

Prisoner Reintegration Challenges Facing Women with Mental Health Problems

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Department of Sociology and Archaeology

Statement of the Problem/Significance of the Project

The number of individuals being released from prison has focused attention over the last ten years on describing the characteristics and needs of men and women leaving prison, identifying effective policies and programs to support community reintegration, and factors related to relapse and recidivism. Each year, nearly 700,000 men and women are released from prison into communities across the United States (Carson and Sabol 2012). Many do not make a successful transition: two-thirds are arrested within three years and one-half are returned to prison, either for parole violations or new crimes (Langan and Levin 2002). This revolving door phenomenon is costly in terms of criminal justice system expenditures, not to mention the human and social costs borne by crime victims, returning prisoners, their families, and the communities in which they reside. Over the past decade, researchers have been conducting research to understand the process of prisoner reentry and reintegration and identify factors associated with reentry success and failure, with the goal of informing policy and practice. A major area that has been under-examined relates to offenders being released from prison with mental health conditions, particularly among women. This project proposes to examine the mental health status among a sample of women leaving confinement and the role that mental health problems play in shaping a variety of reentry outcomes.

Background

Women entering the correctional system represent a population at high risk for mental health problems and there is a growing body of research on the mental health needs of women offenders (see Gido and Dalley 2008). One major finding from this research is that incarcerated women are likely to report extensive histories of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (Greenfeld and Snell 1998). Moreover, surveys conducted among incarcerated women have shown a strong link between childhood abuse and adult mental health problems, particularly depression, post-traumatic stress, panic, and eating disorders (see Messina and Grella 2006). These mental health problems pose problems for women at every stage of the criminal justice process, from arrest to incarceration to community reentry and reintegration.

Women leaving prison face multiple, often simultaneous tasks as they embark on the process of reestablishing their lives outside prison—finding housing, getting a job, earning enough money to support

themselves, reconnecting with children and family—and these intermediary steps influence the ability to live a drug-free and crime-free life. Unresolved health and substance use problems likely complicate an already challenging transition (Travis 2005; Mallik-Kane and Visser 2007, 2008). Returning prisoners with health problems may be unable to engage in work or other activities because of pain or sickness, and their families may be unwilling or unable to serve as a fallback support. They are additionally confronted with the tasks of managing their health problems, such as accessing health care and keeping up with medications or appointments. Those with severe or unmanaged health problems face an increased risk of adverse outcomes, including physical illness, relapse into drug use or, particularly in the case of mental illness, inappropriate behavior that provokes a law enforcement response (Gido and Dalley 2008). It stands to reason that successful treatment of returning prisoners' health conditions could increase their chances of reentry success by improving their ability to work, support themselves, and abstain from substance use, all of which have been shown to contribute to desistance from criminal activity and reduce criminal recidivism and rearrest.

Fifty-six percent of adult state prisoners self-report a recent history of mental health problems (James and Glaze 2006) and about 16 percent are estimated to have a serious mental health problem during their prison incarceration, including clinical depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts, and hallucinations (Ditton 1999). By gender, studies show that 16 percent of male but 24 percent of female prisoners have a mental health problem and that 7 to 10 percent of males and 15 to 18 percent of females have psychotic or major affective disorders, described as serious mental illness (e.g., Ditton 1999; Lamb and Weinberger 1998). However, about 19 percent of males and 30 percent of females are also believed to have functional problems stemming from a mental disorder when the definition is broadened beyond serious mental illness (Pinta 1999). Finally, the National Survey on Drug use and Health found that about half of women on probation or parole experienced any mental illness in the past year (NSDUH 2012), compared with 30 percent of similarly situated men (Feucht and Gfroerer 2011). Thus, women in the criminal justice system have substantial rates of mental health problems and rates that are higher than those of men, despite the fact that in-prison services have not expanded sufficiently to meet treatment needs.

Thus, while mental health problems may affect both men and women as they exit prison, women are likely to face greater challenges due to the severity of their mental health problems, lack of treatment, and parenting issues. Moreover, few studies have examined the longitudinal experiences of women leaving prison. This project intends to quantitatively examine the reentry experiences of women with and without self-reported mental health problems on post-release outcomes once released from prison using a variety of applied and theoretical factors. Specifically, I intend to examine the reentry experiences of

women with mental health conditions while in prison on several outcomes at nine to fifteen months following release, controlling for several important demographic, family, and criminal history indicators. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to develop a more comprehensive and current understanding of the role that mental health plays among women leaving prison in the reintegration process, with the specific intention of offering empirically and evidence-based recommendations for improved policy and practice.

Objectives

Completion of this project will provide insight into a growing and vulnerable population of female offenders with mental health conditions being released from prison into the general community. These mental health problems pose challenges for women at every stage of the criminal justice process, from arrest to incarceration to community reentry and reintegration. The proposed study will examine the mental health status among a sample of female offenders leaving confinement and the role that mental health problems play in shaping their reentry outcomes, *an area that to this point has not been fully examined using a sample of diverse, contemporary offenders*. The results could have strong policy implications concerning the services for incarcerated female offenders with mental health conditions both while incarcerated and during their reintegration into the community upon release from prison. Given that correctional policies have historically been enacted using a “one-size fits all” approach for both male and female offenders (primarily based off of studies of male offenders), this research could provide valuable information concerning the reentry needs of female offenders, particularly concerning those with mental health conditions.

There are two primary objectives of this research, of which each is expected to result in a peer-reviewed journal article. The first paper seeks to present a description of women leaving prison and compare the reentry experiences of women with and without self-reported mental health problems. This paper will provide a description of those offenders more likely to experience mental health issues while incarcerated, and will several outcomes related to respondents’ demographics, criminal history, familial support, and other related physical health problems. A primary focus will remain on the physical health problems offenders with mental health conditions have (e.g., such as perceived poor health, likelihood of hospitalization, and suicidal ideation), as the limited research in this area has focused on male offenders.

The second paper will more directly examine the causal mechanisms of mental health and prisoner reentry for female offenders, paying particular attention to long-term reentry challenges facing offenders with mental health conditions. Very little research has examined the causal mechanisms and implications of an offenders’ mental health status on their long-term reentry success, particularly considering that few datasets actually exist to study such a phenomenon. Specifically, I will examine how

an offender's mental health status in the immediate post-release period from prison differentially affects various reentry outcomes in the nine to fifteen months after release. The longitudinal analyses will examine the mediating effect of an offender's mental health status upon release from prison on the relationship between an offender's life circumstances prior to being incarcerated on various post-release indicators of successful and unsuccessful reintegration, including employment, criminal activity, illegal drug use, and the ability to maintain housing.

Thus, the two primary research questions will be: (a) What factors are more likely to predict successful reentry (e.g., employment, substance use, housing, criminal activity) immediately after release from incarceration? (b) Does the mediating effect of a mental health condition immediately following release lead to more unsuccessful reintegration outcomes (reduced employment and housing; increased crime and substance use), and are there indirect effects between the antecedents of pre-release demographic and familial factors and successful reintegration and reentry outcomes? It is expected that those offenders with mental health problems will have poorer reentry outcomes concerning criminal recidivism and substance use post-release, will be less likely to maintain employment and housing, and will have more problems concerning their physical health compared to those without similar mental health problems.

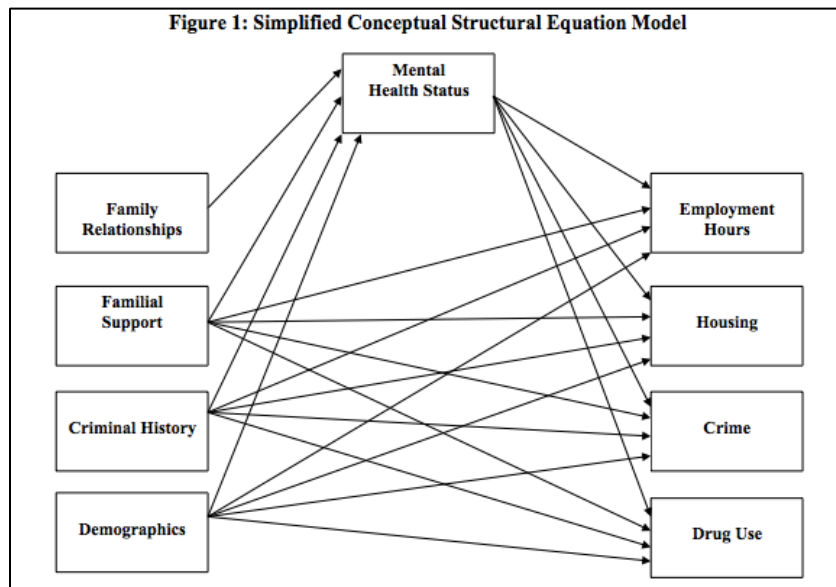
Research Methods

The data that will be used for the proposed study come from the *Returning Home* study. In 2001, The Urban Institute in Washington, DC launched *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*, a multistate, longitudinal study designed to explore the process of prisoner reentry, the challenges that returning prisoners and their families face, and the pathways to successful reintegration. This contemporary dataset gathered through *Returning Home* provides a comprehensive look at individuals' life circumstances prior to and during prison, and over the course of a year after release from prison. From 2002 to 2005, the study targeted all prisoners serving at least 1 year in state prison and returning to the city and county areas of Chicago, Cleveland, and Houston (N = 740). To date, only a limited number of studies have examined the reentry and reintegration process of criminal offenders, the majority of which have utilized samples of white men that came of age in the 1950s. The literature, particularly concerning the importance of mental health, needs to be revisited using contemporary and diverse longitudinal samples of offenders such that evidence-based policy recommendations concerning this vulnerable population can be made.

After each prisoner's release, up to 3 personal interviews were conducted within 15 months, including interviews with those who were in jail or had been returned to prison. Only female respondents that completed both the pre-release and the last post-release interview (about twelve to fifteen months

after release) will be included in the current study. These datasets, although restricted, have already been obtained through the principal investigator of the *Returning Home* study. Like many studies surveying offenders who often experience continual life-changing circumstances, the datasets are extensive and complex. The data from each of the three states will need to be cleaned, coded, and merged into one complete usable dataset prior to data analysis.

Multiple statistical techniques will be utilized between the two proposed papers. First, bivariate relationships will be examined to better understand the general problems and reentry experiences of these women based on their mental health status. Second, multivariate logistic regression models will be estimated to individually assess the influence of the independent variables on multiple outcomes commonly associated with a successful reentry experience. Logistic regression will be suitable for the proposed inquiry because the dependent variables will be recoded into a dichotomous measurement (0,1). Logistic regression is also useful because it provides an odds ratio to gauge the effect size of the independent variables. In order to establish the role of mental health on reentry outcomes for women, a parsimonious set of independent variables measuring demographic and social support factors from previous reentry research will be selected.

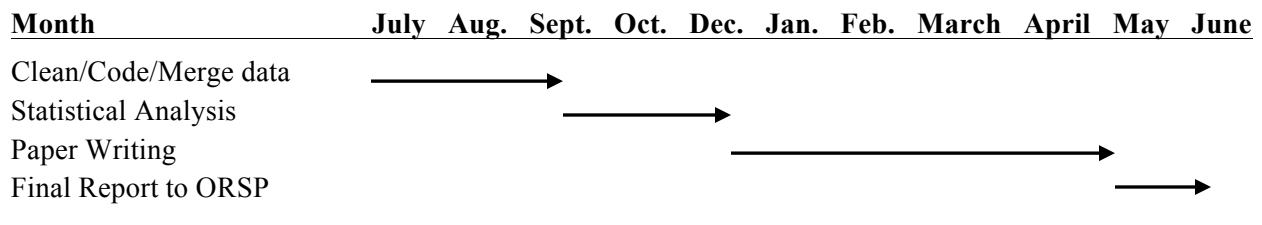


To adequately account of the longitudinal design of the study, structural equation modeling (SEM) will also be used to examine the mediating effect of the offender's mental health status on the reentry outcomes (see Figure 1). SEM is ideal for this data because it allows the examination of change over time using both observed single-item variables as well as latent constructs (multi-item variables). In general, the exogenous (baseline measures prior to release) variables will be used to predict all the

endogenous (reentry outcomes at post-release follow-up interviews) variables, while mental health status will also be used to predict the other endogenous variables. This analytic strategy will properly identify the effect of mental health status on the outcomes while controlling for other factors and will indicate the indirect effect of exogenous variables on the outcomes through mental health status (see Figure 1). The statistical program Mplus will be used to model the data, and has already been purchased through a CLS technology grant awarded in 2013.

I expect to complete the project in its entirety by June 2015. Despite having already obtained the data, this data needs to be heavily cleaned, coded, and merged before any data analysis can begin. Given the intricate and technical nature of the longitudinal modeling techniques that will be utilized for this study, much time will be given to properly preparing the data for analysis. I anticipate cleaning and coding the data during the summer of 2014. I am proposing to complete and submit two journal articles to reputable peer-reviewed journals in the fields of criminology and criminal justice. I anticipate all statistical analyses to be completed by December 1st, leaving five months to complete the proposed papers. Given this time frame, I am confident in the successful completion of this project.

Project Timeline



Final Product and Dissemination

This research has the potential to yield many important academic and policy-related results. Each of the papers proposed will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal related to criminology and criminal justice. It is anticipated that these articles will be submitted to reputable journals such as the *Journal of Research on Crime and Delinquency*, the *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, or the *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*. I will also present each paper at a national conference, specifically at the 2014 American Society of Criminology conference in San Francisco, CA, and the 2015 Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences conference in Orlando, FL. Finally, the findings from this research will be shared with the Urban Institute, the research arm of the National Institute of Justice that conducted the original *Returning Home* study. This is a vital step to ensure that the results of these studies can be disseminated not only in academic circles, but will also be referenced to and available to those

practitioners and policy makers that work with female offenders with mental health problems. This also has the potential to lead to future collaborative research projects using the *Returning Home* data that would allow me to explore the role of mental health and other important factors related to successful prisoner reentry experiences for offenders, which could lead to additional external funding opportunities.

This project is an attempt to add to the understanding of a growing population of incarcerated female offenders with mental health problems. Not only can the proposed projects add to the existing theoretical understanding of reentry process using a contemporary and diverse sample of offenders, but will also be used to inform current correctional policies and programming with an aim to better prepare these offenders for release, reduce criminal recidivism, and increase public safety.

References

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Curriculum Vitae

Nicholas W. Bakken

Assistant Professor of Sociology & Archaeology
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Education:

- Ph.D. Criminology, University of Delaware, 2009
- M.A. Criminology, University of Delaware, 2006
- B.S. Sociology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, 2004

POSITIONS:

- 2009 – Present Assistant Professor of Sociology and Archaeology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Bakken, N., Gunter, W., & Visher, C. (2013). Spirituality and desistance from substance use among reentering offenders. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*. DOI: 10.1177/0306624X13494076.
- Visher, C., Bakken, N., & Gunter, W. (2013). Incarcerated fatherhood, community reintegration and successful outcomes. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 52, 451-469.
- Gunter, W., & Bakken, N. (2012). The many measurements of self-control: How reoperationalized self-control compares. *European Journal of Criminology*, 9, 309-322.
- Bakken, N. & Gunter, W. (2012). Self-cutting and suicidal ideation among adolescents: Gender differences in the causes and correlates of self-injury. *Deviant Behavior*, 33, 339-356.
- Gunter, W., Kurtz, S., Bakken, N., & O'Connell, D. (2012). Desisting from prescription drug abuse: An application of growth models to Rx opioid users. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 42(1), 82-97.
- Bachman, R., Gunter, W., & Bakken, N. (2011). Predicting feelings of school safety for lower, middle, and upper school students: A gender specific analysis. *Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice*, 7, 59-76.
- Gunter, W., & Bakken, N. (2010). Transitioning to middle school in the sixth grade: A hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analysis of substance use, violence, and suicidal thoughts. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 30, 895-915.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

- Bakken, N., Gunter, W., & Visher, C. (2013). Reentry and spirituality: The impact of belief on desistance from drug use. Paper to be presented at the American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA.
- Bakken, N., & Gunter, W. (2013). Studious and recreational users: Distinct motivations for non-prescribed Rx use. Paper presented at the Midwest Sociological Society, Chicago, IL.

Bakken, N., Visher, C., & Gunter, W. (2012). Fatherhood and incarceration: The role of children and familial attachment in the transition from prison. Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology, Chicago, IL.

Bakken, N., Gunter, W., & O'Connell, D. J. (2011). Physical bullying and cyberbullying: Two sides to the same coin? Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology, Washington D.C.

Gunter, W., Bakken, N., Kurtz, S., & O'Connell, D. (2011). Nonmedical prescription opioid use: Gender differences in growth models of desistance. Paper presented at the American Sociological Association, Las Vegas, Nevada

SELECTED FUNDED RESEARCH

Intramurally-Funded

Nonmedical Prescription Drug Use Among College Students
Principal Investigator, 2013, \$3,500
Department of Sociology and Archaeology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
CLS Small Grant Award

Predictors of Desistance from Crime and Drug Use: A Focus on Fatherhood, Spirituality, and Other Informal Social Controls
Principal Investigator, 2012, \$3,000
Department of Sociology and Archaeology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
CLS Small Grant Award

Under Review

Crowdsourcing Production: Encouraging Prevention and Intervention Strategies in Digital Environments
Co-Principal Investigator, 2013-2015, \$374,536
Department of Sociology and Archaeology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Drug Abuse Prevention Intervention Research (R21)
National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

Provost's Teaching Excellence Award, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, \$1,000, 2012-2013.

University of Wisconsin Libraries Research Fellow, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, 2012-2013.

SERVICE

Ad-Hoc peer reviewer for: *Deviant Behavior*, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *Journal of Adolescence*, *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, *Journal of Drug Issues*, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Pediatrics*, *Youth & Society*

GRANT PROGRAM Faculty Research Grant		REFER TO RFP FOR ALLOWABLE CATEGORIES FOR UW-L GRANTS OFFICE USE ONLY		
PROPOSAL TITLE Prisoner Reintegration Challenges Facing Women wi		PROPOSAL NO.	Total Funds	
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/PROJECT DIRECTOR Nicholas W. Bakken		Fiscal Year	Proposed	Granted
A. PI/PD and Co-PIs (List each separately with title) First Name M Last Name Title		Funds Requested By Proposer		Funds Granted
1.	Nicholas W Bakken Asst Profess	\$5,000		
2.				
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OTHER PERSONNEL First Name M Last Name Title				
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TOTAL PI/PD and Co-PIs (1-6) and Other Personnel (1-4)		\$5,000		
B. REPLACEMENT COSTS (contact dean's office for current per credit amount)				
1.	(0) Credits	\$0		
C. STUDENT WORKERS (SHOW NUMBERS IN BRACKETS)				
1.	(0) RESEARCH/GRADUATE STUDENTS	\$0		
2.	(1) UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS	\$0		
TOTAL STUDENT WORKERS		\$0		
TOTAL SALARIES AND WAGES (A+B+C)		\$5,000		
D. EQUIPMENT (LIST ITEM AND DOLLAR AMOUNT FOR EACH ITEM EXCEEDING \$1,000)				
1				
2		\$0		
3		\$0		
TOTAL EQUIPMENT		\$0		
E. TRAVEL				
1	DOMESTIC (INCL. CANADA, MEXICO AND U.S. POSSESSIONS)			
2	INTERNATIONAL	\$0		
TOTAL TRAVEL		\$0		
F. OTHER COSTS				
1.	MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT LESS THAN \$1,000, AND SUPPLIES			
2.	PUBLICATION COSTS/DOCUMENTATION/DISSEMINATION	\$0		
3.	SERVICES - EXTERNAL	\$0		
4.	SERVICES - INTERNAL	\$0		
5.	OTHER	\$0		
TOTAL OTHER COSTS		\$0		
G. TOTAL COSTS (A THROUGH F)		\$5,000		
H. FUNDS FROM OTHER SOURCES TO SUPPORT THIS PROJECT				
1		\$0		
I. AMOUNT OF THIS REQUEST (G) OR (G MINUS H)		\$5,000		

Note: Budget justification/narrative must be submitted with this budget sheet.

Prisoner Reintegration Challenges Facing Women with Mental Health Problems

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Department of Sociology and Archaeology

Budget Narrative

I am requesting a \$5,000 research stipend to fund this project and the two papers being proposed. This stipend will be used to pay for the time necessary to complete this project during the summer and fall of 2014. It is expected that the cleaning, coding, and merging of the data will occur over the summer, with the statistical analyses and writing to occur during the 2014 fall and spring semesters. Given the time that will be needed to work with a very complex series of datasets, complete the quantitative analyses, conduct thorough literature reviews, and write the articles, this stipend will fund the estimated 150-200 hours of work that I expect to complete the project in a satisfactory manner.