

Exploring pre-release expectations and post-release experiences of people released from prison in Australia

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Presentation overview

- Context
- Background
- Research aims
- Method
- Key findings
- Implications and policy agenda

Context

- Over 42,000 people in prison in Australia
- Over 68,000 instances of release from prison per year
- 60% of people in prison have been imprisoned previously
- 50% of those released from prison return to custody or community corrections within two years

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). *Corrective services, Australia*.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). *Prisoners in Australia*.

Department for Correctional Services (2022). *10by20 Report 2022*.

Background

- Extensive and enduring post-release difficulties
- Difficulties compound and interact, reinforcing negative pathways
- Repeat incidences of imprisonment often result, perpetuating cumulative disadvantage
- Serial depletion of resources becomes more disabling over time, making successful community integration unlikely

Research aims

- Overarching aim to understand the lived experience of release from prison in Australia
- Explore how prisoners conceptualise their life after prison and prepare for their release
- Understand how barriers to, and facilitators of, community (re)integration interact and unfold over time

Method

- Prospective, longitudinal study
- Qualitative interviews with 12 men prior to their release
- Subset of 5 men reinterviewed up to one-year post-release
- Total of 27 post-release interviews
- Hybrid analytical approach, combining reflexive thematic analyses with narrative methods
- Focus on honouring the men's lived experiences and emphasising their own perspectives

Key findings

1. Prison life most influential for informing release expectations:
 - Vocational and educational programs
 - Parole process
2. Prison acts a circuit-breaker
3. Existing post-release support structures are problematic
4. Families can inadvertently negatively affect re-entry experiences
5. 'Antisocial' peers can positively affect re-entry experiences

Implications and short-term policy agenda

- Improve communication about and administration of parole process
- Improve availability and administration of custodial programs
- Supplement vocational and educational programs with links to industry
- Reassess conditions prohibiting contact with known offenders

Implications and long-term policy agenda

- Increase investment in post-release housing
- Improve access to post-release healthcare
- Increase accessibility to gradual release schemes
- Consider nuances of family dynamics and restructure treatment programs accordingly

Thank you!

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