

**ENHANCING OFFENDER RE-ENTRY**  
**An integrated model for enhancing offender re-entry**

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**Abstract**

*Notwithstanding diminishing crime rates in many countries, high rates of incarceration continue to engage political and public scrutiny in the management of (increasing) correctional populations. It appears such interest is driven by the competing concerns of fiscal pressures and ideological shifts: essentially lack of funds and, in many jurisdictions, a lean towards more conservative doctrines regarding offender care. Perhaps not completely surprisingly, these two themes can also actually work in harmony. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the United States, where spiralling costs of corrections appear to have seduced politicians to consider less punitive models which, ironically, are more effective at reducing crime and costs. At present, various states have embraced what has often been referred to as the Canadian model, that is, a less punitive and more empirically-grounded rehabilitative approach to addressing crime. Indeed, the number of U.S. citizens involved in the criminal justice system is staggering (7.3 million adults), with approximately 700,000 individuals returning home each year to their communities from prison. Encouragingly, recent legislation and funding such as the Second Chance Act have put a spotlight on offender re-entry. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine how well the field is positioned to meet proffered expectations for re-entry regarding risk reduction and public safety and to*

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*debate whether existing conceptualizations of offender change can adequately inform offender re-entry initiatives.*

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## **Context**

Once a mainstay of U.S. politics alone, a continuing conservative ideology (“Prisoners of politics”, 2009) has recently driven a punitive agenda throughout North America, expanding its influence beyond U.S. borders into the correctional discourse within Canada and other developed countries. These “get tough on crime” initiatives have arisen due to multiple inter-related reasons, including public concern about safety, political expedience for gaining public approval, and increasing concerns among citizens and legislators regarding the indirect and direct costs of crime. However, increased interest in a new approach to corrections is also evident in the U.S. where the limits of the “get tough” approach have been most acutely observed. Parenthetically, this situation is changing as evidenced by substantial shifts in correctional ideology being championed by U.S. federal agencies (e.g., National Institute of Corrections). This includes a major initiative involving offender re-entry (also called transition, reintegration and resettlement), referring to the return of prisoners to their communities. This initiative has commonly focused on various strategies (i.e., employment training, stable accommodation, addictions counselling) that facilitate offenders’ post-incarceration success.

In this present paper, we deliberately focus on re-entry in the United States, recognizing that success in the world’s biggest correctional arena will significantly augment parallel efforts in Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Also, since the scope of the problem is perhaps greatest in the U.S., so is the potential for gain. Admittedly, then, the implications of success or failure in offender re-entry are paramount. The results of current efforts could arguably influence public policy in the U.S. and elsewhere for the foreseeable future. In short, we need to get it right; this prompts some judicious caution, taking care not to over-promise and under-deliver when it comes to the purported efficacy and efficiency of our collective correctional efforts. Good intentions, alone, will be insufficient to bolster service delivery models (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Cullen, in press).

Following decades of managing crime in the United States through incarceration, the past decade has seen renewed interest and increased funding (Second Chance Act, 2007), such that there is considerable optimism for non-punitive alternatives that balance public safety concerns with rehabilitative interests. Notably, policy decisions and practice guidelines are increasingly based on empirical evidence and fiscal efficiency, although this is not the case in all western corrections (“Prisoners of politics”, 2009). Clearly, the stakes are enormous and touch the very fabric of life in America (Petersilia, 2004; Travis, 2009). Indeed, based on the most recent statistics presented below, if crime were a disease, the term *pandemic* would not overstate the level of national concern and the impact of crime on all aspects of the lives of Americans. Last year, the Pew Center on the States reported more than 1 in every 100 adults in the U.S. was confined behind bars

(Warren, 2009). Further, combining all probationers, parolees, prisoners and jail inmates, America has more than 7.3 million adults (representing 1 in 31 adults or 3.2 percent of the population) under some form of correctional control, at an unsustainable cost of nearly \$60 billion a year (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2008). Moreover, according to BJS (2008), 735,000 individuals leave U.S. state and federal prisons each year and return home. This at-risk group has high returns to prison, especially in the early stages of release to the community (with 30% of all re-arrests over a three-year period occurring within the first six months; BJS, 2008). Compared to two decades ago, more offenders are released on some form of community supervision, further exacerbating an already over-burdened probation and prison system.

This is the reality and phenomenon of offender re-entry. Nonetheless, this presents an important opportunity for further understanding and enhancing offenders' successful return to their communities. Beyond an approach that solely describes a population of individuals in movement from incarceration to community, a thoughtful approach to offender re-entry is about offender change, that is, the *process* by which individuals move from being active criminals to contributing citizens. Thus, the focus of this paper is to outline what is known about the conceptualization and measurement of this change process and what next steps would advance our knowledge. Along with this, we hope to emphasize that the pursuit of a full understanding of offender re-entry requires us to conclude that the "truth" about this phenomenon cannot be restricted to a particular discipline.

Encouragingly, there are expanding and ever-improving bodies of knowledge that inform risk and need assessment, correctional interventions, and community aftercare/supervision, all which are intertwined within offender re-entry and together have been coined *evidence-based practice* (Serin, 2006a). Indeed, recent testimony to Congress (Travis, 2009) and a book-end series on evidence-based practice (EBP; Crime & Justice Institute, 2010) suggest there is abundant evidence that, when applied thoughtfully, EBP should insulate practitioners from misguided zeal and stupidity. Still, integration of this knowledge remains an ongoing challenge for policy-makers and practitioners. Advocates of this new re-entry movement speak the mantra of evidence-based practice; however, such practice often lacks specificity and rigor. Yet, this movement has nicely advanced beyond Martinson's (1974) infamous "nothing works" phrase to instead ask: "what works for whom?" Recent research regarding offender motivation and treatment readiness (Serin, Kennedy, Mailloux, & Hanby, 2010; Ward, Day, Howell, & Birgden, 2004) might reasonably modify this to "what works for whom, and when does it happen?"

It is our proposition that advancing the efficacy of the re-entry movement requires utilizing more systematic assessment, incorporating improved community intervention, and implementing human services with fidelity and humanity. Encouragingly, this approach has been championed for more than two decades by Andrews and his colleagues (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Recent challenges have been put forward, arguing that there is potential to unduly focus on offender deficits as we attempt to identify and

modify offenders' "needs" (Ward & Brown, 2004), although this criticism has recently been attenuated (Ward, Melsner, & Yates, 2007).

In this paper, we provide an overview of established and emerging knowledge in five broad areas that are relevant to re-entry: i) utilization of risk assessment, ii) identification of criminogenic needs, iii) provision of correctional intervention, iv) probation and parole supervision, and v) aftercare. In isolation, the inference is that *each* of these efforts explains some reductions in reoffending. In reality, little is known regarding their *relative* and *combined* contributions to offender success and crime desistance. Moreover, an overarching conceptual model that integrates these literatures is presently and noticeably absent. Therefore, the core goal of this paper is to briefly highlight these important contributors to successful re-entry through a model (see Figure 1) that acknowledges that each component is situated within a larger framework: a multi-faceted correctional system serving offenders undergoing gradual and complex changes toward desistance. As such, the proposed integrated model underscores that re-entry is not the purview of a single discipline and that major contributions come from corrections, addictions, criminology, corrections, mental health, parole, psychology and social work.

### ***What do we know?***

#### ***Risk Assessment***

When predicting future criminal behaviour, unstructured clinical approaches (i.e., interviews) appear least predictive, consistent with the extant research (Hanson, 2009; Monahan, 2007). For this reason, most agencies presently utilize risk and need assessments because they both provide group estimates of re-offending and identify individual treatment needs (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). Unlike risk instruments that only consider static, unchanging factors (e.g., second generation assessments), these instruments consider both static and dynamic, changeable factors (e.g., third generation assessments). In general, static factors provide information that attempts to predict *who* will fail, whereas dynamic factors attempt to provide greater clarity about *when* an at-risk individual will fail. Both pieces of knowledge are important in offender re-entry and community corrections (Bogue, Campbell, & Clawson, 2004). Of note, a recent meta-analytic review of risk scales showed no marked superiority among commonly used risk instruments in the prediction of violence recidivism (Campbell, French, & Gendreau, 2009). This encourages the use of third and fourth generation assessments (e.g., the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory [LS/CMI], an instrument designed to aid treatment planning and offender management; Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2008), because while providing comparable accuracy to second generation assessments, they also provide greater utility for case management (by identifying treatment targets).

Thus, the conventional wisdom makes it mandatory to ground one's correctional practice with a validated risk assessment. At present either the LS/CMI or the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R; a shorter assessment tool within the same family as the LS/CMI; Andrews & Bonta, 1995) appear to be the choice risk instrument for case management in the United States (for non-sex offenders), although we know of no scientific survey of instrument sales. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, structured professional judgment approaches appear to be more popular with psychologists engaged

solely in the risk assessment enterprise (Archer, Buffington-Vollum, Stredny, & Handel, 2006). These findings highlight that best practices in one context (i.e., correctional case management) do not necessarily translate to another (i.e., forensic/court risk assessment).

Offenders with higher risk scores are at greater risk to repeat or resume criminal behaviour in the future. For this reason, risk assessment underpins case management (Andrews & Bonta, 2006); greater supervision and intervention is best allocated to offenders with higher risk. That is, risk assessment indicates *who* is at risk. However, it is important to recognize that risk assessment data are group-based and while current assessment accuracy greatly exceeds chance, it is not perfect and rarely reflects *when* an individual offender is at risk. While timing of risk is of particular relevance in offender re-entry, until knowledge advances further, we are largely left with the inelegant approach to simply assume an offender is at immediate risk when previous risky situations (e.g., substance abuse, association with criminal friends) are present.

While risk assessment is critical to allocate resources for case management and correctional intervention (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; MacKenzie, 2006), we assert that risk assessment primarily informs the process of risk *acquisition* while it is less clear that this is sufficient to inform the process of crime *desistance*. Risk factors (whether static or dynamic) explain and describe initial and continued involvement in criminal behaviour. On the other hand, crime desistance is arguably more central to re-entry. To the extent crime acquisition and crime desistance are related but different processes (Serin & Lloyd, 2009), it appears additional factors beyond risk must be considered to advance our understanding of re-entry. Factors that influence crime desistance (i.e., protective) are not simply the absence of risk factors (Lloyd & Serin, in press), necessitating a complementary model where both are considered. Earlier we have posited a transition model of offender change (Serin & Lloyd, 2009) and for this paper we have expanded this model to reflect re-entry (see Figure 1).

Thus, with respect to risk assessment in the arena of probation and re-entry, the field needs to advance beyond existing measures and consider factors that are related to crime desistance, that is, protective factors. Recently we have been working on a new measure of dynamic risk, the Dynamic Risk Assessment of Offender Re-entry (DRAOR; Serin & Mailloux, 2009). The DRAOR employs stable and acute dynamic factors and protective factors, making it uniquely relevant for re-entry research. The DRAOR is completed monthly by probation staff and it has been adopted as a national standard for probation in New Zealand. Preliminary data indicate that protective factors incrementally predict probation outcome when controlling for a second generation risk estimate (Tamatea & Wilson, 2009). This work is also proceeding in Australia, Canada, and the United States.

### *Criminogenic Needs*

As alluded in the brief discussion on risk assessment, criminogenic needs are typically identified by the use of such measures as the LSI-R, which are mainly utilized by probation and parole officers. Other approaches involve coding offenders' narratives regarding precursors to criminal behaviour (Zamble & Quinsey, 1997) or developing a problem-based review of an offender's criminality (Rice, Harris, Quinsey, & Cyr, 1990).

Another strategy has been the functional analysis of an individual's offence chain (Pithers, Beal, Armstrong, & Petty, 1989), often in the context of relapse prevention work. There have also been some efforts to develop reliable self-report questionnaires regarding antecedents to offending (Serin & Mailloux, 2001). Finally, for a long time, psychologists have created questionnaires (e.g., The Psychological Inventory of Thinking Styles, Walters, 2007; Measures of Criminal Attitudes and Associates, Mills, Kroner, & Forth, 2002) for use in assessment protocols to supplement interviews and to identify treatment needs.

However, while the method used to identify criminogenic needs may influence the final compilation, the field has most commonly looked to meta-analytic findings for the definitive list of items that predict crime. It should be noted that this may be somewhat limiting since only those factors that are well represented in the published literature can be included in these analyses. This does not necessarily mean this has been a tautological exercise, but it may be that further research in this area could yield additional criminogenic needs, especially for subgroups of offenders.

For theoretical context regarding criminogenic needs, Andrews and Bonta (2006) describe determinants of crime as distal (i.e., historical) and proximal (i.e., immediate, situational) within a model that argues factors at the personal (P), interpersonal (I) and community (C) levels reinforce (R) criminal behaviour (i.e., the PIC-R model). Briefly, the PIC-R model uses a broad range of research to support the conclusion that offenders perceive multiple rewards and minimal costs for their law-breaking behaviour. Perceived rewards for criminal behaviour may include a sense of satisfaction (personal), praise from peers (interpersonal), deference from neighbours (community), or material goods (situational). Thus, those internal and external factors most strongly associated with criminality reflect ideal domains to be systematically targeted in correctional interventions. These interventions are expected to change, modify, or diminish these factors in a way that reduces future re-offending (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Since identification of dynamic risk factors (i.e., criminogenic needs) is critical to effective service delivery, most agencies utilize third or fourth generation approaches to pinpoint each individual's core risk factors.

Moreover, decades of findings aggregated into meta-analysis have confirmed the relative importance of specific dynamic factors. The work by Andrews and his colleagues has rank ordered variables purported to be related to criminality and have identified the *Central Eight* risk/need factors that are most important in understanding criminal behaviour (which are prior antisocial behaviour, antisocial attitudes, antisocial personality, antisocial associates, problematic circumstances with employment, problematic circumstances in marriage/family, problematic circumstances in leisure/recreation time, and substance misuse). Embedded within this group of variables is the *Big Four* (the first four factors listed above), which are proposed to be the major causal variables in the analysis of the criminal behaviour of individuals. Equally important, a series of meta-analyses have also confirmed that certain variables previously considered to be important correlates of crime in more sociological theories have proven

to be relatively unimportant. Analyses show these factors should be considered minor risk factors (i.e., socioeconomic status, psychological distress).

Meta-analytic research reported by Andrews and Bonta (2006) using eight different datasets from eight independent meta-analyses identifies the major correlates of criminal conduct: antisocial cognitions, antisocial peers, antisocial history (average  $r_s = .22$ ). These analyses also indicate that substance abuse is a moderate correlate of crime ( $r = .18$ ; cf. Dowden & Brown, 2002), as are family and marital relationships. While research on the impact of family relationships on re-entry outcomes is still in its infancy, studies indicate that family involvement results in better employment outcomes and reductions in drug and alcohol abuse (La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004; Sullivan, Mino, Nelson, & Pope, 2002; Visher, Kachnowski, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). For these reasons, enhancing offender re-entry efforts requires correctional intervention to address addictions issues while aftercare must consider the potential influence of family members.

Finally, specific cognitive skills such as planning (i.e., strategy formation), inhibition, and cognitive flexibility are typically deficient in offenders (Blud, Travers, Nugent, & Thornton, 2003). This highlights thinking style as a further treatment target within an effective re-entry initiative. At the risk of being unduly prescriptive, the major foci for generic correctional programming (i.e., excluding unique populations such as domestic abusers, sex offenders) therefore appear to be addictions, antisocial thinking, cognitive self-change (an unspecified amalgamation of problem-solving, self-regulation, and perspective-taking), and healthy relationships.

### Correctional Interventions

The accepted overall model for understanding effective correctional programs is a risk, need, and responsivity model (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Cullen, in press; Polaschek, under review; Ward et al., 2007). This is nicely described as the holy trinity by Cullen (in press) who appropriately admonishes us to recognize that this work is a much richer paradigm for offender change than a simple distillation of these three components. Nonetheless, interventions that target criminal needs, provide higher risk cases with a higher dosage, and utilize a cognitive-behavioural model of delivery that accounts for gender, motivation and learning styles have yielded reductions in recidivism of 28% (Smith, Gendreau, & Swartz, 2009), while specifically targeting criminogenic needs yields the greatest effect sizes. This “holy trinity” framework has resulted in a proliferation of programs purported to be “evidence-based”.

Still, it is also clear there is marked variability in potential for effectiveness among correctional programs regarding assumptions, staff selection and skills, dosage, and therapeutic milieu (Polaschek, in press). For example, there appears to be a minimum dosage requirement for success (Bourgon & Armstrong, 2005). Program variability is perhaps most clearly described in those agencies that have a program accreditation process and which perform structured audits (e.g., Correctional Program Assessment Inventory; Gendreau & Andrews, 2001) of their programs. Finally, it is worth noting that community-based intervention yields slightly greater effect sizes (Gendreau, Goggin,

Cullen, & Paparozzi, 2001), making after-institution care an important component of offender re-entry initiatives.

The most comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of specific correctional interventions comes from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2006). Their data provide a more conservative estimate of recidivism reduction (less than the “best practice” reduction of 28%), but suggest realistic reductions in recidivism between 4.8 to 22%, depending on the type of program. Education and employment efforts are the least effective, while addictions programs are slightly more effective, vocational programs even slightly more so, and intensive supervision paired with programming the most effective.

### Offender change

Since correctional programming appears to be moderately effective in reducing re-offending, particularly when delivered with fidelity, our ability to determine which offenders benefit most from treatment becomes a key interest in the face of scarce correctional resources.. For the most part, this has been addressed by comparing program completers with non-completers, yielding evidence that offenders who complete programs have improved outcomes (McGuire et al., 2008). But what about variability among program completers in terms of post-program performance? Given apparent offender heterogeneity in terms of risk and need profiles, as well as differences in skills and readiness, it is naive to assume all program completers benefit equally; moreover, effect sizes are modest, rather than perfect.

Within our lab, we embarked on a review (Serin, Lloyd, Helmus, Derkzen, & Luong, 2010) to identify the measures most frequently employed to measure individual-level change and critically examined evidence that change scores predict future offending. The scope of the review was narrowed to explore the cognitive skills, violence reduction (excluding domestic and sexual violence), and substance abuse treatment domains. Studies were included in the review if the research (1) sampled a group of offenders attending treatment within one of the specified domains and (2) assessed variable(s) prior to treatment as well as upon treatment completion, at a minimum. The review identified 22 cognitive skills, 11 violence reduction and three substance abuse studies that assessed treatment change, but only three cognitive skills, four violence reduction and one substance abuse study attempted to directly link intra-individual change to criminal behaviour outcome. Of these, four studies offered sample sizes large enough to conduct adequate statistical studies and three studies showed a significant association between recidivism and at least one change measure. Other studies of adequate sample size did not report significant reductions on change variables, precluding analysis of follow-up data.

Essentially, the only construct that predicted outcome was antisocial thinking, regardless of program domain, although no single instrument was utilized across those few studies that both measured criminal thinking and considered recidivism as an outcome variable. In short, it appears that the measurement of offender change is insufficient to meaningfully inform post-program decisions for individual offenders. From this we



conclude that our measurement strategies need improvement, that we need to conceptualize new constructs underlying offender change, or both.

It is against this backdrop that we must now consider how to reconceptualise offender change as part of correctional intervention and re-entry outcomes. In Figure 1 (to be discussed later), we depict offender change as a constellation of *internal* factors that influence crime desistance and offender re-entry. We also present *external* factors known to influence on offender thinking and behaviour, linking the offender's environment to his internal change process.

#### Probation:

Probation supervision is another area considered important in influencing offender re-entry. Research indicates the quality and nature of the relationship between probation staff and the offender influence offender outcome (Skeem, Eno Loudon, Polaschek, & Camp, 2007). Encouragingly, but not surprisingly, skilled probation staff are effective at improving offender outcomes (Trotter, 1996; Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, & Gutierrez, 2010), demonstrating that probation supervision can be an effective *external* agent of change potentially contributing to re-entry success. As well, and again not surprisingly, caseload size appears to effect outcome (Jalbert, Rhodes, Flygare, & Kane, 2010), suggesting that quality does count. Recently, the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) showed skills-based training for probation officers transfers to real-life client sessions and improves re-entry outcome, even when controlling for risk. However, sessions need to be at least 40 minutes in duration (Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, Scott, & Yessine, in press). Other research has also noted offenders' perceptions of the obstacles and utility of their time under supervision influence probation outcomes (Bottoms & Shapland, 2010). Finally, correctional managers' orientation also impacts outcome (Friedmann, Taxman, & Henderson, 2007; Taxman, Henderson, & Lerch, 2010). For all these reasons, employing qualitative and quantitative measures of client perceptions and probation officer skills appear critical to assessing offender re-entry. Within Figure 1 (to be described more fully later), we assert that both correctional interventions and probation service delivery function as *external* change agents.

#### Aftercare:

The majority of prisoners eventually return to their communities, making transition and aftercare services a fundamental aspect of successful re-entry. The challenges faced by prisoners returning to their communities are well chronicled (Petersilia, 2003, 2004; Travis, 2005, 2009) and underscore that good risk assessment and effective correctional intervention are requisite but insufficient to ensure successful offender re-entry. For example, the U.K. Pathfinders studies demonstrated that post-release contact with correctional staff or mentors was the only aftercare factor that significantly reduced reconviction rates among participants compared to non-participant controls, whereas participants within certain projects were more successful than participants in other projects based on additional factors (Lewis, Maguire, Raynor, Vanstone, & Vennard, 2007).

Studies show that the offender population is characterized by a high prevalence of medical and mental health needs (Ditton, 1999; Harlow, 1998), substance use (Hammett 2000; Mumola, 1999), low educational achievement, and broken family ties (Mumola, 2000; Travis, Cincotta, & Solomon, 2006). Sixty to seventy-five percent have co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders (National GAINS Center for People with Co-Occurring Disorders in the Justice System, 2002). Further, 40% of those released have not obtained a GED or high school diploma, and only one-third receives vocational training while incarcerated (Harlow, 2003). Also, adequate housing is a critical problem. Nelson, Deess, and Allen (1999) found that parolees residing in shelters were at increased risk for substance abuse, unemployment and over seven times more likely to abscond from parole during the first month.

Notably, with respect to relationships and employment, marriage *quality* and job *satisfaction* better predict desistance compared to marital and employment status (Sampson & Laub, 1992; Uggen, 1999), suggesting that qualitative evaluations of perceived quality beyond simple demographic information are a useful aspect of re-entry methodology. Similarly, despite important methodological shortcomings, the Pathfinders project suggested offenders with the largest changes in thinking skills were the most successful in the community (Lewis et al., 2007). Recent research investigating the protective aspects of community aftercare has noted family and other pro-social supports are an important component of re-entry success (Naser & Visser, 2006). Changing the environment to which the prisoner returns and fostering community notification and support through improved interagency collaboration are fundamental aspects of improving re-entry effectiveness. Of particular interest to us is pilot research using the DRAOR in New Zealand (Tamatea & Wilson, 2009) that has demonstrated protective factors are inversely correlated with static and dynamic risk, and that protective factors predict community outcome even after accounting for static risk.

### *Summary*

Advances over the past two decades in offender risk assessment, correctional intervention and probation/aftercare have delineated what does *not* work while also more clearly defining practice guidelines. Failure to follow such practice leads to inaccuracy in decision making, attenuated success rates, and costly, unsustainable, and indefensible inefficiencies. It is also clear that while probation and aftercare do influence re-entry, we know little about measuring offender change. As well, the literature regarding crime desistance has not been well integrated into the risk acquisition literature while numerous policy challenges stunt the integration of desistance theory into re-entry practice (Maguire & Raynor, 2006). This is now where we turn our attention. Our goal is to develop a testable model to determine if integrating these literatures and their related practices will incrementally enhance effect sizes and better define different trajectories toward success for different groups of offenders.

### *Transition Model of Re-entry*

Despite this fairly optimistic summary, key questions still remain regarding offender programming and successful re-entry. First, it is unclear if advances across these related areas (risk assessment, correctional intervention, probation, and aftercare) will yield

increased effect sizes; that is, is there shared method variance? Second, while researchers and practitioners recognize that program content is but one important component influencing outcome (Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007), other issues such as staff (Serin & Shturman, 2008; Dowden & Andrews, 2006) and offender motivation/readiness (McMurrin, 2002; Serin, Mailloux, & Kennedy, 2007) are increasingly recognized as important influences on program performance and subsequent offender outcomes. Moreover, there is a paucity of research demonstrating that intra-individual change has predictive validity; as such, investigating the utility of treatment gains measured with pre-post assessments is an increasingly important challenge (Serin et al., 2010). In short, we know that offender treatment works, but it is less clear for *whom* and *why*. In particular, the psychological mechanisms that instigate, influence, and maintain the observable changes in criminal activity throughout the life course have not been studied in much detail and are poorly understood (Lloyd & Serin, in press; Serin & Lloyd, 2009).

### Description of the model

Figure 1 presents our effort at an integration of key elements of a model for successful re-entry. The model presents a life-course perspective that incorporates risk factors and desistance correlates, the latter resulting from an interplay between internal and external change factors. At some unspecified point in the offender's transition from being an active criminal to a law-abiding citizen, it is hypothesized that a commitment to change occurs. However, we assert that such commitment, alone, is insufficient to sustain change. We are reminded of the regular refrain by offenders departing prison, "this is the last time I am coming (back) to jail". While it is easy to dismiss this prediction as unduly ambitious (Dhimi, Mandel, Loewenstein, & Ayton, 2006), it is equally plausible that internal and external change factors fail to materialize to sustain the *intent* to change. Accordingly, we contend that the processes for entering into crime (i.e., crime acquisition) are different than those for ending crime (i.e., crime desistance), and we have strategically placed them at opposing ends of the age-crime curve (Blumstein & Cohen, 1987). This provides a view of the offender in transition and recognizes that many if not most offenders eventually desist from crime. We further contend that this transition involves both internal and external change factors that will influence an offender's successful re-entry. Whether an internal switch (either an instantaneous event or set of cumulative events) or an external influence (e.g., prosocial supports, successful treatment, positive mentor) first begins the transition remains unclear. Indeed, the conception of change may differ among individuals, but the process is likely a symbiotic relationship eventually reaching a critical stage for sustained and successful change rather than a simplistic linear, additive model. This incremental process is consistent with other research regarding change (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992) but requires elucidation and empirical validation in offender re-entry efforts.

### Risk Factors

Based on our review of meta-analytic findings for risk factors summarized by Andrews and Bonta (2006), it should be no surprise that we include the Big Four (antisocial attitudes, antisocial personality, antisocial history, and antisocial associates) as key components of crime acquisition. Reflective of the age crime curve, we have also included young age. Given the pervasiveness and prevalence of substance abuse in

offender populations (Brochu, Cousineau, Gillet, Cournoyer, Pernanen, & Motiuk, 2001; Kunic & Grant, 2006) we have also included substance use. We do not distinguish among adolescent limited and life-course persistent type offenders (Moffit, 1993), but it is likely that the six crime acquisition factors will over-sample the latter, as well as high(er) risk cases.

### Commitment to Change

As noted above, commitment to change is the initiation of the change process. For several years we have worked on the description and measurement development of the construct of treatment readiness (Serin et al., 2010; Serin et al., 2007) believing that motivation can be enhanced and that pre-treatment primers can reduce program attrition (Marshall & Moulden, 2006; McMurrin, 2009). This work, however, was not novel in that Quinsey (1988) had noted that an increased understanding of treatability was likely more important than improvements in risk assessment. Encouragingly, albeit two decades later, the field has made tremendous advances in conceptual models (Ward et al., 2004) and measurement (Casey, Day, Howells, & Ward, 2007; Serin et al., 2007) of treatment readiness.

### Internal Change Factors

There is strong evidence that the internal experiences of offenders, untapped by existing risk measures, provide unique information about future risk status. For example, a recent meta-analysis suggests that some self-report measures specifically designed to assess the attitudes, beliefs, personality and history of offenders had equivalent predictive validity for recidivism as the best risk assessment measures the field has to offer (Walters, 2006). More importantly, further analyses indicated that these self-report measures accounted for unique variance in recidivism outcome.

Still, while we note that most offenders eventually desist from crime, the exact internal mechanisms of such change remain rather unspecified. While recent work on the Good Lives Model (Ward & Brown, 2004) has changed the discussion points surrounding the important aspects of offender change, empirical validation of psychometrically sound measures have been slow in emerging to validate this model. Accordingly, over the past several years we have embarked on research to delineate and measure constructs that we believe provide promise regarding these elusive internal factors (Lloyd & Serin, in press; Serin & Lloyd, 2009). Our internal change factors include agency, attributions, outcome expectancies, identity, and change beliefs. It should be noted that our ongoing program of research has included the development of self-report questionnaires and staff behavioural ratings to assess these change factors.

A sense of agency, or belief that one is capable of exerting influence upon one's self and environment (Bandura, 1989; France & Homel, 2006) has been identified as important within desistance research (Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes, & Muir, 2004; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2005; Vaughan, 2007; Weaver, 2009). In addition to personal agency beliefs, individuals store beliefs regarding the consequences of various behaviours (e.g., the reinforcement value of actions) that are then activated by

environmental or psychological cues (Metrik, McCarthy, Frissell, MacPherson, & Brown, 2004; Palfai & Wood, 2001). These cues are hypothesized to initiate behaviour as long as self-efficacy and motivation are congruent with the nature of the behaviour and the expected consequences of the behaviour (e.g., outcome expectancies; Palfai & Wood, 2001). The probability of engaging in criminal behaviours or desistance behaviours should increase and decrease along with the expected value attached to them (Harris, 1975). Hence, outcome expectancies regarding continuation or desistance of criminal behaviour seem particularly important internal change factors. Similarly, attributions in criminal thinking (Walters, 2007) and sense of identity (Maruna, 2001) seem relevant in influencing change. For instance, adolescents' constructions of identity were able to differentiate between those with and without a criminal past as well as predict future criminal behaviour (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a; 1990b). Moreover, an offender working toward desistance may imagine being fulfilled and successful in prosocial activities and may translate this self-conception into instrumental behaviours that reinforce this (Stein & Markus, 1996).

Preliminary evidence with an early version of our assessment protocol using only self-report measures with a small sample ( $n=142$ ) indicates that negative crime expectancies, desistance effort, positive desistance expectancies and agency moderately and significantly correlate (Lloyd & Serin, in press). These factors negatively and significantly correlate with positive crime expectancies and negative desistance expectancies. In short, internal change factors related to growth, effort and being prosocial were negatively correlated with antisocial thinking. Notwithstanding these encouraging findings regarding construct validity, it remains to be seen if these internal factors will demonstrate predictive validity; although, this research is ongoing.

Another area of our research regarding internal change factors has been in the area of offender competencies (Hanby & Serin, 2010; Hanby et al., 2009; Serin, 2006b). We hypothesize that certain skills or competencies might influence program engagement and completion, as well as re-entry outcome. We define a core competency as a fundamental ability, knowledge or expertise associated with a greater probability of succeeding in treatment and remaining crime-free on release. Serin (2006b) initially conceptualized five core competencies: a need for change, personal accountability, cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control, and knowledge acquisition and application. Subsequent research using archival data ( $n=2,036$  male federal offenders) demonstrated that offenders with greater competencies had better program participation (Hanby, Serin, & Vuong, 2009). In this case, program performance was a standardized behavioural rating completed by program delivery staff. Recently, we have demonstrated that core competencies distinguish among type of violent offenders ( $n=6,789$ ) (instrumental or not), that violent offenders had significantly poorer program performance, and that persistently violent offenders ( $n=1,188$ ) had significantly lower competency than other violent offenders (Hanby & Serin, 2010). Again, we have now developed self-report questions and behavioural rating scales to reflect these competencies for use in prospective research.

This research regarding internal change factors is encouraging and could be supplemented by other psychological and personality research. In the meantime, these

examples are provided to illustrate the potential benefits of reconceptualising offender change and its measurement.

### External Change Factors

Much of what has been referred to as evidence-based practice is reflected in our depiction of external change factors. It is likely that each independent factor will have an incremental effect on re-entry success; however, thus far these elements have rarely been considered collectively within a single comprehensive model. Our external change factors include correctional intervention (i.e., programs), proactive supervision, aftercare, positive relationships, and a supportive community. As noted above, there is evidence that all these factors have been associated with reductions in recidivism. At present it is difficult to ascribe the effect sizes for one of these external change factors without a consideration of the others. Fully appreciating the cost and complexity of such a task, we are nonetheless unaware of examples where this important advancement has been completed. We assert that re-entry efforts will only advance when *all* of these external change factors are considered within an integrated model. We further expect that there may be shared method variance among external change factors so an investigation of their interactions and application to distinct groups of offenders is also required.

### Desistance Correlates

The previous preoccupation in the research literature solely on crime acquisition ignores that desistance factors are not analogous to the absence of risk factors (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). Moreover, much of the research (Laub et al., 1998) has depicted crime desistance in terms of events occurring in offenders' lives. It may also be useful to consider these desistance correlates as protective factors, such that their presence insulates against engaging in criminal acts even when faced with at-risk situations. In this manner, there is a qualitative element that engages the offender and makes these desistance events salient and sufficiently important to eliminate crime. (We note that crime desistance reflects the cessation of crime, not the attenuation of criminal acts in terms of seriousness or frequency). With this in mind, our list of desistance correlates includes older age (Blumstein & Cohen, 1987), high quality marriage (Maume, Ousey, & Beaver, 2005; Sampson & Laub, 2005), stable employment (Benda, 2005; Uggen, 1999; 2000), changes in the crime costs and rewards contingencies (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Bandura & Walters, 1959; Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004), sobriety from substance use (Fals-Stewart, 2003; Hussong, Curran, Moffitt, Caspi, & Carrig, 2004), and association with prosocial peers (Andrews, 1980).

### Final Thoughts

Risk (e.g., crime acquisition), offender change (e.g., motivation, perceptions about crime desistance), correctional intervention (e.g., knowledge and offender competencies), and aftercare (frequency, quality, support) are all singly related to reduced recidivism, but there has been minimal effort to systematically investigate how these predictors interact or how they might augment offender re-entry outcome in concert with each other. Further, there is modest fidelity in most measurement approaches, which often utilize transparent self-report questionnaires with marginal predictive validity. In this paper we have attempted to describe a model of the key components of successful offender re-

entry. We assert that the field needs more multi-method assessments of these key constructs, repeated over time during programming and supervision, in order to determine their relative discriminant and predictive utility. Only then will a more holistic understanding of the pathways to successful re-entry become clear.

Implementing these practices should realistically yield effects sizes of about 15-20%, however, the research to date has examined interventions and re-entry strategies in isolation, meaning available effect sizes are presently closer to 10% (Aos et al, 2006). Clearly, the process of change is a complex phenomenon, warranting an investigation of the interaction among internal and external change factors (LeBel, Barrett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008). At present it is only possible to speculate if a more systematic methodology can increase effect sizes and identify more robust pathways to change. Importantly, the majority of offenders are multi-need (Andrews & Bonta, 2006) suggesting that integration of services among disciplines is critical. For instance, when offenders who successfully desist are subsequently asked about those factors that facilitated (note, we do not say *caused*) successful re-entry, few ex-offenders identify specific individuals based on their professional affiliation and employment status in corrections (Hubert & Hundelby, 1993; Maruna, 2001). Themes of redemption and agency, however, are common. Perhaps we should take this cue and recognize that different disciplines have unique strengths which should be used cooperatively and not in competition. When efforts are co-ordinated into seamless service delivery, following the ascribed model, corrections staff and other agents of change, the offender and the community are more likely to benefit.

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**Figure 1:** Conceptual model of offender re-entry

