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Key Findings

- Formerly incarcerated individuals transitioning back to society have the highest rate of residential instability of any known demographic group, moving on average about 2.6 times per year.
- The number of residential moves is associated with a parolee's probability of being arrested and of testing positive for drug or alcohol use.
- Parole sanctions that require a former prisoner to reside at a correctional facility (e.g. jail, a technical rule violator center, or drug treatment facility) are associated with higher rates of residential instability even after re-release.

*Papers that inform this brief:

Claire W. Herbert, Jeffrey D. Morenoff, and David J. Harding. 2015. "Homelessness and Housing Insecurity among Former Prisoners." *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 1(2): 44-79.

Harding, David J., Morenoff, Jeffrey D., Dobson, Cheyney C., Lane, Erin R., Opatovsky, Kendra, Williams, Ed-Dee, and Wyse, Jessica J. B. Forthcoming. "Families, Prisoner Reentry, and Reintegration." in Linda M. Burton, Derrick Burton, Susan M. McHale, Valerie King, and Jennifer Van Hook (Eds.), *Boys and Men in African American Families*. New York: Springer.

Residential Instability among the Formerly Incarcerated*

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Summary

This research analyzes the predictors of homelessness and housing instability among the formerly incarcerated, drawing on data on thousands of individuals over a multi-year study of prisoner reentry in Michigan. Higher earnings and social support from parents and romantic partners are the most effective buffers against residential insecurity among former prisoners, while forced moves to correctional facilities are correlated with future residential instability. Policy interventions that seek to reduce residential instability among former prisoners should include strengthening a parolee's familial connections, improving earnings capacity, and cautious use of mandatory interventions that result in a temporary change of residence.

Background

On any given night there are about 665,000 people without a home in this country. Prisons in the United States release about 700,000 individuals over the course of each year. Both populations are at high risk of mental health problems, substance

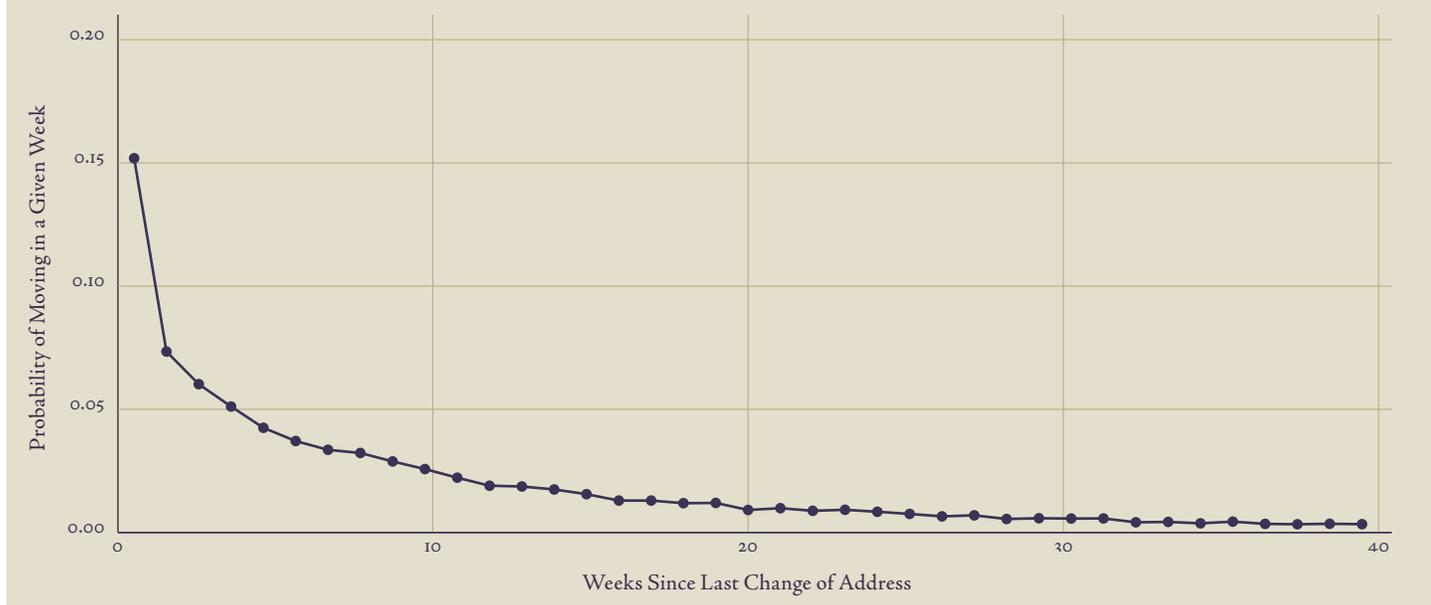
abuse, fragile family relationships, and stigmatization in the broader culture. These two groups share many of the same characteristics, and this study aimed to identify the factors that help former prisoners avoid residential instability and homelessness, both of which are correlated with recidivism.

In this research, we measured residential instability as frequency of changes of a parolee's address over time. We sought to identify the factors that contribute to homelessness and housing instability among the formerly incarcerated in order to understand how to prevent housing insecurity and thereby improve their prospects for avoiding recidivism and enhancing reintegration after prison.

Methods

This research is based on a longitudinal study of parolees in Michigan. We chose a random sample of 3,681 prisoners reentering society during the year 2003 in Michigan, a state where 90% of prisoners are released

Figure 1: Housing Insecurity Greatest During Initial Weeks in Residence



on parole. Our observations began at release and lasted until an individual was discharged from parole or re-incarcerated. We had access to virtually all the information on a parolee that a parole officer would have. The variables we studied included race, gender, employment and earnings, criminal history, family support, drug test results, education, mental health and drug use history, and marital status. We used event history regression analysis to examine predictors of residential moves.

Findings

Parolees in our data move an average of 2.6 times per year, meaning that each week they face about a 5% chance of being uprooted. To put this in perspective, housing experts define unstable housing as one or more moves each year, or about a 2% chance each week of being forced to move.

The likelihood of a parolee moving is highest immediately after relocating to a new address (see Figure 1). About half of moves occur in the first 8 weeks after relocation, and about three quarters

of moves occur in the first 6 months.

This suggests that housing instability begets more housing instability, as each new move puts the individual back in the initial period at the residence when the risk of another move is greatest.

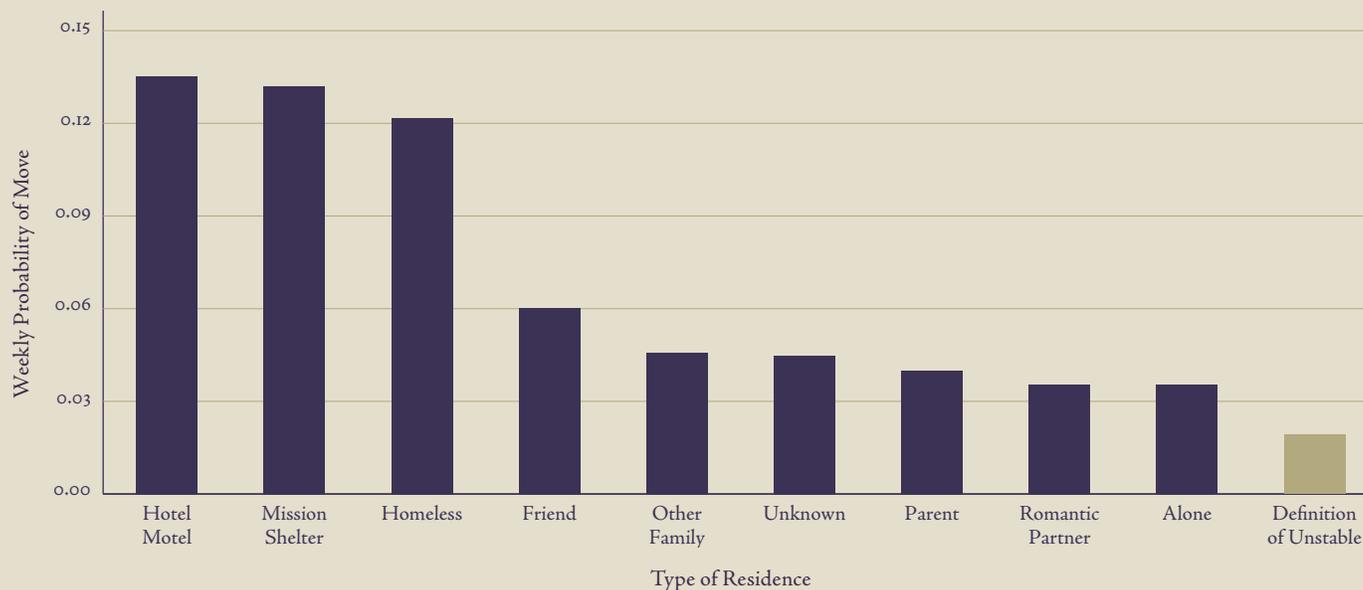
Individuals on parole supervision are potentially subject to forced residential moves for so-called “intermediate sanctions” when they commit technical violations of their parole conditions. These sanctions, defined in this study as any mandatory change of address into a government correctional facility, are intended to punish rule violations and to intervene before rule violations escalate into behavior or criminal activity that could result in return to prison. However, such sanctions can also lead to residential instability. Rather than simply curtailing undesirable activities that might lead to recidivism, intermediate sanctions may put a parolee at greater risk of recidivating by creating further unstable housing in the months after re-release.

The chance that an individual will suffer from housing instability depends partly

on his or her current living situation (see Figure 2). Living on one’s own is the most stable living situation, followed by living with family, living with a romantic partner, living with a friend, living in a motel or hotel, living in a mission or shelter, and being homeless. However, among parolees, the risk of a residential move is always higher than the conventional benchmark for residential instability, as shown by the rightmost bar in Figure 2. Additionally, consistent with past findings in the wider body of research on housing insecurity, our data show that higher income is associated with greater residential stability among former prisoners as well.

Finally, these data also show that changes of address are correlated with future parole violations. A parolee’s probability of failing a drug test or getting arrested is highest in the month after a change of residence. Regardless of what situation an individual is moving into or out of, the likelihood of either arrest or drug use is several times greater than it is in almost any stable state of housing. These findings

Figure 2: Residence Instability by Housing Type



suggest that there are tangible steps policy makers can take to reduce housing instability and recidivism among parolees.

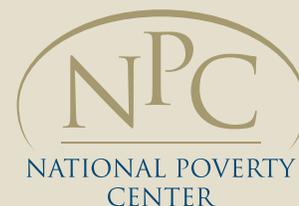
Policy Recommendations

- Because of the increased risk of parole violation, any potential change of address must be carefully managed and encouraged only when absolutely necessary and clearly beneficial. The data suggests that a more judicious use of intermediate sanctions and forced moves in and out of correctional or treatment facilities will increase housing stability. This is because the likelihood of homelessness and address change is highest in the weeks immediately after movement into a residence, regardless of whether the previous address was a private home or one mandated by an intermediate sanction.
- More income improves housing stability. Successful employment programs are likely to reduce residential instability. Parolees who are unemployed or

underemployed are at high risk for housing instability.

- Allowing families in public and subsidized housing to share their homes with formerly incarcerated relatives will give former prisoners a living situation that places comparatively less strain on other social services and assures their placement in some of the most stable living situations available to them.
- Although living on one’s own is associated with the greatest stability, this expensive solution is out of reach for the typical parolee. By far the most accessible option, and the one with the second highest stability, is living with family. This suggests that a vital part of helping the formerly incarcerated reintegrate back into society is assisting them in reconnecting and strengthening bonds with their parents, spouses or partners, and other family members.

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