Who is in favour of what with whom?
Community views about the reintegration of women ex-prisoners

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Outline

- Reintegration as a new focus
- The legal context
- The social context
- The study’s approach
- Early trends and implications
Goals of sentencing

- Incapacitation
- Retribution / punishment
- Rehabilitation
- Deterrence
- Denunciation
- Restoration
- *Anything missing?*
A new addition?

- Reintegration: the process of assisting ex-prisoners / offenders (re)establish connections to wider society

- Reintegration is the only sentencing objective that requires community support in order to be realised.
Rehabilitation v reintegration

Rehabilitation
- Focused on individual
- Based on risk/need principles

Reintegration
- Process of reintroducing an offender into society
- Holistic
- Complex interaction of personality, comorbidity, housing, employment, family, social support
The legal context: Some harsh realities

With regard to adult offenders:

- Reintegration is not mentioned as a goal or ‘principle’ of sentencing in the relevant legal authority of any Australian jurisdiction.
- Rehabilitation is mentioned as a principle of sentencing in 75% (6/8) of Australian jurisdictions (ACT, NSW, NT, QLD, SA and Victoria).
- Western Australia and Tasmania do not mention either reintegration or rehabilitation as principles of sentencing.
So, in the Australian context...

- Reintegration not yet present as a sentencing priority for adults; it appears as a ‘consideration’ in related matters.
- Despite this, there are many reintegration programs now in train, at the planning stage or in operation.
- But how successful can they be when they rely fundamentally on community acceptance/support?
Factors in reintegration

Personal characteristics
- Health
- Drug and alcohol use
- Education
- Employment experience and skills
- Remorse, motivation to change

Environment, social context
- Employment
- Housing
- Family and social networks
- Gov’t policies and programs
- Community attitudes
Factors in reintegration

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- Community attitudes
Gaps in research

- Some research into attitudes to the employment of ex-offenders (focusing on employers)
  
  *but* ...

- No community-wide study of attitudes to the reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-offenders, incorporating domains of reintegration: housing, employment, training, psycho social supports.

- No consideration of the gap b/t support for policy and the reality of reintegrative ideas
The Study

Aims are to identify:

- Levels of community support for specific aspects of reintegration for (ex)offenders
- Community groups with positive/negative views re reintegration of (ex)offenders
- Offending sub-groups (and offenders) that the community is least/most accepting of
- Reintegrative policies that the community are most likely to support
- To identify the predictors of community views about reintegration.
Variables

- Respondent factors:
  - Characteristics
  - Experience
  - Knowledge

- Views about employment of (ex)offenders
  - Proximity (working with)
  - Policy (gov’t support for)

- Views about housing of (ex)offenders
  - Proximity (working with)
  - Policy (gov’t support for)

- Effects of characteristics of (ex)offenders
  - E.g. criminal history, age, motivation to change
Views about ‘eligibility’

Housing (policy / proximity)
Employment (policy / proximity)
Education
Other Programs
Variables

- Respondent factors:
  - Characteristics
  - Experience
  - Knowledge

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Method

- Questionnaire piloted
- Questionnaire mailed out to min. 15,000 randomly selected Victorian households
- Voluntary, anonymous, reply paid return
- Reminder card mailed out approx. 2 weeks after initial mail out
- Expect return rate of approx 15-20%
- About 500 responses already in, 200 entered, some clear trends
- Significant interest in follow up study
Some trends I

- All respondents more comfortable living near and working with a female ex-offender than a male (proximity)
- This gender difference is absent at the policy level
- But, all also more supportive of edn, housing and employment policy than of actually having contact with the ex-offender in any of these domains
Some trends II

- Female respondents more supportive than males of reint initiatives (at both the policy and proximity levels)
- This was true despite women being more likely to report prior victimhood and having higher levels of fear of crime
- Female respondents rate rehab and reint higher as sentencing priorities than males
Some trends III

Clear continuums of eligibility and forfeiture based on:

- offence type (e.g. dealing v possession; ‘hands off’ sexual offences v ‘hands on’),
- type of victim (child /adult)
- relationship to victim
- sentence type
- type of victim
- other processing issues (tmt etc)
So far:

- Some clear patterns – many of which relate to participant and offender gender
- Socially constructed continuums and eligibility cut-offs being identified
- The predictors of these (and rationales) are being highlighted
- Theory building around these processes
- Can identify *genuine* reintegrative opportunities (to aid in the targeting of a limited resource)