

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1: APRIL 2015

Practice

The New Zealand Corrections Journal



DEPARTMENT OF
CORRECTIONS
ARA POUTAMA AOTEAROA

Contact details

Practice: The New Zealand Corrections Journal
Department of Corrections / Ara Poutama Aotearoa
Private Box 1206, Wellington, New Zealand

Email: CorrectionsJournal@corrections.govt.nz

ISSN 2324-4305 (Print), ISSN 2324-4313 (Online)



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Editorial

The desistance issue

Often articles and information about desistance leave me with more questions than answers. Like many practitioners, I am desperate to find the dummies guide 'how to stop offenders re-offending', however it is never likely to be that simple.

Desistance is a term widely used in the fields of criminology and criminal psychology to describe the process of an offender successfully stopping or reducing offending over a period of time. While the term is widely used in the research, it is only just beginning to emerge in our thinking in frontline practice in Aotearoa. However, those of us who work with offenders must develop systems and practices that give offenders the best chance of desisting from crime. In this issue of *Practice* we get the opportunity to explore the topic of desistance further and in context for New Zealand practitioners.

In this issue we have gathered a range of articles from New Zealand and the wider world that I hope will challenge practitioners to think about their practice differently. Throughout all of the articles there is a common thread that the 'offender / client / service user' perspective is very important to ensuring a system promotes change and a move toward desistance. Many articles encourage a collaborative approach; this makes a lot of sense given every individual is unique and every case different, making it imperative for us to customise our practice based on the person and circumstances in front of us.

If you are new to the idea of desistance, a good place to start in this issue is the literature review by Marianne Bevan. This summarises concepts from a comprehensive range of the most prominent authors and articles on desistance.

There are two articles related to the Department's on-going parole research project led by Devon Polaschek from Victoria University. The article by Dickson and Polaschek examines the importance of offenders' individual release plans. Polaschek and Yesberg then examine the relationship between an individual's commitment to change and the likelihood of desistance from crime over a 12 month period.

A comprehensive research report by Jill Bowman into youth desistance follows the Department commissioning Dr Jarrod Gilbert to locate and interview 50 high risk young offenders who 'desisted' from crime. The report contains some salient information for practitioners about what works and what does not and in particular emphasises the importance of reintegrative assistance, and eliciting and enhancing pro-desistance self talk.

We are also privileged to have an international article in this issue contributed by Fergus McNeill, Stephen Farrall, Claire Lightowler and Shadd Maruna who are amongst the world's leading researchers on the topic of desistance. The article presents ten propositions that were developed from a series of workshops throughout the UK that focused on the development of practice for desistance. Some of these propositions challenge common current practice ideals and encourage us to think differently about how our systems operate.

One of the book reviews in this issue looks at *The Resilience Factor* which is considered a bit of a bible for anyone who wants to develop their knowledge of resilience to work with offenders or build personal resilience.

So, I hope this issue of *Practice* will leave you with a lot of questions about your practice, as it's only by questioning what we do that we improve. There probably is no simple 'answer' to how to stop re-offending, but this issue of *Practice* will give you a lot of clues and guidance to hone your practice.

Darius Fagan

Chief Probation Officer, Department of Corrections



Desistance from crime: A review of the literature

Marianne Bevan

Research Advisor, Department of Corrections

Author biography

Marianne Bevan is a Research Advisor in the Research Analysis Team. She started at Corrections in May 2014. Prior to working at Corrections, she conducted research and implemented projects on gender and security sector reform in Timor-Leste, Togo, Ghana and Liberia.

Introduction

Desistance from crime, or the process of ceasing offending and 'going straight', is a much discussed yet poorly understood aspect of criminology (Mulvey et al., 2004). Most simply, it refers to the successful achievement of permanently giving up an offending lifestyle (Farrall & Calverley, 2005). Desistance is however generally recognised to be a process rather than a single event. The path to desistance is thus often characterised by lapses, relapses, and recoveries (Shover, 1996; Maruna, 2001; Giordano et al., 2002). Criminal history data suggests that, at some point in the life course, usually before age 35, most offenders undergo what Wolfgang et al. (1972) described as 'spontaneous remission', where criminal behaviour appears simply to cease.

The developing desistance literature emphasises a range of variables commonly found to be associated with desistance. These range from personal and life course factors, to external influences related to social bonds, employment, partnerships, and family. How these variables influence particular desistance pathways can differ depending on the age, gender and ethnicity of the person.

The following review presents a summary of some of the more important research findings into factors that motivate and support desistance amongst offenders.

Agency and identity formation

As already noted, most offenders are observed to eventually 'mature' out of criminal behaviour. Research on desistance has therefore focused on aspects of the maturation process which might influence desistance.

This process of 'growing up' can lead to new adult roles, a revision of personal values and reassessment of what is important, which can alter perceptions of the value of crime (Shover & Thompson, 1992; Shover, 1996; Healy, 2010; Barry, 2000; Bottoms et al., 2004). The desistance process is influenced by internal

transformations through which offenders are able to develop a new sense of self which in part involves an 'ex-offender' identity (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2002; Bottoms et al., 2004; Healy, 2010). Maruna's (2001) study, which utilised life history data from 55 men and 10 women, found that there was a key difference in how desisters and persisters understood and explained their lives, with desisters more likely to create "new pro-social narrative identities in order to account for, and disassociate themselves from, their criminal pasts" (Appelton, 2010, p.134).

Other studies have highlighted the importance of personal agency, resilience and identity change in the desistance process (Farrall & Maruna, 2004; Serin & Lloyd, 2009; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Healy, 2010). Gender and ethnicity can have an impact on these internal processes (Deane et al., 2007; Hundleby et al., 2007). Deane et al.'s (2007) research with Aboriginal groups in Canada showed that encouraging the reconnection to their cultural ancestry and overcoming internalised ethnic stereotypes supported the development of a new pro-social, Aboriginal identity. Several studies have shown that male desisters are more likely than female desisters to cite personal choice and agency when describing their desistance process (Graham & Bowling, 1995; McIvor et al., 2004; McIvor & Raynor, 2007). Farrall (2002) and Giordano et al. (2002), while endorsing the importance of 'cognitive transformation', also emphasise that its influence should be understood within context: that desistance requires a combination of the individual's exposure to the right 'hooks for change', with their willingness to embrace these 'hooks'.

Peer groups

Peers play a significant role in encouraging or discouraging the delinquent behaviour of adolescents (Barry, 2000; Jamieson et al., 1999; MacDonald et al., 2010; Healy, 2010; Webster et al., 2006; Laub & Sampson, 2003). Peer group offending is often a central factor influencing young people's decision to offend, and

desisters in a number of studies spoke of separating themselves from former peer groups in order to achieve desistance from crime (Healy, 2010; Jamieson et al., 1999; Warr, 1998; MacDonald et al., 2010). Developing new pro-social friendship groups through re-connecting with groups of peers known prior to offending or creating new friendship groups has supported the desistance process for some ex-offenders (MacDonald et al., 2010; Giordano et al., 2003).

Family relationships

Family is understood to play an important role in the push toward, or the pull away from, a criminal lifestyle for young offenders. The existence of good-quality familial relationships can be a key factor in desistance (Bottoms et al., 2004; Healy, 2010; Farrall, 2002; Graham and Bowling, 1995; Farrall & Calverley, 2005; Barry, 2010). Family bonds can provide emotional and material support (Graham & Bowling, 1995), for example through offering access to employment networks (Calverley, 2013). They also provide less tangible forms of support, such as supporting motivation to change identity and 'go straight' (Liebrich, 1993; Sullivan, 2012).

Family members may also be models of pro-social behaviour (Healy 2010). Similar to peer groups, the positive impact of family relationships is highly dependent on the quality of that relationship. Where youth have experienced abuse and neglect, or other family members are themselves involved in crime, it is less likely that relationships will have a positive impact on desistance (Calverley, 2013).

Romantic relationships

Desistance literature has long focused on the impact of being in a romantic relationship on desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Savolainen, 2009). The quality of the relationship rather than its mere existence is thought to impact positively on desistance, with research by Healy (2010), Giordano et al. (2007) and Simons et al. (2002) showing that romantic relationships only increase the likelihood of desistance when satisfaction with the relationship is high. Being in a relationship can provide both 'informal social control' (Osgood & Lee, 1993; Warr, 2002) and can also facilitate motivational behaviour change which leads to changes in goals and shifts in the way that deviant behaviour is seen (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007; Maurana, 2001; Shover, 1996; Farrall, 2005). Research by Simons and Barr (2012) showed that desistance was higher for young people in secure romantic relationships because it allowed them

to develop more trust, empathy and a sense of fairness. The beneficial effects of romantic relationships are often less evident for female desisters. Women are more likely to be negatively impacted by having a partner involved in crime and, in these cases, it is the ending of the relationship that supports desistance (Simons & Barr, 2012; Simons et al., 2002; Haynie et al., 2005; McIvor et al., 2004).

Parenthood

Becoming a parent is often considered a major transition towards adulthood which, like marriage and employment, can alter daily routines as well as create an avenue for a new identity to form. However, evidence for impact on desistance is mixed (Giordano et al., 2011). Parenthood can provide a sense of responsibility including economic responsibility (McIvor et al., 2004; Healy, 2010), the opportunity to create a non-criminal identity in the community (Sullivan, 2012), motivation for reconnecting with members of one's wider family (Brown and Bloom, 2009) and a purposeful activity which changes routines (MacDonald et al., 2010). Research by McIvor et al. (2004) suggests that the

effect of parenthood on the desistance process is more pronounced for female offenders. However studies by Giordano et al. (2002), Kohm (2006) and Blokland & Nieuwbeerta (2005) showed a more limited relationship between the transition to parenthood and desistance. There are a range of factors that

moderate the effect of parenthood on desistance, including relationship situation (Monsbakken et al., 2013) socio-economic status (Giordano et al., 2011; Kreager et al., 2010), and cultural-contextual attitudes within different ethnic groups affecting the extent to which parenthood is a valued social role (Calverley, 2013; Katz, 2000; Sullivan, 2012).

Community support

The wider community around the desisting individual can support desistance, though more through sustaining it, rather than triggering it (Healy, 2010). Farrall & Calverley (2005) and Healy (2010) found that trust and recognition from significant others in the wider community was a factor motivating desisters to sustain a crime-free lifestyle. However, the value of community support is obviously dependent on the nature of the community that the desister is reintegrating back into and, where there are fewer social and economic resources, and more negative influences, the potential for positive impact is lessened (Calverley, 2013).

“Desistance from crime, or the process of ceasing offending and ‘going straight’, is a much discussed yet poorly understood aspect of criminology.”

Employment, training and recreational activities

The research provides a general consensus that stable employment can promote desistance from crime. A number of studies appear to confirm this (Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Horney et al., 1995; Farrall, 2002), although some found only limited impact (McIvor et al., 2000; Barry, 2000). Many of the studies showing the link found that employment has impacts only under particular circumstances, for example when employment generates a personal sense of 'purpose' (Farrall, 2004; Farrall, 2002; Wadsworth, 2006; Staff & Uggen, 2003; MacDonald et al., 2010). According to Farrall (2004) and MacDonald et al. (2010) 'purposeful' employment can support desistance by reducing unstructured time, providing an income which increases independence, increasing self-esteem, helping to develop a legitimate identity, creating new social networks and providing personal goals. Achieving education qualifications, participating in training, and volunteering have also been found to have positive impacts by adding 'purpose' to ex-offenders' lives (MacDonald et al., 2010 Calverley, 2013).

Sobriety and recovery from addiction

Drug use and abuse is often inimical to desistance: drug use and drug-seeking behaviour is often a criminal offence in itself, or typically leads to a range of other criminal acts. Treatment for substance abuse can be an important first step for many desisters, and recovery from addiction is often recognised as a necessary goal before desistance can commence (Christian et al., 2009; Morash, 2009; McIvor et al., 2004). However, desisters are not all found to be entirely drug-free: the 'Pathways to Desistance' study revealed that those with stability in their daily routines could successfully desist even if continuing with (albeit) lower levels of substance use (Mulvey et al., 2004).

Mental health

Offenders with severe or unmanaged health problems face an increased risk of adverse outcomes including: physical illness, relapse into drug use or, particularly in the case of mental illness, inappropriate behaviour that provokes a criminal justice response. Both male and female offenders with mental health conditions reported more post-release criminal behaviour than other returning prisoners (Coleman & Vander Laenan, 2012). It follows therefore that successful treatment of concurrent psychiatric disorders will be an important enabler of desistance.

Spirituality and religion

While religion has featured in desistance studies as a factor supporting behavioural change (Maruna, 2001), there has been limited research to date investigating the role it plays in desistance, although several studies find it can have a positive impact in certain circumstances (Giordano et al., 2008; Shroeder & Frana, 2009).

Criminal justice interventions

There is conflicting evidence about the impact criminal justice interventions have on the process of desistance. A number of studies (for example Carpenter, 2012) claim to have found that incarceration seldom features as a motivating factor amongst those who desist from criminality. On the other hand, some researchers have found that the desire to avoid further entanglement with the criminal justice system was commonly cited as a critical consideration amongst offenders who had 'gone straight' (Barry, 2010; McIvor et al., 2000). The role of supervision by probation services in particular has been investigated, also with equivocal outcomes: desisters only occasionally cite the influence of probation officers as a factor in their desistance (Bottoms et al., 2004; Farrall, 2002; Leibrich, 1993). When there is a good quality relationship, however, the process of desistance is more likely to be supported (Barry, 2010; Leibrich, 1993).

Conclusion

As this review has shown, the pathways that people utilise to desist are complex and varied; desistance occurs via a wide range of pathways and is not a singular process. It may take a number of years, and may be partial for extended periods before it becomes complete. Age and maturation are often important factors. Related to this, the creation of a new pro-social identity is central to the desistance process of many ex-offenders. While choices and decisions to desist have been shown to be a factor, and often an important one, there is usually more to desistance than simply willing it. Individual motivation often interacts with external factors such as the creation of social ties or bonds (between the individual and society) – like work, partnerships or parenthood. While the majority of research on desistance shows some combination of these different factors and pathways out of crime, the common elements are often experienced differently based on the age, ethnicity, and gender of the desister. Therefore, desistance-oriented interventions must have sufficient sensitivity to individual diversity if they are to succeed.

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Discovering desistance: Reconfiguring criminal justice?

Fergus McNeill, Stephen Farrall, Claire Lightowler and Shadd Maruna

Author biographies:

Fergus McNeill is Professor of Criminology and Social Work at the University of Glasgow, where he works in the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research and is Head of Sociology.

Steve Farrall is Professor of Criminology at the University of Sheffield where he is Director of the Centre for Criminological Research.

Claire Lightowler is currently Programme Manager for Evidence Informed Practice at IRISS (Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services). She is about to take up a new post as Director of the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice at the University of Strathclyde.

Shadd Maruna is Professor of Human Development and Justice Studies at Queen's University, Belfast.

Introduction

The subject of desistance from crime has, in recent years, moved from being the preserve of a few curious criminologists to being a topic much discussed in the justice sector (Farrall 2002, Farrall and Calverley 2006; McNeill & Weaver, 2010). It sometimes seems as if whenever we read about or discuss prisons, probation or sentencing reform, the 'D' word gets mentioned.

Although, for desistance researchers, this is exciting in many ways, as the concept has spread from research and theory to policy and practice, a risk has arisen that the word 'desistance' (never the easiest concept to understand) might come to be misused, misunderstood and misapplied. Occasionally, we hear reference to 'desistance theory' or 'desistance policies'. We may even slip into such loose uses of language ourselves. However, there is no *single* theory of why people stop offending, nor is there an obvious or agreed set of policy proposals which can be 'read off' from the research. For those who crave explicit and specific remedies based on 'what(ever) works', this may feel like a limitation. On the other hand, it might also be a strength in that it leaves open space for others, with different forms of expertise, to play their parts in penal reform and development, drawing on their own reflexivity and creativity.

“We asked people to produce ‘provocative propositions’ - that is, statements which demanded action and which stated in a clear and challenging way how the criminal justice system could and should be better focused on helping people stop offending.”

In that spirit, in September 2011 and with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (Award No: RES-189-25-0258), a group of desistance researchers (McNeill, Farrall and Maruna) and an expert on knowledge exchange (Lightowler) created the Desistance Knowledge Exchange Project (DesKE). Working in partnership with the National Offender Management Service for England and Wales, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Community Justice Division of the Scottish Government and with Lagan Media Ltd (an independent film production company), we co-produced a documentary film about desistance (*The Road from Crime*) and then convened a series of eight workshops in which stakeholders discussed and debated the development of 'practice for desistance'. During the workshops we also disseminated a short review of research written for stakeholders (see McNeill et al, 2012: <http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/how-and-why-people-stop-offending-discovering-desistance>).

The workshops with practitioners, policy-makers, probationers, people with convictions and their family members or significant others, took place in Belfast, Glasgow, London and Sheffield in 2012. They were structured around learning from all participants by sharing professional and personal experience and expertise. Following an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) format (see Liebling, Price & Elliot, 1999 and Robinson

et al, 2013), the workshop participants were first asked to reflect on their own or others' experiences of desistance or supporting desistance. Next, they were challenged to describe what processes, skills, relationships or resources they thought were crucial in facilitating positive change. Drawing on these experiences, we then asked the stakeholders to imagine the sort of criminal justice system they felt would better support desistance. We asked people to produce 'provocative propositions' – that is, statements which demanded action and which stated in a clear and challenging way how the criminal justice system could and should be better focused on helping people stop offending. We went on to think about how to realise these propositions; focussing on what needed to be done to achieve this vision of the future of criminal justice. We asked participants in particular to focus on identifying what *they* could do to move towards better practices, services and policies, and to identify what others also need to do to make this happen.

In this short paper, we review the ten most common and best supported of the 'provocative propositions' that emerged in the workshops. It is important to note that although we are the authors of this brief paper, we are not the authors of these *propositions*; nor do they necessarily represent *our* particular readings of desistance research. Rather, they are ideas and proposals that have been co-authored and co-produced by all of those involved in this process in a genuine effort at knowledge exchange.

The provocative propositions

- 1. There is a need for meaningful service user involvement in the design, delivery, assessment, and improvement of policies and provision across the criminal justice system; and for clear career routes for former service users that recognise and value the skills that people with convictions possess.**

Some workshop groups suggested that every probation or criminal justice social work organisation and prison should have active service user involvement to inform service delivery and policy. They argued for greater use of peer mentoring schemes, as well as clear career routes for former service users so that they can progress to (and from) mentoring roles if they wish. Likewise, several participants argued that each component of the criminal justice system should have a service user council or representative body aimed at supporting those who are being supervised.

Practical difficulties (such as restrictions on people with convictions working in prisons to mentor serving prisoners) would need to be resolved. Perhaps the training of criminal justice staff could

embrace the idea of accrediting prior experiences and learning (APEL) so that former service users are not deterred from working within the criminal justice system. Many criminal justice organisations also employ many non-frontline staff (catering, maintaining buildings etc.); could apprenticeships in these trades be created for former service users as well? Thought also needs to be given to support schemes and strategies for when things go wrong (and there will inevitably be such incidents in working with any groups of individuals). Finally, this proposition would require a considerable shift in public and professional mindset as the approaches outlined above challenge entrenched power dynamics and the risk aversion that affects the criminal justice system.

- 2. There is a dire need to reduce the prison population, first and foremost in order to free up resources to invest in efforts more likely to support desistance.**

The workshop participants agreed that there needed to be greater efforts made to educate sentencers about how sentencing can support and frustrate desistance, and there may be a need for legislative reform to reduce the numbers going to custody and the length of prison sentences. Stakeholders agreed that prison ought to be reserved for the most dangerous offenders – and therefore used principally for public protection, freeing up resources for more use of interventions such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation and mental health services. Participants argued that those individuals who are not a danger to the public would be better served by interventions aimed at reparation or opportunities to demonstrate rehabilitation as these are more likely to promote and support desistance. One group suggested a scheme by which prisoners could trade hours of constructive 'pay back' work for remaining days of prison time.

- 3. A rethink of criminal justice social work (CJSW)/probation is necessary to make it more 'holistic' and 'humanised', more focused on the service user's strengths and needs, and more flexible and open to creative work.**

This suggestion would require training and retraining staff as well as the creation of more flexible and imaginative community sentencing options. It would also mean agreeing with service users exactly what supervisor and supervised are going to do together. Participants explained that this would also mean moving away from risk/fear-driven practices, which do not encourage or allow enough time for creative practice. Other ideas included producing 'before and after records' for service users – so they can more easily appreciate the work they have done

and the changes they have made as they progress to better citizenship. Another idea was a service user recognition award – something to mark and acknowledge the progress made.

4. In the future, CJSW/probation offices and officers need to become better connected with local communities with greater community involvement in all of their work.

Participants argued that CJSW and probation staff need to have greater involvement with families and with those broader structures of social support that enable desistance. To do this, staff need to be allowed and encouraged to get out of the office and into the community. All agreed that CJSW/probation needs to be braver in terms of releasing professional staff to do their jobs, encouraging the reduction of bureaucracy to enable this to happen.

5. A wider circle of society should be encouraged to take responsibility for helping people stop offending.

Families and communities (defined as anyone important to the service user) are seen to be a key factor in change processes. Some of the suggestions here focused on creative ideas for encouraging greater involvement in reintegration work among employers, faith communities, civic groups and other potential supporters of desistance. Participants argued that we need to educate society about the lives of those caught up in crime in order to shift attitudes about the causes of crime and the positive role such groups can play in reintegration and desistance.

“People can and do change, and this matters.”

6. Interventions ought to focus less on risk and more readily on the positives, and what people have achieved *and can achieve* in the future.

Generally, any system of assessment and review needs to focus on an individual's strengths (as well as giving appropriate attention to their wants and needs). Language is important; referring to service users as 'clients' (for all its limitations) reminds staff and clients that one of the goals of supervision is to pose the question 'what do *you* want to get out of *your* sentence?' Systems need to be developed whereby successes can be formally recognised and rewarded.

7. Community supervision needs to work to challenge inequality and promote fairness, equalising life chances and contributing to social justice.

Participants argued that we need to create and enable better access to real opportunities for change – and not just to focus on motivating or 'up-skilling' those on supervision. We need to encourage people to focus on where those who have offended in the past are *now*, and the important roles they can and do play in society. Participants suggested that we need to ensure that services are responsive to local needs, with an emphasis on consistency around justice processes, but not necessarily exactly similar services (i.e. not all communities need the same type or the same level of service provision). The ways to achieve this responsiveness to local needs are to be found through consultative and co-productive processes. Participants thought supervision should focus on assisting people who want to change and encouraging others to consider making small steps towards change. While the compulsory element of a sentence should be bound by proportionate and just responses to offending, the voluntary element should be based on the person being supported, and should be developed with their consent. If it is right that people cannot and should not be forced to change, then the change supporting aspects of supervision need to be self-determined, at least as far as that is consistent with public safety.

Participants argued that there also needs to be a strengths-based approach to practice. For example, prisons or probation trusts might partner with local colleges and job centres to

find employment for those on supervision or leaving prison, or work with local colleges to provide training and qualifications to service users who could then produce goods or services that could be sold on to the community. Such a joined-up approach could generate income to pay for training and professional support. This could become a self-sustaining social enterprise; recruiting people to help plan and deliver services and products, thus sustaining their employment. Services need to develop people's human *and* social capital.

8. Redraft the Rehabilitation of Offender Act 1974 to encourage and recognise rehabilitation much earlier, and not stand in the way of desistance in the name of 'rehabilitation'.

Under the Rehabilitation of Offender Act 1974, many people's convictions can never become 'spent', and those whose convictions can become spent often have to wait an inordinately long time (meaning that the law may no longer be useful for promoting change). Participants argued that we need a system which can help all individuals with convictions progress towards their previous criminal records

becoming 'spent' and also speed up the process whenever possible and appropriate. Some thought, for instance, that if there is no further offending, all sentences ought to become 'spent' three years after the end of the sentence (with some exceptions for very grave offences which raise particular concerns about public safety). Another suggestion was that a criminal record tribunal – a review process for people whose past convictions are serious but who can also evidence change on their part – could be established in order to allow those with extensive and serious criminal histories to re-enter the employment market without having to declare offences which took place many years before. The tribunal could consist of reformed offenders, probation officers, judges and lay members. Finally, many participants thought we should follow the example of some European countries in creating stricter tests of relevance for access to criminal records for employers, focusing on why particular convictions are relevant to posts advertised.

9. The public needs more accurate information about the lives of those in the criminal justice system and in particular on the process of leaving crime behind.

Better public education is needed to help to break down the 'them' and 'us' mentality around offending. If individuals in the criminal justice system were more humanised than demonised in the public imagination, members of the public would be more likely to believe that prisoners and probationers are capable of change, and that we all have a part to play in supporting change. Criminal justice agencies have a role to play here in holding up examples of success to demonstrate that positive change is possible, indeed common. New social media was mentioned as one potential way of sharing 'good news' stories from charities, organisations and services, as well as former service users themselves. Likewise, local media may be easier to work with, even providing former service users the opportunity to discuss their own experiences in a local context. Participants thought that schools could get involved in educating children and young people about desistance processes, including through the testimony of desisting individuals.

10. Finally – but perhaps foremost in the tenor of the discussions – the criminal justice system needs to become more acquainted with hope and less transfixed with risk, pessimism and failure.

People *can* and *do* change, and this matters. Hope that one's own life can be better is an important sustaining emotion (but one which is easily damaged). Participants argued that we need to

find ways of fostering hope in the future for those people who have offended in the past and may still be entrapped in a life of crime and hopelessness. A sense of self-progression; a sense of there being a future worth living for, is what the criminal justice system ought to foster in those with whom it engages. Unless and until it does that, it will frustrate the common interests of people who have offended and of their communities in supporting desistance and reintegration.

Closing words

Although the ideas above very much cohere and complement one another (indeed, some overlap), they should not be understood as belonging to a singular vision or to one theory of desistance. DesKE was explicitly intended to harness different forms of expertise rather than privileging or prioritising one singular perspective. Clearly, those working in and living with the criminal justice system have already started to talk and think about how people build new lives. The 'desistance genie' is well and truly out of the bottle. While researchers have plenty more work to do developing a robust, research-based understanding of these processes and of what supports them, arguments over language, social attitudes, policy developments and practice processes cannot and should not wait for research to provide 'answers'. Rather, all of the stakeholders with whom we have engaged – people with convictions, policy-makers, service users, families and practitioners – need to press on with the urgent basis of working out what to do with what we have discovered together.

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Lessons from research into youth desistance

Jill Bowman

Principal Research Adviser, Department of Corrections

Author biography:

Jill joined the Department of Corrections' Research and Analysis Team in 2010. She manages a variety of research and evaluation projects, and has a particular interest in desistance, how probation officers work with offenders, and the needs of female offenders. As well as working for Corrections, she volunteers at Arohata Prison, teaching quilting to the women in the Drug Treatment Unit.

Introduction

A person who starts offending at a young age and who receives a prison sentence before turning 18, is likely to continue committing crime regularly and for many years. Young offenders have higher reconviction and re-imprisonment rates than older offenders. In a five-year follow-up to June 2014, 91 percent of those under 20 were reconvicted and 65 percent were re-imprisoned. As a result, offenders imprisoned as teenagers tend to accrue some of the highest total Corrections costs over the course of their offending.

An understanding of why some offenders who start committing crime at an early age do not go on to become persistent offenders can provide useful insights into the support and resources that may encourage young offenders to turn their lives around. Appropriate interventions by Corrections and other agencies have the potential to reduce significantly re-offending by young people.

The research was thus intended as a qualitative survey of a relatively small sample of offenders to see whether we could obtain understanding of 'what helps' when offenders decide to give up crime. The purpose was purely practical in the sense of generating insights that could be used to improve our case management, one-to-one work, or rehabilitation programme content, that would leverage off these insights. The research was *not* designed to be an in-depth and carefully controlled study of the nature and processes involved in general offender desistance. For this reason methodological design features, such as a comparison 'persisters' group, were not utilised.

How the research was done

The Department identified nearly 450 offenders from its files who:

- had completed at least one prison sentence between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2009
- were aged 20 or under when they completed that prison sentence

- were assessed at the time of their last prison release as having a RoC*RoI risk score greater than 0.5 (that is, a greater than 50 percent likelihood of being re-imprisoned within five years of release)
- had not received a community-based or prison sentence in the three years since 1 January 2010.

After confirming these individuals met the criteria for inclusion in the research, an attempt was made to find recent contact details for them. This was done through searches of our own records on our Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS) database, social media sites, White Pages, and electoral rolls. We also arranged for Immigration New Zealand to match these names with their records to identify anyone who had left the country. Efforts were also made through public sources to exclude those who had died. Eliminating those who had emigrated or died, or who otherwise did not meet the criteria, left almost 300 names.

Following a competitive tender, the Department contracted Dr Jarrod Gilbert, Independent Research Solutions, to interview 50 offenders from the 300 remaining names. We provided him with the names, dates of birth, and the most recent contact information we had been able to ascertain about the former offenders. Dr Gilbert employed a private investigator to track down the large numbers of people whose contact details were no longer current. In many cases the contact information was for a family member or friend of the offender, requiring that person to pass on a request for an interview to the individual.

Dr Gilbert was able to interview 51 former offenders from throughout New Zealand, comprising 49 males and two females. Thirty-two (63 percent) identified as New Zealand European, 13 (25 percent) as Māori, four (eight percent) as Asian and two (four percent) as Pacific Peoples. This compares with the potential sample pool of 44 percent New Zealand European, 45 percent Māori, seven percent Pacific Peoples and 12 percent Other. At the time of interview, the participants were aged between 23 and 34 years, with an average age of 28.7 years.

Twenty-six of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and the remainder were conducted by telephone. Dr Gilbert conducted all interviews, which ensured consistency of approach.

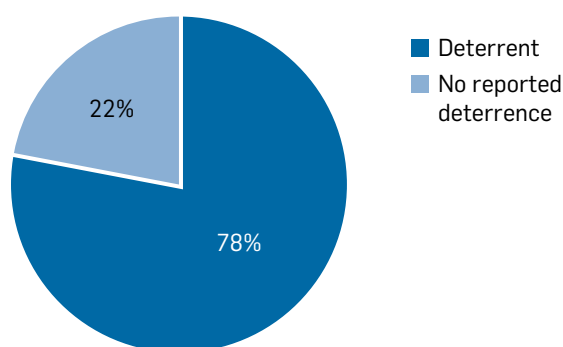
From the literature review conducted by the Department, topics relevant to a discussion of desistance were identified. From this, Dr Gilbert designed a semi-structured interview schedule. Areas explored covered the offender's background, including family, relationships, community, school, employment, health, and drugs and alcohol. The person's offending history covered their entry into crime, co-offenders, the nature of their offending and their attitudes towards crime at that time. Prison experiences covered the offender's attitudes towards prison before, during and after their imprisonment, and programmes or other support they received while in prison. Circumstances following release covered support in the community, education, employment, relationships – including partners and children, contact with probation, and programmes. Importantly, participants were asked questions about their desistance from crime including what motivated their decision.

Key findings

Imprisonment

The factor that study group members most commonly reported as significant in initiating desistance was the experience of having been imprisoned. Forty of the 51 people interviewed stated that being sent to prison was central to making a conscious and deliberate decision to cease further involvement in crime.

Prison as a deterrent



In elaborating on what it was about imprisonment that made it so 'influential', many spoke of being afraid of what could happen to them in prison, such as the risk of being assaulted by other prisoners. Others spoke of a sense that they "didn't belong in there", that they "weren't like the other prisoners". A few described as exceedingly unpleasant the thought that they could end up like the "old lagers," prisoners whose lives appeared to consist of little other than recurrent jail time. For some, the most pervasive aspect was the

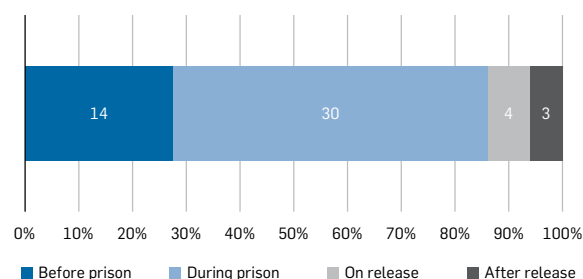
extreme boredom and tedium; a few cited the loss of freedom as particularly painful.

Guilt and shame over embarrassing or disappointing their families by going to prison was mentioned by 29 of the participants. This was particularly noted in relation to their mothers, and was a significant influence on deciding to change their life course.

Study participants who had spent time in both youth and adult units reported that the youth units were more threatening than adult units. None of the interviewees reported having actually been assaulted while in prison, but recalled fears about personal safety being more acute when held exclusively with other young prisoners.

For those who identified prison as a key factor in deciding to desist, 27 percent made the decision prior to arriving at prison (usually at the time of arrest), 59 percent while in prison (often "on the first night"), and the remainder made the decision some time after release. This was generally described as a conscious and determined resolution. For a few, decisions were made over a longer time frame, and gradually strengthened.

Time of decision to desist



Two thirds of the cohort (65 percent) considered that, in hindsight, prison had been a positive experience, opening their eyes to the downsides and risks of continuing in a pattern of criminality. No obvious relationship was found between the decision to desist because of imprisonment, and the length of the prison sentences imposed.

Personal agency

Also found to be important in motivating desistance was an emerging belief in participants that they could, if they so chose, turn their lives around. This was associated with a sense of accepting responsibility for offending, even when others (co-offenders) were involved. Most were motivated by a desire to "move away" from an offending lifestyle rather than a sense of wanting to "move towards" a different (non-offending) lifestyle. While almost half of the cohort recalled having plans for the future at the time of desisting, plans tended to be basic and often vague, mainly revolving around simple lifestyle changes such as "giving up drugs and alcohol" and ceasing to associate with criminally-orientated friends.

Few of the participants reported feeling guilt or empathy in relation to their victims at the time of their offending but, by the time of interview, many recognised the harm their offences had caused. For a few, acknowledging the harms caused to others was associated with the decision to cease crime.

Programmes

Over half the cohort reported having participated in some form of correctional programme. In most cases this was while in prison, but some did so after release or while on community sentences. Recollections of programme names and content was often vague, but some mentioned group-based drug and alcohol programmes, offending-focused programmes, education, employment skills training, cultural courses and “counselling” (probably individual work with a psychologist). Sixty-nine percent of those who completed a programme reported that it had been of some benefit to them, mainly in reinforcing their decision to desist. Specific benefits included helping to overcome their addiction, developing work skills, “building confidence” and acquiring better “skills for life”.

Importantly, those who participated in programmes and courses tended to identify the person who facilitated the programme or course as the most significant influence. Particularly valued was a facilitator with whom the participant felt they could establish a good working relationship during the programme.

Probation

Eighty-two percent of participants reported having been under the supervision of a probation officer at some time, and more than half of these rated their relationship with the probation officer as either “good” or “very good”. Around a quarter specifically reported some positive benefits, including personal support, receiving practical help, and other influences which maintained their decision to desist. However, whereas some recalled a probation officer who seemed interested in helping them, a number indicated that their probation officer seemed simply to be “going through the motions”.

Support after prison

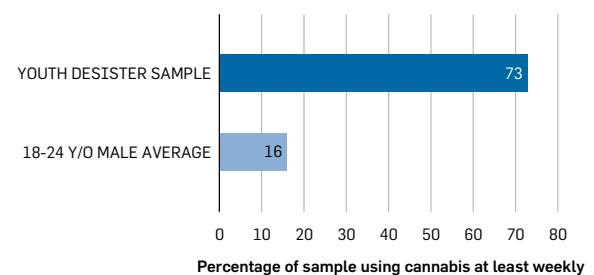
The value of social support from family and friends around the time of release was mentioned repeatedly as an important factor in helping participants “go straight”. It is a significant research finding that almost all those interviewed reported that family or friends were available to help them immediately after they were released from prison. Most moved in with a family member during this period, and the stability and assistance obtained was felt to be critically important in helping to either cement their decision to desist, or

to enable them to avoid falling back into old patterns of behaviour. As well as providing needed accommodation, family (or, in some cases, others) supported them to distance themselves from pro-criminal associates, as well as providing emotional support and (occasionally also) assistance to find employment.

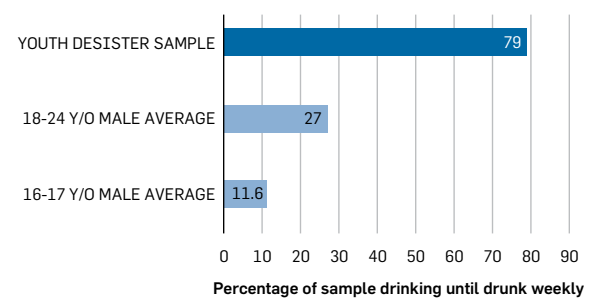
Alcohol and drug use

Heavy use of alcohol and drugs was a major factor identified by many in the cohort in precipitating or maintaining their offending. Almost 80 percent reported using marijuana at this time, with some also using harder drugs. A similarly high proportion reported getting drunk regularly. Based on Ministry of Health data, the cohort’s drug and alcohol use was significantly higher than that of a similar demographic.

Using cannabis at least weekly pre-prison



Drinking enough to feel drunk at least weekly - pre-prison



Source: Ministry of Health (2010)

Most reported that, at the time, they did not consider their alcohol or drug use to be a problem. Now, in retrospect, their alcohol and drug use was generally regarded as highly problematic. Most of these participants reported a significant decrease in drug and alcohol use since ceasing their offending. Interestingly, however, reported levels of both cannabis use and alcohol consumption remained significantly above population norms.

Though most had significantly reduced their drug and alcohol use, only a minority considered that this was important to their on-going desistance. Instead, reduced levels of use/consumption were regarded more as a consequence of having altered their lifestyles.

Some spoke of a sense of having matured and that, having taken on responsibilities (such as new partners, children or steady employment), it simply wasn't feasible to continue on as before.

Changing peer groups

Conscious decisions to change patterns of peer group involvement emerged as an important factor in "giving up crime", and was reported by most of the participants. Strong links with other offenders tended to be the norm when the participants were actively offending. It was seen as "obvious" by almost all that these associations were a potent influence in encouraging regular offending. Consequently, almost two-thirds (63 percent) recalled having made a deliberate decision, and efforts, to sever ties with criminal associates after release from prison. Some acknowledged still having some contact with "old mates", but this was not a primary social connection for any of them.

Employment

Almost all participants recalled wanting to find employment after their release from prison, and more than three-quarters reported finding work within three months. Sixty-one percent indicated that having a job was important in supporting their desistance from crime. Mentioned in this respect was the sense of being able to form new and pro-social friendships, and the stability of lifestyle that work created. On the other hand, the most common view was that their desistance was not dependent on finding or keeping employment. None thought that they would return to crime if they lost their employment and some reported periods of unemployment through which they had maintained their desistance.

Partners and children

At the time of interview 59 percent of study participants were, or had been, in a serious long-term relationship, and a similar proportion had children. Most relationships were formed after release, in some cases several years later. Most of these individuals believed that these relationships and responsibilities had helped them remain crime-free. Although no conclusions should be drawn when numbers are so low, this factor was particularly salient for the two women interviewed for the research.

Conclusion

As noted, the research here was intended as a qualitative survey of a relatively small sample of offenders to see whether we could obtain further understanding of 'what helps' when offenders decide to give up crime. It was not designed to be an in-depth carefully controlled study of the nature and processes involved in general offender desistance, and should not be interpreted as such.

The research showed that the experience of a prison sentence was the most significant factor in the decision to desist. Deterrence was influenced by the fear of what could happen in prison, boredom, and a feeling of not being like other prisoners. Some of the participants also felt ashamed by the hurt caused to family members.

Most of the interviewees took full responsibility for their crimes, and their decision to change was a conscious one. Over a quarter had decided to desist before going to prison, usually at the time of arrest, and a further half decided to cease offending while they were in prison. Prison rehabilitation programmes provided skills to support desistance.

Support immediately after release from prison was critical in maintaining the determination to desist from crime. This was most often provided by family members. Having somewhere to stay, as well as emotional support, assisted the offenders to avoid negative peer influences and to make plans for their future. Replacing anti-social associates with pro-social friends was recognised as being crucial to changing behaviour.

Drug and alcohol use by the young offenders was significantly higher than for a comparable demographic and was identified as a major factor in precipitating or maintaining offending. Although most reported a significant decrease in their drug and alcohol use since leaving prison, it was still generally higher than for their population norm. They regarded their reduction in use as a consequence of their change in lifestyle, rather than a factor in their desistance.

Work was important in developing a stable lifestyle and providing the opportunity for new pro-social friendships, but desistance did not depend on employment. Similarly, partners and children supported the offenders' pro-social identity, but were not instrumental in the decision to desist.

The research findings suggest several areas where the Department could strengthen its interventions for young people to improve the likelihood of their desisting from crime. The importance of reintegrative assistance, including accommodation, employment and other support is well-recognised, and additional help could be provided in this area. Ensuring young offenders are well supported on their release from prison, including reconnecting them with estranged family members, is another area that could be further enhanced. Another area with potentially high value is to consider how desisting offenders' 'self-talk' might be utilised in enhancing the impact of young offenders' rehabilitation. It may be feasible to investigate ways in which the pro-desistance reasoning of participants could be used to craft specific messaging for use by facilitators of short interventions as well as frontline staff (corrections officers and probation officers).



The role of release planning in the reintegration experiences of high-risk offenders

Sophie R. Dickson & Devon L. L. Polaschek
Victoria University of Wellington

Author biographies:

Sophie Dickson is a PhD and clinical psychology student in the School of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Her research interests include the rehabilitation and reintegration of high-risk offenders (with a particular focus on release planning), desistance, and risk assessment.

Devon Polaschek, PhD DipClinPsyc is a Professor of psychology at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Her research interests include theory, intervention, and intervention evaluation with serious violent and sexual offenders, psychopathy, desistance, reintegration, parole and experimental approaches to offender assessment.

Background

The challenges of reintegration

Internationally, the literature on reintegration has demonstrated that high-risk offenders face a number of challenges when being released from prison. Stable accommodation is crucial to the successful reintegration of prisoners back into the community, yet it is difficult for many of them to obtain. Most prisoners return to live with their families after release, but these living arrangements are often only temporary, and are problematic for offenders from criminogenic families (Solomon, Visher, La Vigne, & Osborne, 2006). High-risk offenders also struggle to find employment; in a study of ex-prisoners' adjustment to life in the community, it was reported that unemployment was the norm (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). Similarly, offenders have difficulty in finding positive social supports, in part due to the difficulty of maintaining positive attachments over long periods of imprisonment, and instead turn to antisocial peers for support (Lynch & Sabol, 2001). And finally, high-risk offenders tend to be released to socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods with high levels of crime and poverty (Hipp, Turner, & Jannetta, 2010). The cumulative effect of all of these barriers makes it difficult to resume an ordinary life; the more of these challenges an offender faces after release, the higher his risk of re-offending.

Release planning

One approach to aiding the transition from prison into the community is release planning. Release planning involves examining an offender's plans for life after release, and helping him to improve weak plans by, for example, facilitating access to resources that could ease his transition back into the community. At the time

this research was conducted, release planning was a component of the Special Treatment Unit Rehabilitation Programmes (STURPs) for both high-risk offenders and child sex offenders. Willis and Grace (2008, 2009) looked at the quality of release plans in two samples of child sex offenders who had attended Kia Marama or Te Piriti. Overall, they found that better quality release plans (i.e., plans that were more specific, confirmed, and more prosocial) were linked to lower rates of re-offending after release from prison. Dickson, Polaschek and Casey (2013) found a similar pattern of results with high-risk offenders from a STURP: better quality plans predicted a reduced likelihood of recidivism. Thus it appears that good quality release plans are related to a reduced rate of re-offending after release; however, so far no research has addressed the question of how release plans aid the reintegration process. What is the mechanism underlying the efficacy of release plans?

Research Question One

How do release plans work?

The current research explored two possible explanations for the efficacy of release planning. The first is the *external* pathway, which assumes that good quality release plans simply translate into good quality experiences in the community (e.g., good accommodation plans lead to somewhere reasonable to live on release). Theoretically, this idea is supported by the work of Sampson and Laub (1993), who tested out the assumption that crime is stable across an offender's lifespan. They examined the lifespans of 1000 males and found that, generally, delinquent boys turned into antisocial men, and well-behaved boys turned into prosocial men. However, Sampson and Laub discovered a group who were delinquent as

children but stopped offending and became prosocial adults. Upon closer inspection they found that these juvenile delinquents had experienced 'turning points' in their lives, which counteracted the continuity of their delinquency. These turning points were external events such as getting a stable job or marrying the 'right' woman. Sampson and Laub said that any psychological change was unnecessary and irrelevant: badly behaved people simply stumbled across good life events that turned things around for them. So our first hypothesis was that making good plans leads to offenders having more positive external experiences after release, interrupting their delinquency, and making them less likely to commit another crime.

The second explanation was the *internal* pathway (referring to internal, psychological processes). Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) argued that Sampson and Laub provided an incomplete picture of the desistance process, because they ignored the work the offender does to move toward, and then sustain, a new way of life. They argued that offenders develop psychologically so that they turn towards environments that include positive external events (e.g., employment or marriage), rather than simply chancing upon external turning points. If they didn't change psychologically, they would not recognise turning points, or would be unable to take advantage of them (e.g., when an offender gets a good job offer but then loses the job because of his drinking). Therefore it is important to focus on the role of factors internal to the offender. In order to operationalise the psychological changes that the desistance literature suggests, this study focused on three internal factors: Motivation to desist (the desire to give up crime), Self-Efficacy (the belief in being capable of giving up crime), and Prosocial Identity (seeing oneself as a prosocial individual). So the second hypothesis was that good quality release plans create higher levels of these internal factors, which in turn promote desistance from crime.

Method

To test the above hypotheses, data from three samples of high-risk offenders were collected. The samples were comprised predominantly of Māori men (e.g., 55-66 percent Māori, 22-29 percent NZ European, 6-19 percent Pasifika, and 2-3 percent other) with RoC*RoIs of 0.7 or higher who had been sentenced to at least two years in prison and who were therefore eligible for parole. The quality of offenders' release plans was coded from file data, including psychological reports, and reports to the parole board, as well as other file information. See Box 1 for Release Plan Quality items.

Box 1.

Release Plan Quality Items:

Accommodation
Employment
Prosocial support
Plans to avoid antisocial associates
Risk level of the release environment
Plans to manage risks in the release environment
Total score

Box 2.

Parole Experience Quality Items:

Accommodation
Employment
Prosocial support
Amount of contact with antisocial associates
Number of risks in the release environment
Total score

Both the quality of offenders' external experiences and the three internal factors were assessed at two months after release from prison. The quality of offenders' external experiences was measured from their probation service notes. See Box 2 for Parole Experience Quality items. The three internal factors (i.e., Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Identity) were assessed through interviews with the offenders. They were asked questions such as "How much do you want to go straight?", "How confident are you that you'll be able to go straight?" and "How much do you see yourself as a criminal?" Finally, recidivism data were extracted for the first six months after release. The first study was retrospective and file-based, and focussed solely on Te Whare Manaakitanga participants. The second two studies were prospective, included both STURP participants and untreated high-risk offenders, and were part of the Victoria University Parole Project. The Parole Project included both offenders who had graduated from one of the four high-risk STURP rehabilitation programmes, and a comparison sample of similarly high-risk offenders serving sentences of a similar length but who had not gone through a STURP.

Summary of results

Study one

Study one explored the external pathway, asking: "Do release plans simply translate into better quality experiences on parole?" As expected, overall release plan quality was a significant predictor of overall parole experience quality. But unexpectedly there was only one direct relationship between an item in the release plan scale and the corresponding item in the parole experiences scale: better plans for employment led to better experiences of employment. All of the other relationships between individual items were indirect. For example, making better quality plans for avoiding risk (i.e., release environment and antisocial associate items) led to poorer quality experiences of accommodation or employment.

Parole experiences were found to explain a significant amount of the relationship between release plans and recidivism, indicating that good quality release plans help to reduce recidivism by improving experiences on parole. However, parole experiences did not fully explain the link between release plans and re-offending, indicating that the effect of release plans on re-offending is not due simply to their impact on the external experiences on parole that were measured in this study.

Study two

Study two explored the internal pathway with a slightly different sample, asking: "Do release plans influence factors internal to the offender?" The results demonstrated that good quality release plans led to increased levels of motivation to desist in the community, which in turn led to decreased rates of recidivism. Neither self-efficacy nor identity helped to explain the relationship between release plans and re-offending in this sample. Thus, the results indicated that one specific internal factor, motivation to desist, connects release plans to re-offending. However, motivation to desist did not fully explain this relationship, as there was still a significant relationship between release plans and reconviction when motivation to desist was taken into account.

Study three

Study three aimed first to explore the relative contributions of, and interplay between, the internal and external factors in the prediction of re-offending. Building on the results of studies one and two, it was hypothesised that the relationship between release planning and re-offending would be explained by both the internal and external experiences in the community and that these two domains would have a positive impact on one another, meaning that both motivation to desist in the community and parole experiences would

positively predict each other. The results revealed that when the internal and external pathways were both included in a model (see Figure 1), release plan quality's relationship to re-offending was explained by the external pathway, but not by the internal pathway. These results suggest that release planning helps offenders to have better quality experiences in the community, which reduce their risk of re-offending. When examining the interplay of the internal and external variables (see Figure 2), the results showed that better parole experiences led to increased levels of motivation to desist but motivation had no effect on parole experiences.

Discussion

Overall, these results demonstrated that, as expected, good quality release plans predicted reduced rates of re-offending. The relationship between release plans and re-offending appears to be explained by the impact of release plans on experiences external to the offender (e.g., good quality plans for employment lead to good experiences of employment, which then decrease the likelihood of re-offending). These positive experiences then help the offender to feel more motivated to desist, but this motivation level does not on its own impact on recidivism.

The importance of the external experiences over the internal experiences is consistent with Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. Maslow theorised that our needs fall into five different categories (in order of prepotency: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualisation needs) and that only when our most basic needs are satisfied, do our 'higher' needs emerge, or warrant attention. In Maslow's terms, the external experiences of accommodation, social support, and employment meet needs that sit lower in the hierarchy than internal experiences of motivation to desist from crime (which may reflect a need for esteem or self-actualisation). During the initial few months of life in the community, these external experiences reflect needs that are likely still being met. Put simply, a homeless man will be thinking solely of finding food and shelter. Only after these needs are met will he contemplate satisfying his higher-order need of living a prosocial life¹.

1 However, it should also be noted that the measures of internal experiences in this study were limited to a single item for each type of experience. Future research using better measures of internal experiences should be conducted before we reach the conclusion that internal experiences are not relevant to success on parole.

Box 3.

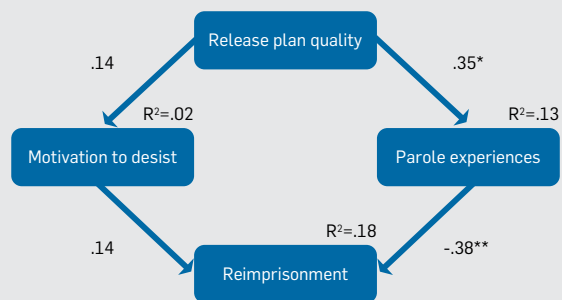


Figure 1.

The relative contributions of the internal and external pathways

Figure 1 shows the standardised regression coefficients for the theorised model in which release plan quality's relationship to reimprisonment is mediated by both motivation to desist and parole experiences. The bigger the regression coefficient, the stronger the relationship. If a number has an asterisk next to it, it means the relationship is statistically significant. In this model release plan quality was a predictor of parole experiences. Parole experiences, in turn, were predictive of reimprisonment. The only significant indirect effect was the relationship between release plans and reimprisonment, mediated by parole experiences (coefficient of .041, $p < .05$).

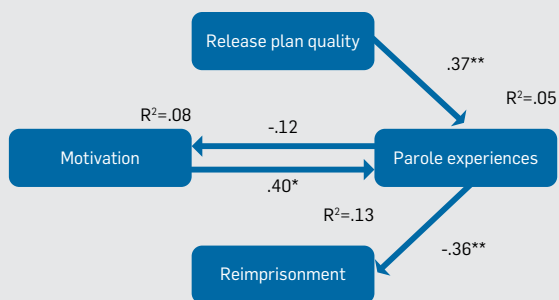


Figure 2.

Interplay between the internal and external pathways

Figure 2 shows the same model as Figure 1 with the nonsignificant relationships removed and relationships between motivation and parole experiences added. The results showed that release plan quality predicted parole experiences, which in turn predicted reimprisonment. Parole experiences were also a positive predictor of motivation to desist, but motivation did not predict parole experiences. The indirect effect from release plan quality to reimprisonment (mediated by parole experiences) was significant with a standardised indirect coefficient of $-.040$, $p < .05$.

Research Question Two

Why do some offenders make better release plans than others?

The final major area of interest in this research was how offenders make good quality plans, with a focus on the contextual variables associated with better quality release plans. Deci and Ryan developed Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) when they saw that, at their best, people can be inspired and exert a great deal of effort, yet at other times, people can also be passive and uninspired. This variation in behaviour represents variation in motivation. Deci and Ryan proposed that behaviours fall on a continuum from extrinsic through to intrinsic motivation. Research on SDT has demonstrated that the theory is able to predict persistent positive behaviour change across a variety of domains. When people are more intrinsically motivated to perform an action, they tend to perform the action better and persist with the action longer than if they are relatively more extrinsically motivated. They also tend to have more interest in the action, more confidence, more creativity, less stress, better self-esteem, and better general well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Deci and Ryan proposed that we have three basic psychological needs that need to be satisfied as we pursue a goal. The first is *autonomy*, which is the desire to be the source of our own actions. The second is *competence*, or one's ability to interact effectively with our environment. The third is *relatedness*, or the feeling of being connected to significant others. These three factors facilitate intrinsic motivation and the internalization of extrinsic motivation. In other words, when our basic needs are met we begin to value and internalise goals that we may not have done before, and become more intrinsically motivated. The main hypothesis for this study was that offenders who experience higher levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness during the planning process would become more intrinsically motivated to create release plans, and would then create better quality release plans.

Method

The sample used for this study was the same as the final sample described in the above method section. We developed two measures to examine the variables of interest; one measure to assess the offenders' levels of the three basic psychological needs, and

another to measure the degree to which an offender feels intrinsically motivated to create a release plan. Offenders completed these measures prior to their release from prison. The quality of offenders' release plans just prior to release was once again coded from file data, such as psychological reports, and reports to the parole board.

Summary of results

We examined how the three basic psychological needs contributed to the level of intrinsic motivation an offender reported to make release plans, and whether the level of intrinsic motivation then predicted release plan quality. The results demonstrated that autonomy was a significant predictor of the level of intrinsic motivation, which in turn predicted release plan quality: the more an offender felt he got to decide what his plans were, the more intrinsically motivated he felt to create good quality release plans, and the better his plans were.

Lastly, the research explored the role of STURP attendance in release planning. We expected that treated offenders would report greater levels of relatedness because they have more assistance in creating release plans, and that this relatedness would lead to them feeling more intrinsically motivated to create release plans. It was also hypothesised that untreated offenders would report higher levels of autonomy, compared to treated offenders because they created plans with less assistance (and therefore may have had more say over what their plans were). Treated offenders did report significantly higher levels of relatedness than untreated offenders, but there was no difference in their levels of autonomy. Treated offenders were also significantly more intrinsically motivated to create release plans. Finally, for the treated group, competence was the only significant predictor of the level of intrinsic motivation, whereas for the untreated group autonomy was the only significant predictor of the level of intrinsic motivation.

Discussion

The results from this study were encouraging for a couple of reasons. First, because they indicated that offenders became more intrinsically motivated to make release plans (and in turn made better plans) when they had higher levels of autonomy. The results showed that offenders in the sample reported high levels of autonomy in general, meaning they had the necessary basic need met to make good release plans.

Second, because they suggest that offenders who participate in treatment in the STURPs perceive that they receive more support with their release planning than untreated offenders but this additional support

does not make them feel that they are any less in control of their release plans. Importantly, treated offenders also had significantly better quality release plans than untreated offenders, suggesting that treatment is helpful in improving release plans.

It was interesting to note that treated offenders reported being motivated by feeling competent, whereas untreated offenders reported feeling motivated by autonomy. This result may reflect the pre-existing differences between treated and untreated offenders. Offenders who refuse treatment may be people who personally value autonomy highly and prefer to do things on their own, whereas offenders who accept treatment may be people who value competence and building personal skills. Alternatively, participating in treatment may lead to offenders feeling more competent at making plans and then valuing that competence highly. We cannot be sure which of these explanations is correct because we did not measure these variables prior to treatment.

Summary and implications

Offenders face a number of barriers to reintegrating into the community, such as unstable accommodation, unemployment, and little prosocial support. The current research suggests that offenders with better quality plans for life after release face fewer of these barriers and are then less likely to re-offend. These more positive experiences in the community then help offenders to feel more motivated to desist from crime. Their basic needs are being met so they can start to think about living a more prosocial life. It's still early days for them though, so getting their basic needs met is more important than their level of motivation to desist in determining whether they re-offend or not. Finally, in order to help offenders to make good plans, it is important that they feel they get to decide what their plans are, and they feel capable of developing good plans. At this stage, we see that the STURPs are creating the kind of environment that helps offenders to make good quality plans.

A few implications arise from these results. The first is that men who come through the STURPs onto parole have better quality release plans than those who do not. Since the time this research was conducted, increased assistance has been provided for untreated high-risk offenders: a change this research suggests is worthwhile. Next, is that if offenders are educated about how good plans can help to keep them out of prison, it may encourage them to put more effort into creating good quality plans. Likewise, educating staff about the importance of promoting autonomy and competence in the release planning context could help men to make even better plans.

And finally, motivation to desist appeared to be unimportant in avoiding re-offending in this research. Does that mean that desistance theory is wrong? Probably not. Most offenders were motivated to desist at release, meaning that what makes the difference among those who *are* motivated is whether or not basic needs are met, and this is more likely if they have a good plan.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Department of Corrections for funding the Parole Project and Victoria University of Wellington for the first author's PhD Scholarship.

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Desistance in high-risk prisoners: Pre-release self-reported desistance commitment and perceptions of change predict 12-month survival

Devon L. L. Polaschek & Julia A. Yesberg
Victoria University of Wellington

Author biographies:

Devon Polaschek, PhD DipClinPsyc is a Professor of psychology at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Her research interests include theory, intervention, and intervention evaluation with serious violent and sexual offenders, psychopathy, desistance, reintegration, parole and experimental approaches to offender assessment.

Julia Yesberg is a PhD student in the School of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Her research interests include the rehabilitation and reintegration of high-risk offenders, theories of offender change and change generalisation/maintenance, desistance, and risk assessment

Much of what we know about successful desistance is the product of hindsight. Although many people decide while in prison that they want to desist from crime, only some are successful during their next release into the community; the process of getting to long-term desistance typically zigzags (Burnett, 2004), and may be affected significantly by external factors (e.g., job loss, financial debt, relationship conflict), no matter how committed the offender was before these setbacks occurred.

Maruna and Farrall (2004) proposed that desistance can be broken into two types: (a) *primary desistance* is any gap or pause in the flow of criminal behaviour; (b) *secondary desistance*, they suggested, is likely to be a longer period free of offending. Much of the desistance literature has focused on how to define desistance based on the length of time between offences (Kazemian, 2007). But crucially, Maruna and Farrall (2004) suggested that secondary desistance is also associated with awareness on the offender's part that he or she is not offending, and "the movement from the behaviour of non-offending to the assumption of a role or identity of a non-offender or 'changed person'" (p. 4). Thus there are two dimensions to their definition of desistance: the length of time since the last offence, and the presence or absence of self-conscious efforts to refrain from offending which may be associated with or lead to a change in identity.

We often talk of desistance as a process that starts after an offender's release from prison; there is little mention of whether or how desistance processes may begin *in* prison. But being sentenced to a long prison sentence is likely to be a significant turning point for some offenders. Going back to prison may lead

to *decisive momentum*, the first step in a secondary desistance process according to the recently proposed Integrated Theory of Desistance from Sexual Offending (ITDSO; Göbbels, Ward, & Willis, 2012). And even though offenders are in custody, because there are many opportunities to commit offences in prison, abstinence from crime can also be demonstrated: the prisoner can be misconduct-free, and staff can describe their attitudes as prosocial and law abiding. Furthermore, probation officers and psychologists will attest that prisoners being assessed for parole often talk about a current commitment to "going straight", and about their perceptions of positive change during their sentence. Consistent with the ITDSO, we speculate that it is possible for offenders to make several initial and meaningful steps in the process of secondary desistance while they are still in prison. The ITDSO postulates that those who attend rehabilitation will enter the second stage of their desistance model—moving from thinking about change (*initial desistance*) to beginning to change (*promoting desistance*; Göbbels et al., 2012).

Scepticism about the validity of offender self-report may lead us to wonder about the value of offenders' talk about desistance and change while they are still in prison, especially if they are high-risk offenders who have not undergone any form of intensive rehabilitation during their sentence. In this brief report, we examine how high-risk offenders view desistance and change, using interview data from the Parole Project collected just prior to release on parole. Consistent with the ITDSO, we examined whether ratings differed for men who were graduates of high-intensity psychological treatment programmes vs. those who were released without such treatment. We also examined whether

prisoners' perceptions of desistance and change were related to reconviction in the first 12 months after release.

Based on research showing that contrary to popular belief, offender self-report can provide valid indicators of later offending behaviour (Walters, 2006), we hypothesised that offenders' ratings would be predictive of reconviction. We expected the strongest relationship to be between these ratings and the occurrence of any reconviction (including breaches): with weaker relationships to reconviction outcomes that did not assume the offender was completely free of offending behaviour (e.g., reconvictions for violence).

Method

Sample

The sample for this study was 141 completers of one of four high-risk special treatment units (HRSTU)¹ and 147 similarly high-risk prisoners who did not complete treatment at one of these units on their current sentence². Each man was recruited for the study and interviewed just prior to release from prison, then followed up in the community. We examined whether they had been reconvicted for a breach of parole, for any other type of offence, for a new violent offence, or reconvicted for an offence leading to a new prison sentence, all within 12 months of the date of release.

See Box 1 for the sample characteristics. Statistically, the two samples were indistinguishable on characteristics that predated the possible effects of HRSTU treatment, except that treatment-completing men were more likely to be lifers, and had been given longer sentences. Post-treatment, they were also much more likely to be released early onto parole (80 percent vs. 32 percent) than those in the comparison sample, but this difference is likely to be influenced by treatment completion.

Box 1

Sample characteristics: means for the two samples

	HRSTU completers	Comparison sample
Age at parole	33.0	31.0
RoC*RoI	.74	.74
Age first conviction	16.0	16.2
No. previous convictions	67.0	69.3
No. previous violent convictions	4.9	4.8
Sentence length given (days) ^a	1595	1269
Parole length given (days) ^a	408	259

^aExcludes 11 HRSTU and 2 comparison men who were serving life sentences; difference is statistically significant.

1 Also known as the 'STURP' (Special Treatment Unit Rehabilitation Programmes): Puna Tatari (Spring Hill Corrections Facility), Karaka (Waikeria Prison), Te Whare Manaakitanga (Rimutaka Prison), and Matapuna (Christchurch Men's Prison).

Procedure

This research was approved by the Victoria University of Wellington School of Psychology Human Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited between November 2010 and January 2014. Each month, Corrections and New Zealand Parole Board records were used to identify those male prisoners over 20 years old who had release dates in the next 10 weeks, were serving sentences of at least two years and had a RoC*RoI of at least 0.65. A team of four senior PhD students from Victoria University of Wellington was trained for the project. These research assistants travelled each month to prisons where several eligible prisoners were located, and met with each prisoner who was willing to take part. Prisoners were advised that the study was being conducted independently of the Department of Corrections and were invited to consent to take part. If they provided written consent, a research assistant then interviewed them for between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. The interview covered experiences in prison, and thoughts about their impending release.

The interviews were semi-structured and at various points, the interviewee was asked to make ratings on a 6-point scale that always ranged from very negative to very positive. For example, we asked each prisoner: "With regard to future crime, are you planning at this stage to go straight, or do you think you'll possibly or probably still get involved in some crime?" (*desistance commitment*; see below). The rating options for this question varied from "definitely still involved in crime" through to "definitely going straight". During the interview, each time a rating was to be made a written copy of the rating scale for that question was put in front of the respondent for reference.

2 These men are called 'comparison' rather than 'untreated' because about 70 percent had attended some form of programme: for example, a Dependency Treatment Unit or the Medium Intensity Programme.

The interview data used in this report came from a series of questions that asked about desistance and change. Men were first asked to report in general how they were feeling about being released. Then they were asked about three key desistance-focused questions: how much they were “planning to desist” (see above; *desistance commitment*), how much they wanted to desist (*desire for desistance*), and their current confidence about “going straight” (*desistance confidence*). Finally, they were shown a pair of 25 cm horizontal lines and asked to indicate on the respective line how much they had changed for the better and how much they had changed for the worse during their current sentence. These results were recorded in centimetres and a net change score was also calculated (based on subtracting the second measurement from the first; range -25.0 to +25.0).

Results and discussion

Turning first to the interview questions, we can see from Box 2 that out of a possible maximum score of six, on average the sample members responded very positively to all of the desistance-related items. Perhaps most notable are the near-maximal ratings to the question “how much are you wanting to go straight?” (*desire for desistance*). These scores indicate that regardless of whether they undertook intensive psychological treatment (vs. no rehabilitation, or less intensive programmes), and regardless of whether they got out early or at sentence end, most men in the sample had a strong desire to avoid future

convictions. Interestingly too, treatment completers and comparisons were equivalent on this rating, though treated men rated their commitment to (“planning to”)—and confidence in—desistance more highly, and thought they had changed more for the better and less for the worse than comparison men.

Asterisks indicate means are statistically significantly different: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Although secondary desistance involves more than simply avoiding reconviction, we thought it was likely that high-risk prisoners on parole regard being conviction-free at least as a necessary first step. Box 3 shows that reconvictions for any offence (whether including or excluding breaches of parole) were the most strongly and consistently related to both desistance ratings and change ratings, supporting our hypothesis that avoiding any new conviction is the most important outcome for those committed to abstaining from crime (i.e. the most strongly associated with desistance ratings). Interestingly, desistance commitment alone was a significant predictor of all types of reconviction outcomes, though most of the other change and desistance variables predicted at least two outcomes. The exception was the first question: How they were feeling about what life would be like when they got out of prison (rated from “really bad” to “really good”). We put this question into the interview to ascertain that avoiding reconviction was not simply related to any positive rating of the future. We found that it was not: most expected release to be “really good” and this expectation was not related to recidivism.

Box 2

Interview data.

	HRSTU completers	Comparison sample	Combined samples
General feeling about release ^a	4.8	4.7	4.8
Going “straight” ^a			
Commitment to? ^{**}	5.5	5.0	5.2
Wanting to?	5.7	5.6	5.7
Confidence? [*]	5.0	4.7	4.9
Change for better ^{b**}	17.6	15.6	16.6
Change for worse ^{b**}	3.1	5.0	4.1
Net change ^{c**}	14.5	10.6	12.5

^aRange 1-6; ^brange 0-25; ^crange -25-+25.

Box 3.

Correlations between interview ratings and type of reconviction

	Breach	Reconviction incl. breach	Reconviction excl. breach	Violence	Prison
General feeling about release ^a	.04	-.03	-.07	-.02	-.04
Going "straight" ^a					
Commitment to?	-.18**	-.19**	-.17**	-.18**	-.13*
Wanting to?	-.10	-.15**	-.14*	-.06	-.06
Confidence?	-.01	-.08	-.12*	-.10	-.10
Changed for better ^b	-.08	-.18**	-.11	-.03	-.12
Changed for worse ^b	.03	.18**	.20**	.05	.06
Net change ^c	-.02	-.20**	-.18**	-.04	-.10

^aRange 1-6; ^brange 0-25; ^crange -25-+25.

Asterisks indicate means are statistically significantly different: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Lastly, because correlational analyses not presented here showed that, as expected, desistance ratings and change ratings were all somewhat related to each other too, we looked more closely at which variables in combination could best predict reconviction for any offence (breach or new offending combined) in the 12 months after release (see Box 4 for the statistical details). In essence, the combination of how strongly they were committed to desistance (the *desistance commitment* question ratings only) and the net amount of change they thought they had made in prison predicted recidivism the best. However, when we ran additional analyses we found that the contribution of net change (i.e., positive change – negative change) was actually almost entirely driven by how much they thought they had changed *negatively* during the current prison sentence. And of course comparison men gave significantly higher ratings to this variable, which in part accounts for their higher rates of reconviction after release³.

What should we make of these findings? First, as we expected, they show that offenders believe that they have changed during their prison sentence in ways that are meaningful for desistance, and that many are strongly committed to desistance. Desistance commitment was stronger in the HRSTU sample but is not exclusively a product of intensive psychological treatment. However, treatment may lead a commitment to desistance to be more successful: comparison men reported that they *wanted* to "go straight" as much as HRSTU completers, but were not as confident about

achieving desistance. Comparison men were also less likely to desist after release; as we note here (see Footnote 2) and elsewhere, in the Parole Project research they were more likely to be reconvicted for all types of outcomes than the HRSTU graduates (see Polaschek et al., 2014, 2015). Similarly, comparison men thought they had made smaller changes for the better and were more likely to rate themselves as having deteriorated in prison than treated men.

Although we might expect desistance ratings and change in prison to be related (i.e., those who think they have changed a lot for the better may expect more strongly to desist on release), and they were somewhat, still these variables were independent enough of each other to offer unique contributions to the prediction of reconviction. Intriguingly for self-report sceptics, these high-risk men's ratings of their progress in prison and of their desistance commitment in particular, represented valid assessments in that they predict future recidivism. Scepticism about offender self-report persists amongst correctional staff despite significant previous research showing that when offenders are asked to make ratings on the "right things" (i.e., on topics that are themselves predictive of reconviction), overall their ratings are as valid in predicting recidivism as other more objective methods (see for example, Walters, 2006). However, although self-reports themselves are predictive, measures of *change* based on self-reported data are often not predictively valid (Serin, Lloyd, Helmus, Derksen, & Luong, 2013), so finding here that both positive and negative change appraisals using a simple visual analogue scale were predictive of reconviction is surprising and encouraging. We think the finding about the importance of predictions of negative change is particularly striking, given that overall, 43 percent

³ The reconviction rate for new offences for treated men was 51 percent and 65 percent for comparison men. When breaches of parole were included, the rates were 62 percent and 74 percent respectively; rates of breaches were 34 percent and 50 percent.

of the sample gave a rating of "0" (i.e., no "change for the worse"). This result would be worthy of further investigation, since in this study we did not collect much detail on the nature of these negative changes. However, if it holds up, it suggests that assessors may want to ask about perceptions of getting worse in their pre-release assessments, if they do not already do so.

Box 4.

Best combination of predictors of reconviction including breaches, in the first 12 months following release: Logistic regression results.

Logistic regression was chosen because it is the type of regression best suited to dichotomous outcome variables (in this case "reconvicted" or "not"). The dependent variable was whether or not the parolee had any reconviction, including parole breaches, for behaviour that occurred in the first 12 months after release on parole.

The first model—based on two variables: (a) strength of desistance commitment—the rating made on the "planning to go straight" question, and (b) net change in prison—significantly predicted reconviction: $\chi^2(2, N=287) = 18.4, p < .01$; Nagelkerke pseudo- $R^2=8.7\%$. Both variables contributed significantly to the resulting model: For desistance commitment, Wald (1)=4.04, $p=.045$, Odds Ratio=.76 (95% CI = .58, .99); meaning that for every 1-point increase in this rating, the likelihood of reconviction decreases by 24 percent. For net change, Wald (1)=6.68, $p=.01$, OR=.95, (95 percent CI = .92, .99); for every 1 point increase in net change, the likelihood of recidivism decreases by 5 percent.

The second model was exactly the same except that instead of net change, we inserted the rating of how much the prisoner thought he had "changed for the worse" (negative change): the negative half of the net change rating. The results were similar: the overall model significantly predicted any reconviction $\chi^2(2, N=287) = 16.6, p < .01$; Nagelkerke pseudo- $R^2=7.9\%$. Again, both variables contributed significantly to the resulting model: For desistance commitment, Wald (1)=5.6, $p=.018$, Odds Ratio=.73 (95 percent CI = .56, .95); meaning that for every 1-point increase in this rating, the likelihood of reconviction decreases by 27 percent. For negative change, Wald (1)=5.03, $p=.025$, OR=.1.1 (95% CI = .1.00, .1.13); for every 1-point increase in negative change rated, the likelihood of recidivism increased by 6 percent.

This is a relatively old, high-risk parolee sample in which we think that most of the members are, at the point of release, engaged in what Maruna and Farrall (2004) referred to as *proto-secondary desistance*: that is, they are trying to become "desisters" but some or perhaps many may still return to offending over the longer term. The results have implications for desistance theory. They suggest that rather than requiring of offenders a period of crime-free activity in the community before we define them as being "in desistance", some already meet the psychological conditions in Maruna and Farrall's definition of secondary desistance (self-conscious awareness of desisting and a sense of being a "changed person") while still in prison. And in turn, these psychological conditions predict reconviction. Anecdotally, for many of those who were interviewed the turning point was being imprisoned "yet again", a finding that is relevant to the phase of decisive momentum in the Göbbels et al. (2012) theory of desistance in sexual offenders. The results also tentatively supported their theory in that those with the most rehabilitation (the HRSTU completer sample) were more committed to, and more confident about desistance.

The findings reported here may be helpful for those involved in assessing and making recommendations, plans and decisions about prisoner release, but this report is our first examination of these ratings. In future analyses of this data set we will be examining links between these pre-release interview ratings and other post-release variables such as DRAOR scores on parole, and information the parolees and their probation officers gave us at follow-up interviews.

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Practice note: Building recovery, reducing crime

Kathryn Leafe

Chief Executive, CareNZ

Author biography:

Kathryn has extensive experience in health and criminal justice, including the early development of UK prison drug treatment, and community criminal justice based interventions. She has co-authored a number of programmes and practice guides including those for HM Prison Service (UK) and Best Practice Guide to providing Drug Services in Prison (UNODC). She has been a social work and business studies lecturer and a consultant and trainer for EU and UNODC programmes across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Kathryn was appointed Chief Executive of CareNZ in 2013.

It is well established that problematic drug and alcohol use is a major driver of crime.

The relationship between substance use and offending is complex and may be related to the following factors or any combination of these:

- Offending to support/fund drug and alcohol dependency
- Offending when under the influence of drugs and alcohol
- Using drugs and alcohol to facilitate offending and/or manage emotions about offending
- Supply of drugs and alcohol
- Combining an activity that would otherwise be legal (e.g. driving) and alcohol/drugs.

In New Zealand it is estimated that two thirds of prisoners have problems with drugs and/or alcohol. This figure correlates with international studies which indicate a prevalence of between 40 and 80 percent. Figures for offenders in the community are not dissimilar.

Problematic drug and alcohol use is a risk factor for offending. Addressing alcohol and drug dependency has a critical role to play in reducing re-offending and in reaching the Better Public Services goal of a 25 percent reduction in re-offending by 2017.

Working within the criminal justice setting has not always been a comfortable environment for alcohol and drug practitioners. Over the years concern has been expressed about the ethics and efficacy of entering treatment under coercion, for example court mandated. However, as a sector we have come to understand more about the role that interventions and practitioners play in building participant motivation. Motivation can no longer be viewed as a personality trait or something one has but rather as something one does. Contrary to long held beliefs, the client's motivation on first presentation is not a predeterminant of success. We

now understand the role of programmes and workers in building motivation. Indeed, research on 'motivated clients' has more to say about the worker than the client themselves. Motivated clients have workers who are empathic, able to build rapport quickly and believe in the possibility of change for the client and likelihood of a positive outcome. Services have needed to recognise that people do not present for treatment because of their alcohol or other drug (AOD) use per se but because of the problems it is causing them. These external motivators need to be internalised if dependency issues are to be successfully addressed. In this way court motivated treatment and treatment to meet sentence plan or parole targets is no different from the threat of a partner leaving, loss of job or Child Youth and Family taking the children into care. A crucial first phase of treatment is to support the client building on and internalising their motivation so that if external motivators change the client continues with the treatment and does not drop out of the service.

Given the correlation between alcohol and drug use and offending, supporting offenders to address and maintain changes in their drug and alcohol use will arguably support them in building offence free lives. There is evidence to support both prison and community based interventions' role in reducing re-offending (Holloway, Bennett & Farrington, 2005). But addressing problematic drug and alcohol use isn't easy and success rates for treatment have not always been positive. Addiction has been described as a chronic relapsing condition and research would suggest that the most likely first outcome of treatment is relapse.

However, the evidence base regarding the efficacy of interventions is growing and there have been significant developments over the last 10 to 15 years. There is greater understanding of what works well and what is not as effective. For a long time the sector has known that the therapeutic relationship itself and the support of peers are important; the research now concurs.

Other evidence has forced the sector to rethink and approach some things differently e.g. motivation. At the same time we are also learning more about neuroscience and change as an ongoing process. These are important if we are to be more effective in helping clients build individual resilience, address their substance use and live crime free lives.

The sector is broadening its understanding of what constitutes treatment. There is increasing recognition that it is not just group or individual therapy. A range of additional activities such as learning to cook, budget, eat a healthy diet, reduce caffeine and nicotine use, physical activity, peer support, mindfulness and positive alcohol/drug free social interactions play a critical part. These support and influence therapeutic interventions and form a critical part of clinical work. For example regular physical activity combined with mindfulness training lowers stress reactivity and enables people to learn to tolerate sensations and emotions which in the past may have acted as triggers for using.

In the New Zealand context ensuring the cultural appropriateness of interventions is essential. This is about more than observing protocol. Interventions need to reflect Māori health frameworks, which characteristically integrate mind, body and spirit within the context of social collectivity. The importance of whānau, iwi and rebuilding cultural connections is critical.

Working with diversity and ensuring that services are accessible, relevant and perceived as such is also important. We cannot address alcohol and drug dependency effectively if we ignore, for example the impact of gender, culture, age, faith, sexual orientation, literacy or disability on the client's using experience or potential recovery.

Research consistently shows that the therapeutic relationship is the critical factor rather than the modality. Abstinence and 12 Step programmes, therapeutic communities and cognitive behavioural programmes have all been effective.

Any treatment model needs to target changeable risk factors. These are well documented and evidenced. There is a lot of similarity between the risk factors for addressing offending/anti-social behaviour and alcohol/drug dependency. It is the targeting, focus and sequencing of interventions to these risk factors that effects behaviour change. Done too quickly or without

adequate practice, new skills and abilities are not sufficiently internalised. Structured treatment builds individual capability and capacity to support a life free from problem drug and alcohol use. It reduces the risk of lapse and relapse and therefore ultimately supports and sustains behaviour change.

We are seeing a shift in treatment from the role of practitioner as expert to the client as their own expert with the resources and capabilities for change. This is important in building self-efficacy. It is essential that the work of treatment helps participants to take responsibility for the changes they are making. In prison it may not feel like much of a choice, but each day in a prison-based Drug Treatment Unit, prisoners choose to go to group. In the same way, turning up to an AOD appointment as part of a community sentence is a choice. We can always choose not to even though there will be consequences to be faced as a result. If we can help offenders recognise these choices and the action they have taken, it not only seeds momentum for

change but they can also take the credit later on.

In the past, the focus has been on building the individual's self-worth and self-esteem. However, how I feel about myself is not the same as my belief in my ability to make and sustain change. Thus identifying any positive movement and recognising achievement is central in building recovery. Interestingly a well-known saying often used in treatment perspective taking reflects this: 'is

the glass half full or half empty?'. Are we looking at what we are doing rather than what we haven't yet achieved and can we begin to understand that the glass is both half full and half empty? Similarly, sobriety countdowns and daily awahi (acknowledgements) in therapeutic community meetings are a critical component in building self-efficacy.

If you have always lived your life as an adult using drugs and alcohol for socialising, communicating, coping with emotions, and managing intimate relationships – life alcohol and drug free can be scary. Temptations are many. Long term change requires that clients are able to navigate the natural experiences of daily life and live 'life on life's terms'. Alcoholics Anonymous members will talk about AA being a bridge to normal living. Effective treatment helps clients to access and build that bridge and ultimately cross over to the other side.

“Research consistently shows that the therapeutic relationship is the critical factor rather than the modality. Abstinence and 12 Step programmes, therapeutic communities and cognitive behavioural programmes have all been effective.”

It can be easy to overcomplicate treatment. Whilst therapy and addressing unresolved issues may be part of the process, practical support and life skills are important in ensuring clients can sustain contact and engagement with a programme; that they can access services and implement changes in their life. Practical help with sleep difficulties, panic attacks, urge surfing and strategies to stay safe can be easily overlooked. Alongside the talking therapy, one of my most effective pieces of work was with an offender in a bail hostel. As part of his relapse prevention plan he needed to get to his first AA meeting. He believed that if he could make it sober to his first AA meeting, he could stay sober for the day. So we plotted his route without passing where he used to drink and use, or could buy alcohol or drugs.

Access to housing, employment and training, and prosocial and non-using peers cannot be overlooked. Having a place to live, an income, a purpose to your day and supportive relationships undoubtedly makes addressing drug and alcohol issues easier. Treatment cannot stop at the counselling room door, group session or residential unit. We need to find ways to incorporate these into the treatment. Aftercare and throughcare post programme are critically important. This is still an area for potential development within the sector and within the criminal justice context. However, we are increasingly seeing new low-threshold initiatives emerge. These services work with people where they are at, providing information and advice and reducing barriers to engagement. Post programme follow up and support following reintegration into the community are also increasingly gaining momentum. Similarly, mentors and peer supporters bring the power of role modelling, real life demonstration and evidence for the potential and possibility of change. This can be very empowering for clients.

Success or desistance involves building resilience and protective factors, creating an insurance policy and investing in recovery.

The use of the term 'recovery' is not without controversy in the sector. Historically recovery was linked with the 12 step fellowships. The concept of recovery from the disease theory of addiction came through abstinence. More recently the term is being used much more broadly with a focus on recovery as being about wellness including the principles of health, a place to live, purpose in life and sense of community. In New Zealand, Te Pou recently published *Equally Well* which highlighted the health inequalities for people with mental health and addiction issues (Te Pou, 2014).

Overseas, in the last few years, the concept of 'recovery capital' has gained increasing traction. Definitions (UK Drug Policy Commission, 2008) of recovery in this context involve three components: wellbeing and quality of life, community engagement or citizenship, and addressing substance use. Becoming a fully participating member of society involves living in accordance with the laws of the land and therefore by implication, offence free.

Clearly we are heading in the right direction. However, we need to continue to develop referral pathways into services including low threshold advice and information interventions (including initiatives such as the Department of Corrections led Out of Gate) as well as peer support, through and aftercare programmes. At the same time structured treatment must address changeable risk factors and build resilience if we are to ensure we fully realise the potential for building recovery and reducing crime.

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The problem with 'the problem with gangs': Reflections on practice and offender desistance

Armon Tamatea

School of Psychology, University of Waikato

Contact: armon.tamatea@waikato.ac.nz

Author biography

Armon Tamatea, PhD; PGDipPsych(Clin), is a registered clinical psychologist and Senior Lecturer at the University of Waikato where he principally teaches in the post-graduate clinical psychology programme. He was also Senior Adviser (Psychological Research) for the Department of Corrections before assuming an academic post where he has continued to develop his special interests in New Zealand gangs, personality disorders, and the role of culture in criminal justice and forensic contexts. He currently divides his working time between research, teaching, and clinical practice.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank various staff across the Department of Corrections, non-government agencies, and members of the gang community for their generosity and insights.

Abstract

Gang membership is considered to be a criminogenic factor that negatively impacts an individual's ability to successfully desist from offending and presents special management challenges across Corrections' service delivery. Despite the durability of gangs in New Zealand, these groups are poorly defined with little known about disengagement processes that may inform broader criminal desistance pathways. This paper argues that a *theory* of gangs is a necessary step to inform constructive and sustainable behaviour change practices. A transitional perspective of gang-centred lifestyles is proposed as a starting point to considering efficacious intervention efforts with offenders who identify with these complex and challenging groups.

Gangs have been a recognisable and conspicuous part of the social landscape in New Zealand since the 1950s (Dennehey & Newbold, 2001; Gilbert, 2013; Manning, 1958; Payne, 1997). Gangs also tend not to elicit much by way of public sympathies, with many members existing at the margins of society, facing long-term alienation from mainstream communities due to the 'triple prejudice' of ethnicity, low socioeconomic status, and antisociality. However, gang membership is also a significant contributing factor for involvement in crime with members of these communities presenting challenges to correctional practice in terms of prison management and an impaired ability to successfully reintegrate into the community (Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Nadesu, 2009; Wilson & Tamatea, 2010). Despite considerable efforts that have been conducted by the Corrections Department over recent years to develop policies directed towards improved management of these offenders, 'gangs' as a social phenomenon appear to be largely under-researched with even less known about the process of gang disengagement and its relationship with offender desistance efforts (Pyrooz &

Decker, 2014). Such a knowledge gap invites a rethink of practice responses that are conducive to community wellbeing as well as supported by an evidence-base. This brief article emphasises some of the ongoing issues that gangs present for Corrections and offers some suggestions for offender management practices.

The problem with gangs: Communities of resistance

Gang membership is considered to be a primary criminogenic factor that negatively impacts an individual's ability to successfully desist from offending (Wood & Alleyne, 2010). Despite recent challenges to the extent of this impact in New Zealand, Corrections' reconviction data revealed that identified gang members tended to reoffend more often and more seriously at 60 months post-release than other offenders – up to three times as much (Nadesu, 2009). Such a finding is not surprising given the range of offence-specific dynamic factors that are concomitant with membership in groups that, amongst other things, promote antisocial ideals.

What is less known is the process of desistance from gang-centred lifestyles (and crime) by members, how this occurs, and what critical factors are involved in hindering and facilitating this transition. Leaving a gang community is often problematic for members. For instance, the *structure* of gangs itself can be prohibitive to exiting. Decker, Katz and Webb (2008) commented that even low levels of gang organisation relate to increased involvement in offending, with higher levels of organisation implying a greater streamlining of gang norms. In addition, the *culture* of gangs is complex and permits a network of relationships that members rely on for validation and social support. A collective outlook that is explicitly oppositional and antisocial threatens to subvert deterrence efforts (Maxson, Matsuda, & Hennigan, 2009) and to facilitate ongoing offending by exposing individuals to violence and risky situations (Rosenfeld, Bray, & Egley, 1999). For instance:

"These details [of my leaving] would get to the National Boss. He orders whatever he orders and it gets carried out. I was five minutes away from getting my head blown off. I couldn't stop the process. My chapter had narked me off as to my whereabouts. My [close, former-associate] had the hitman in the car with him, but he stopped it – gave them the wrong details. He saved my life. 'Uproot and leave' he had said. But I wouldn't...I've fought criticisms, I've fought hits, I've got the beat-downs a few times since then – but I lived." (from Tamatea, 2010)

Furthermore, exclusivity and longevity of many gang chapters means that many members lose alternative social networks outside of the gang (Fleisher & Decker, 2001).

The problem with 'the problem with gangs': Poor definition and theory

Given that gangs tend to draw a disproportionate degree of attention and resource from law enforcement and correctional agencies worldwide, it is of note that 'gangs' as a social phenomenon are poorly defined (Ball & Curry, 1995). A lack of operationalised definition risks developing reactive policies and practices that emphasise containment and restriction of offenders based on affiliation rather than behaviour and needs. Furthermore, poor conceptual understandings of gangs undermine the ability to develop a *theory* of gangs that would serve to guide appropriate research, form an evidence base of salient variables that can inform desistance, and refine efficacious practices that support safe and sustainable change with men whose gang-centred lifestyle presents both recidivism risks as well as a barrier to treatment responsiveness.

Much of the recent international literature regards gangs as a transitory phenomenon that is framed as almost exclusively a youth issue (e.g., Carson, Peterson, & Esbensen, 2013; Taylor, 2013).

However, there is a need to recognise, first and foremost, that New Zealand gangs are forms of *community* with norms, values, processes and practices that possess an internal logic that is understood by members. So, arguably, any behaviour change efforts initiated with members of these groups would benefit from being 'gang-informed' – that is, an approach that recognises the specific contextual issues faced by gang members that illuminates the difficulties of change, such as safety and other costs likely to result from leaving the gang. Again, operationalising gangs is critical to developing an understanding of relevant mechanisms that inform disengagement from these groups.

Understanding gang involvement as a life transition

Although gang desistance is an emerging theme in the criminal justice literature, international sentiment supports the idea that leaving a gang is more accurately described as a *process* than an event (e.g., Sweeten, Pyrooz, & Piquero, 2013). In this spirit, an ethnographic study of 21 former New Zealand gang members revealed an emerging picture of gang involvement as a transitional process that involved the following features (Tamatea, 2010):

First, *common developmental precursors* of gang members included a dysfunctional childhood and abusive home, school failure, peer rejection, delinquent behaviour, and early exposure to gangs. Overt pathways into gang-centred lifestyles included availability of access points such as family and peers; acceptance of group norms and antithetical attitudes towards authority, society, and employment; a heightened sense of hostility from others – especially rival factions; and, access to social and material rewards (e.g., money, illicit substances).

Secondly, *engagement factors* that served to sustain a member's commitment to a gang-centred lifestyle involved fulfilment of *individual* needs such as stimulation-seeking (drugs, aggression), affiliation, status (reputation and position in hierarchy), and material rewards; and, *collective* concerns, such as protection from rivals or law enforcement (uncertainty reduction), social stability (including the ability for members to exert influence on other's behaviour to monitor and shape expectations of personal conduct), and a coherent sense of internal structure that defined in-group/out-group relationships.

Lastly, *exit pathways* for these men occurred in relation to common life-course turning points such as maturation, change of responsibilities (e.g., having grandchildren), relationship strain with family and partners, or changing attitudes towards gang and prosocial lifestyles. The effects of post-gang life revealed few short-term benefits, where ostracism

or threats to life were a common reality. However, almost all of these men recognised long-term pay-offs in developing a prosocial lifestyle, an active and meaningful role in their families, as well as an increased sense of personal agency. Indeed, self-determination in the absence of group pressure was seen as a valuable, albeit costly, outcome.

Taken together, conceptualising gang desistance as a transitory process recognises differing demands and challenges for members at distinct phases of their journey, and intervention efforts that address these stage-specific demands may be more effective than standardised approaches that are not sensitive to these constraints. For instance, individuals are likely to be at their most precontemplative to disengage from gangs when incentives for maintaining membership are lucrative and/or the costs for leaving are too high. Whereas members who have alternative competing rewards outside of the boundaries of the gang (e.g., a new relationship) may exhibit more ambivalence about continuing a gang-centred lifestyle. Both scenarios would require different therapeutic responses to recognise the individual's manifest stage of commitment.

Suggestions for practice

In addition to good rehabilitative practices in general offender management, the following suggestions are proposed to enhance constructive desistance efforts with men who present with gang-centred lifestyles:

First, *understand the issues faced by gang members*. Pathways into gangs, factors that sustain membership, and those that promote (or deter) desistance are likely to be differential, so standard approaches to facilitate withdrawals from this lifestyle are likely to be ineffectual if (1) specific motivation for change and disengagement are not identified, (2) the individual indicates a low degree of readiness to make initial steps, and (3) their safety is neither certain nor assured. The hazards of gang desistance can impact on the person's ability to comply with their sentence conditions, as illustrated by the following former member:

"I had just been released and was given an ultimatum ... to either leave ... and keep my freedom, or stay with the club and go back to jail. I chose the latter [because] they had threatened to turn up to my family home in full Club presence in order to draw attention to my home and make it a target." (from Tamatea, 2010)

"I had just been released and was given an ultimatum ... to either leave ... and keep my freedom, or stay with the club and go back to jail."

As can be seen, gang membership presents dilemmas for those members seeking to leave a gang-centred lifestyle without generating conflict and potential harm as a consequence. Key practice questions: *What gang-specific challenges will have a foreseeable impact for this person? What would those consequences look like? What alternative approaches can I use to support pro-desistance change talk without compromising safety?*

Secondly, seek to *increase relatedness and reduce marginality*. Like any offender engagement, developing a therapeutic alliance is an essential condition to promote change. Needless to say, such alliances can be hard won, especially with individuals who have oppositional and hostile attitudes to authority. Furthermore, ostracism is a real possibility for men who no longer have access to the social resource that gangs or the wider community offer. Creating connections is critical if responsiveness to interventions is likely to be a foreseeable challenge. Consider what might be impeding the individual's ability to access appropriate services, employment, accommodation, and prosocial relationships that elicit trust and alternative social values. Key practice question: *What are the barriers to inclusiveness for this particular individual?*

Thirdly, assist the individual to *increase active participation in the community and reduce their reliance on crime* to meet needs. Effectiveness of interventions may well be the result of long-range investments for the individual members themselves as well as practitioners and agencies

charged with their management. Indeed, given the complex and embedded nature of gang-centred lifestyles, it is realistic to expect change to be a lengthy process. Developing a collaborative approach to rehabilitation avoids placing the individual in an inferior position to the practitioner that might otherwise imply serious reservations of their own capacities and interests in their own welfare. Key practice questions: *If leaving the gang lifestyle is a priority for the individual, what factors are getting in the way? How can I best support their efforts to address these barriers?*

Fourthly, *increase personal agency and reduce reliance on the gang*. Conversations with a number of community agencies and organisations that had a history of regularly assisting gang members to reintegrate into the community revealed that relinquishing gang membership was found to be a highly sensitive issue because of potential hazards for ambivalent members if conditions for change were insufficient to support safe passages from the gang community. In this regard, the individual's *safety* was seen as a first-order priority that

informed the timing and approach to addressing gang membership as a secondary matter. Finally, eliciting alternative (to gang/crime) life narratives and imagined futures might assist in mobilising the individual's efforts to focus their energies in non-gang lifestyle choices. Key practice questions: *How does this individual want to be known (what kind of father, partner, role model)? What legacy do they want to create for themselves? How can I assist them to move closer to those goals?*

Final comment

The enduring presence of gangs in criminal justice contexts speaks to the ongoing challenges of rehabilitation for members as well as an imperative to understand these marginalised communities. Ideally, the development of a theory of gangs would inform a *philosophy of treatment* that promotes meaningful and sustainable behaviour change, reconciling legal conformity with community growth as well as desisting from gangs/crime with improved self and community wellbeing.

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Physical Readiness Assessment and staff resilience

Dr Alan Walmsley

Project Manager, Physical Readiness Assessment, Department of Corrections

Author biography

Alan was on the staff of the University of Otago and Massey University and has worked in the sport and exercise field in New Zealand for more than three decades. He is a life member and former Deputy Chair of Sport and Exercise Science New Zealand and a former council member of the International Society of Biomechanics. Alan has previous experience of occupational fitness assessment for the New Zealand Fire Service, and joined Corrections in March 2013 to design and develop the PRA.

Introduction

In response to staff expressing concerns about their safety in threatening situations, the expert panel on staff safety recommended that a Physical Readiness Assessment (PRA) be developed and introduced. The PRA project was initiated in March 2013 and, over the next year, the PRA was designed, and the constituent elements piloted, with the assistance of staff at Whanganui Prison. Subsequently, performance standards were determined from the results of a study undertaken at eight prison sites.

The PRA is intended to provide an indication of occupational physical performance in relation to the population of frontline staff. However, the PRA also indicates the general level of fitness of participants because performance in some elements of the PRA is dependent on aerobic and anaerobic fitness and muscular strength and endurance. The positive effects of physical fitness on the psycho-physiological stress response indicates that performance in the PRA could serve as a useful indicator of stress resilience.

Physical Readiness Assessment (PRA)

The elements of the PRA are based on the need for any assessment of occupational fitness to reflect the actual requirements of satisfactory performance in the job. Discussion of the physically demanding tasks performed by corrections officers provided the basis for selection of the various elements of the PRA, which were combined into a scenario that reflected a typical sequence of events:

A corrections officer is walking from one unit to another to conduct a search. During the search an emergency 'Break – Break – Break' call is received. The corrections officer runs as quickly and safely as possible to the scene of the emergency and has to use physical force to restore order. Once order is restored, the corrections officer notices an unconscious colleague, and so removes him/her to a place of safety for others to take over care.

Once the emergency is dealt with, the corrections officer walks back to the original unit.

The PRA is composed of six elements; a 300m maximum speed walk, a simulated search, a simulated emergency response, simulated spontaneous 'control and restraint' (C&R), simulated rescue, and a 300m recovery walk. The time for the walking and running sections and the total time taken are recorded and generate scores. The simulated C&R score is determined from measurement of the maximum sustained horizontal force as a percentage of body weight. The five scores generated are combined to produce an overall score for the PRA which is used to determine the performance zone the participant will be placed in.

Prior to setting performance standards, the test-retest reliability of the individual elements and the overall PRA was estimated in a small sample of corrections officers. The volunteers completed the PRA on two consecutive days at the same time of day. Figures 1 and 2 indicate a high level of agreement between the scores from test 1 and test 2 and so the PRA was considered to be a reliable measure of occupational readiness.

Following the reliability study, 200 frontline staff completed the PRA as volunteers to allow performance standards to be set. Analysis of variance revealed small effects for both gender and age in all the variables. Further examination revealed that only participants over 60 were significantly different from all other age groups. These effects may be investigated in more detail in the future but, initially, neither age nor gender was considered in setting initial performance standards because the mean differences in measures were small (≈ 5 percent). Performance scores were determined by converting the raw data to z-scores and placing participants in the ranges shown in Table 1. Each variable was scored individually, and the sum of z-scores was used to determine the final score. The number of participants falling in each score range is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 1

Overall correlation between variables from Trial 1 to Trial 2.

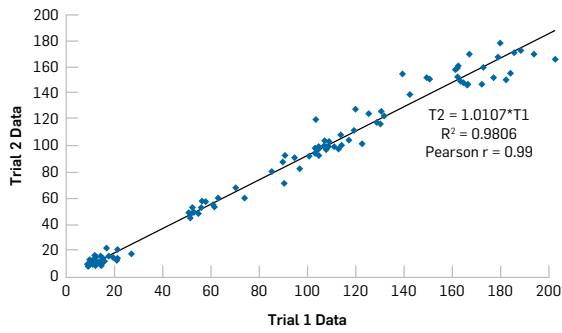


Figure 3

Number of participants falling into each score band.

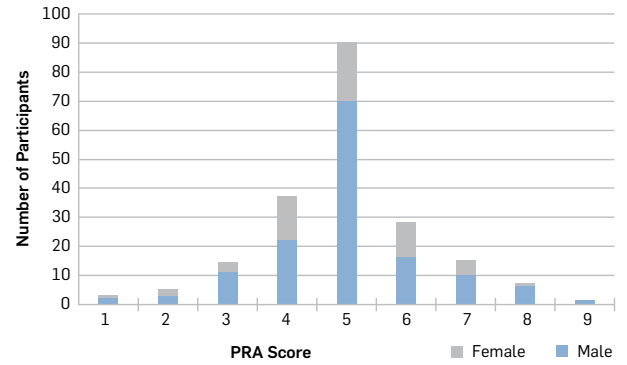


Figure 2

Bland-Altman plot of normalised data.

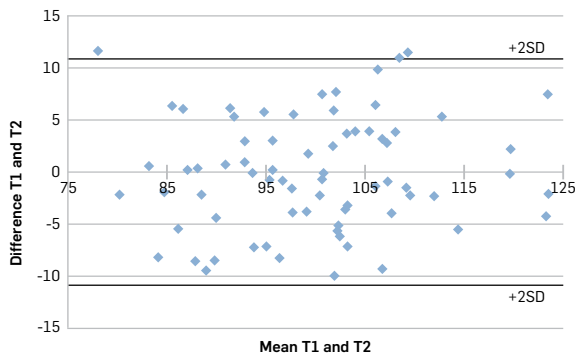


Table 1

Scoring ranges for measured variables

z-score	PRA Score	Description
≤ -2	1	WELL BELOW AVERAGE
≤ -1.5	2	
≤ -1	3	
≤ -0.5	4	BELOW AVERAGE
> -0.5 to < 0.5	5	AVERAGE
≥ 0.5	6	ABOVE AVERAGE
≥ 1.0	7	
≥ 1.5	8	WELL ABOVE AVERAGE
≥ 2	9	

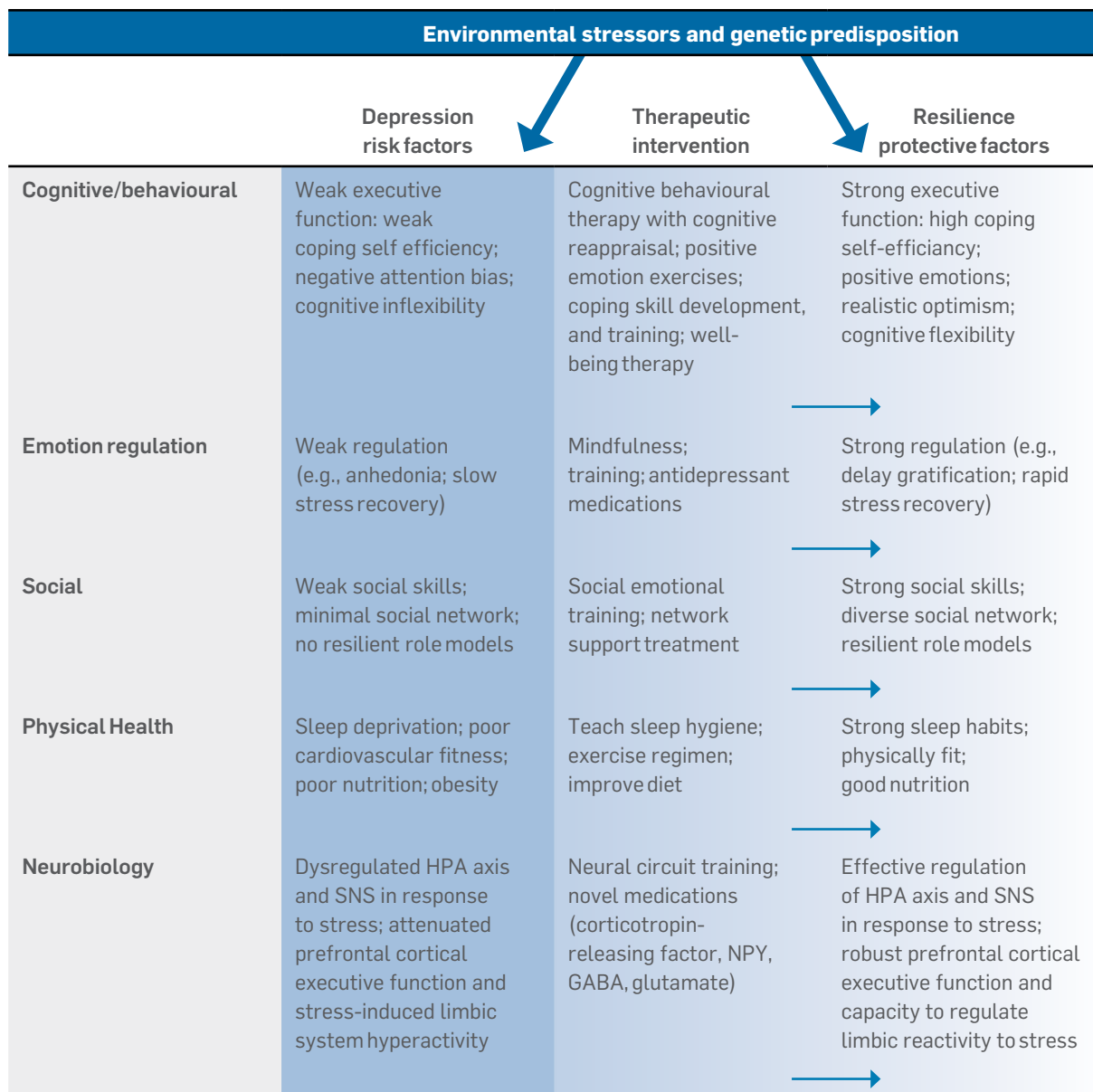
Experience from other agencies and jurisdictions suggested that rather than a simple pass/fail approach the results from the various elements of the PRA should be scored. The scores place staff in a red (well below average), amber (below average) or green (average or above) zone. This approach is a more appropriate measure of fitness for the role because it places an individual in the population of corrections officers and also allows the individual to target training to specific elements that may be causing them issues.

Once performance standards were established, the PRA was trialled at Manawatu and Rimutaka Prisons to examine how the PRA might impact normal operations, how the confidentiality of PRA outcomes could be

maintained, and how support could be provided to those staff who needed to improve their PRA performance. The trials finished at the end of September 2014 and, in addition to the planned outcomes, yielded some useful insights into staff reaction to the PRA and the associated administrative and support processes. Subjective assessment of the PRA as a measure of occupational performance was positive with all feedback confirming the expected high face validity. Most participants expressed the view that the PRA score reflected the ability of a staff member to keep themselves and their colleagues physically safe at work.

Figure 4

The dimensions of resilience and therapeutic interventions that affect them (Southwick & Charney, 2012).



How does the PRA help individuals to maintain or improve their resilience to stress? The PRA has always been seen as part of a general staff wellness system because it indicates an individual's status in one dimension of wellness; physical fitness. Most practitioners recognise six dimensions of wellness, namely, physical, occupational, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual. Figure 4 indicates that all-round 'wellness' is closely linked to the resilience protective factors, and so, if resilience may be conceptualised as an adjunct to all-round 'wellness', any measure or indication of wellness could also indicate the resilience of the individual. Therefore, interventions that improve wellness may also affect resilience to stress. Data from the limited trials of the PRA suggest that it could be seen as an indicator of the physical and occupational wellness of participants, and so could be a useful tool in indicating individual resilience.

Stress and stressors

A stressor is an external stimulus or event that triggers a psycho-physiological protective response, and stress is the physiological response(s) to a stressor. For corrections officers, the most obvious occupational stressors are likely to arise from perceived physical or psychological threats, or events that occur while on duty. However, corrections officers, like all of us, are also subject to stressors arising from their home and personal lives that could have significant results in the workplace because of the need for vigilance and situational awareness while on duty.

Exposure to stressors will activate one or all of three physiological pathways that are responsive to psychosocial stimuli (Everly & Lating, 2002). In order of recruitment and intensity of response, the pathways are; the neural axes, the neuroendocrine axis, and the endocrine axes. The neural axes initiate the immediate physiological responses such as increases in blood pressure, dilation of the pupils, and inhibition of digestive functions; the neuroendocrine axis initiates the 'fight or flight' response including increased cardiac output and stimulation of skeletal muscles; and the endocrine axes determine chronic responses such as suppression of immune mechanisms. In general, the activation of these pathways depends on the intensity and duration of the stimulus, with the endocrine axes requiring much greater stimulus intensity and duration to initiate activity.

The ability to cope with stress (i.e. the psycho-physiological responses to the occurrence of a stressor) depends on the strategies used to attenuate the stress response. Coping strategies may be categorised as adaptive (reduce stress while promoting long term health) or maladaptive (reduce both stress and long term health). Physical exercise, good sleep habits,

and good nutrition may be seen as adaptive coping mechanisms, while alcohol or drug abuse and social withdrawal may be seen as maladaptive mechanisms (Silverman & Deuster, 2014).

Excessive or prolonged stimulation of the physiological pathways may result in organ dysfunction or pathology. This process, known as target organ activation, and the subsequent clinical signs and symptoms are the clues we use to deduce the presence of stress induced illness.

Resilience

Resilience to stressors is a complex multi-dimensional construct, which encompasses the processes of adaptation to adversity and physical threat. To understand the links between stressors, stress, interventions such as the PRA, and resilience it may be helpful to have a common definition of resilience; I will use the US Air Force definition "the ability to withstand, recover from, and grow in the face of stressors" (Robson, 2013).

As an exercise scientist, I conceptualise resilience in terms of the ability to deal positively with repeated episodes of the physiological responses to stressors; that is, coping mechanisms are adaptive. The brain is the key organ of the stress response because it is here that the perception of threat is interpreted and the subsequent physiological response integrated and organised (McEwen, 2007). Neural and endocrine mechanisms mediate the communication between the brain and other organ systems that organise and mount both the acute and chronic stress response. There is some evidence that habitual exercise may benefit brain function by enhancing the effects of growth hormone on neural structures, which improves cognition (Silverman & Deuster, 2014).

There is abundant evidence that habitual participation in physical activity is linked to better health throughout life; more active individuals have lower rates of coronary artery disease, hypertension, stroke, type II diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and depression (Salmon, 2001). The evidence also indicates that an increased level of habitual physical activity ameliorates the target organ effects of the stress response by reducing stress sensitivity; fitter individuals exhibit reduced physiological reactivity to stress and faster pulse rate recovery. Furthermore, the effects of stress reduce as physical activity is increased over time. Physical activity has many direct and indirect benefits to the health, well-being, and readiness of frontline staff:

It is strongly linked to better medical fitness (e.g., cardiorespiratory health, reduced risks for some cancers), physical fitness (e.g., body composition, muscular fitness), psychological fitness (e.g., stress-buffering, protection against depression and anxiety, increased self-esteem), and behavioral

fitness (e.g., good sleep practices, sleep quality). Physical activity can also help reduce the major risks to optimal mission performance: physical injury, being overweight and psychosocial dysfunction. Furthermore, group physical activity can improve social fitness through the development of social networks and cohesion (Robson, 2013, p. 23).

Conclusion

The PRA is an indicator of physical and occupational fitness, and improving performance in the PRA by being habitually physically active will help confer resilience by reducing stress reactivity and the behavioural and metabolic consequences of stressful episodes. Assisting staff to be physically active and maintain and enhance their physical fitness will pay dividends in terms of resilience to stress.

The contributions of physical fitness to resilience make it a smart investment, even in times of scarce resources (Robson, 2013, p. 24).

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Whakamanahia Wahine Programme for low-risk women offenders

Dr Annie Weir

Director, Impact Research NZ, Honorary Research Fellow, School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland.

Author biography:

Dr Annie Weir is the Director of Impact Research NZ and is an Honorary Research Fellow with the School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland. Dr Weir is passionate about producing credible research and evaluation that informs organisational policies and practices in the education, health and social service sectors. She is particularly interested in how agencies and organisations interpret and implement government policies. Her research and evaluation involves investigations into marginalised and vulnerable groups in New Zealand.

Abstract

The Department of Corrections Innovation Fund supports their aim to reduce recidivism. The Whakamanahia Wahine community-based programme received funding for two pilots in 2013 and 2014 which were attended by between ten and 14 low-risk female offenders from the Bay of Plenty. The programme goals were to improve individual well-being and personal development and to reduce recidivism. The programme was based on a holistic approach to building sustainable skills for personal wellbeing including self-efficacy around educational attainment, building personal wellbeing skills, fostering positive relationships and creating personal pathway plans. A three-month follow-up evaluation from the first pilot showed zero recidivism amongst the contacted participants. This evaluation was based on self-report only from the five participants that were able to be contacted. The programme for the second pilot for ten participants kept mostly the format of the first pilot, however based on participant and stakeholder feedback, the programme length was extended (from six weeks to eight weeks), a co-facilitator and mentors were included as well as selecting educational goals based on the participants' individual needs. These programme elements are supported by the international literature on good practice. The evaluations and results of these two pilots support the possibility for future mainstreaming of funds to offer this programme more widely.

Introduction

The Whakamanahia Wahine programme was designed by Presbyterian Support Northern (PSN) which is large social service provider. Funded by the Department of Corrections Innovation Fund, the programme aimed to reduce recidivism of low-risk female offenders in the Bay of Plenty. The community based programme was aimed at low-risk female offenders as it was thought that they were most likely to benefit from it and that they would be able to make sustainable positive changes in their lives, thus reducing their chances of re-offending. Based on a holistic approach to developing participants' wellbeing, the programme focused on psychological, family, spiritual and physical dimensions of wellbeing. Impact Research NZ was commissioned by PSN to undertake an evaluation of the implementation of the programme.

This paper briefly highlights some international good practice examples for reducing recidivism which can inform practice in the New Zealand context. We discuss

the development, implementation, outcomes and key success factors of the first pilot programme (June – July 2013). Evaluation of the first pilot demonstrated it achieved the intended outcomes and led to funding by the Department of Corrections for a second pilot. The second pilot (May – June 2014) confirmed the value of the programme for increasing participants' wellbeing and reducing recidivism among low-risk female offenders.

The international context on rehabilitation for female offenders

We position the Whakamanahia Wahine Programme in the context of international good practice around community rehabilitation for reducing recidivism among female offenders. This section briefly outlines aspects of good practice and innovation in relation to community rehabilitation from the United Kingdom (UK), Europe, and the United States of America (USA), with a focus on women's rehabilitation where this is available.

Reviews on good practice

Reports from the UK, Europe and the USA on female rehabilitation programmes indicate that good practice includes:

- women-only
- incorporate non-offenders to normalise the experience
- strengths-based, developing a sense of purpose and fostering hope
- tailored to individual needs in ways that consider issues of identity
- based on effective learning principles
- empowering women to problem solve and build positive relationships
- holistic and consider practical concerns and link with mainstream agencies
- motivational for participants encouraging them to seek further education or employment (Deville et al., 2005; Gelsthorpe, et al., 2007; Frazer et al., 2014; Worrall & Gelsthorpe, 2009).

Practical considerations such as transportation and childcare assistance can support programme attendance (Gelsthorpe, et al., 2007). Good practice programmes also provide access to post-programme support and foster ongoing supportive relationships including mentors (Fletcher and Batty, 2012; UK Ministry of Justice, 2013).

The international context and evaluations of these services indicate a number of good practice elements such as building positive relationships with peers, mentors and probation staff, empowering women to problem solve and to seek education and employment opportunities, and providing follow-up support. The Department of Corrections Innovation Fund allowed us to trial these principles in a NZ context and adapt as required.

Department of Corrections Innovation Fund

An Innovation Fund was set up to support the Department of Corrections strategy to "create lasting change" by breaking the cycle of re-offending (Department of Corrections, 2011). Through the Innovation Fund the Department of Corrections provides community groups with an opportunity to deliver offender intervention programmes.

The Whakamanahia Wahine rehabilitation programme for women on community sentences is one of these programmes, with goals of improving interpersonal skills and personal relationships, promoting positive change and creating pathway plans. Participants were low-risk female offenders currently being managed by Bay of Plenty Community Corrections staff.

The Whakamanahia Wahine Programme

Programme design

Presbyterian Support Northern (PSN) designed the personal development programme for women on community sentences. The course was based around the concept of Te Whare Tapa Wha model of wellbeing (Durie, 1998) to structure mechanisms for behavioural change which include elements of psychological, spiritual, physical and family health. At the outset the participants were invited to name their own programme. The name chosen, Whakamanahia Wahine, represents hope for a positive future, and taking ownership of the name was a significant step in a programme designed to rebuild and restore the women's lives, and for them to become strong for themselves and their children.

Programme delivery (Pilot One)

The personal development programme was held four days a week (9:30am to 2pm) over a six week period from 4 June to 11 July 2013. The programme followed a strengths-based approach. It offered opportunities for educational attainment and skill building, links to education, service and community organisations and fostering new friendships that continued after the completion of the programme.

The programme was led by a dynamic facilitator who is an accomplished author, adult educator and family violence advocate and who herself had previously offended and could relate to the participants.

Transport to and from the programme was provided and the programme was designed to fit around the school day. Church volunteers provided the participants with food and refreshments during the day. The church volunteers and participants bonded positively.

Participants of Pilot One

Eleven of the original 14 participants (aged 19 – 43 years) of which 50 percent were Māori and 50 percent were Pākehā completed the programme. Most participants had no formal qualifications with a few having achieved Level 3 NZQA unit standards. All the participants had experienced hardship and trauma which had culminated in enforced government agency intervention (including social justice and social services) as well as government agency support (including financial support, social housing, and health care). Many women had family to care for; some had children removed from their care due to concerns of domestic abuse and child welfare. Other concerns included gang affiliations and dependency on alcohol or drugs. Their offences included theft, fraud, wilful damage, assault and supply of a controlled substance.

Evaluation of Pilot One

Evaluation method

A qualitative evaluation of the first pilot of the programme was conducted by Impact Research NZ between June and August 2013. The evaluation collected participants' perspectives using surveys (beginning and end of programme) and interviews (end of programme and three months after programme completion). Key stakeholders such as probation officers, programme staff and volunteers were surveyed and/or interviewed upon programme completion. Document review associated with programme design, implementation and reporting was also conducted.

Programme objectives of increased confidence, improved self-esteem and enhanced interpersonal skills were met by all participants.

They gave examples of how the programme helped them: "gain new positive friends", "be myself again", "recognise good and bad communication", "learn my triggers to relapsing and handle my anger better", "choose more wisely who I bring into my life", "believe in myself", "set goals and stick to them", "practice new skills", and "lead a group, delegate and organise".

All participants achieved NZQA unit standards as an outcome of attending the programme.

In total, 11 participants attempted NZQA Unit standards, seven participants completed Level 1 Unit 3503 (interpersonal communications), eight participants completed Level 1 Unit 496 (self-management) and eight participants completed Level 2 Unit 1827 (self-management). Four participants had completed some unit standards prior to commencing the course. However, all participants achieved at least one (additional) unit standard as an outcome of attending the course.

Every participant produced a personal plan with specific goals for future progress. As an outcome of the programme, every participant produced a pathway plan with specific goals identified such as: "take steps to get my babies back" and "go on to further study and make a better life for my family".

All participants reported the drugs and alcohol information session and motivational and inspirational guest speakers as the most effective programme activities. In addition, 93 percent also reported healthy food options, taking turns to open and close the day, and working on NZQA unit standards as effective.

The facilitator delivery style and introduction to the model of wellbeing was well received. A strong bond was formed between the facilitator and participants, who reported that the programme had been life changing; "really inspiring" and "now I see things a lot differently".

Probation officers reported the programme had a positive impact on the participants. The programme was of great value and exceeded expectations.

Overall, probation staff noted "a big positive change" and participants were described as having "more positive thinking and uses this in her interactions with others", able to "make better decisions and take responsibility for behaviour" as well as "less blaming of others". This changed attitude was evidenced by participants "working towards making positive changes" and "working towards a more positive and independent lifestyle".

The key recommendations included: extending the programme from six to eight weeks to allow a greater balance of outcomes for personal development

and individual learning; reduce the dependency on one facilitator by intruding a co-facilitator; introduce mentors to assist participants toward the end of the programme and to provide ongoing support; introduce individualised pathway plans as well as personalised learning objectives to encourage further engagement with formalised learning.

“...the programme took a strengths-based approach for participants, focusing on goal setting and skill development and allowing them to run training sessions and obtain NZQA standards...”

A three month follow-up evaluation of Pilot One

was conducted to get an indication of the ongoing impact of the programme on their lives following programme completion. Only five women could be contacted for an in-depth telephone interview in which none of them reported having re-offended since doing the programme. They were motivated to continue not to re-offend as they wanted to keep their children and saw benefit from the changes they had made in their lives including, for some, having gained housing and employment.

Pilot Two of the Whakamanahia Wahine Programme

The second pilot of the programme for ten participants ran from 4 May to 20 June 2014 with similar attendance rates and participant characteristics. This second pilot was also funded by the Department of Corrections Innovation Fund. The evaluation of the first pilot was used to amend the programme content and delivery for the second pilot, including extending

the programme from six to eight weeks, introducing a co-facilitator, mentors and tailoring NZQA units participants' needs.

Discussion

The Whakamanahia Wahine programme incorporated a range of the elements identified as good practice which likely contributed to the positive changes reported by participants and probation staff. The programme provided links with mainstream agencies, provided transport to and from the service, was women-only and fostered supportive relationships with mentors and non-mentors. These elements have been discussed as good practice in community rehabilitation programmes (Bonta et al., 2013; Gelsthorpe et al., 2007; Macguire et al., 2010). Further, the programme took a strengths-based approach for participants, focusing on goal setting and skill development and allowing them to run training sessions and obtain NZQA standards. Feedback from participants suggested that these activities empowered the women to problem solve and seek educational opportunities. The women reported ongoing support networks formed between them, helping them stay focused and motivated to apply the skills learnt in the programme. A strengths-based approach underpinning these activities has been identified as important good practice. In particular a strengths-based approach appears to be particularly important for changing offenders' perspectives on themselves and a future of non-offending (Frazer et al., 2014).

The programme also incorporated factors recognised by the Department of Corrections as reducing the risk of re-offending: addressing negative behaviours; changing personal attitudes and beliefs; developing social skills to engage positively with others; gaining life skills and experience valued by employers. Participants expressed a change in their own attitudes and this was also recognised by probation officers. Of the five women (45 percent of participants) who could be contacted to take part in the post course evaluation, none reported having re-offended. However, it is acknowledged that these participants were all low-risk offenders, the sample size was very small, the re-offending measure was self-report and the follow-up period was very short at three months.

Following completion of the second pilot, mentoring relationships provided ongoing support, and in both pilots it was noted that the programme strengthened supportive relationships between participants and probation officers. Mentors noted initial reluctance and scepticism on the part of participants often changed as the programme went on. Childcare facilities were not provided but have been suggested in Gelsthorpe et al., (2007). Childcare responsibilities limited the attendance of some participants, however the timetable was structured around the school day and the majority of participants were able to attend most sessions.

Motivational speakers and a facilitator with relatable life-experiences to the participants were identified as positive elements of the programme and reflect the international literature on the importance of peers in rehabilitation motivation (Devilly et al, 2005) and the increased use of identity-based peers and mentors in programmes for offenders (Fletcher and Batty, 2012).

The programme thus appears to be largely in line with international good practice for reducing recidivism and the elements of the programme noted in this literature should be retained in future programmes which may attract mainstream funding.

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Book review: *The Resilience Factor*

Karen Reivich, PhD & Andrew Shatte, PhD
2002, Three Rivers Press

Reviewed by Jane Freeman-Brown
Senior Adviser, Office of the Chief Psychologist

Dr Jane Freeman-Brown is the former Senior Advisor in the Corrections National Office Psychology Team and has been registered as a Clinical Psychologist since 2004. She completed her PhD and Post-graduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology at University of Otago and is currently completing a Masters in Bioethics and Health Law via distance learning with the University of Otago

“I’ve had many catastrophes in my life, some of which have actually happened.”

Mark Twain

My interest in this book came long before I had even read it. Hearing that a principal psychologist at the Department of Corrections had bought individual copies for all members of his staff made me think there must be something special about it. After all, it is normal to have one office copy of a book. Having *eight* copies in one office might suggest that the secret to life had actually been discovered. I needed to get my hands on it. And since reading *The Resilience Factor* I have gone on to recommend it to so many people that it is a shame that I do not have shares in the Three Rivers Press publishing house.

The Resilience Factor is 342 pages long and thus not a coffee table type of book – nonetheless it offers substance and respect to the reader’s intellect, rather than being a collection of clichéd self-help statements. The authors have an approachable and humorous writing style and are not shy about stating things bluntly:

“When it comes to appraising ourselves, others, and situations, we are downright shoddy scientists.” p.55

If we are to withstand the detrimental effect of real or perceived stress then physical and mental resilience is required. But how does this happen? Are we born with a fixed capacity for resilience? Or is it something that can be learned? How come some people seem to crumble under the slightest sign of stress and other people appear stoic and unflappable in even the direst circumstances? The key message of authors Reivich and Shatte is that resilience can be learned. The authors are American academics whose primary research focus is on resilience and optimism. They take a cognitive-behavioural approach that the skill set they

advocate can increase resilience, and, in line with the modern world’s obsession with finite lists, claim that there are *seven* keys to finding your inner strength and overcoming life’s hurdles. These seven strategies form the bulk of the chapters in the book, before the authors apply them to three settings in life that particularly benefit from increased resilience: relationships, parenting and work.

An integral section of the book is a section on realistic optimism. This is where the empirical basis to the book really shines and why it will outlive its ‘pop psychology’ rivals. Whilst some self-help books provide the literary equivalent to cheerleading, *The Resilience Factor* discusses how to maintain a productive and hopeful outlook by believing that good things may happen and are worth pursuing, but that effort, problem solving and planning are needed to bring these about.

Frequently, sections in the book are precipitated by a relevant literary quote. Rather than being clichéd statements the quotes are thought-provoking and relate well to the topic at hand. For example, the following DH Lawrence quote from 1928 was used to introduce a section on ‘resilience in life’, where the authors talk about life in America following the aftermath of September 11, 2001:

Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We’ve got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.

Overall, *The Resilience Factor* delivers on its promise to find keys to discover inner strength and overcome life's hurdles. It is not an instant gratification book, as the reader has to be willing to introspect and have the patience to go through the exercises of the predominantly cognitive strategies. However, it is worth the energy as the book's suggestions are empirically based and practical.

Lastly, the cover of *The Resilience Factor* has a particularly striking visual representation of resilience. It shows a photograph of a lone tree on top of a tall craggy rock whose roots and trunk have been severely bent and warped through the perilous weather conditions. However, despite this, the tree has a stunning array of green leaves in the upper branches. The implication is simple: even in the toughest of circumstances, flourishing is possible.



Book review:

Desistance from Sex Offending: Alternatives to Throwing Away the Keys.

Laws, R. & Ward, T. (2010).
Guilford Press: London.

Reviewed by Benita Stiles-Smith, PhD

Reviewer biography:

Benita Stiles-Smith is a Senior Clinical Psychologist practising in the Hastings Psychologist's Office of the Department of Corrections. Her graduate education was obtained in the United States, and she has enjoyed practising in a variety of settings prior to joining the Department of Corrections.

The New Zealand Department of Corrections has a keen interest in the process of reintegrating offenders into mainstream society. Desistance from offending is an area of burgeoning study in the field which supports and underpins the process of reintegration. The Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) Model (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) is the underlying model the Department of Corrections uses for working with offenders. This book adds a deeper understanding of working with offenders who are in the process of not only moving from offending, but toward pro-social living, and brings to life many practical aspects of responsivity in the process of achieving desistance from crime.

For those interested in broad and historical context, Laws and Ward initially take care to present the background to desistance thinking, reviewing the progression of research which has slowly accrued since the 1980s. They draw upon the seminal research of Sampson and Laub (1993) and the progression of their thinking by Maruna (2001), cogently discussing relationships between criminological, forensic psychological, rehabilitation, and reintegration literatures.

Taking into account that desistance research is currently in the early stages of development, this book presents a framework for supporting rehabilitation and reintegrative work through use of the Good Lives Model. A substantive presentation of the model is given, with assessment and tracking tools, case presentations and formulations developed, and components and potential applications of the model demonstrated.

When used in conjunction with RNR, the Good Lives Model provides grounding and breadth for RNR within rehabilitative reintegration. Desistance theory describes an integration of social and cultural elements, and the Good Lives Model expands and weaves threads from these elements with focus on future orientation, individual application, and contextualised, strength-based, and holistic perspectives. Such familiar elements as motivational interviewing, offence mapping, and dynamic risk factors are parts of the rehabilitative discussion and formulation. This occurs in several phases and results in a plan which is generated by helping the offender identify his particular factors for desistance.

The book ends with a comprehensive and thoughtful discussion regarding ethics and the attendant dilemmas in correctional systems. Robust support of desistance is recommended as the additional necessary element to the RNR focus we are using. Knowing

more about desistance process will help us to support it, and using the Good Lives Model may be an effective avenue to increasing this knowledge base.

This book was one of the first of its kind when it was published in 2010, and has been followed by several other books on desistance (e.g., Calverly, 2014; Flynn, 2012; Healy, 2012; King, 2013). Groups of interested practitioners and researchers are increasingly collaborating to describe the phenomenon and process of desistance. This book, however, was a ground-breaker which continues to be current in its views and is home-based for us, being written by a New Zealand researcher. Reading it gives a good foundation for other literature which has since been produced on the topic.

“This book adds a deeper understanding of working with offenders who are in the process of not only moving from offending, but toward pro-social living...”

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