

Chapter 7

The Five Rs of Prison Reform With Ethnoracially Diverse Offenders: A Clinical Forensic Psychological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

There are various barriers associated with successful reentry into society for individuals released from prison. Reuniting with family members, rehabilitation efforts, employment, and housing are just some examples of obstacles individuals face when released into the community. Additionally, the costs stemming from the number of people incarcerated, length of stay in prison, racial disparities, and the mental status of offenders create an increased risk for post-release readjustment complications. This chapter focuses on what we call the Pentagonal Post-Release Risk Assessment Framework, or the 5 Rs, which include consideration for risk association of recidivism, reunification, rehabilitation, reintegration, and racism. For individuals released back into the community, it is imperative to consider the 5 Rs. Neglecting one or more of the 5 Rs may perpetuate a cycle of reoffending.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a confluence of psychosocial and forensically relevant challenges encountered by post-release inmates (Coates, 2015; Cortes & Rogers, 2010; Dandurand et al., 2008; Taliaferro et al., 2016). It is not uncommon for them to experience obstacles that lead to them reoffending as they attempt to reconnect with significant others, gain meaningful employment, and essentially reintegrate into mainstream society (Esparza Flores, 2018; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Taliaferro et al., 2016).

Reengagement or reunification after a lengthy incarceration is a psychosocial barrier that offenders must prepare for in advance of release in order to maximize re-entry into the community. Globally, the prison population is estimated at around 11 million, with rates of incarceration at 698 per 100,000 population in the United States (Walmsley, 2016). The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world approaching 1.5 million people imprisoned (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2017). The imprisonment rate of African American males was 5.8 times higher than that of white males. It is estimated about 48% of people in prison have mental health difficulties and 29% of those inmates were diagnosed with a serious psychiatric disorder (Hagan et al., 2018; Lurigio et al., 2004). By default, correctional facilities are the largest health care centers for mental disorders in the United States.

Collectively, the clinical forensic costs stemming from the number of people incarcerated, length of stay, racial disparities, and the mental status of offenders create an increased risk for post-release readjustment complications (Bahr et al., 2004; Walters, 2011). Although various forms of outside relational contacts while in prison do permit them to remain somewhat aware of evolving dynamics of a personal and world nature, their psychocultural rhythm is disrupted and distorted by an incarceration that allows only pockets of exposure to their previous life course. Since their old decision-making instincts are dysfunctional, offenders are often less likely to muster the capacity to reverse unwanted relational circumstances that can further stall reunification efforts (Franke et al., 2019; Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017). Further, upon release they are often psychologically and emotionally out of sync with significant others which can result in relational turbulence and other unwanted consequences.

Offenders are not a monolithic group as their ethn racial and psychological circumstances are diverse (Cain & Parker, 2020). For example, pre-incarceration relational problems are not unusual and are unlikely to be mitigated simply as a byproduct of being in prison (Sanchez-Meier et al., 2002). Job options and employability obstacles also further exacerbate their ability to successfully reintegrate into their families, much less a non-offending community (Schaeffer & Borduin, 1999); efforts must be made to reverse some of these unwanted psychosocial trends.

A desirable post-release readjustment outcome must derive from an intrinsic motivation to heed the lessons learned or those that must be learned in order to achieve desired psychosocial adaptations. These are intrapersonal prerequisites for offenders in order to stop repeat behaviors from their past criminogenic histories that previously led to incarceration. The evidence is clear: rehabilitation of offenders for reentry is an intractable problem that nonetheless must be addressed.

It is important to adhere to empirically derived metrics that identify issues that could prove detrimental to an offender's readjustment. While the evidenced-based principles for post-release inmates may appear clear to some, there are five vital factors that should be captured: Recidivism, Rehabilitation, Reunification, Reintegration, and Racism. These post-release adjustment factors will hereafter be referred to as the Five Rs. The Five R's form the basis of the *Pentagonal Post-Release Risk Assessment Framework*. Each element of the Five Rs functions as a way to profile an offender prior to their release by understanding

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