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Integrating Environmental Considerations into Prisoner Risk Assessments

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Abstract

Reducing re-offending amongst ex-prisoners is of paramount importance for both penal and societal reasons. This paper advances an argument that the current prisoner risk assessment instruments used in the UK neglect to account for environmental determinants of re-offending. We frame this position within the growing literature on the ecology of recidivism, and use the principles of environmental criminology to stress the importance of the opportunities for crime that are present in an ex-prisoners' neighbourhood. We conclude by considering the implications for policy and discuss how these might conflict with the practical realities of managing ex-prisoners.

Keywords: Environmental criminology - Ecology of Recidivism - Prisoner Resettlement - Desistance.

Introduction

Almost every offender that goes to prison will, at some point, be released back into the community. Whilst some may not go on to re-offend after release, the evidence suggests that many do (Langan and Levin, 2002; Ministry of Justice, 2010, 2011). Reducing this risk of re-offending is of critical importance for minimising harm in society, and is one of the most tenable ways of fostering tertiary crime prevention. Recidivism risk assessments under taken on UK prisoners typically rely on individual-level factors (Home Office, 2002), rather than

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considering how these interact with neighbourhood-level factors. We submit an argument in this paper that UK prisoner resettlement efforts overlook a crucial component of re-offending behaviour – the environmental influences provided by the residential location an ex-prisoner is released to. By environmental, we refer to the place-based situational characteristics of their residential neighbourhood resettlement point, rather than the individual conditions in which they are placed (e.g. the type of location of the housing, rather than the type and condition of the house). Overlooking these environmental influences means that little consideration is given to where an individual resettles in their re-offending risk assessment. With a sizeable prison population (this figure stood at 83,087 for England and Wales on 11January 2013) and the greater consideration of restorative justice measures to address prison intake, it is vital that we understand what contribution neighbourhood-level factors have on the risk of recidivism. It may well be a profound area for policy development.

This paper will start by summarising the research to date on the ecological perspective of recidivism. This synthesises research that has emanated from the United States where efforts to explore prisoner resettlement (also termed reentry) were initiated. Drawing from the principles of environmental criminology, we then shape an argument that emphasises the importance of the opportunities for crime that are present in an ex-prisoners' neighbourhood. We advance that there is a substantial theoretical base to underpin this geographical perspective, and the first empirical foundations are now being laid in support of this core premise. We conclude by considering the implications for policy and discuss how these might conflict with the practical realities of managing ex-prisoners. Adopting such a perspective expands insight into factors affecting the desistance of crime and opens up opportunities for considering these geographical influences in the management of offenders.

The Ecology of Recidivism

Recidivism can be measured in several ways**.** Common units of measurement include reconviction (Coid et. al., 2007; Mears et. al., 2008), reincarceration (Kirk, 2008; 2012) and re-arrest (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006). Due to their reliance on official records, measuring recidivism accurately using any one of these data sources is fraught with difficulties. Official statistics can severely underestimate offending behaviour, or can be an artefact of law-enforcement targeting strategies (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006; Ministry of Justice, 2011). Despite these issues, research has shown the prevalence of recidivism to be compelling. For example, in a study of US prison releases, two-thirds were re-arrested within the first year following their release (Beck and Shipley, 2001; Langan and Levin, 2002). In the UK individual prison reconviction rates were published for prisoners released in 2007 for the first time (Ministry of Justice, 2010). This showed that there was considerable variation; for offenders with sentences under a year the reconviction rate ranged from 26.7 per cent to 76.6 per cent (per prison), for offenders with sentences over a year this ranged from 2 per cent to 54.9 per cent.

A recent Campbell Collaboration systematic review (started in 2003) stressed that there has been a preoccupation with measuring the occurrence of re-offending (whether some offend again), rather than the frequency(how many times they reoffend) (Villettaz et. al., 2006).

This review found that most recidivism studies (fitting their criteria) used reconviction as an outcome measure, although also noted that due to the problems with measuring recidivism, more nuanced measures of re-offending were beginning to manifest. For instance, proponents of self-report data from offenders assert that these data are a more effective approximation of the likelihood of re-offending than official statistics generated by the criminal justice system (Kautt, 2008).Self-report data are though criticised for being unreliable (Ministry of Justice, 2011).

To date, recidivism studies have predominantly focused on individual-level risk factors (Home Office, 2002), which stem from the assumptions of a number of sociological theories. This has yielded a fairly consistent set of correlates with re-offending, which include youth, unemployment, low educational attainment, mental illness, substance abuse, learning disabilities, and family dysfunction (Farrington, 1987; LaVigne et. al., 2006; McCord, 1978; Shannon, 1985). These individual-level characteristics are then heavily used in risk-prediction instruments to measure the likelihood of an individual re-offending on release from prison (Cullen and Gendreau, 2000).

Perceptively, Gottfredson and Taylor (1985) were the first to note the absence of the environmental context in recidivism research. It took another couple of decades before a small but growing body of literature emerged, concerned with the ecological risk factors that ex-prisoners encounter on release from prison (Abrams and Freisthler, 2010; Bhati, 2001). In the first instance, this research has shown that prisoners are most likely to return to the neighbourhoods they lived in before their incarceration (La Vigne, et. al., 2006; Leverentz, 2011; Lynch and Sabol, 2004).

The neighbourhoods where prisoners are most likely to return tend to be disadvantaged urban areas, often lacking in economic resources and community-based support services, are characterised by low social cohesion and poor informal social control, and often have high crime rates (La Vigne and Mamalian, 2003; La Vigne and Thomson, 2003). That is not to say that ex-prisoners are resettled into the highest crime areas (e.g. see La Vigne and Kachnowski, 2003), but the areas where they are released to can certainly be thought of as conducive to crime.

Kubrin and Stewart (2006) have developed this thinking further by exploring the influence that the socioeconomic status (SES) of a neighbourhood has over the variation in recidivist behaviour. In their innovative paper, they employed multilevel modelling techniques on ex-prisoner address data, and found that being released to a disadvantaged neighbourhood (i.e., with low SES) was a significant risk factor for recidivism, when controlling for individual-level attributes. They observed that "ex-prisoners rely on neighbourhood resources, services, and amenities to successfully reintegrate" (2006, p. 167). Low SES neighbourhoods lack such resources, and this in turn may disadvantage ex-prisoners who resettle there. Kubrin and Stewart concluded by emphasising the importance of the community context in the successful resettling of ex-prisoners and called for other neighbourhood-level characteristics to be studied.

Research that has extended the notion of neighbourhood effects further was conducted by Mears, et al., (2008). These scholars studied the social ecology of the areas offenders resettle in after being incarcerated. This study used hierarchical linear modelling on US counties to test whether various ecological conditions affected ex-prisoner reentry and recidivism, and whether these relationships varied across different groups of males (stratified by age and ethnicity). The ecological conditions tested were high levels of resource deprivation and racial segregation (in common with other ecological-level studies of violence, this latter condition was operationalized using an index of dissimilarity for US census tracts).

The first set of findings generated by Mears et al. (2008) relate to the relationship between recidivism and the ecological characteristics of neighbourhoods where ex-prisoners are resettled. Accounting for individual-level controls (such as supervision on release and criminal justice resources at the neighbourhood level), their results indicated that resource deprivation was positively associated with recidivism for violent crime; not associated with property crime, and negatively associated with drug crime. When racial segregation was included in the model, the relationship between drug crime and ecological conditions did not hold. No other notable relationships were observed to be a direct effect of racial segregation in the models run for this part of the analysis.

The second set of findings tested the effect of age (young being defined as under 29 years) and race, (defined as white or non-white) whilst controlling for both individual and ecological-level controls. These results pointed to a positive relationship between young non-white males and violence and drug offence recidivism. This effect did not appear to be associated with high levels of resource deprivation or racial segregation. Recidivism involving property offences was disproportionately greater amongst young white males, but this was the only notable race-age group for property, as the other groups had similar levels of recidivism.

The third hypothesis tested by Mears et al. (2008) was that the interaction between age and ethnicity would be tempered by the ecological conditions of the neighbourhoods that offenders were released to. Put otherwise, the social ecology would exacerbate the individual-level chances (defined by age and ethnicity) of recidivism. Racial segregation was found to be associated with increased risk of recidivism (for drug and property offences), particularly among older non-white offenders; but this effect was not maintained for young non-white offenders.

Taken collectively, the contemporary research into the geographical resettlement of offenders following their release from prison shows that the neighbourhood context is likely to matter when predicting their risk of recidivism. That is, the places ex-prisoners return to are likely to be part of the reason that they get tempted back into offending. The research also serves to highlight the complexities of disentangling the relationships between individual-level and neighbourhood-level risk factors.

The Environmental Perspective to Prisoner Resettlement

Thus far we have sketched out the research landscape that has defined that neighbourhood characteristics are likely to influence an ex-prisoners' risk of re-offending following their resettlement back into society. These studies have focused on the socio ecological aspect of recidivism, or rather, the effect that social structure and social organisation (i.e. cohesion) has on a prisoner's experience on release. In this section we argue that the situational influences on crime that can be present in a neighbourhood play a powerful role in influencing the risk of re-offending. By situational influences we mean the dynamics of the immediate environment that facilitate or encourage crime. In other words, these are the proximal causes, rather than the distant causes of offending.

The situational perspective to thinking about crime is born out of the routine activity approach (Felson and Cohen, 1979). This theoretical approach posits that for a crime to occur a motivated offender must come into contact with a suitable target (victim) in space and time, in the absence of a capable guardian. The 'routine activities' of people's lives determine the timing and frequency of this crime chemistry. Deliberately simplistic (Felson, 2008), this theoretical model has profoundly shaped the direction of crime research for the past thirty years and has been integrated with the rational choice perspective (Cornish and Clarke, 1986) to form crime pattern theory, the principal pillar of environmental criminology (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1981). Pattern theory (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1995) overlays offender's routine activities onto an environmental backcloth (where the locations of all activity nodes are arrayed), and considers how offenders rationally choose their targets when committing crime. Collectively, these approaches are known as opportunity theories, which emphasise the important role of opportunity in crime.

The value of applying the environmental perspective to the resettlement of ex-prisoners has been championed by Cullen, et al. (2002). These authors propose that community supervision of released prisoners could be greatly enhanced by adopting a new paradigm they call 'environmental corrections'. This employs the principles of environmental criminology to consider how to reduce the risk of recidivism in ex-prisoners. From this vista, recidivism is assumed to be "due to offenders' retaining criminogenic motivation or propensity and their having access to opportunities for crime" (Cullen et. al., 2002: 33). Thus, reducing recidivism requires a two-pronged approach; one which seeks to inhibit, or neutralise, criminal propensity, the other which removes access to opportunities for criminogenic situations. Reducing propensity to offend can be considered the long-term goal, and is often seen as the moral and socially desirable strand. Reducing access to opportunities, temptations and provocations is more of a short-term intervention, but may remove the immediate triggers which propensity feeds off.

Offenders are often released back into communities that can be considered to provide a heightened contextual risk to a successful resettlement process. Abrams and Freisthler (2010) investigated this relationship for young offenders; examining the relationship between a neighbourhood's resettlement rate of young ex-prisoners and what they termed the corresponding 'environmental risks and resources'. Environmental risks were defined as land-use patterns that were hypothesised to provide criminal opportunities, such as off-

licenses and vacant housing, along with the violence rate in the neighbourhood, which was argued to be a fairly consistent predictor of increased aggressive behaviour in young offenders. Environmental resources were approximated by the provision of social and community-based services (such as social services, employment programmes, and youth-friendly community or recreation centres). Using spatial error regression models on 272 postal codes for Los Angeles County, California, Abrams and Freisthler found positive associations not only between youth resettlement rates into a neighbourhood and the economic disadvantage of that neighbourhood (unemployment, poverty and concentration of ethnic minorities), but interestingly, with the environmental risks. Environmental resources were only significant when modelled singly (i.e. without the environmental risks). These scholars concluded that "the study results may suggest that routine activities are more likely to affect juvenile reentry rates than geographic densities of institutional resources" (Abrams and Freisthler, 2010: 48). This leads us to suggest that by understanding the influence that environmental inducements may have on an individual's risk of re-offending (following their release from prison), a better offender management framework can be put in place that would help to identify how this risk can be minimised.

Residential Change as an Inhibitor of Criminal Opportunities

It is through the lens of this environmental corrections perspective that we now present trailblazing research that recognises that neighbourhoods differentially offer opportunities for criminal behaviour, and as a consequence, recidivism. Alongside the research on recidivism there is equally strong evidence on the influence of neighbourhood-level effects on the desistance from crime. One of the most influential studies in recent years is Sampson and Laub's (2005) research on trajectories of crime; indeed it has served to be the keystone of the 'life course' approach to crime and desistance. These scholars followed up a 1940s cohort used by Glueck and Glueck (1950; 1968) and augmented the original data with criminal history information and interviews with 52 of the surviving sample. Sampson and Laub's interviews yielded narratives that a change in residence was often described as an important turning point in ex-offender's lives (along with marriage, military service, reform school and gaining employment). They submit:

> "what appears to be important about institutional or structural turning points is that they all involve, to varying degrees, (1) new situations that "knife off" the past from the present, (2) new situations that provide both supervision and monitoring as well as new opportunities of social support and growth, (3) new situations that change and structure routine activities, and (4) new situations that provide the opportunity for identity transformation" (2005: 18).

Relocation then has the potential to act as a catalyst for desistance from criminal activities by providing a severance from old situational and social triggers. If we take the position that offenders encounter opportunities for crime through their routine activities, then the interruption of those activities suggests prospects for limiting access to opportunities. Whilst desistance also requires a commitment to a law-abiding lifestyle (Maruna and Roy, 2007), avoiding temptations and provocations provides a good chance for breaking habitual

decision-making and choices and building new pro-social attachments and lawful routine activities.

A direct test of this premise – that relocation can influence lower rates of recidivism – has only recently manifested. The unique social and geographical conditions provided by the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans permitted an examination of the forced relocation of offenders, without incurring any of the usual ethical concerns of a social experiment. On the back of this, Kirk (2008) studied whether a change in residential environment exacted a change in the levels of recidivism (measured by reincarceration). The results indicated that there were reductions in rates of re-offending by ex-prisoners who relocated from their former neighbourhoods, and this effect endured for at least 3 years (Kirk, 2012). This finding was echoed by Sharkey and Sampson (2010) who determined that Chicago adolescents were less likely to commit further violent offences when they moved outside of the city, rather than to new neighbourhoods that were proximate to their former residence.

Community Context

So why does the social and situational context offered by a neighbourhood have a bearing on the success - or otherwise - of prisoner resettlement? To answer this question, we suggest that it is prudent to think about the level of informal social control that a community is capable of exerting over its members. In the phraseology of the routine activity approach such controls have been termed 'handlers', 'guardians' and 'place managers' (Eck, 1995). Handlers reduce offender's motivation; guardians protect vulnerable targets and place managers regulate behaviour at places. The availability - and capability - of these handlers, guardians and place managers is multifaceted and varies considerably across individuals and communities (Reynald, 2010).

The level of informal social control that a community wields over its residents (i.e. as handlers, guardians and place managers) can be seen as setting the 'social climate'. In other words, if antisocial behaviour and criminality are not challenged by others, these forms of behaviour become perceived as permissible. Such inaction on the part of residents can set the tone of what behaviour is socially acceptable, or at the very least not successfully managed by the members of a community. This goes some way to explain why prior research has established a positive relationship between exposure to violence and youth antisocial behaviour (Patchin et. al., 2006) and is particularly important when we acknowledge that neighbourhoods with high violence rates often are the places prisoners originate from, and return to (Abrams and Freisthler, 2010).

Turning to specific members of the community, the people that an ex-prisoner directly interacts with after being released from prison can support or undermine desistance efforts. On the one hand, such people can offer economic and emotional support on release from prison, and may provide informal social control which restricts the offender from acting on criminal propensities. In this case they would be acting as 'handlers' – having a prosocial effect on the ex-prisoner (Felson, 1986; Tillyer and Eck, 2011). On the other hand, criminally minded family and peers may serve to encourage or enable offending behaviour. In this case, they would weaken an ex-prisoner's resolve to desist from re-offending. Whether an ex-

prisoner's social ties are likely to promote or inhibit desistance from a criminal lifestyle thus hinge on the nature of those ties (i.e., how strong or transient they are) and the characteristics of those involved (are they prosocial or antisocial?). Moreover, it is equally possible that both positive and negative influences may be present in an ex-prisoner's life, thus creating a conflict. For example, it may be that a girlfriend or mother actively discourages drug use or criminal behaviour, but associates encourage a return to previous offending.

The social cohesion in a neighbourhood; that is the level of mutual trust and shared values amongst residents, may influence the effectiveness of guardians. In support of this, Skogan (1986) argued that "When residents form local social ties, their capacity for community social control is increased because they are better able to recognize strangers and more apt to engage in guardianship behavior against victimization" (p. 216). Hence, neighbourhoods which lack cohesion will not be able to adequately perform guardianship over their members. The design of the built environment in a neighbourhood (e.g. high or low rise housing) may also contribute to a community's capacity for guardianship.

The last of the controls is place managers, who are owners, managers and employees of particular businesses and land uses (for instance; bars, leisure centres, parks, skate-parks). They, by the nature of their role, should be controlling or monitoring behaviour at these places. However, the effectiveness of this role is highly variable, and is putatively going to vary according to the social climate of the surrounding area and the explicit policies and resources at a given facility.

Communities then, are the sum of the characteristics of the people and places they comprise. They differentially offer prospects for informal social control, meaning that behaviour is well managed in some places, and not in others. The absence or ineffectiveness of handlers, guardians and place managers leads to plentiful opportunities for crime in some neighbourhoods, and it is these communities where ex-prisoners commonly resettle (La Vigne and Mamalian, 2003). We believe that these dimensions of informal social control may go some way to explaining why there is geographic disparity in re-offending rates across different neighbourhoods. The community context provided in neighbourhoods with low controls (be they handlers, guardians or place managers) is that they are simply more conducive to crime. That is, devoid of these controls, opportunities and temptations to commit crime can be high in the neighbourhoods in which individuals who are released from prison are resettled in to.

Integrating Environmental Considerations into Prisoner Risk Assessments

Risk assessments undertaken on UK prisoners are, usually, based on individual-level factors (Home Office, 2002). They do not duly extend such assessment to the environmental conditions an offender will be released to following their prison sentence. Evidence is starting to accumulate which indicates that this might be a fruitful avenue to explore, helping to more accurately determine an individual's risk of re-offending.

Warr (2002) asserts that separating offenders from their criminally-minded peer group can serve to reduce access to criminal opportunities. We reason that this may be because the peer group may reinforce certain social norms (i.e., criminal values) or exert social pressure, which precipitates criminal behaviour (Wortley, 2001). Thus, separating an ex-prisoner from criminal peers removes the temptations and provocations that may promote criminal behaviour, regardless of the physical opportunities for crime.

It can further be argued that social ties, to some extent, govern the discretionary routine activities a person engages in. Kirk (2012) postulates that when ex-prisoners resettle in their old neighbourhoods the same criminal opportunities and associates that influenced their offending prior to imprisonment are present. For many reasons a change in residential location may lead to a change in routine activities (with different associates) which inhibits the discovery of criminal opportunities. "Thus, to the extent that residential change leads to the fragmentation of deviant social ties, a reduction in crime may result" (Kirk, 2012, p. 6). Whilst it is true that strongly motivated people will always pursue activities that correspond to their interests (such as drinking alcohol), the social networks one has can be a strong influence over the timing and frequency of such activities.

Residential change, as well as facilitating a change in routine activities, may also open up new avenues for supervision, monitoring and social support (Kirk, 2012). Informal social control exerted by new employers, colleagues, place managers of facilities such as shops and leisure outlets frequented, and guardianship by community members may inhibit criminal motivation and enable prosocial behavioural routines to develop. The opposing argument to this is that by resettling in a new area, an ex-prisoner is less known to community members, and therefore their behaviour may not be as closely scrutinised in comparison to their old neighbourhood.

The mounting empirical evidence supports the premise that a change in residential neighbourhood can increase the prospects for desistance for many ex-prisoners. However, this is not a simple relationship. One of the key questions centres on how far an ex-offender needs to move away from their old neighbourhood to be free of its influence on their offending. Can this be a different neighbourhood within the same town or city? Does it need to be a completely different region of the country to sufficiently sever the ties with the old neighbourhood? These are questions that have yet to be addressed by the research community. It seems to us that the distance of the relocation is perhaps less important than the new neighbourhood offering an environment that is less conducive to crime.

To help further the argument of relocation assisting desistence we can also turn to the principles of situational crime prevention (SCP – a sister approach to routine activities), which seeks to disrupt the situational mechanisms which facilitate or encourage crime. SCP is known for being focused on reducing opportunities for crime to occur. In short, it seeks to increase the effort needed to commit crime; increase the risk of unpleasant consequences; reduce the rewards of crime; reduce the provocations and remove the excuses for crime (Clarke, 1992). The situational mechanisms at work that may therefore reduce recidivism would be to increase the risk that offenders would need to go to to resume their prior

offending behaviour, and by changing the residential neighbourhood that an ex-prisoner is released to, an increase in effort is required to seek out opportunities for crime and find criminally minded peers. This may not eliminate all re-offending, but may make it less likely so that the net effect is one of crime reduction. This chimes with the observation made by Villettazet. al, (2006) that measures of recidivism are preoccupied with the dichotomous outcome of whether re-offending has or has not taken place. Perhaps it would be more prudent to move to a system of measuring whether reductions in the frequency (or severity) of offending have been achieved, so that harm reduction is the principal goal.

This may all be perfectly feasible in theory, but in practice there are several problems with the application of offender relocation. Limited housing opportunities and a lack of cross-jurisdictional partnership working create practical challenges that make it difficult to implement strategies that review the placement and relocation of offenders from prison. Often there are very limited options for where an individual can be resettled following their release from prison, hence why the majority return to their former exact address or area of residence. In addition, without a lead from central government, very few local public agencies would be open to operating a strategy that may bring more prison releases into their area (from other parts of the country), who they know very little about, and have to provide support services to. This therefore makes it practically very difficult to opt for a nationally-coordinated simple prisoner relocation strategy.

Instead, we take the stance that offender supervision and management strategies should consider the influence of where each prisoner resettles in the assessment of that individual's risk of re-offending, alongside the already proven and used individual-level factors. That is, whilst practically it would be difficult to force a person to relocate to an area where they have no social ties (plus in some cases this might be challenged on Human Rights grounds), assessment of an individual's risk of reoffending pursuant to the environmental criminology principles we have argued are important in this paper could offer a more accurate and rounded measure of reoffending risk.

Discussion and conclusion

Plainly, the successful resettlement of prisoners back into society is extremely challenging. Reducing recidivism amongst this high risk group is of paramount importance for both penal and societal reasons. It is though fraught with difficulties due to the numerous factors that could influence an individual's likelihood of re-offending. In this paper, we submit an argument that offending is just as likely to be driven by situational factors (the dynamics of the immediate environment that facilitate or encourage crime), than by an individual's internal propensity. Adopting this approach offers practitioners a framework for considering which mechanisms are important to consider in reducing recidivism.

Recognising the role the environment has to play in offending can be used to great effect in offender management policies. To facilitate and sustain an ex-prisoner's desire to lead a law-abiding lifestyle, the context of the neighbourhood to which they are released must be taken

into consideration. If their old neighbourhood contains antisocial influences (such as family members or associates who are criminally minded), then it is less likely that an offender will be able to resist re-offending. Similarly, if prior offending is mainly opportunistic (i.e. not premeditated or planned), then the opportunities for crime in the area a prisoner is released to will have a bearing on their likelihood of recidivism. However, some following their release from prison may prosper from the support of family and associates, whom help them towards desistence. Here we argue that whilst each individual following their release from person may be influenced by their neighbourhood in different ways, it is the omission of considering these types of influences that may make many risk assessments of reoffending incomplete, and at worst inaccurate.

Individual-level risk factors (such as poor educational attainment, drug use, antisocial behavioural tendencies to name a few) obviously play an important role in an individual's assessment of reoffending risk, but whether they have a stronger pull on the offender than environmental-level risk factors (those neighbourhood-level features they are exposed to which encourage or enable criminal behaviour) remains unclear. Decoupling these effects is complex, and is one of the primary reasons why recidivism research has only recently begun to disentangle one from the other. Further research is clearly required to qualify more exactly the influence the immediate environment has on the likelihood of re-offending.

Whilst a change in neighbourhood is not appropriate for all ex-prisoners, for some relocation may offer the chance to sever links from old situational or social triggers which caused criminal behaviour. The habitual dimension of behaviour is often time-critical. If, for the immediate period after release – which ample evidence suggests is the most vulnerable time period for re-offending (Ministry of Justice, 2011) – old habits and associates are replaced with new routines, therein lies prospects for a genuine change in behaviour. Suggesting to an individual on release from prison the option to relocate, or forcing relocation, does though present practical problems. However, the importance of where an individual resettles, we argue, should not be ignored in their assessment of reoffending risk. This would require the assessment of reoffending risk that is made on each individual on release from prison to include an assessment of the influence that opportunities and temptations to commit crime are present in the neighbourhood where the individual is to be resettled. The metrics to determine this type of assessment would require further research, but could include how familiar they are with the neighbourhood (e.g. are they returning to where they used to live and where they have previously offended) and the current crime levels in the area (e.g. with high crime levels being an indicator of rich opportunities that may tempt the individual to reoffend).

Evidence suggests that neighbourhood-level situational factors influence offending, and will therefore also likely influence an individual's risk of re-offending following their release from prison. At present, these factors are not considered in the assessments that are completed to determine an individual's risk of reoffending following their release from prison or as part of the continual assessment during their post-release period of supervision. In sum, where an offender resettles matters, with its influence being considered as part of the each individuals risk of re-offending assessment.

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