

**EX-PRISONERS AND ACCOMMODATION:
WHAT BEARING DO DIFFERENT FORMS OF HOUSING
HAVE ON SOCIAL REINTEGRATION OF
EX-PRISONERS?**

Dr Eileen Baldry
Dr Desmond McDonnell
Peter Maplestone
and
Manuel Peeters
University of NSW

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University with the Brosnan Centre

*Paper presented at the
Housing, Crime and Stronger Communities Conference
convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the
Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
and held in Melbourne, 6-7 May 2002*

Acknowledgements

This material was produced with funding from the Commonwealth of Australia and the Australian States and Territories. AHURI gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, without which this work would not have been possible.

Disclaimer

AHURI Ltd is an independent, non-political body which has supported this project as part of its programme of research into housing and urban development, which it hopes will be of value to policy-makers, researchers, industry and communities. The opinions in this publication reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AHURI Ltd, its Board or its funding organisations. No responsibility is accepted by AHURI Ltd or its Board or its funders for the accuracy or omission of any statement, opinion, advice or information in this publication.

Introduction

Two groups of prisoners being released from gaols, one in New South Wales the other in Victoria, have agreed to be interviewed regarding their accommodation and social experiences and prospects before release, and then at three months and six months after release. This paper reports on the project midstream. It outlines the method being used and the initial descriptive results from the pre-release, and some very tentative findings from 3 month interviews.

Background

Policy and literature were explored and reported in an AHURI positioning paper. A summary of this report follows. The extensive literature supporting this background is referenced at the end of the positioning paper. (<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/pubs/position.html>)

Policy Context

There were over 20,000 full-time prisoners (sentenced and unsentenced) in Australia in 2000 (ABS 2001), approximately 7,400 in NSW (NSW Department of Corrective Services 2000) and 3,200 in Victoria (Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner 2001). There are no reliable data on numbers of prisoners being released into the community each year but estimates suggest over 30,000 in Australia. There has been a dramatic increase in numbers being imprisoned over the past decade.

- Although Correctional Services are State responsibilities, matters pertaining to ex-prisoner re-entry to the community involve many government departments and programs, both State and Federal.
- In Victoria and NSW, Correctional Service departments fund or partly fund a very small amount of post-release support (NSW Department of Corrective Services 2001b). Departments of Housing, Health and Community/Human Services and Centrelink are involved in providing services but none have had clearly defined policy aims and objectives or practices regarding housing for people being released from prison (NSW Department of Community Services 2001; NSW Department of Housing 2000; Victorian Office of Housing 2001; Department of Justice 2001; Victorian Department of Human Services 2001a,b,c,d).
- A very small number of non-government agencies provide what little services there are, with the Supported Assistance Accommodation Program (SAAP) providing the bulk of assisted housing places designated for ex-prisoners (Victorian Department of Human Services 2001a,b,c,d,e; NSW Department of Community Services 2001); .
- Governments have no reliable data on ex-prisoners' housing experiences nor the relationship between housing and recidivism.

The Victorian Government is funding a number of pilot post-release service initiatives (Department of Justice 2001) but, as these were begun in early 2002, evaluations are not yet available.

Literature

International and Australian literature in this field is characterised by:

- a paucity of studies in general;
- a lack of work on the particular housing issues faced by high needs groups;
- few empirical studies featuring samples of sufficient size to be representative of this group as a whole; and
- a lack of theoretically and statistically supported insight into the influence of factors such as housing on reoffending and social reintegration. (Paylor 1995)

Earlier international studies and reviews:

- pointed consistently to the strong association between ex-prisoners and accommodation in terms of their social reintegration;
- argued that structural factors are fundamental to ex-prisoners being able to gain and maintain suitable housing. (Banks & Fairhead 1976; Corden, Kuipers & Wilson 1978; Corden & Clifton 1983; Ramsay 1986; Walton 1987; Haynes 1990)

Later studies agree on:

- the need for specialised housing and post-release bridging throughcare workers in all prisons;
- the need for housing issues to be dealt with as a priority at induction (reception into prison);
- changes in housing benefits to enable social housing to be retained by prisoners;
- allowing prisoners day release prior to release to enable housing search/inspection;
- the design of a flexible system of housing able to cater to varied need, but still based on a core of supported accommodation;
- less institutionalised ex-prisoner-only accommodation; and,
- programs for keeping homeless individuals out of prison in the first instance. (NACRO 1992, 1993; Paylor 1995; Carlisle 1996; UK Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Unit 2001; UK Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Rough Sleepers Unit 2001)

No large empirical study has been done in Australia regarding ex-prisoners and accommodation. Studies have been done involving women ex-prisoners in Victoria (Carnaby 1998). Findings agreed with those of international studies.

What has emerged consistently across time and continents, is that:

- a large minority of people being released from prison does not have suitable accommodation to which to go;
- pre-release information and support in securing accommodation are grossly inadequate;
- ex-prisoners and recidivists who are re-incarcerated point to lack of suitable housing as a key factor in their unsuccessful transition to outside life;
- there is almost a total lack of coordination / integration amongst appropriate government and non-government agencies in this matter;
- there are particular subgroups amongst ex-prisoners, such as those with a mental illness; young unattached males serving short sentences, single women with children, who are more vulnerable and more likely to end up without adequate housing;
- social isolation is a core experience for many ex-prisoners who end up homeless or with unstable, unsuitable housing; and
- sending ex-prisoners to ex-prisoner hostels may be a continuation of the labelling practices of the prison and that, although 24 hour supported hostels are necessary for some ex-prisoners as a transition to the community, a greater variety of accommodation, especially self-contained units, with support being available in situ, be provided.

Literature on Related Issues

Studies into the relationship between social issues and difficulties amongst prisoners, such as homelessness (Benda 1983; McCarthy & Hagen 1991; Vitelli 1993; Stark 1994; De Lisi 2000), mental illness/disturbance (Belcher 1988; NACRO 1992; Weinberger 1998; Harrington 1999), intellectual disability (Hayes 1991, 1996; Lyall et al 1995) and post-release experience (Hardie et al 1998; Chase 1999) have indicated consistently a high level of difficulty in securing suitable accommodation upon release:

- There is a higher rate of incarceration of persons with such problems than in the general population.
- Similar problems exist for Indigenous Australian persons.
- Women, especially sole carers of children and those with a drug problem, have major difficulties in finding affordable suitable housing upon release.

The current provisions for ex-prisoners with particular problems or in minority groups are reported to be grossly insufficient.

The Project

The project is a year long study in which 200 prisoners in NSW and 150 in Victoria are being interviewed. Interviews consist of mainly closed, with some open-ended questions. The first interview was conducted just prior to leaving prison and subsequent interviews are being held at 3 months and then 6 months post-release. This is a consecutive sample.

Data being gathered include participants' pre-prison housing and social situation and, after release, their social progress, especially their housing experiences.

Aims

The aims of the research are to:

- Provide an understanding of the housing needs and circumstances of persons being released from prisons in New South Wales and Victoria.
- Ascertain the importance of type of accommodation, in association with the other factors, which contributed to successful resettlement of ex-prisoners.
- Evaluate and compare the different housing forms experienced by ex-prisoners in relation to a variety of social support programmes.
- Analyse to what extent there is programme integration and how effectively it supports sustainable accommodation / tenancies for ex-prisoners.
- Compare accommodation types and social outcomes of the marginal and "at risk" sub groups within the ex-prisoner sample (eg psychiatric, intellectual disability, women sole parents, women experiencing domestic or other violence, family breakdowns) and also Indigenous peoples.
- Provide data for use in comparative studies between this at risk group and other at risk groups.

Methods Being Used to Gather Data

Organising Data Gathering

After Ethics approval had been given by the Department of Corrective Services (DCS) in NSW and Victoria and by the relevant University bodies, contact was made with each of the prisons selected for the research. This selection was made on the basis of Corrective Services' staff advice regarding the main releasing prisons in each state. Arrangements for regular interview sessions with soon to be released prisoners were made with each prison and the research assistants attended at those times. All prisoners about to be released were invited by a prison staff member to meet the research assistant who explained the project. If willing, the prisoner signed the consent form and the pre-release interview was carried out. Interviews generally took place in a separate room provided by the prison governor. The participant then provided the interviewer with contact numbers and addresses for the follow-up interviews. This provided a consecutive sample of prisoners being released from those prisons included in the research. Of course, as participation is voluntary, some prisoners did not even respond to the call by the staff member to be introduced to the research. This is not, nor was it intended to be, a representative sample of either prisoners or releasees.

Pre-Release Interview

The interview schedule being used for the pre-release interview is the one approved by each DCS and no variance after that approval could be made. The interview covers: demographic information, including prior imprisonment, length of sentence and parole status, housing prior to imprisonment and hoped for after release, family relations, employment prior to incarceration and hoped for after release, alcohol and other drug issues, debt and information received on housing and other social matters prior to release. Particular attention is paid to type of housing and with whom the participant was living/hopes to live. Interviews were carried out face to face with the interviewer recording the answers. This manner was used as a number of prisoners are functionally illiterate and may not have been able to fill out the form. But each interviewee had a copy of the schedule to which to refer and where scales or choices were to be made, cards were provided to assist the participant.

Stamped addressed post-cards were given to each participant as both a reminder of their participation and for them to send to the research team should they change address.

Although provision was made for interpreting where appropriate, only one prisoner who was unable to communicate in English volunteered to participate. This shortcoming is probably due to the lack of invitations to participate being available in a variety of languages and reluctance on the part of Non-English Speaking background prisoners to participate in anything non-compulsory.

Data from the interviews is being entered into an SPSS program as the data gathering proceeds and both original interviews and computer files are kept locked. Each participant is given a code number and that is the only identification on the interview schedule. The number and name are kept together in a locked filing cabinet accessed by the research team only. A calendar is kept of which participant should be interviewed at their particular 3 and 6 months points.

The pre-release interviews proceeded smoothly with support and cooperation from Corrections' staff. Descriptive data from these interviews are reported and discussed below.

Post-Release 3 Month Interview

The research assistants have tried to keep in contact with participants between release and the 3 month interview date, but, not unexpectedly, some participants have faded from "sight". Some have returned postcards with new contact numbers/address. Those who are able to be contacted are being interviewed either in person or over the phone. The 3 month interview schedule contains the same questions as the pre-release interview (housing, employment, alcohol & other drug issues etc) but is minus the demographic questions. It has additional questions regarding cost of housing, support associated with housing, connections with agencies, programs being attended, and how things are going generally. The names/prison numbers of those unable to be contacted are being given to Probation and Parole, the Department of Corrective Services or to the main SAAP/post-release hostels (permission was granted by each participant for this process). If the person is back in prison, interviews are being sought there.

Again, data from these interviews is being entered as it is gathered. Preliminary information from those 3 month interviews able to be completed, is discussed below.

Post-Release Six Month Interview

Exactly the same interview schedule is being used for the 6 month as for the 3 month interview. These interviews are scheduled to begin in May 2002.

Data Analysis

To address the aims of this research, data is to be subjected to multivariate analyses to determine the importance of type of accommodation in association with the other factors. Does a significant relationship exist between those who are faring better in terms of their social reintegration, and a particular aspect of their post-release housing? Conversely is there a significant relationship between an aspect of housing and those who are faring very poorly/have been re-incarcerated? Internal comparisons between "at risk" and marginal groups (eg sole parents) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the sample are being made where possible. Thus, for example; Indigenous with non-Indigenous; those with drug problems with those without; sole parents with partnered parents. It may also be possible to assess how those with multiple / layered at risk factors such as women ex-prisoners, who are single parents with a drug addiction fare in comparison to those with lesser risk factors such as male ex-prisoners with a partner. Qualitative information, that is being thematically analysed, is being obtained via open-ended questions and this will add understanding and depth to the quantitative analysis. Data will be analysed for significant relationships between factors and qualitative analysis will be carried out on the open-ended questions.

Results To Date

Pre-release interviews were held with 356 prisoners about to be released from prisons in NSW and Victoria. Over a three month period (November 2001 to January 2002) 201 (134 male & 67female) prisoners in NSW and 155 (132 male & 23 female) in Victoria were interviewed. An over-representation of females was sought deliberately to overcome the problem of the very small number of female compared to male prisoners. Without a large enough number of female participants valid statistical comparisons could not be made. The data from these interviews is being presented in combined forms except where there are significant differences between the NSW and Victorian samples. It must be remembered that this is a consecutive sample of releasees. Demographic data on prisoners is usually gathered and presented in the form of a census, that is a snapshot of who is in prison on a given day each year. This does not give a realistic picture of who goes in and out of prison. The sample being drawn in this study provides better information upon

which to develop a picture of the situation of those being released. For example, the NSW prison census indicates that short-term prisoners are in a minority (NSW Legislative Council 2001). But for every prisoner serving a long sentence, there may be 4 or 5 different persons going in and out on short sentences. Over the period of a year, those serving long sentences stay in prison whilst those serving shorter sentences go in and out. The census also does not account for those who were on remand who had served a period in prison but were released to freedom without a prison sentence. These people have served a prison sentence just as sentenced prisoners have and face many of the same problems upon release that sentenced prisoners do. This consecutive sample of releasees, even allowing for those who refused to participate, picks up to some extent, these differences.

Pre-Release Interviews - Combined NSW and Victorian Data

This data is mainly descriptive therefore frequencies and raw numbers are being used to express these results. Some cross-tabulations indicating direction have been done and reported where salient. Combined NSW - Victorian frequency tables are in Appendix 1.

Profile of the Participants

- Age: 276 (78%) 35 years old or under; 136 (38%) 26 years or under
- Gender: 266 males (75%), 90 females 25%
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander: 57 (16%)
- Highest education level reached: 268 (75%) reached only part secondary (most of these did not even finish year 10)
- Disability: 66 (19%) self-reported a disability, most of these were physical disabilities

It is important to note that the disability figures are based on self-reports. Because of the high level of stigma attached to intellectual/psychiatric disability in the prison milieu it may be that self-reporting of such disabilities is discouraged. Moreover as Hayes (1991, 1996) has noted a significant proportion of prisoner intellectual and psychiatric disabilities remain undiagnosed. Also, as participation was voluntary, persons with a mental illness in particular are unlikely to have come forward. Given these points, and the fact that a significant minority of participants appeared to display noticeable cognitive and intellectual deficits, figures reported for intellectual and mental disabilities among participants in this study are certainly conservative.

Nature of offence: 134 (38%) convicted of a violent offence (this includes any assault no matter how minor) or of robbery/extortion. The rest were convicted of property, drug, motoring or other offences. The category of "other" was composed primarily of a number of less serious offences, or combinations of less serious offences, or where the participant was unable to identify a single primary offence, or where the participant was unable to identify any offence. The fact that short sentences dominated indicates the vast majority of the offences were not of the most serious nature.

- Length of time served: 199 (56%) had served 6 months or less; 292 (82%) had served 12 months or less; 329 (92%) had served 24 months or less at the time of release.
- Prior incarceration: 236 (66%) had served a prison sentence before.
- Parole: 187 (53%) said they would be on parole.

A surprisingly high number of NSW participants said they were going to be on parole. This is discussed below.

Country of birth: 308 Australian born (86.5%), 42 (11.8%) overseas born and 6 (1.7%) unknown. It seems that more Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) overseas born than Australian born refused to even meet with the researcher. For example, in NSW, correctional staff indicated there was a high rate of refusal to participate in the research by women from a Vietnamese background. There was provision for interpreting services but these women did not even agree to come to a meeting with the researcher where interpreting could take place. Reasons for the lower than was hoped for participation by NESB persons are unknown but it is fair to speculate that a combination of lack of English, fear and suspicion of any unnecessary interaction with those who could be associated with authorities and cultural factors may have been involved.

Prior Employment Status and hoped for employment post-release: Only 124 (35%) said they had been employed prior to their incarceration; 137 (38%) said they had been unemployed but looking for work. The rest were on other benefits, home duties or not seeking work. Twenty four percent said they had employment arranged post-release, 45% said they didn't know whether they would get employment and 30% expected to go onto some kind of pension/benefit.

Alcohol and Other Drug Problems: Less than 20% stated that alcohol and/or other drugs were a moderate or severe problem.

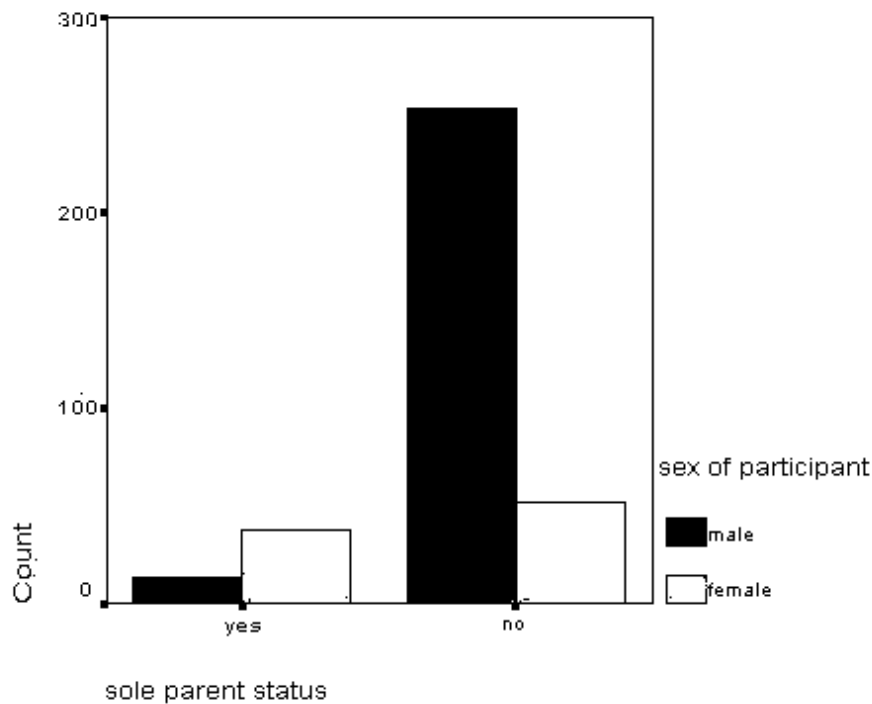
The self-reports on problems with alcohol or other drugs by many participants indicate either significant denial, or an overly sanguine view of their present personal drug issues. Although very few participants indicated more than moderate problems with drugs other than tobacco, the post-programs data shows that nearly 30% of participants expected to be entering a compulsory (for example associated with parole) drug rehabilitation program post-release. These figures do not include those who may be entering less formalised self-help programs such as Narcotics Anonymous. Given that, according to all research on the matter, 70% to 80% of prisoners abuse alcohol or other drugs, these drug problem figures are conservative. Nevertheless they throw light on participants' attitudes to their drug use. They were asked what level of problem their use of each drug presented for them. Their answers indicate clearly that, at that point in time, as they were about to be released, they thought that they were (or they wanted to be perceived as being) in control of their drug use.

One of the outstanding differences noted in the demographic/profile information is between male and female in certain categories. These are discussed below.

Significant differences by gender (gender differences in housing appear in the next section)

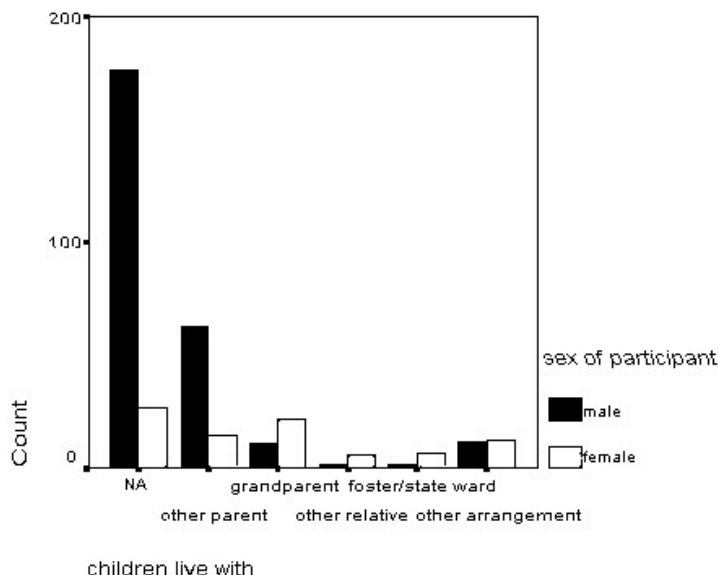
(NOTE: The vertical arm of all the charts represents the number of participants, percentages have been quoted in the explanations below the figures and can be found in the frequency tables in appendix 1)

Figure 1
Sole parent Status



Quite clearly, and not unexpectedly, a much higher proportion of our sample of women (42%) releasees than men (5%) is a sole parent. When put together with the housing by gender results below, this information suggests the prospect for women sole parent releasees finding suitable accommodation looks grim.

Figure 2
Carers of imprisoned participants' children



On the whole children of male releasees were living with their mother. Children of women releasees were more likely to be living with a grandparent. In other words women do not have the support of a partner / parent in way men do, in regard to care of children.

Figure 3
Prior Employment Status

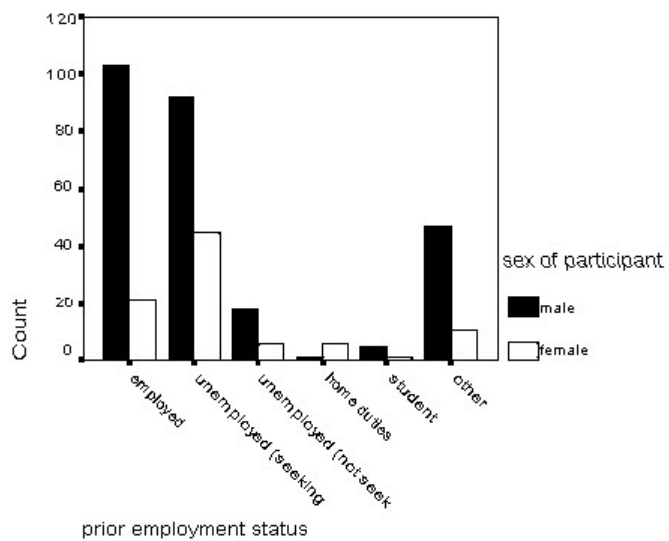
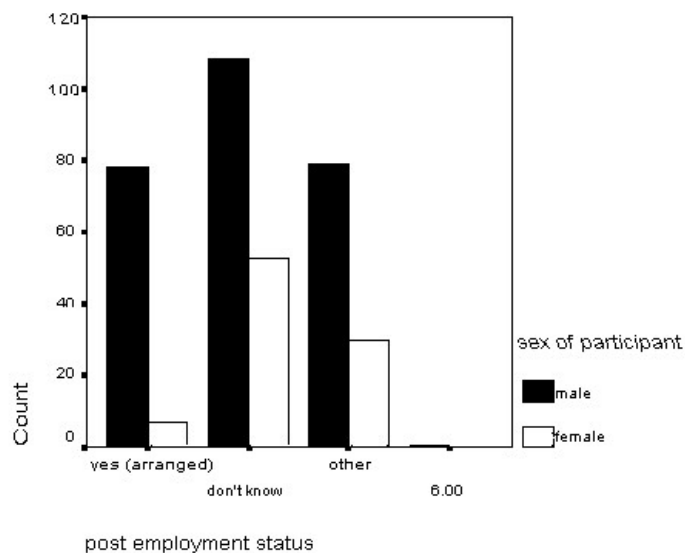


Figure 4
Employment post release



Women releasees (57%) were more likely to have been unemployed prior to incarceration than men (41%) were. They were much less likely to have a job arranged or to be hopeful of work upon release. Perhaps women were more realistic in their expectations regarding their prospects than men were and many expected to be eligible for a benefit of some kind (such as a sole parent benefit).

Comments on NSW Compared to Victorian Pre-Release Results

(Comments are being made only on significant differences between the two states.)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participants

Only 13 (8%) of the Victorian participants said they were Aboriginal whereas 44 (22%) indicated that in NSW. This is not at all surprising given the lower rate of population of Aboriginal persons in the Victoria population compared with NSW. NSW Corrections staff indicated that there was a significant number of refusals to participate among Aboriginal male prisoners. Nevertheless

Aboriginal persons figure quite highly as a proportion of overall NSW participants. This was due to Aboriginal women prisoners being more forthcoming. One possible reason for this is that a majority of the Aboriginal women who agreed to participate had already received what they perceived as diligent and empathic pre-release assistance. This assistance, which was from the Yulawirri-based Koori women's transitional worker Michelle Knight, may have disposed the women to participation in this research project.

On Parole

There are unexpectedly high figures for those claiming to be on parole in NSW (63%) compared with Victoria (39%). These figures fly in the face of traditionally accepted levels of about 1/3 of releasees being on parole. Because a large number of NSW participants who said they were on parole had not met with a Parole officer, despite release being imminent (within a week), it was assumed they had misunderstood their parole status. Following consultation with NSW Corrective Services and Probation and Parole it appears that this high figure is due to a marked increase in court-based parole orders. Investigation of this is being undertaken by relevant Departmental officers. This matter is of significance because, if such a large number of participants is on parole but had not had pre-release contact with a Parole officer, they are highly likely to breach their parole orders. This may occur due to their not meeting their parole requirements, such as having suitable accommodation or attending meetings with a parole officer. Breaching parole conditions usually results in a return to prison.

Debt

An unexpectedly low percentage of NSW participants (22%) reported debts compared to Victorian participants (40%). Kennedy & Durrington (1999) found high levels of debt among ex-prisoners. However a significant number of NSW participants did report debts to the Department of Housing (15.9%) compared with 11% of Victorian participants, a situation which they reported prevented them from gaining further assistance from that department until the debts were resolved. Of this group women comprised a significant portion whose houses/flats were vandalised while they were incarcerated and whose lease, as a result, was in the process of being handed back to the Department of Housing or transferred to another tenant. Another grouping comprised those who simply got into arrears due to being incarcerated and being unable to get in touch with their Housing office to resolve matters. Many participants who held public housing properties were scared to concede their lease while incarcerated fearing that, upon release, Housing would not supply them with a replacement property as per Departmental guidelines.

Post-release Information Type/Sources

Participants were asked whether they had received or been offered any information before leaving prison, about accommodation and support post-release. If they had, then they were asked what type of information they had received and who gave it to them.

Housing and support information type given prior to release NSW
Figure 5

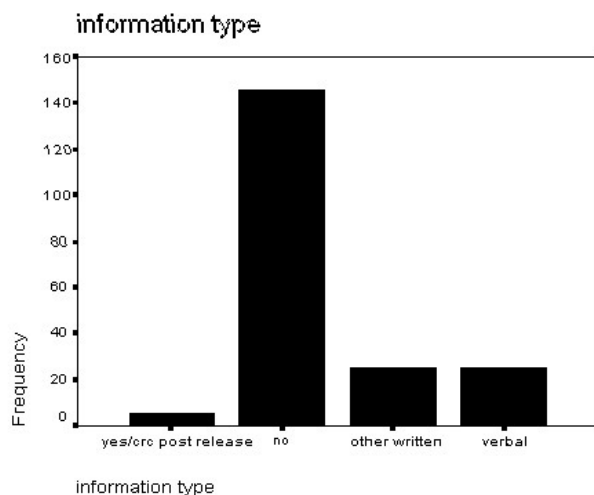
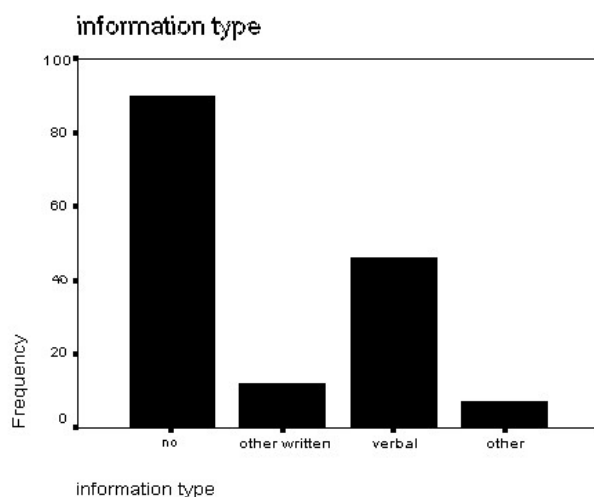


Figure 6
Victoria



73% of NSW participants and 58% of Victorian participants said they had received no information of any kind about accommodation or support prior to release.

Both these figures are extremely worrying but the NSW figure, as extreme as it appears, is genuinely conservative. The most minimal levels of assistance (down to even passing mentions by staff to prisoners) were counted as information. Even useless/problematic forms of assistance, for instance incorrect information, unsuitable delivery methods such as expecting functionally illiterate prisoners to be able to comprehend written bulletins or to complete complex paperwork unaided, were included. However one subgroup of participants, namely aboriginal women in NSW, was well served in this regard. Fully 73.6% of NSW Aboriginal women participants received pre-release housing assistance. This was primarily due to the efforts of one individual, Yulawirri-based Koori women's transitional worker Michelle Knight.

As accommodation is the primary focus of this research, detailed discussion of both prior and post accommodation for participants is discussed below.

Housing (Combined Data)

Participants were asked what type of accommodation they had prior to incarceration and what they expected post-release

Figure 7

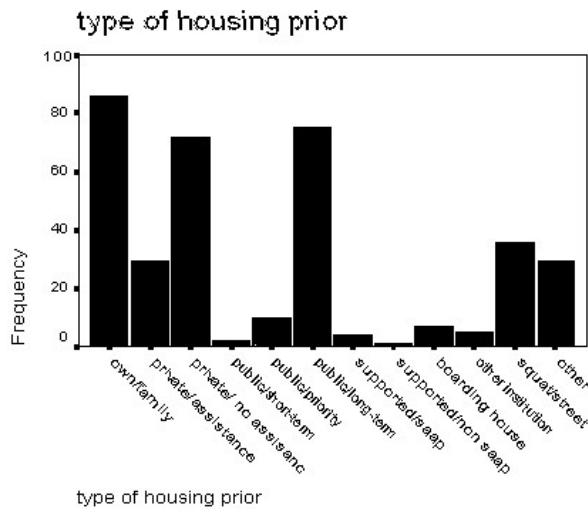
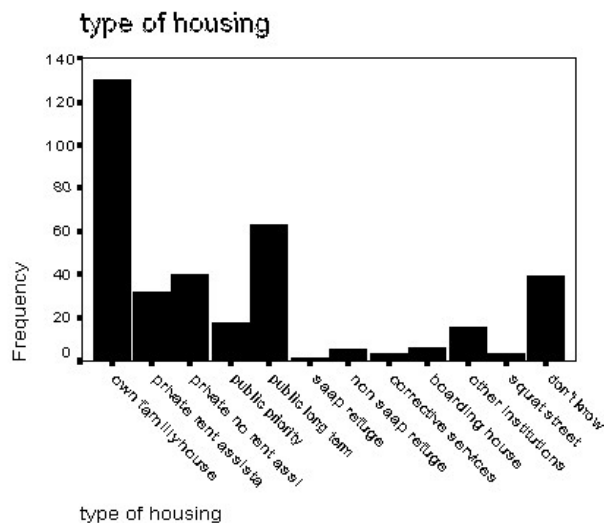


Figure 8
Housing Post-release



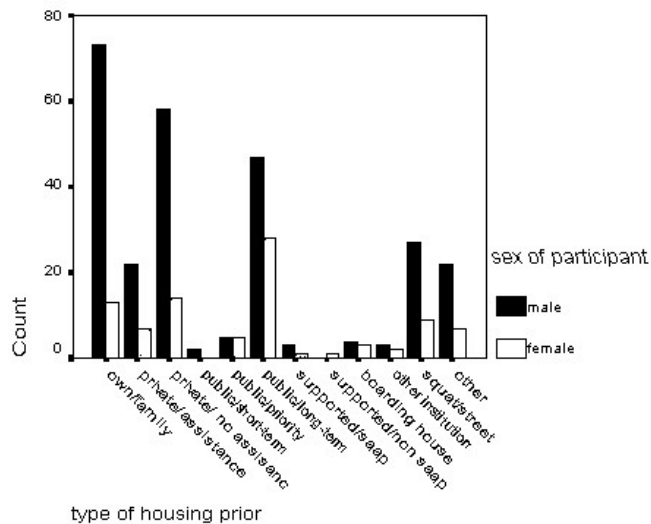
Twenty percent of the sample was in squats, on the streets, in institutions or in other highly marginal accommodation prior to incarceration; 16% expected to be in such a situation or did not know where they would go post-release. There is a significant difference between housing prior to incarceration and hoped for post-release, in particular the large increase in those hoping to move into family accommodation post-release (36%) compared with those who had been in such accommodation prior to imprisonment (24%). Aboriginal participants were more likely than non-Indigenous to be expecting to go to accommodation at family or friends post-release. 34% of participants were dependent on some form of public housing or assistance prior to incarceration and an almost equal percentage hoped to be assisted in this way post-release. Again Indigenous persons, especially Indigenous women, were expecting public housing. Although Aboriginal men were not expecting to get private housing, Aboriginal women were more hopeful but did not expect to get rent assistance.

Participants with disabilities were expecting to live with parents/family/public priority housing or boarding houses. But, as prior to incarceration, 20% of those living on the street had a psychiatric disability, it is possible that these participants may find themselves in a similar situation post-release.

Gender Differences in Housing

Figure 9

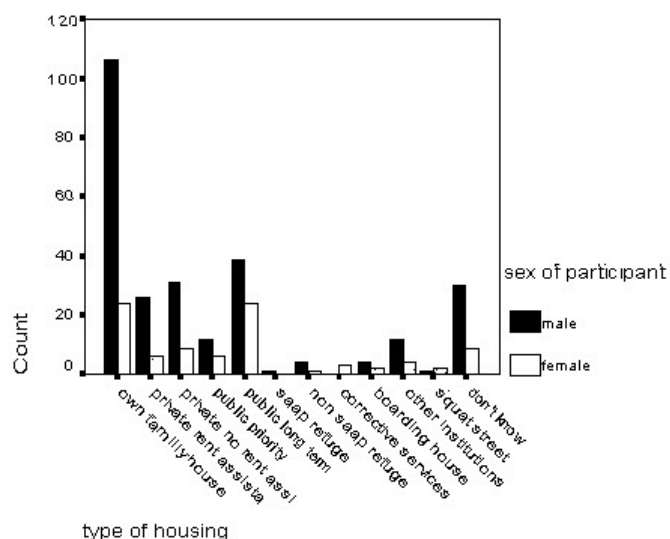
Housing prior to incarceration by gender



Women were more dependent upon public housing (38% female; 21% male)) and were much less dependent upon privately rented or owned accommodation prior to incarceration than male participants.

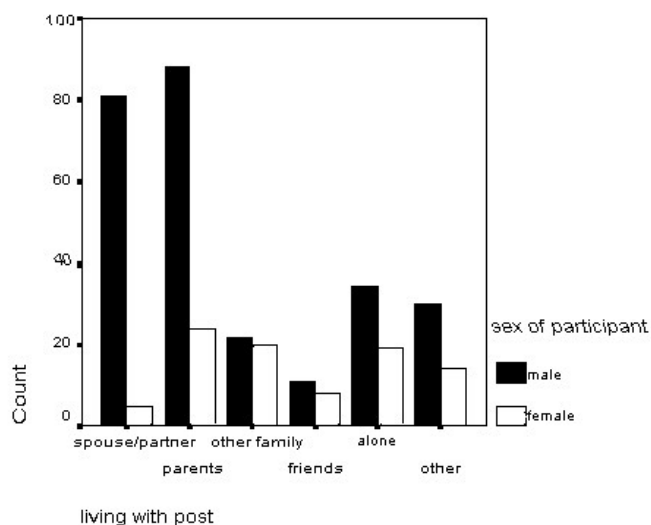
Figure 10

Housing post-release by gender



Whereas there was an increase in males expecting to live in their own or their family's house post-release (from 27% to 40%), women were more likely to expect public housing or housing separate from their family.

Figure 11
Living with post by gender



Men were much more likely to expect to be living with their parents or partner (67%) post-release than women (32%) were.

Women participants, who are sole parents, constitute a significant portion of the groups of women participants dependent on public housing prior to incarceration. They make up 50% of the women participants who were in short-term public housing, 20% of the women in priority public housing and 50% of the women in long term public housing. Alarming female sole parents also comprised 66.7% of those women living on the street or in a squat prior to incarceration. The situation foreseen post release was very similar. In addition it was found that women sole parent participants comprised fully 100% of the women expecting to live in boarding houses, and they numbered 33% of those women who did not know where they would be accommodated post release. Moreover, of the indigenous persons who had accumulated Department of Housing debts, half were female sole parents.

Post-Release Three Month Interviews – Directions

Although most of the 3 month interviews have yet to be completed, an examination of completed interviews does indicate some tendencies within the cohort. It is highly likely that the participants interviewed so far are the ones faring better than their peers are. This is because those who are proving more difficult to find are likely to have been re-arrested and re-incarcerated or to be living in marginal housing / to be homeless. Of the participants we have information on so far we have noted the following:

Post Employment Status

Some of the participants who reported having jobs waiting for them/pre-arranged post released did obtain that work, but an equal number did not. No participant who reported being out of work prior to release had gained employment at the 3 month point. The large majority was deriving income from benefits or pensions.

Living Arrangements Post Release

The vast bulk of those participants interviewed who intended to live with parents or other family members post release, at 3 months were living in other arrangements (alone, with friends, homeless, hostels). For most of these individuals the family option was at best a very short term option, whether believed to be so prior to release or not.

Type of Housing Post Release

So far, as many as 20 individuals who had been housed prior to incarceration, may have found themselves homeless post-release. This supposition is based on reports from family members - with whom the participant stayed for a few days - who said that their relative is now in a shelter/on the streets/homeless. These individuals are still being followed-up. Although many participants were hopeful of finding solutions in the private rental market, at this stage very few of them have succeeded. Many more have - much to their distaste - ended up in boarding houses, homeless shelters and other institutional accommodation.

Drug Problems

Participants reached have tended to report much higher levels of problems with each of the drug categories with the exception of tobacco where reported levels of problems remain stable or have fallen. Problems with access to rehabilitation programs and affordable methadone have been reported as aetiological factors in their increased drug problem.

Re-Incarceration/Recidivism

The NSW and Victorian Departments of Corrective Services are following up those participants who have "disappeared" from view. The results are awaited.

Discussion

The Pre-release interview data provides, for the first time in New South Wales and Victoria, detailed information regarding what accommodation and other social matters a reasonable sample of releasees had experienced before imprisonment and what they expect after release.

Regarding accommodation, of significance is the high level of reliance on public housing and rent assistance reported prior to imprisonment (34%), especially by Aboriginal participants. Of even more significance is the expectation by 32% of releasees that they will have publicly supported housing and by 73% that they will be living with partner, family or friends after release. Indications from the 3-month interviews conducted so far are that these expectations are not being met in many cases. Of the 356 participants, only 1% expected to be moving into formal post-release supported accommodation. Rather spectacularly, 68% said they received no information at all about post-release accommodation or support prior to leaving prison. In NSW this rate was a staggering 73%. This lack of information is in keeping with findings noted in international literature. Added to this is the surprising fact that a number of NSW participants had not known that they were to be released on the date provided to the researchers by Corrective Services. They had expected to be released at a later date. The problem here is that they had made no provisions for their post-release needs, had seen no one about accommodation and had not informed family or friends. Allied to this was the comment by many that they had been unable to see a welfare officer during their time in prison.

Some of those NSW short-term sentenced participants who stated that they were on parole but had not seen a parole officer were particularly concerned about the fact that they did not have a stable address. Based on their knowledge of how parole works (ie the need for a stable address) they worried that this might mean they would not be released or that it would be a problem for them when released.

Women releasees with children indicated that they face a very uncertain future post-release regarding accommodation and support. But the difference that can be made by an enthusiastic and dedicated transition worker can be seen with the large number of NSW Aboriginal women who received information about post-release accommodation and support. Whether that translates to a more positive post-release experience has yet to be seen.

All studies on prisoners' socio-economic status show that they are amongst the most disadvantaged and poorest in society (NSW Legislative Council 2001). This study confirms this, but adds these dimensions of disadvantage to their pre and post-release experiences. For example:

- 71% of Australian households live in their own home (either owned or paying mortgage) (ABS 2001b) whereas only 24% of this sample was living in their family owned home prior to incarceration.
- 26% of Australian households rent either from private or public landlords (ABS 2001b) whereas 56% of this sample was renting prior to incarceration.
- 20% of those households in Australia that were renting were renting from housing authorities (ABS 2001b) whereas 44% of those in this sample who were renting were renting from housing authorities.
- 6% of all households in Australia were living in public housing (ABS 2001b) whereas 25% of this sample were living in public housing prior to incarceration.
- 38% of Indigenous households in Australia own or are buying their own home (ABS 2001b) whereas no Indigenous participants either owned their own home or lived in a home owned by their family.
- Less than one percent of Australians (or Australian households) (ABS 2001b) are homeless or living in highly marginal circumstances whereas 18% of this sample was living in such circumstances prior to incarceration.

From this evidence it appears that this sample of releasees is at the extreme end of housing poverty.

It is too early in the study to discuss clear directions post-release. The little information gathered at the 3 month interviews done so far does indicate that their circumstances post-release are worse than they experienced prior to imprisonment and worse than many had expected. Indications are that many who had hoped to secure private rental accommodation have not been able to do so. Some who had not thought they would be homeless are finding that they are. Arrangements with family seem to be a very short-term solution with the reality of living back with parents and other family members presenting unexpected problems. So far the level of contact with government agencies other than Centrelink has been minimal. Alcohol and other drugs are proving more of a problem than had been expected.

An aspect of disadvantage that will be pursued further into the project is the possibility that there is a concentration of ex-prisoners in certain already disadvantaged suburbs or towns.

Once the 3 and 6 month interview results are in and analysed, a bulletin and a final report will be prepared.

References

- ABS. (2001a) *2000 Prisoners in Australia*, Canberra, ABS
- ABS (2001b) *2001 Census*, Canberra, ABS
- Banks, C. (1978) A Survey of the SouthEast Prison Population, *Research Bulletin*, 5, pp 12-24.
- Banks, C. and Fairhead, S. (1976) *The Petty Short-Term Prisoner*, London, Barry Rose Publishers.
- Benda, B. (1993) Predictors of Arrest and Service Use among the Homeless: Logit Analyses, *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 17, 2, pp 145-161.
- Belcher, J. (1988) Are Jails Replacing the Mental Health System for the Homeless Mentally Ill?, *Community Mental Health Journal*, 24, 3, pp 185-195.
- Carlisle, J. (1996) *The Housing Needs of Ex-Prisoners* (Research Report), York, University of York Centre for Housing Policy.
- Carnaby, H. (1998) *Road to Nowhere: A Report on the Housing and Support Needs of Women Leaving Prison in Victoria.*, Melbourne, Flat Out Inc.
- Chase, R. (1999) A Case Study in Transition for Ex-Offenders: Sponsors Inc, *Southern Illinois Law Journal*, 23, pp 505-517.
- Corden, J. (1983) Persistent Petty Offenders: Problems and Patterns of Multiple Disadvantage, *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, XXII, pp 68-90.
- Corden, J. and Clifton, M. (1983) The Socially Isolated Prisoners Project, *Research Bulletin*, 16, pp 45-48.
- Corden, J., Kuipers, J. and Wilson, K. (1978) *After Prison: A Study of the Post-Release Experiences of Discharged Prisoners*. Papers in Community Studies No 21, York, University of York.
- DeLisi, M. (2000) Who Is More Dangerous? Comparing the Criminality of Adult Homeless and Domiciled Jail Inmates: A Research Note, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 44,1, pp 59-69.
- Department of Justice (2001) *Support Services in Corrections Targeted Transitional Housing*. Victorian Department of Justice, Melbourne.
- Haines, K. (1990) *After-Care Services for Released Prisoners: A Review of the Literature*, Cambridge, University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology.
- Hardie, T., Bhui, K., Brown, P., Watson, J. and Parrott, J. (1998) Unmet Needs of Remand Prisoners, *Medicine, Science and the Law*, 38, 3, pp 233-236.
- Harrington, S. (1999) New Bedlam: Jails -- Not Psychiatric Hospitals -- Now Care for the Indigent Mentally Ill, *The Humanist*, 59, 3, pp 9-10.
- Hayes, S. (1991) Pilot Prison Programs, *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 17, 2, pp 209-216.
- Hayes, S. (1996) *People With An Intellectual Disability And The Criminal Justice System: Two Rural Courts.*, New South Wales Law Reform Commission Research Report 5, Sydney: NSW Law Reform Commission.
- Kennedy, L. & Durrington, D (1999) *The Prison and Debt Project*. University of Queensland Social and Economic Research Centre.
- Lewis, K. and Hayes, S. (1997) Health of Women Ex-Prisoners, *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 3,

- Lyll, I., Holland, A., Collins, S. and Styles, P. (1995) Incidence of Persons With a Learning Disability Detained in Police Custody: A needs assessment for service development, *Medicine Science and Law*, 35, 1, pp 61-71.
- McCarthy, B. and Hagen, J. (1991) Homelessness: A Crimogenic Situation?, *British Journal of Criminology*, 31, 4, pp 393-410.
- National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders [NACRO]. (1992) *Revolving Doors: Report of the Telethon Inquiry into the Relationship Between Mental Health, Homelessness and Criminal Justice*, London, NACRO.
- NACRO. (1993) *Opening the Doors: A Report from NACRO's National Policy on Resettlement.*, London, NACRO.
- New South Wales Department of Community Services. (2001) *SAAP Service Framework* , (1st revision, March 2001).
- New South Wales Department of Corrective Services. (2000) 1999/2000 Statistical Supplement, Sydney, NSW Department of Corrective Services.
- New South Wales Department of Corrective Services. (2001a) *Corporate Plan 2001-2004*, Sydney, NSW Dept of Corrective Services.
- New South Wales Department of Corrective Services. (2001b) *Community Funding Programs: Three Year Vision (2001/2-2003/4)*, Sydney, NSW Dept of Corrective Services
- New South Wales Department of Corrective Services. (2001c) *Community Funding Plans: Expressions of Interest Information and Submission Package (2001/2-2003/4)*, Sydney, NSW Dept of Corrective Services.
- New South Wales Department of Housing. (2000) *Public Housing Services*, Sydney, NSW Department of Housing.
- New South Wales Legislative Council (2001) *Select Committee on the Increase In Prisoner Population Final Report*. Sydney, NSW Parliament.
- Paylor, I. (1995) *Housing Needs of Ex-Offenders*. Aldershot, UK, Avebury.
- Ramsay, M. (1986) Housing for the Homeless Ex-Offender: Key Findings from a Literature Review, *Research Bulletin*, 20, pp 57-60.
- Stanton, A. (1982) *A Survey into the Accommodation Circumstances of Prisoners Held for Periods of up to Three Months at H.M.P. Birmingham.*, Birmingham:, West Midlands Probation and After-Care Service
- Stark, L. (1994) The shelter as “total institution”: an organizational barrier to remedying homelessness, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 37, 4 pp 553-563.
- UK Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions Rough Sleepers Unit. (2001) *Blocking the Fast Track from Prison to Rough Sleeping*, London, DETR.
- UK Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Unit. (2001) *Submissions to the Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Prisoners Project*. London, Cabinet Office, (draft made available to authors)
- Victorian Department of Human Services (2001a) <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/vhs>
- Victorian Department of Human Services. (2001b) VHS Focus Group on Homelessness and Pre- and Post-Release Services for Prisoners--Women and Men Prisoners., Internet, Available <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/vhs/pdfs/backprisonmen.pdf>
- Victorian Department of Human Services. (2001c) VHS Focus Group on Homelessness and Pre- and Post-Release Services for Prisoners--Women Prisoners--Outcome Papers., Internet, Available <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/vhs/pdfs/outprisonwomenmen.pdf>

- Victorian Department of Human Services. (2001d) VHS Focus Group on Homelessness and Pre- and Post-Release Services for Prisoners--Men Prisoners--Outcome Papers., Internet, Available <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/vhs/pdfs/outprisonmen.pdf>
- Victorian Department of Human Services. (2001e) VHS--Outcomes Paper--Representatives of Prison Providers and Sentence Management., Internet, Available <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/vhs/pdfs/outprisongen.pdf>
- Victorian Office of Housing. (2001) *The Aim of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Package.*, Internet, Available <http://hnb.dhs.vic.gov.au/ooh/oohchfch.nsf/TOC/A9AFBA9D89DE2D2C4A25687F00798586>.
- Vitelli, R. (1993) The Homeless Inmate in a Maximum Security Prison Setting, *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 35, 3, pp 323-331.
- Walton, D. (1987) The residential, employment, and educational needs of offenders, In Harding, J. [Ed] *Probation and the Community*, London, Tavistock Publications.

Appendix 1

Frequency Tables - Combined Pre-release data NSW and Victoria

Sex of participant

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	266	74.7	74.7
	female	90	25.3	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	57	16.0	16.0
	no	299	84.0	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Parole

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	187	52.5	52.5
	no	169	47.5	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Age

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-21	42	11.8	11.8
	22-26	94	26.5	38.3
	27-35	140	39.4	77.7
	36-45	61	17.2	94.9
	46-55	17	4.8	99.7
	56+	1	.3	100.0
	Total	355	100.0	

Previous Incarceration

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	236	66.7	66.7
	no	118	33.3	100.0
	Total	354	100.0	

Disability

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	none	290	81.5	81.5
	physical	51	14.3	95.8
	psychiatric	12	3.4	99.2
	combination	3	.8	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Principal Offence

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	violence	56	15.7	15.7
	robbery/extortion	78	21.9	37.6
	larceny/fraud/other property	85	23.9	61.5
	drugs	45	12.6	74.2
	justice/security	3	.8	75.0
	motoring	32	9.0	84.0
	against good order	2	.6	84.6
	fine default	3	.8	85.4
	other	52	14.6	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Time Served

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3 months	94	26.4	26.4
	4-6 months	105	29.5	55.9
	7-12 months	93	26.1	82.0
	13-24 months	37	10.4	92.4
	25-60 months	21	5.9	98.3
	61-120 months	4	1.1	99.4
	121+ months	2	.6	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Education

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	missing	1	.3	.3
	tertiary	9	2.5	2.8
	technical or trade	37	10.4	13.2
	post secondary	4	1.1	14.3
	secondary	37	10.4	24.7
	part secondary	242	68.0	92.7
	primary	25	7.0	99.7
	no formal schooling	1	.3	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Family type

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	single	207	58.1	58.1
	married	30	8.4	66.6
	separated	24	6.7	73.3
	defacto	81	22.8	96.1
	divorced	14	3.9	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Dependent Children

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no kids	214	60.1	60.1
	one	63	17.7	77.8
	two	40	11.2	89.0
	three	23	6.5	95.5
	Four +	16	4.5	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Sole Parent

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	51	14.3	14.3
	no	305	85.7	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Children Living With

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NA	203	57.0	57.0
	other parent	78	21.9	78.9
	grandparent	33	9.3	88.2
	other relative	8	2.2	90.4
	foster/state ward	9	2.5	93.0
	other arrangement	25	7.0	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Prior Employment

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	employed	124	34.8	34.8
	unemployed (seeking work)	137	38.5	73.3
	unemployed (not seeking work)	24	6.7	80.1
	home duties	7	2.0	82.0
	student	6	1.7	83.7
	other	58	16.3	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Post Employment

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes (arranged)	85	23.9	23.9
	don't know	161	45.2	69.1
	other	109	30.6	99.7
	missing	1	.3	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Living With Prior

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	spouse/partner	90	25.3	25.3
	parents	95	26.7	52.0
	other family	35	9.8	61.8
	friends	30	8.4	70.2
	alone	78	21.9	92.1
	other	28	7.9	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Type of Housing Prior

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	own/family	86	24.2	24.2
	private/assistance	29	8.1	32.3
	private/ no assistance	72	20.2	52.5
	public/short-term	2	.6	53.1
	public/priority	10	2.8	55.9
	public/long-term	75	21.1	77.0
	supported/saap	4	1.1	78.1
	supported/non saap	1	.3	78.4
	boarding house	7	2.0	80.3
	other institution	5	1.4	81.7
	squat/street	36	10.1	91.9
	other	29	8.1	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Living With Post

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	spouse/partner	86	24.2	24.2
	parents	112	31.5	55.6
	other family	42	11.8	67.4
	friends	19	5.3	72.8
	alone	53	14.9	87.6
	other	44	12.4	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Type of Housing Post

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	own family house	130	36.5	36.5
	private rent assistance	32	9.0	45.5
	private no rent assistance	40	11.2	56.7
	public priority	18	5.1	61.8
	public long term	63	17.7	79.5
	saap refuge	1	.3	79.8
	non saap refuge	5	1.4	81.2
	corrective services supported	3	.8	82.0
	boarding house	6	1.7	83.7
	other institutions	16	4.5	88.2
	squat street	3	.8	89.0
	don't know	39	11.0	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Debt

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	dept of housing	49	13.8	13.8
	private organisation	6	1.7	15.4
	other	51	14.3	29.8
	no debt	250	70.2	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Alcohol

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not a problem	295	82.9	82.9
	hardly a problem	15	4.2	87.1
	medium problem	27	7.6	94.7
	serious	19	5.3	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Tobacco

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not a problem	101	28.4	28.4
	hardly a problem	43	12.1	40.4
	medium problem	108	30.3	70.8
	severe	104	29.2	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Heroin

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not a problem	262	73.6	73.6
	hardly a problem	28	7.9	81.5
	medium problem	28	7.9	89.3
	serious	38	10.7	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Pills

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not a problem	310	87.1	87.1
	hardly a problem	16	4.5	91.6
	medium problem	14	3.9	95.5
	serious	16	4.5	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Speed

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not a problem	263	73.9	73.9
	hardly a problem	43	12.1	86.0
	medium problem	32	9.0	94.9
	serious	18	5.1	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Other Drugs

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not a problem	291	81.7	81.7
	hardly a problem	12	3.4	85.1
	medium problem	26	7.3	92.4
	serious	27	7.6	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Gambling

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not a problem	307	86.2	86.2
	hardly a problem	14	3.9	90.2
	medium problem	16	4.5	94.7
	serious	19	5.3	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Programmes Post Release

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	none	171	48.0	48.0
	drug rehab	105	29.5	77.5
	employment	7	2.0	79.5
	other	73	20.5	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Information type

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes/crc post release info package	5	1.4	1.4
	no	236	66.3	67.7
	other written	37	10.4	78.1
	verbal	71	19.9	98.0
	other	7	2.0	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	

Information Source

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	non applicable	243	68.3	68.3
	welfare officer	27	7.6	75.8
	parole officer	4	1.1	77.0
	other officer	23	6.5	83.4
	chaplin	1	.3	83.7
	other	58	16.3	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	