

Recently many countries have been experiencing rapidly growing youth offending and imprisonment. For example, between 1992 and 2002 the young adult male prison population in England and Wales increased by 54 percent (Home Office, 2003). Government efforts and criminal justice policies have focused on the under 18 population but the penal system has generally been unable to reduce recidivism among young adult offenders. Reconviction rates among young adult males released in 1999 were extremely high with about 75 percent returning to prison within two years of release (Home Office, 2003).

Although there has been extensive research on recidivism, there has been much less study of the process inmates go through when they are released from prison.

Researchers have begun to study re-entry more extensively but more research is needed to understand the process of desistance and what helps parolees succeed. To further understanding of this relatively neglected important trend we examine background and incarceration factors associated with expectations to reoffend among young male offenders (aged 18 to 21) interviewed in England. In particular, we consider how self-efficacy, peer networks, family factors and life plans influence intentions to stay out of trouble following release.

In our consideration of intentions to reoffend, we draw upon the theory of planned behaviour. Ajzen (1991) underscores that intentions to perform a behavior are central. Intentions are assumed to show how hard someone is willing to try to perform a behavior, and behavioral intention is the immediate antecedent to behavior. In this study, we examine how hard inmates think it would be to *not* perform a particular behavior – that is to stay out of trouble. The theory of planned behavior proposes that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control determine behavioral intentions. The attitude measure examines a person's disposition toward a

behavior, subjective norms include attributes of a person's social environment, and perceived behavioral control addresses variation in a person's ability to control the performance of a behavior. Drawing upon this theory, we examine the influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control on the intentions of young offenders to reoffend.

Various factors both during and previous to imprisonment are expected to influence intentions to reoffend. Previous studies have noted the importance of social support in and outside prison in coping with incarceration. Family ties and relationships prior to imprisonment, as well as contact while in prison influence delinquency among young offenders. For example, one of the most powerful predictors of delinquency among family-related variables is parental rejection. Participation in rehabilitative programs while in prison can also influence recidivism among young offenders. Job skills and employment opportunities can reduce reoffending depending upon the age of the offender. We therefore examine the influence of vocational training and contacts with friends and family while in prison on intentions to reoffend as mediated by attitudes, behavioral control, and subjective norms. In addition, we consider the influence of education, age, employment, and family ties prior to imprisonment on participation in vocational courses and contacts with family and friends while in prison.

In total one third of the total prison population of 300 young offenders in a prison in England were interviewed. Questions included information on offence and sentencing, education and employment prior to incarceration, as well as courses taken and employment during incarceration. Information on family background, including family structure and peers was also obtained. In particular, inmates were asked about plans following release and future family expectations. Attitudinal measures included

questions about life control, self-efficacy, and gender ideology. Questions about family and friend visits during the past week, including letters and phone calls, were recorded. Finally, questions were asked regarding general health. Genograms were used to identify family relationships and to indicate violence, alcohol, or drug problems, or prior imprisonment of parents, siblings, or partners. Closeness to family members or conflict with family members was also recorded.

The dependent variable in this paper is intentions to reoffend. In particular, it is a measure of how hard the inmate reports it will be to not reoffend following release. The primary independent variables include measures of attitudes, behavioral control, and subjective norms. The estimation procedure followed two steps. First, OLS regression was used to determine the influence of background characteristics on activities in prison (vocation classes and total contacts). Second, the influence of prison activities on planned behavior factors (attitudes, behavioral controls, and subjective norms) was examined using regression models. Then, the influence of planned behavior on the expectations to stay out of trouble was estimated using regression models. . Structural equation modeling was then used to allow for the estimation of error terms, as well as to estimate a path model linking background characteristics, prison activities, planned behavior, and intentions to reoffend together in one model.

The transition from prison to the community is a vulnerable time when individuals may be susceptible to the influences of deviant peers. It is well established that criminal behavior is associated with the criminality of one's friends . Recent research on desistance confirms that a shift away from friendships with people who are involved in crime is one key element in the desistance process. Consistent with this, we found that the delinquency of one's friends was associated with perceptions of

how easy it would be to stay out of trouble. With fewer friends to encourage and reward deviant behavior, motivation for committing crime may diminish.

An important question is whether other variables are related to criminal attitudes and behavior, after peer influences are taken into account. We found that specific plans, perceptions of control, and self-efficacy were all associated with intentions to stay out of trouble, net of the influence of deviant peers. This finding has important implications for efforts within prisons to help prepare offenders for the transition back into the community. It suggests that vocational courses and policies that encourage family contact may help increase feelings of self-efficacy and prepare offenders for successful reentry.

In summary, we found that intentions to stay out of trouble were most strongly associated with the number of delinquent friends. Intentions to stay out of trouble were also significantly associated with the specificity of post-release plans, life control, and self-efficacy, net of peer influences. Offenders' feelings of life control were stronger among those who took vocational courses while in prison and among those who had more frequent contacts from family members and friends. The findings are consistent with the self-efficacy theories and provide insights into the process of reentry among offenders. Given the large increases in prison populations and high recidivism rates, the findings have implications for helping offenders reenter society successfully and decreasing recidivism rates. Specific policies that are consistent with our findings are vocational courses and policies that encourage contact with family members and friends. In addition, interventions that help offenders make specific plans and increase feelings of control and self-efficacy have promise in helping released offenders successfully complete the transition from prison to the community.

