

CLEVELAND PRISONERS' EXPERIENCES RETURNING HOME

KEY FINDINGS

- Sixty-four percent of men in the study participated in prerelease programming and 87 percent participated in other ODRC programs while in prison. Men who received general counseling in prison reported drug or alcohol intoxication less often in the first few months following release.
- Prior to release, most prisoners expressed the desire and willingness to change their criminal behaviors, although 64 percent recognized they would need help in dealing with their problems once released.

(Continued on page 2)



In 2001, the Urban Institute launched a four-state, longitudinal study entitled *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* 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 Ohio, focusing on Cleveland and the surrounding area. The first phase of the study involved analyzing preexisting data maintained by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to describe incarceration and reentry characteristics (see sidebar “A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Cleveland”). The second phase involved interviewing male prisoners returning to the Cleveland area, once before and three times after their release (see sidebar “Profile of Study Participants” for a description of the men interviewed). In addition, researchers held focus groups with residents of three Cleveland communities home to the highest concentrations of returning prisoners, and interviews with Cleveland policymakers and practitioners are under way (see sidebar “Returning Home Study Methodology” for more details about the data collection and analysis).

This research brief documents preliminary findings from phase two, the original data collection effort, and describes the experiences of prisoners returning to the Cleveland area in the first few months after release. A previous research brief entitled *Ohio Prisoners' Reflections on Returning Home* described the pre-release experiences and expectations of prisoners in our sample (Visher, Baer, and Naser 2006). This research brief expands on that information by comparing the prerelease experiences of those prisoners with their experiences after release. We present key findings on a range of reentry challenges and describe factors likely related to postrelease success or failure, such as employment, substance use, attitudes and beliefs, health challenges, criminal histories, and family and community environments. This research brief is intended to serve

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REENTRY DEFINED

For this report, “reentry” is defined as the process of leaving an adult correctional institution and returning to society. The report’s scope is limited to those sentenced to serve time in state correctional institutions in order to focus on individuals who have been convicted of serious offenses, are eligible for state correctional programs, and may be managed by state correctional, parole, and felony probation systems after release.

KEY FINDINGS*(Continued from page 1)*

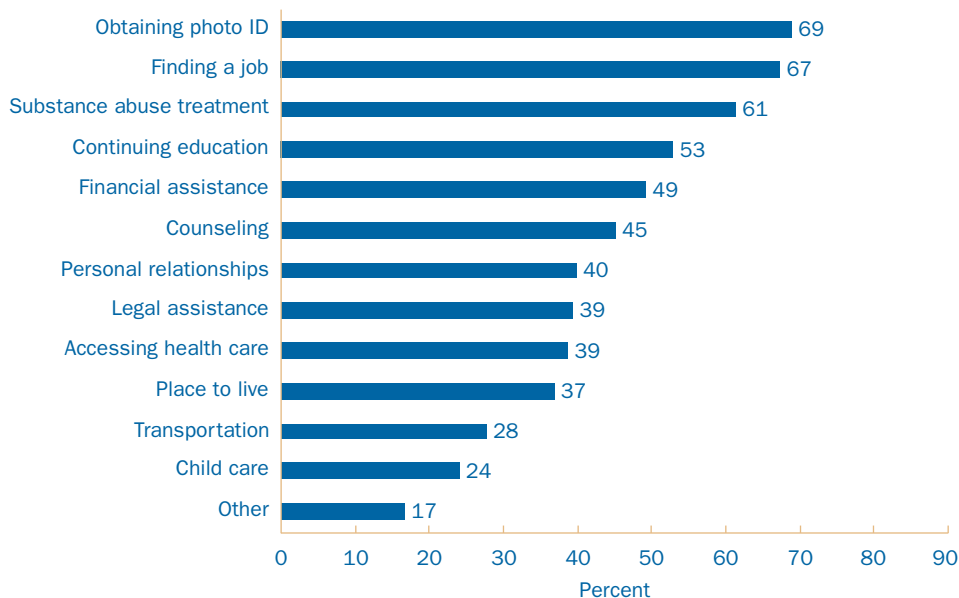
- Prisoners' attitudes toward themselves and the legal system affected their short-term reentry outcomes. The men in the study who were confident that staying out of prison would be easy after release were less likely to report committing a crime, being arrested, or violating a condition of supervision in the first few months following release. Likewise, the more cynical men were about the legal system, the more they reported substance use or intoxication after release.
- Families were an important source of emotional and financial support: after release, 78 percent of former prisoners received support from families and 80 percent lived with a relative. Family support was identified as the *most* important thing that had kept them out of prison.
- Prisoners reported extensive involvement in drug and alcohol use prior to incarceration: 72 percent used drugs and 60 percent reported alcohol intoxication. Following release, these percentages dropped to 13 and 17 percent, respectively. Men who abused drugs and alcohol before incarceration and who were not subject to random drug testing as a supervision condition were more likely to report substance use after release.
- Men had limited success in finding employment after release: 39 percent had worked at some point since returning home. Postrelease employment was significantly higher for men who held jobs during prison and who were required to maintain employment as a supervision condition.
- Over half (59 percent) reported suffering from a chronic physical health condition; 23 percent showed symptoms of depression and 14 percent exhibited signs for post-traumatic stress disorder. After release, 84 percent had no health care coverage.
- A significant share of prisoners returned to a small number of Cleveland neighborhoods characterized by high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Many described these neighborhoods as plagued with drug trafficking (48 percent) and limited in employment opportunities (59 percent). Community residents also reported a lack of adequate support and resources for returning prisoners.
- Although most released prisoners returned to disadvantaged Cleveland neighborhoods, these were not necessarily the same communities in which they had lived before prison. In fact, over half (54 percent) of the men interviewed after release did not return to the same neighborhood, primarily because they wanted to avoid trouble, they had lost their previous housing, or their families or friends had moved.

as a foundation for policy discussions about how released prisoners can successfully reintegrate into their communities, whether in Cleveland or in similar cities around the country.

PREPARATION FOR REENTRY

Prisoners who participate in programs and services while incarcerated may be better prepared for the transition back to their communities after release than prisoners who do not participate in such programs. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) offers prisoners a variety of treatment options while incarcerated, including adult education, counseling, and substance abuse treatment, as well as training in life skills, employment readiness, parenting skills, and anger management.

ODRC's Release Preparation Program, which starts six months prior to release, provides a variety of workshops and services to prepare prisoners for their return to the community. The program also provides referrals to community service providers so released prisoners can continue services after release. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the men in our study reported participating in the prerelease programming ODRC offers. Specific topics covered during these prerelease classes included obtaining photo identification, finding employment, obtaining substance abuse treatment, continuing education, getting financial assistance, renewing personal relationships, and finding legal assistance, health care, housing, transportation, and child care (figure 1). Over half (58 percent) of those who received prerelease services were required to do so by ODRC. The majority of prerelease

Figure 1. Topics of Prerelease Programs (N = 226)

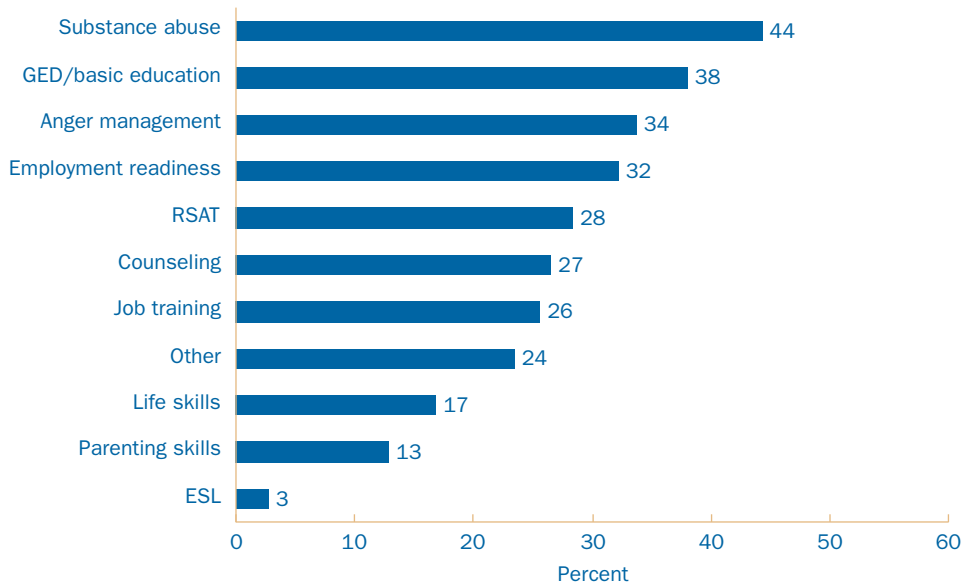
Note: Data are based on the postrelease respondents who reported receiving prerelease programming. Cases with missing information are not included.

INTERPRETING THIS REPORT

A number of caveats about interpreting and generalizing findings often accompany research projects of this complexity, 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 respondents and one that enables rigorous analyses that cannot be achieved through ethnographic studies, focus groups, or 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 use social services or are rearrested. Thus, the findings in this report draw from the perspectives of those who have had first-hand experience with the challenges of prisoner reentry. However, as with all self-reported data sources, findings may include factual inaccuracies resulting from lapses in memory and respondents overreporting or underreporting certain 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 observation can be explained in part by the fact that former prisoners' perspectives of the experience may differ from the assumptions many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers share. In addition, the experience of working with certain subpopulations rather than with all returning prisoners likely shapes some commonly held views of them. Again, this research is based on a sample of male prisoners being released rather than a sample of former prisoners who sought services in the community. Recognizing that our respondents represent a reentry cohort rather than a sample of the current "stock" population of Ohio prisoners is also important.

When reviewing the sections of this report on the factors predictive of former prisoners' reintegration successes and failures, it is important to remember that the findings are preliminary. The short-term outcomes used for this report were based on men's self-report of their own behaviors one to three months following release. Future analyses using longer follow-up periods and augmenting self-report measures with official recidivism data will allow for a more thorough examination of the factors that affect prisoners' reintegration experiences.

Figure 2. Participation in Prison Programs and Services (N = 357)

Note: Cases with missing information are not included.

program participants (73 percent) began receiving these services at least one month prior to release. In general, most participants (60 percent) found the pre-release classes helpful for their transition back into the community. After attending classes, 39 percent were referred to a service provider within their community, and of those respondents, about half (52 percent) accessed the services to which they were referred. The reason they most often gave for not following through with referrals was that they did not think they needed the service (40 percent).

Beyond prerelease classes, prisoners may also participate in a variety of other programs and services ODRC offers. Nearly all the men in our study (87 percent) participated in at least one of the programs offered during their prison term. Attendance at employment-related classes, such as job training and employment readiness courses, were most common, followed by substance abuse treatment or counseling (including Alcoholics Anonymous [AA], Narcotics Anonymous [NA], and Residential Substance Abuse Treatment

[RSAT]), adult basic education,¹ anger management and violence prevention courses, and general counseling (figure 2). Approximately one-quarter (23 percent) earned their General Equivalency Diploma (GED) while serving their current prison term.

Considering how often Ohio inmates used in-prison programs and services, we further examined whether men who participated in these programs have better short-term outcomes after release.² Among the men in this study, participation in prison-based programs appears to help reintegration. Men receiving general counseling in prison reported less drug use and intoxication, and those who had any job during incarceration were more likely to be employed after release.

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Prisoners' attitudes and beliefs about themselves and the world around them can affect their ability to reconnect with their family, friends, and community after release. Recently, researchers have found that

A PORTRAIT OF PRISONER REENTRY IN CLEVELAND

This research brief stems from an earlier research inquiry into incarceration and release trends in Ohio over the past two decades and an examination of the cohort of Ohio prisoners released in 2001. Results were published in a research monograph entitled *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Ohio* (La Vigne and Thompson 2003). Some key findings from the *Portrait* include the following:

- Between 1982 and 1998, Ohio's prison population nearly tripled in size from 17,147 to 48,171, mirroring the national trend in prison population growth. By 2004, Ohio had the 7th largest prison population in the United States and the 25th highest incarceration rate. The increases in the Ohio prison population were due to more admissions and longer lengths of stay resulting from the rise in new commitments for drug offenses and increases in serious violent crime.
- With Ohio's rising prison population came a significant increase in the number of prisoners released annually. In 2004, 28,117 inmates were released from Ohio prisons, three times the number of inmates released two decades earlier.
- Excluding technical violators, nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of the release cohort in 2001 served one year or

less in prison, and 82 percent served three years or less; the average time served was two years.

- The majority of Ohio prisoners released in 2001 were released through mandatory release (70 percent), and 60 percent were placed on supervision.
- Forty-four percent of the prisoners released in 2001 had been incarcerated in an Ohio prison at least once before. Of those released in 2001, 17 percent were returned to an Ohio prison within one year.

Since 2002, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) has been developing a more holistic and systematic approach to prisoner reentry in which the concept of reentry underlies the assessments and programming a prisoner receives while in prison as well as after release. While much of the postrelease reentry strategy is focused on "reentry-intensive" inmates (those with the most serious criminal histories) who are released to supervision, the ODRC has launched a release preparation program for all inmates, regardless of their risk assessment level or whether they will exit to supervision. The Release Preparation Program, which starts six months prior to an inmate's release, includes employment readiness and other workshops and seeks to provide transitional linkages so that the inmate will continue to receive needed services after release.

motivation to change can increase prisoners' likelihood of successful reintegration (Maruna 2001). To assess the attitudes and beliefs of the men in our study, we asked a series of questions about their readiness to change, self-esteem, perceived control over their lives, feelings about the legal system and the police, and spirituality.

Most men in our study expressed readiness to change their criminal behavior. Just prior to release, 82 percent reported that they were tired of the problems their crimes cause, and almost all wanted to get their lives straightened out (97 percent). Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) expressed a need for help in dealing with their problems once released, and 89 percent claimed that they would give up friends and hangouts that often led them into trouble.

Prisoners' self-esteem and perceptions of control over their lives can influence their willingness and ability to change. Once the men in our study were released,

their self-esteem increased significantly. While about half (57 percent) rated highly on measures of self-esteem at the end of their prison term, a greater percentage (75 percent) reported high self-esteem after they had been out in the community a few months. The same improvement over time, however, was not found for control over life, with respondents reporting no change in control over their lives before and after release (63 percent and 64 percent, respectively). As evidence that positive attitudes and a willingness to change can influence behavior, those men who thought staying out of prison would be easy were less likely to report criminal behavior after release.³

Attitudes toward the police and the legal system may influence behavior and willingness to abide by the law after release from prison. When surveyed during incarceration, although the majority (76 percent) expressed dissatisfaction with the police, few (9 percent) were cynical toward the legal system itself. Multivariate analysis did find, however, that the more

cynical men were about the legal system, the more likely they were to report substance use or intoxication in the few months following release.

We asked about prisoners' spiritual beliefs as they could influence motivation to make positive life changes. While in prison, most men (63 percent) were considered to be highly spiritual. Over half (56 percent) prayed or meditated, and one-quarter (27 percent) read the Bible or other religious literature, on a daily basis. Following release, most believed their religiosity was about the same as when they were incarcerated (73 percent). A similar percentage prayed daily (59 percent), but fewer (16 percent) reported reading religious literature on a daily basis. Only 28 percent of men in our study belonged to a religious organization after their release.

MOMENT OF RELEASE

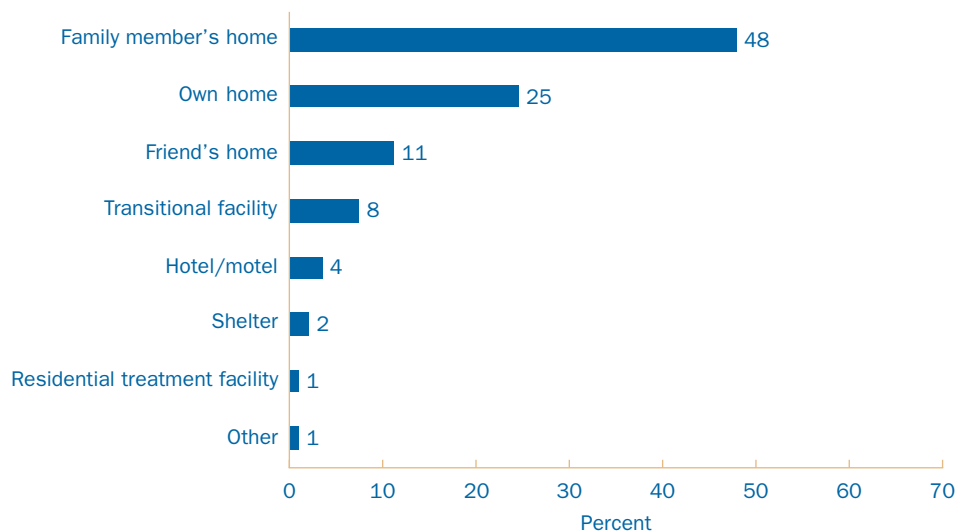
Few studies have focused on prisoners' reentry experiences immediately following release. Although anecdotal accounts have often portrayed prisoners as being released to the street at any hour without money or a place to go, evidence from this and other recent samples of released prisoners in other major cities has

presented a more positive picture of the first few hours of the reentry experience (Nelson, Deess, and Allen 1999; Visser, Kachnowski, La Vigne, and Travis 2004). Of the men in our study, almost all (99 percent) were released from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and were therefore able to access social and other services as needed. About half were released wearing prison-issued street clothes (48 percent), and another 21 percent wore clothes friends or family provided. Only one-third (33 percent) had a non-ODRC photo ID at the time of their release.

Once released, the majority of released prisoners in our study had someone pick them up at the prison gates (60 percent) or took the bus (31 percent). Only 18 percent had received tickets or money for transportation. The first night away from prison was usually spent at the house of a relative or friend or in their own home. Of those who went to a transitional or residential treatment facility, two-thirds were court ordered to do so, and the rest went voluntarily. The remaining men spent their first night at a motel, shelter, or back in jail. Only one person reported sleeping on the street (figure 3).

Few men in our study had sizable financial resources available upon release. Typically, released prisoners

Figure 3. Where Respondents Slept the First Night Out (N = 357)



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

were given \$75 in gate money and had another \$13⁴ available from other means, most often from family or a prison account. Only six men reported that no financial resources were available to them at the time of their release.

FAMILY AND PEERS

Prior to entering prison, about two-thirds of the men in the study were single (63 percent), with 23 percent married or living with an intimate partner. Over half (58 percent) had at least one child under age 18. Of those parents, 57 percent lived with at least one of their minor children, 86 percent supported their children financially, and 20 percent were required to pay child support.

Research on prisoner reentry and family experiences has often focused on the effects of incarceration on the family, particularly the effects on the children of incarcerated parents. Less is known, however, about the effects of family relationships on prisoners' reintegration successes and failures. In general, the men in our study felt they were close with their families. Many reported having close relationships with four or more family members before (43 percent), during (42 percent), and after (59 percent) prison. Mothers and stepmothers were most frequently mentioned as the people to whom they felt closest.

Contact from family and friends while in prison may influence these relationships after release. Nearly all of the prisoners in our study reported some contact with family or friends during their last three months in prison. While almost all corresponded with at least one person through mail (95 percent) or over the phone (89 percent), friends or family personally visited about one-third (38 percent) in the three months prior to release. Spouses and intimate partners, mothers, and children were the most likely to visit.

Most prisoners expected to receive emotional and financial support from family and friends after release, and the amount and duration of support they received often met or exceeded their expectations. While only half (50 percent) of the men in our study expected family members to provide financial support

after release, 78 percent received at least one month of support and 52 percent reported that the amount of financial assistance their family provided was *more* helpful than they had anticipated.

Families were also an important source of housing. Four out of five men in our study (80 percent) lived with a relative after release, which matched their expectations (78 percent expected to live with family). A few months following release, 35 percent were living with their mother, 26 percent with a sibling, and 23 percent with a spouse or intimate partner. Only 6 percent were living with friends, and 8 percent were living alone.

The men in our study had high expectations for their relationships with family and the support they would receive from family. While incarcerated, they acknowledged how important family is to staying out of prison, although they did not fully recognize this importance until after they had been in the community a few months. When asked before release what things would be important to keep them from returning to prison, men in our study mentioned support from family (63 percent) and spending time with children (46 percent), although these were not indicated as frequently as obtaining employment (90 percent), finding a place to live (84 percent), and abstaining from substance use (72 percent). However, when asked a similar question a few months after release, the largest percentage (26 percent) identified support from family as the *most* important thing that had kept them out of prison, and an additional 9 percent named seeing their children. The things they had anticipated as being the most influential, such as employment, housing, and drug use, were viewed as much less important (8, 7, and 4 percent, respectively).

Although family and friends can have a significant influence on a recently released prisoner's reintegration process, their impact is not always positive. Family members often have their own problems with substance abuse and the law. A large portion of the men in our study had family members with a history of conviction (64 percent) and incarceration (62 percent), and 30 percent had relatives serving time. Family members of nearly two-thirds (64 percent) had problems with drugs and alcohol.

PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

- The prerelease sample consisted of 424 men. Eighty-four percent, or 358 men, participated in the first postrelease interview conducted one to three months after release.
- The median age of respondents was 36 years, with ages ranging from 19 to 73 years.
- Seventy-four percent were African American, 18 percent were white, and the remaining 8 percent were identified as other racial groups, including multiracial. Across all racial groups, 5 percent categorized themselves as Hispanic.⁵
- Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) were single and had never been married, while 23 percent were married. Sixty-seven percent had children, and approximately one-third (31 percent) of all respondents had lived with at least one minor child before entering prison.
- Fifty-five percent had high school diplomas when they entered prison. Almost three-quarters (70 percent) had worked prior to entering prison, and 58 percent had worked 40 or more hours per week in the six months prior to incarceration.
- Most (83 percent) had at least one prior conviction, and 31 percent reported four or more. Sixty-five percent had previously served time in prison, and 44 percent had spent time in a juvenile correctional facility. Over half of the men (54 percent) had their first arrest before they turned 18.
- At the time of the prerelease interview, the self-reported median time served for the current offense was two years.⁶
- Forty-seven percent were currently incarcerated for a violent crime. Other conviction charges included property crimes (e.g., burglary, theft) and technical violations (15 and 13 percent, respectively).
- Approximately one-quarter (24 percent) were currently incarcerated due primarily to a drug charge. Seventy-two percent of all respondents had used controlled substances, and 60 percent reported recent alcohol intoxication before entering prison. Marijuana and cocaine were the most prevalent substances used prior to incarceration.

The friends of released prisoners in our study also had histories of extensive criminal involvement, which could potentially impact their reintegration success. The majority had at least one friend who had committed theft (76 percent) or assault (71 percent), abused drugs (88 percent), or sold drugs (77 percent). Approximately three-quarters (74 percent) had a friend who had been to prison. About one-third (33 percent) reported having only positive peer influences in their lives after release.

SUBSTANCE USE

Much research has documented a link between substance use and criminal activity, and rates of substance use are particularly high among incarcerated 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 (Mumola 1999) and three-quarters of soon-to-be-released prisoners had histories of drug and/or alcohol use (Beck 2001). The substance use histories of the men in our study mirror these national data, with a signifi-

cant share reporting extensive and serious prior involvement with drugs and alcohol. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) reported some drug use, with marijuana and cocaine topping the list of drugs, and 60 percent reported alcohol intoxication in the six months prior to prison. When asked about the frequency of substance use during the six months preceding incarceration, over half (52 percent) reported *daily* drug use or intoxication, with 27 percent using marijuana and 14 percent using cocaine on a daily basis.

Not surprisingly, pre-prison drug and alcohol use caused problems for many men in our study. When presented with an array of family, relationship, employment, financial, and legal problems they might have experienced, 48 percent indicated experiencing one or more problems as a result of their drug use, most commonly relationship problems and arguments at home. One-quarter (25 percent) reported that their drug use resulted in an arrest during the six-months prior to incarceration, including charges for driving under the influence. The share of men who reported problems caused by drinking was slightly lower (42 percent of all men) than for problems stem-

ming from drug use. As was the case with drug users, drinkers were most likely to report problems with relationships and arguments at home, and nearly one-quarter (22 percent) had been arrested due to their alcohol use (figure 4).

In this study, the men who used drugs or were intoxicated in the six months prior to incarceration were significantly more likely to participate in a substance abuse program during their prison stay than those who did not. Overall, 49 percent of respondents participated in a drug or alcohol treatment program while in prison, including AA and NA. Nearly one-third (28 percent) participated in the intensive RSAT program while incarcerated, with a completion rate of 65 percent.

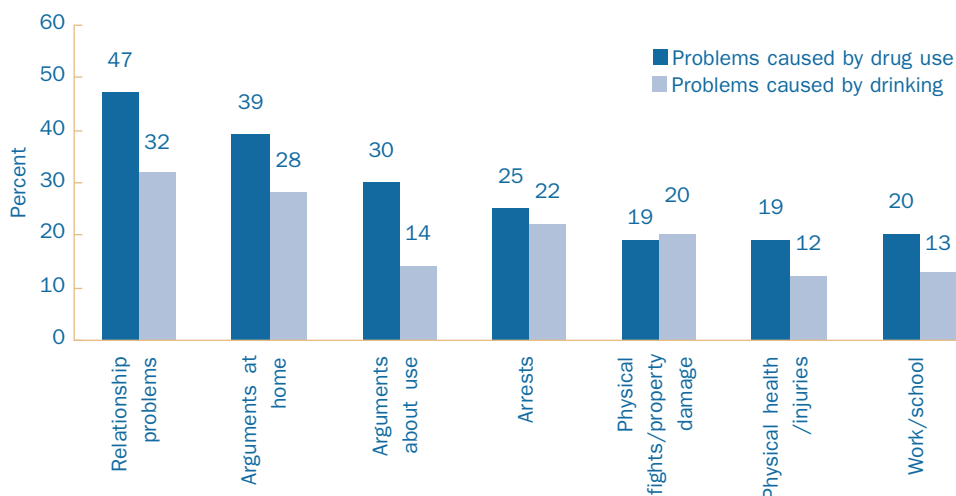
When interviewed one to three months after release, fewer than one-quarter of the men in the study (23 percent) reported drug use or intoxication (figure 5). The majority of men (71 percent) were subject to random drug testing as a condition of their supervision, and nearly two-thirds of men on supervision (60 percent) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that being under parole supervision will help them stay drug free. However,

men may also have been less than forthcoming about their substance use because of their postrelease supervision status.

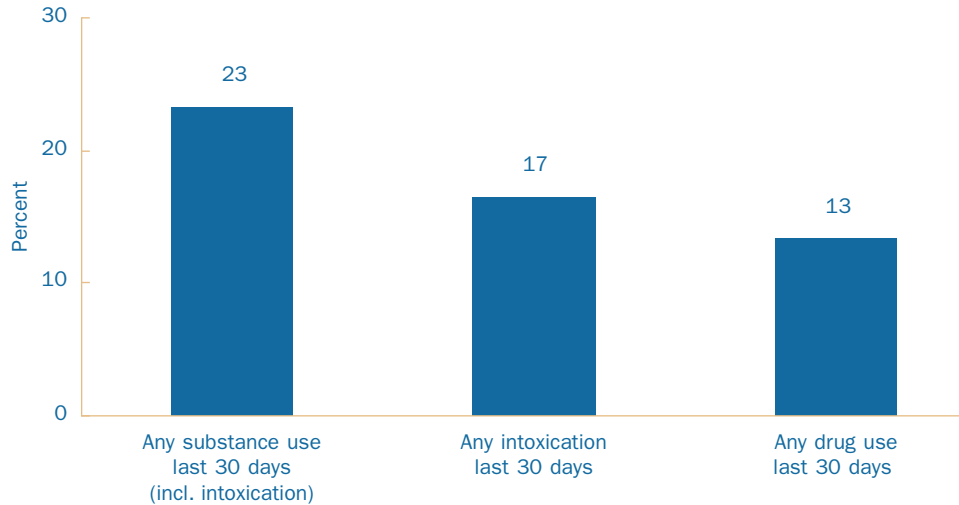
Rates of participation in substance abuse programs were much lower after release than they had been in prison, with 22 percent participating in some type of program since release, and 18 percent reporting they had attended AA or NA in the past 30 days. Of those who attended AA or NA, the average number of days attended in the previous month was 10.

In an effort to better understand what factors influence released prisoners' ability to avoid drug use and intoxication after release, we examined how a variety of factors affected postrelease drug use. Analyses indicated that men who participated in counseling while in prison, held less negative views of the legal system, and were subject to random drug testing as a supervision condition, were less likely to use drugs or be intoxicated after release. Not surprisingly, a history of substance use before incarceration increased the likelihood of reported use after release.

Figure 4. Percentage of Drug and Alcohol Users Reporting Problems Related to Use (Ns = 387 and 321)



Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive (i.e., a respondent may indicate more than one problem related to substance use).

Figure 5. Substance Use at One to Three Months Postrelease (N = 357)

FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS AND SUPPORT

Men left prison with many financial obligations and relied on financial support from sources other than legal employment after their release. When interviewed one to three months after release, 80 percent of the men in our study reported owing money (including debts associated with child support, fines/restitution/court costs, supervision fees, and other costs), and 59 percent said paying off these debts had been hard. Overall, 58 percent of men reported being worried about surviving financially, and 66 percent said it would be *pretty hard* or *very hard* to make enough money to support themselves. Over one-third (38 percent) of released prisoners felt they could benefit from financial support services. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of unemployed men in the study relied on income from spouses, family, and friends, and about one-third (29 percent) received public assistance, compared with 15 percent of their employed counterparts (table 1). Employed men also relied on other sources of financial assistance in addition to the income earned through their jobs, although to a lesser degree than unemployed respondents.

EMPLOYMENT

Finding and maintaining a legal job after release can help reduce the chances that an ex-prisoner will re-offend (Harer 1994; Sampson and Laub 1997; Uggen 2000), yet many prisoners face serious challenges when seeking employment after release (Holzer,

Table 1. Sources of Income in the Past Month (percent)

Type	Unemployed respondents (n = 251)	Employed respondents (n = 107)
Spouse, family, or friends	74	47
Public assistance	29	15
Legal employment	5	90
SSDI or SSI	4	0
Illegal activity	6	0
“Under the table”	25	21
Other source	4	0

SSDI = Social Security Disability Insurance; SSI = Supplemental Security Income.

Note: Respondents were interviewed one to three months after release. Sources of income for less than 2 percent of the population (i.e., unemployment, workers compensation, Social Security retirement, and veteran’s/military disability payments) are not included in the table.

Raphael, and Stoll 2003). During the six months before entering prison, over two-thirds (70 percent) of respondents were employed, typically in construction/landscaping, factory work, and food service. However, one-third (33 percent) reported receiving some of their income from illegal activity. Just over half (53 percent) had been fired from at least one job.

During their incarceration, some respondents participated in programs aimed at improving job skills and preparing them for postrelease employment. About one-third (32 percent) participated in employment readiness programs, 26 percent received job-training, and 86 percent held prison jobs at some point during their prison term. While nearly all men (90 percent) agreed that finding a job after release was important for them to stay out of prison, only about half (51 percent) expected that finding a job would be easy. Most (89 percent) reported that they would like *some help* or *a lot of help* finding a job after release.

Men who were interviewed a few months after release had limited success in finding employment. Thirty-nine percent had worked at some point since their release, and fewer than one-third (30 percent) were employed at the time of the interview, though most (72 percent) of those employed worked 40 or more hours per week. Of those who were employed, 28 percent had talked to friends, 16 percent had talked to relatives, and 24 percent had used a temporary employment agency to find their job.

For those who were employed at the postrelease interview, most reported overall satisfaction with their jobs. A large majority got along well with their coworkers (92 percent) and felt they were treated fairly (92 percent). About three-quarters reported thinking that their current job would give them better opportunities in the future (77 percent) and that they would be happy at their job one year later (70 percent). Despite these positive findings, nearly half of employed respondents (42 percent) reported general dissatisfaction with their wages. The median income for employed men in our study was \$640 per month.

To better understand why some men are more successful in obtaining employment upon release than others, factors related to postrelease employment were

studied, focusing on whether men obtained employment at any point after release, even if they were no longer employed at the time of the postrelease interview. The preliminary analyses indicated that the men in our study who had any job during prison were more likely to report employment after release. Postrelease employment was also higher for men who were required to work as a condition of supervision.

HEALTH

Despite a recent study documenting higher rates of chronic and infectious diseases and mental illness among prisoners than in the general population (National Commission on Correctional Health Care 2002), most men in our study expressed positive opinions about their physical health. Eighty percent assessed their own health as *good* or *excellent* during prison, while the remaining men felt that it was *fair* or *poor* (15 percent and 5 percent, respectively). Similarly, most men (79 percent) rated their health as *excellent* or *good* when interviewed one to three months after release. In spite of these positive self-assessments, over half (54 percent) reported being diagnosed with a chronic physical health condition, such as high blood pressure (20 percent), asthma (16 percent), arthritis (11 percent), and high cholesterol (11 percent). These self-reported rates probably underestimate the actual share of prisoners with such diseases.⁷

A smaller but important share of the men in our study exhibited a need for mental health services. While one in five released prisoners (19 percent) reported having problems with depression and other mental illnesses, responses to standard mental-health screening questions indicate that a higher proportion (23 percent) were likely to be depressed⁸ and that 14 percent had symptoms consistent with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to their incarceration experiences.⁹ Problems with mental and physical health were often intertwined: nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of respondents with a mental health condition reported a physical health condition, compared with 49 percent of those without.

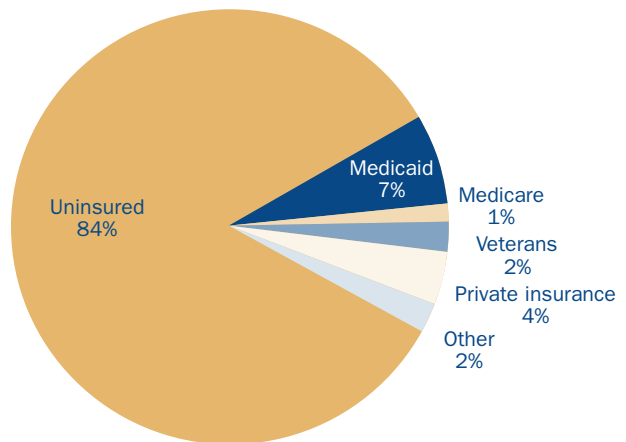
Prison health resources did not appear to fully meet prisoners' needs for services. Of the 59 percent of the

men in our study diagnosed with a physical or mental health condition, only half (28 percent of all men) reported having taken medications on a regular basis while in prison. Those who reported having a health condition were, however, much more likely than other prisoners to report having taken medications during prison (47 percent versus 4 percent, respectively). Furthermore, respondents taking medication were less likely to report violating a law, being arrested, or violating a condition of supervision after release.

Despite the high prevalence of physical and mental health conditions, the men in our study generally had optimistic expectations about staying in good health after release, with 89 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 68 percent thought staying in good health would be easy after release. Regardless of their expectations, many acknowledged that they would need help accessing health services after release, including assistance getting health care (86 percent), obtaining counseling (51 percent), and receiving mental health treatment (28 percent). The men in our study remained optimistic about maintaining good health one to three months after release, with 88 percent reporting that it would be *pretty easy* or *very easy* to do so—but few had the means to access health services.

Most released prisoners (84 percent) were without any type of insurance coverage. Of the small share who had insurance, half were covered under Medicare or Medicaid and the rest through private insurance, Veterans' benefits, or other insurance types (figure 6). Full-time employment slightly increased the likelihood of health coverage: 21 percent of the men working full-time when interviewed after release had health insurance, compared with only 15 percent of those either not working or working fewer than 40 hours per week. Although few of the men in the study (13 percent) reported difficulties getting prescription medications, uninsured men were more likely to have problems. Despite these increased difficulties, the men in our study without health insurance were divided on the importance of health coverage: fewer than half (42 percent) felt that it would be useful to them.

Figure 6. Insurance Coverage among Released Prisoners (N = 353)



POSTRELEASE SUPERVISION

The majority of Ohio prisoners sentenced to a year or more in prison are released to a period of community supervision during which they are expected to follow a number of parole conditions enforced by the Adult Parole Authority (APA) unit of the ODRC. Consistent with this policy, over three-quarters (76 percent) of the men in our study reported being on supervision when interviewed one to three months after release. Among these men, the majority reported meeting monthly (42 percent) or a few times per month (48 percent) with their parole officers (PO), with the average visit lasting 5 to 30 minutes. Additionally, over half (58 percent) had spoken with their PO on the phone at least once in the past 30 days, and one-quarter (28 percent) received a visit at their home from their PO.

The men in our study had generally positive feelings towards their POs: most believed their PO treated them with respect (96 percent), acted professionally (95 percent), and was trustworthy (86 percent). Nearly three-quarters (71 percent) reported that their POs were helpful with their transition home. The released prisoners in the study felt POs were most helpful by understanding their situation (28 percent) and providing encouragement (24 percent).

The ODRC maintains a variety of special conditions that can be required of a released prisoner. The men in

our study reported an average of 10 conditions, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 16. The majority (87 percent) of the men reported complying with their conditions of supervision, and 89 percent said it had been easy to avoid a violation after release. The most commonly cited violations were associating with other parolees without written permission and frequenting places where controlled substances are used. According to the men in our study, employment was the most difficult condition to comply with, followed by sex offender registration and face-to-face contact with their PO, although over half (52 percent) said that none of their conditions were particularly difficult to comply with. Many reported positive views of the impact of supervision on their potential for recidivism. Three out of every five men *agreed or strongly agreed* that supervision would help them stay crime free and drug free (60 percent each). Sixty percent also believed that being under supervision would help them stay out of prison after release. Preliminary analyses lend support to these notions that supervision conditions, such as random drug testing and employment requirements, can increase the likelihood of reintegration success (as previously reported).

CRIMINAL INVOLVEMENT

According to previous studies by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, most prisoners have long criminal records and exhibit high rates of recidivism. Nationwide, more than 60 percent of state prisoners surveyed in 1991 had been previously incarcerated (Beck et al. 1993), 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 (Langan and Levin 2002). Such repeat involvement with the criminal justice system was strongly evident in our study. Criminal histories of the men surveyed were extensive and began early in life: most (83 percent) had at least one prior conviction and nearly half (45 percent) reported four or more prior convictions. Two-thirds (65 percent) had served time in prison before, and 44 percent had spent time in a juvenile correctional facility. More than half (54 percent) had been arrested before they reached age 18. Despite these extensive criminal histo-

ries and high levels of familial criminal involvement (discussed previously), 77 percent of the men in our study expected it would be *pretty easy or very easy* to stay out of prison following release.

To assess their success at avoiding recidivism, the men in our study were asked to self-report any criminal involvement since their release. Six percent of those interviewed one to three months after release reported committing a new crime, and another 6 percent reported being rearrested. Future reports will include official reincarceration data available from the ODRC.

The men in our study who reported avoiding criminal behavior (i.e., new crimes, arrests, and violations of supervision) after release differed from those who did not. Men who were not arrested and who did not violate any law or conditions of supervision within the first few months after release were older and had less extensive criminal histories (i.e., fewer prior convictions and prison terms). They were also less likely to have been incarcerated for a technical violation, less likely to report relying on illegal sources of financial support before prison, and were confident that it would be easy to stay out of prison after release. Additionally, those taking medication for a health condition while in prison were more likely to refrain from criminal behavior once released.

COMMUNITY

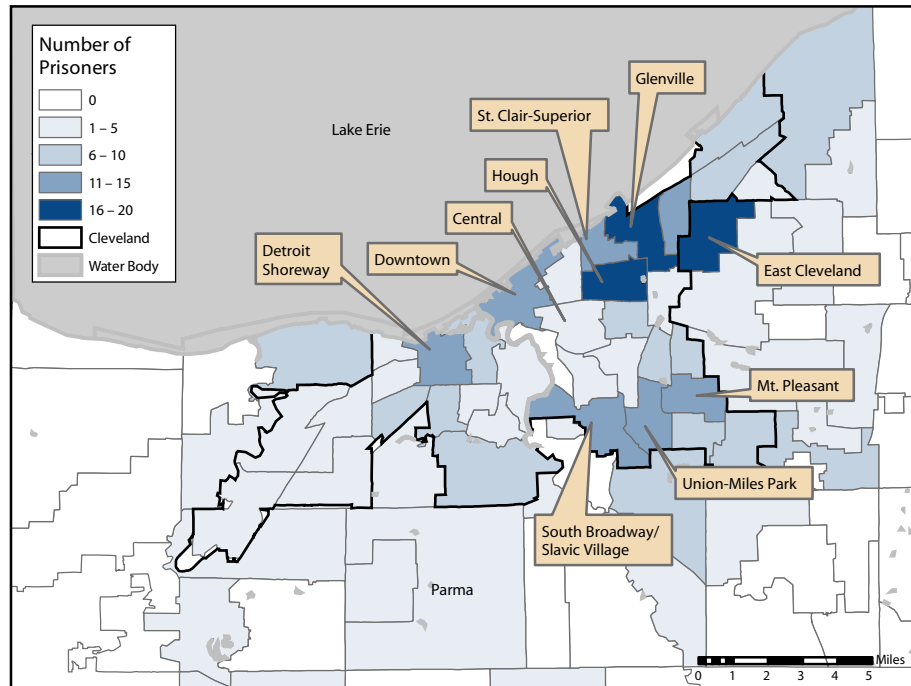
Findings from *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Ohio*, as well as other studies, indicate that a large share of former prisoners live in disadvantaged communities with high levels of poverty and unemployment (Clear, Rose, and Ryder 2001; La Vigne and Kachnowski 2003; La Vigne and Thompson 2003; La Vigne et al. 2003). Prisoners who return to communities with higher concentrations of social and economic disadvantage also have higher rates of recidivism (Visher and Farrell 2005), and communities affected by high levels of incarceration and reentry experience higher crime rates than otherwise expected (Clear et al. 2003). In our study, 75 percent of the released prisoners were residing in Cleveland at the time of the postrelease interview. Additionally, over one-third (34 percent) returned to one of just eight of Cleveland's 36 communities—

Glenville, Hough, Mt. Pleasant, Union–Miles Park, South Broadway/Slavic Village, Downtown, Detroit Shoreway, and St. Clair–Superior (figure 7). Many of these eight neighborhoods exceeded the citywide average rates in unemployment and the percentage of individuals living below the federal poverty level. However, it is important to note that distinct variations in disadvantage may exist within each community.

The men’s reports of pre- and postprison residences contradict the commonly held belief that prisoners return to their old neighborhoods upon release. In fact, over half (54 percent) did not return to the neighborhoods in which they lived before prison. These men lived in new neighborhoods primarily

because they wanted to avoid trouble in their old neighborhoods (28 percent), they lost their previous housing (22 percent), or because their family or friends had moved (18 percent). This perhaps explains why the men had favorable impressions of the neighborhoods they lived in after release, with 77 percent reporting that they lived in a safe neighborhood and 70 percent reporting that their neighborhood was a good place to live. Despite overall satisfaction with their neighborhoods, nearly half (48 percent) reported that drug dealing was a major problem in their community, and only 41 percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the neighborhood in which they resided at the time of the postrelease interview was a good place to find a job.

Figure 7. Distribution of Released Prisoners Who Returned to Cuyahoga County by Town and/or Cleveland Neighborhood (N = 316)



Note: Divisions within Cleveland are neighborhood borders based on the City of Cleveland’s designations. Divisions outside Cleveland are town boundaries.

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 three Cleveland neighborhoods—Central, Hough, and Mt. Pleasant—that are home to the highest concentrations of released prisoners within the City of Cleveland.¹⁰ A combined total of 69 residents participated in the focus groups. At least three participants in each group spoke of close friends or family members who had served time in prison, and at least one person in four of the groups reported serving prison time. Focus group participants were generally sympathetic toward released prisoners in their communities, believing that they faced many obstacles, such as finding employment and housing and providing for their basic needs. They mentioned that the unhealthy community environment to which they return—plagued by dissolving family units, eroding community values, and a failing economy—makes reentry even more challenging.

Participants felt that prisoners returning to these communities do not receive adequate support and suggested that resources within the families be enhanced and that the capacity of agencies that provide services and supervision be strengthened and expanded. Specific recommendations for improving service provision and support included instituting earlier reentry planning in prison, increasing the collaboration between prison programs and community agencies, making program participation mandatory, providing economic incentives to employers that hire former prisoners, and involving families and community members in reentry programming.

When focus group participants were asked how returning prisoners affect their communities, positive effects were most often mentioned, such as the potential for prisoners to mentor youth in danger of entering the juvenile justice system and other prisoners dealing with reentry. Many participants even provided examples of former prisoners as role models who had started programs, become leaders, or otherwise made positive contributions to the community. Only a few participants discussed negative effects of returning prisoners, such as the burden placed on families—particularly parenting and child care

responsibilities—during prisoners' incarceration and subsequent return. For a detailed description of the focus group participants and findings, see Brooks, Visher, and Naser (2006).

HOUSING

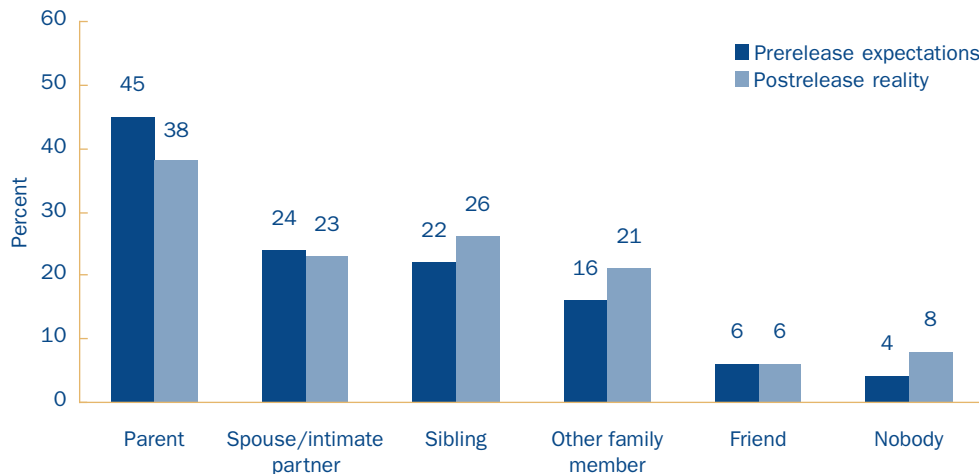
Finding a place to live is one of the first obstacles that returning prisoners must overcome as they are released from prison. Recent research has shown that released prisoners who do not find stable housing are significantly more likely to end up back in prison (Metraux and Culhane 2004). In our study, the men generally recognized the significance of postrelease living arrangements, with 84 percent 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, 70 percent of the men reported that they already had a place to live upon release. Of those who did not have housing arrangements lined up, nearly all (80 percent) reported they would need *some help* or *a lot of help* finding a place to live. The most common housing search methods the men planned to use were contacting a family member (39 percent) and using a referral service or housing program (35 percent).

Over three-quarters (78 percent) of the men in the study expected to live with family after release from prison. The largest percentage expected to live with their mother (40 percent), followed by an intimate partner or a sibling. These expectations were largely realized, with over three-quarters (80 percent) living with a family member or intimate partner one to three months after release (figure 8). Despite restrictions barring certain convicted felons from residing in public housing, only 7 percent reported having trouble finding housing due to their criminal record. Just 4 percent lived in public housing at the postrelease follow-up interview, and an additional 3 percent lived in Section 8 housing. Most notably, every man had secured some form of housing after release.

The men in our study were generally satisfied with their postrelease living arrangements. Almost all (97 percent) reported that they felt safe where they

Figure 8. Living Arrangements after Release: Prerelease Expectations and Postrelease Realities (N = 358)



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

lived and that their current living situation met (52 percent) or exceeded (41 percent) their expectations. Despite this satisfaction, many considered their living arrangements temporary. At the postrelease interview, over half (53 percent) expected to remain at their current location for less than a few months longer, and only one-third (33 percent) hoped to live at the same place one year later. To some extent, these housing arrangements also provided respondents with financial relief, as 61 percent were not paying for housing. However, some indicated that they resided with individuals since release who could jeopardize their prospects for successful reintegration: 21 percent lived with someone who had been in prison, 15 percent with someone who often drank to the point of intoxication, and 10 percent with someone who used illegal drugs.

SUMMARY

This report is the fourth product of the *Returning Home* study in Ohio. The first, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Ohio*, documented incarceration and release trends in the state over the past two decades, while the second, *Ohio Prisoners' Reflections on*

Returning Home, described the experiences and expectations of 424 soon-to-be-released prisoners. In the third report, *Community Residents' Perceptions of Prisoner Reentry in Selected Cleveland Neighborhoods*, local Cleveland residents commented on the experiences and impacts of returning prisoners. This fourth report presented preliminary findings on a range of reentry challenges released prisoners faced as they left prison and returned to Cleveland communities. A number of factors related to prisoners' short-term successes and failures at finding employment, refraining from substance use, and avoiding recidivism after release were described.

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 education and work histories that are often sporadic. Moreover, released prisoners present complicated health challenges, suggesting the need for coordinating health care provision both within and beyond prison walls.

This report also presents new insights that can help inform reentry planning efforts. Preliminary analysis of the survey responses highlights factors that could improve short-term reentry outcomes. First, participation in prison-based programs and services, including general counseling and prison jobs, appeared to reduce the likelihood of substance use and/or improve men's chances of obtaining employment after release. Men's attitudes toward themselves and the legal system also affected their transition home. Those who were confident that it would be easy to stay out of prison after release were less likely to report committing a new crime, being arrested, or violating a condition of supervision, while men with positive views of the legal system were less likely to abuse substances during the few months following release. Additionally, preprison factors identified a high-risk group of men who were likely to get into trouble soon after release. Men were more likely to report violating a law or a condition of supervision if they were younger, had extensive criminal histories, were recently incarcerated for a technical violation, and relied on illegal sources of income before entering prison.

Families appeared to play a large role in the reentry process. After release, many men recognized the importance of their families for providing emotional and financial support. In fact, the largest percentage of men identified support from families as the *most* important thing in keeping them out of prison. Families can also, however, negatively impact reintegration since they often have their own problems with crime and substance abuse. To incorporate families effectively into the reentry process, both the positive and negative aspects of family involvement should be factored into reentry programming.

Additional factors also affected former prisoners' experiences in the first few months after release. Health seemed to play a significant role in the transition home, although the nature of the relationship is not well understood. For instance, those who were taking prescription medications were less likely to recidivate. Another surprising finding was that the majority of men did not return to the neighborhood they lived in prior to incarceration. Most mentioned

avoiding trouble as the reason they did not return to their old neighborhoods. In regard to supervision, most men provided positive feedback on their supervision officers as well as on the role of supervision in encouraging them to abide by the law. Although this view of POs as helpful and supportive is surprising given their role and level of authority over the men's lives, preliminary analyses suggest that supervision conditions, including random drug testing and employment requirements, do increase the likelihood of reentry short-term success. These findings also highlight a potential avenue by which released prisoners can find some support to change their criminal behavior.

Many of the preliminary factors that predicted post-release substance use, employment, and recidivism in the first few months after release were unchangeable characteristics, including age, criminal history, prerelease attitudes, and preprison employment status. Most of these static factors appeared to predispose men to unsuccessful experiences after release. Less was discovered about the dynamic factors that may increase the likelihood of a successful transition back into the community. However, the short-term outcomes used to measure success for this report were based on men's self-report of their own behaviors one to three months following release. Further analyses using longer follow-up periods and augmenting self-report measures with official recidivism data from ODRC will highlight additional factors, both static and dynamic, that affect prisoners' reintegration success. Ideally, identification of the dynamic factors will advise practitioners and policymakers about those characteristics of prisoners and their surroundings that can be altered to increase their chances for successful reentry upon release.

This report is intended to provide a foundation for politicians and practitioners as they consider the various options for improving reintegration among released prisoners returning to Cleveland and similar communities. 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

¹ORC 5145.06 mandates inmates who do not possess a high school diploma or GED participate in a minimum of six months of education programming (or completion of GED/ high school degree) during their incarceration. Omnibus bill HB 510 allows ODRC the capability to exclude special populations from mandatory enrollment in education. According to ODRC policy, Special Population Status includes segregation status, death row, infirmary, crisis stabilization unit, residential treatment unit, and other special classifications. However, any inmate in Special Population Status who requests education will receive programming. Of those men in the study who entered prison without a high school degree or GED, 67 percent reported participating in adult education. It should be noted that lack of available data on Special Population Status prevents the identification of men who would have been excluded from mandatory enrollment in education.

²Preliminary multivariate regression analyses were run to predict self-reported, short-term outcomes. Further analyses using official data and self-report measures from the second and third postrelease interviews will assess the factors that predict long-term outcomes. See the *Returning Home Study Methodology* box for control measures and additional analysis details.

³Results based on a multivariate regression analysis. See the *Returning Home Study Methodology* box for additional analysis details.

⁴Based on median values. Reported amount of gate money given at release ranged from \$0 to \$375 and the other sum of money prisoners had available to them was between \$0 and \$10,000.

⁵The racial composition of men in the study is consistent with the composition of all prisoners released to Cuyahoga County as reported in LaVigne and Thompson (2003).

⁶Median time served excludes the 17 men who we determined should not have been surveyed because they were not approaching release. To be consistent with data collection in other *Returning Home* states, our selection criteria also included men who had been sentenced to at least one year in state prison. Due to sentencing reforms enacted in 1996, many individuals in Ohio prisons are serving sentences of less than one year.

⁷Conditions 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 (National Commission on Correctional Health Care 2002).

⁸Scores of 16 and above on the Center for Epidemiologic Studies depression scale were considered to indicate a high likelihood of depression (see Radloff 1991).

⁹Adapted from the 17-item PTSD Symptom Scale as described in Foa et al. (1993). Scale items correspond to the DSM-III-R diagnostic criteria for PTSD.

¹⁰These neighborhoods were selected based on the geographic analysis of released prisoners conducted for La Vigne and Thompson (2003).

¹¹In the recidivism model, general supervision status was used as a control measure. For the postrelease substance use and employment models, the general supervision controls were replaced with random drug testing and employment as conditions of supervision, respectively.

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RETURNING HOME STUDY METHODOLOGY

The *Returning Home* study is being implemented in four states, including a pilot study in Maryland and full research studies in Illinois, Ohio, and Texas. The goal in each state is to collect information on the life circumstances of respondents immediately prior to and following their release from prison, as well as up to a year 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 pre-release preparation, postrelease housing and employment, and the renewal of personal relationships.

The study design in Ohio is composed of several data collection efforts. The first effort involves 424 male prisoners sentenced to at least one year in prison who are returning to Cuyahoga County and entails (1) a self-administered survey given to groups of prisoners about one month prior to release and (2) three one-on-one interviews with sample members conducted approximately 1 to 3 months, 4 to 6 months, and 12 to 16 months after release. The second effort consists of a series of focus groups with community residents in the Cleveland neighborhoods that receive the highest proportion of returning prisoners, as well as one-on-one interviews with reentry policymakers and practitioners in Cleveland. Data in this research brief come from the self-administered pre-release surveys of 424 prisoners (administered from May 2004 through March 2005), the first postrelease interview with 358 released prisoners one to three months after release, and the community focus group findings.

Locating respondents for the postrelease interviews was difficult, time-intensive, and costly. Although interviews were scheduled to be conducted one to three months after

release, the availability of respondents during the time frame varied greatly: some could not be located until nine months after release, while others completed the follow-up interviews within the first month of release. Ultimately, we were able to interview 358 of the 424 men in our pre-release sample for the first postrelease wave, achieving an 84 percent follow-up rate.

To present a snapshot of prisoners' experiences returning to the Cleveland area, our descriptive analyses included the entire sample of 424 respondents where data were available. To predict preliminary reintegration successes and failures in regard to employment, substance use, and recidivism, we focused our analyses on the 358 men who completed both the prerelease and first postrelease interviews. All predictive analyses used multivariate regression techniques to statistically control for respondents' age, race, criminal history, and supervision status,¹¹ as well as other variables significant in logistic regression equations. Predictive analyses also statistically controlled for the number of months after release that an interview was conducted. Relationships reported as significant are those found to be statistically significant in multivariate models at a probability equal to or less than 0.10.

To ensure that our sample of postrelease interview participants is representative of the larger group of all prerelease participants, we compared the 358 prisoners who participated in the study with those 66 who did not and found no significant differences along several factors, including age, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, prior employment, number of prior convictions, time served, conviction offense, substance abuse history, prerelease family support, and family criminal history, when these factors were tested simultaneously in a regression model.

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