

# CHICAGO PRISONERS' EXPERIENCES RETURNING HOME

## KEY FINDINGS

- Families are an important source of both emotional and tangible support for released prisoners: when interviewed four to eight months after release, respondents cited family as the most important factor in helping them stay out of prison. Predictive analyses confirmed that respondents with family support before prison were less likely to be reconvicted after release, and those with negative family relationships were more likely to be reconvicted or reincarcerated.
- A significant share of prisoners returned to a small cluster of Chicago neighborhoods characterized by high levels of social and economic disadvantage.

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The Urban Institute, in 2001, launched a four-state, longitudinal study entitled *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* in order to examine the experiences of released prisoners returning to communities in Maryland, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas. This research brief presents findings from the Returning Home study in Chicago, Illinois. The first phase of the Illinois study involved an analysis of preexisting corrections data to describe incarceration and reentry characteristics in Illinois (see sidebar “A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois”). The second phase involved a series of interviews with male prisoners returning to Chicago, once before and three times after their release. In addition, interviews were conducted with prisoners’ family members and focus groups were held with residents of four Chicago communities that are home to the highest concentrations of returning prisoners (see sidebar “Returning Home Study Methodology” for more details about data collection and analysis). This research brief documents findings from phase two, the original data collection effort, and describes the experiences of prisoners returning to Chicago. In a previous research brief entitled *Illinois Prisoners’ Reflections on Returning Home*, we described the pre-release experiences and expectations of prisoners in our sample.<sup>1</sup> In this research brief, we expand on that information by comparing it to the experiences of those prisoners after release. We present key findings on a range of reentry challenges and describe the factors related to postrelease success or failure, such as employment, substance use, attitudes and beliefs, health challenges, criminal histories, and family and community contexts. This research brief is intended to serve as a foundation for policy discussions about how released prisoners can successfully reintegrate into their communities, whether in Chicago or in similar cities around the country.

## REENTRY DEFINED

The concept of “reentry” is applicable to a variety of contexts in which individuals transition from incarceration to freedom, including release from jails, state prisons, federal institutions, and juvenile facilities. We have limited our scope to those people sentenced to serve time in state prison in order to focus on individuals who have been convicted of the most serious offenses, who have been removed from communities for long periods, who would be eligible for state prison programming while incarcerated, and who are managed by state correctional and parole systems.

### INTERPRETING THIS REPORT

Research projects of this complexity are often accompanied by a number of caveats with regard to interpreting and generalizing findings, and this study is no different. The intent of the Returning Home study is to present the released prisoner’s point of view—a perspective not often represented in criminal justice research. This view is derived from self-reported data—a time-honored method of gathering sensitive information from a variety of types of respondents and one that enables rigorous analyses that cannot be achieved through ethnographic studies, focus groups, and various forms of journalism. The perspective on the experience of reentry presented here is both distinctive, because it is richer than official data, and representative, because it tells the story of all prisoners reentering society, rather than just those who avail themselves of social services or who are rearrested. Thus, the findings in this report draw from the perspectives of those who have had firsthand experience with the challenges of prisoner reentry. That said, it is important to bear in mind that, as with all self-reported data sources, our findings may include factual inaccuracies resulting from lapses in memory and the potential for respondents to overreport or underreport certain types of experiences and behaviors (e.g., crime and substance use). Nonetheless, the findings presented here are valid and as accurate as those collected

through comparable studies that rely on self-reported data.

Readers may view some findings in this report as new, different, or at odds with other descriptions of the reentry experience. This can be explained in part by the fact that prisoners’ perspectives of the experience may differ in some respects from the assumptions shared by many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. It is also likely that some commonly held views about prisoners are shaped by the experience of working with certain subpopulations rather than with all those who return to society. It is important to keep in mind that this research is based on a sample of all male prisoners being released rather than a sample of released prisoners who sought services in the community. It is also important to recognize that this sample represents a reentry cohort rather than a portion of the existing “stock” population of Illinois prisoners.

This report presents a unique perspective—namely, that of a representative sample of released prisoners sentenced to time in state prison and returning to Chicago. Our cautions about the study’s limitations with regard to sample size or other methodological concerns should not detract from the study’s potential to inform practice and policy and to shed light on the experience of leaving prison.

### PREPARATION FOR REENTRY<sup>2</sup>

Prisoners who participate in programs and services during their incarceration are often better prepared for reintegration upon release, as evidenced by improved postrelease outcomes and reduced recidivism.<sup>3</sup> The Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) offers a range of programs and services to prisoners, including education, job training, counseling, substance abuse treatment, mental and medical health care, and a specially designed prerelease program called PreStart. Because recruitment for our study was conducted through PreStart classes, it is not surprising that the majority (87 percent) of respondents reported participating in a prerelease program. In fact, IDOC requires that almost all prisoners scheduled for supervised release participate in PreStart.<sup>4</sup>

Topics covered during respondents’ prerelease programs included finding a job (79 percent), obtaining photographic identification (photo ID) (72 percent), continuing education (67 percent), and finding a place to live (60 percent), as well as accessing health care, renewing personal relationships, and obtaining substance abuse treatment (figure 1). However, despite the breadth of topics covered, relatively few of the respondents who participated in prerelease programs received referrals to potential jobs (25 percent), continuing education (22 percent), substance abuse treatment (15 percent), or financial assistance (12 percent) in the community. Less than 10 percent received referrals for health care, housing, and counseling services. Furthermore, only one-fifth (22 percent) contacted a community program

or accessed services after their release using a referral from their prerelease program.

In addition to prerelease programs, two-thirds of the respondents participated in a variety of other programs and services during their prison term, and half took part in more than one program. Life skills (42 percent) and employment readiness (39 percent) were the most common programs in which respondents participated, though a significant share also took part in substance abuse, anger management, GED/basic education, residential substance abuse treatment (RSAT), and counseling programs (figure 2). Released prisoners who

improved their educational level (e.g., obtained a GED) during their prison term were significantly less likely to be reconvicted.

Illinois prerelease programs typically provide instructions on how to obtain a photo ID after release, and even though only 22 percent of respondents had photo IDs at the time of release,<sup>5</sup> more than three-quarters (84 percent) had photo IDs when interviewed four to eight months after release. Respondents who had photo IDs after release were significantly less likely to engage in substance use or become intoxicated and to be reconvicted or reincarcerated.

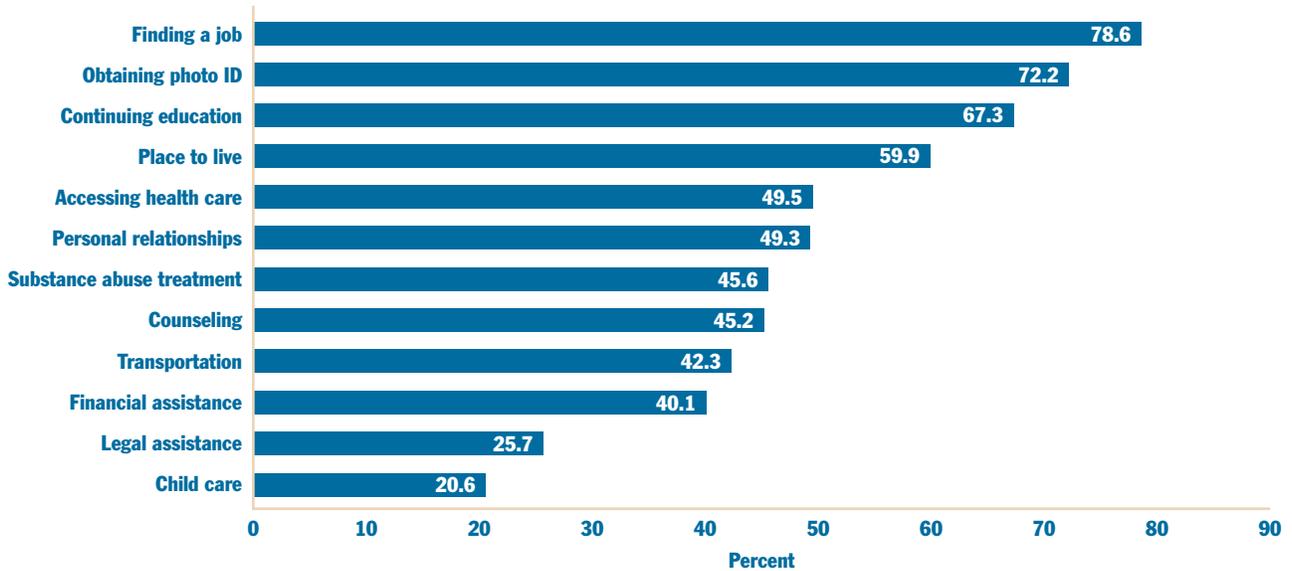
#### KEY FINDINGS

*(Continued from page 1)*

Respondents and community residents described these neighborhoods as providing few sources of social support and limited employment opportunities. Respondents who returned to disadvantaged neighborhoods were less likely to find work after release and were more likely to recidivate.

- Although most released prisoners returned to disadvantaged Chicago neighborhoods, these were not necessarily the same communities in which they had lived before prison. In fact, 45 percent of those interviewed after release resided in different neighborhoods, primarily because they wanted to avoid trouble in old neighborhoods or because their families had moved.
- Prior to release, most respondents expressed a strong desire to change and held positive attitudes, especially feelings of high self-esteem and control over life. These positive attitudes further improved after release. Respondents who exhibited negative attitudes, such as negative views about the legal system and dissatisfaction with police, tended to be younger and were less likely to have worked in the six months prior to incarceration.
- Respondents had limited success in finding employment after release: forty-four percent had worked for at least one week at the time of their postrelease interview. Postrelease employment, as measured by the number of weeks worked, was significantly higher for respondents who had worked before prison, had a work release job during prison, had an intimate partner (e.g., spouse, girlfriend), and/or had not used drugs or been intoxicated after release.
- Though 66 percent of respondents reported some drug use, and 48 percent reported alcohol intoxication prior to prison, only 11 and 8 percent, respectively, reported drug use or intoxication after release. Respondents who avoided substance use after release had higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression, were more likely to have worked for at least one week after release, and tended to live in neighborhoods where drug selling was not a serious problem.
- Three out of ten respondents reported suffering from chronic physical health conditions, and small but important shares showed symptoms of depression (10 percent) and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (4 percent). A total of 81 percent did not have health care coverage after release.
- Twenty-two percent of respondents were reconvicted within 11 months of release, and close to one-third (31 percent) were reincarcerated within 13 months of release. Nearly half of those reincarcerated (15 percent of the sample) were returned on parole revocations. The likelihood of recidivism was related to a number of factors, including extensive prior criminal histories, negative family relationships, postrelease drug use or intoxication, unemployment, and living in a neighborhood characterized by crime and disorder.

**FIGURE 1. Topics Covered during Prerelease Programs (N = 281)**

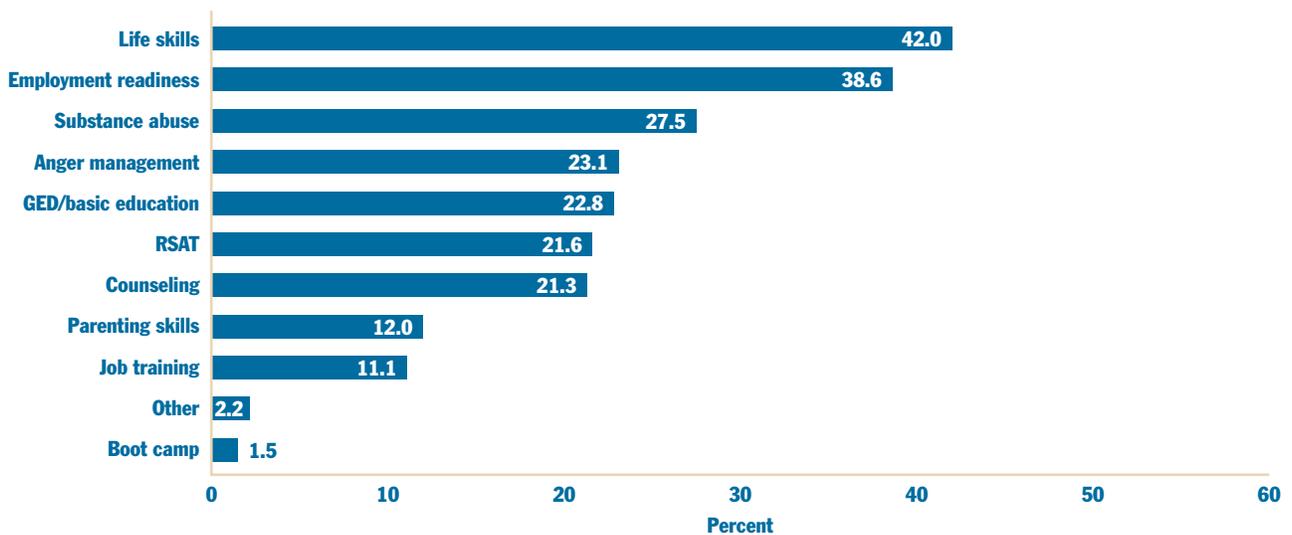


### ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Common sense dictates that prisoners' attitudes toward themselves and others will affect their ability to reunite with families, friends, and communities after release. Previous research suggests that prisoners with higher

motivation levels are more likely to succeed after prison.<sup>6</sup> To assess respondent attitudes and beliefs, we asked a number of questions regarding readiness to change, self-esteem, control over life, and feelings toward the legal system and the police.<sup>7</sup> Most respondents indicated a

**FIGURE 2. Prison Programs and Services in Which Respondents Participated (N = 324)**



### A PORTRAIT OF PRISONER REENTRY IN ILLINOIS

This research brief stems from an earlier research inquiry into incarceration and release trends in Illinois over the past three decades, as well as an examination of the cohort of Illinois prisoners released in 2001. Results were published in a research monograph entitled *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois*.<sup>8</sup> Some key findings from the *Portrait* include the following:

- Between 1970 and 2001, the Illinois prison population increased by more than 500 percent, from about 7,300 to 44,300 prisoners, reflecting a dramatic jump in drug-law violations and parole revocations, and a steady increase in violent offense convictions.
- Along with Illinois's rising prison population came a significant increase in the number of prisoners released annually. In 2001, the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) released more than 30,000 prisoners, nearly a 160 percent increase since 1983.
- Illinois prisoners released in 2001 served an average of 16 months of an average sentence of four and a half years. Nearly two-thirds had been incarcerated for less than one year, and the vast majority was released through nondiscretionary means, such as mandatory release or sentence expiration.
- The largest share (51 percent) of released prisoners returning to Illinois went to Chicago, and one-third of them returned to just 6 of Chicago's 77 communities. These six communities (Austin, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, Englewood, West Englewood, and East Garfield Park) are characterized by high levels of poverty, crime, and other measures of social disadvantage. Only a handful of services for ex-prisoners are located in or near these neighborhoods.

Government leaders, corrections officials, local organizations, and service providers are keenly aware of the reentry challenges in Illinois, and they have been using both research and programmatic knowledge to address them. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Justice awarded IDOC

\$2 million as part of the Going Home initiative, which supports state-run reentry programs nationwide. One year later, Governor Rod Blagojevich announced the reopening of the Sheridan Correctional Center, which offers substance abuse treatment to inmates and represents an important step toward helping reduce drug-related recidivism and victimization. Other Illinois organizations and agencies that have made reentry an important item on their agendas include the Safer Foundation, Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC), the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS), Project JOBS, and the Illinois Workforce Advantage Program.

These efforts are positive steps toward improving reentry outcomes at the state level and in the city of Chicago, the most critical reentry location in the state. The premise of these programs is that a well-designed reentry system can enhance public safety, reduce returns to prison, control corrections expenditures, and help prisoners achieve successful long-term reintegration. The *Portrait* raised questions that could be answered only through one-on-one interviews with released prisoners over time, including the following:

- What are the family circumstances of released prisoners, and what role does the family, as well as other peer and interpersonal relationships, play in facilitating or preventing employment, substance use, and recidivism after release?
- What is the impact of prisoner reentry on communities, and how do community characteristics affect individuals' postrelease outcomes?
- What factors predict employment outcomes for returning prisoners, in terms of both finding and keeping a job?
- How do other challenges of prisoner reentry vary across different populations (e.g., youthful offenders, those with more extensive criminal histories)?

The answers to these and related questions can found in this research brief.

strong desire to change their future behavior. Almost all *agreed or strongly agreed* that they wanted to get their lives straightened out (97 percent), wanted to give up friends and hangouts that got them into trouble (90 percent), and were tired of the problems caused by their crimes (85 percent). Furthermore, while over half (54 percent) had high levels of self-esteem prior to

release, self-esteem levels increased significantly after release, when 78 percent exhibited high self-esteem. Approximately two-thirds of respondents had strong feelings of control over their lives at prerelease (62 percent) and at postrelease (63 percent) interviews, and scale scores for the same respondents increased slightly (by 4 percent) from pre- to postrelease.<sup>9</sup>

We also inquired about respondents' attitudes toward religious institutions and their spiritual beliefs, which may influence decisions to take a more positive course in life following release. Although most respondents (70 percent) reported high levels of spirituality prior to release, less than one-fifth (14 percent) belonged to religious organizations when interviewed four to eight months after release. Also, more respondents reported praying or meditating at least a few times per week before release (71 percent) than did after release (62 percent), and more reported reading the Bible, Koran, or other religious literature at least a few times per week before release (51 percent) than did after release (30 percent).

Legal cynicism is the extent to which individuals consider laws or societal rules not binding;<sup>10</sup> thus, one might expect high degrees of legal cynicism among incarcerated individuals. However, only 19 percent of the prisoners in our sample reported high levels of legal cynicism. We were also interested in respondents' attitudes toward police in their communities because nega-

tive attitudes may contribute to adverse encounters with police upon a prisoner's return. Forty-three percent of respondents reported low satisfaction with police. Younger respondents and those who had not worked in the six months prior to incarceration reported significantly higher levels of legal cynicism and dissatisfaction with police.

Analysis of postrelease outcomes showed that attitudes and beliefs played some role in respondents' abilities to reenter communities successfully. Prisoners who expressed clear intentions to commit crime or use drugs after their release were nearly twice as likely to be reconvicted, while those who, prior to release, anticipated reentry difficulties (e.g., they thought it would be hard to renew family relationships or to support themselves after release) were less likely to be reconvicted or reincarcerated. Respondents with high levels of self-esteem after release had a significantly lower likelihood of using drugs or being intoxicated after release, as did those who encountered fewer reintegration difficulties after release.

#### PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

- The prerelease sample consisted of 400 male respondents.
- The median age of respondents was 34 years.
- Eighty-three percent were African American, 5 percent were white, and the remaining 12 percent identified with other racial groups. Across all racial groups, 10 percent identified themselves as Hispanic.
- Just over half (51 percent) were single and had never been married, and 61 percent had children under the age of 18 years.
- Most (87 percent) had at least one prior conviction, and 35 percent reported four or more. Three-quarters (75 percent) had served time in prison before, and 34 percent had spent time in a juvenile correctional facility. Seventy percent were first arrested before age 18.
- Forty-six percent had a drug offense as their most serious current charge, and the majority reported some drug use (66 percent) and/or alcohol intoxication (48 percent) prior to prison, with marijuana, heroin, and cocaine topping the list of drugs.
- Twenty-three percent had been serving time for violent offenses such as assault and robbery, and 30 percent had been incarcerated for property offenses such as burglary and theft.
- The median time served on their most recent prison term was 18 months.
- Forty-one percent had high school diplomas before entering prison, and 34 percent had been fired from a job at least once.
- Sixty-one percent had been employed during the six months prior to prison, typically in food service, construction, or maintenance jobs. Sixty percent reported that some or all of their preprison income came from illegal activity.

### MOMENT OF RELEASE<sup>11</sup>

With the exception of our findings from the Maryland Returning Home study, as well as a study by the Vera Institute of Justice,<sup>12</sup> very little is known about the circumstances surrounding the initial hours, days, and weeks after a person’s release from prison. While anecdotal evidence suggests that prisoners may be released at any hour of the day or night, without any place to go, the reentry experiences of most of the respondents in our sample were more positive. Most (91 percent) were released during normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and were thus able to access social services and other agencies and businesses as needed. However, only one-fifth (22 percent) had a photo ID at the time of release. Twenty-four percent were met at the prison gates by family or friends. Exactly three-quarters received a ticket or money for transportation, and most took a bus (73 percent) or train (8 percent) to their destination. On the first night out of prison, nearly all respondents found housing at a relative’s home (62 percent) or at their own home (20 percent). None reported sleeping on the street, though a few stayed at shelters or transitional facilities (figure 3).

Few respondents reported any significant financial resources at the time of their release, and a large portion of the sample had preexisting financial obligations, such as child support. A majority (84 percent) of respondents received some “gate money”—funds provided by IDOC—at release, typically \$10 (53 percent of the entire sample). Almost half (48 percent) reported having no

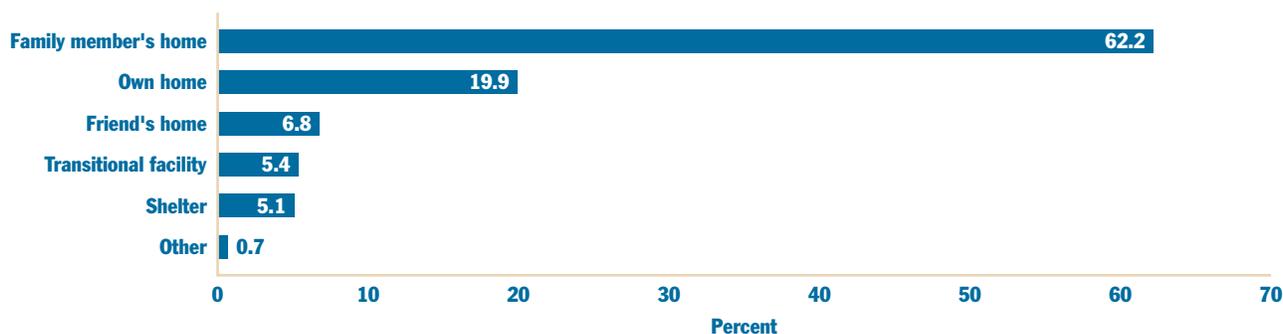
money from any other source, with a median amount of \$4 among all respondents.

### FAMILY AND PEERS

While the effects of incarceration on families and particularly on children have been the focus of criminal justice research, little is known about the inverse relationship—the effects of family relationships and support on the success or failure of released prisoners. Respondents in our sample reported having four or more close family relationships before (46 percent), during (43 percent), and after (52 percent) their incarceration. Respondents most frequently cited mothers and stepmothers as the family member to whom they felt closest. Prior to prison, just over half of the sample was single and had never been married, one-quarter was married or lived with someone as married, and 61 percent had children under the age of 18. Of those with minor children, 50 percent provided some level of financial support to their children, and 42 percent had a minor child living with them just prior to entering prison.

When asked about expectations for family support after release, most respondents reported high expectations of both emotional and tangible support. These expectations were often met or exceeded upon the prisoner’s release. Nearly half (45 percent) of respondents expected some type of financial support or assistance from family members after release. After release, 59 percent received income from a spouse, family, or friends, and nearly all

FIGURE 3. Where Respondents Slept First Night Out (N = 296)



(92 percent) reported having someone in their family to provide them with financial support. Almost three-quarters of the sample expected to live with family, and 88 percent were living with family four to eight months after release. Although respondents also expected to rely on family as a means of finding employment, most did not find employment through their family members. Almost half (49 percent) had expected to talk to relatives as a means of getting a job, yet only 33 percent of those currently employed after release had talked to relatives to find their job.

The importance of family was most apparent to respondents after their release from prison. Prior to release, family support was listed as one of many factors that prisoners felt would be important in helping them avoid prison, with 58 percent of respondents citing family support as important. After release, support from family was cited more frequently than any other factor, by 71 percent of respondents. Conversely, family relationships and dynamics can pose certain risks for released prisoners navigating the many challenges of reentry. Over half (58 percent) of the respondents had at least one family member with a drug or alcohol problem, and one-tenth (12 percent) reported having been physically abused or threatened by a family or household member in the six months prior to entering prison.

Family support was found to be influential in predicting postrelease employment and recidivism. Respondents who scored higher on family support scales before prison were less likely to be reconvicted, while those with negative family relationships (i.e., those who had a family member who threatened or hurt them prior to their incarceration) were more likely to be reconvicted or reincarcerated.<sup>13</sup> Prisoners who had an intimate partner relationship (e.g., spouse or girlfriend) after release reported having been employed for more weeks on average (30 percent more) after release than those without a partner.

We also asked respondents about peer influences after release, which may have an impact on postrelease success or failure. Even though nearly one-third (30 percent) of the prerelease sample reported being members of a gang prior to prison, few respondents (7 percent) interviewed after release said they belonged to a gang. This decline in

reported gang membership began during incarceration, when only 14 percent reported being involved with a gang. Postrelease gang activity was consistent with respondents' prerelease expectations, as only 5 percent had expected to be affiliated with gangs after release. At each time point, nearly all respondents who reported gang membership said they had been members for more than three years. It is important to note that the state of Illinois enhanced its parole conditions in January 2002, prohibiting parolees from knowingly associating with people who are members of an organized gang; and nearly all (99 percent) of the respondents in our sample were under some type of parole supervision. Thus, the true rate of gang participation may be higher than these self-reports suggest.<sup>14</sup>

Nearly half (48 percent) of the respondents interviewed four to eight months after release said they had no close friends. Of those who did have close friends, significant shares reported that one or more friends had been in prison (40 percent), committed theft (30 percent), assaulted someone (26 percent), used drugs (34 percent), or sold drugs (22 percent). Exactly half of the respondents with close friends indicated that none of them had engaged in illegal activity, which was likely related to a deliberate decision on the part of most respondents (81 percent) to give up friends and hangouts that got them into trouble after release. Predictive analyses of postrelease employment showed that respondents who had negative peer influences (i.e., those who had prison friends who were likely to use drugs or commit crimes after release) worked fewer weeks on average than those who did not have such negative peer relationships.

## **SUBSTANCE USE**

Much research has documented a link between substance use and criminal activity, and correspondingly high rates of substance use are often found among prisoner populations. Nationwide, more than half of state prisoners reported being under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time they committed their imprisonment offense<sup>15</sup> and three-quarters of soon-to-be-released prisoners had histories of drug and/or alcohol use.<sup>16</sup> The substance use histories of respondents in our sample mirror these national data, with a significant share reporting extensive

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and serious prior involvement with drugs and alcohol. Two-thirds (66 percent) reported some drug use, with marijuana, heroin, and cocaine topping the list of drugs, and nearly half (48 percent) reported alcohol intoxication prior to prison. When asked about daily drug use during the six months preceding incarceration, 25 percent reported using marijuana, 22 percent heroin, and 15 percent cocaine on a daily basis.

Not surprisingly, preprison drug and alcohol use caused problems for many respondents. When presented with an array of family, relationship, employment, financial, and legal problems they might have experienced, 59 percent indicated that they had experienced one or more problems as a result of their drug use, the most common of which was arguments at home (reported by 41 percent of drug users). Although the share of respondents who reported problems caused by drinking was much lower, it still comprised one-quarter (24 percent) of our sample. As was the case with drug users, drinkers were most likely to report arguments at home (15 percent) as a problem.

Respondents who used drugs or were intoxicated in the six months prior to incarceration were significantly more likely to receive substance abuse treatment during their prison stay than those who did not. However, prior drug users were no more likely to have a current drug conviction than any other type of conviction offense. Overall, 28 percent of respondents participated in a specific drug

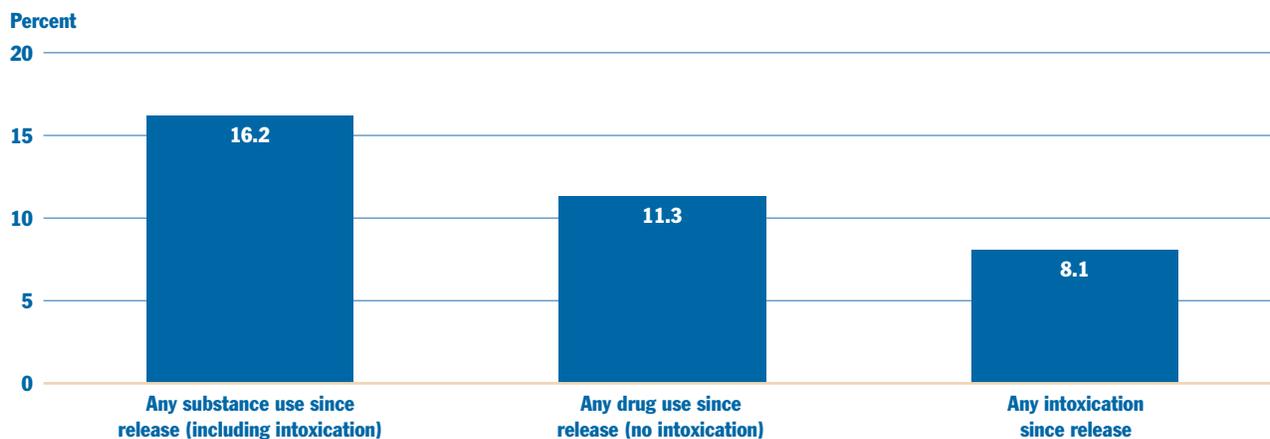
or alcohol treatment program,<sup>17</sup> and 18 percent attended Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous (AA/NA) meetings while in prison.

When interviewed four to eight months after release, 16 percent of respondents reported some type of drug use or intoxication (figure 4). However, given that random drug testing was a requirement for 90 percent of sample members as a condition of their parole supervision, it is possible that random drug testing as a condition of parole had an impact on postrelease drug use. In fact, one-third (33 percent) of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that being under parole supervision helped them stay drug free. It is also likely that respondents were less than forthcoming about their substance use because of their postrelease supervision status.

Rates of participation in substance abuse treatment were also much lower after release than they had been in prison, with 7 percent reporting that they had attended AA or NA in the past 30 days. Of those who had attended AA/NA, the average number of days attended in the previous month was five, with 3 percent of respondents reporting daily attendance.

A number of factors were related to postrelease substance use. Respondents who had photo IDs after release, as well as those who had higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and fewer reintegration diffi-

**FIGURE 4. Substance Use at Four to Eight Months after Release (Ns = 197, 203, and 198)**



culties, were all less likely to use drugs or be intoxicated after release. On the other hand, released prisoners who owed money, had not worked at least one week after release, and lived in neighborhoods where drug selling was a problem were more likely to have engaged in substance use. Somewhat counterintuitively, respondents with a work release job during prison were nearly twice as likely to use drugs after release (26 percent) as those without a work release job (15 percent). One possible explanation for this finding is that those with a work release job accumulated greater savings while incarcerated, increasing their ability to purchase illegal substances upon release; however, because the overall number of respondents in work release programs was small (9 percent), caution should be exercised in attributing significance to this result.

#### FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS AND SUPPORT

Respondents left prison with many financial obligations and relied on financial support from a number of sources other than legal employment. When interviewed four to eight months after release, approximately one-fifth (20 percent) of respondents reported owing money (including debt associated with child support, fines/restitution/court costs, supervision fees, and other costs), and three-quarters (73 percent) said it had been hard to pay off these debts. Overall, more than two-thirds (71 percent) of respondents reported that it had been hard to support themselves financially since their release, and half (53 percent) said financial support would be helpful to them. Over three-quarters of unemployed respondents (77 percent) relied on income from spouses, family, and friends, and one-third (31 percent) received public assistance, compared with just 18 percent of their employed counterparts (table 1). Employed respondents also relied on these sources of financial assistance in addition to the income earned through their jobs, although to a lesser degree than unemployed respondents.

Having financial obligations after release was significantly related to postrelease employment and substance use. Although respondents who owed money were employed an average of four weeks more than those who did not (when interviewed at four to eight months after release), they were also more than twice as likely to have

**TABLE 1. Sources of Income in Last Month for Respondents Interviewed Four to Eight Months after Release (N = 205)**

Type	Currently unemployed respondents (percent) (n = 144)	Currently employed respondents (percent) (n = 61)
Spouse/family/friends	77.1	16.7
Public assistance	31.3	18.0
Legal employment	8.8	76.7
Social Security	4.9	1.6
Medicare/Medicaid	3.5	4.9
Illegal activity	4.2	1.6
“Under the table”	1.4	0.0
Other source	4.9	0.0

used drugs or been intoxicated as those who did not owe money after their release.

#### EMPLOYMENT

Finding and maintaining a legitimate job after release can help reduce the chances that an ex-prisoner will re-offend,<sup>18</sup> yet many prisoners face serious challenges when seeking employment after release.<sup>19</sup> During the six months before prison, almost two-thirds (61 percent) of respondents were employed, typically in food service, construction, and maintenance jobs. Yet the same share reported receiving at least some of their income from illegal activity. Less than half (41 percent) had high school diplomas before entering prison, and one-third (34 percent) had been fired from a job at least once.

During their incarceration, some respondents participated in programs aimed at improving job skills and preparing them for postrelease employment. About one-third (39 percent) participated in employment readiness programs, while 11 percent participated in job-training programs and 9 percent held work release jobs. While nearly all respondents (96 percent) agreed that finding a job after their release was important to them, less than half (41 percent) expected that finding a job would be easy. Most (92 percent) reported that they would like *some help* or *a lot of help* finding a job after release.

Respondents who were interviewed four to eight months after release had limited success in finding employment. Forty-four percent had worked for at least one week since their release, and less than one-third (30 percent) were employed at the time of the interview, though most (80 percent) of those currently employed worked 40 or more hours per week. Of those who succeeded in finding at least some legal employment, the average cumulative length of employment was 13 weeks. One-third (33 percent) of those currently employed had talked to relatives to find their jobs, followed by 27 percent who talked to friends, and 22 percent who walked in and applied. The most common job types included construction/labor (20 percent), maintenance (18 percent), and warehouse/shipping work (15 percent).

For those who were employed at the time of the postrelease interview, most reported overall satisfaction with their jobs. A large majority got along with their supervisors (97 percent) and coworkers (88 percent) and felt that they were treated fairly by supervisors (85 percent). About three-quarters reported thinking that their current job would give them better opportunities in the future (75 percent) and that they would be happy at that job one year later (73 percent). Despite these positive findings, employed respondents were generally dissatisfied with their wages: only 35 percent reported being happy with the amount they were paid. The average pay for employed respondents was \$9 an hour; for 70 percent of employed respondents, their actual hourly wage was lower than the wage they reported expecting to earn before being released.

To identify factors related to postrelease employment, we focused on the number of weeks respondents reported having worked after their release. Not surprisingly, those who had worked in the six months before prison reported working a greater number of weeks after release (seven weeks on average, compared with three weeks for those who had not worked before prison), as did respondents with a work release job during prison (eight weeks on average, compared with five weeks for those with no work release job). Postrelease employment was also affected by respondents' relationships with others: those who had few negative peer influences in prison and those with an intimate partner relationship after release worked significantly more weeks after

release. Also, respondents who did not use drugs or abuse alcohol after release, and those who reported having financial obligations, worked more weeks after release than substance users and those without debt. Communities also played a key role in employment after release: those who reported living in neighborhoods that were good places to find a job worked significantly more weeks, and those who lived in communities where drug selling was a problem worked significantly fewer weeks after release.

## HEALTH

Despite a recent study documenting greater rates of chronic and infectious diseases and mental illness among prisoners than in the general population,<sup>20</sup> most respondents in our sample expressed positive opinions about their physical health. Eighty-six percent assessed their health as *good* or *excellent* during prison, while the remaining 14 percent felt that it was *fair* or *poor*. Similarly, most respondents (87 percent) rated their health as *excellent* or *good* when interviewed four to eight months after release. In spite of these positive self-assessments, 3 out of 10 respondents reported having a chronic physical health condition, such as asthma (13 percent), high blood pressure (9 percent), diabetes (2 percent), or HIV/AIDS (1 percent). With the exception of asthma, these self-reported rates probably underestimate the actual share of prisoners with such diseases.<sup>21</sup>

A smaller but important share of respondents exhibited a need for mental health services. While 4 percent of released prisoners reported having problems with depression or other mental illnesses, such responses indicated that 10 percent were likely to be depressed<sup>22</sup> and that 4 percent had symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to their incarceration experience.<sup>23</sup> Problems with mental and physical health were often intertwined: nearly half (45 percent) of respondents with a mental health condition reported a physical health condition, compared with 27 percent of those without.

Prison health resources did not appear to fully meet prisoners' need for services. While 30 percent of respondents reported having a physical or mental health condition, only half (16 percent) of those respondents reported

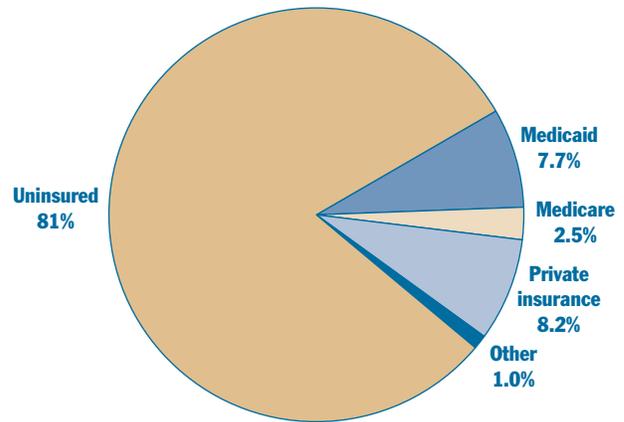
having taken medications on a regular basis while in prison. Moreover, those who reported having a health condition were no more likely than other prisoners to report having taken medications during prison.

Links between prison and community services were relatively rare: nine percent of respondents reported receiving a referral to health services in the community as part of their prerelease planning, and 8 percent received a referral to community mental health services. Prisoners who were taking medications in prison were no more likely than other prisoners to have received a referral to health care services in the community. These findings suggest that prison health resources may not be targeted toward those with the greatest need.

Nonetheless, respondents generally had optimistic expectations about staying in good health after release, with 86 percent reporting that it would be *pretty easy* or *very easy* to do so. Understandably, prisoners who felt their health was fair or poor were more cautious: only 54 percent thought staying in good health would be easy after release. Regardless of their expectations, many respondents acknowledged that they would need help accessing health services after release, including getting health care (74 percent), obtaining counseling (47 percent), and receiving mental health treatment (28 percent).

Four to eight months after release, respondents were still optimistic about staying in good health—92 percent thought it would be *very easy* or *pretty easy* to do so—but few had the means to access health services. Most released prisoners (81 percent) were without any type of insurance coverage. Of the small share who had insurance, about half (53 percent) were covered under Medicare or Medicaid and half (43 percent) were covered through private insurance (figure 5). Full-time employment increased the likelihood of health coverage: close to one-third (29 percent) of respondents working full time when interviewed after release had health insurance, compared with only 16 percent of those either not working or working less than full time. Respondents without health insurance were divided on the importance of health coverage: only half (48 percent) felt that it would be useful to them.

**FIGURE 5. Insurance Coverage among Released Prisoners (N = 204)**



Despite health problems and lack of access to services, released prisoners in our sample did not view health care as very important relative to other needs, such as finding a job, finding housing, or abstaining from drug use. Prior to release, 42 percent of respondents rated health care as an important factor in avoiding a return to prison. Several months after release, only 8 percent felt that health care was important to staying out of prison. However, predictive analyses showed that respondents' mental and physical health was related to the likelihood of substance use and recidivism after release. Depressed respondents were more likely to report using drugs or being intoxicated after release, and respondents who showed signs of PTSD were more likely to be reconvicted. Conversely, the probability of reconviction or reincarceration was lower for respondents who scored higher on the depression scale. Although this relationship may seem counterintuitive, it is possible that depression led some respondents to avoid or limit interactions with others, or to confine routine activities to the home rather than the street.

## PAROLE SUPERVISION

Most Illinois prisoners are released to a period of community supervision, during which time they are expected to follow a number of parole conditions enforced by the Parole Division of the Illinois Department of Corrections.<sup>24</sup> Consistent with that policy, almost all respon-

dents (99 percent) reported being on supervision when interviewed four to eight months after release. Among these respondents, the majority (74 percent) reported meeting monthly with their parole officers (POs), with the average visit lasting 5 to 30 minutes. Respondents held generally positive feelings toward their parole officers: most believed their PO treated them with respect (94 percent), was trustworthy (84 percent), and acted professionally (94 percent), although only half (52 percent) said their PO had been helpful in their transition to the community.

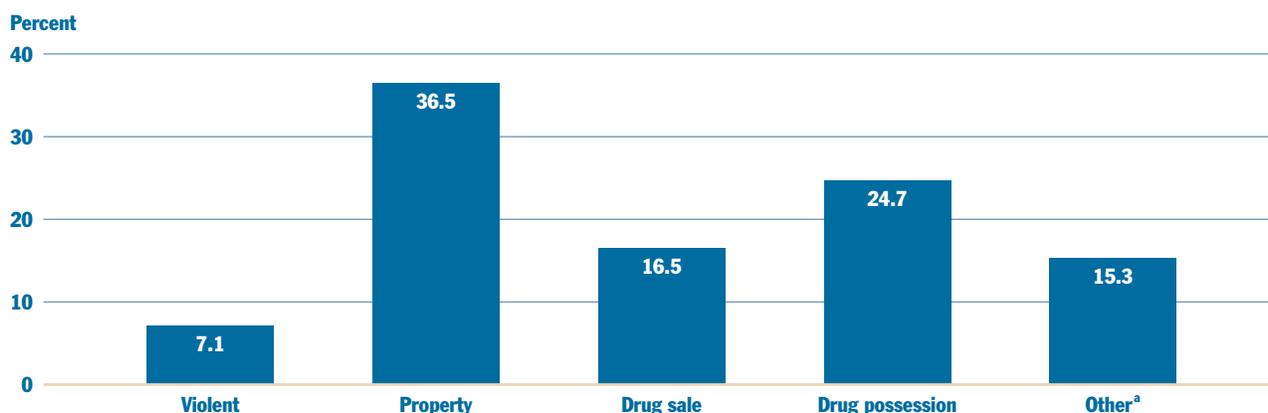
Before 2001, the only conditions automatically applied to Illinois parolees were that they not violate a statute and that they not possess a firearm or other dangerous weapon. However, House Bill 2844 added requirements that parolees report to their PO within 24 hours of release, obtain permission before changing jobs or moving, and consent to a search of their property or person as the PO requires.<sup>25</sup> Respondents in our sample reported an average of 9 parole conditions, with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 12. The majority (89 percent) of respondents reported being in compliance with their parole conditions, and 86 percent said it had been easy to avoid a parole violation after release. The most commonly cited violations were not notifying their PO about a move, not notifying their PO about an arrest, and having a positive drug test. Only about one-third of

the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that parole supervision would help them stay crime free (36 percent) or drug free (33 percent). Furthermore, less than half (45 percent) believed that being under supervision would help them stay out of prison after release.<sup>26</sup>

### CRIMINAL INVOLVEMENT

According to previous studies by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), most prisoners have long criminal records and exhibit high rates of recidivism upon release.<sup>27</sup> Nationwide, more than 60 percent of state prisoners surveyed in 1991 had been previously incarcerated,<sup>28</sup> and over half of state and federal prisoners released in 1994 were rearrested for a new crime (68 percent) or returned to prison (52 percent) within three years.<sup>29</sup> Such repeat involvement with the criminal justice system was strongly evident in our sample. Criminal histories of sample members were extensive and began early in life: most respondents (87 percent) had at least one prior conviction and over one-third (35 percent) reported four or more prior convictions. Three-quarters (75 percent) had served time in prison before, and one-third (34 percent) had spent time in a juvenile correctional facility. More than two-thirds (70 percent) had been arrested before they reached age 18. Despite these extensive criminal histories and high levels of familial

**FIGURE 6. First Postrelease Reconviction by Most Serious Offense (N = 85)**



Source: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA).

a. Includes offenses such as criminal trespassing, weapons violations, and traffic violations.

criminal involvement (discussed previously), 69 percent of respondents expected that it would be *pretty easy* or *very easy* to stay out of prison following their release.

To assess respondents' actual success at avoiding recidivism after release, we collected information on reconvictions and returns to prison from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) and IDOC. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of our sample had avoided both measures of recidivism as of approximately one year after release. However, one-fifth (22 percent) were reconvicted of a new crime within 11 months of release, and nearly one-third (31 percent) were returned to prison on a new sentence or parole revocation within 13 months of release.<sup>30</sup> Most reconvictions were for property crimes (37 percent), drug possession (25 percent), and drug sales (17 percent), while a small percentage were for violent crimes (7 percent) (figure 6). The average length of time between release and reconviction was seven months, compared with an average of eight months between release and reincarceration.

Reconviction data represent new crimes committed that resulted in a conviction. Reincarceration data include new crime convictions as well as parole revocations; in our sample, over half (52 percent) of reincarcerations were for new crime convictions while the other 48 percent were for parole revocations. It is important to note, however, that parole revocations can result from technical violations as well as from new crimes for which an individual is arrested but not convicted. While we are unable to distinguish between these two reasons for revocation, prior research indicates that approximately half of all Illinois parole revocations result from new crime arrests, while the other half result from technical parole violations.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the official data collected on recidivism, we asked respondents to self-report new crimes they committed after release. Twelve percent of those interviewed four to eight months after release said they had committed a new crime, and one-fifth (21 percent) reported having been rearrested. Among those who self-reported postrelease criminal activity, the most common crimes were drug possession (52 percent) and drug sales (12 percent), although respondents also reported committing theft (20 percent), burglary (8 percent), robbery (8 percent), and other crimes (36 percent), such as criminal trespassing and parole violations. Self-reported criminal-

ity and official recidivism were significantly related: 84 percent of respondents who said they had committed crimes at four to eight months after their release were also reconvicted or reincarcerated within one year of release, compared with 25 percent of those who had not self-reported criminal behavior.

Respondents who avoided recidivism after release differed from those who did not on a number of characteristics (figure 7). Released prisoners who were not reconvicted or reincarcerated within 11 or 13 months of release, respectively, had fewer prior convictions and were less likely to have been threatened or hurt by a family member. They were also less likely to have used drugs or been intoxicated after release, and more likely to have a photo ID after release, to have been employed at the time of the interview, and to believe they lived in a safe neighborhood where it was not hard to stay out of trouble.<sup>32</sup> As noted in the health discussion, respondents who exhibited greater symptoms of depression after release were less likely to have recidivated. Analyses predicting reconviction and reincarceration as separate outcomes showed that several other factors also reduced the likelihood of recidivism: respondents who had not used drugs or been intoxicated in the six months prior to prison and those who improved their educational level while in prison (e.g., obtained a GED) were less likely to be reconvicted, while respondents who scored higher on family support scales before prison and those who showed prerelease anticipation of reentry difficulties were less likely to be reincarcerated.

## COMMUNITY

Findings from *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois*, as well as other recent research, indicate that a large share of ex-prisoners are concentrated in disadvantaged communities with high levels of poverty and unemployment.<sup>33</sup> Recent research has also shown that prisoners who return to communities with higher concentrations of social and economic disadvantage have higher rates of recidivism<sup>34</sup> and that communities affected by high levels of incarceration and reentry experience higher crime rates than would otherwise be expected.<sup>35</sup> In our sample, 54 percent of respondents resided in just 7 of Chicago's 77 communities—Austin, North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, West Englewood, Humboldt Park, Roseland, and

**FIGURE 7. Profile of Successful Released Prisoners (N = 325)**

- ◆ Lower number of prior convictions
- ◆ Had not been threatened or hurt by family member before prison
- ◆ Had or obtained a photo ID after release
- ◆ Did not use drugs or abuse alcohol after release
- ◆ Scored higher on postrelease depression scale
- ◆ Employed at the time of the postrelease interview
- ◆ Lived in safe neighborhood where it was not hard to stay out of trouble

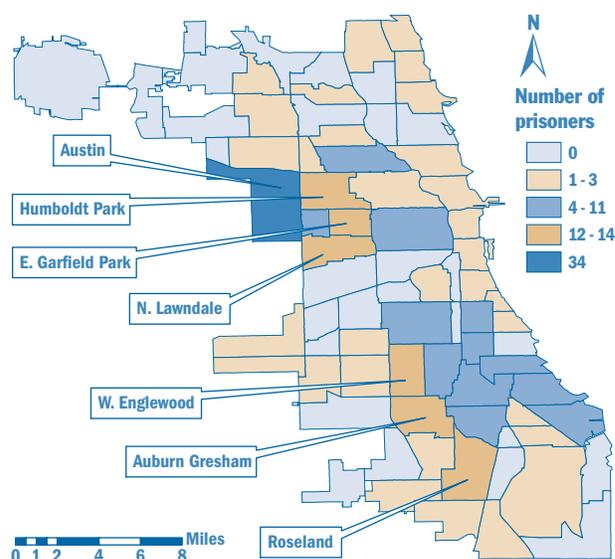
Note: Successful released prisoners had no reconviction or reincarceration within 11 or 13 months of release, respectively.

Auburn Gresham (figure 8). These seven communities generally have above-average rates of unemployment, female-headed households, and families living below the federal poverty level. However, it is important to note that distinct variations in disadvantage may exist within each of these communities.

While it may not be surprising that communities in which released prisoners in our sample reside are disadvantaged, an analysis comparing respondents' pre- and postprison addresses contradicts the commonly held belief that prisoners return to their old neighborhoods upon release. In fact, almost half of the respondents (45 percent) did not return to the neighborhoods in which they had lived before prison.<sup>36</sup> These respondents lived in new neighborhoods primarily because they wanted to avoid trouble in their old neighborhoods or because their family members had moved. This perhaps explains why respondents had favorable impressions of the neighborhoods in which they resided after release, with 86 percent reporting that they lived in a safe neighborhood and 82 percent reporting that their neighborhood was a good place to live. Despite overall satisfaction with their neighborhoods, only one-quarter (26 percent) of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the neighborhood in which they resided at the time of their postrelease interview was a good place to find a job.

We were also interested in exploring how released prisoners affect the communities in which they reside. Toward this end, we conducted two focus groups in each of four Chicago neighborhoods—North Lawndale, Austin,

Humboldt Park, and East Garfield Park—that are home to the highest concentrations of released prisoners.<sup>37</sup> While not by design, focus group participants in all four neighborhoods were personally acquainted with at least one released prisoner, and the vast majority had close relatives and/or friends in the penal system. Though participants were fully aware that many members of their communities had been incarcerated, they did not attribute high crime rates in their communities to those who had been incarcerated. In fact, participants were generally sympathetic toward released prisoners, believing that they faced many obstacles, such as finding housing and employment. Focus group participants believed that these sympathetic views were not shared by their communities overall, which they characterized as “drug-ridden areas” in which neighbors had little concern for one another. They also noted that these communities had many dysfunctional families, which are not equipped to be supportive of family members returning from prison. Overall, focus group participants felt that prisoners are not well prepared for reintegration. They recommended that released prisoners receive more employment services, housing assistance, and mental health programs to help them reintegrate. They also believed that the community—and particularly

**FIGURE 8. Distribution of Released Prisoners Who Returned to Chicago by Community (N = 205)**

churches—should play a more active role in assisting released prisoners.

To complement the focus group findings, we also conducted interviews with 22 state and local leaders, service providers, and officials engaged in prisoner reentry efforts. The opinions of these stakeholders echoed focus group participants' sentiments, stating that former prisoners are not adequately prepared for reentry and that IDOC bears some responsibility for this lack of preparation. Stakeholders voiced concerns about whether communities have the capacity to provide a support network for former prisoners. Moreover, they believed that the stigma associated with being an “ex-offender” presented a significant obstacle in successful reintegration.

As mentioned in previous sections, characteristics of the neighborhoods in which released prisoners in our sample reside were significantly related to postrelease outcomes of employment, substance use, and recidivism. Those respondents who successfully reintegrated—as measured by being employed and staying drug and crime free—were more likely to reside in cohesive and less disorganized communities after release.

## HOUSING

Finding a place to live is one of the first obstacles that returning prisoners must overcome as they are released from prison. Recent research has shown that released prisoners who do not find stable housing are significantly more likely to end up back in prison.<sup>38</sup> Respondents generally recognized the significance of postrelease living arrangements, with exactly three-quarters of prerelease respondents anticipating that having a place to live would be an important factor in staying out of prison.

At the time of their prerelease interviews, 69 percent of respondents reported that they already had a place to live upon release. Of those who did not have housing arrangements lined up, three-quarters (77 percent) reported that they would need *some help* or *a lot of help* finding a place to live. The most common housing search methods respondents planned to use were contacting a family member (42 percent) and using a referral service or housing program (29 percent).

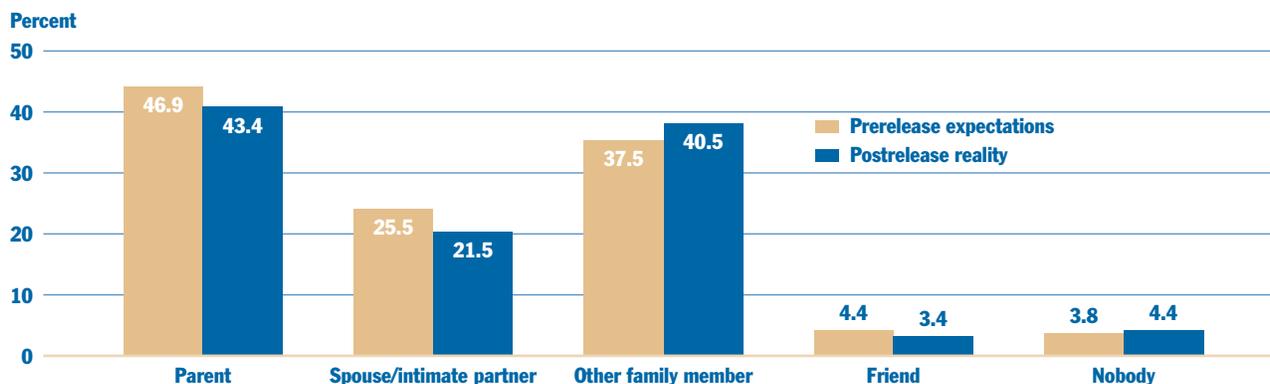
A majority of the sample expected to live with a parent (47 percent), other family member (38 percent), and/or spouse or intimate partner (26 percent) once released from prison. These expectations were largely realized at the time of the postrelease interview, with all but 12 percent of respondents living with family members and/or intimate partners (figure 9). With regard to housing type, just 3 percent of the sample were living in public housing at the postrelease follow-up, and an additional 3 percent were living in Section 8 housing.<sup>39</sup> Despite restrictions barring certain convicted felons from residing in public housing, only 5 percent of respondents reported having had trouble finding housing due to their criminal record. Most notably, all but one respondent (who reported himself homeless) secured some form of housing after release.

Respondents were generally satisfied with their postrelease living arrangements. Virtually all (98 percent) reported that they felt safe where they lived, and more than half (58 percent) reported that they hoped to be living at the same place one year later. To some extent, these housing arrangements provided respondents with financial relief as well, as nearly two-thirds (64 percent) were not paying money for housing. However, some respondents indicated that they were residing with individuals who could jeopardize their prospects for successful reintegration: among those respondents who did not live alone, 11 percent lived with someone who had been in prison, 3 percent lived with someone who used illegal drugs, and 15 percent lived with someone who often drank to the point of intoxication.

## SUMMARY

This report is the third product of the Returning Home study in Illinois. The first, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois*, documented trends in incarceration and reentry rates in the state over the past three decades, while the second, *Illinois Prisoners' Reflections on Returning Home*, described the experiences and expectations of 400 soon-to-be-released prisoners. In this third report, we presented key findings on a range of reentry challenges faced by released prisoners as they left prison and returned to Chicago communities. We described a number of factors related to prisoners' success or failure at finding employment, steering clear of substance use, and avoiding recidivism after release.

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**FIGURE 9. Living Arrangements after Release: Prerelease Expectations and Postrelease Realities (Ns = 341 and 205)**

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive (i.e., a respondent may reside with both a parent and another family member).

In some respects, our findings confirm conventional wisdom. For example, prisoners typically come to prison with significant prior involvement in crime and extensive histories of drug and alcohol use. They tend to have family members who are incarcerated or who use illegal drugs and alcohol. They also have low levels of educational attainment and work histories that are sporadic at best. And after their release, they are reconvicted and reincarcerated at relatively high rates. Moreover, released prisoners present complicated health challenges, suggesting the need for coordinated health care provision both within and beyond the prison walls.

In addition to supporting some commonly held beliefs about the characteristics of released prisoners, this report presents new insights that can help inform reentry planning efforts. Depending on the nature of the relationship, released prisoners can find support and assistance from family members in successfully navigating reentry challenges. Conversely, family relationships that involve the threat or use of violence can lead to negative outcomes. Likewise, communities can present both risk and protective factors in the reentry experience. Almost half of the released prisoners in our sample moved into new communities, often to seek environments better suited to successful reintegration. However, while many viewed their communities as safe and good places to live, those who did not share those views were more likely to use drugs and to recidivate.

This report is intended to provide a foundation for policy conversations about ways of improving reintegration among released prisoners returning to Chicago. Listening to the experiences of these prisoners—and members of the communities to which they returned—should point the way to policy innovations that are empirically grounded, pragmatic, and reflective of the realities of reentry.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Christy Visher, Nancy La Vigne, and Jill Farrell, *Illinois Prisoners' Reflections on Returning Home* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Responses in this section were drawn from the first postrelease interview and a supplemental questionnaire given to those interviewed during the second but not first postrelease time frame (N = 324).

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Lawrence, Daniel Mears, Glenn Dubin, and Jeremy Travis, *The Practice and Promise of Prison Programming*, Research Report (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2002); Gerald Gae, Timothy Flanagan, Lawrence Motiuk, and Lynn Stewart, "Adult Correctional Treatment," in *Prisons*, eds. Michael Tonry and Joan Petersilia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); James Lynch and William Sabol, "Prisoner Reentry in Perspective," *Crime Policy Report*, Vol. 3 (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Nancy G. La Vigne and Cynthia Mamalian, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2003), 40–41.

<sup>5</sup> Based on responses to the first postrelease interview (N = 296).

<sup>6</sup> Shadd Maruna, *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> A full list of attitudinal scales, reliabilities, and the items that comprise them is available upon request. All scales achieved internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from .65 to .95.

<sup>8</sup> La Vigne and Mamalian, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois*.

<sup>9</sup> This increase was statistically significant. "Control over life" was measured by nine items indicating whether respondents felt in control over things that happened to them or helpless in dealing with the problems of life.

### RETURNING HOME STUDY METHODOLOGY

The Returning Home study is being implemented across four states, including a pilot study in Maryland (completed May 2003) and full research studies in Illinois, Ohio, and Texas. The goal in each state is to collect information on respondents' life circumstances immediately prior to and following their release from prison, as well as several months into their reintegration in the community. Each study involves surveys and interviews that explore various reentry expectations, needs, and experiences, such as those related to prerelease preparation, postrelease housing and employment, and the renewal of personal relationships.

The study design in Illinois was composed of several data collection efforts. The first effort involved 400 male prisoners returning to the city of Chicago and entailed (1) a self-administered survey given to groups of prisoners one to three months prior to release and (2) three one-on-one interviews with sample members conducted approximately one to three months, four to six months, and one year after release. The second effort entailed one-on-one interviews with family members of the prisoners in our sample. The third effort consisted of a series of focus groups with Chicago residents, as well as one-on-one interviews with local Chicago stakeholders. Data in this research brief come from the self-administered prerelease surveys of 400 prisoners, the first and second postrelease interviews with released prisoners, and the focus group and community stakeholder findings.

Illinois prisoners in our sample were recruited over a five-month period through the use of a preexisting reentry program known as PreStart. IDOC requires the vast majority of prisoners to complete this two-week prerelease program, which convenes groups of 10 to 30 prisoners in a classroom setting. We scheduled a time during regular PreStart program hours to hold an orientation session, explaining the study and distributing a self-administered survey to those willing to participate. This strategy resulted in a participation rate of 75 percent (of 1,006 prisoners scheduled to attend the orientation, 252 did not attend or attended but declined to participate in the study). Of the prisoners who attended and agreed to participate, 400 planned to return to Chicago upon release. Those 400 male prisoners comprise the respondents in our prerelease sample.

A comparison of all prisoners who participated in the study with those who did not showed no significant differences in terms of age, number of prior incarcerations, sentence length, time served, conviction offense, incarceration for a technical violation, and Chicago residence when these factors

were tested simultaneously in a regression model. Study participants were somewhat more likely to be African American and released to supervision compared with nonparticipants, and those who attended the orientation session and agreed to participate were more likely to have been housed at a minimum-security level than those who did not attend. We also checked for differences between our final prerelease sample and all Chicago-bound male prisoners released from Illinois prisons in 2001. We found no differences with regard to age, race, sentence length, time served, and conviction offense. Prisoners in our sample had somewhat more prior incarcerations, were less likely to have been incarcerated for a technical violation, and were more likely to have been housed at a medium-security level and released to supervision compared with other Chicago-bound male releasees.

Locating respondents for the postrelease interviews was difficult, time-intensive, and costly. Although interviews were scheduled to be conducted one to three months and four to six months after release, the availability of respondents during each time frame varied greatly: some could not be located until seven months after release, while others completed both interviews within three months of release. Ultimately, we were able to interview 329 of the 400 respondents in our prerelease sample for at least one of the two postrelease waves (80 percent follow-up rate), with 71 percent of these respondents completing both postrelease interviews.

To present a consistent snapshot of prisoners' experiences returning to Chicago, our descriptive analyses focus on the 205 respondents whose first or second postrelease interview occurred within four to eight months of their release. Those respondents constitute a representative sampling of the original 400 with the exception of two significant differences: the sample of 205 was slightly older (34 versus 33 years, on average) and was less likely to be reconvicted (17 versus 26 percent). To predict postrelease employment, substance use, and recidivism, we used information from all 562 postrelease interviews conducted with 329 respondents. All predictive analyses used multivariate regression techniques to statistically control for respondents' age, race, and criminal history, as well as other variables significant in stepwise equations (variables were first tested in stepwise equations to reduce potential effects of multicollinearity). Predictive analyses also statistically controlled for the number of months after release that an interview was conducted, possible sources of selection bias, and repeated measurement of some respondents. Relationships reported as significant are those found to be statistically significant in multivariate models at a probability equal to or less than 0.10.

- <sup>10</sup> Robert Sampson and Dawn Jeglum Bartusch, "Legal Cynicism and Subcultural (?) Tolerance of Deviance: The Neighborhood Context of Racial Differences," *Law and Society Review* 32(4) (1999): 777–804.
- <sup>11</sup> Responses in this section were drawn from the first postrelease interview (N = 296).
- <sup>12</sup> Christy Visher, Vera Kachnowski, Nancy G. La Vigne, and Jeremy Travis, *Baltimore Prisoners' Experiences Returning Home* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2004); Marta Nelson, Perry Deess, and Charlotte Allen, *The First Month Out: Post-Incarceration Experiences in New York City* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 1999).
- <sup>13</sup> Family support scales included items indicating whether prisoners felt loved by, close to, and supported by their family, and whether they had a family member they could talk to about problems, turn to for advice, and get together with to relax.
- <sup>14</sup> "Governor's Parole Initiative Cracks Down on Crime," press release, November 7, 2001. Springfield, Ill. Available at <http://www.illinois.gov/PressReleases/ShowPressRelease.cfm?SubjectID=3&RecNum=1558>.
- <sup>15</sup> Christopher Mumola, *Substance Abuse Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report NCJ 172871 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).
- <sup>16</sup> Allen Beck, "State and Federal Prisoners Returning to the Community: Findings from the Bureau of Justice Statistics," Paper presented at the First Reentry Courts Initiative Cluster Meeting, Washington, D.C., April 13, 2001. Available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/sfrc.pdf>.
- <sup>17</sup> The questions about drug and alcohol treatment pertained to participation in Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) or other treatment programs for drug or alcohol problems (excluding AA or NA). Information about treatment participation was collected in both the prerelease interview and the first postrelease interview. This 28 percent statistic is much greater than the 12 percent treatment rate reported in Visher, La Vigne, and Farrell, *Illinois Prisoners' Reflections*; we believe the difference is due to the fact that respondents had the opportunity to participate in substance abuse treatment between the time of the prerelease interview and their release from prison.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert Sampson and John Laub, "A Life-Course Theory of Cumulative Disadvantage and the Stability of Delinquency," *Advances in Criminological Theory* 7 (1997): 133–61; Miles Harer, *Recidivism of Federal Prisoners Released in 1987* (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Prisons, Office of Research and Evaluation, 1994); Christopher Uggen, "Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals: A Duration Model of Age, Employment, and Recidivism," *American Sociological Review* 65 (2000): 529–46.
- <sup>19</sup> Harry Holzer, Steven Raphael, and Michael Stoll, *Employment Barriers Facing Ex-Prisoners*, Urban Institute Reentry Roundtable Discussion Paper (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2003). Available at <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410855>.
- <sup>20</sup> National Commission on Correctional Health Care, "Prevalence of Communicable Disease, Chronic Disease, and Mental Illness," Chapter 3 in *The Health Status of Soon-to-be-Released Inmates: A Report to Congress, Vol. 1* (2002). Available at [http://www.ncchc.org/stbr/Volume1/Health%20Status%20\(vol%201\).pdf](http://www.ncchc.org/stbr/Volume1/Health%20Status%20(vol%201).pdf).
- <sup>21</sup> Conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS can go unnoticed for years without causing overt problems, and their prevalence among prisoners is estimated to be at least twice as high as the survey responses indicate (Ibid.).
- <sup>22</sup> Scores of 16 and above on the Center for Epidemiologic Studies depression scale were considered to indicate a high likelihood of depression. See Lenore S. Radloff, "The Use of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale in Adolescents and Young Adults," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 20(2) (1991): 149–66.
- <sup>23</sup> Adapted from the 17-item PTSD Symptom Scale as described in Edna B. Foa, David S. Riggs, Constance V. Dancu, and Barbara O. Rothbaum, "Reliability and Validity of a Brief Instrument for Assessing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 6(4) (1993): 459–73. Scale items correspond to the DSM-III-R diagnostic criteria for PTSD.
- <sup>24</sup> La Vigne and Mamalian, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois*.
- <sup>25</sup> Illinois General Assembly, House, "CD Correct Parole Requirements," 92nd General Assembly, May 31, 2001.
- <sup>26</sup> Because 99 percent of the respondents in our sample were released to supervision, we were unable to assess the relationship between being under supervision and avoiding recidivism, avoiding drug use or intoxication, and obtaining employment after release.
- <sup>27</sup> Patrick Langan and David Levin, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report NCJ 193427 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2002); Allen Beck, Darrell Gilliard, Lawrence Greenfield, Caroline Harlow, Thomas Hester, Louis Jankowski, Tracy Snell, James Stephan, and Danielle Morton, *Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1991*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report NCJ 136949 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1993).
- <sup>28</sup> Beck et al., *Survey of State Prison Inmates*.
- <sup>29</sup> Langan and Levin, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*.
- <sup>30</sup> Reconviction data were unavailable for 5 of 400 respondents in our prerelease sample.
- <sup>31</sup> David E. Olson, Brendan Dooley, and Candice M. Kane, "The Relationship between Gang Membership and Inmate Recidivism," *Research Bulletin* 2(12) (Chicago: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 2004).
- <sup>32</sup> Neighborhood cohesiveness and lack of disorder was a factor scale derived from nine items measuring the extent to which respondents agreed with statements such as the following: "My neighborhood is a safe place to live"; "If there is a problem in my neighborhood, people who live there can get it solved"; "It is hard to stay out of trouble in my neighborhood"; and "Drug selling is a major problem in my neighborhood."
- <sup>33</sup> Nancy G. La Vigne and Vera Kachnowski, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Maryland* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2003); La Vigne and Mamalian, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois*; Todd Clear, Dina Rose, and Judith Ryder, "Incarceration and the Community: The Problem of Removing and Returning Offenders," *Crime and Delinquency* 47 (2001): 335–51.
- <sup>34</sup> Eric Baumer, "Community Context and Offender Recidivism in Illinois," unpublished report, 2003.
- <sup>35</sup> Todd Clear, Dina Rose, Elin Waring, and Kristen Scully, "Coercive Mobility and Crime: A Preliminary Examination of Concentrated Incarceration and Social Disorganization," *Justice Quarterly* 20(1) (2003): 33–64.
- <sup>36</sup> Responses were drawn from the first postrelease interview (N = 296).
- <sup>37</sup> These neighborhoods were selected based on the geographic analysis of released prisoners conducted for La Vigne and Mamalian, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois*.
- <sup>38</sup> Stephen Metraux and Dennis P. Culhane, "Homeless Shelter Use and Reincarceration Following Prison Release: Assessing the Risk," *Criminology & Public Policy* 3 (2004): 139–60.
- <sup>39</sup> Public housing is not necessarily an option for released prisoners in Illinois. The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) considers criminal history as part of its admission criteria and bars individuals convicted of drug-related or violent crimes from public housing for up to three years, although CHA admission policies allow for exceptions to this ban if the individual has successfully completed a rehabilitation program or the circumstances surrounding the offense no longer exist (La Vigne and Mamalian, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois*).

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