



INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY • COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK • IJRD.CSW.FSU.EDU

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After leaving prison with high hopes, new traumatic experiences and loss of critical resources complicate the reentry process for many individuals

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Researchers at the Institute for Justice Research and Development (IJRD) at the Florida State University College of Social Work find that [nearly half of study participants experience an impactful traumatic event](#) after their release from incarceration and lose substantial resources that would otherwise support their successful release. This trauma and loss occurs within the first eight months after release from prison.

Of those who experienced trauma, one in five lost a loved one to homicide, nearly 25% were violently assaulted, 31% witnessed a serious injury or death, 31% were diagnosed with a life-threatening illness or sustained a serious injury, and 60% learned of the serious injury or death of a loved one.

“In addition to having to navigate constantly changing and sometimes tumultuous community conditions, individuals leaving incarceration begin to experience extremely traumatic events and loss almost immediately after being released. The support systems available to them in communities are not prepared to adequately respond and our data suggest that the need for change in available supports is urgent,” said Carrie Pettus-Davis, associate professor of social work and director of IJRD.

Study participants also experienced lost or reduced employment, income, transportation, housing, their own health and the health of their loved ones, medical insurance, social support from family and friends, and community engagement. All of this while facing high expectations from correctional stakeholders, community-based service providers and their own families.

The data presented in this report were collected prior to increased public attention and heightened consciousness on racial violence occurring in our nation. “Given how these events have affected all of us, one can imagine how those who have recently released from prison have been affected as the reentry period is often a stressful and chaotic time of transition in the best of circumstances. A national exploration of racial violence may be experienced by these individuals in an amplified way, making a stressful transition even more challenging,” said Stephanie Kennedy, director of research dissemination at IJRD.

Experiences of trauma are disruptive for many people, even those who have not experienced incarceration. Symptoms include psychological distress, anxiety, depression, fear, paranoia, mistrust of other people, impulsivity, aggression, relationship problems, hyper-reactivity, and misinterpretation of social cues based on the lingering impact of the traumatic event.

“Individuals with incarceration histories are often expected to overcome loss and turmoil without help and at speeds faster than we would expect of any other person living in the community. It is time for community members and stakeholders to better understand the post-incarceration experience and ask if our expectations of immediately paying off debt, finding employment, gaining more education, attending multiple programs, and engaging in community services are just too high,” said Pettus-Davis.

The study focuses on the 5-Key Model for Reentry. This innovative intervention is being implemented in seven states across the nation. This report uses data from Phase 1 of the study, where the 5-Key Model is being tested with more than 1,500 men and women who have released from 50 prisons into 12 urban and rural counties in four states across the country. It is designed to help individuals leaving incarceration and returning home to increase community stability, develop well-being and thrive in their communities.

Access the [one-page key takeaways from the full report here](#).

For more information on the study, please visit our website:

<https://ijrd.csw.fsu.edu/publications/research-reports>

ABOUT the Institute for Justice Research and Development (IJRD),

We prioritize rapid dissemination of research findings to the advocates, professionals, and policymakers who can adopt them rather than limiting the communication of our findings to academic audiences. The mission at IJRD is to advance science, policy, and practice to improve the well-being of individuals, families, and communities impacted by criminal justice system involvement, in a first of its kind research and development center. The movement from mass incarceration toward smart decarceration has the potential to produce effective, sustainable, and equitable criminal justice reforms.

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