

Reentry



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Re-entry - Prajakta Kanegaonkar Every society has got its own norms and regulations for controlling crimes and enforcing laws. During the process of law enforcement it becomes inevitable to separate the criminals or the law breakers from the normal society. The question that certainly looms is, doesn't a person who is labeled as a criminal by law have a right to rehabilitation or normal living if he or she decides to settle down post the imprisonment?

It is very alarming and worrisome when more than half a million prisoners are released in periodically. The issue to integrate them in the society has taken a serious form. While serving the sentence they could be subjected to mental abuse or mental health treatment. This results in less and less people participating in vocational or pre-release educational programs. Without the skill sets required to survive, with the police record that cant be wiped or erased, no family accepting or supporting them and no where to go, great majority is re arrested in less than six months. It probably would be easy to pick people for the crimes they have committed as it is a necessary act for smooth and safe functioning of the society. However reintegrating them into the society is a task that seems an undaunted perpetual problem. As the number of ex-convicts continues to grow, their alienation poses as a threat to the society, which their imprisonment is expected to protect.

The story of Jean Sanders narrated by Amanda Ripley in Living on the Outside touches all the issues faced by the ex-convict. Jean was picked by the law several times for petty drug dealing and car thieving. All he wanted was a normal life. His struggle is a representative case. During the 1990s America witnessed multiplying of prisons. It was forgotten that the more are locked inside, the more needed to be released. Rehabilitation was not the

game of the day. Outside the prisons the Federal Government restricted welfare and housing facilities to the ex-criminals. In such case, when no education to support, no vocational training, a non-accepting society and family who is not ready to take in, these ex-criminals turn to crime again. This has also resulted in the law enforcing system turning into supervisory system. Sanders had to make valiant efforts to pick up a better job. He is unable to do manual labor due to injury caused during imprisonment. This is again representative as most ex-criminals have serious health and medical problems. The parolees are expected to do several reporting. As quoted in the article, " the system is designed to make these guys fail. The health care system starts after 45 days post release. The 45 days period is extremely crucial for people who are recovering from addiction. The case is representative of ex-felons. Ironically the ex-felon population has also a vast majority of black or African-American population, which is as high as 47%. This clearly indicates that as high as 25% of this population would not be able to vote or unable to access credit or any other privilege of a normal citizen. This also converts them into permanently diminished group within the society.

Joan Petersilia, Professor of Criminology in University of California is the author of the book, *When Prisoners come home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*. She focuses on how this issue became so significant in the correctional field. She makes several specific recommendations towards the success of reentry of offenders in the community. She further discusses the effect on children due to their parents' imprisonment. As she states, " In some ways children are the unseen victims of the prison boom and the war on the drugs". She comprehensively summarizes the barriers faced by the ex-felons while trying

to be productive citizens. She knowledgably gives suggestions and proposals and discusses them in order to improve the reentry of the ex-offenders.

In her research paper *The Mark of a Criminal Record*, Devah Pager has discussed how a criminal record is a grave obstacle to employment, which also has serious implications for racial disparities. For ex: the ratio of callbacks for non-offenders relative to ex-offenders for whites is 2: 1, and this same for blacks is 3: 1. The effect of criminal record is thus 40% larger for blacks than for whites.* Employers already skeptical of employing blacks become all the more apprehensive when they come to know about the criminal record of the black person.

The time has come to question ourselves about the imprisonments and the objectives behind them. Prisons or locking should mean to stop the crime or put an end to criminal tendencies and not the offenders or the criminals. And if we are successful in stopping the crime then a successful rehabilitation of the ex-offender would further put a stop to any more crimes in the society.

*page 959 racial differences in effects of criminal record - the mark of criminal record- Devah Pager

Sources:

1. *When Prisoners come home : Parole and Prisoner Reentry* - Joan Petersilia 2003.
2. *The Mark of a Criminal Record* - Devah Pager, Northwestern University AJS Volume 108, Number 5 (March 2003)
3. *Living on the Outside* - Amanda Ripley