

Australian Prisoners' Post-release Housing

Eileen Baldry, Desmond McDonnell, Peter Maplestone and Manu Peeters^{*}

Introduction

This paper provides a review and analysis of current international and Australian research literature on the re-entry experiences of people being released from prison, with a specific focus on housing and associated social matters. The intent is to further the research and policy agenda on this matter in Australia by identifying current information and gaps in knowledge.

In Australia a wide range of factors are associated with who becomes a prisoner. These include poverty, being a ward of the state, Aboriginality, lack of secure home due to abuse or other negative factors, drug abuse, mental illness, intellectual and learning disabilities, debt, unemployment, lack of education and poor social skills, and social isolation. These kinds of factors are over-represented amongst those facing criminal court, and those in juvenile detention and adult prisons. They are also prevalent amongst partners and families of prisoners, and therefore also amongst ex-prisoners (Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues 1998; Conway 1999; Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice 2000; Select Committee Inquiry into the Increase in Prisoner Population 2001; Victorian Department of Human Services 2001; Simpson et al 2001). International and local literature suggest an over-representation of these factors amongst homeless and poorly housed persons, and an over-representation of ex-prisoners amongst the homeless also (Benda 1991; NACRO 1992; Aderibigbe 1997; Belcher 1988; Keys Young 1998; Craig & Hodson 2000).

There are, then, very serious forms of cumulative disadvantage facing a large number of those leaving prison and returning to the broader community. Until recently, policy responses to these issues have been in the domain of State Departments of Corrective Services and a small number of Non-Government Agencies. On the whole such responses have tended to treat people with these multiple disadvantages as if their problems were due entirely to individual failings and pathology. The remedies have likewise been centred on individual treatments and crisis interventions. As discussed further below, policy and its implementation in this realm have been poor. In particular, the relationship between being

* This paper is based on literature gathered for an AHURI funded research project 'Ex-prisoners, accommodation and social re-integration' by Eileen Baldry (UNSW), Desmond McDonnell (RMIT), Peter Maplestone (UNSW) and Manu Peeters (RMIT).

a recently released prisoner, and experiencing poor housing and social integration, has been shown to be a significant one in international studies (Belcher 1988; Benda 1993; NACRO 1993; Paylor 1995a, 1995b; Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Desai, Lam & Rosenheck 2000; UK Social Exclusion Unit 2003). However, there is scant information on this matter in the Australian context (Carnaby 1998; Keys Young 1998; Conway 1999; Victorian Department of Human Services 2001).

Upsurge in interest

All OECD countries have seen a rise in prisoner numbers and rates over the past decade. In the UK, for example, the imprisonment rate rose by 40% over the 1990s (UK Parliament 2001).

In Australia, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2003):

- The prisoner population increased from 15,559 at 30 June 1992 to 22,492 at 30 June 2002. The 45% increase in the number of prisoners during this period exceeded the 15% growth in the Australian adult population, resulting in the adult imprisonment rate increasing from 118 to 148 prisoners per 100,000 adult population.
- The proportion of prisoners who were Indigenous rose from 14% in 1992 to 20% in 2002.
- The proportion of prisoners on remand increased from 12% in 1992 to 20% in 2002.
- The recidivism rate of ever having been re-incarcerated is 60%.

Although there are no national data on those being released from prison, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services estimated from its Centrelink registrations that, in the 1999–2000 financial year, some 43,200 persons were released from Australian prisons. Over one quarter of these (11,900) had served less than 14 days and 31,300 had served more than 14 days (Anderson 2000). These numbers include all those who served any time at all but exclude those released into other custody. The figures may not include all released prisoners as some may not register with Centrelink. As the rate of imprisonment rises, so the rate of those being released rises. This is because the majority of prisoners serve less than a 12 month sentence (ABS 2003).

Developments in approaches to Post-release policy

There have been developments (or rather re-discoveries) in social theory relevant to the post-release field that have permeated policy thinking in Europe and the UK over the past 6 years. This is especially the case in relation to social inclusion/exclusion theory. This theory suggests that particular groups and individuals may be excluded from social interaction and benefits due to structural and personal factors related, on the whole, to poverty (Levitas 1999; Benn 2000). Relevant factors include lack of employment opportunities, geographical disadvantage, inequitable distribution of educational opportunities and affordable housing, mental illness and lack of a safe family context (Benn 2000). Exclusion may cause individuals and groups to suffer even greater disadvantage, making it near impossible to become socially included (Mandelson 1997; OECD 1998; Young 1999). The harm, it is argued, extends to the society as a whole because such exclusion disrupts social cohesion (OECD 2003). Those in prisons and detention and under various orders, including those persons being released from prison, tend to be among the most socially excluded. They are among the most unlikely to become socially integrated

and are thus likely to cycle in and out of courts and prisons (Jones Finer & Nellis 1998). There is nowhere else for them to go, no way to include them in the general community. Prison appears to be the last major institution left into which to send such 'difficult' people.

Governments in many countries, as noted later in this paper, have become aware of the burgeoning numbers of ex-prisoners facing difficulty establishing themselves in society. These Governments are now turning their attention to the matter, most using the social exclusion paradigm, and are doing so in a more systematic manner than previously.

International studies

What is known of the intersection and relationship between being an ex-prisoner, and being homeless or having unsuitable housing post-release? Studies in the USA, Canada and the UK provide some data on homelessness, other social disadvantages and the criminal justice system. These studies, outlined below, are relevant to understanding the challenges facing Australian ex-prisoners, and institutions such as Departments of Corrections and Housing that are meant to cater to their needs. It must be noted that doing research in this field is extremely difficult, as following up ex-prisoners in the community, unless they are on parole, is not an easy task; many appear to move frequently.

Hagan and McCarthy (1997) interviewed street youth in Vancouver and Toronto, Canada. They found that living on the streets, by itself, contributed to youth crime, and from there to arrests and spells in detention. In comparing the two cities, it was found that street youth in Toronto were less involved in crime and had fewer arrests and periods in detention than youth in Vancouver, which had double the rate. This, the researchers concluded, was due to Toronto having more social support and services for these youth than Vancouver with its emphasis on crime control. Out of their study they draw conclusions emphasising class and structural matters, such as the availability or otherwise of supported housing, and note that 'understanding poverty is as crucial to understanding crime as it is to explaining and understanding homelessness' (Hagan & McCarthy 2000:239). Five years earlier Paylor (1995b) had emphasised a similar point in relation to young offenders in the UK. He argued from his analyses of research data gathered on young offenders' interactions with state institutions, that he had 'direct evidence of a relationship linking institutional arrangements and processes [for example economic circumstances and welfare] on the macro level of society and the dynamics of life histories on the individual level' (p165).

Children in the UK in the care of a local authority were found to be more likely to be homeless and involved in criminal activity and in detention than the general population (Parliamentary Select Committee on Health 1998). In fact 38% of children in juvenile detention had been in state care. Similarly, a study on children in foster care in New York found that 1 in 5 ended up on the streets, homeless and that they were likely to come before the courts (Office of the Public Advocate 2001). These studies suggest that at least part of the reason for these children's homelessness and involvement with the criminal justice system, lay in the poor service afforded them whilst in the care of the state.

In the USA the intersection of homelessness and the criminal justice system is most often addressed in studies of mental illness. Typical questions raised by researchers (noted below) have been 'Since de-institutionalisation of persons with a mental illness, are jails replacing the mental health system for the homeless mentally ill?' and 'Does this represent a criminalisation of the homeless mentally ill?' These questions arise from data indicating higher numbers of persons with a mental illness who are homeless, having been arrested and imprisoned. There is mounting evidence of a strong association between a history of psychiatric hospitalisation and homelessness on the one hand, and homelessness and a

history of involvement with the criminal justice system on the other. Figures show consistently that between 30–40% of mentally ill persons facing court or in prisons having been homeless and that homeless mentally ill persons are up to 40 times more likely to be arrested and 20 times more likely to be imprisoned than mentally ill persons with stable, suitable accommodation (Belcher 1988; Shah 1989; Benda 1991, 1993; Caton et al 1993; Martell et al 1995; Aderibigbe 1997; Lamb & Weinberger 1998; Solomon & Draine 1999; Desai et al 2000). In fact, in 1986, a Report of the National Institute on Mental Health stated that ‘by default the criminal justice system has replaced the mental health systems as a primary provider of care to many homeless mentally ill persons’ (cited Aderibigbe 1996:130). Shah (1989) warned against mistaking penal sanctions for therapeutic intervention for homeless mentally ill persons. Similar observations have been made in Canada (Vitelli 1993; Zapf, Roesch & Hart 1996) and the UK (James et al 1999; Craig & Hodson 2000).

In the USA studies also note that a higher proportion of those who are homeless with a learning disability have been arrested and incarcerated, compared to those without any other problem than their homelessness (Lyal et al 1995; Winter et al 1997).

General Post-release

Researchers in the UK have published the most studies in the English language literature on ex-prisoners and housing. They have also attempted to ascertain whether post-release accommodation was better or worse than pre-incarceration, whether people are more likely to be homeless (and re-arrested) after their most recent incarceration if they have been incarcerated often and what other social problems are associated with the post-release experience.

Paylor (1995a) concluded that, in the UK in the 1990s, the accommodation outlook for ex-prisoners was worse than studies in the 1970s had indicated. More than half (35) of the 68 men and women ex-prisoners retained in his study experienced deteriorated housing situations following release from prison compared to their housing prior to imprisonment. Women were at greater risk of finding themselves in unsuitable accommodation or homeless than men were. Earlier Banks and Fairhead (1976) had found that, of the 300 ex-prisoners in their post-release study of petty offenders, those released with no stable accommodation to go to were three times more likely to re-offend and be re-incarcerated than those who had accommodation. They also reported that offenders who were homeless upon release were unlikely to be granted bail or given a community sentence in the event of their re-offending. A UK Home Office survey of the south-east’s prison population, which gathered data on prisoners’ levels of homelessness and their relation to social integration and re-offending (Banks 1978), found that 33% of all prisoners and 42% of petty offenders had been homeless on arrest. These homeless offenders comprised 6% of all first offenders and a huge 77% of offenders with 21 convictions or more. In other words, the higher the number of times in prison the more likely the prisoner was to have been homeless on arrest.

Corden, Kuipers and Wilson (1978) followed the pre and post-release housing resources of 97 male prisoners who were eligible for voluntary after-care. Of this cohort 26.1% had been homeless on entry to prison, and many more had been lodged in unstable or impermanent accommodation. At release, 49.5% of the men were uncertain of their destination one week prior to release, and 31.7% were homeless on release. Significant relations were found between the standard of post-release accommodation and overall social isolation, and also between deterioration in quality of accommodation post-release and levels of re-offending, but the authors avoided the inference that these relationships

might be mono-directional or causal. Corden and Clifton, in a 1983 study, focused on socially isolated prisoners comprising almost exclusively homeless (95% no fixed address at release), unemployed, highly alienated, significantly mentally disordered, and physically unhealthy men. Finding suitable housing for participants was a painful endeavour. They concluded that the housing problems of such ex-prisoners were overwhelmingly the result of structural causes such as supply and discrimination rather than inadequacy on the part of ex-prisoners. Participants said they benefited from the intangible, interpersonal things, such as a supportive, warm relationship with the social worker, rather than any specific material forms of assistance. Indeed participants were critical of the hostels and boarding house style of accommodation found for them. Corden (1983) emphasised the multiple disadvantages, especially lack of stable supported housing, experienced by petty offenders who cycle in and out of prison. Carlisle's (1996) study followed the post-release housing experience of 61 UK prisoners hailing from 6 male and 2 women's prisons. Imprisonment saw 38 of the 61 participants lose housing held previously (8 of the 19 women; 10 of the 15 from ethnic minorities). Almost all would have preferred to retain their former housing. Social support was a demonstrated crucial factor in retaining past housing. Hamlyn & Lewis (2000) found that 90% of the 178 women in their post release sample of women being released from all UK women's prisons, experienced barriers to inclusion in the community due primarily to lack of accommodation and money, and to social isolation and depression.

In summary, a range of international studies conclude that proportionally more persons who are homeless are incarcerated than in the general population and that there is a significant association between being homeless and being imprisoned and being an ex-prisoner and being homeless or in poor housing. Some UK studies suggest that imprisonment itself may increase the likelihood of homelessness or poorer housing upon release than had been experienced prior to incarceration, and that multiple incarcerations increase the likelihood of homelessness. Homeless petty offenders appear at more risk of incarceration than those with stable accommodation and are at more risk of continued homelessness and re-arrest post-release than those who have stable housing. Many studies battle with small numbers and a low retention rate when it comes to research participants. This makes valid statistical analyses problematic. When viewed together, though, they provide a disturbing picture of the poor housing prospects of ex-prisoners and point to the connection between recidivism, cycling in and out of prison on short sentences, and homelessness. When other factors that are over-represented amongst ex-prisoners are included, such as having been a ward of the state or having a mental illness or a learning disability, studies suggest the likelihood of being homeless and then re-incarcerated in the post-release period is greater than for the general prison releasee population.

Responses Internationally

As noted earlier, governments internationally are responding to the problem of post-release integration with a variety of policies and programs. Most are funding both government and not-for-profit organisations to research, develop policy and provide services. The budgets and services are very small so far and much of what is being done is in the form of trial programs.

UK and Europe

The UK Home Office Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) and the UK Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have been given a mandate to try to address the difficulties faced by ex-prisoners and to try to help reduce recidivism. When the Blair Labor government came to power in 1997, one of its policy directions was to address social exclusion (UK Social

Exclusion Unit 2003). Relevant government departments' studies identified youth and adults who had been incarcerated as socially excluded and as at high risk of homelessness and re-offending (UK Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions Rough Sleepers Unit 2001; UK Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Unit 2001). The UK government recognised that basic skills/literacy/numeracy and the multidimensional barriers faced by the vast majority of releasees must be addressed because these are factors increasing the likelihood of exclusion (UK Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Unit 2001). It is presently supporting a joined up/throughcare model for skill development, prison work and post release housing and employment. The model also emphasises the importance of one to one support, and a holistic approach to reintegration (ie attention to housing/social links as well as employment issues). It also takes into account the fact that schemes take a long time to achieve results, as it takes time to build up contacts, goodwill, trust, and skilled staff (UK Social Exclusion Unit 2003). There are some programs running in the UK using this 'joined-up' approach. For example, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) is trialling a resettlement program inside a prison as well as a variety of resettlement programs post-release (NACRO 2003).

The European Union's European Social Fund has been funding programs mainly focused on employment for ex-prisoners but including a holistic approach that attempts to address social exclusion and barriers experienced by releasees. Its programs are attempting also to combat the factors that lead to exclusion (European Social Fund 2002).

In summary prison post-release policy and practice in the UK and Europe to address ex-prisoner homelessness include both systemic and individual matters and focus on:

- integrated support and services around housing, drug rehabilitation and employment;
- building trust and support in the community especially with employers; and
- providing pre-release resettlement services.

Theoretical underpinning for the approaches being taken comes from arguments that a majority of those caught up in the criminal justice system have been socially excluded and are further excluded by imprisonment, particularly in regard to accommodation and employment.

USA Ex-offender programs

Approaches in the USA to dealing with social problems post-release vary from state to state but generally have focussed on individual employment as the answer. Until the late 1990s there was a marked lack of evaluation studies on USA post-release programs but the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is remedying that lack (for example see NIJ 1998; NIJ 1999). Finn (2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d) and others (for example Travis 2000; Maruna & LeBel 2003) suggest from program evaluations, that those with the best outcomes in terms of low recidivism rates, display similar approaches to the principles guiding European and UK services (although they are not as systemically oriented). Such programs provide:

- a holistic array of services, for example even though the service may be centred on employment, assistance in finding stable housing is an essential part of the service;
- service provision beginning prior to release so that matters such as housing are being addressed before a prisoner is released; and
- long-term relations with employers whereby a service builds up trust and establishes a database of employers willing to employ ex-prisoners.

Further, some USA writers conclude that solutions to ex-prisoners integrating into the communities to which they return may lie in:

- connected planning & services on the part of government departments and non-government organisations such as Housing, Corrections, and Employment Agencies;
- adequate resources in the form of capital and recurrent funds being provided to post-release services;
- case workers and mentors being assigned to releasees; and
- the provision of a range of supported housing (from twenty-four hour structured support to minimal support for those able to live independently) (Strawn 1999; Heinrich 2000; Finn 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d).

These latter points are recommendations rather than actual policy approaches to date.

It must be noted here that the solutions just outlined are not new, especially in Australia. For example, the newly established Parole Service in NSW in the 1950s and 1960s provided pre and post-release support and follow-up for all prisoners, whether they were on parole or not, with the service helping coordinate a wide network of voluntary community supports (Hayes *cir* 1988). This meant that almost all prisoners being released had either a parole officer or a volunteer, whom they had met prior to release, assisting with matters such as housing and employment and not least providing personal support.

Australian Studies

There are few Australian studies focussing on post-release housing and other social outcomes for prison releasees. The studies that have been undertaken have all been with subgroups of prisoners or ex-prisoners, such as women, young people or Indigenous Australians. Reliable information and data on the general ex-prisoners population is not available. Nevertheless what literature there is, points to a lack of suitable housing as one of the main post-release problems for ex-prisoners.

Interviews with girls and young women involved in the juvenile justice system in Victoria and South Australia (SA) (Alder & Hunter 1999) provide graphic descriptions of their prior living circumstances. 'I got kicked out at the age of nine. I live on the street'; 'I lived in a caravan... I lived with some friends, in emergency shelters, back to hostels.'; '.. I left (home) when I was eleven.' On the whole for these young women 'unsettled housing arrangements seemed to be the norm.' (Alder & Hunter 1999: i 1-14). There are, though, no Australian studies focussing on post-juvenile detention housing or social integration. On a related matter the Ignatius Centre in Melbourne reported that a growing number of young persons who were developing a mental illness, self medicated with illicit drugs, became homeless and ended up in the criminal justice system (Norden 2001).

The proportion of prisoners who have had contact with mental health services in the twelve months prior to their imprisonment is estimated to be 33% of male and 50% of female prisoners in NSW (Greenberg 2002). As international studies quoted earlier have pointed out, there is a significant association between homelessness, mental health problems and having been or being incarcerated. This may well be the case in Australia but there is no study on ex-prisoners with a mental illness or disturbance and their housing situation post release.

Hayes found that significantly more persons with an intellectual disability were in the population before the court and in the prison population than in the general population (Hayes 1996). Although homelessness or housing data on prisoners or ex-prisoners with an intellectual disability are not available in Australia, when Hayes' work in NSW (1991, 1996) and Green's case studies (2002) are combined with what is known regarding this group overseas, the likelihood is that ex-prisoners with an intellectual disability are over-represented among homeless ex-prisoners.

Indigenous Australians

A disproportionate number of Indigenous persons are caught in the vicious cycle of prison, re-arrest and re-incarceration. Unsuitable housing or homelessness is likely to compound the risk of arrest and imprisonment, which in turn feeds back upon the housing problems of the person(s) involved. As is well documented, Indigenous Australians are massively over-represented in all forms of detention. In 2002, 20% of the Australian prison population were Indigenous persons. The national rate of imprisonment for Indigenous persons was 1,806 per 100,000 of the adult Indigenous population (ABS 2003). Nationally, the Indigenous rate of imprisonment was 15 times the non-Indigenous rate. Indigenous persons are also over-represented among the homeless (Keys Young 1998).

One Indigenous Supported Assisted Accommodation Program (SAAP) worker commented:

our people in the gaols ... that's their home ... they go in and out. That's a form of homelessness. They can't cope outside ... it's hard to keep the rent up, their living skills up ... and they re-offend (Keys Young 1998:44).

The same report noted that there was a lack of effective pre and post-release programs for Indigenous people leaving custody often resulting in homelessness; neither was there suitable accommodation for Indigenous families visiting relatives in prison, resulting in temporary homelessness (p vii).

Women

Women being released appear to be in an even worst situation than most men. For example there is only one dedicated supported accommodation for women in NSW — Guthrie House — and that is overwhelmed with women referred by parole officers, the drug court or on bail. A Victorian study has pointed to a similarly severe lack (Carnaby 1998). Women releasees with children may find themselves in an impossible situation. If they do not have suitable accommodation arranged before they are released, it is difficult to get their children back from foster or substitute care. Whilst they are trying to negotiate the many systems they must go through, their chances of slipping into homelessness and re-offending grow and they are often unable to complete everything necessary to establish a home where they can have their children (Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues 1998).

There may be hidden homelessness for those connected with the criminal justice system. For example children of imprisoned parents appear to be at a higher risk of homeless than other young persons are (Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues 1998). It is surmised that this is due to, amongst other matters, breakdowns in alternative living situations, going into substitute care and, in general, having severely disrupted childhoods (Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues 1998).

Conway suggests for Queensland, the third largest correctional jurisdiction in Australia, that the negative factors associated with ex-prisoners' post-release experience are:

a general deterioration of housing conditions post-release due to debt, family breakdown, discrimination, stigma, lack of advocacy support, lack of references, limited income and reduced employment prospects (Conway 1999:29).

Few of the Australian studies discussed provide evidence regarding the relationship between being incarcerated and post-release housing and other social outcomes. Reports such as those by Keys Young (1998), Conway (1999), Ogilvie (2001) and ACTCOSS (2002) relied upon other literature and worker interviews. Valuable though these reports are, they do not provide statistically reliable or representative data on ex-prisoner homelessness, unemployment or other social problems, nor on the nature of the association of these factors with imprisonment.

An interim report on research involving a large sample of persons being released from NSW and Victorian prisons (340 releasees with a retention rate of 70% by nine months post-release) by the authors of this current paper, indicates that suitable, supported and stable housing is associated with staying out of prison (Baldry et al 2003). Detailed findings of this research are the subject of a future paper and will address a number of the research questions posed in this paper regarding the associations between imprisonment and housing.

Despite this lack of information there have been some new policy and program developments in Australia regarding post-release housing and social integration since 2000.

Policy and practice with a focus on NSW and Victoria

State Correctives Services Departments have formal policies regarding support for post-release programs but the post-release budgets are very small compared to all other funding allocations (for example it is less than 0.1% of the total Corrections budget in NSW). This is not counting the Parole Service (community corrections) that has some post-release responsibility for monitoring a minority (approximately 1/3) of people released from prison. Although other government departments, such as State Housing and Health and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services have an interest in ex-prisoners' well-being and have had discrete procedures pertaining to ex-prisoners, only in the past three years has formal policy development been initiated in such departments.

Victorian (Department of Justice 2001) and Western Australian (Department of Justice 2003) governments are trialling a number of services to try to increase support to releasees. For example Transitional Housing Management (THM), a Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative, is a joint pilot of the Office of Housing and the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner in Victoria. It is piloting, in three prisons, the ongoing provision of appropriate housing services to sentenced prisoners who, on release from prison, would be at high risk of homelessness. This is occurring through assistance from a Housing Placement Worker who conducts a specialist housing assessment, develops individual housing case plans, and matches client needs with immediate and longer term accommodation and support options (Department of Justice 2001). The 2000/01 State Budget contained funding for three post-release transitional units accommodating up to 60 ex-prisoners at any one time. These are in addition to the approximately 50 places already funded.

Currently in NSW, the state with the greatest number of prisoners in Australia with over 22,000 releasees per year, the only dedicated services are the six NGO accommodation services providing about 50 places in all. Four transitional workers were appointed in 2002 but finding accommodation or any other suitable service is extremely difficult. Many releasees who find themselves without housing use SAAP services, some of which are becoming by default ex-prisoner accommodation.

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee *Working Report: Building Solutions for Individuals and Families who Experience Homelessness*, (Victorian Department of Human Services 2001) highlights and summarises critical problems common across NSW and Victoria:

- Many prisoners without family or community support leave prison without any post-release support, including housing assistance, material aid and other services.
- No datum is currently collected from people in the prison system regarding their housing status or risk of homelessness on release (although there are attempts to address this in some prisons by the trials discussed above).
- Case management services within prisons do not currently include comprehensive assessment and exit planning in relation to housing issues.
- SAAP funds a small number of post-release support services, but the *SAAP Act* precludes expansion of this role.
- Current prison environments and regulations inhibit communication and information dissemination, often delaying potential housing actions/outcomes.
- The homeless service system is often structured to respond once a person is homeless, and is not geared to effect the transition from prison to housing seamlessly.

Two groups of prisoners are still neglected in these developments:

- those being released from remand (approximately 20% of the Australian prison population is on remand);
- those who have served very short sentences, in NSW for example approximately 50% of the 'flow-through' prison population serves a sentence of six months or less.

The Australian policy and program developments discussed above are indications that relevant government departments are recognising the negative results, such as those outlined earlier in this paper, of ignoring the post-release housing support needs of ex-prisoners.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed literature and research regarding post-release housing and related social issues in a climate of increasing prisoner rates. The literature examined and the studies quoted suggest that ex-prisoners are more likely to experience poor housing and are more vulnerable to homelessness and related social problems than the general population. These post-release problems are associated with a range of factors over-represented amongst prisoners and ex-prisoners such as lack of social skills, education, social support and poverty, and to do with racism and a variety of disabilities such as mental disturbance and intellectual disability. Some research noted above claims that imprisonment makes

housing and other social matters worse for releasees in the post-release period than prior to imprisonment. This is a crucial point. If imprisonment itself can be shown to increase the likelihood of homelessness and social problems for releasees, especially for those with mental or intellectual disabilities, the argument to reduce the use of imprisonment in favour of community care and treatment (see Department of Justice 2003) is strengthened. The quantitative research evidence for this conclusion though has yet to be provided.

It has been argued using social exclusion theory that, not only is it ethically and morally repugnant to use the criminal justice system to deal with social problems of some excluded citizens, but it creates further social problems as well. In contrast, a social inclusion approach suggests addressing the exclusionary factors ex-prisoners experience. Suitable housing is a fundamental requirement to participating in society. Without it, employment, health, personal relationships, and education are almost impossible to sustain.

To date research regarding the extent and causes of post-release housing difficulties in Australia is lacking. Notwithstanding this, the Australian reports and studies noted above do provide some information indicating that many ex-prisoners are unlikely to be able to deal with structural exclusions such as lack of affordable, suitable or supported housing, lack of education and employment opportunities, poverty or disabilities post-release, by themselves. It is clear that the majority does not integrate into society because 60% is reincarcerated (ABS 2003). If reducing recidivism is the declared aim of contemporary Corrective Services Departments in Australia (for example see Department of Corrective Services 2002), then for this aim to be even partly realised, greater research attention, involving both quantitative and qualitative studies, must now be given to the crucial matter of the relationship between poor housing and recidivism in the post-release period.

References

- ABS (2003): <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/e8ae5488b598839cca25682000131612/8d5807d8074a7a5bca256a6800811054!OpenDocument>>.
- ACTCOSS (2002) *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT Final Report*, Department Education Community Services, Canberra.
- Aderbigbe, YA (1997) 'Deinstitutionalization and criminalization: tinkering in the intersices', *Forensic Science International*, vol 85, no 2, pp 127-134.
- Alder, C & Hunter, N (1999) 'Not worse, just different?': *Working with Young Women in the Juvenile Justice System. Report of Findings 2: Young Women's Juvenile Justice Experiences*, Criminology Department, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- Andersen, J (2000) *Crisis Payment & Prisoner Statistics*, Internal Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services paper, Canberra.
- Baldry, E, McDonnell, D, Maplestone, P & Peeters, M (2003) *Ex-prisoners, accommodation and social reintegration*: <<http://www.ahuri.edu.au>>.
- Banks, C (1978) *A Survey of the South East Prison Population*, Home Office Research Bulletin no 5, pp 12-24.
- Banks, C & Fairhead, S (1976) *The Petty Short-term Offender*, Howard League, London.

- Belcher, JR (1988) 'Are jails replacing the mental health system for the homeless mentally ill?', *Community Mental Health Journal*, vol 24, no 3, pp 185–195.
- Benda, BB (1991) 'Undomiciled: a study of drifters, other homeless persons, their problems, and service utilization', *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, vol 14, no 3, pp 39–67.
- Benda, BB (1993) 'Predictors of arrest and service use among the homeless: logit analyses', *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, vol 17, no 2, pp 145–161.
- Benn, M (2000) 'New Labour and Social Exclusion', *Political Quarterly*, vol 71, no 3, pp 309–318.
- Carlisle, J (1996) *The Housing Needs of Ex-Prisoners*, University of York Centre for Housing Policy, York.
- Carnaby, H (1998) *Road to Nowhere: A Report on the Housing and Support Needs of Women Leaving Prison in Victoria*, Flat Out Inc, Melbourne.
- Caton, CLM, Wyatt, RJ, Felix, A, Grunberg, J & Dominguez, B (1993) 'Follow-up of chronically homeless mentally ill men', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol 150, no 11, pp 1639–1642.
- Conway, J (1999) *Issues Paper: Housing Needs of Prisoners and Their Families in Queensland*, Housing Policy and Research, Department of Housing, Brisbane.
- Corden, J (1983) 'Persistent Petty Offenders: Problems and Patterns of Multiple Disadvantage', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, no XXII, pp 68–90.
- Corden, J & Clifton, M (1983) 'The Socially Isolated Prisoners Project', *Home Office Research Bulletin*, no 16, pp 45–48.
- Corden, J, Kuipers, J & Wilson, K (1978) *After Prison: A Study of the Post-Release Experiences of Discharged Prisoners*, Papers in Community Studies No 21, University of York, York.
- Craig, TKJ & Hodson, S (2000) 'Homeless youth in London: II. Accommodation, employment and health outcomes at 1 year', *Psychological Medicine*, vol 30, no 1, pp 187–194.
- Department of Corrective Services (2002) *Annual Report 2001–2002*, NSW DCS, Sydney.
- Department of Justice (2001) *Evaluation of THM — Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative*, Victorian Department of Justice, Melbourne.
- Department of Justice (2003) *Community re-entry program for prisoners*, Government of Western Australia, Perth.
- Desai, RA, Lam, J & Rosenheck, RA (2000) 'Childhood risk factors for criminal justice involvement in a sample of homeless people with serious mental illness', *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*, vol 188, no 6, pp 324–332.
- European Social Fund (2002) *Working with ex-offenders*: <<http://www.esf.gov.uk/goodpractice/websheets/exoffenders.shtml>>.

- Finn, P (2002a) *Texas' Project Rio*, US Department of Justice, Washington DC.
- Finn, P (2002b) *Washington State's Corrections Clearinghouse*, US Department of Justice, Washington, DC.
- Finn, P (2002c) *Chicago's Safer Foundation*, US Department of Justice, Washington, DC.
- Finn, P (2002d) *The Centre for Employment Opportunities*, US Department of Justice, Washington, DC.
- Green, J (2002) 'Experiences of Inmates with an Intellectual Disability' in D Brown & M Wilkie (eds) *Prisoners as Citizens*, Federation Press, Sydney.
- Greenberg, DM (2002) 'The interaction between mental health and the criminal justice system' paper presented at *Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System Seminar*, University of Sydney Institute of Criminology, Sydney.
- Hagan, J & McCarthy, B (1997) *Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hagan, J & McCarthy, B (2000) 'The meaning of criminology', *Theoretical Criminology*, vol 4, no 2, pp 232–242.
- Hamlyn, B & Lewis, D (2000) *Women Prisoners: a survey of their work and training experiences in custody and on release*, Home Office, London.
- Hayes, F (cir 1988) *Voluntary Welfare Work in Prisons*, The Prisoners' Aid Association of NSW, Sydney.
- Hayes, S (1991) 'Pilot Prison Programs', *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, vol 17, no 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, NSW Law Reform Commission, Sydney.
- Heinrich, S (2000) *Reducing Recidivism Through Work: Barriers and Opportunities for Employment for Ex-offenders*, Great Cities Institute, University of Illinois, Illinois.
- James, DV, Farnham, F & Cripps, J (1999) 'Homelessness and psychiatric admission rates through the criminal justice system', *Lancet*, vol 353, no 9159, p 1158.
- Jones Finer, C & Nellis, M (eds) (1998) *Crime and Social Exclusion*. Blackwell, London.
- Keys Young (1998) *Homelessness in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context and its possible implications for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. Final Report*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Lamb, HR & Weinberger, LE (1998) 'Persons with severe mental illness in jails and prisons — a review', *Psychiatric Services*, vol 49, no 4, pp 483–492.
- Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues (1998) *Children of Imprisoned Parents Report*, NSW Parliament, Sydney.

- Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice (2000) *Crime Prevention Through Social Support: Second Report*, Parliamentary Paper No 437, NSW Parliament, Sydney.
- Levitas, R (1999) *The Inclusive Society, Social Exclusion and New Labour*, Macmillan, London.
- Lyall, I, Holland, AJ & Collins, S (1995) 'Offending by adults with learning difficulties — identifying need in one health district', *Mental Handicap Research*, vol 8, no 2, pp 99–109.
- Mandelson, P (1997) *Labour's next steps: tackling social exclusion*, Fabian Society, London.
- Martell, DA, Rosner, R & Harmon, RB (1995) 'Base-rate estimates of criminal behaviour by homeless mentally ill persons in New York City', *Psychiatric Services*, vol 46, no 6, pp 596–601.
- Maruna, S & LeBel, TP (2003) 'Welcome Home? Examining the 'Reentry Court' from a strengths-based perspective', *Western Criminology Review*, vol 4, no 2, pp 91–107.
- NACRO (1992) *Revolving Doors: Report of the Telethon Inquiry into the Relationship Between Mental Health, Homelessness and Criminal Justice*, NACRO, London.
- NACRO (1993) *Opening the Doors: A Report from NACRO's National Policy on Resettlement*, NACRO London.
- NACRO (2003) *The On Side Project*: <<http://www.nacro.org.uk/data/briefings/nacro-2003041101-cjr.pdf>>.
- NIJ (1998) *Successful Job Placements for Ex-offenders*: <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/168102.htm>>.
- NIJ (1999) *Washington State's Corrections Clearinghouse: A Comprehensive Approach to Offender Employment*: <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/174441.htm>>.
- Norden, P (2001) *Heroin Use as a Form of Self-Medication*, The Ignatius Centre, Richmond, Victoria.
- OECD (1998) *The battle against exclusion*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2003) *OECD Observer*, No 237, May.
- Office of the Public Advocate (2001) *Children still at risk*, Office of the Public Advocate, NY.
- Ogilvie, E (2001) *Post-release: The current predicament and the potential strategies*, Criminology Research Council: <<http://www.aic.gov.au/crc/oldreports/ogilvie.html>>.
- Parliamentary Select Committee on Health (1998) *Parliamentary Select Committee on Health Report*, UK Parliament, London.
- Paylor, I (1995a) 'Offending, homelessness and the lifecourse', *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, vol 22, no 3–4, pp 165–177.
- Paylor, I (1995b) *Homeless Needs of Ex-Offenders*, Aldershot, Avebury.

Shah, SA (1989) 'Mental disorder and the criminal justice system: some overarching issues', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, vol 12, no 2/3, pp 231–244.

Select Committee Inquiry into the Increase in Prisoner Population (2001) *Final Report*, Legislative Council of the Parliament of NSW, Sydney.

Simpson, J, Martin, M & Green, J (2001) *The Framework Report*, Intellectual Disability Rights Service, Sydney.

Solomon, P & Draine, J (1999) 'Using clinical and criminal involvement to explain homelessness among clients of a psychiatric probation and parole service', *Psychiatric Quarterly*, vol 70, no 1, pp 75–87.

Strawn, J (1999) 'Welfare to Work Programs: the critical role of skills', *Kellogg Devolution Initiative Paper*, Centre for Law and Social Policy, Washington DC.

Travis, J (2000) *But they all come back: rethinking prisoner reentry*, NIJ, Washington.

UK Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions Rough Sleepers Unit (2001) *Blocking the Fast Track from Prison to Rough Sleeping*, DETR, London.

UK Parliament (2001): <<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2001/rp01-083.pdf>>.

UK Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Unit (2001) *Submissions to the Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners Project*, Cabinet Office, London.

UK Social Exclusion Unit (2003): <http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/published.htm#pub_reports>.

Victorian Department of Human Services (2001) *VHS Focus Group on Homelessness and Pre- and Post-Release Services for Prisoners - Women and Men Prisoners*: <<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/vhs/pdfs/backprisonmen.pdf>>.

Vitelli, R (1993) 'The homeless inmate in a maximum security prison setting'. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, vol 35, no 3, pp 323–331.

Winter, N, Holland, A J & Collins, S (1997) 'Factors predisposing to suspected offending by adults with self-reported learning disabilities', *Psychological Medicine*, vol 27, no 3, pp 595–607.

Young, J (1999) *The exclusive society: social exclusion, crime and difference in late modernity*, Sage, London.

Zapf, PA, Roesch, R & Hart, SD (1996) 'An examination of the relationship of homelessness to mental disorder, criminal behaviour, and health care in a pretrial jail population', *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol 41, no 7, pp 435–440.