

GEORGE WARREN
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The Social, Emotional, and Economic Implications of Returning Home

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Returning home, returning to others

- Between 66% - 92% of reentering prisoners rely on families for support
- Tangible supports - housing, clothing, food, childcare, transportation, and financial/employment assistance.
- Emotional support, support with addictions, informational support.
- When support is positive, sustained, people do better
- Relationships are complicated and when stressed, can become maladaptive

What Is Family?

Family Defined

- Biological and adoptive relatives, intimate partners, close friends, faith leaders, mentors, sponsors.
(diZerega, 2010; Fontaine, 2012; Shanahan & Agudelo, 2011).
- In a large study of family inclusive case management, 60% of clients were connected to either a nonmarried intimate partner, parent, or sibling (Fontaine, 2012).



ACTIVITY AT YOUR TABLE

Case Scenario: John

- 38 years old
- Two years ago, lost his job due to substance abuse issues.
- After he lost his job, his wife left him with all of their possessions and moved across the country.
- He found another job but then was laid off due to budget cuts almost immediately. He was never able to find another job.
- Only family lives in Puerto Rico. He scapped up enough money to fly there and had only his phone, his wallet, and his suitcase of only case.
- When he arrived his wallet and phone were stolen out of his back pocket. Outside of his clothes, those were his only possessions.
- His wallet had the phone number and address of his family. He has no access to money or identification because they were in his wallet. His family has a common Puerto Rican name.
- They new he was arriving sometime this week, but otherwise, didn't have his exact flight information. The family is poor and their phone is periodically disconnected because they can't pay the bills.

What does John do?

- Describe how John finds his family in Puerto Rico after he arrives at the airport.
 - What financial resources are used?
 - What emotional resources?
 - What social resources?
- Once John finds his family, what does he need from them to help get his life back together?
 - What financial related resources does he need?
 - What emotional resources?
 - What social resources?

What does the Family do?

- Describe how the family helps to find John once he arrives in Puerto Rico.
 - What financial resources are used?
 - What emotional resources?
 - What social resources?
- Once the family finds John, what type of support do they need to provide him to help him get his life back together?
 - What financial resources does he need?
 - What emotional resources does he need?
 - What social resources does he need?

What are Family Circumstances?

John and his Family

- How is John like a person reintegrating into the community from prison?
- How might John coming to live with his family make the family circumstances be similar to a person returning from prison?

Family Circumstances

- This is a heterogeneous group – with diverse circumstances. Little research on families of reentering prisoners. Research that is available shows strained circumstances.
- **Financial circumstances** (many families report)
 - Very low incomes
 - Low educational statuses which influences income
 - Unemployment or underemployment
 - Financial burden when a prisoner returns home
 - Less ability for former prisoners to contribute financially

Question for the tables:

What type of financial related issues surfaced when you were problem solving the case example of John and his family?

Family Circumstances

- **Emotional circumstances** (many families report)
 - Frustration
 - Disappointment
 - Resentment
 - Demeaning and demanding both directions (pushing too hard too soon)
 - Former prisoners can resent dependency
 - Interpersonal conflict

Question for the tables:

What type of emotional related issues surfaced when you were problem solving the case example of John and his family?

Family Circumstances

- **Social circumstances** (many families report)
 - Physical and mental health concerns
 - Competing caregiving responsibilities
 - Can sometimes put unrealistic demands on former prisoner
 - Family history of criminal justice involvement or total lack of awareness of what it is like to have been incarcerated
 - Stigma associated with having a family member in prison
 - Forced involvement in social service systems (e.g., foster care or service providers and corrections professionals asking for their help)

Question for the tables:

What type of social related issues surfaced when you were problem solving the case example of John and his family?

**It's Complicated....
What to do?**

Family Resilience Framework

- Crises and persistent adversity impact the whole family
- Stress can derail the functioning of the family
- Distress is heightened when it reactivates painful emotions from the past
- Maladaptive approaches may work short term, but become dysfunctional overtime

Family Resilience Framework

- Key processes underlay effective and healthy family functioning
 - Normalize and contextualize distress
 - Draw out family strengths to counter helplessness and reinforce confidence
 - Restructure family roles and mutual support
 - Proactive communication and problem solving
- Intervening on these key processes, while focusing on family strengths results in
 - Improved social support
 - Guidelines for practical support, crisis management, problem solving
 - Reduces stress
 - Reinforces patterns and practices that will improve future dealings with stressors and crisis

Mitigating Stressors of Returning Home

- Challenge yourself to always view your client as inextricable from the family that is supporting him/her.
- Reinforce to the client that he is part of, not separate from, the family unit. Do so positively.
- When addressing client needs, ask about family needs. For example, when you send your client to an organization that will help your client to find a job, ask your client if he/she has family members that need help finding a job too. If they do, encourage your client to bring the family member(s) with him/her. If your client gets a job, but other families don't, then he/she is not going to make much financial progress.

Mitigating Stressors of Returning Home

- What other types of resources do you refer your clients to that other family members could benefit from?
- How could John and his family work together to reduce strain on each other?
- Take some of the pressure off: Encourage/ help clients to create positive support networks outside of the family
 - Support groups, mentors, community centers, volunteering
 - Alternating people who come to probation and parole
 - Moving beyond their comfort zone
- Take some of the pressure off: Encourage family members to reach out for support – they are going through a transition and stressors too.

Skill Building

Skill Building for... families

- We do skill building for families around everything but providing positive support for a person who has engaged in crime and/or is returning from prison.
- Parenting classes, classes for caring for a family member with disabilities, who are aging, who have mental illnesses, who a physical disease, managing unruly teenagers, and the list goes on...
- Social support skill building – specific to that individual, that will help that live a positive, prosocial life.
- Like programming (or kids), social support is not one-size-fits-all, and families have a hard time figuring out what works for their loved one.

Skill building, how can you help?

- I know you aren't all family therapists, but here are some things a skill building program would include, maybe you can help reinforce some of these ideas.
- Connecting – learn about the families' experience as a result of a loved ones incarceration; engage families in the utility of family work.
- Assessment – learn about perspectives on reentry; personal and client-oriented desired changes

Skill building, how can you help?

- Psychoeducation – differences between enabling and supportive behaviors; realistic expectations; getting the support they need.
- Communication skills – how improved communication can reduce stress.
- Problem solving – with self-care; support from others; and ongoing dialogue

Thank you and Questions?

References