families and communities has only recently been the subject of scholarly attention (e.g., Petersilia 2003; Petersilia & Travis 2001; Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). A handful of studies have examined the lives of individuals released from prison. However, these studies are based on small or unrepresentative samples (Adler, 1992; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999; Shover, 1985; Solomon, Roman, & Waul, 2001; Zamble & Quinsey, 1997) or were conducted decades ago (Glaser, 1964; Glueck & Glueck, 1950, reanalyzed in Sampson & Laub, 1993; Irwin, 1970; Studt, 1967; Waller, 1974). As a result, they may not be generalizable to the issues facing prisoners being released today.

In a break from previous research, Maruna (2001) analyzed 50 in-depth, qualitative life narratives of former prisoners (30 desisting and 20 persisting) and highlighted the importance of attitudes and expectations in understanding postrelease outcomes. When compared with persisting offenders, desisting men and women held dramatically more positive expectations about their future and stronger senses of control over their own lives. They blamed past criminal behavior on the negative circumstances surrounding their lives at the time, and they viewed living through such struggles as necessary to helping them become stronger, more well-rounded individuals. Maruna argued that such "rehabilitative storytelling" of past crimes enabled exprisoners to move on and "make good" of their lives, eventually slowing down and/or ceasing all criminal behavior. The *Returning Home* Project collected extensive data on prisoners' attitudes and expectations regarding their release. This paper provides a preliminary analysis of those data.

The *Returning Home* Project

The *Returning Home* project is designed to explore the phenomenon of prisoner reentry within five domains—the individual experience, as documented through interviews with prisoners before and after release from prison; the family experience, as documented through interviews with family members of returning prisoners; the peer group experience, as documented through prisoner interviews both before and after their release; the community experience, as documented through interviews with key community stakeholders and a sample of residents; and the broader policy environment at the state level, including information on relevant state policies regarding parole supervision, workforce development, drug treatment, kinship care, and assistance to the poor.

Instrument Design

At the center of this complex research design are the surveys and interviews conducted with returning prisoners. In order to gather baseline information from

soon-to-be-released prisoners, we employed a self-administered questionnaire, which was delivered to groups ranging from 3 to 29 prisoners[1] and proctored by 2 to 3 research staff. This method was chosen because of its successful implementation in previous studies (P. O'Brien, personal communication, 2002; Steurer, Smith, & Tracy, 2001) and to reduce data collection costs. Hence, the survey instrument was designed to be compatible with this type of data collection method (e.g., no complex sentences, response options, or skip patterns appear in the instrument).

The baseline questionnaire was, in large part, developed from existing surveys, articles, and reports on the domains of interest. Where feasible, published scales were used or were adapted for this study. (A list of the primary sources is available upon request.) In the baseline instrument, we were primarily concerned with documenting preprison characteristics, in-prison experiences, and expectations about the period immediately following release. The conceptual domains included: personal characteristics (demographics), attitudes and beliefs (e.g., readiness to change, control over life, spirituality, likelihood of future criminality), health status, substance use, criminal history, expectations for postrelease success/failure, employment history, financial status/needs, antisocial influences/networks, prosocial networks and activities, social support, service needs, and family background and support.[2]

The instrument was initially designed to be delivered orally to the group of selected respondents. That is, each question would be read aloud by a proctor, and the respondents would follow along on the printed survey, completing each question after it was read.[3] Pretesting of these procedures among 21 prisoners quickly revealed that reading each question aloud was a tedious process that was not tolerated well by the respondents, as those with higher reading comprehension levels skipped ahead and became impatient. During a subsequent round of pretests, few respondents encountered difficulty in completing the survey on their own, so this latter procedure was adopted for the baseline data collection. The survey subcontractor staff, serving as proctors for the survey, answered questions individually and helped respondents when they had difficulties.[4]

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[1] Group sizes varied tremendously depending on the size of the prison facility and the attendance rate for any given session.

[2] The draft instrument was reviewed by a panel of 17 experts with substantive experience in corrections, reentry, employment, and health, among other topics, and their comments greatly improved the revised instrument. We were concerned about the need to develop an instrument that was accessible to persons with low literacy levels; hence, the instrument was constructed to avoid complex sentences, response options, or skip patterns. The Flesch-Kincaid readability test, a subroutine in Microsoft Word, scored the baseline instrument at a third-grade reading level.

[3] This had been the procedure in a Department of Education-sponsored study administered to prisoners in three states (Steurer et al., 2001).

[4] No non–English-speaking respondents appeared in the Maryland sample, so we did not have the need for foreign language translation.

Sampling and Recruitment

For the pilot study, our initial goal was to recruit a sample of 350 male and female prisoners who: (1) had been sentenced to at least one year by a Maryland court, (2) were returning to the City of Baltimore, (3) were within 30 to 90 days of release, and (4) were representative of all releases for the year (in terms of release reason, offense type, time served, race, and age).[5] In accordance with Institutional Review Board approval of the study, only those prisoners who were 18 years of age or older were eligible for recruitment.

Working with the Maryland Division of Correction (DOC), we chose nine facilities (six for men and three for women) that were in close proximity to Baltimore, housed prisoners of a range of security levels, offered a variety of programming, and would enable us to reach our sampling goal of 350 respondents within four months. Thus, we aimed to obtain a "temporal sample" of the population of prisoners being released from these nine facilities over the course of a four-month period.[6]

The recruitment process we implemented was based on the realities of conducting research within a prison setting. We learned, for example, that release dates and locations of individuals changed frequently, and often by the time updates were entered into DOC's main computer system, the information was often no longer accurate. We also found that we were unable to create a regular interview schedule at each facility due to a scarcity of meeting space and conflicts with DOC classes and programs. Instead, we identified case managers in each facility who generated lists of soon-to-be-released prisoners and helped us schedule interview sessions at available times and locations. After receiving the lists from case managers, we selected individuals and grouped them in interview sessions and sent the schedules back to the case managers for review. Even in the course of one week, we would often learn from the case managers that several persons on the list had been transferred or released, and these individuals were therefore removed from the list of those scheduled for the interview. Once a list was finalized, individualized flyers were generated and distributed to each prisoner by correctional staff. On the morning of the interview, correctional staff would distribute passes to each individual invited to attend the session, indicating that attendance to the orientation to learn more about the research project was mandatory.[7]

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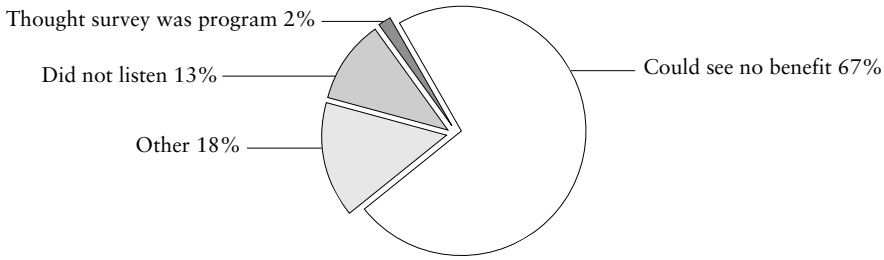
[5] For the full research design, the sample size will be 650 respondents per site (450 males and 200 females).

[6] We selected facilities in and around Baltimore because we were informed by the DOC that these prisons had a greater proportion of individuals returning to the city, and this decision also enabled us to limit travel costs. In addition, Maryland DOC routinely transfers men who are returning to Baltimore to facilities in Baltimore within a year of their release date.

[7] In other research studies of prisoners, most notably the *1997 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities,* sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and carried out by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, informed consent procedures are explained to potential respondents during an initial meeting or orientation session (see also Miranne & Geerken, 1991).

Of 720 prisoners who were initially identified for the study, 448 attended an orientation session. Following informed consent procedures, persons who attended this session were free to participate in the study or refuse participation. Refusal rates were extremely low among women prisoners: only 4% refused to participate. Refusal rates were higher among male prisoners: 34% refused to participate. Reasons for not participating varied among prisoners (see Figure 1), with the most common reason being that they could see no benefit to themselves in taking part in the study. Others indicated that they had thought the interview session was a program and when they learned otherwise, they were not interested in participating. Some briefly entered the room and when they learned that it was not mandatory for them to participate in the study, they left before listening to the study description. However, the female prisoners appeared to look forward to the change in routine that the orientation session offered, and they enjoyed sharing their experiences both verbally and through completion of the survey.

Figure 1
Prisoners' Reasons for Nonparticipation in Study



Discussions with and observations of our survey subcontractors revealed that there were two types of survey staff conducting the sessions: graduate students and young professionals, and members of the community who were primarily involved in service delivery jobs. By and large, the latter category of proctors was much more effective in communicating with prisoners and persuading them to participate in the study, so some mid-course staffing changes were made that lowered the male refusal rates slightly.

The sampling and recruitment processes described above were constrained by the realities of conducting research in a prison setting. Each step of the process—requesting lists of soon-to-be released prisoners, asking prison officials to distribute invitational flyers and passes to prisoners to attend the orientation session, describing the study and following informed consent procedures—has the potential to introduce sampling and selection biases. In order to identify sampling and selection biases at either stage of our recruitment process (orientation

and survey administration), we employed both binary and multinomial logistic regression. A binary logit model was used to estimate the prisoners' decision to attend the orientation or not, and a multinomial logit model was estimated with a three-category dependent variable: (1) attended and participated; (2) attended and refused; and (3) did not attend.[8, 9]

The binary model predicting attendance indicated that only two variables, number of prior incarcerations and race, were significant: those with more previous incarcerations were less likely to attend the orientation session and blacks were more likely to attend than whites. The results of the multinomial model indicated that men were more likely than women to attend and refuse to participate, and those facing a period of supervision after release were more likely to attend and refuse than those being released without postrelease supervision. Those with longer sentence lengths (i.e., the sentence meted out by the court) were also more likely to attend and refuse to participate, but this difference failed to reach significance at a probability less than 0.05 ($p = .058$).

The results that present the most important implications for both internal and external validity are that the number of prior incarcerations predicted nonattendance, and that postrelease supervision and, to some extent, sentence length predicted refusals. Thus, prisoners with extensive criminal histories and more serious conviction offenses were less interested in attending the orientation session and may be underrepresented in the sample.

Preliminary Findings

In this section, we present preliminary findings from our survey of soon-to-be-released Maryland prisoners. We begin by providing descriptive information on sample demographics, education, employment, criminal history, substance use, family, housing, and health. Then we describe and identify correlates of prisoner attitudes and expectations relating to life after release within these eight areas.

Demographics

Respondents in our sample represented a range of ethnic, racial, social, and educational backgrounds. Of the 324 prisoners interviewed (235 male and 89

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[8] These analyses are available on request.

[9] In the DOC data we examined for these analyses, 64 cases had prison admission dates more than one year after the date that a prison sentence was imposed—meaning that DOC personnel had possibly overwritten previously correct data when such individuals were returned on parole or probation violations. For these cases, we were uncertain about the validity of variables measuring sentence length, time served, and felony conviction. Therefore, we chose to include a dummy variable in the binary and multinomial logits to account for these cases; this dummy was not significant.

female), respondents were a median age of 34 years. In terms of race, black/African-Americans represented the largest share of respondents, at 83%, followed by 8% of respondents who identified themselves as white/Caucasian, and 9% of respondents who identified with other racial groups (see Table 1). Three percent of respondents considered themselves to be Hispanic.

Survey respondents were predominantly male (73%). Over two thirds were single and never married before incarceration (69%). Only 7% reported being married but 69%were parents at the time of admission. In terms of citizenship, more than 97% of prisoners were born and raised in the United States and 98% reported that they were U.S. citizens.

With regard to their current conviction offense, respondents indicated a mix of crime types. Over half (55%) were drug offenders, convicted of either dealing or possession. Burglary, theft, and fraud comprised the next largest group. About 27% were serving time as a result of a parole violation. Of those, 58% were for a technical violation and 42% were for a new crime committed while on parole. As of February 2003, all but eight of the survey respondents had been released from prison. Approximately 44% had served less than one year in prison this term. An additional 25% had served between one and two years, 21% had served two to five years, and the remaining 9% had served five or more years.

Education

Respondents were asked about the highest education level they had achieved both before entering prison as well as currently. The largest percentage (33%) of prisoners reported having a 10th to 11th grade education before prison. Another 16% had graduated from high school and 24% had earned a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED). When the surveys were administered, the share of respondents who reported a GED as their highest level of education increased from 16% before prison to 24% at the time of release—meaning that a fair number of respondents had obtained their GED during their current incarceration.

Employment

In terms of preprison employment, 65% of respondents indicated that they had worked for money in the six months before entering prison the current term. About half (48%) had worked between 31 and 40 hours per week, most commonly at jobs such as construction, installation, food service, and transportation.

Less than a third of respondents (30%) indicated that they currently had a job in prison, averaging 30 hours per week and earning an average of $3 per day (half earned about $1 per day). The types of jobs respondents held in prison were mostly food service and sanitation jobs.

When asked about the importance of finding a job after they were released, nearly all respondents (97%) agreed that finding a job was important to them and that having a job was important to staying out of prison (90%). And, while most respondents (84%) also indicated that they would need some help or a lot

Table 1

Characteristics of the Maryland Prerelease Survey Respondents (N = 324)

Age		
Mean	33.4 years	
Median	33.5 years	
Gender		
Male	235	72.5 %
Female	89	27.5
Race/Ethnicity[a]		
African-American or Black	262	82.9 %
White	26	8.2
All others	28	8.9
Hispanic ethnicity	9	3.1
Marital Status (preprison)		
Never married	217	69.1 %
Living with someone as married	20	6.4
Married	21	6.7
Separated or divorced	53	16.9
Other	3	0.9
Parenthood		
Any children	216	69.0 %
Minor children (<18)	177	59.1
Highest Educational Attainment		
Below 10th grade	46	14.7 %
10th to 11th grade	103	33.0
High school graduate	49	15.7
G.E.D.	75	24.0
Some college or graduate	39	12.5
Substance Use in Six Months Before Prison		
Daily alcohol use	81	26.5 %
Daily cocaine use	94	30.1
Daily heroin use	127	40.7
Current Conviction Offense		
Murder/robbery/assault	41	15.4 %
Burglary/theft/fraud	46	17.3
Drug dealing	94	35.3
Drug possession	53	19.9
Other offense	32	12.0
Criminal History		
Previous juvenile incarceration	89	27.5 %
Previous prison incarceration	202	65.0
Criminal Involvement of Family Members		
Family member ever convicted of a crime	189	60.4 %
Family member currently in prison	121	39.5

Note. Percentages are based on the nonmissing responses to each item.
[a]Respondents were asked to separately identify their race (black, white, or other) and ethnicity (Hispanic or not). The number of nonmissing responses to each question was 316 and 291, respectively.

of help finding a job after their release, 65% felt that it would be pretty easy or very easy to find a job. An overwhelming 88% felt that once they obtained a job, it would be pretty easy or very easy to keep it.

Criminal History

For most survey respondents, the current prison term was not their first encounter with the criminal justice system. Many survey respondents began their criminal careers at a young age: the average age at first arrest was 18 years, two thirds (66%) were first arrested at age 18 or younger, and 28% had served time in a juvenile correctional facility. This early onset of criminal behavior may not be surprising in light of many respondents' family and social backgrounds. Respondents were often not the first in their families to be involved in crime. For 60% of the respondents, someone in their family other than themselves had been convicted of a crime, and 40% had another family member who was also currently serving time in prison. Involvement with gangs, however, did not appear to be a contributing factor in respondents' criminal careers in this sample: 96% of respondents reported that they were not a member of a gang in the six months before prison.

Not surprisingly, respondents had several prior convictions, with 84% reporting more than one conviction, and 35% reporting that they had five or more convictions. Almost two thirds (65%) of respondents had served a prior prison term, with an average of 1.6 prior prison terms. About 53% of the survey respondents reported being on parole at least once in the past. Of those who had been on parole previously, 71% indicated that they had had their parole revoked and had been sent back to prison one or more times.

Substance Use

A history of substance use is prevalent among incarcerated men and women and can serve as a predictor of postrelease outcomes. Maryland prisoners were asked several questions about their drug and alcohol use during the six months leading up to their incarceration.

The majority reported some drug use (78%) and/or alcohol use (61%). For many respondents, their alcohol and drug use appeared to be fairly extensive: 66% said they spent a lot of time using, or recovering from using, alcohol or drugs during the six months prior to their current incarceration, and approximately the same share (63%) used alcohol and drugs more often or in larger amounts than intended during that time. Frequency of substance use varied by type of substance: one quarter (24%) of respondents used marijuana on a daily basis in the six months before entering prison; 27% drank alcohol daily; 30% used cocaine daily; 41% used heroin daily; and 23% injected drugs at least once in the six months before entering prison.

Drug and alcohol use had caused serious problems for many respondents. Nearly two thirds of drug users reported arrests associated with their drug use.

About one half of drug users reported relationship problems and arguments at home about their drug use. Almost one third of drug users reported missing school and/or work or losing a job as a result of their drug use. For alcohol users, arrests and arguments at home were the most commonly cited problems associated with their alcohol use.

Family

The support of family members is considered to be an important piece of the reintegration process. Families can play a critical role in providing food, housing, clothing, and transportation, as well as in providing emotional support to the returning prisoner. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their current relationships with family members,[10] their expectations for the future of these relationships, and the amount of emotional and tangible support they expected to receive from friends and family after their release.

Overall, respondents indicated that they felt close to their family members and considered them a significant source of support. About 40% of respondents said they had a close relationship with four or more family members. When asked about to whom in their family respondents felt closest, mother or stepmother was by far the most frequently cited family member (35%). Over three quarters (77%) indicated that they felt close to their family, and 89% said that they wanted their family to be involved in their lives.

Survey respondents had high expectations about the levels of tangible and emotional support that they would receive from their family after their release. About 54% expected financial support from family during the first months after release, and 71% expected to live with family members after their release. Most respondents (over 85%) also felt that their families would be emotionally supportive after their release; they felt that family members would love them, listen to their problems, and have a good time together with them. Surprisingly, respondents' perceptions of likely family support after release were higher than their reports of family support before incarceration.

Another important family issue for soon-to-be-released prisoners was reunification with their children. Returning prisoners have been apart from their children for many months—often years—and this long-term separation can create reentry challenges of its own. According to survey results, 59% of respondents were parents of minor children. Overall, however, prisoners who reported being parents believed it would not be difficult to renew relationships with their children, with 79% responding that it would be pretty easy or very easy to do so.

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[10] "Family member" was defined as a blood or legal relative, someone with whom they had a child in common, or a significant other or guardian they lived with prior to their incarceration or planned to live with after they were released from prison.

Housing

One of the more surprising findings from the prerelease survey was that finding housing after release did not seem to be a serious concern for soon-to-be-released prisoners: 64% of participants claimed to know where they would be living after their release. More than anyone else, mothers/stepmothers were whom respondents expected to be living with after release (39%), with the next highest group being boyfriends or girlfriends, at 19%. Fathers were less likely to be a source of support than were mothers, as only 6% said that they expected to live with their fathers after release from prison.

Health

About 88% responded that compared to others their age, their overall physical health was excellent or good, and over 95% thought it would be easy to remain in good health following their release. This self-assessment, however, may not be an accurate representation of soon-to-be-released prisoners' health needs. It is possible that the respondents viewed the question as comparing themselves to their peers in prison, rather than to the general population. About 24% of respondents reported that they were taking prescribed medication for a chronic health condition.

Attitudes and Expectations of Life After Release

Recent research on former prisoners (Maruna, 2001) points to the importance of individual attitudes and expectations of life after release. Prisoners who express a more positive outlook about their future may be less likely to recidivate, while prisoners who express a less positive (and even negative) outlook should be more likely to recidivate. In our survey, we presented respondents with a list of issues potentially confronting them after release (e.g., finding employment), and we asked whether they felt each issue would be very easy, pretty easy, pretty hard, or very hard to accomplish. We also asked prisoners how much help they believed they would need in dealing with each issue, and we offered the response options of no help, some help, or a lot of help.

Somewhat surprisingly, the majority indicated that it would be pretty easy or very easy to accomplish almost every issue after release. However, most prisoners (68%) also indicated that they would need at least some help in dealing with each issue.

As mentioned previously, nearly two thirds (65%) of the sample felt that it would be pretty easy or very easy to find a job, and 88% felt that it would be easy to keep a job once employed. Respondents also indicated that supporting themselves financially after release would not be difficult: nearly three quarters (72%) thought it would be pretty easy or very easy to do so. Respondents planned to primarily rely on their own jobs and their families to support themselves during the first month after release, as these were the two most frequently chosen sources of financial support (54% and 42%, respectively). Nonetheless, nearly

one third of respondents said they would need a lot of help finding a job and getting financial assistance after release. Also, 62% of prisoners who reported having some debt expected it to be pretty hard or very hard to pay off their debt.

With regard to housing, more than 70% felt that it would be pretty easy or very easy to find a place to live. Consistent with this finding, most respondents indicated that they already had a place lined up (56%) or that they would need no help finding housing (12%). The remaining third of respondents said they would need help finding housing.

Despite prior incarcerations and parole failures, respondents were also optimistic about staying out of prison following their upcoming release: more than three quarters (78%) indicated that it would be pretty easy or very easy to stay out of prison after release and that it would be pretty easy or very easy to avoid a parole violation. Since nearly half of the respondents were currently serving time for drug convictions, it is noteworthy that more than 40% expressed a need for help finding drug or alcohol treatment after release. Nearly three quarters also said they would need help securing transportation, getting more education, and obtaining job training, health care, and counseling services. One third said they would need help getting mental health treatment. Most respondents (82%) who expected to be on parole agreed or strongly agreed that their parole officer would be helpful in meeting these needs.

Finally, many respondents (77%) believed that it would be pretty easy or very easy to renew family relationships following their release. Of those with children, 79% felt that it would be easy to renew relationships with their kids. Most of the respondents with children (62%) also indicated that they would need some help or a lot of help finding childcare.

To explore the formation of prisoner attitudes and expectations, we examined their correlations with respondent characteristics (results of our correlation analysis are presented in Table 2).[11] Respondent characteristics included current age, age at first arrest, and number of prior confinements to prison. We also included three scales measuring family relationships, readiness to change, and self-esteem.[12]

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[11] Although not presented herein due to space limitations, we found that virtually all of the variables measuring prisoner attitudes and expectations were significantly correlated with one another. For example, prisoners who felt that it would be hard to find a job postrelease were also likely to think it would be hard to stay in good health (.353), and they were likely to express the need for help finding a job (.403).

[12] All scales range from 1 to 4. The family relationships scale included 11 items measuring whether the respondent had someone in his/her family to turn to for help, to talk to and spend time with, and who understood his/her problems. The readiness to change scale included 4 items measuring whether respondents were tired of the problems caused by their crimes and wanted to get their life straightened out. The self-esteem scale included 6 items measuring whether respondents were satisfied with themselves and felt important to others. The reliabilities of these scales were .962, .548, and .727, respectively.

Table 2
Correlates of Prisoner Attitudes and Expectations

	Current Age	Age at First Arrest	Number of Prior Confinements	Family Relationships Preprison[a]	Readiness to Change[a]	Self-Esteem[a]
Education and Employment						
Help getting more education	.110 *	-.006	.060	-.041	159 **	-.026
Help getting job training	.076	-.044	.084	.033	.234 ***	-.133 **
Hard to find a job	-.062	-.055	.046	-.187 **	.059	-.200 ***
Help finding a job	.078	-.047	-.002	.059	.128 *	-.009
Hard to keep a job	-.044	-.059	.082	-.131 **	-.063	-.152 ***
Financial Support and Housing						
Hard to support self financially	.160 ***	-.006	.091	-.268 ***	.067	-.204 ***
Hard to pay off debts	.108	-.022	.111	-.191 **	.151 *	-.053
Help getting financial assistance	.169 ***	-.010	.097	.003	.209 ***	-.051
Hard to find place to live	.135 *	.009	.077	-.345 ***	.117	-.254 ***
Help finding housing	.126	-.033	.023	-.173 *	.062	-.063
Criminal Behavior and Substance Use						
Hard to avoid parole violation	.000	-.061	.047	-.285 ***	-.029	-.215 ***
Hard to avoid prison	-.035	-.188 ***	.201 ***	-.210 ***	-.064	-.298 ***
Help getting drug/ alcohol treatment	.124 *	.171 **	.122 *	-.104	.142 *	-.089

Table 2: Correlates of Prisoner Attitudes and Expectations, continued

	Current Age	Age at First Arrest	Number of Prior Confinements	Family Relationships Preprison[a]	Readiness to Change[a]	Self-Esteem[a]
Family						
Hard to renew family relationships	.073	-1.31 **	.066	-.549 ***	-.076	-.311 ***
Hard to renew relationships with kids	.078	-.145 **	.149 **	-.323 ***	.020	-.270 ***
Hard to regain custody of kids	-.088	-.121	.092	-.083	-.021	-.012
Help getting child care	-.095	-.106	.019	-.141	.071	.055
Health						
Hard to stay in good health	.146 **	-.003	.110 *	-.231 ***	.164 ***	-.218 ***
Help getting health care	.224 ***	.074	.056	-.094	.191 ***	-.119 **
Help getting counseling	.100	-.021	.169 **	-.091	.170 **	-.027
Help getting mental health treatment	.290 ***	-.034	.177 **	.022	.265 ***	-.134

[a] For the family relationships, readiness to change, and self-esteem scales, higher scores correspond to stronger family relationships, greater readiness to change, and higher self-esteem.

*Significant at $p \leq .10$ **Significant at $p \leq .05$ ***Significant at $p \leq .01$

By far, respondents who had strong family relationships before prison had the most positive expectations for life after prison. Respondents with stronger family relationships expected it to be easier to find a place to live (-.345), keep a job (-.131), support themselves financially (-.268), avoid a parole violation (-.285), and avoid prison (-.210). On the other hand, respondents with few family members who understood and could help with their problems had the most pessimistic outlook on postprison life. From previous research and by their own words, these respondents should be at the greatest risk of returning to prison.

Also notable but not necessarily unexpected, respondents who expressed the greatest desire to change their criminal behavior and improve their lives were most likely to want help getting mental health treatment (.265), more education (.159), job training (.234), financial assistance (.209), health care (.191), and drug/alcohol treatment (.142) following release. Prisoners who expressed the least readiness to change wanted virtually no help with any of these issues. This discouraged attitude expressed by a subset of prisoners accords well with the "condemnation script" observed by Maruna (2001) among persisting offenders he interviewed.

On the other hand, prisoners with relatively high levels of self-esteem also indicated little need for help getting job training (-.133), or health care (-.119) after release. They were apt to believe that it would not be hard to find a place to live (-.254) or a job (-.200), avoid prison (-.298) or a parole violation (-.215), and stay in good health (-.218). Interestingly, these prisoners tended to have close family relationships, whereas those who were not ready to change had weaker relationships.[13] Following Maruna's (2001) research, the positive attitudes expressed by these prisoners emulate those of desisting offenders.

Finally, few of the attitudes and expectations respondents expressed were associated with the length or extent of their criminal careers. Neither age at first arrest nor the number of prior confinements was significantly correlated with prisoner attitudes regarding postrelease education, employment, financial support, or housing challenges. The biggest impact that criminal history appeared to have on respondents' postrelease outlook was on their perceived ability to avoid returning to prison and on their view of how difficult reuniting with family would be. Respondents who were first arrested at a young age and who had served more prior confinements were likely to view avoiding prison and renewing family relationships as pretty hard or very hard.

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[13] The correlation between self-esteem and family relationship was .231. The correlation between readiness to change and family relationship was .187.

Implications and Future Directions

Our prerelease findings represent the first stage of our research on prisoner reentry in Maryland and raise a number of questions that will be answered in later phases of our research. While we know much from our analysis of soon-to-be-released prisoners in Maryland, there is much more to be learned. Such additional knowledge can provide valuable guidance to practitioners and policymakers as they prepare to expand reentry efforts in the state.

We know, for example, that a history of substance use is common among prisoners in Maryland, especially heroin and cocaine usage. What this current research has not yet told us is to what extent prisoners returning to Baltimore are drawn back into a pattern of drug use and whether they seek and receive treatment for these problems. While substance abuse treatment programs do exist throughout the state, it is unclear whether returning prisoners are aware of them, whether cost or transportation issues limit their ability to access these services, and whether providers have targeted services to prisoners at the moment of their release from prison—when they are likely to be in the greatest need of assistance.

Prisoners' expectations for both family support and reunification were extremely high (although this varied by the extent of prisoners' criminal background), yet we know very little about whether these expectations are realized, and if they are not, what the implications of those dashed expectations might mean for reentry success or failure. This information would be useful in developing the content of family reunification programs both behind bars and on the outside. It could also help guide counseling efforts aimed at encouraging exprisoners to establish or renew relationships with prosocial, rather than antisocial, peers.

In addition, our preliminary analysis has revealed some information about the different types of reentry challenges that different populations might face. For example, older prisoners are more likely to recognize the difficulties facing them after release, especially concerning their need for financial support, housing, and health services. Those who have several prior confinements were more likely to report that it would be hard to renew relationships with their children and avoid a return to prison. Future analyses will examine the reentry challenges experienced by women, who often have different and more pressing family issues than men. Identifying the different needs for subpopulations of returning prisoners will help create effective programs, avoiding the "one-size-fits-all" model in favor of one that targets individuals' needs.

As mentioned earlier, this paper is an early product from a much larger study, *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*, which is examining prisoner reentry in four states. Many of the unanswered questions described above, and others, will be explored through other components of the *Returning Home* Maryland pilot, including postrelease interviews with prison-

ers returning to Baltimore, and interviews with family members after these prisoners are released. These interviews are critical to understanding the individual, family, and community circumstances affecting reentry.

Such interviews, combined with analyses of official records, will help identify needs of former prisoners, such as housing, employment, and health care. The longitudinal aspect of this study will help practitioners prioritize programs by focusing on some of these needs before others. Interviews with family members may help identify factors that have bearing on the returning prisoner's ability to stay drug- and crime-free, and enable us to explore the role that expectations—both on the part of the prisoner and the family member—may have on the exprisoner's reintegration experience.

Returning Home also explores the role of community setting and organizations on prisoner reentry through an assessment of local community resources, assets, and risks; analyses of community administrative and census data; interviews with community stakeholders; and focus groups with community residents. Interviews with community stakeholders are intended to shed light on gaps in local resources available to returning prisoners, particularly in the areas of heaviest concentrations of returning prisoners. Neighborhood focus groups can inform grassroots efforts to support returning prisoners (e.g., helping them find housing or jobs, and offering childcare services). And, by linking individual data on released prisoners to data on neighborhood indicators, we can begin to explore the influence that community characteristics may have on postrelease success or failure.

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