



MULTI-SITE FAMILY STUDY ON INCARCERATION, PARENTING AND PARTNERING



PREDICTORS OF REENTRY SUCCESS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most research on reentry success focuses on recidivism, commonly understood as a return to the criminal justice system (through arrest or reincarceration) after release from prison. In this sample of more than 1,000 reentering men in five states, we examine reentry success in terms of recidivism plus four additional outcomes: abstinence from drug use, employment, positive couple relationships, and financial support for children.

- About two-thirds of men were successful in at least four of these five areas (based on their own reports one year after release).
- Reentering men were generally more successful in avoiding illegal drug use, having positive couple relationships, and financially supporting their children than in gaining employment or avoiding criminal justice system involvement.
- Family contact during incarceration was positively associated with reentry success for couple relationship quality and financial support for children. Family contact also showed a weak, positive association with employment success.
- Success across multiple outcomes was influenced by both pre-incarceration characteristics and in-prison programming and experiences. Men who received employment and education services before release were more likely to be successful after reentry.
- Administrative corrections data indicated that nearly 80 percent of these reentering men were not reincarcerated in state prison within 24 months of release.

About This Research Brief

This brief examines reentry success using a common measure of recidivism and measures of success in other areas, including employment, drug use, and two dimensions of family relationship quality that are very rarely examined in reentry studies: financial support for children and intimate/coparenting relationship quality. The data are from the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP). Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the study includes implementation and impact evaluation components and qualitative and quantitative analyses of participants in programs that provide services to incarcerated fathers and their families.

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BACKGROUND

The effects of incarceration extend far beyond release. Among the 1.57 million individuals in prisons in the United States (Carson & Golinelli, 2014), nearly all will be released at the end of their sentences, and an estimated 600,000 people are released from prison annually (Carson & Golinelli, 2013). Reentry to the community following incarceration is a transitional period in an individual's life that presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities. As they return to the community, individuals may navigate reuniting with family and friends, securing housing and employment, seeking treatment for medical or behavioral conditions, and avoiding further involvement with the justice system. These multiple factors present challenges but can also serve as sources of support and contribute to success during the reentry period. However, the existing research on reentry success tends to focus solely on avoiding recidivism (Cobbina, 2010; Yahner & Visher, 2008; Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, & Fisher, 2005) without exploring a more comprehensive, multidimensional understanding of what success following incarceration may entail.

Much of the research in this area focuses on factors that predict **avoiding rearrest or return to prison or jail**. Recidivism is a fundamental consideration in the reentry process because many justice-involved individuals do reoffend after release. The most recent and commonly used data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), which examined patterns across 30 states, found that more than two-thirds (68%) of individuals released from prison had been rearrested within three years of reentry. Within five years, 77 percent had been rearrested, and 55 percent had returned to prison (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014).¹ Other analyses using offender-based samples, as opposed to the event-oriented data usually used in recidivism analyses have found lower rates of failure, with approximately 33 percent reincarcerated during a 12-year period (Rhodes, Gaes, Luallen, Kling, Rich, & Shively, 2016). Whether the recidivism rate is 33 percent or 55 percent, it is clear that it continues to be a significant challenge for the reentry population.

Factors found to reduce recidivism include older age, no prior history of incarceration, having employment and housing, avoiding peers with criminal or substance abuse behaviors, integrating into safer neighborhoods, and having physical or mental health conditions (which may limit activity outside the home) (Yahner & Visher, 2008). Other studies have found that avoiding rearrest and reincarceration is predicted by participating in substance abuse classes, supportive family and peer ties, and regular employment (Malik-Kane & Visher, 2008; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Berg & Huebner, 2011; Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010). Of note, a study of adolescent male offenders in New York City found that, in addition to more commonly studied factors, one key predictor of desistance (defined as avoiding rearrests) was having health insurance (Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins, & Richie, 2005). Two female-only studies also found an association between access to social services on release and lower rates of criminal behavior (Kim, Rich, Zierler et al., 1997; Freudenberg, Wilets, Greene, & Richie, 1998).

Although avoiding recidivism is a critical measure of reentry success, other dimensions are important to consider. Illicit drug use and employment have received the most attention in previous research. When looking at **abstinence from illicit drug use**, Robbins, Martin, and Surratt (2009) found that attending substance abuse classes while incarcerated and lack of prior drug use both predicted lower drug use during reentry. Among adolescent men, employment following release was a protective factor against use of hard drugs (crack,

¹ The estimate for returns to prison is based on 23 states rather than 30.

cocaine, or heroin), while prior use of hard drugs and living with users of drugs or alcohol increased the likelihood of hard drug use during reentry (Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins, & Richie, 2005). The latter study also found that, for adult women, protective factors included participating in drug and alcohol programs and job training or educational programs, as well as employment after release and having friends or family members who work or attend school regularly.

Several studies examine **employment** as a stand-alone measure of reentry success. Described as “a centerpiece of the reentry process,” finding a job was identified by a sample of incarcerated men as their number one reentry priority (Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride, 2004; Nelson, Dees, & Allen, 2011). The positive effects of employment can extend beyond the individual to the broader community. These include daily structure and positive social connections for the individuals, increased income and financial stability for families, a broader community tax base, and a lower overall crime rate (Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride, 2004). Employment is a particular challenge, however, because prisoners typically have lower educational attainment than the general population (Harlow, 2003) and are disproportionately released to communities with high unemployment and limited job opportunities (Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride, 2004). Individuals with a criminal record, especially minorities, also face discrimination in the labor market (Pager, 2007; Bushway, 2004). Work release opportunities in prison can help inmates develop job skills and are associated with better employment outcomes on release (Visher, Kachnowski, La Vigne, & Travis, 2004). A longitudinal, multistate study of former prisoners identified previous work experience, connections to potential employers prior to release, and connections with family members as factors that improve the likelihood of post-release employment (Visher, Debus-Sherrill, & Yahner, 2011). Individuals who used drugs, had a chronic physical or mental health condition, were older, and were nonwhite had poorer employment outcomes. Other factors that may influence employment success include parole conditions that accommodate work schedules, case management through employment programs, and individual motivation (Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride, 2004).

Finally, successful reentry is related to family functioning, although this facet of reentry success has received much less research attention than the other areas. **Intimate or coparenting relationship quality** and **providing financial support for children** are two important components of post-release family functioning. Interviews with incarcerated individuals before and after release confirm that family (including intimate partners) often serves as a source of housing, emotional support, financial resources, and overall stability during the reentry period (Visher, Kachnowski, La Vigne, & Travis, 2004). Studies with former prisoners have found that those with close ties to family members, including spouses or intimate partners, report higher levels of optimism, confidence, financial and emotional support, and intent to desist from future criminal activity (Burnett, 2004; Nelson, Dees, & Allen, 2011; Naser & Visher, 2006). Providing financial support for children is a dimension of reentry success because it indicates acceptance of parental responsibility and positive family engagement and may be motivation for post-release employment.

STUDY PURPOSE AND METHODS

Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP) documents the implementation and effectiveness of relationship and family-strengthening programs for justice-involved couples during

incarceration and after release. The data collected also provide a wealth of new information on the experiences of families before, during, and after incarceration. Although this brief uses data collected for the MFS-IP impact evaluation, the findings are not about the impact of MFS-IP programming. Rather, the findings create insights into salient issues for a large sample of men and identify key factors that predict successful reentry at various time points.

Despite a broad base of research on the importance of family connections to reentry after incarceration, most analyses use measures of reentry success that focus on avoiding recidivism and, when other domains are considered, finding employment and abstaining from illicit drugs. Although these are critical to a successful transition back to community life, reentry experiences are complex, and individuals and communities are likely to have multiple goals and varied definitions of success following incarceration.

The analyses presented here add to the commonly used definitions of reentry success (no recidivism or rearrest, employment, and abstinence from illicit drug use). It adds two measures of family relationships, **financial support for children** and **intimate or coparenting relationship success**, to present a more holistic and family-oriented definition of successful life following incarceration. In addition, this brief acknowledges these broader reentry goals by introducing a multidimensional definition of reentry success, comparing factors that affect post-release trajectories across domains and offering a quantitative perspective on how these factors influence one another during the reentry period.

The independent variables explored as correlates of reentry success at various points following release were drawn from factors identified in past research as being likely to influence several reentry outcomes. The analysis examined criminal history, including **previous arrests**, **age at first arrest**, and **years incarcerated**, because of the documented association between prior criminal activity and subsequent recidivism, particularly in the years immediately following release (Yahner & Visher, 2008; Kurlychek, Brame, & Bushway, 2006). Criminal history also has a known influence on employment options (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2002).

The analysis also examined **receipt of services prior to release**, with a focus on services related to employment, education, alcohol or other drug use, or family and couples issues, given evidence that rehabilitative services such as these can affect an individual's reentry experiences (Lattimore, Steffey, & Visher 2009; Cullen & Gendreau 2000). The analysis also included the family factors (**marital status**, **number of children**, and **in-person contact before release**) given the known reliance of individuals on family during reentry (Visher, Kachnowski, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004) and the known association between family contact during incarceration and decreased recidivism after release (Bales & Mears, 2008; Berg & Huebner, 2011; Hairston, 1991; Mills & Codd, 2008).

The analysis examined **employment prior to incarceration** given the association between prior work history and subsequent ability to obtain post-release employment (Berg & Huebner, 2011). **Having a high school diploma or GED**, which has been associated with greater post-release employment and earnings, was also examined. The models included **no problematic alcohol or drug use prior to incarceration** because of evidence that links prior use to continuing use on reentry (Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins, & Richie, 2005; Robbins, Martin, & Surratt 2009).

Health status, as defined by **no physical health limitations** and **good mental health**, was included because some studies have found an association between better health and higher recidivism (Yahner & Visher, 2008), but good health may also allow for greater ability to

participate in the labor market. Finally, the models included higher self-reported **locus of control**, or a sense of control over one's own life. This concept may be relevant to reentry because incarcerated individuals who feel in control of their lives may have lower levels of stress, lower rates of depression, stronger problem-solving abilities, and greater belief in their ability to influence reentry outcomes—all of which may affect the reentry process (MacKenzie & Goodstein, 1986; Reitzel & Harju, 2000).

Data Collection Approach

Beginning in December 2008, couples in five program sites (Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, New Jersey, and New York) were enrolled in the MFS-IP impact study. Interviews were conducted at baseline with 1,991 men and 1,482 partners in the five sites. Couples were interviewed again at nine- and 18-month follow-up. A 34-month follow-up interview was conducted with more than 1,000 of the couples in two sites. During the baseline interview, at which point all the men were incarcerated in a state prison, men identified their primary intimate or coparenting partners (referred to as “survey partners” throughout this brief). Those partners were then recruited for baseline interviews. All interviews captured detailed information about a “focal child,” who was selected at the father's baseline interview. Selection of a focal child prioritized children who were closest to age 8 and coparented by both members of the study couple.

This brief examines reentry success using baseline interview data and data from the men's post-release interviews, with analyses limited to the 1,017 men who were released from incarceration at some point during the follow-up period and who participated in at least one post-release interview. The baseline interview took place, on average, two and a half years after the men were incarcerated. The MFS-IP impact study was not designed to be a reentry study. Because program models varied, study sample members were released at varying points during the follow-up period.

To understand the men's reentry experiences at standardized time periods relative to release, we classified each post-release interview of a sample member as having taken place a) less than four months after the man's release, b) four to twelve months after release, c) 12 to 24 months after release, or d) more than 24 months after release. Therefore, because of the nature of the study, a given sample member's reentry experiences could be reflected at one, two, or three of these time periods.² In addition to the self-reported interview data, we also used administrative data from the state departments of correction (DOC) in the five states. DOC data were obtained for more than 90 percent of the reentry sample (937 men). We developed indicators of reincarceration in a state prison within 12 and 24 months of release from these data.

The analysis combined data across sites and for treatment and comparison groups. In other words, some men received MFS-IP healthy relationship programming (and other services) and others received “treatment as usual.” Many treatment and comparison group men received services through sources other than the MFS-IP program. Therefore, this analysis does not provide insight into whether specific components of MFS-IP programs could affect reentry. Both treatment and comparison men were subject to the selection criteria for the impact evaluation (Lindquist, McKay, Bir, & Steffey, 2015). All multivariate analyses controlled for site and group assignment.

² In other words, the analytic samples that were included in analyses exploring success at each of the four time periods differed slightly at each time period. In addition, because Indiana and Ohio were the only two sites where the 34-month interviews were conducted, the “more than 24 months after release” analyses are limited to men from these sites.

Sample Characteristics

Most of the men in the study sample reported being in unmarried intimate relationships with their survey partners. On average, the men had three children. Men had fairly extensive criminal histories beginning around age 17. See **Exhibit 1** for details.

Analytic Approach

We first explore success with a widely used indicator of recidivism: **lack of reincarceration in state prison**. We identify the proportion of sample members who were not reincarcerated in a state prison (based on administrative corrections data) within 12 and 24 months of release. We also identify the average time to first reincarceration and predictors of reincarceration avoidance using multivariate models. Independent variables include service receipt (alcohol or drug treatment, employment services, education services, family and couple services), family contact during incarceration, demographic characteristics, criminal history and incarceration characteristics, and attitudes and personal characteristics.

Next, we explore reentry success at four post-release points using self-reported data. We examined five dimensions of reentry success:

- **No rearrest or reincarceration** (no self-reported arrests, time spent in county jail, or incarcerations in prison during the reference period)
- **No illicit drug use** (no self-reported use of illicit drugs other than marijuana during the reference period)
- **Employment** (self-report of any employment at the time of the interview)
- **Intimate or coparenting relationship quality** (composite indicator of quality of relationship with “survey partner” using four survey items³ that measure the frequency with which the couple avoids conflicts and resolves issues constructively)

Exhibit 1. Baseline Characteristics of Sample Members (n=1,017)

Relationship with Survey Partner	
Relationship Status	
Married	24%
In an intimate relationship	71%
In a coparenting relationship only	5%
Parenting/Coparenting Characteristics	
Average # of children	3.0
Average age of focal child	7.0 years
Age, Education, and Employment	
Age at study enrollment (mean)	33.7 years
Has at least a high School Diploma or GED	68%
Employed prior to incarceration	58%
Incarceration History	
Age at first arrest (mean)	16.9 years
Number of previous adult incarcerations (mean)	6.3
Length of current incarceration (mean)	2.6 years

The self-reported measure of avoidance of rearrest and reincarceration differs from the official reincarceration measure used in the first set of models in several ways. The official reincarceration measure only reflects new incarcerations in a state prison (it does not include administrative data on new arrests, which we were unable to obtain at either the federal or state level for 4 of the 5 states). In contrast, the self-reported measure includes new arrests, new incarcerations in a county jail, and new incarcerations in a state prison. Therefore, the self-reported measure is more inclusive of a broader range of dimensions of recidivism and, as such, the results of the two analyses may differ.

³ Men were classified as successful who answered “never,” “rarely,” or “sometimes” to two statements about the escalation of arguments (“Your arguments get very heated”; and “Small issues suddenly become big arguments”) and “often,” “sometimes,” or “rarely” to two statements about resolving issues constructively (“You are good at working out your differences with each other”; and “You and your survey partner calmly discuss something”).

- **Financial support for children** (limited to men who are fathers of a minor child; a self-reported indicator of whether fathers provided at least some financial support to the “focal child” during the reference period)

We examine the proportion of men who were classified as successful in any of the areas at each of the four post-release follow-up periods, as well as the proportion who were successful across all five dimensions.⁴ Finally, we identify predictors of overall and domain-specific reentry success using multivariate logistic regression models with the same set of independent variables as explored in the recidivism models.

Notes on Analytic Approach to Multivariate Models

The following independent variables were included in each logistic regression model:

- Received any education services at any point before release
- Received any employment services at any point before release
- Received any alcohol or drug treatment at any point before release
- Received any family/couple services at any point before release, including parenting classes, couples’ relationship education, family counseling, or batterer intervention classes
- Amount of in-person contact with family during baseline incarceration (summary indicator of amount of in-person contact from survey partner, children, and other family members)
- Age at baseline
- Race (white vs. nonwhite)
- Hispanic (Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic)
- Married at baseline
- Number of children at baseline
- Number of previous arrests
- Years incarcerated (baseline incarceration)
- Has at least a high school diploma/GED at baseline
- Employed prior to incarceration
- Fewer problems with alcohol/drug use prior to incarceration (a scale measuring how often respondents experienced nine problematic behaviors related to drug or alcohol use in the six months prior to incarceration)
- No physical health limitations at baseline (no serious health problem that limits the amount or kind of work they can do)
- Good mental health at baseline (self-reported current emotional or psychological health as excellent, very good, or good)
- Fewer learning problems (a scale based on six survey questions that covered respondents’ difficulty and speed with doing math in their daily lives, reading a newspaper or magazine, and writing letters or filling out forms)
- Higher locus of control (a single item measuring how often the respondent feels he is able to control the important things in his life)

In addition, each model controlled for treatment vs. comparison group status and site.

REENTRY SUCCESS USING TRADITIONAL RECIDIVISM INDICATORS

Based on DOC data, the majority of reentering men were successful in avoiding a new incarceration in state prison. Specifically, only 11 percent of the men were reincarcerated in state prison within 12 months of their release, and only 21 percent were reincarcerated within 24

⁴ Men who were not fathers were treated as missing cases in the “financial support for children” domain and were counted as successful in the cross-domain outcome if they were successful on the other four domains.

months. Among men who were reincarcerated, the average time from release to the first reincarceration was just under one year (341 days).

Very few independent variables were significantly associated with reincarceration within 12 or 24 months. Men who were older at study enrollment and the time of first arrest were more likely to be successful in this outcome at both time periods (that is, to not have been reincarcerated within 12 or 24 months of release). In addition, those who had more in-person contact with family members during their incarceration and less problematic alcohol or drug use prior to their incarceration were more likely to avoid reincarceration within 24 months of release. Men with more previous arrests were less likely to be successful in this outcome at both time periods (see **Exhibit 2**).

REENTRY SUCCESS IN OTHER DOMAINS

Several patterns emerged from self-reported data (**Exhibit 3**). First, men were more likely to be successful in family relationships and avoiding illicit drug use than they were in finding employment and avoiding recidivism.

Second, during the post-release period, men appear to “gain their footing” with time in regard to getting jobs and providing financial support to the focal child.⁵ However, the odds of success deteriorate slightly with time with regard to intimate or coparenting relationship quality and illicit drug use. The odds deteriorate quite dramatically with regard to recidivism. For these domains, fewer men were classified as successful with each post-release period.

Exhibit 2. Summary of Multivariate Models Predicting No Reincarceration in State Prison within 12 and 24 Months of Release

	No Reincarceration in State Prison (DOC data)	
	12 months	24 months
Pre-release services		
Employment	n.s	n.s
Education	n.s	n.s
Substance abuse	n.s	n.s
Family services	n.s	n.s
In-person contact with family during incarceration	n.s	+
Age (older)	+	+++
Race (white vs. nonwhite)	n.s	n.s
Hispanic (Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic)	n.s	n.s
Married	n.s	n.s
Higher number of children	n.s	n.s
More previous arrests	-	---
Older age at first arrest	++	+
Higher number of years incarcerated	n.s	n.s
Has at least a HS diploma/GED	n.s	n.s
Employed prior to incarceration	n.s	n.s
Fewer problems with alcohol/drug use prior to incarceration	n.s	+
Higher locus of control	n.s	n.s
No physical health limitations	n.s	n.s
Good mental health	n.s	n.s
Fewer learning problems	n.s	n.s

+++ / ++ / + Statistically significant positive association at the .001 / .01 / .05 level.

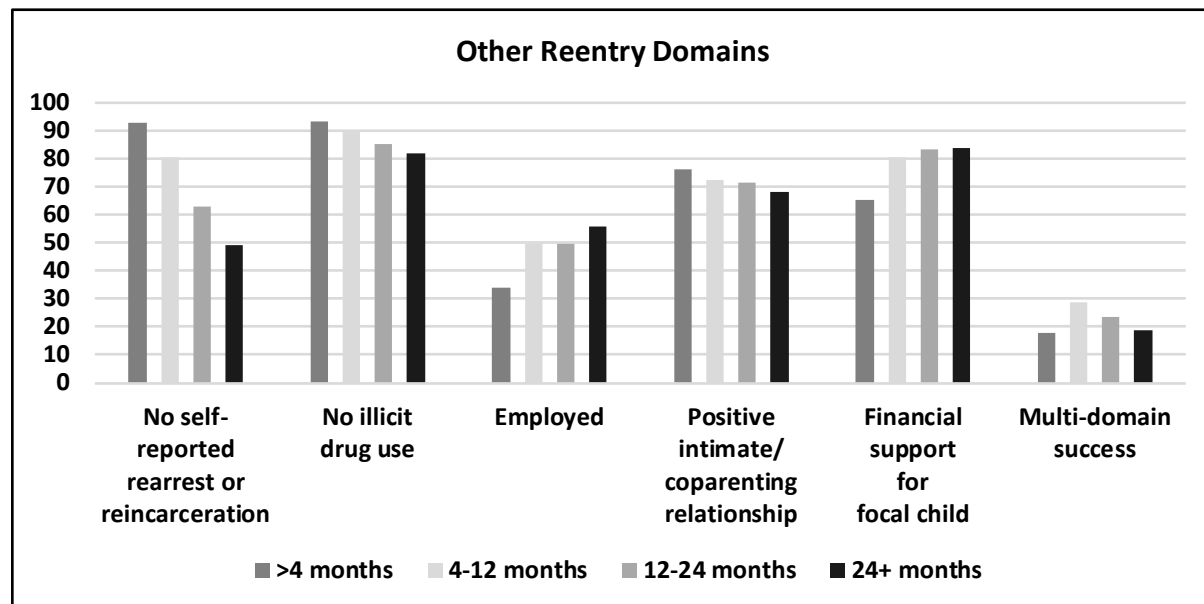
--- / -- / - Statistically significant negative association at the .001 / .01 / .05 level.

Note: All models also controlled for site and treatment/comparison group status.

⁵ Greater proportions of men reported financially supporting their child than were employed. This apparent inconsistency may, in part, be explained by 1) the fact that financial support for children was a fairly inclusive indicator (men were classified as providing financial support if they self-reported the provision of any financial support for their children) and 2) the possibility that men could have accomplished this financial support through means other than employment, such as money provided from family or from illegal income.

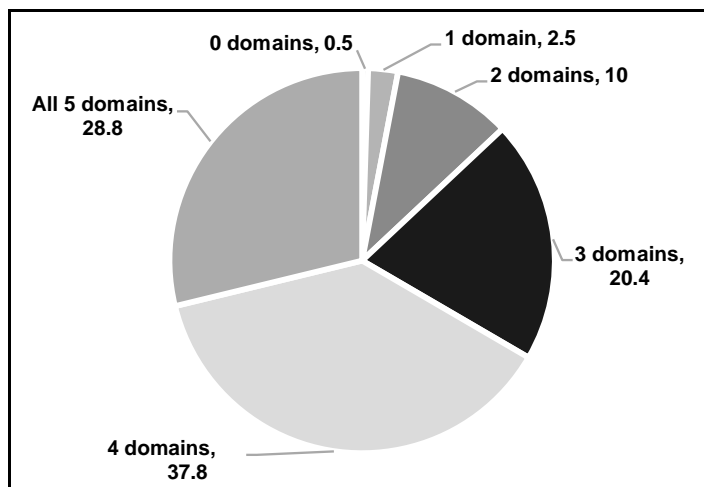
The pattern is inconsistent for the multidomain success indicator, which classifies men as successful at a given time period if they were successful in each of the five domains. Whereas men appear to make strides during the 4-12 months following release (relative to the immediate post-release period), in the two subsequent time periods, decreasing proportions of men are successful.

Exhibit 3. Proportion of Reentering Men Classified as Successful in Each Domain, by Post-Release Time Period



Data from the 4–12-month follow-up reveal that about two-thirds of the men were successful in at least four of the five domains (see Exhibit 4). Eighty-seven percent were successful in three or more domains. Men were less likely to achieve success in all five domains (29%) than to be successful in four of the five domains (38%).

Exhibit 4. Percentage of Men Classified as Successful in 0-5 Domains, 4-12 Months Post-Release



Multivariate models identified several interesting predictors of reentry success (Exhibit 5). As with the models predicting avoidance of reincarceration in state prison (Exhibit 2), the number of previous arrests was negatively associated with **self-reported**

avoidance of rearrest or reincarceration. (That is, men with more prior arrests were less likely to desist from rearrest or reincarceration at the first three post-release time periods.) Other factors associated with no recidivism at one or more post-release points included receiving employment services prior to release, being older at first arrest, having at least a high school diploma or GED, having been employed prior to incarceration, and having good mental health at baseline. Results were mixed for problematic alcohol and drug use, and men with fewer self-reported learning problems were less likely to be successful in this domain 4-12 months after release.

Exhibit 5. Predictors of Success in Multivariate Models, by Domain and Post-Release Time Period

	No Self-Reported Rearrest or Reincarceration				No Illicit Drug Use				Currently Employed				Positive Intimate/Coparenting Relationship				Financial Support for Focal Child				Multi-Domain Success			
	Time period ^a				Time period ^a				Time period ^a				Time period ^a				Time period ^a				Time period ^a			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Pre-release employment services			+								+												+++	
Pre-release education services									+	++			+									++	-	
Pre-release substance abuse services									++										-					
Pre-release family services									-						--						+++			
In-person contact with family during incarceration										+				+++	+		++	+++	+	+				
Age (older)														+	+	+								+
Race = white (vs. nonwhite)							--	---	+															
Hispanic (Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic)																								
Married																								
Higher number of children											+	+		+			-			-				
Greater number of previous arrests	-	--	---		--					--	-											---	---	
Older age at first arrest	+		+				+													-		-		
Higher number of years incarcerated																		---	---	-				
Has at least a HS diploma/GED			+									+	+											+
Employed prior to incarceration			+						+++	+++	++	+									++	++	++	
Fewer problems with alcohol/drug use prior to incarceration	-		+		+		+													-		+		
Higher locus of control						++																		
No physical health limitations						+		++		+++	+++	+								+	+	+		+
Good mental health			+				+											+	+					
Fewer learning problems		-					-			+														--

^aTime period 1 = less than four months post-release, 2 = 4-12 months post-release, 3 = 12-24 months post-release, 4 = more than 24 months post-release.

+++/++/+ Statistically significant positive association at the .001/.01/.05 level.

---/--/- Statistically significant negative association at the .001/.01/.05 level.

Note: All models also controlled for site and treatment/comparison group status. Blank cells indicate nonsignificant associations.

Success in abstaining from **illicit drug use** was more likely for men who were older at first arrest, reported fewer problems with alcohol and drug use prior to incarceration, and who had a higher locus of control, no physical health limitations, and good mental health. White men, men who had more previous arrests, and men with fewer learning problems were less likely to be successful in this domain. All of these associations were significant at one or two post-release time periods only.

Post-release **employment** was more likely for men who received employment, education, or substance abuse services prior to release, had more family contact while incarcerated, had at least a high school diploma or GED, were employed prior to incarceration, had no physical health limitations, and had fewer learning problems. In addition, white men and men with more children were more likely to be employed. Factors negatively associated with post-release employment were the number of prior arrests and having received family services (e.g., parenting classes, healthy relationship education, couples' counseling, or batterer intervention classes) prior to release.⁶

Success was more likely in **intimate or coparenting relationships** for men who received education services prior to release, had more in-person contact with their families during incarceration, were older, and had more children. Men who received any family services prior to release were less likely to be successful in this domain.

Men who provided **financial support to their focal child** after release had more in-person contact with their families during incarceration, no physical health limitations, and more positive mental health. Several factors were negatively associated with success in this domain. Men who received family services prior to release, who had more children, were older when first arrested, had been incarcerated for longer times, and had fewer problems with alcohol or drug use prior to incarceration were less likely to provide financial support for their focal child at one or more post-release time periods.

When examining **multi-domain** success, several factors that were significantly associated with success in individual domains were also significant in these models. Men were more likely to be successful across all domains at one or more times if they had received employment services prior to release, had at least a high school diploma or GED, were employed prior to incarceration, had fewer alcohol and drug problems prior to incarceration, or had no physical health limitations. Mixed results were found for education services, and, inconsistent with the domain-specific findings, men who received family services prior to release were more likely to be successful across all domains at the 4–12-month time period. Older men were more likely to be successful across all domains 24 months (or later) after release, and men with more prior arrests, who were younger at first arrest, and who had fewer learning problems were less likely to be successful across all domains in at least one post-release time period.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH

The findings from this study help to broaden our understanding of successful reentry. Reincarceration in state prison is an important outcome to examine, as it is critical to correctional administrators and policymakers (and often the focus of cost-benefit analyses). However, other outcomes are important to consider, given the far-reaching effect of

⁶ The family services receipt variable indicates that one or more services related to family functioning was received, based on self-reports. Because it is an aggregated variable, the analyses do not identify the effectiveness of any specific family service. Individuals could have received services that attempt to enhance family relationships (e.g., healthy relationship education) or to mitigate a family crisis (e.g., family violence cessation). The context for such service, as well as the service itself, may affect reentry success.

incarceration on reentering individuals and their family members. The current analyses explored reentry success across several domains, including recidivism (based on both self-reported and administrative data), abstaining from illicit drug use, and finding employment, as well as two dimensions of family relationship quality that are very rarely considered in reentry studies: intimate or coparenting relationship quality and financial support for children. The results uncover specific domain areas and time points when reentering men appear to be struggling. In addition, the analyses identified several factors that make success in each domain, as well as overall success, more or less likely. These findings enable one to identify areas for intervention with factors that are amenable to change.

Additional supports are needed to promote employment and avoid recidivism. Subjects appeared to have the most difficulty in the areas of employment and, in the long-term, desistance from criminal activity (based on the self-reported measure of recidivism that was more inclusive than the measure based on administrative data alone). This is not surprising given the men's extensive criminal histories and the barriers to gainful employment faced by people with criminal records. Previous research has found that individuals with a criminal record, especially minorities, face discrimination in the labor market (Pager, 2007; Bushway, 2004). Many men also had educational deficits and a host of other barriers that made it difficult to obtain employment in a competitive job market. The relative lack of success in employment suggests that more supports are needed to increase the employability of reentering prisoners. In this study, the men who did find jobs were more likely to have at least a high school diploma or GED, been employed prior to incarceration, and to have no physical health limitations or learning problems. Receipt of employment, education, and substance abuse treatment services before release increased the odds of finding post-release employment. Increasing access to such services, assisting men in completing high school (and postsecondary) coursework, and helping them address physical health limitations could be promising areas for intervention. Although this study did not identify other in-prison services that reduce the likelihood of reoffending, programs that could deter criminal activity after release should be promoted and evaluated. For example, cognitive behavioral interventions, which address criminal thinking through cognitive skills training, have consistently proved effective in reducing recidivism (Pearson, Lipton, Cleland, & Yee, 2002; Wilson, Bouffard, & MacKenzie, 2005; Lipsey, Landenberger, & Wilson, 2007). They are widely viewed as a core component for rehabilitation and reentry.

Family contact during incarceration is important for reentry success. Men who had more in-person contact with family members during their incarceration were more likely to be successful after their release. Specifically, they were more likely to get jobs, have more positive intimate or coparenting relationships, avoid reincarceration in state prison, and among fathers, financially support their children after release. Previous analyses from the MFS-IP study sample have also identified the role of family contact during incarceration in facilitating post-release relationship quality, including father-child coresidence, frequency of engagement for nonresidential fathers (Lindquist, Comfort, Landwehr, Feinberg, Cohen, McKay, & Bir, 2016), and intimate relationship stability and exclusivity (Lindquist, Landwehr, McKay, Feinberg, Comfort, & Bir, 2016). Taken together, these findings strongly indicate that policies and programs designed to encourage and facilitate family contact during incarceration could help men avoid further criminal activity, promote better intimate or coparenting relationships, and promote a father's support of his children after release. Family relationship quality is an important reentry outcome, given that families are a critical source of support for former prisoners. Further, having strong pro-social networks can influence other post-release outcomes of critical importance to policymakers, such as recidivism and substance use (Visher,

Kachnowski, LaBigne, & Travis, 2004; Bales & Mears, 2008; Barrick, Lattimore, & Visher, 2014; Cochran, 2014).

Employment, education, and substance abuse treatment services in prison can bolster post-release success. Men who received employment services, educational assistance, or substance abuse treatment during their incarceration were more likely to get jobs after release. Given the difficulty that returning prisoners face in securing employment, the positive effect from such services is very promising for interventions. Increasing access to such services may generate a substantial return on investment for policymakers if participants are able to obtain legitimate employment after release. In addition, participating in employment services during incarceration was associated with cross-domain success and less recidivism (based on the self-reported measure). Whether this was a direct or indirect effect (through increased employment) could not be determined from the data.

Despite the generally promising effects of employment and education services, pre-release substance abuse services and family strengthening services showed mixed results (some positive and some negative associations). However, because the multivariate models controlled for men's participation in the Office of Family Assistance funded program components that the impact study was designed to evaluate (couple-based relationship strengthening education), negative findings do not suggest that family strengthening services are detrimental to reentry success. In addition, the models controlled for problematic alcohol or drug use prior to incarceration (a proxy for needed substance abuse treatment), which creates some difficulty in interpreting the results. Additional research on the effect of various services and combinations of services on post-release outcomes is needed.

Additional education and mental and physical health services could promote successful reentry. The positive influence of education (having at least a high school diploma or GED) and good mental and physical health on reentry success suggests several additional priority areas for pre-release programming. Increasing access to basic education programs, supporting prisoners in obtaining education credentials, addressing unmet mental health needs, and helping manage physical health conditions could be important investments for post-release success. Unlike some of the other characteristics associated with reentry success in the current analyses (e.g., age, criminal history, number of children, pre-incarceration employment, and problematic alcohol and drug use), educational attainment and health are factors that are amenable to change through appropriate intervention. Addressing such service needs could facilitate post-release employment, financial support for children, and desistance from criminal activity.

Models for providing long-term supports after release should be explored. Although many reentry initiatives that provide a menu of services both prior to and immediately after release have been implemented during the past several decades, practitioners continue to struggle with ensuring that services are available for the long term after release and that reentering individuals are connected to the services available in their communities. Some reentry studies have documented a decline in service use among former prisoners as time passes, even though self-reported needs for services remain constant or even increase with time (Lattimore & Visher, 2010). The findings from the current analyses illustrate the importance of providing support services well after the immediate transition back into the community. Although some men "gained their footing" over time in some domains (such as getting jobs and providing financial support to the focal child), the odds of success appear to deteriorate slightly with time for intimate or coparenting relationship quality and illicit drug use, and they deteriorate quite dramatically with time for recidivism. For these domains, fewer men were classified as successful with each post-release period explored. This pattern highlights the need to identify

and promote service delivery models that ensure continued support services well after former prisoners transition back into their communities.

Holistic programs designed to promote success across domains should be tested. This analysis showed that some individual program components (e.g., employment, education, and substance abuse treatment services) can make a difference in men's likelihood of reentry success in individual domains. However, additional research is needed to discern how to effectively combine elements into holistic programming that would meet the myriad of needs of reentering individuals. Identifying models that support multi-domain success would have a major impact on public safety as well as the quality of life of returning prisoners and their families.

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Multi-Site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering

Funded by the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), the Multi-site Family Study of Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MSF-IP) is focused on exploring the effectiveness of relationship and family-strengthening programming in correctional settings.

Implementation Study: Annual site visits entailing in-depth interviews and program observations were conducted with all 12 grantee programs through fall 2010. The implementation evaluation comprehensively documented program context, program design, target population and participants served, key challenges and strategies, and program sustainability.

Impact Study: From December 2008 through August 2011, couples participating in MFS-IP programming and a set of similar couples not participating in programming were enrolled in the national impact study conducted in five of the grantee program sites. Study couples completed up to four longitudinal, in-person interviews that collected information about relationship quality, family stability, and reentry outcomes.

Qualitative Study: A small qualitative study was added in 2014, in which in-depth interviews were conducted with about 60 impact study couples to capture detailed information about the families' experiences during the male partner's reentry.

Predictive Analytic Models: Using the impact study sample of more than 1,482 couples (from the 1,991 men who did baseline interviews), a series of analyses is being conducted to examine the trajectories of individual and family relationships and behaviors before, during, and after release from incarceration. A public use dataset will be released for further analysis at the completion of this project.

This brief and other publications related to the MFS-IP study are available from the HHS ASPE Web site: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/evaluation-marriage-and-family-strengthening-grants-incarcerated-and-reentering-fathers-and-their-partners>.

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