

Final Report

Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of housing have on social reintegration?

authored by

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

AOD: Alcohol and other drugs

DCS: Department of Corrective Services

FaCS: Family and Community Services (Commonwealth department)

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding

NACRO: National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders (UK)

NGO: Non-Government Organisation

SAAP: Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme

SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Sciences

TERMINOLOGY

Mental Disturbance: A short period of mental illness like experience and behaviour, sometimes caused by trauma or drug or alcohol abuse.

Mental Illness: A chronic or sustained psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder

Offender: person who has committed an offence and has been found guilty in a court of law.

Parole: A period determined by the courts in which an offender is released from prison in to the community but is still under sentence. The parolee must meet certain parole conditions set by the courts, such as having stable, suitable accommodation and reporting regularly to the parole office.

Post-release: An arbitrary period of up to about six - eight months after release from prison.

Prisoner: person who has been incarcerated. This is a more inclusive term than offender as 'prisoners' comprise not only incarcerated offenders (those tried and found guilty) but also those being held in remand and those individuals that may have been falsely imprisoned.

Recidivism: Repeat offending and imprisonment.

Remand: Period during which an individual who has been charged with an offence but who has not yet been tried and found guilty and not been granted bail or cannot meet bail requirements, is imprisoned awaiting trial.

Social Integration/Reintegration: The introduction/return of the ex-prisoner to functional, personally fulfilling and responsible participation in wider society. It comprises factors such as secure housing, adequate income, supportive interpersonal relationships.

Throughcare: Programs which aim to provide continuity of treatment/support and education for prisoners throughout their period of incarceration and into their post-release environment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia sees approximately 44,000¹ persons released from prison each year. That number is increasing in most States. Prisoners (and therefore ex-prisoners) as a group have high levels of very poor education, unemployment, mental and intellectual disabilities, poverty and alcohol and other drug problems making them amongst the most disadvantaged persons in Australia. A majority eventually is re-incarcerated indicating that most ex-prisoners are not rehabilitated by their prison term and are able to integrate into society once released from prison. The prison treadmill is socially and financially very expensive for the ex-prisoner and society, and thus finding out how to increase an ex-prisoner's chances of making a successful transition is highly desirable.

There is evidence from international studies indicating that suitable housing is a crucial factor in prison releasees making a successful transition from prison to the broader society. Very little research has been done in Australia on this matter, but with the increasing imprisonment rate, it is of growing policy and practice interest to the State and citizens.

The research project "Ex-prisoners and accommodation" set out to explore connections between accommodation and allied social matters, and ex-prisoners' social experiences and social integration post-release. It was conducted between mid 2001 and early 2003, with the data being gathered between November 2001 and January 2003. One hundred and ninety four participants in NSW and 145 in Victoria were interviewed just prior to release and then were sought for interview at 3, 6 and 9 months post-release. 145 of the NSW and 93 of the Victorian participants were re-interviewed or followed up in some way, meaning that 70% of the original sample was included in the final analyses. Questions covered housing and social experiences prior to incarceration and at the three points post-release. Participants were also asked about why they thought things had gone as they had as well as being given the opportunity to comment on any aspect of their post-release housing and support experiences.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS 11 for the total sample as well as separately for NSW and Victoria, for significant factors and associations. Qualitative information was analysed into categories and themes and provided some insight into the quantitative results.

Results

Moving two times or more between interviews post-release, in other words being highly transient, was found to be the case for half the sample and was also found, using logistic regression, to be a predictor of return to prison. Increasing problematic use of heroin post-release was also found to be a predictor of return to prison.

Significant associations were shown between returning to prison and

- Being homeless
- Not having accommodation support and for those with support, the support being assessed as unhelpful
- An increase in the severity of alcohol and other drug problems

Significant associations were shown between returning to prison and

- Being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- Being a woman
- Having a, or some debt(s)

Significant associations were shown between staying out of prison and

- Not moving at all or moving only once in the three month period between interviews

¹ In 2001 it was estimated by FaCS that there were around 43,000 releases in 2000 from prisons around Australia. We have extrapolated from that, assuming that the number has increased by about 1,000 over 3 years given the rise in the prison population over that time is at least that number.

- Living with parents, partner or close family
- Having employment or being a student
- For those who had support and contact with agencies, that contact being assessed positively by participants

There were significant differences between NSW and Victorian outcomes. Significantly more Victorian participants were staying with parents or close family and had employment than their NSW counterparts. NSW participants came from, returned to and moved between more highly concentrated and socially disadvantaged geographical areas than the Victorians. There were many comments regarding the connection between being a recently released prisoner and negative attention by the police. There were also many comments by participants about not meeting agency criteria and there just not being anywhere they could afford to live without assistance.

Interpretation and discussion

Stable, socially supported housing was clearly associated with staying out of prison and increased social integration. The converse, not having such housing, was associated both in participants' comments and in the quantitative results with slipping back into transitory life style, problematic drug use and being re-arrested and re-incarcerated. As 80% of the sample had been incarcerated for 12 months or less and 50% for six or less, these outcomes are relevant to considerations of the impact of short sentences on the social and economic capacities of those sentenced to such periods.

In NSW the significant decline in social standards compared to prior to incarceration, was marked. This was not so marked in Victoria although still evident. It may be that the lower rate of incarceration, the lower cost of housing and the greater resources applied to post-release matters in Victoria helps explain these differences. Nevertheless in both states there was an extraordinary level of transitoriness (half the sample) that, in any other context, would be recognised as absolute homelessness. But it is of such a nature in this sample that it is best termed, 'a state of homelessness'.

It seems there is also a progressive stripping away of things that promote social attachment such as stable housing, family and social engagements each time a person is incarcerated.

Those who were with supportive family or attended an agency with helpful housing and other post-release support, such as a post-release worker or parole officer, were more likely to have stable housing and employment. A particular person who is available to support a releasee in a variety of matters including housing, drug, employment and family issues is, from these results, obviously a vital aspect of successful integration.

Ex-prisoners were perceptive in their assessment of the helpfulness or otherwise of agencies, support provided and housing. They should be involved in decision-making about the services and support they are offered and in the provision of such services.

Indigenous participants, especially Indigenous women, fared the worst in finding suitable accommodation and staying out of prison. The institutional barriers to their progress appear enormous. Sole parents (mostly female) and young unattached men were the next groups particularly vulnerable to homelessness and lack of integration. Few participants were willing to identify as having a mental illness or having an intellectual disability but it was clear quite a reasonable number did have these disabilities as their post-release experiences indicated that they did. The connection between AOD use, transitoriness and these disabilities appears strong and is supported by qualitative information.

As the geographical concentration of ex-prisoners in cumulatively disadvantaged suburbs and towns was very marked, especially in NSW, there are implications for housing authorities and social services to build community strengths in these areas, and to attempt to locate away from these areas those who wish to move.

Policy implications

The results support that:

- Each and every prisoner have a trained case-worker for housing, personal and advocacy support prior to and post-release;
- Up-to-date and accurate release and post-release information be provided prior to release;
 - A multi-agency team approach be taken;
 - A continuum of supported housing be developed;
 - Support to parents and other family members of ex-prisoners be available;
 - Stable housing be established for releasees from the outset ;
 - Specialised Indigenous women’s post-release supported housing be established;
 - Holistic strengths-based (rather than deficit based) post-release programs be established;
 - Reduction of concentration of ex-prisoners in highly disadvantaged areas and the building of community strengths in those areas be extended; and
 - Bail houses be established.

1. INTENT OF THE STUDY

With the rapidly rising prison population in most Australian States and Territories and the concomitant rise in persons being released after serving a prison sentence, there is heightened interest and concern on the part of governments and researchers, regarding the social impact of more prisoners returning to the community. There is no formally gathered information on releasees from prison in Australia and even the number released per year is unknown. FaCS (Anderson 2001) estimated in 2001 that about 43,000 persons were released Australia wide in 2000 and DCS NSW estimated that some 15,500 were released in the same year in NSW. But this is a rough figure because there is no standard accounting method. Should all releasees be counted or should those held in remand who were released without further incarceration, not be counted? Should those who served less than 2 weeks in prison not be counted? These fundamental unanswered questions and lack of reliable and clear information about releasees hinder post-release research and policy and program provision.

One thing is known about prison releasees – a majority is re-convicted and returned to prison at some time in their lives (ABS 2003). Why do most ex-prisoners not manage to stay out of prison? More specifically is anything known about what helps and hinders released prisoners to achieve social and economic integration in their post-prison lives? The reasonably small amount of research done internationally has indicated consistently that suitable housing is a vital factor in ex-prisoners' social integration. This project set out to investigate whether this is the case in Australia (or at least in the two most populous states) and whether any other social factors adhere to or are associated with housing for ex-prisoners' successful transition to life outside prison.

The research was intended to begin to address the lack of knowledge in Australia about transition from prison to outside society and the role played by housing, by following up and interviewing each individual in a cohort of persons being released from NSW and Victorian prisons, from just prior to release to nine months post-release. By far the majority of full-time prisoners received into the prison system in the two States each year is on a short sentence (under 12 months). They are thus unlikely to be on parole and therefore without established contact / support in the community post-release. Another significant minority that is serving a long sentence serves his/her full sentence and is released without parole due to restrictions on the granting of parole for certain categories of prisoners. Although these ex-prisoners are the hardest to follow-up in the community because they have no formal reporting requirement and usually want to avoid bureaucratic contact, we chose to take as our sample *all* those being released from selected prisons who were willing to participate, over a three month period. This, we hoped would capture a realistic picture of releasees. Because it is difficult to keep in touch with prison releasees this type of research is reasonably rare and has not been done with a general group of ex-prisoners in Australia before. Some researchers have followed up specific groups, for example a group of parolees or a group attending a specific service or women in Victoria, or have taken data from census statistics.

The results provide some surprising differences between the two states and some disturbing information about the housing precariousness and lack of support in the majority of participants' lives.

1.1 Project Aims

The original aims of the research were to:

- Provide an understanding of the housing needs and circumstances of persons being released from prisons in New South Wales and Victoria.
- Ascertain the importance of type of accommodation, in association with the other factors, which contributed to successful resettlement of ex-prisoners.
- Evaluate and compare the different housing forms experienced by ex-prisoners in relation to a variety of social support programmes.

- Analyse to what extent there is programme integration and how effectively it supports sustainable accommodation or tenancies for ex-prisoners.
- Compare accommodation types and social outcomes of the marginal and "at risk" sub groups within the ex-prisoner sample (eg psychiatric, intellectual disability, women sole parents, women experiencing domestic or other violence, family breakdowns) and also Indigenous peoples.
- Provide data for use in comparative studies between this at risk group and other at risk groups.

By the time we had analysed the three-month data it was clear that there were a number of further questions the research could address if given a further six months; AHURI granted an extension to the project. These additional aims were to:

- Provide information on whether ex-prisoners are coming from and returning to already severely disadvantaged suburbs and towns and explore any implications for relevant departments.
- Explore whether ex-prisoners who do not find themselves re-incarcerated within the first 6 months but have not found support and accommodation with their families as expected, make more use of formal support and rehabilitation services than their peers who have been re-incarcerated.
- Gather housing and support "stories" of those who have stayed in formal ex-prisoner supported accommodation.
- Explore the barriers to obtaining stable accommodation for what is emerging as a small core of extremely transient ex-prisoners.
- Explore the barriers to obtaining suitable accommodation for the minority of participants (such as NSW Aboriginal women) who were given housing and support information pre-release but who are still not finding housing post-release.
- Explore whether "court parole" being granted to short term prisoners in NSW results in more support in terms of finding accommodation and services or in some participants breaching their parole due to lack of appropriate housing and explore the implication for the Probation and Parole Service.

These aims are addressed in the results and discussion section of this paper.

First previous studies and literature on this matter and current policy in NSW and Victoria are explored.

2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND TO POST-PRISON EXPERIENCE

Policy and literature were explored and reported in detail in an AHURI positioning paper (Baldry et al 2002a). A summary of that section of the positioning paper follows with a section reflecting on the more programmatic focussed literature, as that has been of growing interest to policy and program developers.

2.1 Policy Context

There were over 20,000 full-time prisoners (sentenced and unsentenced) on census day in Australia in 2002 (ABS 2003), with currently approximately 8,100 in NSW (NSW Department of Corrective Services 2003) and 3,500 in Victoria (ABS 2003). This census count though does not give a realistic picture of the “flow-through” numbers of prisoners entering and being released from Australian prison systems over the period of a year. There are no reliable data on numbers of prisoners being released into the community each year but FaCS estimates suggested in 2001 over 43,000 Australia-wide (Anderson 2001). There has been a dramatic increase in numbers being imprisoned over the past decade with a 45% increase between 1992 and 2002. Both NSW and Victoria are seeing increases again after a brief stabilisation in 2001/2002 due mainly in NSW to a dramatic increase in the remand population. Against the trend, Western Australia has begun to reduce its imprisonment rate by starting to eliminate short sentences and the Northern Territory is also reducing its incarceration rate. Both are making greater use of community based resources in tackling persistent petty property crime and street crime

- Although Correctional Services are State responsibilities, matters pertaining to ex-prisoner re-entry to the community involve many government departments and programs, both State and Federal.
- In Victoria and NSW, Correctional Service departments fund or partly fund a very small amount of post-release support with NSW for example directing only 0,3% of its budget to community based post-release programs (NSW Department of Corrective Services 2001b). Departments of Housing, Health and Community/Human Services and Centrelink are involved in providing services but none have had clearly defined policy aims and objectives or practices regarding housing for people being released from prison (NSW Department of Community Services 2001; NSW Department of Housing 2000; Victorian Office of Housing 2001; Department of Justice 2001a; Victorian Department of Human Services 2001a,b,c,d). Over 2002 Centrelink stepped up its organisational arrangements to try to ensure all prisoners receive an appropriate Centrelink payment upon release and is working at MOUs with all prisons. Interagency meetings and agreements are also being discussed as a way to gain some integration and coordination in this field. All of these are in early stages so there is no evaluative data on them yet.
- A very small number of non-government agencies provide what little housing services there are, with the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) via NGOs providing the bulk of assisted housing places, about 50 in each state, designated for ex-prisoners (Victorian Department of Human Services 2001a,b,c,d,e; NSW Department of Community Services 2001). A pilot program with a very small number of transitional workers assisting prisoners being released was begun in late 2002 in NSW but early indications are their work is severely hampered by lack of suitable housing.
- Governments have no reliable data on ex-prisoners' housing experiences or the relationship between housing and recidivism.
- The Victorian Government is funding a number of pilot post-release service initiatives including an extra 60 accommodation places (Department of Justice 2001a) but, as these were begun in early 2002 and have not yet been fully implemented, full evaluations are not yet available. Interim findings though indicate better outcomes for those in these programs (Aktepe et al 2003).

2.2 Literature

International and Australian literature in this field is characterised by:

- a paucity of studies in general;
- a lack of work on the particular housing issues faced by high needs groups;
- few empirical studies featuring samples of sufficient size to be representative of this group as a whole; and
- a lack of theoretically and statistically supported insight into the influence of factors such as housing on re-offending and social reintegration. (Paylor 1995)
- Earlier international studies and reviews:
 - pointed consistently to the strong association between ex-prisoners and accommodation in terms of their social reintegration;
 - argued that structural factors are fundamental to ex-prisoners being able to gain and maintain suitable housing. (Banks & Fairhead 1976; Corden, Kuipers & Wilson 1978; Corden & Clifton 1983; Ramsay 1986; Walton 1987; Haynes 1990)

Later studies agree on:

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

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

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

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

a transition to the community, a greater variety of accommodation, especially self-contained units, with support being available in situ, should be provided.

2.3 Literature on Related Issues

Studies into the relationship between social issues and difficulties amongst prisoners, such as homelessness (Benda 1983; McCarthy & Hagen 1991; Vitelli 1993; Stark 1994; De Lisi 2000), mental illness/disturbance (Belcher 1988; NACRO 1992; Harrington 1999), intellectual disability (Hayes 1991, 1996; Lyall et al 1995; Simpson, Martin & Green 2001) and post-release experience (Hardie et al 1998; Chase 1999) have indicated consistently a high level of difficulty in securing suitable accommodation upon release:

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

The current provisions for ex-prisoners with particular problems or in minority groups (such as all those groups just mentioned) are reported to be grossly insufficient by the authors noted above and by recent Inquiries and reports in NSW (New South Wales Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice 2000; NSW Legislative Council 2001; NSW Legislative Council 2002).

2.4 Discussion of specific studies relevant to post-release experience

As indicated in the preceding discussion the nature of the relationship between the accommodation needs of ex-prisoners and sustained social re-integration is complex. The level of complexity does ease somewhat as the discussion becomes focused upon program needs within a specific policy context or particular target group, women for example, or juveniles, or those deemed 'persistent petty offenders'. The following studies, when chronologically arranged, conduct an ongoing discussion, within a number of correctional jurisdictions, of the principal themes identified above. They indicate some progress over the last few years in policy and program development, but do not contribute to the conceptual barriers that appear to bedevil contemporary responses to the relationship between the accommodation of ex-prisoners and their social integration and vulnerability to re-offending.

Ford (1991) argues that homelessness is the most significant of the multiplicity of problems suffered by petty offenders in the UK. She concludes that whereas the provision of stable accommodation for this group of offenders may not have had an effect upon further contact with the criminal justice system, provision of stable housing enabled alternative sentences to be considered to an extent they might not have been otherwise. Accommodation and the stability it implies provides for a range of sentencing options that may sustain positive social supports.

What stability means in housing for ex-prisoners is summarised in an issues paper by Conway (1999). Conway's paper identifies for Queensland, the third largest correctional jurisdiction in Australia, negative factors discussed in earlier research:

..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)

In the report of its focus group study the Minnesota Department of Corrections (2001) continued concerned about appropriate housing and re-offending, now described as a factor in diminished public safety. The study resulted in eight findings that largely replicate issues identified in other studies such as the level of concern offenders evoke among property managers and communities. But a number of the specific findings are relevant to the present study. The finding that specialised offender housing was highly concentrated in some areas and unavailable in others is particularly relevant to New South Wales and Victoria where many

ex-prisoners return to rural districts or outlying suburbs with little in the way of services. The Minnesota study also found that the provision of supportive, affordable post-release housing, including the guarantee of emergency bed access, requires effective transition services starting well before release. If the provision of services of this kind takes the form of programs, the Minnesota study raises an issue discussed in other North American studies concerning the effective implementation of programs conducted in prison.

Travis, Solomon and Waul (2001) found that most prisoners in the United States do not participate in prison programs. Indeed the rate of participation in programs had dropped between 1991 and 2001. This finding is echoed in NSW where hours of education provided to prisoners halved over that decade. As with other studies, this study identifies the period immediately following release as critical to re-integration and therefore the guarantee of emergency bed access as being most significant.

Ogilvie (2001) notes that in the Australian context as elsewhere, the importance of directing resources towards pre and post-release programs is now advocated not only by academic researchers but also practitioners. She reflects recent Australian (Aungles, 1994) and British (Hamlyn and Lewis, 2000) studies when identifying accommodation as

....central to any genuine attempt at re-integrating newly released prisoners. The cost of four weeks bond, one months rent up front, plus connecting the electricity and a phone, is more often than not beyond the financial capacity of people immediately leaving prison.... (Ogilvie, 2001:2).

It is of course relatively easy to identify the importance of stable accommodation for ex-prisoners given the other known instabilities of their experience such as access to employment and the re-establishment of relationships. In relation to Victoria Ogilvie identifies the structural arrangements that prevent those in most need from securing access to post-release accommodation. While incarcerated a prisoner is not deemed 'homeless', though they may have been homeless prior to incarceration, and is therefore ineligible to apply for public housing. A further service difficulty arises from the fact that many prisoners are not and cannot be aware of the exact time of their release² and therefore are unable to satisfy one important requirement for an accommodation agency. These difficulties are compounded for women with dependent children as Ogilvie discusses,

.....satisfactory accommodation arrangements are crucial with respect to women regaining access to children who have been placed in 'care' situations of one type or another. This can mean that in the absence of any alternative, some women may feel compelled to return to violent partners post release. (Ogilvie, 2001:4).

A study of crisis accommodation and support needs of women exiting custody in the Adelaide metropolitan region, conducted by the South Australian Department of Human Services, found that the key features of an effective re-integration program include:

- a focus on addressing needs identified by clients;
- offering choices, clear information and pathways to other service options;
- continuity of worker/client relationships;
- programs for both pre and post release

(Slowinski, 2001:1)

The study drew attention not only to the need for support for 'exiting' women prisoners, but support of a kind capable of accepting clients who are difficult in that they have high and complex needs. This observation could be generalised to embrace a very substantial portion of

² Prisoners held on remand or awaiting appeal hearings may be released directly from court if not given a prison sentence or found not guilty or granted bail or if their appeal is upheld – this happens in up to 50% of remand cases – thus these prisoners do not know the date of their release. Successful appeals against negative parole decisions can result in a person being released on parole with little notice or unsuccessful parole applications may result in persons not being released when they thought they were going to be. We also found in NSW and Victoria that 5% of our sample had been given the wrong release date and were not released when they thought they were going to be.

the ex-prisoner population. The study is also significant for its recommendations in relation to preventive strategies; that is strategies aimed at reducing the risk of homelessness and its attendant destitution, and efficient protocols between prison programs addressing post-release and service providers. Significantly, this study also drew attention to the high representation of Aboriginal women in the prison population and noted the initiative to appoint a Women's Worker as part of the Aboriginal Prisoner and Offender Support Service.

The focus upon prevention of post-release problems in the South Australian study is found in a more advanced state of development in a 2002 draft paper of the Victorian Department of Human Services, *Victorian Homeless Strategy*. In relation to the accommodation needs of ex-prisoners the paper recommends a pilot program establishing Housing Placement Workers in three correctional centres and assistance to short term prisoners to maintain their existing housing arrangements.

When combined the two parts of this review of the literature identify agency reports, targeted studies of need and statistical data as the principal sources of information about the level and range of accommodation needs of ex-prisoners. Each of these sources has strengths and weaknesses. Few targeted studies of need have been undertaken in Victoria or New South Wales. Agency information relies exclusively on data gathered from agencies servicing ex-prisoners but it can be assumed that many ex-prisoners in need of accommodation do not use the services provided by agencies or are not able to be accommodated by them due to severe shortage of spaces. Further, agencies may not share common data definitions. Agency studies, as indicated in the preceding discussion, emphasise prevention and the related need for forms of implementation that ensure high levels of client participation. They also identify an enduring problem for criminal justice systems: the need for integrating services within the prison with those post-release to provide a pathway that provides the possibility of long term stable housing, not just short term crisis accommodation.

In relation to this background the present study is complementary in that it has been able to monitor a sample population over time allowing information in relation to post-release accommodation and related social matters to be registered at critical intervals in the first year of release.

3. STUDY METHOD – COLLECTING DATA FROM EX-PRISONERS

3.1 The Project

Originally the project was a year-long study in which 201 prisoners in NSW and 155 in Victoria were interviewed pre-release. The first interview was conducted just prior to leaving prison and subsequent interviews were held at 3 months and then 6 months post-release. Seven of the original interviewees in NSW and ten in Victoria subsequently were found to be unsuitable participants as they were not released when expected. Thus 194 participants (130 male and 64 female) in NSW and 145 (122 male and 23 female) in Victoria were included in the pre-release sample and were followed up post-release. After the three month data was gathered and analysed, an extension grant was provided to allow for an interview at nine months post-release and to conduct further analysis of some unexpectedly rich data being gathered. At the end of the nine-month interview period, 238 participants, 145 in NSW and 93 in Victoria had been interviewed or had information gathered regarding their post-release experience. This represents 70% of the original sample, an extremely good response rate for this kind of research.

Interviews consisted of mainly closed, with some open-ended questions. Data gathered included participants' pre-prison housing and social situation and, after release, their social progress, especially housing experiences. The closed questions were intended to provide quantitative data for a population about whom almost nothing statistical is known and the open-ended to provide some explanatory insight into any statistically significant outcomes and into how ex-prisoners interpret their after-prison experiences.

3.2 Methods used to gather data

3.2.1 Organising data gathering

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

3.2.2 Pre-release interview

The interview schedule being used for the pre-release interview is the one approved by each relevant department and no variance after that approval could be made. The interview covered: demographic information, including prior imprisonment, length of sentence and parole status, housing prior to imprisonment and hoped for after release, family relations, employment prior to incarceration and hoped for after release, alcohol and other drug issues, debt and information received on housing and other social matters prior to release. Particular attention was paid to type of housing and with whom the participant was living/hoped to live. Interviews were carried out face to face with the interviewer recording the answers. This manner was used as many prisoners are functionally illiterate and may not have been able to fill out the

form. But each interviewee had a copy of the schedule to which to refer and where scales or choices were to be made, cards were provided to assist the participant.

Stamped addressed post-cards were given to each participant as both a reminder of their participation and for them to send to the research team should they change address. Although provision was made for interpreting where appropriate, only one prisoner who was unable to communicate in English volunteered to participate. This shortcoming is probably due to the lack of invitations to participate being available in a variety of languages and reluctance on the part of Non-English Speaking background prisoners to participate in anything non-compulsory.

Data from the interviews were entered into an SPSS 11 program as the data gathering proceeded and both original interviews and computer files were kept locked. Each participant was given a code number and that was the only identification on the interview schedule. The number and name have been kept separately in locked filing cabinets accessed by the research team only. A calendar was kept of which participant should be interviewed at their particular 3, 6 and 9-month points. The pre-release interviews proceeded smoothly with support and cooperation from Corrections' staff. Descriptive data from these interviews are reported below.

3.2.3 Post-release 3, 6 and 9 month interview

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

3.3 Data analysis

Quantitative data was recorded using SPSS 11, as it was gathered. To address the aims of this research, data was subjected to statistical analyses (tests of significance and regression analysis) to determine association of factors. Qualitative information was analysed thematically.

Information, where available, on each factor for each participant from both NSW and Victoria was entered into an SPSS data set. There were 238 participants in this set out of a possible 339 representing a 70% response rate (64% for Victoria and 75% for NSW). Some participants did not answer all questions hence the differing sample numbers in some tables.

Chi-square tests or symmetric measures where applicable, were carried out. The combined set was dis-aggregated into NSW and Victorian data to test for significant differences between the two states. Logistic regression analysis was applied to factors that emerged as significant

Some analysis was also done on the complete (339 participants) sample where appropriate.

The qualitative data, which was thematically categorised, is used to help develop an understanding of the meaning of the statistical findings.

4. EX-PRISONERS' HOUSING AND OTHER SOCIAL EXPERIENCES POST-RELEASE

The results of the pre-release interview are rehearsed here briefly (they were presented as a Work-in-Progress paper in 2002; see Baldry et al. 2002b) as they set the context and backdrop to participants' post-release experience.

4.1 Pre-release

The profile and key features of the total sample of releasees and of pre-release interviews were:

75% were male, 25% female

16% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

66% had been imprisoned previously

82% had just served sentences of 12 months or less with 53% having served 6 months or less

75% had not completed secondary school with most not completing year 10

73% in NSW, 58% in Vic were given no information on accommodation or support pre-release

20% in NSW and 12% in Victoria were homeless (literally without shelter) prior to imprisonment

16% expected to be homeless or did not know where they were going post-release

24% were in family accommodation prior to imprisonment, but 36% expected to be with their family post release

34% had been dependent on public or assisted housing prior to imprisonment

38% female, 21% male participants were in public housing prior to imprisonment

40% males were expecting to live in their family's house post-release compared to 27% prior to imprisonment

67% of men expected to be with parents / partner post-release whereas only 32% of the women expected that.

Of women participants, women sole parent made up 50% of those in short-term public housing; 20% in priority public housing; 50% in long-term public housing and 67% of the homeless women prior to imprisonment. They expected the same post release.

35% had been employed prior to incarceration

76% did not expect to or did not know whether they would be employed post-release.

This description of the participants' circumstances confirms the extreme precariousness most experience in relation to housing, family relations, employment and participating in society both prior to their incarceration and upon release.

As noted above, prior to imprisonment approximately 20% in NSW and 12% in Victoria of the sample were homeless. A third had been in public or publicly assisted accommodation. Most had not arranged accommodation upon release but hoped they could stay with family or friends or move straight into public housing. Only 16% expected to find themselves homeless. The reality at 9 months post-release was worse than the participants had expected.

At 9 months, as far as could be ascertained, 34% of the whole sample had been re-incarcerated, 32% in Victoria and 35% in NSW. This is likely to be a conservative figure as a number of participants may have been incarcerated interstate (we have anecdotal information to that effect). Also NSW Corrective Services was unable to provide information on whether participants had been in and out of prison between the 4 and 9-month checks due to privacy legislation. The demographic profile of the reinterviewed post-release participants showed no significant differences from the larger pre-release sample.

4.2 Findings

Although staying out of prison post-release is a gross and not necessarily very accurate measure of social integration for prison releasees, it is an indication that an ex-prisoner is managing socially and economically to some extent. It is also one of the only readily available and fairly reliable measures on releasees' progress. Thus we use return to prison as the dependent variable in most of the analyses. Return to prison is also currently a topic of serious political and policy interest and by using it we are using a readily understandable currency in debates and discussion about criminal justice policy and practice. We use re-incarcerated and return to prison interchangeably, mainly for variety.

4.2.1 Definition of homeless

We used Chamberlain and MacKenzie's (1992) primary level as the definition of homelessness for analysis in this study mainly because it accorded with our participants' understanding of homelessness. Primary homelessness refers to being without conventional accommodation (living on the streets, in cars, in squats). Thus when our participants said they were homeless they really meant it in the most fundamental sense - they had no proper shelter. Had we used all three of Chamberlain et al's levels of 'unsustainable and unsatisfactory' accommodation, that is primary level (as stated), secondary level as transient accommodation and tertiary level as medium to long term accommodation but without the security of a lease to mean homeless, most of the sample, especially in NSW would be homeless. This is analysed and discussed in some detail later in the paper.

We look first at what factors measured in the study appeared to be associated with being re-incarcerated and what factors appeared to be associated with staying out. The calculation of the significance of the associations is based on Chi-Square. Whenever in the presentation of results, an association is reported as 'significant' it means the Chi-Square value has been calculated as $p \leq .05$. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

4.2.2 Accommodation Moves

The releasees were asked at each 3-month interview how many times they had moved in the past 3 months. Given the inevitable difficulty of keeping track of all the releasees (with some being interviewed only once and others all three times), the data yielded by this question have been combined for the purposes of this analysis, that is we combined the number of moves each participant reported in each 3 month period to make up that participant's total number of moves. The question we asked was about the number of moves since the last interview so there was an attempt to eliminate double counting. As most participants were not interviewed at all three post-release interview points, the information about moves is likely to be on the conservative side. Of the 226 participants who gave information about the number of times they moved, 114 (50%) did not move at all or moved only once and 110 (50%) moved 2 or more times, with 15.5% moving more than 4 times.

Table 1 Number of moves Post-release

Moves	0 or1	2 or more	total
Not returned	89 (78%)	46 (41%)	91
Returned prison	25 (22%)	66 (59%)	135
Total	114	112	226

Of those who did not move or moved just once, only 22% had been re-incarcerated at nine months whereas of those who moved twice or more 59% were back in prison. This difference was statistically significant.

This extremely high mobility is indicative of homelessness. On the whole participants said they moved because they had to, not because they chose to. They were thrown out of or felt they

had to leave family or friends' places, couldn't pay the rent or just could not access suitable housing.

From my Mum's to my uncle's – there were problems with my uncle – then with a mate then lots of moves because I was using again (male aged 23)

Moved around for 3 months, went back in, then stayed at friends' – moved about 8 times (female aged 32)

Here there and everywhere. .. moved about 20 times – kept moving so I wouldn't be a burden .. ended up sleeping in the laundry (female aged 22)

2 nights at Hanover .. then in a caravan .. all over. At rental places I had to pay weekly, way too expensive. No luck with real estate agents .. ended up on the streets (male aged 32)

Places weren't suitable .. got robbed .. I'm at Mum and Dad's on the waiting list (housing dept) (female aged 39)

Lived mostly in cars and with friends – moved about 8 times. Impossible to rent – far too expensive – and I couldn't get public housing 'cause they claim I've got a debt. Moved around due to lack of money (male aged 43)

Lots of moves following work – living in hostels (male aged 20)

My friends were just sick of me so I had to keep moving (male aged 22)

This trend was evident from early on in the post-release period. Those who were in unstable housing circumstances were more likely to return to prison at each stage that interviews were undertaken. Moving often post-release is also related significantly to having been incarcerated previously.

4.2.3 Increase in homelessness

Overall homelessness for participants increased (from 18% prior to incarceration to 21.4% post-release).

Table 2 Type of housing post-release

Type of housing	Homeless	Other	Total
Not returned	19 (39%)	117 (65%)	136
Returned	30 (61%)	63 (35%)	93
Total	49	180	229

There was a significant relationship between being homeless and being re-incarcerated.

At nine months post-release the rate of homelessness for the NSW participants had increased when compared with the pre-incarceration rate (from 20% to 28%). On the other hand Victorian participants' homelessness rate was reduced (12% to 8%), although 14% of those re-incarcerated had been homeless before re-arrest.

Housing was the main problem .. I don't have a home (female aged 32)

Some dissecting of the data is needed here though because the story is not as simple as the fact that, according to the last known information, 49 of the 229 we were able to interview post-release were homeless. At one point (when analysing the 6 month figures) the number of homeless had almost doubled in NSW (from 20% to 38% of the sample). It is clear from the large numbers who moved 2 or more times that at some stage in the 9 months individuals may have been in squats or on the street but then may have moved into a friend's place for a short period and may have moved out again to family or a hostel. In other words perhaps up to half of the participants experienced episodes of homelessness. For example we estimate that the final NSW homeless figure is closer to 33% of the sample and the Victorian figure may be quite

conservative for the following reasons. We did not count living with a friend (even though in most cases that meant sleeping on a friend’s couch) as homeless despite the fact that a person in such circumstances is really homeless and is understood to be so in all homeless research (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1992). In our final data set regarding with whom participants were living, 34 said they were living with friends, 84 said alone and 16 said with some other person or group (for example a hostel). 35 said they were living in SAAP (not specialised ex-prisoner accommodation which was counted separately) or some other short term supported place or boarding house and many of the 23 who said they were in private rental without assistance were without tenure and were moving often. Many participants did not think of themselves as homeless if they had a bed for a few nights. When all this information is combined with the data on moving often, where half the 229 post-release sample had moved twice or more over the 9 month period (most in the space of a few months), it becomes clear that a significant number who do not appear in the homelessness category were effectively homeless or were moving in and out of homelessness.

4.2.4 Who participants were living with

Of the 41% of those living with their parents, partner or other family member only 23% returned to prison. 52% of those living with others – friends or acquaintances - or alone returned to prison.

Table 3 Living with post-release

Living with	Parents/family	Others/alone	total
Not returned	72 (77%)	64 (48%)	136
Returned	22 (23%)	70 (52%)	92
Total	94	134	228

These differences are significant.

In this matter, NSW and Victoria diverged significantly. In NSW the majority (60%) of those who expected or hoped to be living with their parents were not doing so at 9 months post-release. Many of these individuals ended up being those who moved often, with qualitative data indicating that their parents had been unwilling to put up with their drug use or chaotic lifestyles or that there had been serious arguments. For the most part these families seem to be disadvantaged themselves, with many living in public housing and in cramped conditions.

In Victoria a significantly larger percentage (44%) than in NSW (18%) was still living with parents at 9 months post-release. Staying with parents and other close family appears to be associated with stability, not having to move and staying out of prison.

- Being at the same address (that father owns) .. I knew my accommodation was alright (male aged 25)
- I was lucky to have a partner paying off a house (male aged 40)
- I had to move in with my Dad (male aged 40)
- Got a lot of family support (with housing) (female aged 23)

There are though other factors to be considered. Housing in Sydney is very expensive and there was some indication that fewer parents of NSW participants lived in desirable places (in Sydney) as far as participants were concerned than was the case in Victoria. Nevertheless, even in Victoria there was still a significant minority who fell out with family and found themselves in unsuitable accommodation or homeless. Again these are amongst the ones who moved often and were more likely to be back inside at 9 months.

4.2.5 Parents who lived with their children

Seventy one (31%) of the 228 released prisoners whose parental status was known had dependent aged children. Among those with dependent children, there was a marked association between the participant having lived at least at some stage of the nine months follow-up period with their offspring and a decreased likelihood of returning to gaol.

Unfortunately, the small number of subjects involved permits of just a single comparison between the released prisoners with dependent children who lived with them and those who did not:

Table 4 Children living with post-release

Children's living arrangements	With released prisoner	Other arrangement	Total
Not returned	21 (78%)	14 (32%)	35
Returned	6 (22%)	30 (68%)	36
Total	27	44	71

The difference in outcomes for the two groups is statistically significant. More than three-quarters of the subjects who lived with their children remained free compared with a little under a third of those who did not. However, there are two major grounds for caution in the interpretation of this finding. First, the decision to live with their children may reflect a degree of more general responsible intent on the part of the participant concerned that disposed them to remain on the right side of the law. Second, their recidivism rate of 22% at 9 months is less than that of the 'no dependent children' group (36%) but less dramatically so.

4.2.6 Debt

Of the 226 participants for whom we have information regarding debt post-release, 116 (51%) said they had a debt of some sort. There may be many reasons for debt and these will be addressed in the discussion, nevertheless those with a debt were more likely to return to prison (50%) than those who had no debt (30%).

Table 5 Debt post-release

debt	debt	No debt	total
Not returned	58 (50%)	77 (70%)	135
Returned	58 (50%)	33 (30%)	91
Total	116	110	226

These differences are statistically significant. Of those with a debt 35 (30%) had a Department of Housing debt and of these participants 22 (63%) returned to prison compared with 45% of those with other forms of debt.

There were clear indications from participants in both States that they did not even bother trying to resolve housing debts because they believed, from previous experiences, that they were wasting their time. This matter gains importance when it is realised that being able to move into long-term public housing appears to be associated with staying out of prison.

4.2.7 Public Housing

When family accommodation, which is the type of housing most associated with staying out, is removed from the data, those in long term public and assisted rental housing are more likely to stay out of prison than those in other forms of housing such as crisis, short-term, hostel or non-assisted rental places (66% and 47% respectively).

Table 6 Type of housing post-release

Type housing	Long term public & rental assist	All other (non-family)	total
Not returned	42 (66%)	54 (47%)	96
Returned	22 (34%)	62 (53%)	84
total	64	116	180

These differences are significant.

Long-term public and rental assisted housing are associated with secure stable housing which is, by definition associated with not moving often. The latter is associated with staying out of prison.

Although the numbers were too small to perform statistical analyses on them, a number (19) of participants were living in boarding houses and, contrary to our expectations had a slightly lower return to prison rate than the average. The only reason to mention this is that boarding houses are a destination for some ex-prisoners and these may be a source of support and stable housing.

4.2.8 *Suitable accommodation*

Participants self-reported on whether their accommodation was suitable for them. Of those who said it was unsuitable (119 persons), 55% returned to prison. This is compared with the 25 (24%) of those who said it was suitable and who returned to prison.

Table 7 suitable accommodation post-release

Acc. suitable	suitable	Not suit.	total
Not returned	80 (76%)	53 (45%)	133
returned	25 (24%)	66 (55%)	91
total	105	119	224

The differences are statistically significant. In other words ex-prisoners' own estimation of the suitability of their accommodation is a very reliable guide to whether it is and whether they return to prison.

Having stable accommodation has helped enormously .. got bail (female aged 33)

Better accommodation would be good but not in this area – I've got to get out of Springvale (male aged 25)

Having stable accommodation has played a big part (male aged 30)

Particularly housing has been a problem. I ended up at a friend's place in Frankston. It's not a good place for someone who wants to kick a habit (female aged 32)

I was screaming for a house – there was a lot going on – I was dealing with drug issues and there was no housing support available (male aged 34)

Have been in local council housing and it's a bad environment – tenants and drugs, They're not attentive to alcohol and drug issues so I'm moving to my Mum's (female aged 23)

Those who stated their accommodation was unsuitable were significantly more likely to have been incarcerated before.

4.2.9 *Support helpful*

Participants were asked whether they had any support associated with housing post-release. 151 said they did receive some support, mainly moral with other forms being financial, social and counselling. Participants' self-assessment as to whether the support was helpful, like the suitability of their accommodation, was highly correlated with recidivism. Only 14 (18%) who said the support was helpful returned to prison whereas 52 (69%) of those who said it was unhelpful returned to prison.

Table 8 support helpful post-release

Support helpful	Helpful	Not helpful	total
Not returned	62 (82%)	23 (31%)	85
returned	14 (18%)	52 (69%)	66
total	76	75	151

These differences are statistically significant. In other words, ex-prisoners are well aware of the helpfulness or otherwise of the kind of support they are receiving.

4.2.10 Contact with agencies

Only 22 (10%) of the 224 participants who answered the question regarding contact with agencies post-release said they had no contact at all. We removed these 22 from the calculation, joined the specialised post-release agencies (parole and ex-prisoner agencies) together and compared the result to all other agencies combined (Centrelink, Community Services, Housing, DCS). Those who had contact with the specialist post-release agencies were less likely to return to prison with only 24% of those in contact with specialist services returning compared to 45% of those in contact with other agencies.

Table 9 Contact with agencies post-release

Agency	Parole/ex-pris.	other	total
Not returned	40 (76%)	82 (55%)	122
Returned	13 (24%)	67 (45%)	80
Total	53	149	202

The differences are statistically significant.

Despite this finding, there were some notable mentions made of specialist services in the “other” category. For example the intensive personal support service recently introduced by Centrelink received a number of good reports.

4.2.11 Agencies helpful

Yet again ex-prisoners’ own assessments of the helpfulness of agencies proved to be highly reliable in indicating whether they were returned to prison.

Table 10 Agencies helpful post-release

Agency helpful	Yes	No	Total
Not returned	79 (80%)	41 (41%)	120
Returned	20 (20%)	59 (59%)	79
Total	99	100	199

These differences are statistically significant.

The appropriateness of post-release services is not, and should not be exclusively a matter for professional judgement. Participants in this study had their own opinions of what was appropriate and helpful.

A local agency .. helped me to get set up before I was released. They had visited me in prison, provided a bit of support and explained where I could get information (male aged 34)

I’d be lost without my X caseworker .. helps out with everything – accommodation counselling .. (male aged 43)

Parole have been helpful .. good to have someone to talk to (male aged 32; male aged 20; male aged 24; male aged 40)

Drug and alcohol counselling has been helpful (female aged 30; male aged 26)

The intensive personal support from Centrelink was very helpful when I was homeless (female aged 32; male aged 25; male aged 28)

But participants' experiences of agencies varied depending, it appears, upon the particular worker they saw and the timing.

Centrelink did a lot of bad stuff – mucked my pay around and I couldn't pay the rent (male aged 24)

Parole was OK until I changed workers (male 22)

I tried (most of the post-release agencies) before I got out .. I didn't have enough time before release to get things set up ..saw people from Y agency .. no one could help (male aged 23)

There's nothing in my area (male aged 33)

Corrections doesn't help. I did a program 2 days before I was released and I'd been inside 18 months (male aged 43)

I (went through) Y agency but it didn't turn up anything (male aged 22)

4.2.12 Programs post-release

Just under half (45%) of those who answered the question (225) about attending programs post-release, said they attended a program. Those who attended programs were more likely to stay out of prison (68%) than those who did not (53%).

Table 11 Program attendance post-release

Attend	attended	Not attend.	total
Not returned	69 (68%)	66 (53%)	135
Returned	32 (32%)	58 (47%)	90
Total	101	124	225

These differences are statistically significant.

4.2.13 Within programs

Of those who attended programs half attended drug rehabilitation programs and the rest attended employment (19%) or counselling and holistic therapeutic (31%) programs usually including some alcohol and other drug counselling. Most of the drug rehabilitation was attached to non-government organisations. When those who didn't attend any programs are removed from the sample, and the drug rehabilitation is compared to employment and therapeutic programs, those who did the drug rehabilitation programs were more likely to return to prison. This as much as anything may reflect the difficulties facing this group as the quality of the services rendered.

Table 12 Comparing programs post-release

Attend	Drug rehab	Empl/others	Total
Not returned	28 (55%)	41 (82%)	69
Returned	23 (45%)	9 (18%)	32
Total	51	50	101

These differences are statistically significant.

Although these results are quite startling, that is those attending the drug rehabilitation programs had such a high recidivism rate compared to those attending the employment and other programs, a number of things must be considered. It may be that those attending the other programs do not have serious drug problems, and, as will be seen when the alcohol and

other drug problems results are analysed shortly, drug problems appear to be extremely challenging. It is also likely to be the case that those who are already managing drug problems better are those who can then go on to employment and other programs.

4.2.14 Employment

Of the 227 participants who answered the question about employment post-release, only 36 (16%) had employment of any kind or were full-time students. Of those who had employment or were full-time students only 3 or 8% returned to prison whereas 46% of those who were unemployed returned to prison. None of the 5 students had returned. This is a significant result.

Table 13 Employment post-release

Employment	Employed/student	Not empl.	Total
Not returned	33 (92%)	103 (54%)	136
Returned	3 (8%)	88 (46%)	91
Total	36	191	227

But some in the sample were not looking for paid work, or were incapable, due to disabilities or other factors of acquiring a job. So when those who were not seeking or not able to work are removed from the sample, there were 142 seeking work or full-time student activity. 36 of those were employed or students and 106 (75%) were unemployed and seeking work. Of those unemployed seeking work, 54% were back in prison compared to 8% of those employed or students.

Table 14 Unemployed /employed post-release

Employment	Employed/student	Unem. Seeking	Total
Not returned	33 (92%)	49 (46%)	82
Returned	3 (8%)	57 (54%)	60
Total	36	106	142

These differences are statistically significant.

Participants commented on the connections between housing, employment and drugs.

- Job and accommodation are a huge issue .. I was lucky to get a job (male aged 40)
- You can't think about job interviews until you've got drugs sorted out (male aged 26)
- If I didn't have my family and work it would be hard with accommodation (male aged 24)
- I wanted to work – settle down with my missus (male aged 34)
- Moved a lot trying to work (male age 20)
- Having stable accommodation has played a big part .. and getting work has been important as well (male aged 30)

When the employment figures are dis-aggregated by state a very different picture emerges. Of the 36 employed or full-time students 26 were from Victoria meaning that only 10 (7%) of the NSW sample had employment or were full-time students. There is a significant association between the Victorian participants who had employment also having stable housing and staying out of prison (only one of those 26 Victorians returned to prison). There was also a clear positive connection between suitable housing, managing drug problems and employment.

4.2.15 Drug Use

Participants were asked to rate their alcohol and other drug use according to a simple scale – not a problem, hardly a problem, a medium problem, a serious problem – before release and at each interview post-release. Prior to release very few rated their drug use as either a medium or serious problem. But cumulatively, the numbers rating their drug use as a problem increased significantly, and many said their alcohol or other drug use was a significant factor in their return to prison. But importantly, many associated their increased use with lack of support and stable housing and having to live or stay in unsuitable accommodation and localities. We believe participants under-rated their drug problems quite significantly both pre- and post-release. Pre-release there is the well-known halo effect whereby people about to be released are more optimistic about their capacities and future than is warranted and feeling in control of drug problems is part of this. Also, denial that one is an alcoholic or that other drugs are an overwhelming problem is one of the biggest hurdles for a person to get over before the problem can be addressed. Thus it is not surprising that participants did not admit to drug problems in the numbers we believe would have been realistic. We asked about alcohol, heroin, speed and other drugs (marijuana, cocaine, pills). The results were similar indicating the worse the drug problem, the more likely the person was to be returned to prison. We report only the results for heroin as the example.

4.2.16 Heroin

Table 15 Heroin use post-release a problem

Heroin problem	Not/hardly	Med/serious	Total
Not returned	124 (70%)	7 (16%)	132
Returned	54 (30%)	36 (84%)	90
Total	179	43	222

These differences are significant. Returning to, or increasing drug use was referred to constantly by participants as being a result of deteriorating personal circumstances, the cause of relationship breakdowns, a problem they were trying to deal with and was associated with returning to prison.

.. problems with financing drug treatment .. (female aged 33)

Had to move from Mum's because she doesn't like me using drugs (male aged 18)

.. stayed with my brother, I bought drugs he paid the rent but that didn't work out, then on the run (female aged 30)

D&A was helpful but it was more the people I hung out with (male aged 18)

Bad accommodation played a big part.. about drug use .. I need a dry out centre (male aged 32)

They [coke, heroin] are the reason why I am back here now. Have to do crime to get the money together. (Male aged 32)

This is about my twentieth go at detoxing...I keep going back to using every time when I'm under pressure. (Female aged 28)

A detox centre would be better than jail (male aged 18)

It was all good, then I got onto the drugs when I was homeless (female aged 32)

These results only confirm what alcohol and other drug researchers have shown. But the significant results reported here are an indication of the growing problem alcohol and other drug use posed for these releasees. Their self-assessments accorded with the progressively negative association between worsening drug problems and a higher likelihood of return to prison.

4.2.17 Gender

We had deliberately over-represented women in the sample because, if we had included them proportionally according to their numbers in prison (7%) we would not have had the numbers to perform valid analyses.

Women participants (87 of the 339 participants) were more likely to return to prison over the 9-month study period than their male counterparts. Of the men in the sample 78 (31%) returned to prison whereas 37 (43%) women returned.

Table 16 Gender returned post-release

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Not returned	174 (69%)	50 (57%)	224
Returned	78 (31%)	37 (43%)	115
Total	252	87	339

This is a significant result. Women appear to have had greater problems than their male counterparts securing suitable accommodation. Proportionally far fewer were living with parents, partners or close family than the men were.

4.2.18 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

There were 57 Indigenous Australian participants. Of these 29 or 51% had been re-incarcerated by the 9-month point whereas only 31% of the non-Indigenous sample had been returned to prison.

Table 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander returned post-release

A&TSI	ATSI	Not ATSI	total
Not returned	28 (49%)	196 (69%)	224
Returned	29 (51%)	86 (31%)	115
Total	57	282	339

Of those Aboriginal participants returned to prison 23 were from NSW and 6 from Victoria. Thus both states saw a return rate of 51% for Indigenous Australians. Indigenous women represented almost half of the Indigenous sample. The women returned to prison at a greater rate than Indigenous men with 68% of the Indigenous women back in prison at nine months compared with 36% of the Indigenous men. None of the Indigenous participants had lived in a family home post-release and there was reliance on public and publicly assisted housing. But many of the women were unable to secure public housing upon release due to debt and being in poor standing with the Housing Authority. It was not uncommon for these women to have allowed family or friends to use their Departmental house whilst they were in prison and for the house to have been damaged. The women then bore the responsibility for that damage.

Half of the NSW Indigenous participants had come from and returned to 2 clusters of suburbs in Sydney, 1 in South Western, the other in Western Sydney. Almost all moved more than once each 3 months with most moving a number of times but the moves were between the same few places in these concentrated areas. There was a strong trend towards poorer housing and living alone with 80% of those few still out of prison living alone at the 9-month interview. Fully half of those Indigenous participants out of prison at 9 months were homeless.

4.2.19 Where were participants living?

Participants came from, went back to and called home a small number of suburbs and towns in both NSW and Victoria.

This is another area of significant difference between NSW and Victoria. In NSW by far the majority of participants came from and went back to a very small number of clustered suburbs and towns in eight areas. These suburbs and towns are clustered in the South West and West

of Sydney, the Newcastle and Wollongong area and in three places on the North Coast, and in the West of NSW. Although a majority in Victoria came from and went back to suburbs and towns that were disadvantaged, they were not as clustered as in NSW although there was some clustering around a disadvantaged area outside of Melbourne and in two areas within Melbourne.

4.2.20 *Housing costs*

The majority indicated that they paid very little for housing. This was clearly because they were living with others who paid the rent / owned the house, or were homeless or were in public housing. There was though a significant minority renting privately and paying over 30% of their incomes on housing. In NSW, the small number in private rental at 9 months was paying 50-70% of income for housing. Those living in Sydney had the most difficult time.

Prices here are insane. I pay 150 per week for a room with a fridge. That's the cheapest I could find without having to pay a huge bond. (Male aged 25)

I could just about live on the dole if rent was reasonable...but I have had to beg and beg [family, friends] to keep going.. (Male aged 26)

4.2.21 *Comments by participants regarding how things have gone*

There were a number of themes not or only partly canvassed by the findings so far, that participants raised in regard to why things had gone badly or well for them.

Relationships with partners and family

Participants raised the difficulties they experienced, often to do with housing, when their relationships with others went badly.

In and out of my parents' place – the dynamic hasn't been right (female aged 33)

Moved because of arguments mainly – couldn't see eye to eye (male aged 32)

In and out of my Mum's – she doesn't like me using drugs (male aged 18)

My relationship busted up and I had to move back to my Mum's but I didn't want to be a burden so I moved in with a mate but moved out again (male aged 25)

Fucking-up on the family front takes a long time to fix up (female aged 33)

My problems are more about my relationship with my ex (male aged 28)

Main problem has been conflict with my wife (male aged 40)

Accommodation is pretty difficult with family stress (male aged 26)

When things went well they often put it down to family help and support.

. having a lot of family support (female aged 33; female aged 23; male aged 34)

I was lucky my partner could help (male aged 40)

Not being able to find a suitable agency or not meeting agency criteria

A number of people commented on their inability to find an agency that would work with them.

There's nothing in my area or age group (male aged 33)

I tried the S agency and others but there was nothing (male aged 43)

I got a sheet of numbers from Y agency that were all disconnected (male aged 32)

I've been out for 6 months and I'm not eligible – where do I go? (female aged 33)

Intensive parole was a farce – I didn't fit into their programs (male aged 33)

I didn't fit Z or W agencies' criteria (male aged 32)

Police harassment

Many participants felt the police were keeping them under surveillance, were making life difficult and were creating barriers to progressing.

I often feel angry – the police are on at me all the time. I live in a small country town and there is nothing going on so they are always at my door and have gone through my place a couple of times .. they blocked my application to get my Ps (male aged 33)

I did courses and my parole but the police are the main problem (male aged 43)

4.3 Are there predictors from this study of return to prison?

We used a logistic regression to try to determine whether any of the significant factors we had derived were predictors of being re-incarcerated. The factors most highly predictive of return to prison were worsening problems with use of heroin and moving often.

Table 18 Predictors of return to prison using Logistic Regression

Variables	B	Sig
Moving often	1.445	000
Worsening Heroin problem	2.354	000

We were not surprised that a worsening heroin use problem was a predictor of re-incarcerated, as heroin is an illegal substance. But being transient or homeless is not an illegal activity and the fact that it is a predictor of re-incarceration is of serious concern.

4.3.22 Conclusion

The results reported above provide, for the first time in Australia, statistically valid and reliable data about a general sample of people being released from NSW and Victorian prisons. Limitations to the sample were that there were groups who did not volunteer to be interviewed such as those who spoke little or no English and those who identified as having a mental illness or intellectual disability. There were some in the sample who obviously had a mental illness or disturbance as, post-release, they indicated they had some difficulties with their mental health.

The results reported above are discussed in the following section.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Accommodation and related social matters

The results of this study paint a generally grim picture of life for a majority of the prison releasees in this study, with those in NSW faring worse in securing reasonable housing and employment than their Victorian counterparts.

The discussion is based on responses to and reflection upon the research aims and objectives.

5.1.1 *Housing*

The number of times a participant moved, according to the logistic regression, was the housing factor most predictive of re-incarceration and things going badly in general for the releasees in this study. . In our interim findings we speculated that there was a small core of highly transient ex-prisoners who could not find stable housing. This has turned out to not be the case. Far from being a small core, fully half of the participants we were able to locate were transient, that is they were moving two or more times between interviews. This is an extraordinary finding with ex-prisoners surely representing one the most transient groups in Australia. Participants made causal links between having to move often and deteriorating relations with family members or friends, increasing drug use, unsuitability of accommodation location, expense of accommodation and not wanting to be a burden by staying too long with friends and relations. Of course what comes first, having to move or these other problems is impossible for us to determine and it is probably not a case of simply a one-way causal relationship. This accords very closely with Robinson's (2003) discussion of iterative homelessness in the case of those with mental disorders and of course as we have noted, we believe a number who did not identify as having a mental disorder in our sample did. The key matter here is the need to provide support for those releasees who are finding stable housing, family or other relationships and / or drug use to be serious problems.

On the other hand living in stable, supportive accommodation, such as with parents (where parents are not part of the criminological problem for the participant) or in a stable supported housing setting is strongly associated with things going well post-release. Employment together with stable housing was highly associated with doing well in Victoria. It is virtually impossible to get employment without stable housing so the priority of suitable housing for releasees is obvious. Because there was such a strong association between moving often and returning to prison, and between moving often and having been incarcerated before, stable housing can be further identified with helping releasees break the cycle of offending and re-incarceration. Secure and stable housing is also associated with being less visible on the streets and therefore being targeted less by the police, although some participants in stable housing were still objects of frequent police attention. Participants commented on harassment by police, being stopped and questioned (some felt goaded) even when there was no immediate reason to do so. Being known to the police, being on the streets and being at a loose end (no employment or other engaging activity) were quite clearly factors in the cycle of participants' criminal justice involvement. When it is remembered that 80% of the sample had been incarcerated for 12 months or less and half for 6 months or less, the worsening social dislocation they experienced post-release suggests the negative impact of short sentences for both ex-prisoners and the community.

Two-thirds of participants said they had some support post-release but half of them said that support was not helpful. We included moral, financial, practical and counselling or therapeutic support in this category. We asked about support specifically associated with housing. Few had helpful support as part of their housing. Those who did tended to be those living with parents, partners or family members who were actively helpful with encouragement, real interest in whether the participant was doing well and finances. The results point to support being a very important aspect in helping releasees overcome social, personal and financial barriers to integration post-release because those who rated their support helpful were far less likely to return to prison and commented on its importance in helping them manage. Support was seen as helpful when: it made a participant feel worthwhile and respected if he or she

achieved something; there was encouragement and belief in them throughout difficult periods; financial or other practical help allowed a participant to get through a crisis or to the point of moving ahead. As so many in the sample ended up living alone, isolation and lack of support become particular matters of importance. It was certainly our impression that the majority of those living alone and out of prison at the time we last spoke with them were most vulnerable to transience, re-offending and re-incarceration.

5.1.2 Agencies

Parole needs to be explored because contact with parole was associated with not going back to prison. At the pre-release interview, we were surprised at the large number of participants in NSW who said they were on parole; this was not the same in Victoria where about one third said they were on parole. We expected the same percentage to be on parole in NSW but found that about two thirds said they were on parole. This was laid down to the increasing use of what is called court parole as opposed to parole issued by the Parole Board. Court parole, (a short period of parole following a short prison sentence) may be given by a magistrate to convicted persons who are sentenced to a short period, for example one or two months, in prison. This kind of parole is not under the control of the Parole Board. In such cases the parole period may have few or no requirements. For example the NSW Parole Board requires a person to have suitable accommodation before being released on parole but this is not the case with court parole. It may thus be of little effect in providing a support contact for participants. This was found to be the case, with a majority in NSW who were on court parole, not seeing a parole officer prior to, nor after release. Those who benefited from contact with the parole service (significantly fewer with parole contact returned to prison) were those who appeared to be on supervised parole. Having to have accommodation arranged before release on parole and an attentive parole officer may help some secure stable accommodation and may provide support where there might otherwise be none.

There was virtually no integration of services or programmes for the majority of participants. The majority who tried to resolve housing problems was not helped or not able to be helped by other agencies and those who went to AOD rehabilitation programmes did not see these as part of their accommodation support. Most participants avoided services and programmes unless they absolutely had to attend (such as going to Centrelink and seeing their parole officer). The insular or limited nature of many agency services for ex-prisoners is marked.

It did not appear to be the case that those still out at nine months but who had not found stable housing made more use of services to help them stay out. These participants were mainly those who said they were living alone and were still moving fairly often. We think it is likely most will return to prison and the only difference between them and those who have already returned is largely luck.

This is not to say some participants did not benefit substantially from NGO services and the newly emerging Government services, such as the Centrelink intensive Personal support. Specialist services with experience and knowledge of the post-release context were most helpful. But a number of things stand out. The two main problems noted by participants and obvious to us, were:

- the severe lack of such services compared with the need and in particular the lack of suitable housing with integrated support, and
- the lack of organisation in the prisons to ensure pre-release information and support is available for short term prisoners. Of course this is of little use if there is no stable, suitable and affordable accommodation available for them in the community.

None of our participants were living in specialist ex-prisoner accommodation although a number used other services provided by ex-prisoner agencies. This highlights the scarcity of specialist accommodation and also the barriers posed by the strict entry criteria many have. For example the need to be newly released rather than being out for a month or two. We found some participants felt unable or unwilling to live in a group house, and although we have examples gathered independently from this sample of very successful group houses, they do not suit everyone. Although as noted, Victoria seemed to be doing better in the matter of stable

housing than NSW, the lack of suitable housing was a striking feature of the whole sample. Another obvious matter was the poor information available to most participants upon release and post-release. Most either did not receive any information, did not receive it in a form that was understandable or useful, or information they did receive was wrong or out of date. In the instances where information was accurate and forthcoming, participants found it useful.

5.1.3 Particular groups of participants

Indigenous Australian participants

The most severely disadvantaged group amongst all participants was Indigenous women in NSW. These women experienced the highest rate of re-incarceration and homelessness in the sample. We noted in our interim report that these Aboriginal women had had a dedicated worker who had contacted them prior to release and we thus expected that they might manage better with that support. But they did not. Further investigation indicated that the Indigenous women's worker was battling extreme odds in trying to help her clients. A fundamental problem was her inability to find suitable housing for most of the women. There seem to be a number of reasons for this. Most of these women were multiple recidivists and had little in the way of accumulated social or material goods prior to incarceration. Most had children and needed appropriate housing in an appropriate area; some had parole conditions precluding them from living with various family members; a number had debts or other problems with the Housing Department. All had served short sentences, and cycling in and out of prison was almost the norm, almost a way of life for these women. Going to prison did not prepare them nor create pathways to successful community living.

Sole parents

Women sole parents (some of whom were Indigenous) were the next most disadvantaged with many having serious problems securing suitable housing for themselves and their children. This seemed to be associated with cumulative problems such as AOD issues, poverty, isolation, housing debt and unhelpful or absent partners.

Young single males

Most young men in NSW and some in Victoria who had hoped for housing with their parents or other family members were sorely disappointed. Most had been sent packing or had left voluntarily by 2 months post-release because of drug use, bad behaviour, fights over a variety of issues or not wanting to outwear their welcome.

Those with a disability

As we noted earlier, prisoners with a mental illness or disturbance either did not volunteer to participate or did not self-identify as having a mental health problem. We feel that quite a number of the participants who had not identified as having a mental health problem either suffered episodes of mental disturbance or experienced a worsening of their mental health state post-release. This is based on the problems some said they experienced and on things said by family members. It would not be at all surprising if this were the case given the strong associations shown in other studies between homelessness, having a mental health problem, incarceration and drug use. But we are unable to report anything concrete in regard to ex-prisoners with a mental illness.

It must also be remembered, as we reported in our interim findings, that we did not seek participants from prisons with specialist disability sections such as Intellectual Disability units or Psychiatric units. Thus such people are under-represented in our sample.

Of those who did identify as having a disability, most said they had a physical disability. There were no significant findings regarding persons with a disability.

5.1.4 Remandees

Initially we had a reasonable number of remandees volunteering to be included in the study. Unfortunately most of them were those who were not released when they thought they would be and so could not be included. Some did not even get as far as being counted in the sample even though they did the interview because it became clear by the end of the interview that

their release date was unclear. We have some qualitative observations about those with whom we did talk. Just as with the sentenced participants, remandees seemed to have precarious housing arrangements, made worse by the uncertainty of the time they would spend in prison.

5.1.5 *Geographical concentration*

Almost all participants came from and went back to disadvantaged suburbs and towns that, in NSW in particular, were concentrated in just a small number of areas. These are places in the top 30 seriously disadvantaged places in NSW and Victoria in Vinson's (1999) study of cumulative disadvantage. Indigenous participants were the most highly geographically clustered in NSW and were returning to disadvantaged communities with no capacity to support them. Aboriginal women in particular often were returning to situations of abuse and violence but had no where else to go.

Work in the USA is indicating that communities with significant numbers of their members going into and returning from prison become depleted of the social and economic capacity to support themselves and the ex-prisoners (Travis et al 2001). The situation creates a vicious cycle. This is certainly observable in the clustered areas and disadvantaged places to which most of our sample returned. Not surprisingly, these areas were places of high unemployment, often with high levels of public housing and poorly serviced by public transport. Many participants commented that they wished to get away from these areas because they were not at all conducive to beating their drug problems, staying away from old associates or resolving relationship problems. Those who did try to find accommodation elsewhere could not afford the rental costs or ended up in very precarious housing such as caravans and in any case, this housing was still in disadvantaged areas.

5.1.6 *Specialist ex-prisoner accommodation*

As noted already, none of our sample was able to secure accommodation in one of the specialist supported accommodation services in either Victoria or NSW. That is not very surprising given their scarcity and relatively low turnover of clients. Most clients stay between three and six months and most such group houses have less than 12 places. At the beginning of the research it was estimated that there were about 50 accommodation spaces in each state although these increased in Victoria during the research period.

We have information on these specialist ex-prisoner agencies collected independently of the quantitative and qualitative data forming the bulk of this study. Some of this information is taken from agencies' own evaluations and some from discussion with some agencies and their clients. One agency for example, Community Restorative Centre (CRC) based in NSW, was so disappointed that none of our sample was living in CRC accommodation that it ran a parallel study. CRC collected the same information as we did from all the ex-prisoners (if willing) who either were in or came into its SAAP funded crisis house over the 3 months we recruited our sample and followed up at three and six months. Of its sample of 15 men, none were back in prison at six months, twelve had stable secure housing and six had work or were studying (only one had had employment prior to prison). This sample from CRC cannot be taken as comparable to the sample we gathered because it is very small, most who enter the support houses have served longer sentences than was the average in our sample and most are referred by welfare or parole officers prior to being released. This is quite a different situation to the majority of our study participants as most had been on short sentences and most had not had a chance to even see a welfare or parole officer prior to release. Nevertheless, CRC's information is of assistance in pointing to the benefits of support. The crisis house, like most of the supported ex-prisoner hostels, has support available 24 hours a day and is attentive to the range of issues facing the ex-prisoner such as alcohol and other drug use, training and employment, relations with family, isolation, lack of purpose and depression.

Comparing the costs of prison and supported accommodation not surprisingly indicates that supported post-release housing is less expensive than prison. It costs between \$45,000 (minimum security) and \$100,000 (super maximum security) to imprison a person in Australian prisons for a year. It costs between \$20,000 (non-intensive support) and \$35,000 (24 hour support) per year for supported accommodation for an ex-prisoner (CRC figures, Guthrie House figures).

Close consideration must be given to the very high costs of sending a person to prison for a short sentence compared to the benefits of punishment and reparation, such as community service orders which by the way appear to have much better outcomes in terms of recidivism than prison (Maruna & LeBel 2003), based in the community. The induction procedure for prison is very costly and time consuming. A person sentenced to a month's imprisonment must be assessed fully as if being admitted for years, a case-plan drawn up, health checks made, the person must be classified, probably moved from the reception prison to another prison and issued with clothing and other prison requirements. He or she may well experience violence along the way. Whilst this is going on, their housing (if they had any) is likely to be lost to them, a job (if they one) gone and family relations often worsened. Then they are released without having seen an education officer, a welfare officer, a parole officer or a transitional worker. The whole exercise has cost many thousands of dollars because most of the induction takes place in maximum security conditions at around \$200 per day, usually far more than the financial worth of the crime committed. It has, as seen from the results of this research, probably sent the ex-prisoner into a state of homelessness, worse than when he or she entered prison, and then re-incarceration, unless suitable housing support interventions are made. The negative outcomes for the ex-prisoner, his or her family and the general community are quite obvious.

A comment here regarding persons on remand is appropriate. As noted in the findings remandees appeared to be in an equally parlous state in regard to housing as their sentences counterparts. When it is realised that some 50% of remandees in NSW do not receive a prison sentence at the end of their remand period (Thompson 2001), the financial and social costs of remand for petty offenders should also be questioned.

5.1.7 Participants' assessments of services

Participants' own assessments of their housing circumstances and support proved highly accurate in predicting return or otherwise to prison. Prisoners and ex-prisoners' views of what would be helpful and what they need are generally not sought, or if they are given are ignored. Rather than taking the view that only the professional knows what the ex-prisoner needs, services that work with the knowledge prisoners and ex-prisoners bring are likely to be more successful than those developed by 'experts' alone. The Sisters Inside agency in Queensland is an example of an ex-prisoner developed and run post-release service with a successful record in helping recently released women find housing and providing them with support.

5.2 General Discussion

The significance of the findings above are highlighted when compared to housing data on the general Australian population.

71% of Australian households live in their own home (either owned or paying mortgage) (ABS 2001) whereas 24% of this sample prior to incarceration and only 21.4% post-release were living in their family owned home.

26% of Australian households rent either from private or public landlords (ABS 2001) whereas 56% of this sample was renting prior to incarceration and 40% post-release (the difference is explained by the increase in homelessness and use of marginal housing such as crisis and hostel accommodation).

20% of those households in Australia that were renting were renting from housing authorities (ABS 2001) whereas 44% of those in the pre-release sample and 52% of the post-release sample who were renting were renting from housing authorities.

6% of all households in Australia were living in public housing (ABS 2001) whereas 25% of the pre-release sample and 26% of the post-release sample were living in public housing.

38% of Indigenous households in Australia own or are buying their own home (ABS 2001) whereas no Indigenous participants either owned their own home or lived in a home owned by their family prior to release or post-release.

Less than one percent of Australians (or Australian households) (ABS 2001) are homeless or living in highly marginal circumstances whereas at least 18% of this sample was living in such circumstances prior to incarceration and at least 28% of the post-release sample were doing

so. As explained in the results, these are likely to be gross underestimates with half the sample moving two or more times between the three monthly interviews.

These comparisons provide stark evidence of the housing poverty and distress of the participants in this study. For the majority of participants, circumstances were worse and exponentially worse for the most disadvantaged such as Indigenous participants, post-release. This housing distress can be associated with the number of times they have moved and been incarcerated before, their lack of family or availability of helpful professional support and their worsening drug use. For many their family and friends were part of their problem and it was unhelpful to be forced to return to them for accommodation but most had no option. Those who were doing reasonably well were those who had not moved often, had employment, and had supportive families (particularly where the family was able to offer material support like money), parole officer or agency worker.

These findings are highly reminiscent of Corden's research (1978, 1983) in which short-term petty offenders upon release were likely to be socially isolated, & marginally housed or homeless. Corden's participants moved between hostels and the street often preferring the street to the institutionalised nature of homeless hostels.

It is as if each time a person is imprisoned, a little more of the social and other resources (like somewhere to live) that they may have held, even tenuously, are stripped away or lost. There appears to be a serial depletion each time persons already in disadvantaged circumstances are incarcerated and released. Their already meagre social and economic resources are leeched away if there is no intervention to stop it. This cycle began very quickly upon release for about half of the participants. It would be more appropriate to refer to a situation of homelessness than attempt to unravel the web of interconnected causes. The support that seems to work well both from this study and as noted in recent international literature is holistic support whether it be informally from the family or from a professional. Such support treats the ex-prisoner as a whole human being rather than just treating what are assessed as the deficits of the person (Maruna & LeBell 2003). Nevertheless this study has provided results not brought together before by showing that moving often post-release is a predictive factor in a person's return to prison. That does not mean that just ensuring an ex-prisoner has stable affordable housing will prevent him or her from returning to prison, but it does mean that he or she will be better off than if they were moving every week or so. And when stable housing is combined with helpful support that assists in addressing things like drug problems, family relations and employment the evidence from this study is that ex-prisoners are much less likely to return to prison.

6. POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The lack of stable, secure, supported housing for persons being released from prison is the major policy and program issue to arise from this study. This study has provided evidence that a period in prison, especially a short period, far from rehabilitating an offender, leads to a worse social context post-release than prior to imprisonment for many. As far as housing is concerned, the policy of imprisonment for short sentences for petty crime seriously destabilises at least half of those imprisoned and results in re-offending and re-incarceration. This knowledge should inform policy development and implementation. It is only our surmise, but one of the reasons Victorian participants fared better may be the fact that the rate of imprisonment is half that of NSW and therefore the proportional impact on communities supporting returning ex-prisoners is significantly less. In broad policy terms, the increasing scarcity of long term public and social housing in areas where there are education and employment opportunities for poor and disadvantaged members of society, the increasing push towards head-leasing private rental properties as a solution in an unregulated rental market and the un-affordability of housing particularly in Sydney leaves people being released from prison in an impossible position as far as accommodation is concerned. This came through consistently in the qualitative data.

There are many policy and practice implications arising from the research regarding ex-prisoners and housing, some of which are already being taken up in some states. We propose the following:

- Prior to release connection needs to be made with each and every prisoner by a case-worker to establish the person's housing and support situation with a view to post-release support. The caseworker should be someone who works consistently with the same prisoner / ex-prisoner. The parole service used to do this with all prisoners and it could well return to that role if it was provided with increased resources.
- Up-to-date and accurate release and post-release information should be provided, in a manner relevant to the prisoner, to all prisoners prior to release.
- A multi-agency team approach to housing, health, mental health, AOD and employment (Centrelink matters), including ex-prisoners' views and knowledge, is required. Coordination and integration of programs and services is vital. For example the Victorian Human Services Department is running a number of trials to support ex-prisoners, Corrections Health Service in NSW has just finished running a trial transition program for those with drug problems.
- A continuum of supported housing is required. Some ex-prisoners require 24 hour intensive support in a group setting upon release, others require independent living with less intensive support.
- Support to parents and other family members of ex-prisoners, where the ex-prisoner has moved in with these family members, should be made available.
- Stable housing should be established for releasees from the outset with support to help maintain that housing.
- Support workers should be well-trained in relevant fields
- Advocacy by the case-worker should be available where necessary to help deal with housing debt, rental and rent assistance matters.
- Specialised Indigenous women's post-release supported housing should be developed.
- Holistic strengths-based (rather than deficit based) post-release programs should be run in association with supported housing. (An example of such a program is the BASE program run by the Newtown NSW Parole Office).
- Attention should be given to assisting prison releasees to settle away from negative locations and to reducing the concentration of ex-prisoners in highly disadvantaged areas.

- Work to build community strength and cohesion in cumulatively disadvantaged areas from which most prisoners come and return should be continued and expanded.
- Bail houses should be provided to keep a substantial number of remandees currently held in prison, out of prison. This may help reduce the social depletion they suffer.

6.1 Conclusion

As stable supported housing has been shown by this research to be so crucial in the social integration of people being released from prison, it is clearly a matter governments and relevant agencies should address via policy and program implementation. Providing support that assists ex-prisoners to find and stay in suitable housing has emerged as one of the most significant things in helping them integrate into the wider community. Dealing with AOD matters becomes easier when housing is stable and lives are not constantly in chaos through frequent moves or living on the streets. And employment becomes a possibility in those circumstances as well. Where participants did not have helpful support from family a number commented on the helpfulness of relevant support workers, like those from ex-prisoner agencies or a parole officer. Thus support is a vital ingredient with stable housing. The high rate of frequent moves among this ex-prisoner sample, particularly in NSW, is indicative of institutional failure to address the post-release period as a serious, in fact vital period in which to work intensively to prevent recidivism and improve the social and economic circumstances of those caught in the revolving door of imprisonment.

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