

## Preface: Prisoner Reentry

G. Roger Jarjoura  
*Guest Editor*

There is no question that prisoner reentry is a significant social issue. In 2004, there were over 650,000 offenders released from prisons in the U.S. (LaVigne and Cowan, 2005). The sheer volume of formerly incarcerated persons returning to communities across this country has implications for public safety, the economy, and for the civic engagement of these persons. Over two-thirds of those released from prison will be arrested and over half will return to confinement within three years of their release (Hughes and Wilson, 2004). At the same time that the number of prison inmates in this country is at an all time high, there are smaller proportions of offenders participating in educational and treatment programs while incarcerated. This further exacerbates the challenges that offenders will face when trying to do well after their release (LaVigne and Cowan, 2005). This special issue of *Western Criminology Review* focuses on the topic of prisoner reentry. In this issue we present five articles that build on the still developing literature on this key theme.

Since the late 1990s, there has been growing attention in the literature on the issue of prisoner reentry. Much of what has appeared since then has served to inform us about the nature of prisoner reentry and the challenges that must be addressed to facilitate effective reentry. More recently, we have begun to see more attention to the practice of prisoner reentry. Petersilia (2004), for instance, calls for research that goes beyond the use of recidivism as the primary outcome measure and that resonates with practitioners. She encourages a focus on ways to measure reintegration—this might involve assessing attachment to social institutions, capturing the impact of employment in the lives of the individual offenders, and tracking indicators of civic engagement, among other things. Petersilia goes on to remind us that practitioners are unlikely to adopt strategies that do not make sense or are not straightforward enough in their design to lend themselves to easy implementation.

We have seen that reentry efforts are not always successful. In one noteworthy recent example, researchers found that formerly incarcerated persons taking part in the Greenlight Transitional Services Demonstration Project fared worse than those not receiving any reentry support (Wilson et al., 2005). Wilson and his colleagues suggest that this may be a reflection that the program did not last long enough or provide effective case management. At a time when there is widespread public attention to the issue

of prisoner reentry, it is critical that we give thoughtful consideration to the practice of prisoner reentry (Piehl, LoBuglio and Freeman, 2003). The articles in this special issue do just that. They each provide guidance in the enhancement of reentry programs. Practitioners should take note of the strategies being advanced by these authors.

Laura Winterfield, Pamela Lattimore, Danielle Steffey, Susan Brumbaugh, and Christine Lindquist kick off the issue with a presentation of findings from the multi-site evaluation of the federal Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI). SVORI is an important initiative in that it allows us to take a look at what can happen if we actually link offenders with services that are called for by assessments of risks and needs. In this article, the focus is on whether the desired services are more likely to be offered for the offenders participating in SVORI than for those not participating in SVORI. The SVORI evaluation involves sites in all 50 states, and the results of this important evaluation have been eagerly anticipated.

The next article, by Rebecca Naser and Christy Visher, looks at the impact of incarceration and reentry on the families of the prisoners. They take a look at the prisoners' expectations regarding family support prior to release and then examine the kinds of family support that are actually provided after release. In addition, Naser and Visher consider the perspective of the family members themselves and incorporate those voices into their analysis. Since family support is thought to be a critical factor for reentry success, this article is valuable in helping to shape reentry practices.

There has been attention in the literature to the phenomenon that most prisoners will be returning to lower-income communities in urban areas. Yet there are some inmates that are faced with returning to rural areas. Eric Wodahl takes a look at the unique challenges inmates face when they return to rural communities. He begins where much of the literature on prisoner reentry leaves off and then extends our understanding by considering the nature of housing, employment, and treatment for substance abuse and other mental health issues in rural areas. He does so by drawing inferences based on contemporary research in sociology, addictions, and health care. He offers suggestions on ways to better prepare offenders who are returning to rural locales.

William Barton advocates for building a strengths perspective into juvenile reentry programming. He argues for a shift from a focus on deficits to a focus on strengths. He begins with a discussion of a national evidence-based model for juvenile reentry and then walks through how to incorporate a strengths perspective into this model. Finally, he provides a discussion of the implementation of a program that is an example of the kind of approach he is proposing. As Travis (2002) notes, reintegration is as important a goal as the reduction of recidivism is. Barton provides us with a strategy for enhancing the likelihood of reintegration.

Martha Henderson and Dena Hanley finish the issue with an article that stresses the importance of effective planning in the development and implementation of reentry programs. They present information on the Baldrige Criteria Performance for Excellence Model and lay out a careful framework for adapting this model to prisoner reentry. For each of the criteria in the model, the authors present specific examples of the kinds of actions that may be taken by managers and leaders. The authors go step by step through the different criteria. Those designing reentry programs often do what makes sense to them without any attention to evidence-based practices or strategic planning. Readers who seriously apply these criteria as they develop reentry programs just may find that they have created a program that works for the population being served.

## References

Hughes, Timothy and Doris J. Wilson. 2004. *Reentry Trends in the United States: Inmates Returning to the Community After Serving Time in Prison*. U.S.

Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. [Online]. Available: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/reentry.htm>.

LaVigne, Nancy G. and Jake Cowan. 2005. *Mapping Prisoner Reentry: An Action Research Guidebook*. Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center. [Online]. Available: [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411250\\_RMNguidebook.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411250_RMNguidebook.pdf).

Petersilia, Joan. 2004. "What Works in Prisoner Reentry? Reviewing and Questioning the Evidence." *Federal Probation* 68 (2). [Online]. Available: [http://www.uscourts.gov/fedprob/September\\_2004/whatworks.html](http://www.uscourts.gov/fedprob/September_2004/whatworks.html).

Piehl, Anne M., Stefan F. Lobuglio, and Richard B. Freeman. 2003. *Prospects for Prisoner Reentry*. Working paper. Economic Policy Institute. [Online]. Available: <http://www.epinet.org/workingpapers/WP125.pdf>.

Travis, Jeremy. 2002. *Thoughts on the Future of Parole*. Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center. [Online]. Available: <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410521.pdf>.

Wilson, James A., Yury Cheryachukin, Robert C. Davis, Jean Dauphinee, Robert Hope, and Kajal Gehi. 2005. *Smoothing the Path from Prison to Home: An Evaluation of the Project Greenlight Transitional Services Demonstration Project*. Vera Institute of Justice. [Online]. Available: [http://www.vera.org/publication\\_pdf/319\\_590.pdf](http://www.vera.org/publication_pdf/319_590.pdf).