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Assessing Current Programs and Reentry Needs in Trinidad and Tobago: Insights from Offenders – An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Much literature in the United States explores how offenders' perceive current programs and reentry challenges. However, little is known about such needs in the Trinidad and Tobago Prison System (TTPS). This research was designed to determine what are the perceived reentry needs of the sampled offenders? As such, fifty offenders in the TTPS were asked about how they perceive current services provided by TTPS, what programs they believe are necessary for success on release, and their anxiety level about (release) returning to the community in order to gauge their perceptions about anticipated reentry needs. Over all, respondents' identified employment, life skills, and access to educational programs as major reentry needs.

Introduction

In 2002, a cabinet appointed task force was established and mandated to review the Trinidad and Tobago penal system (Husbands, 2010). The task force developed two key recommendations. First, they argued for a shift in the penal system from retributive to restorative justice. Second, they wanted to see the implementation of a restorative justice philosophy and reintegration penal policy throughout the criminal justice system (Husbands, 2010). The cabinet approved the recommendations and, in 2007, the Penal Reform and Transformation Unit was charged with implementing them (Husbands, 2010). In addition to this philosophical shift in the criminal justice system, the task force also recommended the establishment of a parole system to alleviate prison overcrowding. Parole, the conditional release of a prison offender after serving part of his or her sentence, allows the offender to live in the community (under supervision) during the parole period.

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As a result of the 2002 cabinet task force recommendation to develop a parole system, prisoner reentry has become an important policy issue in Trinidad and Tobago. While, in the United States, much work explores reentry needs and programs; however, the same does not hold true for Trinidad and Tobago. To help inform policy regarding parole, in September 2008, the Penal Reform and Transformation Unit commissioned Correctional Management and Communications Limited (CMCL) to conduct a series of needs assessments to help establish the framework to develop a parole system (CMCL, 2008). The CMCL did not want to make recommendations based solely on what is known from the available literature in the United States. Therefore, 50 offenders, who were incarcerated in the Trinidad and Tobago Prison System (TTPS), volunteered to participate in a survey research project and share their perceptions about current programs and anticipated post-release challenges (CMCL, 2008). Following the lead of Taylor-Greene, Polzer, and Lavin-Loucks (2006), the present study, utilizing data collected by CMCL, aims to better understand how offenders perceive the delivery of current programs offered by the TTPS and as well as what are their anticipated reentry needs. Given the absence of literature on prisoner reentry in the Caribbean, the survey of literature in this paper draws from the body of available reentry needs research in the United States.

Background Information

Successfully reintegrating offenders when they are paroled is important since empirical evidence suggests that the most critical risk period for recidivating is immediately following release. Generally, offenders who recidivate do so within 12 to 18 months of release from prison (Clear, 2007; Clear and Karp, 1999; Petersilia, 1999, 2005; Proctor, 1999). Paroled offenders have conditions to follow including being closely monitored and supervised, are required to adhere to strict reporting guidelines based on standards of contact, are required to maintain employment, and must maintain a stable residence and program involvement. Offenders who violate these conditions and/or commit a new offense are subject to a revocation hearing and a possible return to prison to complete their original sentence and/or a new sentence if convicted of another offense or technical violation. As such, the provision of parole allows for easing the transition of the offender from prison to the community through supervision and programming which is believed to reduce the risk of recidivism (Proctor, 1999; Welsh and Farrington, 2006; MacLellan, 2004; Petersilia, 1999, 2005).

Agnew (1992) has proposed strain theory as a theoretical way to understand deviance which can be tied to the likelihood of recidivating. Essentially, if an individual faces repetitive stressors this leads to increased anger which is positively correlated with the commission of criminal and deviant acts. Individuals on parole, who do not successfully transition into mainstream society, may be at increased risk of life stressors especially if transitional programs are lacking. Further, Martinez (2010) suggests role accumulation theory as a way to understand how successful reentry into the community will be

and focuses on the “accumulation” of non-criminal social roles. Essentially, those offenders who are able to acquire new pro-social roles which enhance self-esteem will be less likely than others to recidivate. Clearly, prison programs designed to lessen potential stressors an offender may face on release from incarceration, by addressing educational, employment, and housing issues, should address problems of strain and anger. Further, having programs in place during the parole period should aid offenders in acquiring a non-criminal role identity which should be positively associated with successful reentry into the community.

To successfully transition an offender so that he or she is prepared for the reentry requires assessing the skills, abilities, and behaviors that the offender will need to reenter society. To be effective, this process must begin when the offender is first incarcerated. Therefore, the first step in the reentry process ideally begins during classification when the offender enters the reception and evaluation center. As such, a fully systematic and highly structured intake program is required. The compilation and processing of the assessment information is then used to identify the skills, abilities, and behaviors that the offender will need to make a successful transition back into the community (Andrews, Bomta & Wormith, 2006; Baird and Neuenfeldt, 1990; Gendreau and Goggin, 1996). Appropriate assessment data is used to develop an individualized case plan that outlines the educational, vocational and treatment programs that should be provided to the offender during the period of incarceration to ensure that he or she returns to the community as a law-abiding and productive citizen (Baird and Neuenfeldt, 1990; Levinson, 1988). This is increasingly important for individuals who are released from their sentence earlier for parole.

Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago are island republics off the northeast coast of Venezuela (U.S. Department of State 2009). Two ethnic groups account for 82 percent of the population--those of African descent (41 percent of the population) and East Indians (also an estimated 41 percent of the population) (U.S. Department of State 2009). Most of the population (70%) identify as Christian; however, 23% of the population identify as Hindus and 6 percent as Muslim (U.S. Department of State, 2009). A majority (65.6%) of those in the labor force are in service work, followed by construction and utilities (17.5%), manufacturing (13%) and agriculture (4%). Unemployment is relatively low (4.5%); however, a significant portion (21%) of the population lives below the poverty line. The average schooling for an adult is 7.8 years; however, the literacy rate is high (98.4% for those over 15 years of age). More than half of all adults (66.5%) have attained a primary education and 22 percent have completed secondary school (U.S. Department of State, 2009).

The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service currently incarcerate approximately 5,000 prisoners. The vast majority (97%) of offenders are men (Trinidad and

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Tobago Prison Service 2008). Seven facilities, plus the Remand Center hold prisoners in Trinidad and Tobago; the Women's Prison, the Maximum Security Prison, Golden Grove Prison, Port of Spain Prison, Carrera, Tobago Prison, and the Youth Training Centre (Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, 2008). All institutions house male offenders except for The Women's Prison that houses women regardless of age. Only young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one are sentenced to the Youth Training Centre (Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, 2008). All other facilities house adult male offenders.

Prisoner Reentry Challenges

According to Walsmeley's (2009) *Global incarceration and Prison Trends*, The Caribbean Islands are ranked, along with Central Asia and South Africa, as having a substantial portion of its citizens serving prison sentences. Walmsley (2009) found that the median rate of incarceration in the Caribbean is a little below 300 per 1,000 inhabitants. For Trinidad and Tobago, the rate of incarceration stood at 350 per 100,000 inhabitants (sentenced prisoners only).

Approximately 95% of offenders incarcerated in Trinidad and Tobago will be released back into the community. The concept of reentry involves the use of programs targeted at promoting the effective reintegration of offenders back to communities upon release from prison and jail (USDOJ, 2009). Empirical studies suggest that a variety of programs are needed in order to effectively assist offenders in the reentry process, to include, prerelease programs, drug rehabilitation and vocational training, and work programs (USDOJ, 2009). As indicated earlier, without such programs that provide offenders with the necessary skills and tools needed for future success, upon release many ex-offenders recidivate. In other words, newly released offenders reinitiate themselves into criminal activity (i.e. crime similar or differed from their original crime(s)) as a means for survival. As opposed to rehabilitating an "imprisoned offender" and releasing an "ex-offender" the policy mandates of many prisons and jails result in the unintentional release of offenders to neighborhoods and societies already ravished by crime (Travis 2000). Many parolees have difficulty managing the most basic ingredients for successful reintegration—reconnecting with jobs, housing, and their families, and accessing needed substance abuse and health care treatment.

Empirical evidence suggests that mass incarceration disrupts neighborhood life and corrodes the ability of neighborhoods for self-regulation by undermining security and social stability in our most vulnerable communities (Clear 2007). As well, a significant numbers of offenders returning home after imprisonment confront a range of challenges, including but not limited to finding employment and shelter, lack of family and community support and an inability to obtain resources, programs, and services from governmental agencies or community providers (Clear 2007; Clear and Karp 1999; MacLellan 2004; Petersilia 2005; Sampson and Raudenbush 2004; Travis 2004; Travis and Visser 2006; Visser

and Courtney 2006). As such, these offenders confront a range of personal issues that can jeopardize their chances of succeeding in the community and, in some instances, make it more likely that they will recidivate and be re-incarcerated (Travis 2004). Research shows that providing services in addition to post-release supervision, such as substance abuse treatment, mental health services, job placement, vocational training, and educational programming, can lower recidivism rates and improve outcomes for former offenders (MacLellan 2004; Petersilia 1999, 2005; Welsh and Farrington 2006). Unfortunately, MacLellan (2004) notes that services typically available are uncoordinated, poorly resourced, and far from comprehensive. What is categorically apparent from the empirical evidence is that a failure to address these challenges impedes the chances of successful reentry for the offender (MacLellan 2004; Petersilia 1999, 2005; Welsh and Farrington 2006).

Survey of Offender Reentry Literature

Ensuring successful reentry requires understanding the relationship between the events that mark the beginning of an offender's incarceration and those that mark the offender's release into the community. These offenders often come from, and return to, disadvantaged communities (Clear, 2007; Clear and Karp, 1999; Petersilia, 2005; Sampson and Raudenbush, 2004; Travis, 2004; Travis and Visher, 2006; Visher and Courtney, 2006). This social disadvantage is further exacerbated by the prison experience. Offenders tend to possess low levels of workplace skill and education and with the addition of a custodial term to an ex-offender's personal history this further diminishes employability (Allen, Latessa, Ponderder, and Simonsen, 2007). Similarly, stable accommodation is hard to obtain since ex-offenders do not have the financial means to secure private housing, or may be ineligible for priority public housing (Visher and Courtney, 2006). In addition, returning offenders have serious deficits, such as drug dependence and mental health problems, and many lack jobs, incomes, stable homes, and support networks (Travis, 2004; Travis and Visher, 2006; Visher and Courtney, 2006; Visher, Baer, and Naser, 2004). Not surprisingly, offenders identify employment as one of their biggest reentry challenges (Visher and Courtney, 2006).

A lack of education presents another significant hurdle that offenders often face. Many offenders have less than a high school diploma (Allen et al., 2007) and others have diagnosable learning disorders that place them far behind their peers (Altchuler and Brash, 2004). Incarcerated individuals are typically less educated than the general population (Allen et al., 2007). A significant challenge for ex-offenders is finding a place to live. Some offender's who are released from prison live with a family member, close friends, or significant other (Visher and Courtney, 2006). The Vera Institute of Justice study found that of the 49 offenders followed after their release from prison, 40 were living with a relative, or with their spouse or partner, in the month right after they were released (Visher et al., 2004). In the Urban Institute's *Returning Home* study, 153

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respondents were interviewed about two months after their release (Visher et al., 2004). When asked where they lived after getting out, Visher and colleagues found that nearly half (49%) said they slept at a family member's home on their first night (2004). The results also revealed that another 10 percent slept at a friend's house on the first night out of prison. Further, at the time of the interview (two months out) the overwhelming majority (80%) were living with a family member. However, for some returning prisoners, residing in the home of a family member, friend, or significant other is not an option. Therefore, the offenders often resort to shelters, a motel if they have finances; or they may find themselves homeless (Travis, 2004; Visher and Courtney, 2006). For example, a 1999 Urban Institute three-site study of 400 returning prisoners with histories of drug abuse found that 32 percent had been homeless for a month or more at least once in their lifetimes (Travis, 2004). Travis noted that eighteen percent reported they were homeless for at least a month in the year after they were released from prison (2004). This is problematic as Visher et al. (2004) found that respondents with strong family support, who experienced few negative dynamics in intimate relationships, were more likely to find employment after release and less likely to use drugs.

Research suggests that a large number of offenders are drug and alcohol abusers, and that others have used drugs or alcohol at some point in their lives (Allen et al., 2007). For example, in 1997, almost one-third of the men in prison had been drinking at the time of their current offense and reported a problem with drugs as recently as the year prior to going to prison (Allen et al., 2007). Substance abuse and criminal activity go hand in hand in many cases. Mumola (1999) reported that more than half of prisoners were under the influence when they committed a crime that led to their imprisonment. Likewise, Visher and colleagues (2004) found that 78 percent of the respondents in their study reported some sort of substance abuse (30% reported the use of cocaine and 41% reported heroin use on a daily basis before entering prison).

To summarize, the most prominent barriers ex-offenders encounter when released from prison into the community include, but are not limited to, finding and sustaining employment, lack of education, finding housing, their criminal history, reunification with family, receiving substance abuse treatment, limited finances and access to resources, and lack of support from family members and the community (Clear, 2007; Clear and Karp, 1999; Visher and Courtney, 2006; Travis, 2004; Visher et al., 2004). As the ex-offender reintegrates back into the community steadily, they often find daily stressors and frustrations as they reenter into the community with their families and workplace (Travis, 2004; Visher et al., 2004). Travis notes that they often find it increasingly difficult to have a pro-social lifestyle (2004). Further, the stigma and resulting marginalization of being incarcerated present problems for offenders. Becker (1963) argued that once labeled deviant it is very difficult for individuals to re-integrate into mainstream society. Ideally, after-care programs can assist the offender with not only skill development but newly-acquired skill and behavior required as they enter into society (Snyder, 2004). Without a formal and

structured program in place that builds upon earlier treatment protocols, offenders may relapse without the service and social support (MacLellan, 2004; Snyder, 2004; Travis, 2004; Welsh and Farrington, 2004; Visher et al., 2004).

Methods

An exploratory study was conducted to identify specific challenges offenders perceive they will face on release from prison as well as how they evaluate current prison programs. A sample of offenders (N = 50) volunteered to share their views about these issues. Staff from the Maximum Security and Golden Grove Prisons, Women's Prison, and Youth Training Centre provided all offenders at these facilities the opportunity to participate in this study. In total, 50 offenders volunteered. Data for this work comes from a needs assessment conducted by the Correctional Management and Communications Limited (CMCL) aimed at examining TTPS current case management, evaluation of current programs, and reentry issues. The needs assessment aimed to identify TTPS strengths and capital (economic, human, and social) that would aid in the development of a parole system as well as to identify the challenges within the TTPS that might impede the implementation of a parole system.

A survey of the literature pertaining to offender reentry was conducted to develop questions for the "Release Planning" questionnaire. The final questionnaire consisted of a series of 40 closed-ended questions including demographic characteristics, education, employment history, incarceration, and drug use. Likert scale questions were included to examine the offenders' perceptions of preparation for release by the TTPS, programs and services needed to prepare for release, attitudes about release, and levels of anxiety about returning to the community.

Offenders included adult males housed at the Maximum Security Prison and Golden Grove Prison (N = 22), female offenders housed at the Women's Prison (N = 16), and youthful offenders housed at the Youth Training Centre (N = 12). All offenders, except those in the Youth Training Centre, were serving multiple year sentences; however, the vast majority will eventually be released into the community.

Respondents were asked to indicate their current *age* in number of years. Respondents identified as either male or female (Males = 0; Females = 1). Respondents were asked about their *marital status* which was coded as married (1), divorced or separated (2), or widowed (3), never married (4), or living with partner (5). The variable of *race* was coded as African descent (1), East Indian (2), Chinese (3), Mixed (4), or other (5). Respondents were asked to indicate if they had any *children* (Yes = 1; No = 0). Respondents were asked how many years of *education* they had completed. Further, respondents also were asked to choose from the categories to identify the highest level of completed education. Primary education was coded as 1, Secondary education was coded as

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2, Trade was coded as 3, University was coded as 4, and other was coded as 5. Respondents were asked to check yes (1) or no (0) indicating if they were *employed* before their current incarceration. Participants were asked what *type of offense* lead to their incarceration. These were categorized as: Drug related (1), Violent offense (2), Property offense (3), Violation of Probation (4), and other (5). Participants were asked to indicate if their current incarceration was their first one (yes = 1; no = 0). If this was not their first offense, respondents were also asked to indicate the number of times they had been incarcerated. Respondents were asked if they engaged in *drug activity* within six months of being arrested (yes = 1; no = 0). Next, respondents were asked how much the TTPS prepared them for release into the community (responses were coded as 0 (not at all), 1 (a little), 2 (somewhat), or 3 (very much), which programs and or services they needed in order to prepare for release into the community (coded the same as above), how they felt about being prepared on release from prison (respondents could indicate if they strongly agreed or agreed (3), neither agreed or disagreed (2), or disagreed or strongly disagreed (1) to these statements). Finally, offenders were asked about their anxieties and concerns on being released from prison and returning to the community (scaled from 1 to 5, anxiety level was classified as being high anxiety (1) to indicating low anxiety (5)). First, we present demographic information on this sample and responses to closed-ended questions. Because of the sample size, as well as the sense that basic issues are similar regardless of where offenders are housed, data has been aggregated for presentation; however, we note some differences between institutions when appropriate.

Results

The sample consists of 50 offenders who are remanded to the custody of the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service. Of the 50 study participants, nearly half of the offenders were adult male offenders (44%), 32 percent were at a women's prison, and 24 percent at the Youth Training Centre. The majority were of African Descent (47%), 24 percent were East Indian, and 29 percent identified themselves as other. Respondents' ages ranged between 18 and 70 years old, with an average age of 38. The majority of respondents (63%) were single, divorced, separated or widowed, and 65 percent reported having children. A third of offenders (34%) had completed primary school and 51 percent had a secondary education. Slightly more than three-fourths (76%) of respondents were employed prior to the current incarceration. Forty percent of respondents reported being incarcerated for a violent offense, while a third (33%) reported a drug-related incarceration (8% were in for a property offense and 19% for other offenses). This was the first incarceration for most of the respondents (76%) and approximately one-third of the respondents reported using drugs six months before being arrested for the current incarceration (see Table 1).

Looking at demographic differences by offenders in different types of institutions, we see that the majority (62%) of male offenders were of African descent as were many (42%) youth offenders; however, only 31 percent of female offenders were

of African descent. Female offenders and youth were most likely to identify as mixed race (38% and 42% respectively compared to 14% for male offenders). The median age for female offenders was less than for adult male offenders (37 vs. 49 respectively). The median age for the youth sample was 18.44 (with a range from 18-20). The most likely marital status for each group was never married (36% for adult men, 33% for women, and 75% for youth); however, 23 percent of men were married (fewer women and youth (13% and 8% respectively) were married). Both female offenders and youth had a higher mean level of education compared to adult male offenders (11.14, 10.18 vs. 9.36). Most (90%) adult male offenders were working prior to being incarcerated as were most (75%) women; however, only 58% of youth were working prior to incarceration. Fewer (14%) adult male offenders were incarcerated for a drug related offense compared to women (47%) or youth (50%) as adult men were most likely (48%) to be incarcerated for a violent offense.

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Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics for Sample Study

Variable	Frequency	%
Type of Prison	22	44
MSP & Golden Grove	16	32
Women	12	24
Youth Training Centre	34	68
Gender	16	32
Male	6	15
Female	5	10
Age	6	15
< 18	9	21
19-24	8	17
25-34	7	16
35-44	23	47
45-54	12	24
55+	14	29
Race/Ethnicity	22	45
African descent	9	18
East Indian	8	16
Other	4	8
Family Status	6	12
Single	32	65
Living With a Partner	17	35
Married	16	34
Divorced/Separated	24	51
Widowed	3	6
Children	1	2
Yes	3	6
No	38	76
Educational Attainment	12	24
Primary	16	33
Secondary	4	8
Trade	19	40
University	9	19
Other	38	76
Employed Before Incarceration	12	24
Yes	17	34
No	33	66

Most offenders reported using drugs prior to being incarcerated (67% for adult men, 88% for female offenders and 66% for youth offenders). This was most likely the first incarceration for adult male offenders (77%), female offenders (81%) and youth offenders (66%).

Table 2. Offenders' Perceptions of How Much Current TTPS Programs Prepared Them for Release into the Community

Question	All	Male	Female	YTC
Provided Transitional Counseling				
Very Much	51%	36%	57%	67%
Somewhat	36%	53%	21%	25%
Not at all	13%	11%	21%	8%
Helped to Develop a Pre-release Plan				
Very Much	37%	29%	33%	50%
Somewhat	52%	65%	40%	50%
Not at all	11%	6%	27%	0%
Provided substance drugs counseling				
Very Much	41%	41%	40%	42%
Somewhat	18%	41%	0%	8%
Not at all	41%	18%	60%	50%
Provided Alcohol Counseling				
Very Much	36%	45%	33%	25%
Somewhat	11%	22%	7%	0%
Not at all	53%	33%	60%	75%
Provided Educational Programs				
Very Much	75%	60%	87%	83%
Somewhat	21%	40%	0%	17%
Not at all	4%	0%	13%	0%
Provided Job Training				
Very Much	48%	26%	67%	58%
Somewhat	26%	42%	20%	9%
Not at all	26%	32%	13%	33%

Our focus is to better understanding how offender's perceive services provided by the TTPS as well as perceptions of what their reentry needs are. Tables 2-5 present findings from six questions designed to assess offender's perspective of current TTPS services as well as reentry needs. Looking at Table 2, we see that in regards to providing transitional counseling, most offenders noted that the Prison Service provided sufficient transitional counseling (36% stated that the Prison Service provided some transitional counseling and 13% felt that the Prison Service did not provide any transitional counseling). Looking at differences in offenders' perceptions by institution, those at the Youth Centre and female offenders were most positive about the TTPS providing sufficient transitional counseling. The majority of both youth (67%) and women (57%) thought the TTPS provided sufficient transitional counseling; however, only 36 percent of

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adult male offenders agreed. Thus, there appear to be marked differences in how offenders perceive current programs based on the type of facility in which they are currently housed. Half of all (52%) offenders felt that the Prison Service provided some assistance with developing a pre-release plan (37% felt that a significant amount of assistance was provided; 11% stated that they did not receive any assistance) (see Table 2). Once again, youth were most likely to feel the TTPS was providing some assistance compared to adult male or female offenders (50% vs. 29%, 33%). In fact, almost a third (27%) of female offenders felt the TTPS was not doing much at all for them with regard to pre-release programs. Regarding drug counseling, 41 percent of offenders perceived that the TTPS provided this service while 36 percent felt alcohol counseling was provided. Most offenders; however, reported that they did not receive any substance abuse or alcohol counseling. Once again, female offenders and youth, were more likely than adult male offenders to state that the TTPS was not providing any substance abuse program (60% and 50% vs. 18% respectively) (see Table 2).

Approximately three-fourths of offenders perceived that educational programs were currently offered to help them successfully reintegrated into the community and nearly half noted that job training was provided (see Table 2). Female offenders and youth (87% and 83% respectively) were more likely than adult male offenders (60%) to perceive current educational programs were being offered. This pattern also held with regard to offenders perceptions that job training was currently provided (26% of adult male feeling the TTPS offered job training compared to 67% of female offenders and 58% of youth). Overall, these results suggest that educational and jobs programs, followed by transitional counseling, are perceived by offenders as part of current programs offered by the TTPS to prepare them for reentry into the community. Further, the female and youth populations were more likely to note that TTPS provided programs to help them prepare for reentry into the community than the adult male population.

Offenders were asked what types of programs are needed to help them prepare for their return to the community. The vast majority (81%) perceived that they needed job training skills and life skills training to successfully prepare them for release into the community (see Table 3). Further, the vast majority (75%) of offenders perceived a need for basic educational programs, counseling about pre-release planning, and information about community resources (61%) in order to be prepared for release into the larger community (see Table 3). Finally, many offenders (44%) perceived a need for vocational training, as well as drug counseling and alcohol counseling, in order to be successfully prepared for their return to the community. Regardless of where the offender was housed, perceived needs for successful reentry did not vary. Still, youth perceived the need for mental health counseling (54% vs. 27% for adult men and 33% for women) and women were more likely to perceive the need for pre-release planning compared to others (79% vs. half of adult male and youth offenders). Generally, offenders perceive job training skills, life skills, and access

to educational programs as being essential for successful release into the community (see Table 3).

Table 3. Offenders' Perceptions of Programs and Services Needed to Prepare for Release in the Community

Question	All	Male	Female	YTC
Job Training Skills				
Very Much	81%	80%	68%	100%
Somewhat	17%	20%	26%	0%
Not at all	25%	0%	6%	0%
Vocational Training				
Very Much	44%	44%	39%	50%
Somewhat	47%	45%	46%	50%
Not at all	9%	11%	15%	0%
Basic Educational Programs				
Very Much	74%	56%	86%	83%
Somewhat	17%	25%	7%	17%
Not at all	10%	19%	7%	0%
Life Skills Programs				
Very Much	81%	77%	79%	91%
Somewhat	14%	18%	14%	9%
Not at all	5%	6%	7%	0%
Drug Counseling				
Very Much	40%	33%	54%	36%
Somewhat	24%	28%	8%	9%
Not at all	36%	39%	38%	27%
Alcohol Counseling				
Very Much	34%	25%	46%	33%
Somewhat	24%	31%	39%	11%
Not at all	42%	44%	15%	44%
Counseling about Transiting into the Community				
Very Much	55%	50%	79%	50%
Somewhat	27%	44%	7%	40%
Not at all	18%	6%	14%	10%
Counseling about Pre-release Planning				
Very Much	60%	50%	79%	50%
Somewhat	30%	44%	7%	40%
Not at all	10%	6%	14%	10%
Information about Community Resources				
Very Much	61%	60%	71%	50%
Somewhat	30%	30%	21%	42%
Not at all	9%	10%	7%	8%

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When asked about their opinions related to being released from prison, all offenders perceived that the Prison Service needed to provide more release planning for successful re-integration into the community (see Table 4). Still, the vast majority of offenders were positive about their future, and optimistic about receiving support from their family upon release from prison. Most (82%) of offenders thought that planning for release should begin when first processed into the institution. Notably, most (83%) offenders actively sought out programs to prepare for release. Few (less than a third) offenders perceived that they needed a period of supervision upon release; however, 43 percent were unsure about a need for post-prison supervision (formally known as parole) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Offenders’ Opinions about Being Released from Prison

Question	All	Male	Female	YTC
Should Provide more Release Planning for Reintegration				
Agree	100%	100%	100%	100%
Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%
Preparation Should Begin at the Committal Process				
Agree	82%	90%	71%	82%
Disagree	11%	10%	21%	21%
Unsure	7%	0%	7%	18%
Actively Sought Out Programs to Prepare for Release				
Agree	83%	81%	93%	75%
Disagree	11%	5%	7%	17%
Unsure	6%	14%	0%	8%
Need Period of Supervision upon Release				
Agree	36%	38%	36%	33%
Disagree	21%	33%	50%	50%
Unsure	43%	29%	14%	17%
Positive about the Future				
Agree	98%	95%	100%	100%
Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unsure	2%	0%	0%	0%
Family will Provide Support upon Release				
Agree	88%	96%	73%	92%
Disagree	0%	0%	20%	8%
Unsure	12%	4%	7%	0%

Finally, offenders were asked about the level of anxiety they have about being released from prison and returning to the community. Over a third of all

offenders (39%) perceived their anxiety level would be high on release; however, more (45%) perceived that their level of anxiety on release would be low (see Table 5).

Table 5. Offenders’ Perceived Anxiety about Being Released from Prison

Question	All	Male	Female	YTC
Having Adequate Preparation for Reentry				
High Anxiety	39%	40%	33%	46%
Mid-Level Anxiety	16%	21%	13%	9%
Low Anxiety	45%	42%	54%	0%
Finding Shelter				
High Anxiety	44%	50%	38%	42%
Mid-Level Anxiety	7%	11%	0%	8%
Low Anxiety	49%	39%	62%	50%
Finding Job				
High Anxiety	37%	28%	36%	50%
Mid-Level Anxiety	11%	11%	14%	8%
Low Anxiety	52%	61%	50%	42%
Receiving Continued Support from Justice System				
High Anxiety	29%	39%	42%	0%
Mid-Level Anxiety	22%	39%	16%	0%
Low Anxiety	49%	22%	42%	100%
Psychological Adjustment				
High Anxiety	30%	39%	23%	25%
Mid-Level Anxiety	16%	17%	23%	8%
Low Anxiety	54%	44%	54%	67%
Absence of Support from Family				
High Anxiety	36%	32%	23%	25%
Mid-Level Anxiety	5%	5%	23%	17%
Low Anxiety	59%	63%	54%	58%
Absence of Support from Community				
High Anxiety	34%	31%	54%	42%
Mid-Level Anxiety	11%	16%	8%	0%
Low Anxiety	55%	52%	38%	58%

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When it comes to finding shelter, 44 percent of the respondents perceive high levels of anxiety whereas almost half (49%) were not very worried about this issue at all. Half (52%) of these offenders did not perceive much anxiety about finding a job; however, 37% were very anxious about this issue. Youth offenders expressed more anxiety about finding a job compared to adult male or female offenders (50% vs. 28% and 36% respectively). With reference to receiving continued support from the justice system, less than a third (30%) of offenders perceived high anxiety. Most (52%) offenders perceived no anxiety about this issue especially youth offenders. Most offenders did not indicate any perceived concerns with psychological adjustment, absence of support from their family, or absence of support from the community (see Table 5). Adult male offenders were most concerned about perceived support from the community compared to women or youth (31% vs. 54% for women and 42% for youth) (see Table 5). These findings suggest that the best way to immediately ease anxiety for offenders is to provide them with shelter and then help locate employment.

Summary and Discussion

This study provides insight into the post-prison needs and challenges of offenders under the custody and control of the TTPS. Given that ours is a convenience sample, findings must be interpreted with this in mind. Strikingly, the reentry challenges and post-release needs of TTPS offenders mirror those of offenders incarcerated in the United States. Overall, respondents' major perceived needs are *employment, life skills, and access to educational programs*. Other needs are related to these basic ones. For instance, financial and material needs can be met if the offender obtains and has consistent employment. Likewise, if the offender is accepted into the community, he or she will be more likely to have opportunities to gain employment. Notably, female and youth offenders perceived current programs at the TTPS more positively than did adult male offenders. Further, given the lack of programs at adult facilities in Trinidad and Tobago it is notable that so many offenders perceive current programs as positively as they do.

In general, the offenders were positive about the programs such as transitional counseling, and educational and job programs provided by the TTPS to prepare them for successful release into the community, however, they noted that substance abuse programs were not provided. Most of them expressed a low level of anxiety about being release into the community and held a positive outlook about the future. Even so, all of the offenders noted a need for TTPS to provide more release planning programs. In summary, the successes or failures of ex-offenders being returned to the community is contingent upon identifying the reentry needs of the offender population and then providing the appropriate programs and services, with a specific focus on identified criminogenic needs. From the offender's perspective, this work has provided some insight into what those needs are for the TTPS.

In light of insights from offenders, it is important for an offender to become a productive and contributing member of the society from which they have been removed. In order for this to be accomplished, several areas must be addressed. The first necessity is the rehabilitation of the offenders themselves. Programs and services to address the criminogenic factors that contribute to offending should be provided. Policy makers and prison administrators therefore need to operate from a treatment framework as opposed to punitive framework in order to elicit offenders' participation and growth. Second, programs need to be implemented to address the criminogenic needs of the offender population and to address the offender's functional, educational, and vocational competencies based on the employment market demand. In order to implement and deliver programs which aid the offender in making a smooth reentry, a validated risk/needs assessment instrument and a comprehensive analysis of an offender's criminal history and behavior is needed. The risk/needs assessment instrument measures the parolee's propensity to further criminal activity, indicates the level of officer intervention that will be required if the offender is granted parole, and most importantly identifies areas in offenders' life that place him or her at risk of returning to prison upon completion of his or her sentence, and targets risks and needs that require attention. Third, it is important to provide access to basic life skills programs that improve offender's behaviors, attitudes, thinking patterns, motivation, and ability to live independently. Empirical evidence suggests that cognitive behavioral programs are amongst the most effective programs to change an offender's thinking patterns. Finally, it is important to engage natural communities in the reentry process. It is especially important to include other governmental as well as non-governmental agencies in the reentry process to ensure that the offender receives uninterrupted programs, services and supports upon his or her return to the community.

Limitation of Current Study

A major limitation of the current study is that data rests on a small convenience sample of offenders. Since ours is a convenience sample, one must be cautious about generalizing to a broader population of offenders in the TTPS system. Future research in this area should rely on a larger sample as well as a sampling technique which elicits a broader sample of offenders. Further, this work rests on perceptions of programs and needs of those currently incarcerated in the TTPS. However, in the absence available data about the post-release needs of the offender population, this work served as a gateway to begin the conversation about offender reentry needs in Trinidad and Tobago. It should also be noted that we utilize a Likert type scale when asking offenders about their perceptions of current programs and reentry needs. Such scaling, that asks respondents to choose between a lot to not as much or very much vs. somewhat, is given to bias in how respondents self-describe needs. Nevertheless, Likert type scales are widely used in the social sciences. Future work might utilize in-depth interviews to further explore issues that emerged in the current work.

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In conclusion, while this exploratory study provides insight into TTPS offender's post-prison needs and anticipated challenges, the findings should not be used as the sole determinants of TTPS offender post-release needs and challenges. Moreover, the sample size is relatively small, as such, a more comprehensive study with a larger sample size is recommended to provide more conclusive evidence of the offender's post-prison needs and anticipated challenges.

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