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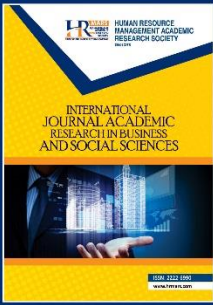
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Challenges in Re-Entry among Former Inmates: A Review

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Abstract

Failure of re-entry has been associated with risks of higher recidivism rates and is a potential factor of decreased in inmate's well-being. This article will examine the challenges endured by the former inmates during the process of re-entry. A literature search has been performed using various keywords like "challenges", "re-entry", "crime", "inmates" and "former inmates" in databases, such as Emerald, Elsevier, Sage, and Google Scholar. The results indicate that majority of the inmates undergo common challenges, which includes limited employment prospects, lack of family support, difficulties in securing housing, unstable physical/mental condition and drug dependency. Therefore, this article review is hoped to call for efforts to be made by the government and interested parties to reduce these challenges encountered by former inmates upon their prison release.

Keywords: Challenges, Re-entry, Former Inmates, Review

Introduction

Over the last decade, countless of inmates have been released from prison. Such information amidst the expansive prison population, which has been well documented in various criminal research (Freeman, 2003; Bushway et al. 2007; Forster, 2010; Glaze, 2011). The Ministry of Justice (2016) has found that nearly 1.6 million inmates were incarcerated in state and federal prisons; recent estimates indicate that the total prison population in England and Wales have increased from 41,000 inmates to 84, 405 inmates from 1993 to 2016 (Ministry of Justice, 2016).

Many scholars have highlighted that over 11 million inmates are subsequently caught again each year within 12 months of being released from prison (Glaze, 2011). Evidence from various sources has shown that former inmates are commonly involved in criminal activities due to the failure of re-entry processes after returning to the society (Laub et al. 2003; McGovern et al. 2009; Mears et al. 2010). According to Petersilia (2001), re-entry refers to the process of transition from prison to community after a period of secured confinement in a detention center or prison.

The literature on crime has classified re-entry process into three main phases, which are; (i) being removed from families, friends, children, and community members for a certain period of time, (ii) being associated with other inmates who have also committed a crime, and (iii) returning to the same community after undergoing punishment and rehabilitation for a certain term (Mears, 2008). Extensive researches have also validated that re-entry process is complicated further by the inmate's need to perceive the "former inmate" label and experience stigmatization due to their criminal history (Springer et al. 2011; Solomon, 2012; Stahler et al. 2013).

Due to the increasing percentage of recidivism rates over the last decade, a rigorous investigation has been made to discuss criminology theory and re-entry policy for a better understanding of inmates' public identity management after prison release (Belenko, 2006; Atkin et al. 2011; Berg et al. 2011). Therefore, the current review is an extension of existing re-entry research, focusing on the challenges confronted by former inmates during their re-entry process.

Methodology

A literature search has been performed using available articles on the topic of interest. The keywords utilized for related article retrievals include; "challenges", "re-entry", "crime", "inmates" and "former inmates" on the Emerald, Elsevier, Sage and Google Scholar database. A large number of original and review articles have been obtained according to the selected title, abstracts, and keywords.

For this review, the inclusion criteria are: (1) electronic records published in English between 1-Jan-1996 to 31-Dec-2016, (2) individual who has been incarcerated for a minimum of 6 months, (3) the sampled review includes juvenile, young offenders and adult offenders, and (4) studies possessing at least 15 human subjects (to decrease bias associated with inadequate sample size). By contrast, the exclusion criteria are: (1) articles/review paper with an unclear description of challenges endured by inmates in the re-entry process. Figure 1 has depicted the flow chart of the review process.

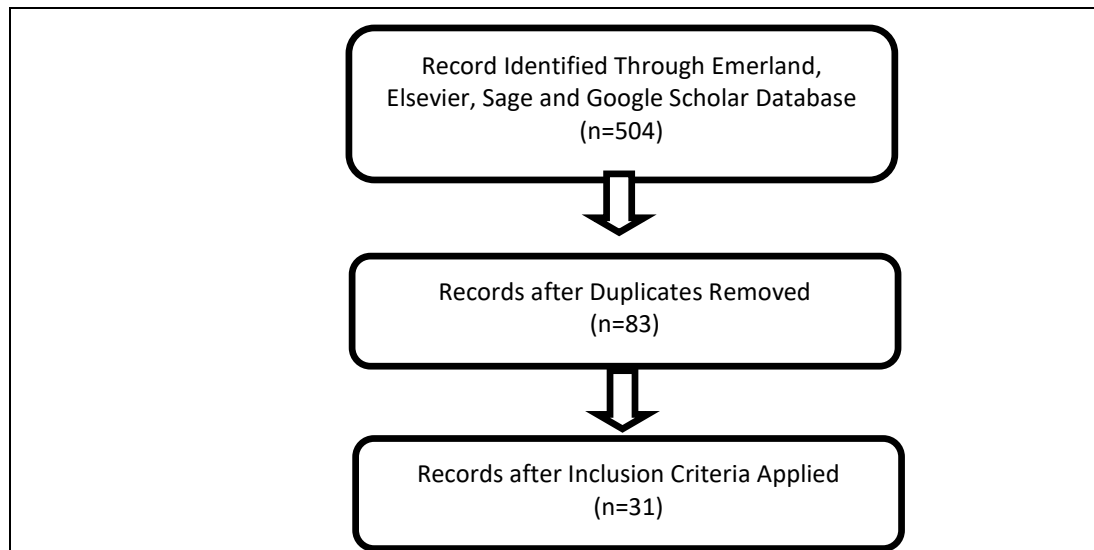


Figure 1: Flow Chart of Review Process

Challenges in Re-entry among Former Inmates

Employment

In the context of 'post-prison', obtaining a steady job is a difficult task for the returning inmates. Evidence has demonstrated that it is necessary for them to readjust with the community and manage a stable financial situation after being released from prison (La Vigne et al. 2008; Lattimore et al. 2010). Bernstein et al. (2000), Petersilia (2001), and Travis et al. (2001) have highlighted that a majority of inmates left prison with little or no saving, rendering employment opportunities with decent wages as an important factor for not returning to criminal activities.

Internet has proven to be an opportunity for employers to access criminal records of their prospective employees (Holzer et al. 2004). Therefore, the basic "job-opportunity" for former inmates is limited as most employers do not trust an individual with crime conviction (Pager, 2003; Stoll & Bushway, 2008). As a result, many experience failures in obtaining secure job placement due to general reluctance of hiring them. Moreover, employment prospects are also less due to a low level of education, limited work experience, and inadequate job skills most inmates come with (Freeman, 2003; Bushway et al. 2007; Atkin et al. 2011; Berg et al. 2011).

Multiple meticulous types of research have proven that there is a significant relationship between employment factor and failure in re-entry (Freeman, 2003; Holzer et al. 2004; La Vigne, 2009; Glaze, 2011). Thus, an opportunity to attain a secure job must be enhanced to reduce post-release recidivism rate and to help the inmates in developing wider networking in a community.

Lack of Family Support

Social scientists have specified the vital role family members play in reconnecting former inmates to the conventional social order (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Prior studies have revealed that a family is the main source of emotional, social, and financial support to inmates (Visher et al. 2004). However, former inmates generally encounter setbacks and challenges to restore their

relationship with family members and are subsequently less prepared to undertake new responsibilities (Travis et al. 2003).

Incarceration has been found to drastically disrupt the parent-child relationship, spousal relationship, and family network (Travis et al., 2003), while strengthening family relationship are the biggest challenge in re-entry (Thompson, 2004; La Vigne et al., 2009). Recent research has also documented that inmates serving long-term sentences will perceive a bigger gap and undergo tougher challenges during a reunion with respective family members and friends (Berg et al. 2011; Stahler et al. 2013; Ortiz, 2014).

Furthermore, emotional and social support from family members has been strongly associated with reduced anxiety and depression symptoms among former inmates (Freeman, 2003; Bushway et al. 2007; Foster, 2010). Hence, strong attachment to family members and friends during the transition period to mainstream society is crucial to reduce re-entry failures. Such mechanism is also expected to enhance the psychological well-being and maintaining a pro-social bonding among inmates.

Housing

A stable housing and residency is a basic survival necessity, especially for inmates who are not accepted by family members upon their return. However, the lack of savings and incomes pose as the biggest obstacle toward attaining a suitable housing after incarceration (Taxman et al. 2002; La Vigne et al. 2008). Moreover, the process is hindered further due to: (i) negative prejudiced owners possessing stigma towards former inmates, (ii) complicated formal and informal regulations both, and (ii) unaffordable rental fees offered by the owners (Metraux & Dennis, 2004).

Various studies and meta-analysis have highlighted the fact that inmates returning to neighborhoods accompanied with higher social and economic disadvantages could not escape from poverty (Langan et al. 2002; Sullivan, 2004; Wehrman, 2010; Ortiz, 2014). Without a safe place to stay, they find it harder to survive, whereas going back to an unstable baseline residential is highly associated with risks of new conviction (McGovern et al. 2009).

Therefore, a supportive housing privilege is beneficial for successful re-entry, as the combination of deinstitutionalization and lacking of family support can increase the homelessness rate among former inmates. Thus, housing authorities should consider lowering their screening criteria and initiating house rental for former inmates to ensure the availability of shelter upon release.

Health Care

According to National Commission on Correctional Health Care (2002), the rate of infectious diseases among inmates is substantially greater compared to the general population. Almost 40% of former inmates are associated with chronic physical and mental co-morbidities, such as depression and high blood pressure (Miller et al. 2012). Moreover, inmates are five to ten times

at risk for schizophrenia, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), psychotic disorder, Hepatitis B, bipolar disorder, tuberculosis, and Hepatitis C (Travis & Petersilia, 2001).

Furthermore, it has been recently shown that incarcerated female inmates show a higher prevalence of mental health disorder compared to their male counterparts (Miller et al. 2012). A national study has also found that female inmates have encountered various mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression upon their release from prison (Miller, 2012). According to Langan et al. (2002), Belenko (2006), Binswanger et al. (2007) and Springer et al. (2011) re-entry processes have also failed due to relapse of alcohol abuse and chronic medical conditions.

As inmates having common physical and mental health issues are more likely to face problems upon their re-entry attempt, better diagnostic procedure, screening, and treatment are required to help them once they are released. Moreover, society and community members should also offer comprehensive social support to enhance the inmate's self-concept thus they could achieve a successful re-entry back into the community.

Substance Abuse

Petersilia (2001) has found that prior to incarceration, 60% of female inmates have met the criteria for drug dependency, which are known as "poly-drug abuser". This term is defined as a condition of being dependent on more than one drug, leading towards further negative post-release outcome (Petersilia, 2001). Furthermore, according to Langan et al. (2002) and Belenko (2006), substance abuse among former inmates has a significant relationship to recidivism.

Despite receiving adequate treatment in prison (prison-based care), reports have shown that around 40% of inmates relapse to substance abuse in the first three months upon being released from prison (Visher et al. 2004). Mears et al. (2010), have also supported such statements, stating that inmates who have insufficient networking and linkage during post-prison are more vulnerable towards relapses. Hence, according to Mears et al. (2010) and Foster (2010) continuous follow-up sessions and community based-care are crucial to avoid potential relapse among inmates.

Past experimental studies have proven that drug dependency is a vital factor attributable towards failure in re-entry (Langan et al. 2002; Lattimore et al. 2010). This suggests that the treatment inmates receive during their convicted period is only short-term benefits. Thus, a well-trained case manager or social worker, continuous counseling session, and extended behavioral treatments are among the necessary strategies to be employed to ensure adequate intervention for the inmates before and after being released from prison.

Conclusions

Inmates are challenged in many ways throughout their transition period from prison to community. To promote successful re-entry, employers must be willing to trust and hire former inmates, while family members should provide emotional and social support upon their release from prison. Additionally, allocation of extra funding towards building a community-based

halfway houses for former inmates who doesn't have a shelter is preferable. A collaboration between healthcare and counseling services in assistance provision specifically for those having physical, mental health, and substance dependency will prove to be beneficial in reducing the recidivism rate.

Unfortunately, a majority of community members are still reluctant to provide social and emotional support to former inmates, whereas very few are willing to offer assistance. It is ironic that poor social connectedness poses such a profound effect on the inmates' likelihood to return to the community. Thus, to ensure effective and successful re-entry inmates need to unlearn their criminal mindset and be willing to re-engage in the society.

Furthermore, the internal and external changes posed by re-integration should be embraced, as they must learn the "self-survival" strategies to re-assimilate among their family, friends and community members. Hence, proper training and preparation should also be given to inmates so they could adapt, transform, and be ready to undergo any challenges when they return back to the community.

A crime-free lifestyle requires an effective program that will change the attitude, beliefs, and coping skills of inmates to help reduce the risks and rates of recidivism. Thus, the government, non-government agencies, policymakers, and practitioners alike should work together to plan and provide a comprehensive community-based program for inmates. Such mindset will assist the inmates in enduring the challenges faced during their re-entry process and also helps to promote social responsibility among them.

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