



URBAN INSTITUTE
Justice Policy Center
2100 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20037
<http://justice.urban.org>

Returning Home Illinois Policy Brief

Prisoner Reentry and Residential Mobility

By Nancy La Vigne and Barbara Parthasarathy

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Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry is a longitudinal study of prisoner reentry in Maryland, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas. The study explores prisoner reentry across five domains: (1) the individual experience, as documented through interviews with prisoners before and after release from prison; (2) the family experience, as documented through interviews with family members of returning prisoners; (3) the peer group experience, as documented through prisoner interviews both before and after their release; (4) the community experience, as documented through interviews with key community stakeholders and focus groups with residents; and (5) the broader policy environment at the state level.

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The growth in the number of persons released from incarceration and returning to communities has sparked great interest in the topic of prisoner reentry, and specifically in strategies to increase the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated persons. These strategies can benefit from an understanding of the challenges released prisoners face in navigating the reentry process. One such challenge that has been virtually neglected in the literature is that of maintaining residential stability over time.

While the issue of released prisoners obtaining housing has been addressed thoroughly,¹ prior research falls short of examining the extent to which housing arrangements for this population change over time. The one exception is the startling finding that the likelihood that a Georgia parolee will be rearrested during the period of parole supervision increases by 25 percent each time the parolee changes addresses.² This finding has important implications for both parole supervision and service provision, but merits further exploration among different geographic populations.³

The data collected from the *Returning Home* study of male prisoners returning to Chicago provide a unique opportunity to examine the extent of and reasons for residential mobility among released prisoners and how mobility might affect reentry outcomes. Specifically, this research brief poses the following questions:

- How often do released prisoners change residences? Why do they change addresses?
- Are there differences in reentry outcomes between former prisoners who change residences and those who remain at one address?
- Among those released prisoners who change addresses, how far do they move and to what types of neighborhoods?

The answers to these questions have important policy implications. Identifying the characteristics of more transient former prisoners may provide guidance on the special needs of this subpopulation. Moreover, identifying the precise locations of released prisoners can help inform postrelease supervision efforts as well as the spatial allocation of housing, treatment, and other social services.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This analysis is based on data collected from three waves of postrelease interviews with Returning Home-Chicago respondents: wave 1 data were collected at two to three months after release (N = 296); wave 2 data were collected between six and nine months after release (N = 266); and wave 3 data were collected between one and two years after release (N = 194). For the purpose of comparisons across interview waves, this policy brief examines characteristics and differences among the 145 respondents who completed all three postrelease interviews.⁴ Survey data from all three waves were analyzed and compared to identify changes in mobility over time, as well as to identify differences between those who change residences (“movers”) and those who remain at one address (“stayers”). All three interview waves include interviews with sample members who had returned to prison for a new

crime or a parole revocation. Wave 3 survey data, which included documentation of all residences during the period of release and leading up to this final interview period, were analyzed separately to determine the geographic distance between moves and the extent to which moves crossed census tract and neighborhood boundaries. These data were also analyzed to determine whether movers end up residing in better or worse neighborhoods, as measured by socio-demographic data.

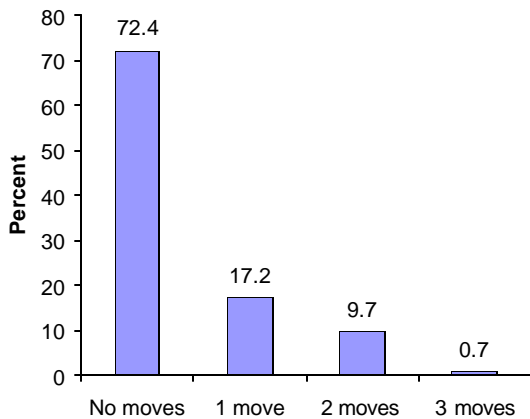
Analysis results are presented in four parts: (1) a description of the mobility patterns and residential satisfaction of respondents at each of the three postrelease interview waves; (2) an overview of reasons respondents gave for why they moved residences during the study period; (3) a comparison of the demographic characteristics of movers versus stayers; and (4) an analysis of the distance and nature of movers’ relocations.

MOBILITY AND RESIDENTIAL SATISFACTION

Our findings reveal that respondents’ residences were surprisingly stable over time, with that stability decreasing only marginally over the course of the study period. At the time of the first postrelease interview (at two to three months after release), the average number of moves reported across respondents was 1.12, with 88 percent residing in only one place. By the time of the third postrelease interview (one to two years after release) the average number of moves increased to 1.39 (see table 1). An examination of the number of moves by the time of the third interview indicates that the majority of respondents (72.4 percent) still resided in the same place, with very few respondents (10.4 percent) moving more than once after release (see figure 1).

Table 1 summarizes characteristics of respondents’ living arrangements and their satisfaction with them, with highlighted rows indicating significant differences across interview waves. We observe that residential satisfaction increases with time: more

Figure 1. Number of Moves at One to Two Years after Release (N = 145)



respondents hoped to be living in the same place in a year at wave 3 than at wave 1 or wave 2, although favorable responses across all three waves are quite high. Despite this overall satisfaction, respondents at all three waves were equally likely to believe that their neighborhoods were not good places to find jobs, with less than one-third indicating that their neighborhoods offered likely employment prospects.

In terms of specific living arrangements, we observed an increase in respondents reporting that they lived with an intimate partner, as well as respondents reporting that they paid to live where they did, over the course of the study period. These findings suggest that respondents tend to view their living

arrangements and neighborhoods more favorably over time, perhaps in part because of increased independence demonstrated by the fact that a greater share of respondents are contributing their own financial resources toward housing. Aspects of respondents' neighborhoods that are perhaps more intractable, such as the availability of jobs, may not contribute to respondents' overall residential satisfaction.

REASONS FOR MOVING

At the second and third waves of postrelease interviews, respondents who had reported living in more than one place for at least one week

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Significant Differences
No. of places resident lived for more than one week since release	1.12	1.33	1.39	Number of places respondent lived for more than one week since release was significantly lower at wave 1 than at wave 2 or wave 3.
Percent hoping to live in same place a year from now	56.7%	60.3%	74.4%	Percent hoping to live in same place a year from now was significantly higher at wave 3 than at wave 2 or wave 1.
Percent who feel safe where currently living	96.6%	99.3%	98.6%	None
Percent living with intimate partner	17.2%	24.3%	28.3%	Percent living with intimate partner was significantly lower at wave 1 than at wave 2 or wave 3.
Percent living with parent	46.2%	46.4%	44.1%	None
Percent living with other family member	49.7%	46.4%	45.5%	None
Percent living in public/Section 8 housing	8.8%	6.9%	10.4%	None
Percent paying money to live where currently living	15.9%	37.3%	46.2%	Percent paying money to live where currently living was significantly higher at each consecutive wave.
Percent reporting trouble finding housing due to criminal record	1.8%	4.1%	4.8%	None
Percent reporting neighborhood good place to live	79.4%	83.3%	86.2%	None
Percent reporting neighborhood good place to find a job	30.0%	28.6%	31.3%	None

were asked the reasons for their moves. It is interesting to note that family dynamics played a larger role in wave 2 moves (occurring up to six to nine months after release from prison) than in moves occurring up to one to two years after release. As illustrated in figure 2, wave 2 respondents were much more likely to report that their moves were a result of family members moving. The implication of these findings is that wave 2 respondents joined their family members in relocating, although in some cases it could be that respondents had to move because they were staying with a family member who relocated without the respondent. Family conflict was also more prominent among wave 2 respondents, with twice as many respondents indicating that they had moved because they were not getting along with family or that they had overstayed their welcome. By contrast, wave 3 respondents were more likely to have relocated to get their own place or to live with a partner or friend. This suggests greater independence on the part of respondents over time and is consistent with the findings illustrated in table 1.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MOVERS AND STAYERS

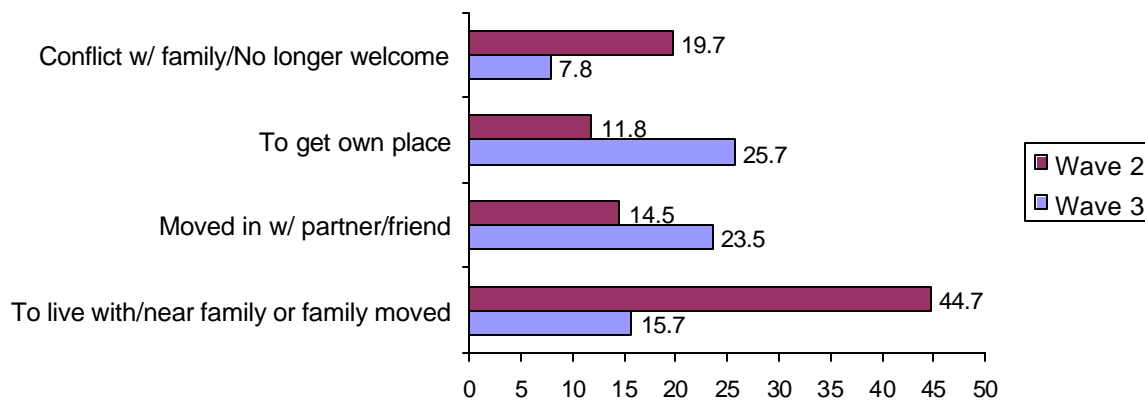
A comparison of means⁵ between movers and stayers based on the entire sample of wave 3 interview respondents (N = 198) sheds additional light on whether moves in general are

positive or negative events for recently released prisoners. Movers had lower levels of self-reported family support and rated their family relationship quality lower than did stayers, which may explain the high share of movers who relocated to live on their own, as described in the previous section. Movers were less likely than stayers to believe their neighborhood was a good place to find a job, and they were more likely to report that having a criminal record made it difficult to find housing, which could be a source of their mobility compared to stayers. Despite these difficulties, movers were more likely than stayers to believe that their neighborhood was a good place to live and that they would be living there for a long time. Importantly, there were no significant differences between movers and stayers with regard to postrelease illegal drug use or intoxication, postrelease conviction (through 21 months after release), measures of family emotional support, partner relationship quality, neighborhood disorder, and employment status at the time of the interview.

DISTANCE AND TYPES OF MOVES

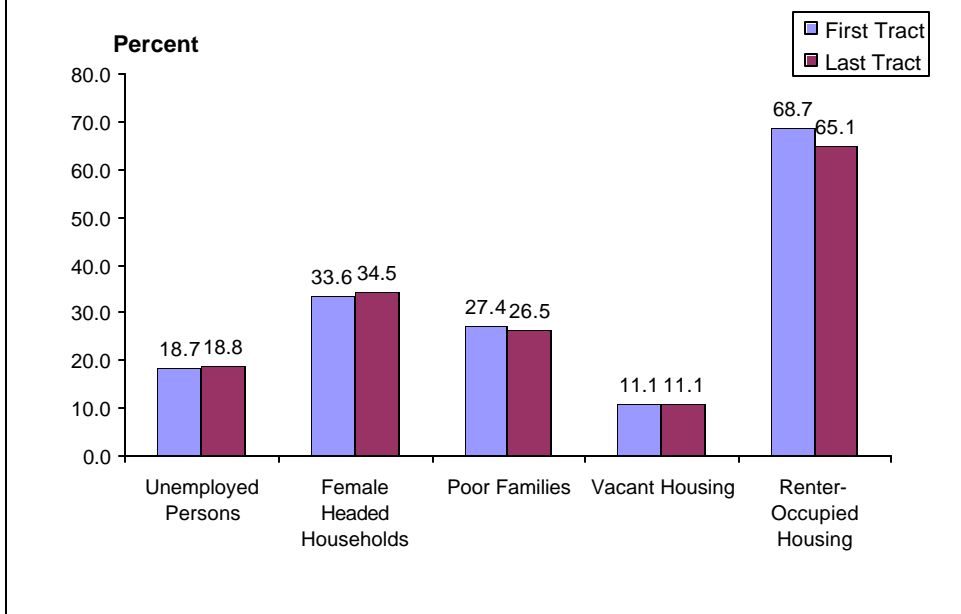
Conventional wisdom might suggest that ex-prisoners' moves within the community are relatively small, with most movers relocating short distances away from their previous addresses within the same neighborhood. To

Figure 2. Comparison of Reasons for Moving, Wave 2 versus Wave 3



Note: Survey item responses were "check all that apply" and therefore do not total 100 percent.

Figure 3. Comparison of Characteristics of First and Last Census Tract in Which Movers Lived



the contrary, of the 49 respondents⁶ who reported having moved at least once, the average distance⁷ between first and last known residence was 2.79 miles. Ninety-two percent (45) of them moved to different census tracts, and three-quarters (37) moved to a different neighborhood. Of the 45 respondents who moved across census tracts, we detected only slight differences in the socioeconomic indicators between the areas, none of which were statistically significant. Figure 3 compares the census tracts on five factors: percentage unemployed, percentage of female-headed households, percentage of poor families, percentage of vacant housing, and percentage of renter-occupied housing. It appears that, in general, moves across census tracts are neutral in terms of quality of life, with the last census tracts in which respondents resided rating no better or worse than the first ones.⁸

SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

While the extent of residential mobility among released prisoners in Chicago is not particularly high, with roughly three-quarters of

respondents reporting they had lived at only one address since their release, this policy brief has shed new light on the types of people who move, the reasons for their moves, and the types of neighborhoods in which they reside. Perhaps the most important finding is that movers are not necessarily at greater risk of relapse and recidivism than stayers. In fact, it appears that those who move do so to avoid family conflict or to be more independent, with many movers ultimately changing residences in order to reside with an

intimate partner or friend. And, while the distance moved is relatively far, the nature of the move is neutral in terms of community well-being. All of these findings indicate that, from a policy perspective, there is no reason to identify movers as a particularly vulnerable or needy population. Indeed, moves could be a sign of increased financial responsibility on the part of the released prisoner.

The relative distance that released prisoners move, however, may have important implications for the identification and provision of services for this population. While the majority of released prisoners do not move, the fact that most movers end up residing in different neighborhoods and census tracts may create an inaccurate picture of the true locations of the released prisoner population overall. This may in turn lead to poor resource allocation decisions—such as where to site a substance abuse treatment facility—if they are guided solely by the initial release addresses of prisoners maintained by the department of corrections. Such decisions would be best made relying upon address information maintained by the state's parole agency, assuming those addresses are updated on a regular basis during the entire period of postrelease supervision.⁹

END NOTES

¹ For a comprehensive review of research and programs pertaining to housing and reentry, see Roman, Caterina Gouvis and Jeremy Travis (2004). *Taking Stock: Housing, Homelessness, and Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

² Meredith, Tammy, Speir, John, Johnson, Sharon, and Heather Hull. (2003). *Enhancing Parole Decision-Making Through the Automation of Risk Assessment*. Atlanta, GA: Applied Research Services, Inc.

³ As Meredith et al. (2003) note in relation to risk assessment tools, caution must be exercised when applying these types of research findings across geographic populations.

⁴ A comparison of those who completed any one versus all three postrelease interviews indicates that this subsample of 145 is slightly biased, in that they were less likely to have used drugs or been intoxicated after release, had slighter greater measures of family support, and were somewhat less likely to live in disorderly neighborhoods.

⁵ Differences were deemed significant at p# .05.

⁶ There were originally 52 people who moved, but we excluded from the analysis two respondents who moved out of state and another who moved out of Cook County.

⁷ As measured by the median. The mean distance was 5.1 miles, which is inflated by a handful of outliers.

⁸ It is important to note that there was a high degree of variability within the neighborhood measures: ten respondents moved to areas that were more disadvantaged than their previous neighborhoods on all five measures, nine persons moved to areas that were less disadvantaged on all five measures, and the remaining 26 persons moved to areas for which some neighborhood measures were more and some were less disadvantaged than their previous neighborhoods.

⁹ Illinois is in a favorable position to do so, given that over 85 percent of released prisoners are supervised in the community and that parolees' addresses are updated promptly through the use of a computerized telephone check-in system. This approach may not be helpful, however, in states that have lower percentages of supervised releasees.

Methodology

The Illinois Returning Home study entailed four separate data collection efforts with 400 male prisoners returning to the City of Chicago. Prisoners were recruited over a five-month period through the use of a pre-existing reentry program known as PreStart. The Illinois Department of Correction (IDOC) requires the vast majority of prisoners to complete this two-week pre-release program, which is convened in groups of 10 to 30 prisoners in a classroom setting. This strategy resulted in a participation rate of 75 percent and the resulting sample was representative of all releases for the year based on factors such as major offense, admission type, release reason (MSR/parole, discharge, etc.), security level, time served, as well as demographic characteristics, such as race and age.

This analysis is based on data collected in one prerelease survey and three waves of postrelease interviews. The first survey was administered one to three months prior to release (N = 400). Postrelease data were collected from three subsequent waves of interviews: wave 1 data were collected at two to three months after release (N = 296); wave 2 data were collected between six and nine months after release (N = 266); and wave 3 data were collected between one and two years after release (N = 198).