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**SUBJECT:** *Research in Review*

**TO:** Executive Staff  
Superintendents  
Other Readers



**FROM:** Gary Zajac, Ph.D.  
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Enclosed please find Volume 7, Number 3 of *Research in Review* (RIR). This issue presents a series of reviews dealing with various topics including the dangerousness of sex offenders, the impact of sentencing guidelines on correctional populations, prisoner reentry (reentry trends and effective reentry programs), and longitudinal research on criminal careers (the duration of criminal careers and factors affecting desistance from criminal behavior over the life-course). With this issue of RIR, we welcome two reviews by Jessica Hathaway, a Pennsylvania Management Associate who is currently doing a rotation in this office. Ms. Hathaway prepared summaries of two pieces- *Returning Home: Understanding The Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* and *Studying Criminal Career Length Through Early Adulthood Among Serious Offenders*.

We welcome your feedback on RIR. We also welcome your suggestions for specific topical areas for future issues. While we cannot promise that we can produce an issue in response to all suggestions offered, we are very much interested in knowing what questions and topics are most interesting to our readers. Future issues of RIR will continue with a review of our own departmental research, as well as article reviews, book reviews, and other relevant pieces.

Thank you for your continued interest in *Research in Review*.

# Research in Review

Office of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants

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## *Summary and Major Findings of Articles Reviewed*

Lisa L. Sample et al. 2003. "Are Sex Offenders Dangerous?" *Criminology & Public Policy*, 3(1), 59-82. Page 2

This article examines patterns of sexual and other reoffending of sex offenders in order to investigate a commonly held assumption that sex offenders are inherently more likely to continue repeating their current offense (e.g. a sex offense) than are non-sex offenders, and thus that they are more "dangerous" than other types of offenders. This study found that sex offenders were no more likely to reoffend for the same type of offense (nor for any type of offense) than non-sex offenders, leading the authors to suggest that policy on sex offenders should be driven more by data on reoffense patterns.

Sean Nicholson-Crotty. 2004. "The Impact of Sentencing Guidelines on State-Level Sanctions: An Analysis Over Time." *Crime & Delinquency*, 50(3), 395-411. Page 4

This article examines the impact of sentencing guidelines on state corrections populations over the period 1975 through 1998, with a special focus on mandatory guidelines. The study finds that in states where sentencing guidelines are explicitly tied to available corrections resources, prison populations have remained relatively stable. Guidelines states without such a resource linkage, on the other hand, have seen increases in their populations. This lends support to the practice of tying sentencing guidelines to available prison resources.

Christy Visher et al. 2004. *Returning Home: Understanding The Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center. Page 5

This study by the Urban Institute explores issues surrounding prisoner reentry among a sample of ex-offenders returning to Baltimore, Maryland. The authors conclude that one of the most central components of prisoner reentry is the family, as many ex-offenders rely on family members for a residence, financial help, and emotional support. The study also finds that substance abuse treatment and job skills training are important components of reentry preparation that must continue to be reinforced. In addition, given that few respondents had some form of medical insurance upon release but a significant proportion sought out medical services, the authors conclude that reentry planning should include better coordination of continued health care services for released offenders.

John H. Laub and Robert J. Sampson. 2003. *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys To Age 70*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 293 pp. Page 9

In this book, Laub and Sampson report findings from a 50-year longitudinal study of a group of 500 men who are currently approaching age 70 and have been followed since their early adolescence as a group of juvenile delinquents growing up in Boston. The purpose of the study is to examine criminal behavior over the life-course, and more specifically, to discover what factors lead to desistance from criminal behavior. The authors conclude that offenders

desist as a result of a combination of individual actions (choice) in conjunction with situational contexts and structural influences. Desistance is more than a mere “aging out” of crime; it is the result of certain “turning points” in life such as marriage, stable employment, and military service that 1) knife off the past from the present, 2) provide not only supervision and monitoring but opportunities for social support and growth, 3) bring change and structure to routine activities, and 4) provide an opportunity for identity transformation. Laub and Sampson’s fascinating study is widely considered to be the longest longitudinal study ever conducted in the field of criminology.

Alex R. Piquero et al. 2004. “Studying Criminal Career Length Through Early Adulthood Among Serious Offenders.” *Crime & Delinquency*, 50(3), 412-435. Page 12

This longitudinal study examines the average criminal career length and its correlates among a sample of 377 male offenders. The authors conclude that the average criminal career length is slightly over 17 years, with a range of 4 to 30 years. An examination of the correlates associated with career length reveals that individuals with an early onset of criminal behavior tend to have longer criminal careers while those with longer lengths of stay in prison and who score higher on cognitive abilities tend to have shorter criminal careers.

Richard P. Seiter and Karen R. Kadela. 2003. “Prisoner Reentry: What Works, What Does Not, and What Is Promising.” *Crime & Delinquency*, 49(3), 360-388. Page 14

This study presents a review of existing evaluations of prisoner reentry programs, to determine which programs work, which do not work, and which are promising. The review identifies positive results for many types of prisoner reentry programs. Vocational training and/or work release programs were found to be effective in reducing recidivism as well as in improving job readiness skills. Graduates of certain substance abuse treatment programs were less likely to be re-arrested, commit a drug-related offense, continue drug use, or receive a parole violation. Halfway house and prerelease programs were generally effective in reducing recidivism (both the frequency and severity of future crimes). Educational programs (while not successful in reducing recidivism) and certain types of programs for sexual and violent offenders were found to be promising.

Future volumes of RIR will continue to feature summaries of the PADOc’s own research projects, as well as reviews of new and interesting journal articles and books. We at RIR hope that you find these topics to be informative, practical and relevant to your work in corrections.

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### *Detailed Reviews*

Lisa L. Sample and Timothy M. Bray. 2003. “Are Sex Offenders Dangerous?” *Criminology & Public Policy*, 3(1), 59-82.

This study explores empirical support for the assumption that sex offenders are inherently more dangerous, that is to say more likely to commit the same types of offense, than are non-sex offenders. This assumption is thought to underlie much of the special attention given to these sorts of offenders in the criminal justice system, such as mandated DNA collection, civil commitment, registration and community notification.

Dangerousness can be defined in many ways. Public and political conceptions of danger may differ from scientific attempts to measure this construct. Among criminal justice researchers and practitioners, danger often equates with *risk* – the statistical likelihood that the offender will continue to commit the same, or different, offenses. Other definitions of danger may center around the magnitude or type of harm done to victims or the repugnance of the crime. Not all conceptions of risk can be measured with equal degrees of ease or accuracy.

This study looks at danger as risk – the probability of additional crimes being committed. Data on arrests for all types of crimes and offenders in Illinois was examined for the period 1990 through 1997. This encompassed adults 17 and older covering approximately 953,000 offenders, nearly 2.3 million arrests and nearly 3 million charges. Offenders arrested in 1990 were followed for up to five years to track any rearrest offenses. The authors chose arrest offense as their primary unit of analysis, instead of reconviction or reincarceration offense, in order to control for plea bargaining that might conceal sex offenses. Data was collected on incarcerations, though, to account for reduced time at risk for arrestees. The nearly 11,000 specific offenses under Illinois law were collapsed into 24 offense categories similar to what is found in the Uniform Crime Report. These categories were then placed into a hierarchy that resulted in sex offense being weighted as the second most serious type of offense (behind homicide). This allowed the authors to assign a single most serious crime to offenders who had multiple arrests.

This study found that on the whole sex offenders had a relatively low rate of rearrest at five years out, with 45.1 percent rearrested for any crime. By comparison, 74.9 percent of those arrested in 1990 for robbery were rearrested for any crime within five years. Similarly, 66 percent of those arrested in 1990 for burglary, 58 percent arrested for nonsexual assault and 52.9 percent arrested for larceny were rearrested for any crime within five years. Only two crime categories had lower levels of rearrest for any crime within five years than sex offense – homicide (44.2%) and property damage (38.8%).

This study also examined rearrests for the same offense, in other words, a person arrested in 1990 for a given offense and then rearrested for the same type of offense within five years – for sex offense the rate was 6.5 percent, for property damage 38.8 percent, for nonsexual assault 37.2 percent, for larceny 30 percent, for robbery 17.9 percent, for burglary 23.1 percent, for homicide 5.7 percent, for kidnapping 2.8 percent and for stalking 5 percent. Thus, only two offense categories had a lower rate of offense-specific rearrest than sex offense.

The authors also examined the notion that other crimes, such as burglary, might serve as “gateways” to sex offending. They found that persons arrested in 1990 for a nonsexual crime had lower rates of rearrest for a sex offense within five years than did persons originally arrested for a sex offense. No 1990 nonsexual arrest group had a rearrest rate for a sexual offense of greater than three percent (recall that 6.5 percent of sex offenders arrested in 1990 were rearrested for a sex offense). Thus, the greatest “gateway” crime for sex offending seems to be sex offending itself, albeit at a low rate.

In sum, this study finds that sex offenders had a relatively low overall rate of reoffending and a low rate of offense specific reoffending, compared to other offense categories. These findings are echoed by some other recent research, such as the major study recently released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.<sup>1</sup> The authors acknowledge the common argument made in rebuttal to such a conclusion, that many sex offenses go undetected. While their study does not collect original data on this issue, they do refer to findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), pointing out that underreporting of crimes is variable across offense and victim types. Some offenses are underreported at greater levels than sex offenses. If we are to posit that some sex crimes go unreported (which indeed is true), much the same could be said for other types of crimes, such as simple assault and larceny, at least according to the NCVS. The authors make the case that official data (such as arrest records) are at least a systematic and documented source of data on the prevalence of crime; it is difficult to research what cannot be consistently measured.

The authors conclude that the findings of their study suggest that sex offenders may not be as dangerous as is commonly thought, at least where danger is defined by likelihood of recidivating (as opposed to harm to victims or repugnance of the crime). Other offense categories, such as robbery, show a markedly higher statistical likelihood of recidivating. They raise the question of whether criminal justice policies such as community notification, DNA collection and lifetime offender registration might be better targeted towards offenders with a greater probability of persistent offense-specific offending.

This study, while limited by its focus on a single state, raises provocative questions. These questions clearly reach beyond the domain of corrections, which neither establishes law nor imposes penalties. This study and others like it, however, focus attention on the issue of how to distinguish risk levels of various types of offenders. This has important implications for offender interventions and program management, which produce the best results when informed by objective assessments of risk and need. Assumptions based upon type of offense should not substitute for an evidence-based approach when deciding where to intervene with which offenders and under what circumstances.

Sean Nicholson-Crotty. 2004. "The Impact of Sentencing Guidelines on State-Level Sanctions: An Analysis Over Time." *Crime & Delinquency*, 50(3), 395-411.

This study evaluates the impact of sentencing guidelines on state prison populations over the period 1975 through 1998 to test the proposition that guideline schemes that link sentencing decisions to prison resources are better able to manage prison populations than guidelines that operate irrespective of available correctional resources. Research on guideline systems has produced mixed findings, with no clear consensus on the impact of sentencing systems on prison populations. The outcomes depend in part on the primary intention behind the development of the system – crime

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick A. Langan, Erica L. Schmitt and Matthew R. Durose. 2003. *Recidivism of Sex Offenders Released in 1994*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

control, punishment, management of correctional resources, etc. Some states such as Minnesota, Washington and Kansas, built into their guidelines a consideration of available prison resources (capacity), allowing sentencing to be tied to present or projected resources. Other states, including Pennsylvania, did not. Systems with different driving philosophies are likely to have different impacts upon prison growth. The author argues that many studies of guidelines impacts have been hampered by poor longitudinal designs, in other words, by a failure to properly track prison growth before and after enactment of guidelines and to control for other variables that could impact prison population levels.

The present study examines prison population trends from prior to the evolution of guideline systems through the late 1990's (when guidelines had "matured"). Prison populations (measured as incarceration rate per 100,000 citizens and number of new admissions to prison per 100,000 citizens) in all fifty states are related over time to the presence or absence of mandatory guidelines, controlling for factors that are also thought to impact incarceration levels, such as demographics, economic indicators and crime rates.

This study found that guideline systems that included a prison resource adjustment component saw an average annual decrease in rates of new commitments of 29.8 inmates per 100,000 population. States without a direct linkage of sentencing policy to prison resources saw an average annual *increase* of new commitments of 13.9 inmates per 100,000 population. Looking at overall annual incarceration rates (i.e. not just new commitments, but the entire prison population), states that did not link guidelines to resources saw an annual average increase in incarceration rate of 32 inmates per 100,000 population

Thus, the author concludes that the presence of a statutory linkage between sentencing decisions and available correctional resources has a direct and strong impact on prison commitments and population levels over time. States that built such linkages into their sentencing guideline schemes seemed to have better controlled their prison population levels. This study provides interesting new insight into the impact of sentencing guideline systems on correctional resources and budgets.

Christy Visher, Nancy LaVigne, and Jeremy Travis. 2004. *Returning Home: Understanding The Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center.

In 2001, researchers from the Urban Institute initiated a two-year pilot study to examine issues surrounding the process of prisoner reentry. Specifically, the objective of the study was to answer two primary questions: 1) how are ex-offenders affected by their release from prison and reentry into the community, and 2) what are the underlying reasons that lead ex-offenders to re-offend? The study focused on prisoner reentry in the state of Maryland, specifically in the city of Baltimore and neighboring communities, where there are extremely high rates of ex-offenders. In 2001, 59 percent of all prisoners released in Maryland returned to Baltimore City. More specifically, 30 percent of all

former prisoners returned to just 6 of the 55 communities surrounding Baltimore. Compared to other cities in Maryland, Baltimore is considered economically and socially disadvantaged with a median household income of \$30,078 (43% below the state median income), an 8 percent unemployment rate (about double the state average), 23 percent of the residents living below the federal poverty line, and 25 percent of the households being female-headed (almost double the state average of 14%).

The research involved studying a sample of 324 prisoners (235 men and 89 women), who completed self-administered questionnaires both prior to and after their release from prison. For the first post-release surveys, 153 individuals from the original sample were surveyed within 30 to 90 days of release from prison. At 4 to 6 months post-release, 104 individuals from the original sample were again contacted to participate in a second post-release survey.

Results from the first post-release surveys indicated that only four out of ten respondents were working full time within 30 to 90 days of their release from prison. Those who were working reported that the most successful method for finding a job was to use personal contacts such as family members or friends. Individuals who were employed were more likely to report participating in a work release program, receiving job training in prison, having to work as a parole condition, and having debts such as child support and parole supervision costs. One factor the study differentiated between was difficulties in finding a job compared to difficulties in being able to keep a job. Prior to being released from prison, participants were generally optimistic about their job prospects, with 65 percent thinking that it would be *pretty easy* or *very easy* to find a job and 88 percent reporting it would *pretty easy* or *very easy* to keep their job. By the second post-release interview, however, the respondents' perceptions had changed: 45 percent thought it was *pretty easy* or *very easy* to find a job and 74 percent thought it was *pretty easy* or *very easy* to keep their job. This difference in perception was found to be largely due to the realities of the job market. Upon entering the job market, ex-offenders were less satisfied with their salaries (about 50% of respondents expected to make the same or slightly higher salaries upon release, when in reality, 30 to 90 days after release, the average salary was about \$1 less than they made prior to incarceration). In addition, the study noted that the types of jobs ex-offenders were able to obtain (e.g. food service, construction, etc.) typically offered no room for advancement.

Prior to incarceration, 78 percent reported using illegal drugs and 61 percent reported alcohol use. While incarcerated, 27 percent of respondents indicated that they had participated in a drug/alcohol program. At 30 to 90 days post-release, 33 percent of respondents said that they had used alcohol or other drugs. After release from prison, 50 percent of respondents reported that they felt they needed counseling, but only 30 percent sought out these services. Younger respondents and those who had family members/friends who used alcohol or other drugs were more likely to drink or use drugs post-release, while those who participated in alcohol or other drug (AOD) treatment programs in prison and those who had family members that were supportive of their recovery were less likely to use.

Prior to release from prison, 88 percent of inmates reported their physical health as good or excellent compared to 80 percent who felt the same post-release. After being released from prison, the

majority of respondents reported that they had no medical coverage or health insurance for hospitalization, doctor visits, or prescription drug coverage (only 15% reported they had coverage of some kind). This becomes a significant reentry issue given the fact that some 58 percent of respondents had been under the care of a physician, 19 percent had been to the emergency room at least once, and 40 percent reported they had at least one medical problem.

The majority of respondents participated in prison employment readiness (70%) and substance abuse (34%) programs but were typically serving longer sentences than those respondents who did not participate in these programs. One important finding was that many inmates are released from prison before being eligible to even receive necessary treatment because of the large percentage of inmates serving shorter sentences and the waiting lists to get into programs. Further, while 45 percent of respondents participated in at least one pre-release program, 41 percent reported that none of these programs had been helpful to their parole success. In the post-release interviews, when asked what programs or services they would have liked to receive, the most common responses dealt with employment (26% of respondents said they would have liked job training).

The overwhelming majority of respondents reported that the emotional and financial support they received from their family and close friends was what helped them the most during the transition from prison to the community. More than 40 percent of respondents reported having tight-knit family relationships with at least four family members while 10 percent said they had no close relationships with members of their family. At 30 to 90 days post-release, 51 percent were receiving some financial help from family members and 80 percent reported that they were living with family (of which 20% were living with a spouse or significant other). After the first post-release interview, 82 percent of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that their family was as supportive as they had expected. It would seem that one of the key protective factors to community reintegration is having close and supportive relationships with family.

Almost 60 percent of Maryland prisoners return to Baltimore each year, and of this group, 36 percent were further concentrated in 6 of 55 communities containing above-average unemployment rates, female-headed households, and families living well below the federal poverty level. While the majority of ex-offenders reported feeling safe in their communities, 60 percent believed drug selling was problematic. Thirty percent thought they would be able to find jobs in their neighborhood. About two-thirds of the pre-release sample reported that they had a residence lined up, but by the first post-release interview, only 82 percent intended to make this their permanent residence. By the second post-release interview, 52 percent of respondents expected to either get their own place or move in with their partner and/or children in the next few weeks or months.

Most of the pre-release respondents anticipated that the reentry process would be relatively simple: the majority of the sample reported it would be *pretty easy* or *very easy* to keep a job (88%), be socially accepted (81%), renew relationships with children (80%), avoid returning to prison (78%), avoid a parole violation (78%), support themselves financially (71%), or pay child support (63%) after release from prison. Not all reentry matters were as straightforward as respondents had anticipated, however. At the first post-release interview, at least half of the respondents who thought



it would be easy to find a job, support themselves financially, and pay off debts, reported that these tasks were *pretty hard* or *very hard*.

Most of the respondents in the study had a prior history of involvement in the criminal justice system: 84 percent of the sample had a prior conviction, 42 percent had a history of four or more prior convictions, 68 percent had been incarcerated previously, 56 percent had a juvenile arrest record, 28 percent had been incarcerated in a juvenile detention center, 60 percent had a family member that had a criminal record, and 39 percent had a family member that was incarcerated during the same time as they were. Despite their criminal backgrounds, 78 percent of the respondents thought it would be *pretty easy* or *very easy* to stay out of prison/avoid a parole violation and 87 percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they would avoid friends and places that would get them in trouble. Eighty-two percent of the pre-release sample thought their parole officers would help them to transition back into society, but only 50 percent of the post-release sample felt the same. Six months after release from prison, one in three respondents had been rearrested, one in ten were reconvicted, and 8 percent returned to prison after sentencing, 7 percent returned to prison on a technical violation or new charge, and 16 percent of the total sample returned to prison within six months of release for various reasons.

Several policy implications are supported from the results of this study. The authors recommend that more programs be utilized to strengthen the family unit since one of the most important identified components of prisoner reentry is the family. Families provide ex-offenders with a residence, financial help, emotional support, and a stable life. Since one of respondents' main concerns was finding a job after release, job preparedness and work release programs also need to be reinforced. In light of the fact that over 50 percent of respondents returned to prison for drug-related crimes but only 35 percent had received substance abuse treatment, AOD programming should continue to be expanded to more offenders. Finally, given that few respondents had some form of medical insurance at post-release but a significant proportion of released offenders sought out medical services, reentry planning should also include better coordination of continued health care services for released offenders.

The primary limitation of this study is that it does very little to address why certain ex-offenders do not re-offend, but instead focuses largely on reentry problems related to re-offending. Future research should consider studying parole successes to better determine what protective factors influence them not to re-offend. Future research must also consider the role that certain cognitive factors such as coping and problem-solving skills play in the reentry process. Finally, while this study reveals interesting reentry trends, the findings must be taken with a degree of caution until larger sample sizes are utilized and the results are replicated in other jurisdictions.

### Book Review:

John H. Laub and Robert J. Sampson. 2003. *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys To Age 70*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 293 pp.

An emerging body of literature in the field of criminology is beginning to make use of longitudinal research designs, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, to examine the issues surrounding life-course criminality (i.e., the “criminal career” path over the span of a lifetime). Specifically involved in this type of research are four broad questions: 1) what factors cause the onset of criminal behavior, 2) what factors affect the rate of participation in criminal behavior over the span of the criminal career, 3) what factors lead to persistent criminal behavior over the life-course, and 4) what factors lead to desistance from a life of crime. In this book, Laub and Sampson expand on their previous book, *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life*, to explore the latter question of what factors lead to desistance from a life of crime. Their study is widely considered to be the longest longitudinal study ever conducted in the field of criminology. The subjects of their study are 500 men who are currently approaching age 70 (or who have previously died in some cases) and have been followed for over 50 years, since their early adolescence as a group of juvenile delinquents growing up in Boston. The research was originally initiated by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck in the 1950’s as a part of their classic *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study and was subsequently continued by the authors of this book in 1987. The authors use a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, synthesizing data from multiple sources of institutional records and extensive life-history narrative interviews, to paint a picture of the pathways to desistance from crime.

Laub and Sampson begin by describing their theoretical framework, as developed through their earlier findings from the study. They approach the study from a “life-course” perspective, proposing at the forefront that human lives are embedded and shaped by historical context, that the timing and structure of certain events over the course of a person’s lifetime have profound implications, and that humans possess a certain ability to construct their own life course through choices made. The longitudinal design of the study compliments this life-course perspective by allowing the subjects of the study to be examined at different stages throughout their entire life instead of during one snapshot period of time.

In laying out their theoretical framework, the authors also introduce the concept of “turning points”. They define “turning points” as points in time where a lasting shift in the direction of one’s life trajectory occurs. Turning points can involve conscious or unconscious decisions and are often only recognized retrospectively. Throughout their study, Laub and Sampson attempt to identify turning points in the lives of desisting offenders. The three significant turning points that are eventually identified, fall under what the authors label as “informal social controls”. These three significant turning points are: 1) marriage, 2) employment, and 3) military service. The authors conclude that these three variables seem to have the most profound effect on the process of desistance from criminal behavior.

Marriage, especially strong marital attachment, was found to be a strong predictor of desistance. Several specific dynamics of the interaction between marriage and desistance were distinguished. First, a strong marital attachment was often identified as the culmination of an “investment” in a social bond. As that investment grew, the incentive for avoiding crime increased because more was at stake. Marriage was also found to influence desistance because it frequently led to significant changes in everyday routines. Marriage entails obligations that tend to reduce leisure activities outside of the family. Thus, the transition from marriage was followed by a decline in time spent with friends and exposure to delinquent peers. Marriage was also found to lead to desistance because of the direct control exerted by spouses. Often spouses were found to monitor and attempt to control the desisting offender’s behavior (often referred to by desisting offenders as “nagging”). Spouses often took charge by directly supervising and managing the affairs of the household. Finally, marriage was found to lead to desistance through a change in self-perception. For many, getting married connoted getting “serious”; in other words, becoming an adult or taking responsibility.

Like marital bonds, strong ties to work were also found to lead to desistance from crime. The authors conclude that the mechanisms underlying the desistance processes for employment were similar to those for marriage. Specifically, marriage and work seem to have a significant impact to the degree that both maintain a stable presence. Often, an employer’s initial “risky” investment in hiring an ex-offender was found to initiate a process of interdependency in which the ex-offender reciprocated the investment. Eventually, this reciprocal investment became an incentive for the desisting ex-offender to avoid crime because more was at stake. Also, even more than marriage, work (especially full-time work) was found to lead to a meaningful change in routine activities. Like marriage, full-time legal employment gave more structure to the desisting offender’s time and provided fewer opportunities for criminal activity and other forms of deviance. Finally, stable employment was found to build up a degree of self-efficacy and purpose within desisting offenders. Having a good job was seen by desisting offenders as one of the principal mechanisms enabling them to be taken seriously, to be seen as useful, and to “grow up”.

Laub and Sampson find some evidence to suggest that military service represented another turning point that initiated and sustained the process of desistance from crime. First, military service represented a significant change in that it removed ex-offenders from prior adverse influences (e.g., bad neighborhoods, delinquent peers) and the social stigma of a criminal record. Beginning with basic training, the military provided a basic education and socialization designed to reorient the ex-offender to a world with different rules and structures. Upon entering the military, both past accomplishments and past deficits had diminished influence (a “knifing off” of past experiences). Second, the military often provided opportunities (e.g., education and in-service training) that served as a bridge to a pro-social life for predominantly disadvantaged men. These benefits served to enhance later attachments to work and marriage. Third, as with marriage and employment but more by conscious design, the military changed the routine activities of ex-offenders such as hanging out with anti-social associates and participating in delinquent activities.

In summary, Laub and Sampson conclude that offenders desist as a result of a combination of individual actions (choice) in conjunction with situational contexts and structural influences. The processes of desistance operate simultaneously at different levels (individual, situational, and community) and across different environments (family, work, and military). Desistance is more than a mere “aging out” of crime. Instead, desistance seems to be the result of turning points such as marriage, stable employment, and military service that 1) knife off the past from the present, 2) provide not only supervision and monitoring but opportunities for social support and growth, 3) bring change and structure to routine activities, and 4) provide an opportunity for identity transformation.

Two potential limitations to this study must be noted. First, the subjects of this study grew up in a specific historical context that is quite different from today. Many sociologists have pointed out that the institution of marriage has changed dramatically in a short period of time. Divorce rates are higher and views of gender roles in marriage have evolved. Also, the subjects of this study who served in the military, did so predominantly during the World War II era, a time when the military was quite different in many aspects. Even the criteria for military service has changed in a way that precludes many with criminal backgrounds. As such, it is difficult to discern whether the factors of desistance that are identified in this study are more a function of the historical context that these social institutions were embedded in or whether these social institutions possess more enduring characteristics that facilitate desistance across any historical context.

Second, the authors are unable to adequately account for the potential explanation that marriage, employment and military service represent a selection bias effect. In other words, those who got married, remained employed and joined the military may in fact have already been on the pathway to desistance before participating in any of these social institutions. Potential pre-existing pro-social characteristics may have simultaneously led some to participate in these social institutions and desist from a criminal career. Therefore, it is unclear as to whether the effects of these three factors (marriage, work, and military service) are causes or simply correlates of desistance from crime. The authors attempt to resolve this issue through their analysis of qualitative interviews but are unable to adequately control for such an effect in the results of their quantitative analysis.

Overall, Laub and Sampson present a fascinating and impressive study. Their 50-year longitudinal design and unique combination of qualitative and quantitative methodological techniques are virtually unparalleled in the field of criminology. The interviews and individual life accounts alone make this book worth reading, as they provide incredible insight into the life-course of both criminal desisters and persistent offenders. The results of this book provide both practical policy implications and important theoretical developments that are bound to be enduring contributions to the field.

Alex R. Piquero, Robert Brame, and Donald Lynam. 2004. "Studying Criminal Career Length Through Early Adulthood Among Serious Offenders." *Crime & Delinquency*, 50(3), 412-435.

Most studies on criminal careers tend to focus on issues surrounding the prevalence, frequency, and specialization of criminal behavior. This study takes a look at an under-explored component of criminal career research: the average length of the criminal career (or career duration). Although studies involving research on criminal career duration have been conducted intermittently since the early 1970's, the results are often included as a side bar. Given the policy implications of such research, the authors of this study highlight the importance of arriving at a better understanding of the average length of criminal careers. The findings and recommendations of this study are intended to inform the development of incapacitation theory, especially in light of seemingly counter-productive sentencing structures and "three strikes" laws around the country. While the public's perception is often that "get-tough" laws help to protect citizens, it is well-established through research that offenders participate less in criminal activity as they grow older (commonly referred to as "aging out" of crime). Therefore, continuing to incarcerate individuals after the span of their criminal career has ended may represent an inefficient use of criminal justice resources, at least from the perspective of incapacitation as the goal of incarceration. According to the authors of this study, the key to a more effective incapacitation strategy is to use incarceration as a sanction for criminals towards the beginning of their careers when they are offending at their highest rates.

The subjects of this study were 377 male offenders, who were incarcerated by the California Youth Authority (CYA) from 1965 to 1984. Each offender was tracked for an average of nearly 13 years after being release from incarceration in order to estimate their criminal career length. Career length was measured as the interval between the original and the most current period in custody. A variety of independent control variables were also measured. Criminal history variables included the first documented occurrence of trouble with authorities (average of 12 years old), prior number of violent offenses (average of 1.3 violent offenses), length of stay in prison/jail (average of 30 months), frequency of offending prior to incarceration (average of 1.4 previous crimes committed), and age when paroled (average of 24 years old). Other criminal risk variables that were collected included measures of family dynamics and cognitive abilities. On average, 42 percent of the sample reported growing up in an "intact family". Twenty percent of the sample reported being raised in a family that received public assistance. Measures of family criminality revealed that 54 percent of the sample had siblings with a criminal history, 14 percent had a father with a criminal history, and 1 percent had a mother with a criminal history. Standardized test scores showed that the average offender in the sample held an eighth grade reading and math level.

The results of the study indicate that the average offender in this sample was 12 years old when first getting into trouble with the law and had an average criminal career length of approximately 17 years. Thus, according to these estimates, the average criminal career is completed by the time an offender reaches age 30. When accounting for certain control variables, however, significant

differences emerge. Specifically, six variables exhibit a significant effect on criminal career duration. Those subjects with a longer follow-up period, whose families received welfare, and who were older when released from incarceration tended to have longer careers. Those with longer lengths of stays in prison/jail, who were older at the time of their first police contact, and scored high on cognitive abilities tended to have shorter criminal careers.

The authors point to three key conclusions that emerge from these findings. First, among the study sample, the average career length was a little more than 17 years, with a range of 4 to 30 years. These career length estimates were substantively similar across race. Second, an examination of the correlates associated with career length revealed several relatively robust effects. Consistent with prior research, those individuals with an early onset age tended to have longer criminal careers. At the same time, preventative effects were associated with length of stay in prison and increased cognitive abilities. Third, the correlates associated with career length were more similar than different across race.

The authors point to two policy implications that emerge from their findings. First, while “three strike” laws are often perceived to be an effective strategy for incapacitating repeat offenders, lawmakers, prosecutors, judges, and correctional officials must take into consideration that these laws might only garner short-term success, as offenders’ careers are likely to cease in early adulthood. Second, given the identified correlates of criminal career length, policy makers must consider crime prevention/intervention options that aim to delay the onset of criminal activity into late adolescence and improve cognitive functioning. Such approaches may help to significantly shorten the length of criminal careers.

Certain limitations to this study must be noted. First, there is no way to be certain that each subject’s entire career length has indeed been measured since it may be that some individuals in the sample were simply experiencing a lull in their offending during the study period and may resume offending in the future. Second, the correlates of career length may be a function of this particular sample, especially given that the sample represented a group of more serious offenders. The study must be replicated and findings must be validated on other populations of offenders (e.g., a sample of less serious offenders, female offenders, etc.). Third, the study did not partial out career duration by crime type. It is hypothesized that significant differences in career duration across crime types would be identified by doing so. For instance, prior research has shown that property offenders tend to exhibit shorter careers than violent offenders. Fourth, the authors note that the study did not contain data on the place(s) that subjects resided throughout their lives. Some research suggests that certain places are correlated with longer criminal career averages, and to the extent that individuals reside in such places for longer periods of time, such an environment might influence the length of their criminal careers.

This study provides an important addition to our understanding of the distribution and correlates associated with criminal career length. The central theoretical and policy implications of the study will serve as a building block for future studies to further explore the dynamics of criminal career duration.

Richard P. Seiter and Karen R. Kadela. 2003. "Prisoner Reentry: What Works, What Does Not, and What Is Promising." *Crime & Delinquency*, 49(3), 360-388.

The past decade has seen a renewed interest in prisoner reentry, primarily due to changes in many of the factors surrounding the release of prisoners and their return to the community. The number of released prisoners has increased considerably over the past two decades. The communities that offenders predominantly return to have become less stable and less capable of providing social services and support to the large number of returning offenders. A growing percentage of prisoners are now released unconditionally into the community without any supervision. For those who are released under parole supervision, the focus of supervision is now largely on risk management and surveillance and less on counseling. Also, a larger number of released prisoners are now failing in the community and returning to prison, especially for technical violations of parole. Given these trends, the importance of identifying effective offender reentry programming is crucial. This study presents a review of existing evaluations of prisoner reentry programs, to determine which programs work, which do not work, and which are promising.

For the purpose of this study, a reentry program is defined by the authors as 1) correctional programs that focus on the transition from prison to the community (e.g., prerelease, work release, halfway houses, or specific reentry programs), or 2) programs that have initiated treatment in a prison setting and have linked with a community program to provide continuity of care. Thirty-two studies were identified by the authors as meeting this definition and were thus included in their analysis. To determine if a program works or not, the study utilized the Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods (MSSM), a methodology previously developed for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to identify crime prevention programs that work. This scale ranks each study from 1 (weakest) to 5 (strongest) on overall internal validity. For a program to be considered to work, at least two Level 3 evaluations must include significance tests indicating that the intervention was effective, with the preponderance of the remaining evidence supporting this conclusion. For a program to be considered not to work, at least two Level 3 evaluations must include significance tests indicating the ineffectiveness of the program, with the preponderance of the remaining evidence supporting this conclusion. If a program is found to be effective in at least one Level 3 evaluation and the preponderance of the evidence generally concurs, the program is considered to be promising. Results of these reviews are presented by program type below:

#### Vocational and Work Programs

- A Level-5 evaluation of a work release program in Seattle, Washington compared a group of work release participants to a control group of those who completed their full sentence. Generally, the program achieved its primary goal of preparing inmates for their final release and facilitating their adjustment to the community. Those participating in the work release group were somewhat less likely to be arrested, but the results were not statistically significant.

- Two studies of the Post-Release Employment Project (Level-4 studies) collected data on 7,000 federal offenders and evaluated the program over a 4-year period, comparing those participating in training and work programs with similar offenders who did not take part. The longitudinal results found significant and substantive training effects on both in-prison (misconduct reports) and post-prison (employment and arrest rates) outcome measures.

### Drug Rehabilitation

- A Level-5 study examined 2,315 federal inmates, composed of a treatment group and two comparison groups. Results indicated that drug treatment significantly reduce both recidivism and relapse rates for men but not for women.
- Two evaluations of Therapeutic Community (TC) programs in Texas (both Level-4 evaluations) demonstrated the effectiveness of TC's followed by community aftercare as a substance abuse treatment model. Those who completed both the in-prison TC and an aftercare program were the least likely to be reincarcerated (25%), compared to aftercare dropouts (64%) and an untreated comparison group (42%). Another study of in-prison TC programs followed by residential aftercare found that such programs reduced the likelihood of postrelease arrest by 12 percent.
- Another evaluation of the Key-Crest program in Delaware (a Level-4 evaluation) also demonstrated the effectiveness of in-prison substance abuse treatment followed by community aftercare. The program consisted of an in-prison TC, followed by a work release program and community aftercare. Those completing all phases of the program were more likely to be arrest-free and employed at 18 months post-release.

### Education Programs

- An evaluation of the Learning, Instruction, and Training=Employment (LITE) program in Kentucky (a Level-4 study) found that the educational components of the program did not have an effect on the recidivism rates of program completers, when compared to non-graduates. While reading and math competencies increased, this did not translate to reductions in recidivism.
- A study of prison behavior and post-release recidivism of more than 14,000 Texas inmates (a Level-3 study) found that those who participated in prison education programs demonstrated higher academic achievement but did not generally demonstrate lower recidivism rates.

### Sex Offenders/Violent Offenders

- A Level-4 study randomly assigned 2,125 offenders to either a cognitive skills training program or to a control group. All participants were subject to at least a 12-month follow-up period after release. The study indicated that completion of the cognitive behavioral therapy program (including the aftercare component) did reduce reincarceration rates by 11 percent.
- A Level-3 study of violent sex offenders in Toronto, Canada concluded that no significant difference existed between recidivism rates of offenders who completed treatment (18%) and those who refused treatment (20%).



### Halfway House Programs

- A Level-4 study of 37 halfway house programs in Ohio examined outcomes in terms of the frequency and severity of criminal offenses and concluded that the halfway house group committed fewer and less severe offenses during a 1-year follow-up. Halfway house participants also performed better than the comparison group on measures of community adjustment (finding and holding a job, being self-supportive, and participating in self-improvement programs) but the results were not statistically significant.
- An evaluation of a halfway house for female offenders in California (a Level-3 study) compared the number and severity of offenses of halfway house participants to a control group of non-participants. The results indicated that the average number of crimes in the treatment group was one half that of the control group. In addition, the severity of the crimes committed by the treatment group were significantly lower than that of the control group.

### Prison Prerelease Programs

- An evaluation of the PreStart program in Illinois (a Level-3 study) concluded that 1-year rearrest rates for the treatment group (40%) were significantly lower than for a comparison group of non-participants (48%). Even larger decreases in recidivism were noted when examining reincarceration rates- 12 percent of the treatment group compared to 32 percent of the comparison group.
- A Level-4 study of five different samples of pre-release inmates in Massachusetts was conducted to test the effect of prerelease participation on recidivism. Post-release tracking demonstrated a 12 percent recidivism rate for prerelease participants compared to a 29 percent recidivism rate for the comparison group of non-participants.

In conclusion, this study identifies positive results for many prisoner reentry programs. Vocational training and/or work release programs were found to be effective in reducing recidivism rates as well as in improving job readiness skills for ex-offenders. Graduates of substance abuse treatment programs were less likely than other parolees and noncompleters to have been arrested, commit a drug-related offense, continue drug use, or receive a parole violation. Halfway house programs were found to be effective in reducing the frequency and severity of future crimes. Prerelease programs were also found to be effective in reducing recidivism rates of ex-offenders. In the “promising” category, educational programs were found to increase educational achievement scores but have not yet produced convincing evidence of being able to reduce recidivism rates. Also, certain programs for sex and violent offenders were found to be promising.

While the authors provide evidence that certain reentry programs are effective in helping ex-offenders to transition to and remain successfully in the community, limitations of this review must be noted. The authors provide virtually no evidence to suggest that certain programs do not work. As the title of the study suggests, the purpose of the review is to determine what reentry programs work and what reentry programs do not work. Clearly the authors oversimplify matters by basically concluding that all programs either work or are promising. More discriminating results are needed in the future to determine which programs are more effective than others, which program perhaps do not work, and what specifically it is about effective programs that make them work. Part of the

problem is the method of review used in this study- the MSSM. This methodology is not a true meta-analytical review, as it relies heavily on statistical significance testing alone. Such an approach is often referred to as a narrative (or boxscore) review and is often criticized for oversimplifying study results. In summary, while this study provides a good starting point for examining what types of reentry programs can be expected to demonstrate effectiveness, it does little to significantly advance the broader “what works” literature that is already in existence. Future reviews of the reentry literature must make use of more powerful meta-analytic approaches to gain a clearer picture of what works for who and how.