

## RESEARCH IN BRIEF

# Barriers to Successful Re-Entry

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### Introduction

In the world of criminal justice, re-entry refers to the assimilation of a previously incarcerated individual back into society and their community (National Institute of Justice, 2013). Re-entry is a complex, multi-faceted process that requires a focus on different areas such as employment, health, housing, and social networks to be successful.

This research brief details the importance of studying re-entry and enhancing successful re-entry. Additionally, this data brief will examine various barriers to successful re-entry as well as the consequences of these obstacles. Factors that promote successful reentry will also be discussed.

### Prevalence

Since 2001, correctional facilities within the United States have housed over 1.5 million people each year (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016; Carson & Kluckow, 2023). Many have referred to United States' correctional institutions as a "revolving door" (Pew Center on the States, 2011). As part of this revolving door, thousands of individuals each year rejoin conventional society after time spent in a correctional institution.

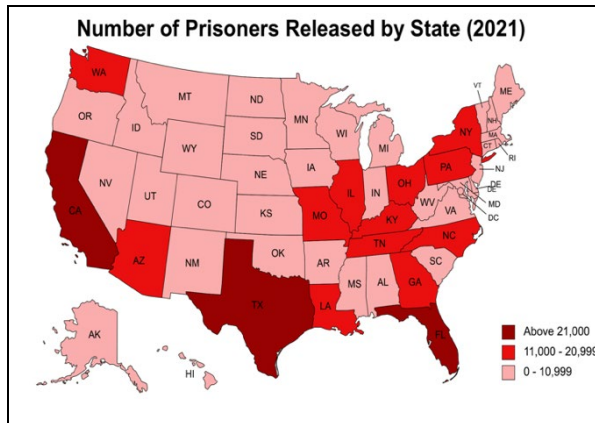
Based on data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (see Carson 2022), nearly 450,000 individuals within the United States were released from state and federal prisons in 2021 alone. In some states (e.g., California, Texas, Florida), over 21,000 previously incarcerated individuals were released back into their communities during 2021 (see Figure

## HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2021, nearly 450,000 individuals were released from state and federal prisons.
- On average, a previously incarcerated individual will spend over 6 months unemployed post-release.
- Those who were previously incarcerated are approximately 10 times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population.
- Eighty-two percent of individuals across 24 states who were released in 2008 were re-arrested within 10 years of their release.
- Familial support, access to housing, and employment were all found to reduce rates of recidivism.

1). The primary goal of corrections is to have individuals serving sufficient time behind bars so they will never want to return. To prevent cyclical incarceration, it is crucial to account for barriers individuals may face during reentry.

**Figure 1**



Source: Carson (2022)

## The Barriers for Reentry

With newfound freedom comes newfound struggles. Those who are released from United States' correctional facilities face a variety of different trials and tribulations. These struggles include, but are not limited to, employment, housing, and transportation.

In the realm of employment, a previously incarcerated individual will be unemployed for over six months, on average, following their release (Wang & Bertram, 2022). Further, during ages 18 through 54, individuals in the general population will spend around 20% more of their time employed than those who have experienced incarceration (Wang & Bertram, 2022).

These obstacles do not stop once a person is employed post-release. One study found that approximately 49% of previously incarcerated persons earn less than \$500 during their first year on the outside. Further, the same study found that only about 20% of ex-prisoners will earn more than \$15,000 during their first year after being released (Looney & Turner, 2018). This income level leaves nearly the majority of previously incarcerated individuals barely above the US poverty guidelines for a one-person household during the year the study was

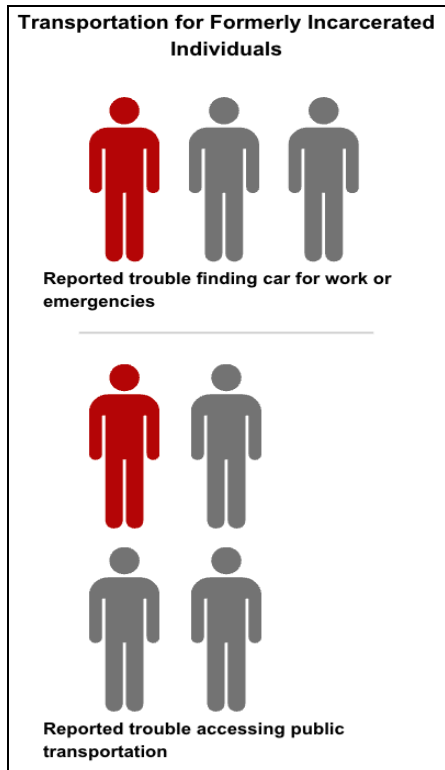
conducted (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

Another common barrier for those being released from a correctional institution is housing. Compared to the general population in the US, rates of homelessness are approximately 10 times higher for those who were previously incarcerated (Couloute, 2018). This author also found that the rate of homelessness increases for those who have been behind bars more than once. Some formerly incarcerated individuals will immediately seek a shelter following their release. In fact, 50,000 formerly incarcerated individuals per year seek refuge in local shelters following their reentry (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2016).

Transportation is also an area of struggle for those being released from correctional institutions. Unlike employment and housing, transportation becomes vital the very instant a person steps foot outside their former correctional facility. Transportation is crucial for individuals to return to their original communities post-release. Although transportation must be provided by Federal prisons, local jails are not required to provide transportation upon release (McCann, 2023). Even if transportation is provided upon release, long-term transportation is not provided for things like employment or treatment programs, many of which can be conditions of parole (McCann, 2023). In one study, it was discovered that for individuals living in rural communities, the lack of transportation was the largest barrier to abiding by parole and probation guidelines (Zajac, Hutchison, & Meyer, 2014). According to a reentry survey, about one in three formerly incarcerated individuals reported trouble finding a car for employment or emergency purposes. That same survey also found that approximately one in four formerly incarcerated people had trouble

accessing public transportation (McCann, 2023).

**Figure 2**



Source: McCann (2023)

**Adverse Consequences of these Barriers**

Recidivism is an unfortunate reality for many who are released from correctional institutions. According to a study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, almost half (46%) of those who were released from prison in 2012 in 34 states were re-arrested within five years of their release for either a new charge or a violation of their parole or probation conditions (Durose & Antenangeli, 2021). A similar study found that, across 24 states, around 66% of those who were released from prison in 2008 were re-arrested within three years, and about 82% were re-arrested within 10 years of re-entering conventional society (Antenangeli & Durose, 2021). Although there are many factors that contribute to high recidivism rates, these basic barriers associated with housing and

employment can contribute to a pattern of imprisonment and prevent motivated individuals from returning successfully to society and their families (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016).

**What Works**

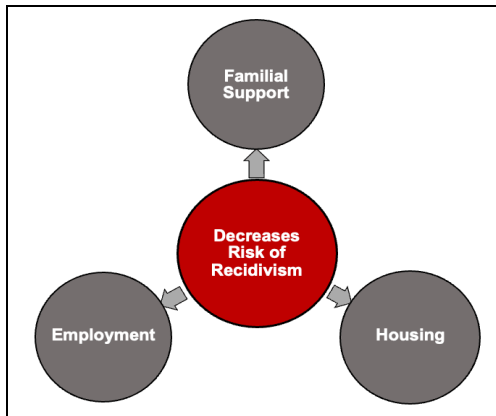
Several studies have found links between various pro-social endeavors and lower recidivism rates. In a longitudinal study analyzing employment post-incarceration, Visher and colleagues (2008) found that those who were employed within the first two months after being released were less likely to recidivate during their first eight to twelve months outside of prison. Additionally, these authors found that those who made higher wages during their first two months post-prison were less likely to be re-incarcerated (2008). Aside from quick and lucrative employment post-release, persons who participated in job training programs during incarceration were more likely to avoid re-incarceration one-year post-release (Visher et al., 2008).

The lack of available housing post-release has also been found to be correlated with recidivism rates. For example, Jacobs and Gottlieb (2020) found that recidivism rates increased from 17% to 33% for those who were considered “high-risk” because they were homeless. When compared to persons released into their family’s home, recidivism risks were 35% higher for persons beginning reentry without housing.

As additional evidence of the importance of familial support, multiple studies have found a reduction in recidivism and rearrest rates for those who have close connections with and support from their family post-release. For example, Mowen and colleagues (2020) found that persons with strong ties to their family post-release were less likely to recidivate as their families were able to provide instrumental support such as housing and transportation. Other research

(e.g., Visher et al. 2008) found that almost half (48%) of released persons rely on financial support from their friends and family eight months post-release. This same study found that nearly three-fourths of the sample used friends or family to find post-release employment.

**Figure 3**



Source: Jacobs & Gottlieb (2020); Visher et al. (2008)

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