

# Stress and Hardship after Prison<sup>1</sup>

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The historic increase in U.S. incarceration rates made the transition from prison to community common for poor, prime-age men and women. Leaving prison presents the challenge of social integration—of connecting with family and finding housing and a means of subsistence. The authors study variation in social integration in the first months after prison release with data from the Boston Reentry Study, a unique panel survey of 122 newly released prisoners. The data indicate severe material hardship immediately after incarceration. Over half of sample respondents were unemployed, two-thirds received public assistance, and many relied on female relatives for financial support and housing. Older respondents and those with histories of addiction and mental illness were the least socially integrated, with weak family ties, unstable housing, and low levels of employment. Qualitative interviews show that anxiety and feelings of isolation accompanied extreme material insecurity. Material insecurity combined with the adjustment to social life outside prison creates a stress of transition that burdens social relationships in high-incarceration communities.

The growth of U.S. incarceration rates transformed the character of social life in poor communities. Prison admissions and releases were concentrated in poor urban neighborhoods, and imprisonment became a common life event for recent birth cohorts of men, particularly minorities, with little school-

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by grant 5R21HD073761-02 from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health; SES-1259013 from the National Science Foundation; a grant from the Russell Sage Foundation; and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. We gratefully acknowledge the Boston Reentry Study respondents and the significant as-

ing (Pettit and Western 2004; Sampson and Loeffler 2010; Pettit 2012). In 2010, over 700,000 people were released from prison, and incarceration rates for male high school dropouts under age 40 reached 12% for whites and 35% for African-Americans (Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014). A burgeoning research literature studied the social and economic effects of incarceration (Wakefield and Uggen [2010] provide a review). Criminologists examined the population turnover associated with incarceration in inner-city neighborhoods (Clear 2009). The return of former prisoners to their communities, termed “prisoner reentry,” also became an important focus of criminal justice policy (Petersilia 2003; Travis 2005).

The process of transition from prison to community affects the larger relationship between the penal system and the poor communities from which penal populations are drawn. Irwin (1970, p. 107) describes the inmate’s challenge of “withstanding the initial impact” of moving from institution to community. Visher and Travis (2003, p. 96) argue that understanding the “pathways of reintegration after prison release” involves focusing on “the complex dynamic of the moment of release.” Risks to health, mostly related to drug overdose, were found to be acute immediately after incarceration (Binswanger et al. 2007). Despite severe risks, program intervention may be most effective in the first months of community return (Redcross et al. 2012). Survey data also indicate the great fluidity of the postincarceration period and motivation for criminal desistance appears to be especially strong (Nelson, Deess, and Allen 1999). In short, the long-term effects of incarceration on communities depends partly on the many individual experiences of the first months after prison release.

While the transition from prison to community may have enduring effects, the process also became important in its own right as part of the population dynamics of poor urban neighborhoods. Considering the web of social relationships in poor neighborhoods, incarceration is chiefly important for the separation it yields between an individual and a community. Leaving prison presents the formerly incarcerated with the task of social integration, of establishing membership in free society, of forming or reestablishing relationships, and of learning new social roles.

Despite historically high rates of prison release and research on the effects of imprisonment, there are few detailed accounts of the process of

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sistance of the Massachusetts Department of Correction, which provided access to correctional facilities and advice and collaboration throughout the research. The data for this article are from the Boston Reentry Study, a research project conducted by Bruce Western, Anthony Braga, and Rhiana Kohl. We thank Devah Pager, Alice Goffman, Simon Jackman, and Rob Sampson, the Justice and Inequality Reading Group, and the *AJS* reviewers for helpful comments. Direct correspondence to Bruce Western, Department of Sociology, Harvard University, 33 Kirkland Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138. E-mail: western@wjh.harvard.edu

entering society after incarceration.<sup>2</sup> Being weakly attached to stable households, unevenly involved in mainstream social roles, and sometimes on the run, prison releasees are an elusive population for research (Goffman 2014; Harding et al. 2014). We offer a framework for studying social integration immediately after prison and provide an empirical analysis of the first six months of community return for a sample of men and women going to the Boston area. Using a unique data source, the Boston Reentry Study (BRS), we measure social integration with indicators of family support, housing, and subsistence through employment and government programs. We study how social integration varies with personal characteristics, criminal justice supervision, and respondents' isolation from social life in the first week of release.

Studying variation in social integration also sheds light on the effects of incarceration. Measurement and causal inference are challenging for a disadvantaged and transient population often detached from mainstream institutions. Still, close observation of the process of prison release suggests a causal mechanism linking incarceration to poor outcomes: the stress of transition from prison to community. The stress of transition describes the anxiety of adjusting to social interaction in free society under conditions of severe material deprivation. At the individual level, the stress of transition may impair mental health, trigger relapse, and more generally slow the process of social integration. At a community level, the stress of transition broadly burdens social relationships in localities with high incarceration rates.

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION AFTER PRISON

Imprisonment is segregative. Its conclusion creates for former prisoners the task of entering and establishing themselves in free society. Policy analysts use the term "prisoner reentry" to describe the exit from incarceration. Often, however, former prisoners move to different communities from those where they originated (Harding, Morenoff, and Herbert 2013; Massoglia, Firebaugh, and Warner 2013). For some with histories of juvenile incarceration, prison release may offer the first opportunity to live as an adult

<sup>2</sup> The Urban Institute's pioneering Returning Home project fielded longitudinal surveys of released prisoners in several states, but this research suffered from high rates of attrition, and the samples consisted mostly of parolees (e.g., Visher, LaVigne, and Travis 2004; Travis 2005). Ethnographers in high-incarceration communities have closely observed the involvement of poor men in the criminal justice system, but prison release has not been a key topic in most studies (e.g., Sullivan 1989; Black 2010; Goffman 2014). In one of the few recent studies of the process of prison release, Harding et al. (2014) provide an excellent discussion of material deprivation among 24 prisoners released in Michigan (see also Fader 2013; Leverentz 2014).

in a noninstitutional setting. In these cases, leaving incarceration is not so much resuming an earlier residence (reentry) but simply a transition from prison to community.

Becoming a member of a community after prison is a process of social integration. Joining a community involves more than just living in a given place. Community membership conveys attachment to a social compact comprising a set of roles and conferring a basic level of living. We define the first steps to social integration as the development of family relationships, finding a place to stay, and obtaining a means of subsistence. Connections to family, residence, and an income provide the preconditions for more fully developed relationships to state and community that have historically defined full citizenship.

Social integration involves simultaneously establishing community belonging and material security. Ties to family, a stable residence, and a means of subsistence allow full participation in community life and fulfillment of the socially valued roles of kin, citizen, and worker. Estrangement from family, housing insecurity, and income poverty leave former prisoners at the margins of society with little access to the mainstream social roles and opportunities that characterize full community participation. Our focus on social integration broadens the definition of “success” after incarceration. In contrast to the usual focus on recidivism, a successful transition from prison in our analysis involves attaining a basic level of material and social well-being consistent with community membership (e.g., Irwin 1970, p. 175).

As suppliers of housing, income support, and social connection, families play a key role in normalizing the lives of those coming out of prison. Research on criminal desistance, showing that strong and stable romantic relationships can be turning points in criminal careers, provides one example of the integrative role of families (Sampson and Laub 1993; Warr 1998). Recent research on incarceration and family life extends the study of desistance by examining relationships with partners and children (e.g., Comfort 2008; Wakefield and Wildeman 2013). Still, romantic relationships can be destabilizing, particularly when partners are dependent on drugs or involved in crime (Leverentz 2011; Wyse, Harding, and Morenoff 2014). These cases suggest that parents, grandparents, and siblings, rather than partners, may be important sources of emotional and material support (Martinez and Christian 2009; Leverentz 2011). To study the integrative role of family, we consider the role of partners and kin in providing the positive contributions of money and housing.

Stable housing is also basic to social integration. Still, only a few studies have examined homelessness and housing insecurity immediately after incarceration (Travis 2005, chap. 9; Metraux, Roman, and Cho 2007). Data

from New York and Philadelphia indicate that 4%–11% of released prisoners stayed in homeless shelters at some point in the two years after release. In Massachusetts, around 10% of prisoners were found to exit directly to homeless shelters in the late 1990s (Metraux et al. 2007, p. 5). Research on incarceration and housing insecurity has mostly studied shelter use, although a more complete account would also examine transitional housing, single-room housing, and rooming with family. In the analysis below we consider several different kinds of housing and try to assess the quality and security of housing with qualitative interviews.

Finally, a regular income immediately after incarceration can meet a variety of other needs. For a population of largely prime-age men, employment is a significant source of income in the first months after prison release. Employment also helps build pride, social status, and a daily routine (Sullivan 1989). However, average earnings are extremely low after incarceration, and unemployment has been found to exceed 30% (e.g., Kling 2006; Western 2006). With low wages and high unemployment, welfare programs provide another important source of income (Harding et al. 2014). Below we analyze rates of employment and receipt of public assistance in the six months after incarceration.

Research on recidivism and the effects of incarceration suggests how family ties, housing, and financial support might vary across the population of ex-prisoners. We explain variation in social integration with theories of formal social control, socioeconomic disadvantage, the life course, histories of addiction and mental illness, and the dynamics of social isolation.

The transition from prison to community is in many ways a criminal justice process. The formal social control of imprisonment concludes, and, for many, community supervision by a probation or parole officer begins. Imprisonment itself might influence the transition to community through the effects of prison conditions on releasees. Across the great variety of penal conditions—the security levels of prisons or the availability of programs, for example—separation from the community remains the fundamental fact of incarceration. Long periods of penal confinement separate inmates from the socialization of work and family, leaving them poorly equipped for independent living (Glaser 1964; Straus 1974). Often, the current incarceration is just the most recent in a life history preceded by detention in local jails and juvenile facilities. Connections to family and friends tend to erode with lengthy terms of incarceration and histories of prolonged institutionalization. Behavioral adaptations to prison also become more ingrained (Clemmer 1940; Flanagan 1981; Glaze and Bonczar 2010). Long sentences and long histories of incarceration are likely to impede social integration by weakening family ties and socializing inmates into the routines and interactions of prison life.

Formal social control often continues after prison with some kind of community supervision (Carson and Golinelli 2013, p. 4).<sup>3</sup> Probation and parole supervision usually requires regular drug testing and checks of employment and residence, and violators risk reincarceration. These conditions of supervision are intended to promote employment and reduce recidivism. Consistent with these goals, labor market studies report that parolees have higher employment rates after release than before incarceration (Pettit and Lyons 2007; Tyler and Kling 2007). We expect probationers and parolees to have higher rates of employment and housing security to comply with the conditions of supervision.

Prisoners mostly come from poor backgrounds, but those leaving prison still differ in their socioeconomic disadvantage. Education, race, and gender are all lines of social inequality along which the transition from incarceration might vary. Low pay and joblessness have been explained by the low levels of schooling for men and women coming out of prison (Kling 2006; Tyler and Kling 2007). The human capital associated with a high school diploma may improve employment for a population that averages less than 12 years of schooling. As a disproportionately minority population, the formerly incarcerated also face discrimination and secondary labor markets that offer little job security or wage growth (Western 2006). Thus, audit studies find evidence of discrimination in low-wage labor markets where minority job seekers with prison records meet greater obstacles to employment than whites (Pager 2003; Pager, Western, and Sugie 2009). Because of discrimination and involvement in secondary labor markets, social integration may develop more slowly for formerly incarcerated blacks and Hispanics. Apart from race and education, we also study gender differences in social integration. Qualitative studies of poor communities suggest women are more closely linked to family than men (e.g., Stack 1975; Edin and Nelson 2013), perhaps improving the chances of social integration for female prisoners. Still, the high rate of sexual abuse, other victimization, and drug addiction among female prisoners may confer a unique disadvantage that undermines prospects for employment, housing security, and family support (Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2003).

A life course perspective motivates analysis of social integration for different age groups. Young prison releasees may be more criminally active, and younger parolees in their twenties have been found to be less responsive to postprison programming (Uggen 2000). Against these obstacles to

<sup>3</sup>Community supervision may take the form of parole or probation. Probation is determined at sentencing and is typically an extension of a judicial function administered by a court. Parole release is determined at the end of a period of incarceration and is typically an executive function administered by a correctional authority.

social integration, younger respondents may retain close ties to parents and other family members who might provide material support. Establishing membership in a community may be especially difficult for older men and women (Laub and Sampson 2003, pp. 169–72). Older released prisoners are likely to have served longer or multiple terms of incarceration, and they may have exhausted family support. They may also be “off time,” competing for entry-level jobs or housing placements that are usually filled by those much younger.

Apart from the vulnerabilities of age and socioeconomic disadvantage, the great prevalence of drug addiction and mental illness among those in prison also impedes social integration after release. Many in our sample of Boston-area men and women reported lifetimes of severe drug use, commonly citing addiction to cocaine, heroin, or alcohol. A related group also indicated diagnoses of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, and learning disorders. We also received reports of respondents’ schizoaffective and bipolar disorders. Addiction and mental illness reduce productivity and strain intimate relationships (Miech et al. 1999). The stigma of diagnosis limits access to social and economic opportunities (Link et al. 1997). We thus expect a history of mental illness and drug addiction to hamper social integration directly after incarceration.

Finally, we conceive of leaving prison and returning to society as a cumulative process in which experiences just after release affect outcomes some months later. Those who actively build relationships and secure material well-being at an early stage can further develop social support and material security. In contrast, if newly released prisoners begin the transition from prison in a position of unusual social isolation, integration into community life may be delayed or thwarted altogether. Here, isolation describes a detachment from social life in which time is passed alone without gainful activity. (A similar concept of social isolation is used in the sociology of mental health, e.g., in research on the elderly; see Cornwell and Waite 2009.) Our analysis introduces an index using time-use data from the first week after prison release in which isolation is measured with indicators of disconnection from family and inactivity. People who are alone and idle after release are likely to have less family support and greater housing insecurity and unemployment in the following months.

Formal social control, socioeconomic disadvantage, histories of addiction and mental illness, and initial isolation may all shape the first few months after release from incarceration. This account of the resources, constraints, and capacities of former prisoners motivates a quantitative analysis of social integration. We also supplement the quantitative analysis with descriptions of the adjustments and coping strategies adopted by the formerly incarcerated in the transitional period just after prison release.



## DATA AND METHODS

To study social integration among newly released prisoners, we analyze data from the BRS. The study collects data on the transition from prison to community for a sample of 122 men and women who were leaving Massachusetts state prisons for neighborhoods in the Boston area.

The BRS measured the social and economic life of released prisoners with frequent interviews over a one-year follow-up period. Respondents became eligible for the study by recording a Boston address in their release plans and were recruited over a period of a year beginning in 2012. Nearly a quarter of all state prisoners going to the Boston area participated in the study. The study sample is observably similar to the population of releasees. Respondents and nonparticipants share the same racial and gender composition, were incarcerated at similar levels of custody, and shared similar scores on a risk assessment instrument (see the appendix).<sup>4</sup> BRS respondents were given a baseline interview a week before prison release. Follow-up interviews were conducted at one week, two months, six months, and a year after incarceration. Structured interviews with all respondents were combined with semistructured probes and follow-up questions to obtain quantitative measures of social integration and more textured accounts of life conditions after prison. Interviews—conducted in pairs by project investigators, staff, and graduate students—typically ran from one to two hours and were audio recorded. Interviews were conducted in public places, treatment programs, group quarters, private homes, and correctional facilities. To focus on the initial process of social integration, this article analyzes data just from the first six months after incarceration. (More complete details of the BRS research design are described in Western, Braga, and Kohl [2014].)

Attrition and survey nonresponse pose significant threats to research on released prisoners. The Urban Institute's Returning Home study conducted a series of interviews in four states from prerelease through the first year in the community (LaVigne and Kachnowski 2003; LaVigne and Mamalian 2003; Watson et al. 2004; Visher and Courtney 2007). Over the year of follow-up, survey nonresponse varied from 39% to 68%. In another survey study, the Vera Institute of Justice followed a sample of prison and jail inmates through their first 30 days after release, but only 56% completed the study (Nelson et al. 1999). The BRS adopted several strategies to minimize study attrition, including cash incentives for interviews, regular phone check-ins,

<sup>4</sup>People convicted of violent crimes are overrepresented and drug convictions are underrepresented in the study sample. Because of a large-scale court review of corrupted evidence from a Massachusetts forensic laboratory, a large number of drug offenders were released at short notice before they could be recruited to the study.



and consultation with a list of supplementary contacts. Through the one-year follow-up period, we achieved a response rate of 91% for an economically marginal and sometimes homeless, hard-to-reach population.

Descriptive statistics for the BRS sample are reported in table 1. Similar to prison releasees nationwide, the median age of BRS respondents is 34 years (Carson and Golinelli 2013, p. 38), and the sample is mostly male and nonwhite, with 60% having dropped out of high school. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported a history of drug or alcohol addiction or a mental health diagnosis, comparable to self-reports in national inmate surveys (Travis et al. 2014, chap. 7). Descriptive statistics also reflect the extensive correctional supervision of the sample respondents. Over 60% were released to parole or probation supervision or both. Conditions of supervision were similar for probation and parole, and 66 out of 75 supervised respondents were on probation. About a third of the sample had served at least three years in state prison. The large share of respondents serving less than three years reflects the usual overrepresentation of short-sentence inmates and parole violators in cohorts of prison releasees (Blumstein and Beck 1999, p. 35). Still, the extensive criminal justice supervision of the BRS respondents is reflected in their incarceration histories. Over half the sample report being incarcerated for more than half their adult lives.

Table 1 also reports measures of social integration before the current incarceration. Respondents were asked whether they felt close to family, where they were staying, and whether they were employed. Over two-thirds of respondents said they felt close to their families before incarceration, but older respondents and those with histories of addiction and mental illness reported weaker connections to family. Only 20% of the sample reported living in temporary or marginal housing before arrest, but housing insecurity was unusually prevalent among older respondents and those with histories of addiction and mental illness. Finally, about 40% of respondents were unemployed at the time of their arrest. In sum, over half the sample had attained a rudimentary level of social integration before prison. Foreshadowing the postprison results, however, older respondents and those reporting mental illness and addiction were more socially marginal before incarceration than average.

Release from Massachusetts prisons to the Boston area resembles the transition from incarceration to community in many other urban areas, particularly in the northeast of the United States. However, Massachusetts state prisons only incarcerate felony defendants sentenced to more than 2.5 years, compared to one year in most other jurisdictions. (The remainder are committed to Massachusetts county houses of correction.) Thus, the minimum length of stay for sentenced BRS respondents may be somewhat longer than the national average. Similar to the national pattern, those from Massachusetts are returning mostly to poorer, and disproportionately mi-

## Stress and Hardship after Prison

TABLE 1  
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAMPLE OF  
FORMERLY INCARCERATED MASSACHUSETTS STATE PRISONERS

|   | PERCENTAGE<br>DISTRIBUTION | PREINCARCERATION CHARACTERISTICS |                                     |          |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|
|   |                            | Felt Close<br>to Family          | Marginal or<br>Temporary<br>Housing | Employed |
| All respondents . . . . .                 | 100.0                      | 70.2                             | 19.7                                | 59.0     |
| Gender:                                   |                            |                                  |                                     |          |
| Female . . . . .                          | 12.3                       | 86.7                             | 20.0                                | 53.3     |
| Male . . . . .                            | 87.7                       | 67.9                             | 19.6                                | 59.8     |
| Age:                                      |                            |                                  |                                     |          |
| Under age 30 . . . . .                    | 31.1                       | 78.9                             | 18.4                                | 50.0     |
| 30–44 . . . . .                           | 44.3                       | 77.8                             | 14.8                                | 59.3     |
| Over age 44 . . . . .                     | 24.6                       | 44.8                             | 30.0                                | 70.0     |
| Race/ethnicity:                           |                            |                                  |                                     |          |
| White . . . . .                           | 30.3                       | 55.6                             | 27.0                                | 62.2     |
| Black . . . . .                           | 50.8                       | 74.2                             | 21.0                                | 58.1     |
| Hispanic . . . . .                        | 18.9                       | 82.6                             | 4.3                                 | 56.5     |
| Schooling:                                |                            |                                  |                                     |          |
| High school dropout . . . . .             | 59.8                       | 74.0                             | 21.9                                | 56.2     |
| High school graduate . . . . .            | 40.2                       | 64.6                             | 16.3                                | 63.3     |
| Addiction or mental illness:              |                            |                                  |                                     |          |
| None . . . . .                            | 34.4                       | 78.6                             | 4.8                                 | 66.7     |
| Mental illness or<br>addiction . . . . .  | 32.8                       | 77.5                             | 17.5                                | 55.0     |
| Mental illness and<br>addiction . . . . . | 32.8                       | 53.8                             | 37.5                                | 55.0     |
| Probation or parole:                      |                            |                                  |                                     |          |
| Not supervised . . . . .                  | 38.5                       | 63.0                             | 27.7                                | 59.6     |
| Supervised . . . . .                      | 61.5                       | 74.7                             | 14.7                                | 58.7     |
| Time served:                              |                            |                                  |                                     |          |
| Less than 3 years . . . . .               | 68.0                       | 69.9                             | 22.9                                | 57.8     |
| 3 years or more . . . . .                 | 32.0                       | 71.1                             | 12.8                                | 61.5     |
| Time spent incarcerated as adult:         |                            |                                  |                                     |          |
| 50% or less . . . . .                     | 44.3                       | 72.2                             | 18.5                                | 63.0     |
| More than 50% . . . . .                   | 55.7                       | 68.7                             | 20.6                                | 55.9     |

NOTE.—Blacks include respondents identifying as West Indian, Cape Verdean, and black biracial. GED recipients are included among those who had not finished high school. Marginal or temporary housing includes living at multiple residences, in a transitional housing program, in a shelter, in a sober house or rooming house, on the streets, or in a correctional facility. Data on preincarceration housing and employment use information on the six months before the arrest or parole violation that led to the current incarceration. *N* = 122.

nority, neighborhoods (Brooks et al. 2005; Travis et al. 2014, chap. 10). In contrast to some states, certain government benefits are widely available to prison releasees in Massachusetts. Thus, nearly all respondents in the BRS were enrolled in Medicaid before release—unusual by national standards—and most were enrolled in food stamps after two months. Prerelease Medicaid enrollment may become more common with implementation of the Affordable Care Act (2010), and former prisoners are broadly eligible for

food stamps in the northeast, but restrictions are common in southern and western states for those with prior drug convictions (Food and Nutrition Service 2012; Rich et al. 2014).

## RESULTS

Our analysis of social integration separately examines family support, unstable housing, employment, and receipt of public assistance. Social integration is most consistently and strongly related to age, gender, drug addiction, and mental illness. These results are reported in the tables below. Tables showing variation in social integration with race and schooling, time served, and total adult incarceration are reported in the appendix. We further explore variation in social integration with a regression analysis that introduces a measure of social isolation in the first week after release. The quantitative results are then placed in the context of qualitative interviews that describe the coping and adjustment that accompanies the transition from incarceration to community.

### Family Support

The BRS provides a detailed picture of family contact in the first week after release from prison. The survey's time-use module divides the day into mornings, afternoons, and evenings, recording how and with whom respondents spent their time. For each day, we coded whether respondents spent any time with family, with friends, or alone. On the first day out of prison, over two-thirds of respondents had some contact with family, and about a third had contact with friends (fig. 1). Over half on the first day of release spent at least some time alone. Over the course of the week, the proportion spending time with family declined while the proportion spending time alone slightly increased. After seven days, around 60% of the respondents were spending time alone, half were spending time with family, and about a third were with friends. In short, newly released prisoners were often alone for some part of their day, and a high level of initial family contact declined in the first week after release.

Apart from contact with family, the survey also recorded several direct measures of support. We constructed a measure of family support that indicated respondents who received money from family in the month of the survey or who were staying with family (see table 2). While the proportion of respondents staying with family stayed roughly constant at around 40%, family financial support declined through the first six months of community return as respondents gained greater financial independence. About two-thirds of respondents received money or housing from family in the first week after release. Overall family support declined to just over 50%, six months

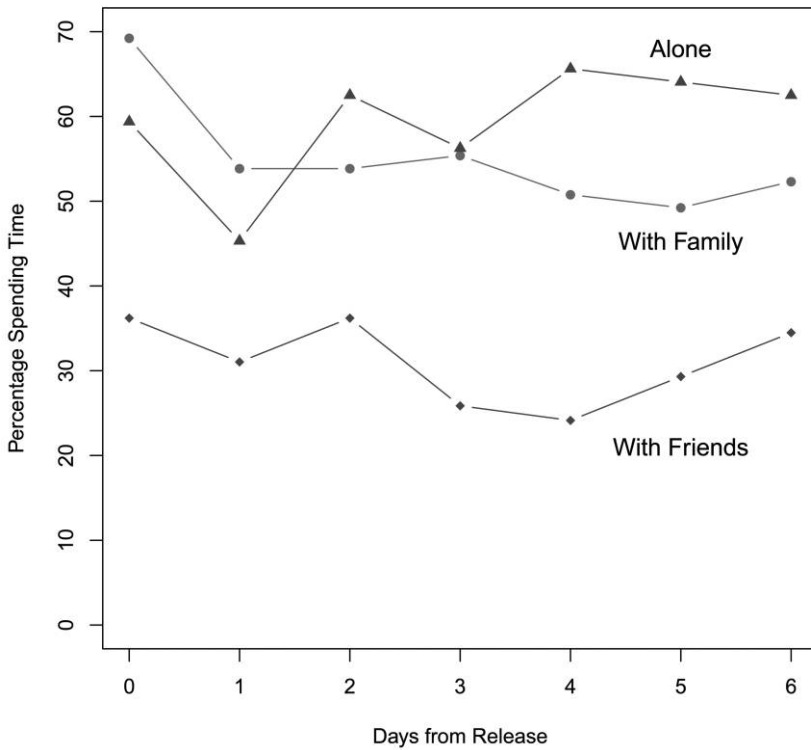


FIG. 1.—Percentage of respondents spending time with family, friends, or alone in the first week after release from prison ( $N = 117$ ).

later. Women were much more likely to receive money or housing from family than were men. Family support was weakest for respondents with histories of drug addiction and mental illness and those over age 44. Older respondents and those reporting drug problems and mental illness were also more persistently detached from family. Forty percent of those over 44 and 30% with mental illness and addiction never reported family support at any of the three postrelease interviews.

Which family members support their kin released from incarceration? Here, the qualitative interview data supplement the quantitative analysis. Studies of the family life of the formerly incarcerated have focused on romantic partners and children (Braman 2004; Lopoo and Western 2005; Wakefield and Wildeman 2013), but family support for newly released prisoners in the BRS sample was mostly provided by mothers, sisters, and grandmothers. One respondent, Miguel (a pseudonym), a Hispanic man in his midtwenties, had a good relationship with the mother of his seven-year-old

TABLE 2  
 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS RECEIVING MONEY FROM FAMILY OR STAYING WITH  
 FAMILY, ONE WEEK, TWO MONTHS, AND SIX MONTHS AFTER PRISON RELEASE

|  | One Week | Two Months | Six Months |
|--|----------|------------|------------|
| All respondents . . . . .              | 66.9     | 60.7       | 56.6       |
| Gender:                                |          |            |            |
| Female . . . . .                       | 86.7     | 80.0       | 92.9       |
| Male . . . . .                         | 64.1     | 57.7       | 51.1       |
| Age:                                   |          |            |            |
| Under age 30 . . . . .                 | 91.9     | 80.0       | 83.9       |
| 30-44 . . . . .                        | 65.4     | 57.1       | 50.0       |
| Over age 44 . . . . .                  | 37.9     | 42.9       | 37.0       |
| Drug addiction or mental illness:      |          |            |            |
| None . . . . .                         | 78.0     | 66.7       | 69.2       |
| Mental illness or addiction . . . . .  | 65.0     | 64.1       | 54.3       |
| Mental illness and addiction . . . . . | 56.8     | 50.0       | 43.8       |
| Sample size ( <i>N</i> ) . . . . .     | 118      | 112        | 106        |

daughter. She and Miguel had broken up after his arrest, and he was involved with several women (including her) in the first months after release. Although Miguel had close contact with his daughter and her mother, he immediately moved back with his own mother after leaving prison. He did not pay rent but gave his monthly food stamps to the household. Miguel's mother also provided financial support (e.g., paying his cell phone bill) and often took care of his daughter, who visited on weekends.

Sisters were another common source of support. Nick, a white man in his late twenties, was released directly from disciplinary segregation in a maximum security prison. Months before he went home, his sister found a construction job for him and took him into the apartment she shared with her husband. Throughout his transition back into the community, Nick's sister housed him and ensured he had steady work. Nick had a three-year-old daughter with a woman whose relationship with him began when they would use heroin together two years before his most recent incarceration. In the first few months after release, Nick's daughter lived with her mother and grandmother, and Nick would sometimes stay there. Six months out of prison, he and his daughter's mother had separated. He cited their history of drug addiction as a source of conflict. Nick's sister was emotionally supportive through his drug relapse and subsequent overdose. She also helped him manage his deteriorating relationship with his child's mother.

We often observed the supportive role of female relatives like Miguel's mother and Nick's sister. Through six months out of prison, about 80% of respondents who reported staying with family were staying with female relatives, and around half of these were mothers. (Three respondents reported staying with their fathers.) Only about 10% of respondents stayed

with a partner during the first six months out of prison. Family members, rather than partners, were also key sources of financial support. At one week out of prison, 55 respondents received money from family, and only 11 received money from a partner. By six months, twice as many respondents received money from family than from a partner. Thus, we find that mothers and female relatives generally provided significant support immediately after release from prison, and respondents received greater material support from family members than from romantic partners.

Gender differences in family support reflect the close relationship between formerly incarcerated women and their parents. Women were more likely than men to receive money and housing support from parents over the first six months out. This is especially striking given the high levels of mental illness and drug addiction reported by female respondents. Six of the nine women who reported histories of mental illness and drug addiction were staying with family at six months after incarceration. Among men, only 3 out of 29 with histories of addiction and mental illness were staying with family. Parents, and mothers in particular, had often played a lifelong caring role for daughters with poor mental health and dependence on drugs. For such parents, the transition from prison to community was often described as the latest episode in a series of crises that extended back to adolescence.

### Housing

To study the housing of released prisoners, we distinguish marginal and temporary living situations defined as residing in a homeless shelter, a sober house or residential program, a rooming house (usually paid weekly), or a hotel or motel; staying at multiple residences; or being homeless on the streets or in a correctional facility.<sup>5</sup> In these cases, housing is either highly insecure or in group quarters outside of a traditional household or both. Similar to how we collected our one-week data on time spent with family, we asked respondents where they stayed each night in the first week after leaving prison. Figure 2 shows the proportion of respondents who stayed overnight with family or friends or in marginal or temporary housing. In the first week after coming out of prison, 40%–50% of respondents stayed with family and 20% reported staying with friends. The remainder slept in marginal or temporary housing that consisted mostly of shelters and sober houses. Through the first week, respondents stayed less often with family and became more likely to be staying with friends or in shelters or transitional housing.

<sup>5</sup> Sober houses are low-income group residences in Massachusetts that conduct drug and alcohol testing and rehabilitative programs.

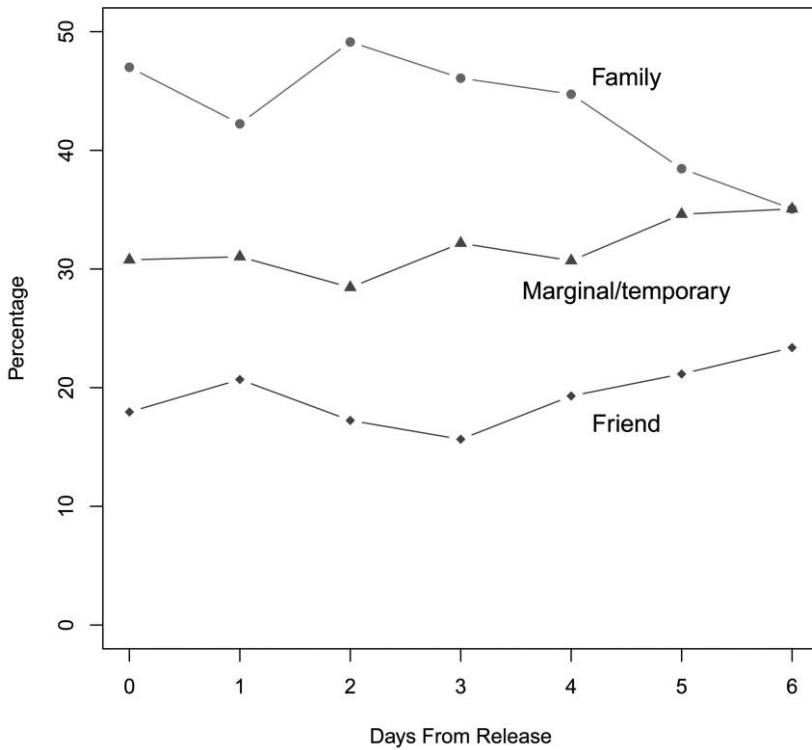


FIG. 2.—Percentage of respondents staying overnight with family, friends, or in temporary or unstable housing in the first week after release from prison ( $N = 117$ ).

In the six months after incarceration, just over a third of the respondents reported marginal or temporary housing (table 3). Housing insecurity was most common among those over age 44 and for those with histories of addiction and mental illness. Over two-thirds of older respondents were unstably housed in the first week after incarceration compared to just 16% of those under age 30. Housing improved for older respondents over the six month follow-up period, but even so, over half were in temporary or marginal housing after six months. Respondents with histories of mental illness and addiction reported similar levels of unstable housing. Underlining the persistent disadvantage of older respondents and those reporting mental illness and addiction, over 40% of both groups were in marginal or temporary housing at each interview through six months after release.

Although the survey data indicated severe housing instability, the quantitative indicators probably overestimate the permanence and independence of housing. Only a few respondents lived independently within six months



## Stress and Hardship after Prison

TABLE 3  
 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS IN MARGINAL OR TEMPORARY HOUSING,  
 ONE WEEK, TWO MONTHS, AND SIX MONTHS AFTER PRISON RELEASE

|                                    | One Week | Two Months | Six Months |
|------------------------------------|----------|------------|------------|
| All respondents . . . . .          | 37.7     | 35.8       | 35.3       |
| Gender:                            |          |            |            |
| Female . . . . .                   | 26.7     | 20.0       | 20.0       |
| Male . . . . .                     | 39.3     | 38.1       | 37.6       |
| Age:                               |          |            |            |
| Under age 30 . . . . .             | 15.8     | 16.2       | 27.0       |
| 30–44 . . . . .                    | 35.2     | 33.3       | 31.4       |
| Over age 44 . . . . .              | 70.0     | 65.5       | 53.6       |
| Drug addiction or mental illness:  |          |            |            |
| None . . . . .                     | 14.3     | 14.6       | 19.5       |
| Mental illness or addiction . . .  | 35.0     | 37.5       | 35.1       |
| Mental illness and addiction . . . | 65.2     | 56.4       | 52.6       |
| Sample size ( <i>N</i> ) . . . . . | 122      | 120        | 116        |

NOTE.—Marginal or temporary housing includes living at multiple residences, in a transitional housing program, in a shelter, in a sober house or rooming house, on the streets, or in a correctional facility.

of leaving prison. Living with family members was not counted as temporary or marginal, although in some cases relatives themselves were unstably housed or were made so by the arrival of a family member newly released from prison. In a medium security prison, we interviewed a 32-year-old white man named Tim who told us he would be released to a transitional housing program in a week’s time. After release, he spent several hours at the program before deciding he could not sleep there. His sister took him to her place where she thought he might stay one or two nights. Tim ended up staying with his sister and her 14-year-old son for several months. Because his name was not on the lease, after two months they had to move to a new apartment, subsidized by his sister’s Section Eight housing voucher. Another respondent, Jeff, a 20-year-old African-American man we interviewed in a maximum security prison after five years of incarceration, spent his first three nights with different friends and siblings. He then began living with his mother, despite a court order requiring him to stay away from the neighborhood where she lived. After several months his mother received a notice from her housing association warning that she would be evicted if he continued to stay there. Jeff, with some pressure from his probation officer, eventually moved out so that his mother could maintain her residence.

These cases illustrate the instability of family housing. Taking in family members after prison release can add to already crowded households and sometimes violate leases, risking eviction. Although living with family is relatively stable compared to shelters and other temporary housing, around

20% of respondents who were staying with family at one week after release reported a new address two months later.

### Public Assistance and Employment

In the first week after release, we asked respondents to describe their time use in employment or in activities related to social programs. In a few cases, respondents had already arranged work immediately after release or were employed in work-release jobs that continued after incarceration. More commonly, employment-related activity involved applying for jobs, often online; responding to help-wanted signs; or for a few with union cards, going to hiring halls in the building trades. Programming activity included things like enrolling in food stamps or other social programs, attending anti-addiction meetings, or collecting benefits from public agencies or community programs.

For each day, we recorded whether respondents were engaged in work-related activity, in activities related to programs, or simply doing nothing (fig. 3). On the first day out of prison, over half of respondents were involved with or applying to programs. Program activity declined for the next two days and then increased over the remainder of the week. One week after release, about half of all respondents were spending at least some part of their day on programs, either traveling to them or enrolling. Respondents also spent significant time in no activity at all. The proportion who were simply idle increased from around 30% to 50% through the week. In contrast to measures of programming and idleness, rates of employment-related activity were very low. Only a few respondents were working or looking for work shortly after release. Four or five days out, about 15% were seeking work or in paid employment.

Table 4 shows rates of employment and receipt of public assistance in the six months after incarceration. Receiving public assistance is significantly more common than employment, especially in the first two months. By the end of the first week after release, just over 40% of respondents were receiving public benefits. Within two months, the rate of receipt had climbed to over 70% and remained at this level over the next few months. Benefit receipt tended to be higher among those with weaker family support and more unstable housing—among those who were older and with histories of addiction and mental illness.

In the first two months after prison release, nearly all those in the BRS who received public assistance were enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps). Food stamp eligibility is based on a means test for net household incomes below the federal poverty line. For respondents in Boston, the food stamp benefit was typically \$200 a month. Food stamps often supported the respondent's household and the respon-

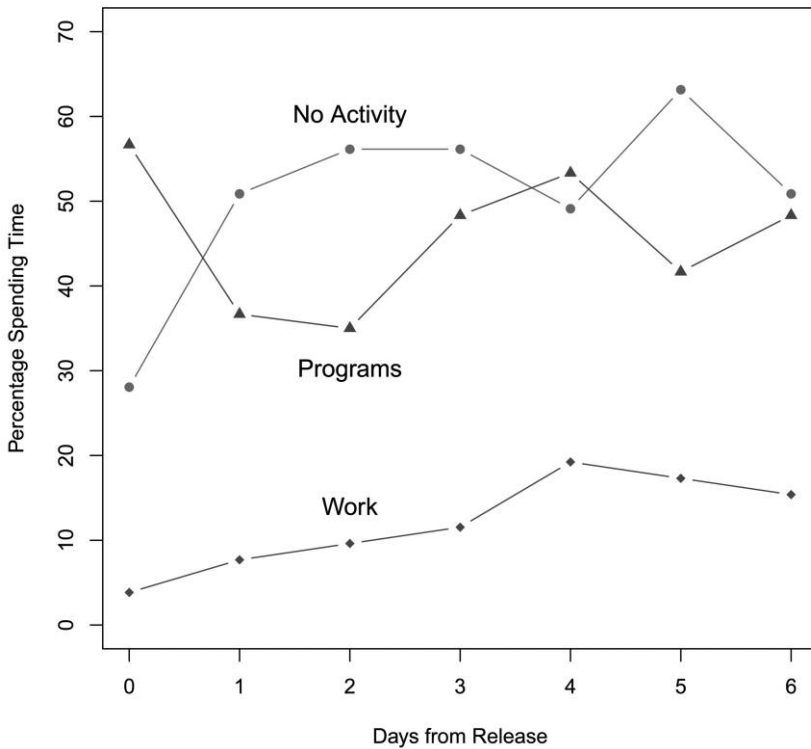


FIG. 3.—Percentage of respondents spending time in programs, work, or in no activity in the first week after release from prison ( $N = 117$ ).

dent's place in the household, as benefits were frequently passed on to family members or transitional housing programs.

Trends in employment were similar to those for public assistance, climbing significantly from 18% to 43% in the first two months and then remaining at a relatively high level (table 4). The lowest levels of employment are associated with high rates of benefit receipt. Thus, we observe persistently low employment rates among women and those with histories of mental illness and addiction. Employment increased greatly among older respondents but always remained below the sample average. Despite the improvement in employment, additional tabulations show that about half of the older respondents were persistently unemployed for the first six months of prison release.

The employment rate more than doubled between one week and two months after prison release, but qualitative data showed that steady full-time work was rare. Respondents continuing work-release jobs or with

TABLE 4  
 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS RECEIVING MONEY FROM PUBLIC ASSISTANCE OR IN PAID  
 EMPLOYMENT ONE WEEK, TWO MONTHS, AND SIX MONTHS AFTER PRISON RELEASE

|  | One Week | Two Months | Six Months |
|--|----------|------------|------------|
| Receiving public assistance:           |          |            |            |
| All respondents . . . . .              | 43.6     | 74.1       | 70.5       |
| Gender:                                |          |            |            |
| Female . . . . .                       | 40.0     | 73.3       | 64.3       |
| Male . . . . .                         | 44.1     | 74.2       | 71.4       |
| Age:                                   |          |            |            |
| Under age 30 . . . . .                 | 27.8     | 61.8       | 66.7       |
| 30-44 . . . . .                        | 51.9     | 72.0       | 62.5       |
| Over age 44 . . . . .                  | 48.3     | 92.9       | 88.9       |
| Drug addiction or mental illness:      |          |            |            |
| None . . . . .                         | 40.0     | 69.2       | 61.5       |
| Mental illness or addiction . . . . .  | 40.0     | 66.7       | 68.6       |
| Mental illness and addiction . . . . . | 51.4     | 88.2       | 84.4       |
| Employed:                              |          |            |            |
| All respondents . . . . .              | 17.8     | 43.4       | 52.6       |
| Gender:                                |          |            |            |
| Female . . . . .                       | 6.7      | 26.7       | 26.7       |
| Male . . . . .                         | 19.4     | 45.9       | 56.6       |
| Age:                                   |          |            |            |
| Under age 30 . . . . .                 | 11.1     | 51.5       | 52.8       |
| 30-44 . . . . .                        | 30.8     | 47.1       | 56.0       |
| Over age 44 . . . . .                  | 3.3      | 27.6       | 46.4       |
| Drug addiction or mental illness:      |          |            |            |
| None . . . . .                         | 22.5     | 61.5       | 65.0       |
| Mental illness or addiction . . . . .  | 20.0     | 41.0       | 56.8       |
| Mental illness and addiction . . . . . | 10.5     | 25.7       | 35.1       |
| Sample size ( <i>N</i> ) . . . . .     | 117      | 112        | 114        |

NOTE.—Eleven respondents reincarcerated by the six month interview were coded as not employed.

family connections to work were the most stably employed. More commonly, respondents were initially employed in day labor often doing construction, home improvement, and, in the winter, snow removal. Trey, a black man in his late twenties, was trained as a painter and asked his mother's landlord for work soon after his release from prison. By the two-month interview, he was making about \$450 a week painting apartment units, but the work was temporary and only lasted until the next unit. Construction jobs, too, were always temporary. Some respondents remained continuously employed but worked in a succession of temporary and under-the-table jobs. Another black respondent in his twenties, Malcolm, got a construction job with a former employer after his release and worked a security job a few nights each month. Both jobs were sporadic, and hours depended on how much work was available. By his two-month interview Malcolm was unsure whether he still had a position with either job, and at

six months, he reported being unemployed for a month after his employer moved out of state.

### Regression Analysis of Social Integration

With its small sample, the BRS has little power to study the association between predictors and social integration, controlling for other covariates; the small sample size is likely to yield statistically insignificant estimates. However, pooling the one-week, two-month, and six-month surveys increases sample size, providing a panel data set with three time periods. The panel data can also be used to estimate significant changes in social integration from one week to two months and from two months to six months. We fit logistic regressions to four binary dependent variables: receiving support from family, residence in marginal or temporary housing, employment, and the receipt of public assistance. Predictors for regression analysis are listed in table 5. Because observations are correlated across the three survey waves, regression standard errors are adjusted for clustering.

TABLE 5  
PREDICTORS USED IN LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION AT  
ONE WEEK, TWO MONTHS, AND SIX MONTHS AFTER PRISON RELEASE

| Variable                  | Description   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Survey wave               | Dummy variables indicating observations from the one week survey and the six month survey (two month survey is the reference category)  |
| Isolation in first week   | A continuous standardized index of time spent without family and in no activity in the first week after release   |
| Mentally ill/addicted     | A dummy variable for those indicating a mental health diagnosis and a history of addiction or substance abuse in the baseline interview (those with only mental illness or addiction or no prior history are in the reference category) |
| Over age 44               | A dummy variable for those over 44 years old at the baseline interview (44 years old and younger is the reference category)   |
| Female                    | A dummy variable for females (males are in the reference category)  |
| Race/ethnicity            | Dummy variables for blacks and Hispanics (respondents identifying as white or other are in the reference category)  |
| High school dropout       | A dummy variable for those who have not completed high school, including those with GEDs (high school graduates are in the reference category)  |
| Time served               | A continuous measure of time served in months for most recent incarceration   |
| Probation/parole          | A dummy variable indicating those on probation or parole (unsupervised respondents are in the reference category)   |
| Total adult incarceration | A continuous measure of the proportion of adult life spent incarcerated   |

The regression analysis explores low social integration among older, mentally ill, and addicted respondents by incorporating time-use data on social isolation in the first week after release. We construct an index of isolation that sums standardized measures of the time spent idle and outside the company of family. (Measures of idleness and family disconnection correlate at 0.5.) The index of isolation is measured in standard deviation units. This measure identifies those who were disconnected from family and socially inactive in their first days out. Rather than causal estimates, the isolation effects describe the cumulative process of prison release in which extreme social isolation in the first few days is associated with a low level of social integration a few months later. The idleness and detachment from family measured by the isolation index is closely related to age, mental health, and drug use. Respondents over age 44 score about one standard deviation higher on the isolation index than those under age 30. The isolation index is also nearly a standard deviation higher for those reporting mental illness and addiction.

The regression results indicate the first two months as a critical period in the progress of social integration (table 6). One-week survey coefficients indicate that rates of employment and receipt of public assistance increase significantly in the first two months after prison release. In contrast, there is no significant change in social integration across the dependent variables from two to six months. Although levels of family support and housing stability were unchanged, on average, over the first six months, we earlier observed improvements in family support, housing, and employment, particularly among older respondents who were more socially isolated than those in their twenties and thirties. In short, we find that respondents became more secure in their family connection, housing, and means of subsistence, especially in the first two months after prison release.

Regression results also show the link between isolation in the first days out with poor social integration in the following months. The odds of family financial or housing support were 30% lower for respondents who were highly isolated (one standard deviation higher) than those who were initially active and in the company of family ( $1 - \exp[-.368] = .31$ ). The effects of initial isolation on housing instability are more than twice as large. A 1 standard deviation increase in isolation is associated with a 65% increase in the odds of temporary or marginal housing ( $\exp[.498] = 1.65$ ). We also find that the odds of employment over the first six months are nearly 20% lower for those with higher isolation in the first week after release ( $1 - \exp[-.213] = .19$ ).

Isolation from family in the first week explains much of the association of age, mental illness, and addiction with later social integration. Still, even controlling for initial isolation, respondents over age 44 are estimated to have significantly more marginal and temporary housing and significantly

## Stress and Hardship after Prison

TABLE 6  
LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF FAMILY SUPPORT, UNSTABLE AND TEMPORARY  
HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, AND RECEIPT OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AT ONE WEEK,  
TWO MONTHS, AND SIX MONTHS AFTER PRISON RELEASE

|                                     | Support from<br>Family<br>(1) | Marginal or<br>Temporary<br>Housing<br>(2) | Currently<br>Employed<br>(3) | Public<br>Assistance<br>(4) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Intercept . . . . .                 | .194<br>(.33)                 | -1.373*<br>(2.02)                          | .701<br>(1.24)               | 1.575**<br>(3.01)           |
| One week postrelease . . . . .      | .309<br>(1.51)                | .051<br>(.30)                              | -1.505**<br>(5.60)           | -1.567**<br>(5.64)          |
| Six months postrelease . . . . .    | -.230<br>(.97)                | -.037<br>(.15)                             | .407<br>(1.72)               | -.225<br>(.93)              |
| Isolation in first week . . . . .   | -.368**<br>(3.20)             | .498**<br>(3.83)                           | -.213<br>(1.89)              | .144<br>(1.38)              |
| Mentally ill/addicted . . . . .     | -.323<br>(.81)                | .920*<br>(2.11)                            | -.561<br>(1.32)              | .688<br>(1.92)              |
| Over age 44 . . . . .               | -.758<br>(1.69)               | .923*<br>(2.03)                            | -.983*<br>(2.38)             | .531<br>(1.45)              |
| Female . . . . .                    | 1.574*<br>(2.13)              | -.859<br>(1.40)                            | -1.092*<br>(1.99)            | -.682<br>(1.33)             |
| Black . . . . .                     | .421<br>(1.01)                | -.015<br>(.03)                             | -.677<br>(1.69)              | .378<br>(1.12)              |
| Hispanic . . . . .                  | -.257<br>(.47)                | -.109<br>(.18)                             | -.582<br>(1.13)              | -1.064*<br>(2.31)           |
| High school dropout . . . . .       | .227<br>(.58)                 | -.033<br>(.08)                             | -.451<br>(1.29)              | -.296<br>(.85)              |
| Time served (months) . . . . .      | -.002<br>(.29)                | .001<br>(.19)                              | .010<br>(1.78)               | -.006<br>(1.06)             |
| Probation/parole . . . . .          | -.044<br>(.12)                | .310<br>(.74)                              | .532<br>(1.57)               | .285<br>(.87)               |
| Total adult incarceration . . . . . | -.205<br>(.30)                | .063<br>(.08)                              | -.647<br>(1.07)              | -.698<br>(1.23)             |
| No. of observations . . . . .       | 333                           | 344  | 338                          | 331                         |

NOTE.—Absolute z-statistics in parentheses. *N* of respondents = 117.  
\*  $P < .05$ .  
\*\*  $P < .01$ .

lower rates of employment. Respondents with histories of mental illness and addiction are also estimated to have significantly high rates of housing instability and public assistance. The regression analysis also reflects the gendered process of social integration, in which family (typically parental) support is the main source of well-being for women. Estimates indicate the high level of family support and the low level of employment that persists over the first six months after incarceration.

In contrast to the effects of isolation, age, mental illness and addiction, and gender, the process of social integration is only weakly related to criminal justice supervision. Parole and probation status, time served in prison,



and the respondent's history of incarceration are largely unrelated to the outcomes of family support, housing, employment, and public assistance.

In sum, regression analysis shows that the first two months out of the first six after incarceration are a fluid period in which respondents are rapidly acquiring their means of subsistence, and housing is becoming more settled. Those who were highly isolated through their first week after prison were likely to be poorly socially integrated six months later—unstably housed, unemployed, and on state assistance. Isolation in the first week was highest among older respondents and those who reported mental illness and addiction. Idleness and detachment from family in the first week explained much of the association between age, mental health and drug use, and the low level of social integration we observed six months later.

### Adjusting and Coping

The gradual and uneven character of social integration reflected in the quantitative data can be interpreted in the context of respondents' qualitative descriptions of prison release. Respondents talked about the departure from prison, the initial reception by family and friends, and the adjustments and anxieties associated with community return.

The departure from prison began with transportation to a destination in the Boston area. Just over a third of the respondents in the BRS sample were picked up from prison by a family member, often parents or siblings, and another quarter were met by a friend or partner. A quarter were transported by the prison authority (so-called state transport) to a train station or regional reentry center. The remaining respondents (about 10%) either walked by themselves to a train station or were picked up by a case worker. Younger respondents were more likely to be collected by family or friends, while over 60% of respondents 45 years or older were transported from prison by the state. State transport from prison is a vivid sign of the initial isolation that regression analysis showed to be linked to poor social integration six months later.

Upon return to the community, many respondents described a social gathering—often a party, cookout, or a meal—that marked the release from prison. The welcome-home event was typically organized by mothers and siblings, and extended family and friends would attend. The gatherings celebrated the return of the formerly incarcerated family member and gave notice that incarceration had ended. In most interviews, family more than friends were at the center of these events, particularly if friends were still involved in crime. The welcome-home party offered a forum for respondents to make a public commitment to family to stay out of trouble and offered family an opportunity to express their support. When a 29-year-old African-American man, Scott, returned home after six years of incar-

ceration, he spent most of his first week out with his mother, daughter, and other family members. During this time he shopped for clothes, went to the park with his daughter, and ate meals with his family. On Scott's fifth day out, his mother hosted a cookout for him attended by his extended family and friends.

Consistent with the quantitative evidence on family support, these rituals of return were uncommon among older respondents. In many cases, older releasees entered shelters or transitional housing programs, not family homes. Curfews and other restrictions limited opportunities for social gatherings. Jerry, a white man in his fifties, entered a homeless shelter in the central city, attended antiaddiction and other program meetings, and made a 10:00 p.m. curfew through his first week out. He met with his elderly father on the day of release (his mother passed away during incarceration) but only gradually reestablished contact with other kin over a period of months. Only 6 out of 28 respondents age 45 and over reported a welcome-home party, compared to 20 out of 36 respondents under age 30.

While welcome-home parties began to draw the formerly incarcerated back into social relationships in the community, respondents often reported discomfort with everyday social interaction in the first weeks after prison release. About 40% of the respondents reported some type of social anxiety in their first seven days. Anxiety took many forms. We often heard reports of discomfort with public transport or crowded public places like stores or nightclubs. Being jostled by strangers, likely on public transport, caused many respondents to avoid trains and buses for the first few months. Several reported difficulties with new technologies. Many acquired cell phones in the first few days after release, but the technology was often unfamiliar, particularly after lengthy prison sentences. Turnstiles for trains in Boston can be entered with an electronic card, and respondents also said that these were difficult to use, causing anxiety and embarrassment. Jack, a white man in his late twenties, spoke about the stress of completing routine tasks. He had trouble adjusting to the new transit system that switched from tokens to electronic cards in the seven years he was in prison. In his first week after release, he missed a mental health appointment (and a survey interview) because of trouble with public transport. As his frustrations grew, he relied more on his sister for rides and company on trains and buses.

Like Jack, several respondents described their unfamiliarity with the simple routines of noninstitutional life or the fast pace of life on the outside. A white woman in her late twenties, Maria, frequently forgot to eat breakfast or lunch for several months because she was used to being called to meals in prison. Over half of the respondents began to smoke cigarettes in their first week out. Many were resuming a habit that began before incarceration, but others reported picking up smoking to cope with the stress

of everyday life outside of prison. A white man in his early thirties, Patrick, reported crippling anxiety throughout his first week. Although smoking was banned at his sober house, Patrick started smoking cigarettes after a few days to help cope with the transition. At the end of the first week, he had begun to experience panic attacks on the trains because of the crowds.

Some respondents described not the acute anxiety around crowds and new technologies but worries about interacting with specific people or places. About 12% of respondents said that they were trying to avoid old friends or “negative people” who were involved in crime, gangs, or serious drug use. Concerns about negative people were expressed most commonly by young black men whose incarceration in many cases was related to drug dealing or neighborhood gangs. When interviewed in prison, an African-American man in his midtwenties named Damian said that avoiding old associates and their hangouts would be very important for staying out of trouble after his release. A week after release, Damian told us that his biggest challenge was staying away from old friends who remained involved in local gangs. He spent most of his first week after release with family and his girlfriend and remained guarded around many of his friends and his old neighborhood.

Some young men worried about the intrusion of street life, but anxiety was more common among older respondents. About half of respondents age 45 and older described some form of anxiety during their first week. In part, greater anxiety reflects the poor mental health of older ex-prisoners in our sample. Even for those with a history of mental illness, the disruption of the daily routine and the regimented administration of antianxiety medication while incarcerated was likely an additional source of stress for a segment of the population with little resilience.

The emotional response to free society also included more diffuse feelings of alienation or being out of place. At one week after release, 12% described feelings of loneliness or feeling like they did not yet fit in or belong. Consistent with the quantitative isolation index, several also reported boredom and spent a lot of time sleeping or just sitting around. One respondent explained that his new routine mirrored his experience of being “in the hole” (disciplinary segregation) during his recent incarceration. Ray, a 59-year-old black man, expressed difficulty reconnecting with the community after completing his 15-year sentence. He spent his first week out of prison bargain shopping alone throughout Boston until an anxiety attack in a department store overwhelmed him with feelings that he did not belong. At close to one month out, Ray was making an effort to spend more time with the residents at the sober house where he was living, but after becoming accustomed to isolation, he said that his attempts at socializing felt like homework.

Despite reports of anxiety and worry in the transition from prison to community, nearly all respondents described the joys and happiness of prison release. The first question on our one-week survey instrument asks “What’s the best part about being out?” To this open-ended question, the responses “freedom” and “family” were the most common. Some respondents caught up on movies they had missed, and many took long walks around the city. One respondent who experienced severe anxiety over the course of the study described the joy on his fifth day out of prison of traveling to a lake with a boyhood friend to go fishing and smoke marijuana.

Because of the challenges of adjusting to social interaction, routines, and technology in free society, many respondents took what they described as a vacation in the first week after prison. This involved mostly staying at home, visiting with romantic partners, shopping, and enrolling in programs in preparation for a more active social and economic life in subsequent weeks.

In his analysis of the consequences of incarceration, Clemmer (1940) described the many small behavioral adaptations to incarceration as “prisonization.” The patterns of social interaction, postures, and attitudes that assisted survival in the intense authority structure of the prison are mismatched to the free flow of human intercourse outside (Maruna and Toch 2005). The adjustments and anxieties we observed in the first weeks after incarceration constituted a process of deinstitutionalization. Several respondents said that they wanted to “wash off” or “remove” the prison from themselves and would do this by getting haircuts, buying new clothes, and cleaning their residence and belongings. Support from family often assisted deinstitutionalization. For some, the welcome-home party affirmed bonds of kinship, signaled moral inclusion, and eased the challenge of what Irwin (1970, p. 115) described as “reentering the world as a stranger” (see also Maruna 2011). Social interaction, new technology, and the routines of everyday life presented obstacles that limited travel, slowed the search for housing and employment, and increased reliance on family. For those without stable housing or family support—mostly older respondents in shelters or sober houses—feelings of anxiety and isolation were more common. Here, social integration was pursued largely in the company of strangers and through the formal agency of government and community programs.

## DISCUSSION

In a sample of Massachusetts prisoners going to neighborhoods in Boston, over a third stayed in marginal or temporary housing, and half were unemployed after six months. Independent housing and full-time employment were rare. While released prisoners were materially insecure, two key supports are indicated in the data. First, we found a high rate of receipt of

public assistance. Two months after prison release, 70% of the Boston sample were enrolled in food stamps and other benefits. Second, over half the sample obtained significant support from family. At six months after release, over 50% were receiving money or staying with family. Most family support in the first months was provided by mothers, grandmothers, and sisters. In only a few cases were respondents residing with or receiving material assistance from romantic partners.

While there is clear evidence of extensive poverty, housing insecurity, and family detachment in the first six months after prison, social integration increased significantly, particularly in the first two months. The employment rate and the rate of public benefit receipt rose sharply in this early period as family financial support declined. Qualitative interviews also revealed a process of adjustment in which respondents initially reported anxiety and feelings of loneliness and alienation. Many respondents described how they discarded prison habits and behaviors in the first few months. Families helped with deinstitutionalization by celebrating the end of incarceration and by providing support to a population adjusting to the everyday complexity of free society. Extreme material hardship in the first week after release followed by a period of rapid adjustment sets apart the immediate period of transition as a distinct phase in the process of leaving incarceration.

Against the trend of growing social attachment, two groups in the sample stood out as unusually socially isolated. Before incarceration, older respondents and those with histories of mental illness and addiction were more unstably housed and felt more distant from family than did the general sample of prison releasees. In the transition to community after incarceration, older respondents and those with histories of addiction and mental illness also experienced the most severe hardship. They received less support from family, were more likely to be insecurely housed or housed outside of regular households, and were less likely to be employed. These respondents also reported high levels of idleness and were more likely to be unconnected with family in their first week out. The correlated adversity of addiction, poor mental health, advanced age, and social isolation points to a group whose needs are acute and for whom the social safety net emerges as a key source of material well-being.

Results for older ex-prisoners and those with histories of mental illness and addiction suggest that family ties and other informal sources of support are not a fixed resource. Instead, people with long histories of incarceration, who may be long-standing sources of trouble and conflict at home, have likely disappointed or alienated many of the family and friends who might otherwise have provided support. The dynamics of deteriorating family support were sometimes revealed in interviews with respon-

dents who had become estranged from some family members but still received support from others.

What is the significance of the criminal justice system in this analysis? In the initial period of prison release, the specifics of criminal justice involvement—parole or probation, time served, histories of incarceration—were largely unrelated to family support, housing, or economic status. Instead, the respondents we interviewed shared a separation from community through imprisonment, and the quality of their return varied with the vulnerabilities of age, illness, and isolation.

This detailed empirical picture of the process of social integration immediately after prison release helps illuminate two areas of research. First, public health and evaluation research points to the period immediately after release as one of acute risk but ripe for timely intervention (Binswanger et al. 2007; Redcross et al. 2012). The current analysis shows a high level of insecurity and isolation, particularly for older releasees and those with mental health problems and histories of addiction. The high risk of drug overdose found in other studies seems likely to be concentrated in this vulnerable segment of the postrelease population. In Massachusetts, Medicaid enrollment (often before incarceration) may have protected sample respondents from overdose and other severe health problems. Still, we might expect greater exposure to risk in other jurisdictions where continuity of care from prison to community is harder to implement. Program intervention also seems especially valuable immediately after release. Whatever the longer-term effects, service-based programs like transitional jobs that pay wages for employment fill an immediate and serious economic need.

Second, research on the social and economic life of people leaving prison is often motivated by an interest in incarceration effects (Wakefield and Uggen 2010; Wildeman and Western 2010; Wildeman and Muller 2012). The current analysis indicates the deep and related problems of unobserved heterogeneity and measurement for research on incarceration effects. Unobserved heterogeneity describes the characteristics of those incarcerated that are unmeasured but correlated with incarceration and the outcomes of interest, such as unemployment or homelessness. Like the incarcerated population generally, BRS respondents mostly come from disadvantaged backgrounds often compounded by problems of mental illness and heavy drug use that are poorly measured in many studies. Prearrest data showed high rates of housing insecurity, detachment from family, and unemployment. In these contexts of correlated adversity, a person's multiple disadvantages and injuries may be more important in their complex combination than individually. Released prisoners return to social contexts that are also difficult to measure with the usual survey instruments or ad-

ministrative records. Prison releasees move frequently between addresses or maintain several residences and would thus be unrecorded by household surveys (Harding et al. 2013). Employment in the first six months after prison was mostly informal and temporary and unlikely to be covered by administrative data such as unemployment insurance records (see also Kornfeld and Bloom 1999). Standard methods would tend to observe those most successful upon release who can become attached quickly to households and find legitimate employment. If only the most successful are observed, the negative effects of incarceration may be underestimated.

The analysis also suggests a mechanism linking incarceration to its negative social and economic effects: incarceration creates a stress of transition. Prison release is a disruptive event that is often unpredictable and unfolding in a context of severe hardship. The high level of material deprivation we observed was combined with feelings of anxiety, isolation, and unease with criminally involved peers immediately after prison release. New technology, crowds, mass transit, and other aspects of everyday life were unfamiliar and only slowly became part of the respondents' daily routines. While other researchers have suggested that the exposure to prison conditions or the stigma of a criminal record may produce negative effects (Pager 2003; Liebling and Maruna 2005; Massoglia 2008), the stress of transition from prison to community is a distinct channel rooted in the fundamentally segregative character of incarceration.

If the stress of transition from prison to community harmed health and well-being, several empirical implications would follow. The effects of incarceration would resemble the effects of stress observed in other domains (e.g., Pearlin et al. 1981; McEwen 1998). In particular, diminished mental health, drug use, and relapse to addiction are likely outcomes (Pearlin 1999; Sinha 2008). We expect that the stress of transition would be most acute immediately after incarceration and would recede with time as social integration proceeded. Finally, the current analysis and other research suggests the socially isolated, older releasees and those with histories of mental illness and addiction may be most vulnerable (Pearlin 1989). These more vulnerable prison releasees have fewer resources to manage the transition from prison. For them, stress might also accumulate and result in further economic insecurity, inhibiting social integration in a more permanent way.

Prisons, for all their varied effects, are important in this analysis for creating an event—leaving incarceration—that begins a struggle for social belonging that is deeply patterned by human frailty. Despite a large research literature on the effects of incarceration, few studies provide a detailed picture of the process of prison release. The basic conditions of community membership—ties to family, a place to live, and a means of subsistence—must all be established. Our analysis shows that most prisoners leave incarceration for poverty in which housing is often insecure and



incomes are supplemented by government programs. In the struggle to obtain community membership, former prisoners rely on mothers, grandmothers, and sisters to play a caring role to feed, provide for, and house their kin, now in their twenties and thirties. For those in their forties and older, family ties have deteriorated, and the state becomes the supporter of last resort. In the larger context of the poor neighborhoods and poor families to which former prisoners return, leaving prison is a challenging transition that strains surrounding sources of assistance. The stress of transition from prison to community is not just felt at the individual level but is a new burden on the social relationships of poor communities with high rates of incarceration.

APPENDIX

TABLE A1  
 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHARACTERISTICS OF  
 BRS RESPONDENTS AND OTHER DEPARTMENT OF  
 CORRECTION (DOC) RELEASES TO BOSTON

|                                    | BRS  | DOC  | Total |
|------------------------------------|------|------|-------|
| Female . . . . .                   | 12.3 | 12.2 | 12.2  |
| Age:                               |      |      |       |
| Under age 30 . . . . .             | 31.2 | 28.0 | 28.8  |
| 30–39 . . . . .                    | 27.9 | 34.2 | 32.5  |
| 40 or over . . . . .               | 41.0 | 37.8 | 38.6  |
| Race/ethnicity:                    |      |      |       |
| White . . . . .                    | 30.3 | 28.9 | 29.3  |
| Black . . . . .                    | 50.8 | 45.8 | 47.2  |
| Hispanic . . . . .                 | 18.9 | 25.3 | 23.6  |
| Recidivism risk:                   |      |      |       |
| High general risk . . . . .        | 61.8 | 58.9 | 59.6  |
| High violent risk . . . . .        | 68.0 | 59.8 | 61.9  |
| Prison security level at release:  |      |      |       |
| Minimum/prerelease . . . . .       | 44.3 | 33.3 | 36.2  |
| Medium . . . . .                   | 41.8 | 55.4 | 51.7  |
| Maximum . . . . .                  | 13.9 | 11.3 | 12.0  |
| Governing offense:                 |      |      |       |
| Violent . . . . .                  | 41.0 | 27.7 | 31.2  |
| Drug . . . . .                     | 21.3 | 50.3 | 42.6  |
| Property . . . . .                 | 16.4 | 12.8 | 13.8  |
| Sex . . . . .                      | 3.3  | 3.3  | 3.3   |
| Other . . . . .                    | 18.0 | 6.0  | 9.2   |
| Time served:                       |      |      |       |
| Less than 1 year . . . . .         | 21.3 | 23.2 | 22.7  |
| 1–3 years . . . . .                | 46.7 | 47.3 | 47.2  |
| 3–10 years . . . . .               | 29.5 | 27.1 | 27.7  |
| 10 or more years . . . . .         | 2.5  | 2.4  | 2.4   |
| Sample size ( <i>N</i> ) . . . . . | 122  | 336  | 458   |

NOTE.—Black respondents include those identifying as West Indian, Cape Verdean, and black biracial.

TABLE A2  
 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS RECEIVING MONEY FROM FAMILY  
 OR STAYING WITH FAMILY, ONE WEEK, TWO MONTHS,  
 AND SIX MONTHS AFTER PRISON RELEASE

|                                   | One Week | Two Months | Six Months |
|-----------------------------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Race/ethnicity:                   |          |            |            |
| White . . . . .                   | 52.8     | 51.5       | 46.7       |
| Black . . . . .                   | 78.3     | 69.0       | 62.5       |
| Hispanic . . . . .                | 59.1     | 52.4       | 55.0       |
| Schooling:                        |          |            |            |
| High school dropout . . . . .     | 66.7     | 61.8       | 59.1       |
| High school graduate . . . . .    | 67.4     | 59.1       | 52.5       |
| Probation or parole supervision:  |          |            |            |
| Not supervised . . . . .          | 60.9     | 59.5       | 57.1       |
| Supervised . . . . .              | 70.8     | 61.4       | 56.2       |
| Time served:                      |          |            |            |
| Less than 3 years . . . . .       | 67.1     | 62.3       | 55.6       |
| 3 years or more . . . . .         | 66.7     | 57.1       | 58.8       |
| Time spent incarcerated as adult: |          |            |            |
| 50% or less . . . . .             | 61.5     | 58.8       | 54.9       |
| More than 50% . . . . .           | 71.2     | 62.3       | 58.2       |

TABLE A3  
 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS IN MARGINAL OR TEMPORARY  
 HOUSING, ONE WEEK, TWO MONTHS, AND  
 SIX MONTHS AFTER PRISON RELEASE

|                                   | One Week | Two Months | Six Months |
|-----------------------------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Race/ethnicity:                   |          |            |            |
| White . . . . .                   | 51.4     | 51.4       | 37.1       |
| Black . . . . .                   | 32.3     | 30.0       | 35.6       |
| Hispanic . . . . .                | 30.4     | 26.1       | 31.8       |
| Schooling:                        |          |            |            |
| High school dropout . . . . .     | 37.0     | 36.1       | 34.3       |
| High school graduate . . . . .    | 38.8     | 35.4       | 37.0       |
| Probation or parole supervision:  |          |            |            |
| Not supervised . . . . .          | 40.4     | 35.6       | 37.2       |
| Supervised . . . . .              | 36.0     | 36.0       | 34.2       |
| Time served:                      |          |            |            |
| Less than 3 years . . . . .       | 37.3     | 36.6       | 36.2       |
| 3 years or more . . . . .         | 38.5     | 34.2       | 33.3       |
| Time spent incarcerated as adult: |          |            |            |
| 50% or less . . . . .             | 40.7     | 40.7       | 35.2       |
| More than 50% . . . . .           | 35.3     | 31.8       | 35.5       |

## Stress and Hardship after Prison

TABLE A4  
 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS RECEIVING MONEY FROM PUBLIC  
 ASSISTANCE OR IN PAID EMPLOYMENT ONE WEEK, TWO MONTHS,  
 AND SIX MONTHS AFTER PRISON RELEASE

|                                   | One Week | Two Months | Six Months |
|-----------------------------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Receiving public assistance:      |          |            |            |
| Race/ethnicity:                   |          |            |            |
| White . . . . .                   | 52.8     | 87.9       | 63.3       |
| Black . . . . .                   | 45.8     | 79.3       | 81.8       |
| Hispanic . . . . .                | 22.7     | 38.1       | 50.0       |
| Schooling:                        |          |            |            |
| High school dropout . . . . .     | 38.9     | 66.7       | 68.2       |
| High school graduate . . . . .    | 51.1     | 86.0       | 74.4       |
| Probation or parole supervision:  |          |            |            |
| Not supervised . . . . .          | 37.0     | 74.4       | 69.0       |
| Supervised . . . . .              | 47.9     | 73.9       | 71.4       |
| Time served:                      |          |            |            |
| Less than 3 years . . . . .       | 43.0     | 75.6       | 73.6       |
| 3 years or more . . . . .         | 44.7     | 70.6       | 63.6       |
| Time spent incarcerated as adult: |          |            |            |
| 50% or less . . . . .             | 46.2     | 82.4       | 68.6       |
| More than 50% . . . . .           | 41.5     | 67.2       | 72.2       |
| Paid employment:                  |          |            |            |
| Race/ethnicity:                   |          |            |            |
| White . . . . .                   | 16.2     | 47.1       | 61.8       |
| Black . . . . .                   | 16.9     | 40.4       | 48.3       |
| Hispanic . . . . .                | 22.7     | 45.5       | 50.0       |
| Schooling:                        |          |            |            |
| High school dropout . . . . .     | 16.7     | 36.2       | 49.3       |
| High school graduate . . . . .    | 19.6     | 54.5       | 57.8       |
| Probation or parole supervision:  |          |            |            |
| Not supervised . . . . .          | 13.0     | 25.6       | 47.6       |
| Supervised . . . . .              | 20.8     | 54.3       | 55.6       |
| Time served:                      |          |            |            |
| Less than 3 years . . . . .       | 13.8     | 39.7       | 51.2       |
| 3 years or more . . . . .         | 26.3     | 51.4       | 55.9       |
| Time spent incarcerated as adult: |          |            |            |
| 50% or less . . . . .             | 15.1     | 43.4       | 57.4       |
| More than 50% . . . . .           | 20.0     | 43.3       | 48.3       |

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## Stress and Hardship after Prison

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