

**Location, Location, Location? Comparing Release Plan Quality,
Community Experience, and Recidivism Rate of High-Risk Offenders Released
to a Fresh Start or Returning to the Devil They Know**

By

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Abstract

When offenders are released from prison, does it matter where they go? To answer this question, this study investigated the effects of residential relocation on 282 high-risk male offenders released from New Zealand prisons. Offenders were initially divided into those returning to their old neighbourhoods and those released to a new location. A second division created three groups: offenders released to a new location were further divided into those making a voluntary residential relocation, and those making a residential relocation non-voluntarily. Offender groups were compared on demographic and criminal history variables, release plan quality, experiences at two months in the community, and recidivism. Recidivism indices were breach of release condition, reconviction, violent reconviction, and reimprisonment over the first year post-release. Release destination and release plan quality coding protocols were developed. Results indicated that parolees returning to their old neighbourhoods and those released to a new location reoffended at approximately the same rate. However, parolees relocating under duress breached conditions and reoffended at a higher rate than both parolees making a voluntary residential relocation and those returning to their old neighbourhoods. Significant group differences in release plan quality and experience in the community were few, but suggested that making a voluntary residential relocation may lead to better parole experiences, and that making a residential relocation under duress may lead to worse parole experiences, than returning to a familiar location. Implications, applications, and limitations of the study are discussed, along with possible directions for future research.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Figures.....	x
List of Tables.....	xii
Introduction.....	1
Residential relocation: A catalyst for change?.....	4
The nature of desistance.....	6
Out of the frying pan: Re-entry challenges.....	7
Planning for release.....	8
Parole in New Zealand.....	12
Introduction to the current study.....	13
Method.....	17
Participants.....	17
Materials.....	19
Risk scales.....	19
Interview data and Department of Corrections file data.....	20
Recidivism data.....	22
Procedure.....	22
Ethics.....	22
Development of release destination classification system.....	22
Fresh Start subcategories.....	25
Release plan quality measure development.....	27
Release Plan Quality coding protocol.....	28
Results.....	31
Recidivism.....	31
Release plan quality.....	31
Community experiences at two months post-release.....	33
Predictive validity of the RPQ.....	35
Release destination: Two categories.....	38
Two-category release destination and demographic characteristics.....	38

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Two-category release destination and release plan quality	40
Two-category release destination and community experience	41
Two-category release destination and recidivism	44
Two-category release destination: Summary	45
Release destination: Three categories	46
Three-category release destination and demographic characteristics.....	47
Three-category release destination and release plan quality	47
Three-category release destination and community experience.....	50
Three-category release destination and recidivism	51
Three-category release destination: Summary	54
Discussion	57
Release destination.....	57
Release Plan Quality coding protocol	59
Implications	60
Strengths and limitations	69
Conclusions	72
References	75
Appendix.....	85
Release Plan Quality coding protocol	85

List of Figures

Figures	Page
1. Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing violent reconviction at 6 months post-release for DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress groups.....	54
2. Kaplan-Meier survival curve showing reimprisonment at 12 months post-release for DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress groups.....	55

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

List of Tables

Tables	Page
1. Inter-rater reliability for Release Plan Quality (RPQ) scale items.....	29
2. Descriptive statistics of total RPQ score and Accommodation, Employment, Prosocial Support, Antisocial Associates, and Idiosyncratic Risk Management item scores for 282 released offenders...	32
3. Mean ratings of parolees' community experiences at two months post-release, rated by parolees and probation officers.....	33
4. Logistic regressions predicting likelihood of breach, reconviction, violent reconviction and reimprisonment at 6 and 12 months post-release using total RPQ score.....	36
5. Means and standard deviations of Devil You Know (DK) and Fresh Start (FS) parolee characteristics.....	39
6. Comparison of DK and FS parolees on Release Plan Quality (RPQ) item and total scores.....	41
7. Comparison of DK and FS parolees' experiences at two months in the community (self-rated).....	42
8. Comparison of DK and FS parolees' experiences at two months in the community (rated by probation officers).....	43
9. Comparison of recidivism rates of DK and FS parolees at 6 and 12 months post-release.....	45
10. Comparison of demographic and criminal history characteristics of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress men.....	47
11. Comparison of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees on RPQ item and total scores.....	48
12. Comparison of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees' experiences at two months in the community (self-rated).....	50
13. Comparison of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees' experiences at two months in the community (probation officer-rated)...	51
14. Comparison of proportion of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees who reoffended at 6 and 12 months post-release.....	52

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Introduction

Starting over and making a fresh start has long been immortalised in popular culture. It comes in many guises, but always essentially encompasses the idea of moving somewhere new, leaving your past behind and becoming a better person. But does it work? Can making a fresh start in a new location support behaviour change for the better? When offenders are released from prison, does returning to their old neighbourhood and resuming their previous lifestyle or making a fresh start in a new location carry a lower risk of reoffending? This study aims to answer these questions, focusing on the recidivism rates of high-risk violent ex-prisoners after release into the community.

Research has revealed a lot about what happens in prison, and about what happens in the years following release. But a gap in knowledge exists with regards to what happens during re-entry and over the first year after release. The knowledge gap surrounding re-entry after release from prison is especially concerning when one considers the economic and social effects of ex-prisoners who, following release, quickly reoffend and return to prison (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013). The reality of having to feed oneself, pay bills, and seek assistance can be extremely difficult for released offenders, who may find themselves “just exhausted trying to live outside” (Opie, 2013, p. 139), and who are tempted by the knowledge that criminal behaviour would provide an escape, however ill-conceived, from immediate woes (Mbuba, 2012). Thus, it is important that research focuses on factors that might affect offenders’ reoffending behaviour and success in the community after release from prison.

In the 1994 film *The Shawshank Redemption*, two characters are granted parole and released to the community after a long period of incarceration (Darabont, 1994). One character (‘Brooks,’ portrayed by James Whitmore), eventually succumbs to the pressure of life outside prison, taking his own life. The second character granted parole in the film (‘Red,’ played by Morgan Freeman), also struggles to make the adjustment from life in prison

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

to the relative freedom of living in a halfway house and working at a grocery store.

Despondent and lonely, Red eventually abandons his parole programme, skipping town for Mexico to find an old friend. The reactions to parole shown by these two characters, encompassing feelings of despair and a desire to escape their situation, help impart how difficult offenders can find the transition from prison back to life in the community. Of course, there is a third category of behaviours exhibited by real-life parolees that is missing from *The Shawshank Redemption*'s portrayal: whether or not ex-prisoners reoffend.

Most offenders report they are tired of prison and want to desist from criminal activity, to 'go straight' and stay out of trouble (Serin & Lloyd, 2009). However, recidivism statistics tell a different story. Research from New Zealand and around the world indicates reoffending after release from prison is the rule, rather than the exception, and reoffending tends to occur quite quickly after release. In the US, around 30 percent of released offenders will be rearrested in their first six months in the community. Two out of every three offenders released from prison will eventually be rearrested (Petersilia, 2003). Within the first year post-release, 22 percent of released offenders will be reconvicted, and 10 percent will be reimprisoned (Langan & Levin, 2002). Within three years of release, half of all released offenders will be reconvicted, and just under half will be reimprisoned (Myers & Olson, 2013). Of all offenders released from New Zealand prisons in 2002/03, 52 percent were returned to prison because of a new conviction at least once during the five years following release. Of the offenders who were reimprisoned within five years of release, almost half took less than a year to return to prison (26 percent reimprisoned within 12 months; Nadesu, 2009).

For high-risk, violent offenders, these statistics are even more alarming. High-risk offenders tend to fail more, and fail faster, than general offenders. In New Zealand, 61 percent of released violent offenders were reconvicted, and 42 percent were back in prison, in

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

the three years following release (Nadesu, 2007). Of the violent offenders who returned to prison within five years of release, almost half had been reimprisoned for another violent offence (44 percent; Nadesu, 2009). Polaschek (2011) reported of offenders who graduated from an intensive prison-based rehabilitation programme, 38 percent of those who reoffended had done so by the end of their sixth month in the community. Dickson, Polaschek and Casey (2013) found that within 12 months of release, 55 percent of the high-risk sample were convicted of a new offence, 18 percent were convicted of a new violent offence, and 27 percent had returned to prison. Offenders lasted an average of just three and a half months before reconviction or reimprisonment, and just over four months before violent reconviction. Dickson and colleagues (2013) also noted that even offenders who showed improvements while in treatment reoffended quickly after release from prison.

Rates of imprisonment have increased considerably over the past two decades, both in New Zealand and internationally (Graffam & Shinkfield, 2012). New Zealand's incarceration rate was 195 per 100,000 population in 2010, having increased from 119 per 100,000 population in 1992 (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010). This puts New Zealand 11th highest of OECD countries for imprisonment rate, and more recent estimates indicate that New Zealand's imprisonment rate may now be 7th highest of OECD countries (Statista, 2015). Over 8,000 male prisoners were incarcerated in New Zealand prisons as at the end of September 2014 (Department of Corrections, 2015). More and more offenders are being sent to jail, and, consequently, more and more ex-prisoners are being released on parole. Investigating the post-release period is thus imperative to discover effective strategies to reduce recidivism rates and increase post-release success of offenders on parole.

Residential relocation: A catalyst for change?

Whether an offender relocates somewhere new and unfamiliar following release from prison or simply returns to his or her old neighbourhood may be pertinent to their likelihood of reoffending. Returning to a familiar area encompasses a parolee's family, friends, employment history, job prospects, gang associations, and local knowledge regarding access to drugs and antisocial associates. Gang factions typically have geographical regions within which they operate, so a parolee moving away from a known area would reduce his or her contact with gang members, and reduce the gang's influence.

Removing released high-risk offenders from their original location may disrupt their pattern of criminal behaviour by separating them from their criminal associates and networks, and by reducing their exposure to criminal opportunities, their access to drugs, and their local knowledge (of, for example, how and where to fence stolen goods). Not only might an ex-prisoner moving to a new area after release have fewer options for crime, but they might also be subject to a lower level of surveillance by local law enforcement due to being unknown in the area, and be able to cut ties with criminal peers and repair familial bonds (Kirk, 2009; 2012). Parolees voluntarily moving somewhere new to make a fresh start might be more inclined to take advantage of opportunities afforded by the new location to break old offending habits and alliances. However, moving away from one's original neighbourhood could also introduce difficulties, such as lack of social support and low accommodation stability.

What might be the real-world effects of residential relocation on reoffending behaviour? Research indicates that moving to a new area could change one's propensity towards crime, delinquent behaviour, victimisation, and disadvantage, helping to foster a lower risk of recidivism. But the view is murky; it is unclear whether moving house may lead to a net increase or decrease in the risk of criminal behaviour. Kirk (2009; 2012) compared

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

reincarceration rates of Louisiana ex-prisoners who were compelled to move to a different area (measured by parish) because of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. For both first-time prison releasees and repeat prisoners, those who relocated were less likely to be reimprisoned within 12 months of release than those who did not. The negative relationship between residential change and reimprisonment continued over a three-year follow-up period, implying that, rather than a mere ‘quick fix’, residential relocation could be a “catalyst for true behavioural change” (Kirk, 2012, p. 347). Sharkey and Sampson found that young people moving neighbourhoods within Chicago exhibited greater rates of exposure to and perpetration of violence, but that moving further afield (out of the city) was associated with reduced levels of both violent behaviour and exposure to violence (Sharkey & Sampson, 2010). Kling and colleagues found that adolescent males whose families relocated to a more affluent neighbourhood showed higher rates of substance use, risky behaviour, and injury after five years than those whose families remained in their original neighbourhoods (Kling, Liebman, & Katz, 2007).

However, research involving another offender group hints that residential relocation may not always have a beneficial effect on reoffending. Convicted sex offenders are often compelled to abide by extremely restrictive relocation requirements; that is, strict guidelines about where to live after release from prison. Sex offenders subject to such restrictions can be prohibited from living within a specified distance of schools, school bus stops, parks, playgrounds, and other areas in which children might congregate (Grubestic, Murray, & Mack, 2011; Levenson, 2008). Ostensibly, restricting where sex offenders can live reduces their risk of sexual reoffending by reducing their access to child victims, but empirical evidence strongly suggests that this strategy does not work (Burchfield, 2011; Levenson, 2008; Nobles, Levenson, & Youstin, 2012). Instead, research indicates that dictating where offenders can and, more importantly, cannot live may instead heighten the risk of

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

reoffending, by increasing hardship and causing friction in domains predictive of recidivism (such as accommodation, employment, and social support; Willis, 2010). In one study, 42 percent of released sex offenders were forced to leave their homes because of residential restrictions, and 49 percent were unable to live with supportive family members (Levenson, 2008).

Thus, residential relocation may not automatically lead to reductions in recidivism levels, and could potentially increase individuals' risk of reoffending through increasing adverse and removing favourable features of one's environment. In fact, enforced residential relocation can lead to poor performance on factors related to reoffending and recidivism outcomes (Burchfield, 2011; Nobles et al., 2012; Willis, 2010). Further research is needed to ascertain the effect of returning to one's previous neighbourhood after release from prison, as opposed to making a fresh start in a new area. To this end, the current study is aimed at illuminating the effects of residential relocation on recidivism for released high-risk offenders.

The nature of desistance

Cessation of offending is the primary focus of correctional psychology research, but desistance, defined as "the absence of criminal behaviour" (Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes, & Muir, 2004, p. 371), is a deceptively complex concept. Many researchers consider desistance from crime to best be conceptualised as a process, rather than a discrete state at which to arrive (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010; Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman, & Mazerolle, 2001; Göbbels, Ward, & Willis, 2012; McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler, & Maruna, 2012; Serin & Lloyd, 2009). A view of desistance from crime as a process takes into consideration the pattern of relapse and false start typical in behaviour change (Göbbels et al., 2012; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992).

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If desistance is the goal, then effectively navigating re-entry is the first step in getting there. The desistance process therefore begins with the re-entry period. 'Re-entry' relates to the initial period after release from prison, and comes with many challenges (more on this in the next section). Successful re-entry is important for reintegration and long-term success in the community. The re-entry phase of the desistance process is particularly relevant here, as the focus of the current study is offenders' behaviour in the first year after release from prison.

Although crucial for the study of desistance, measurement of reoffending can be problematic. Desistance can be difficult to describe, as it denotes the absence, rather than the occurrence, of a phenomenon (Maruna, 2001). In this study, the terms 'desister' and 'persister' may be used to refer to those offenders who cease their involvement in criminal activity, and those who continue their involvement, respectively.

There are many aspects of desistance research on which there is no current consensus, such as the ideal length of follow-up, and the importance of the desistance trajectory (Kazemian, 2007). In practise, follow-up periods, sample sizes, and target behaviours differ markedly between studies. Research investigating recidivism might measure indices of reoffending ranging from the relatively minor (such as a breach of standard release conditions or arrest without charge) to the more severe (reimprisonment for a serious violent offence). Criminal offending is, overall, a low-frequency behaviour, and focusing solely on official reoffending statistics alone fails to provide a complete picture. Therefore, a mixture of data sources may best elucidate individuals' patterns of offending behaviour.

Out of the frying pan: Re-entry challenges

Released offenders are a vulnerable population, with widespread difficulties such as poor education, scant employment histories, antisocial peer groups, and high rates of substance abuse and mental health problems (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Dickson et al., 2013;

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Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013). The release of offenders into the community places strain on community resources and family ties (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Treatment needs often go unaddressed in prison, and offenders return to impoverished and high-crime neighbourhoods (Petersilia, 2003). Prison disrupts an offender's accommodation and social support networks, and the stigma of going to jail can affect an ex-prisoner long after they are released.

Disclosing a prison record may close a lot of doors in the community; an effect which may be exacerbated by neighbourhood disadvantage and impoverishment (Burnett, 2009).

Release plans are one way to attenuate the re-entry challenges faced by released offenders and to smooth the transition from prison to the community. Broadly, a comprehensive personalised release plan contains provisions for salient features of an offender's life post-release, including specific strategies for managing challenges, to maximise the offender's likelihood of success in the community. Release plans might incorporate sections on accommodation, employment, prosocial support, use of leisure time, and management of risk factors such as substance use, antisocial associates, and anger issues.

Planning for release

Accommodation is a major focus of an offender's release plan, and deservedly so. Accommodation instability has been related to increased risk of recidivism. Released offenders who shifted house only once, or not at all, exhibited lower recidivism rates than those who shifted house twice or more (22 percent vs. 59 percent; Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone, & Peeters, 2006). Haynie and South (2005) associated residential mobility with increased risk of delinquent behaviour. They found adolescents who had changed accommodation in the previous two years to be 25 percent more likely to exhibit violent behaviour than those who had spent two or more years at their current address, after controlling for group differences in demographic and social characteristics (such as age, ethnicity, relationship with and education level of parents, and social networks). Further,

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controlling for the self-reported delinquency of peers resulted in a 14 percent decrease in the relationship between residential mobility and adolescent violence (Haynie & South, 2005).

These findings suggest that unstable accommodation can increase adolescents' risk of delinquent behaviour, particularly through the influence of peer delinquency.

Challenges around securing social support can also affect reintegration success and reoffending. Family members and other sources of prosocial support can improve offenders' post-release situation in multiple ways. Released prisoners often rely on family members for social support, financial support, accommodation and employment (Naser & La Vigne, 2006). Proximity to social support has been linked to lower recidivism rates, with one study finding that 23 percent of offenders living with family, parents, or a partner were reimprisoned at nine months, as opposed to 52 percent of those living alone or with non-family (Baldry et al., 2006). Plans for prosocial support are key to an offender's release plan. Research has shown inmates with stronger connections to their family were more successful on parole, with family providing particular assistance with housing and emotional support (Visser & Travis, 2003).

Managing antisocial influences is another central re-entry concern for released offenders. Parole violators have been found to be significantly more likely to associate with people with criminal backgrounds than offenders who did not violate conditions (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009). Persisters were more likely than desisters to have a criminal in the family, and parole violators were less likely to live with their spouse or partner while on parole (Knight & West, 1975; Bucklen & Zajac, 2009).

Another key feature of an offender's release plan for life in the community is employment. For offenders released from prison, employment displaces their time so less time is available for criminal activity. Full-time employment has been linked to increased likelihood of successful parole completion (Bahr et al., 2010). Employment may increase

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

time spent away from antisocial peers, increase opportunities to make new, prosocial friends, and reduce financial pressure, thereby reducing the likelihood of parole failure and recidivism. Employment also provides income, which may lessen the temptation of crime, and may give the offender a sense of purpose and competency. Attaining a sense of satisfaction and pride from having a legitimate income and somewhere to be during the day can also encourage offenders to curb their offending habits (Barry, 2007). Greater employment stability has been linked to greater likelihood of successfully completing parole; parole successes were more likely to report being consistently employed for the duration of parole (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009).

Living off the proceeds of crime allows offenders to become accustomed to a certain level of comfort in their lives, which they are often unwilling to relinquish by moving from illegitimate to legitimate sources of income. Many offenders state that they could make more money selling drugs or in illegitimate business, and it takes time to build up the skill base and experience needed to advance in a 'straight' job. A period of no-man's-land between illegitimate but successful money-making strategies and a well-paying legitimate job leaves offenders especially vulnerable to the lures of illegal activities that, in addition to being profitable more immediately, may be much more familiar and entrenched for the offender. Negotiating parole reporting responsibilities can be difficult for offenders seeking employment, often meaning parolees can commit only to part-time hours (Graffam, Shinkfield, Lavelle, & McPherson, 2005). Procuring material goods and creature comforts have been noted as reasons for offending, whereas gaining a supportive, prosocial spouse and having a child were oft-reported reasons for participants giving up criminal activity (Barry, 2007).

Determining the extent to which a parolee has addressed their major precipitating idiosyncratic risk factors for criminal behaviour is also important for reintegration. If nothing

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

in an individual's life has changed, they are arguably no less likely to offend after release than they were prior to their index offending. Strategies for attenuating risk factors in the community were also included in a release plan. For example, a parolee might have frequently committed offences while under the influence of alcohol, and used alcohol abuse as an excuse or exonerating factor for their offending. An avoidant, denial-based approach to managing alcohol use in the community would not constitute a strong release plan for this offender. Alternatively, if that same parolee was able to identify and acknowledge the connection between alcohol use and offending behaviour, and was committed to addressing substance use in the community with abstinence and a treatment programme, their release plan would be considerably stronger.

Overall quality of release plans, specifically on items focusing on accommodation, employment, and social support, have been shown to add predictive power to existing risk assessment tools, demonstrating the impact these constructs can have on newly released offenders (Scoones, Willis, & Grace, 2012). Measures of release plan quality have been shown to quickly and easily give a good indication of the "overall picture of an offender's risk of future offending" (Dickson et al., 2013, p. 384).

Willis and Grace (2008; 2009) found release plan quality to be directly related to recidivism. They assessed reintegration plans of released sex offenders, and found high quality release plans to be associated with low rates of recidivism, and poor quality plans associated with high recidivism rates. Willis and Grace concluded the "percentage of recidivists decreased steadily with increases in planning quality" (Willis & Grace, 2009; p. 508). Dickson and colleagues adapted Willis and Grace's (2008; 2009) release plan coding protocol for use with a high-risk New Zealand sample. Dickson et al. (2013) found release plan quality was predictive of reimprisonment at one year post-release, and was also effective as a risk prediction measure when compared with established instruments. The current study

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

will also develop a measure of release plan to assess the overall quality of offenders' plans for life in the community.

Parole in New Zealand

The New Zealand Parole Board is the presiding body for approving prisoner releases to the community. All offenders released from prison sentences are released on conditions. Prisoners are released on standard release conditions, to which a number of additional special conditions may be added. Prisoners sentenced to two or more years in prison under the Parole Act (2002) are eligible for parole once they have served one third of their sentence. If granted parole before the end of their prison sentence, a released offender (or 'parolee') will normally serve a parole period of six months plus the remainder of his or her prison sentence. If a prisoner is refused parole, or chooses to serve his or her full sentence, he or she will still serve a six month period of parole after release. This means that, unusually, New Zealand has a mix of discretionary (early release) and mandatory (end-of-sentence) parole regimes. Offenders released prior to their sentence end date may be recalled to prison up until the date at which they would otherwise have been released. Released offenders paroled from life sentences are subject to conditions for the remainder of their lives and may be recalled at any time.

The New Zealand Parole Board sets standard and special release conditions for both discretionary and mandatory release. Standard release conditions state that ex-prisoners must report to their probation officer promptly and regularly, must reside at an approved address, must avoid employment and associates prohibited by their probation officer, and must undergo rehabilitative assessment and treatment as and when directed. Special release conditions either address reasonable concerns of the victim, reduce an offender's risk of reoffending, or facilitate an offender's rehabilitation. Thus, special conditions could relate to residential restrictions, electronic monitoring, or to the offender's finances (for example,

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

earnings may be monitored to ensure income is legitimate). Special conditions could also require an offender to avoid contact with a victim, avoid a specified locale, or to attend a particular treatment or rehabilitation programme (New Zealand Parole Board, 2014).

Introduction to the current study

In the current study, I aimed to investigate the effects of residential relocation on the rates of breach and reconviction of high-risk offenders released to the community from New Zealand prisons. To do this, I used a combination of file and interview data to classify a sample of male parolees' release plans as either *the devil you know* (for parolees returning to their old neighbourhood) or *fresh start* (for those moving to an unfamiliar location). All study participants were serving custodial sentences of at least 24 months, so, regardless of whether or not they were granted early release, all paroles served at least six months on parole conditions (Polaschek, Yesberg, & Chauhan, 2015).

To discover whether *devil you know* (or DK) parolees had intrinsically better or worse plans for release than *fresh start* (or FS) parolees, we developed and validated a coding scheme to assess the quality of offenders' release plans¹. Specifically, the release plan quality coding protocol created by Dickson and colleagues (Dickson et al., 2013; Dickson & Polaschek, 2014) was refined for use with this sample. This release plan coding protocol allowed me to determine whether, at release, parolees returning to the devil they know had inherently better or worse quality plans for life in the community than those making a fresh start. During protocol development, we focused on participants' release plans for accommodation, employment, social support, avoiding antisocial associates, and managing high-risk situations, as research has indicated that these are the release plan features most strongly linked to recidivism (Dickson et al., 2013).

¹ The coding protocol was developed by a second postgraduate student, Chelsea Richards, and the author. We were supervised by Devon Polaschek, and consulted with the original protocol developer, Sophie Dickson.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

I compared DK and FS groups on release plan quality, experiences in the community, and reoffending. Four measures of recidivism were used: breach of conditions, reconviction, violent conviction, and reimprisonment. I examined these indices at two time points: six and 12 months in the community. The first research question for this study was: Does the quality of offenders' release plans predict rate of recidivism? I predicted release plan quality would be related to recidivism, such that higher quality release plans would be related to lower rates of recidivism at six months and one year in the community.

My second research question was: Does release destination (DK or FS) affect the quality of participants' release plans? DK participants were returning to an area where, most likely, they already had family, support people, antisocial associates, and possibly employment. Due to having local friends and family, DK parolees might have had somewhere to stay, but might have struggled to create good plans to avoid criminal peers. FS participants, on the other hand, were moving somewhere new, so may have found it easier than DK parolees to avoid criminal peers and break antisocial habits and friendships. Parolees moving away from their pre-prison neighbourhoods and making a fresh start might have had relatively strong plans for managing antisocial peers, due to living so far away from known associates, but weaker plans for accommodation. Thus, I hypothesised DK participants would have significantly better quality plans for accommodation, employment, and prosocial support, and poorer plans for managing antisocial associates and personal risk factors than FS participants. I also hypothesised FS parolees would have better quality release plans overall.

My third research question was: How do post-release community experiences of offenders returning to the devil they know differ from those making a fresh start? In terms of experiences in the community, I hypothesised that FS parolees would score significantly higher than DK parolees on avoidance of criminal peers, use of leisure time, community support and health, and that DK parolees would score significantly higher than FS parolees

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

on accommodation quality, prosocial support, employment and finances. I predicted DK parolees would be more likely to live with family members than FS parolees. I also expected FS parolees would be more likely to live alone, and to have lower accommodation stability, than DK parolees. My fourth and final research question was: Does release destination affect participants' rates of recidivism? I hypothesised release destination would affect participants' reoffending behaviour, such that FS participants would exhibit significantly lower recidivism rates than DK participants during the first year post-release.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 304 male offenders who were released from New Zealand prisons between November 2010 and January 2014. This study used data collected as part of the Parole Project. The Parole Project is a longitudinal research project with the primary aim of tracking high risk prisoners' behaviour, experiences, and reoffending patterns in the community following release. To participate in the Parole Project, offenders were required to be high-risk, with a RoC*RoI² of at least .70. Participants also typically had a history of violent offending. Despite not all offenders being granted early release (47% of men in the sample were granted early release on conditions, and 53% were released automatically at the end of their sentence), the post-release supervision period is referred to here as "parole," and participants are referred to as "parolees".

Of the sample, 64.4% reported their primary ethnicity as Māori, 26.3% as Pākehā (or NZ European), and 6.3% as Pasifika, with 3.0% reporting other ethnicities. Age of the sample at the time of release ranged from 19 to 60 years ($M = 32$, $SD = 8.6$), and the average age at first conviction was 16 years ($SD = 1.9$). The group's average RoC*RoI score was .74 ($SD = .11$), representing approximately a 74% chance of returning to prison within five years, and the group's average score on the Violence Risk Scale was 52 ($SD = 8.7$). These scores confirmed the high-risk nature of the sample (Bakker, Riley, & O'Malley, 1999; Wong & Gordon, 2006)³. The average duration in prison to which parolees were sentenced was 1403 days ($SD = 938.6$), and the mean duration of participants' terms of community-based parole was 330 days ($SD = 225.9$). The sample had served, on average, 1500 days in prison ($SD = 1593.0$), ranging from 9 months to almost 36 years.

² In some cases, discretionary admittance was given to men with a lower RoC*RoI (for example, as a result of violent behaviour whilst in prison).

³ More information about the RoC*RoI and the VRS can be found under 'Risk scales' in the *Materials* section of this report.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Participants in the current study had amassed an average of 68 prior convictions ($SD = 51.6$) and five violent convictions each ($SD = 4.9$). The sample's number of previous convictions ranged from 3 to 442. The average number of sexual convictions was low ($M = 0.4$, $SD = 1.2$). Only 47 participants had previously been convicted of a sexual offence, and only 16 of those had been convicted of more than one sexual offence. Thirteen participants (4.3% of the sample) were on life parole, meaning that parole conditions would apply for the rest of their lives. These participants were removed for analyses of time on parole, because their data would artificially inflate the group means for these variables.

Index offence refers to the offence for which an offender is serving his current sentence. Most participants were serving sentences for violent offences (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Index offence was a violent offence (such as assault, aggravated robbery or homicide) for 51.8% of the sample, and a dishonesty offence (such as theft or burglary) for 33.3%. Less prevalent index offences were sexual offences (e.g. rape or indecent assault; 6.0% of the sample), drug or anti-social offences (e.g. possession of drugs or disorder; 5.3%), property damage (e.g. wilful damage or arson; 2.1%), administrative offences (e.g. failure to answer bail; 1.1%), and property abuse (e.g. trespassing; 0.4% of the sample). Specific index offence was burglary for 24.8% of the sample, wounding/injuring for 18.4%, aggravated robbery for 17%, assault for 9.3%, and drug offences for 5% of the sample. No other individual index offence was endorsed by more than 5% of the sample.

Approximately half the sample ($n = 151$) had graduated from a residential prison-based rehabilitation programme at one of New Zealand's four High-Risk Special Treatment Units (or HRSTUs). The other half of the sample ($n = 153$) were also high-risk offenders, but were released without having completed an HRSTU programme. Men in this comparison group may have begun or graduated from other residential treatment programmes (such as a motivation programme or a substance abuse treatment programme) but had not completed an

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

HRSTU treatment programme on their current sentence. These men should therefore be considered ‘treatment as usual’, rather than untreated controls.

Materials

Risk scales

RoC*RoI. The RoC*RoI (Risk of re-Conviction x Risk of re-Imprisonment; Bakker et al., 1999) is an actuarial risk assessment tool developed and used by the New Zealand Department of Corrections. RoC*RoI score is expressed as a probability, and represents an offender’s risk of returning to prison within five years of release. For example, a RoC*RoI of 0.80 represents an 80% chance of an offender being reimprisoned in the first five years post-release. The instrument is based on static (fixed) factors that cannot be changed by intervention. Static factors relate to demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender) or criminal history variables (e.g. age at first conviction, number of juvenile offences, amount of time spent in custody). The RoC*RoI showed good predictive validity during development (AUC⁴ = .76; Bakker et al., 1999), and its predictive validity has been supported by subsequent analyses (Nadesu, 2007).

Violence Risk Scale. The Violence Risk Scale (VRS; Wong & Gordon, 2006) is an actuarial instrument developed to assess offenders’ risk of violence, and entails rating an offender on 6 static and 20 dynamic risk factors. Dynamic factors are not fixed, and can change as a result of treatment or intervention. VRS items cover factors such as offence-supportive attitudes, violent lifestyle, and substance abuse (Wong & Gordon, 2013). The 26 VRS items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher ratings reflecting a stronger association between the variable and the offender’s level of violence. Possible VRS scores

⁴ An AUC value of .76 indicates that there was a 76% chance that a randomly selected recidivist would have a higher RoC*RoI score than a randomly selected non-recidivist (Fawcett, 2006).

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

range between 0 and 78; a higher score indicates a greater proclivity for violence. Scores higher than 50 denote a high-risk individual (Wong & Gordon, 2013). Wong and Gordon (2006) reported a Cronbach's α of .93 for items comprising the total VRS score, indicating excellent internal consistency. The VRS displayed AUCs of between .71 and .75 for violent, non-violent and any reconviction over the 1- to 4-year follow-up period, demonstrating strong predictive validity (Wong & Gordon, 2006). Dickson and colleagues found the VRS was predictive of reconviction and reimprisonment in the first 12 months following release in a New Zealand sample (Dickson et al., 2013).

Interview data and Department of Corrections file data

Research assistants conducted interviews with each participant as part of Parole Project data collection. Interviews included open-ended questions, yes or no responses, and Likert scales. As much as possible, responses were recorded verbatim. File documentation held by the Department of Corrections Psychological Services was also collected for each Parole Project participant. Pre-release interviews and two-month post-release interviews provided offenders' release locations. Parole Assessment Reports, sentence plans and Psychological Treatment Reports provided supporting information.

Pre-release interviews. Parole Project pre-release interviews were normally conducted with parolees during the fortnight before their release (up to a maximum of six weeks before release). Most were conducted face-to-face on prison grounds, with a small number of interviews conducted by telephone. Pre-release interviews explored a parolee's ideas about life after release, particularly in terms of accommodation, employment, social support, use of leisure time, substance use, and attitudes towards community-based treatment, probation officers, and supervision requirements.

Two-month post-release interviews. Research assistants conducted post-release interviews by telephone with both offenders and their probation officers around the time that

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

the offender had been in the community for two months (or upon their return to prison). Two-month interviews encompassed where a parolee was living at two months post-release, who he was living with, and what kind of social and community supports were available to him. Interviews also comprised the parolee's employment, finances, physical and psychological health, what he had been doing with his leisure time since release, time spent with criminal peers, alcohol and drug use, and attitudes towards and engagement in criminal behaviour. We had access to two-month post-release interviews for approximately 195 participants.

Parole Assessment Reports. Parole Assessment Reports are created for a parolee's appearance before the New Zealand Parole Board, and inform the Parole Board's decision of whether or not to release him. Parole Assessment Reports provide information about the offender's attitude in prison (how he presented in consultations), treatment programme participation (how well he engaged with and contributed to group sessions), and institutional infractions (being in possession of contraband or assaulting another prisoner). The Parole Assessment Report also outlines the offender's release proposal, including rehabilitative programmes, accommodation, employment, finances, relationships, community/whanau support, victim issues, and healthcare.

Sentence Plans and Psychological Treatment Reports. We had access to Sentence Plans and Psychological Treatment Reports for the majority of parolees. Sentence Plans included a participant's offending needs, behaviour, attitude, compliance, education, work, health, support, housing, finances, and victim-related issues. Psychological Treatment Reports covered an offender's institutional conduct, treatment received, participation and engagement in treatment, static and dynamic risk factors, high-risk situations, warning signs, and any recommendations.

Recidivism data

Four indices of recidivism were examined: breach of release conditions, conviction for any new criminal offence (excluding breach), conviction for a new violent offence, and reimprisonment. An offender could be reimprisoned either for a new conviction or for breaching release conditions. Violent convictions and reimprisonment gave an indication of seriousness of reoffending.

Procedure

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by Victoria University of Wellington's School of Psychology Human Ethics Committee. File and recidivism data access and permissions were granted by the New Zealand Department of Corrections. Full informed consent was sought from participants prior to data collection, and participants were advised that they could withdraw consent at any stage. Identifying information was available only to those working on the study, and all responses and scale scores were kept confidential and securely stored. Participants were informed that the only instance in which confidentiality would be broken was if a response indicated that the participant or another individual was at immediate risk of harm.

Development of release destination classification system

One aim of the current study was to examine whether returning to a familiar area after release from prison put parolees at greater risk of recidivism than making a fresh start in a new area. I therefore developed a release destination classification system to categorise participants as either *devil you know* (DK) or *fresh start* (FS). Evidence for DK or FS came primarily from pre-release interviews, because these documents provided the most recent information about an offender's plans. The paramount distinction was whether a participant

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

was returning to a familiar location during the initial post-release period, or was being released to a new, unfamiliar area. For a fresh start, the new location needed to be far enough from the old one for travel between neighbourhoods to be difficult. For example, moving from Porirua to Lower Hutt in the Wellington region (a journey of around 25km) would be considered FS, whereas moving between two central Wellington suburbs would not.

Devil You Know. Evidence for categorising a parolee as DK came from indications an offender was returning to a familiar location, moving to a different suburb of the same city, or returning to his previous place of employment. Pre-release interviews explicitly asked parolees whether they were living in the same place as before; a ‘yes’ response was taken as evidence of DK category membership. However, not all responses were as clear as “yes, I am living in the same house as before”. If the response to this question was unclear, further evidence was sought.

The offender may have stated he was returning to his “old stomping ground,” or may have returned to live either with his parents or with an established partner in a tested relationship. A tested relationship was defined as a marriage or a committed long-term relationship, established before the participant began his current prison term. A relationship with a new partner whom the offender met recently (i.e. during his most recent prison term) was considered untested.

Further evidence of DK group membership came from Community Probation, New Zealand Police, or Child, Youth and Family expressing concern about an offender’s proposed release address due to it being where he was living prior to his most recent offending. A DK offender might have indicated he would see criminal peers post-release, might have reported concerns about existing antisocial associates, or might have mentioned strategies (however flimsy) to deal with the risks of spending time with old associates. Even if an offender had

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

poor plans for managing influence of antisocial associates, having antisocial peer influence to manage suggested he had previously lived in that area.

Fresh Start. Offenders categorised as FS were released to a new, unfamiliar area, removed from the location of their offending. If an offender reported he did not know anyone in his new area, did not know the town, was moving away from the gang area, or specifically articulated his plans to make a fresh start, this was considered evidence of FS group membership. Further evidence for categorising a parolee as FS was derived from indications that he would be living somewhere he had never lived before, with a new partner in an untested relationship, or with family members he did not know well. Pre-release interviews asked if parolees had specific concerns about running into old associates or about negative reactions from the community. Parolees who responded ‘no’, stating that they were not concerned because they were not returning to the same area, and would not see old associates or anyone who knew their criminal history, were generally categorised as FS. An offender might also have planned to live with his parents or partner who were moving location explicitly to give the offender a fresh start. An offender moving to a new area with his parents or established partner would be categorised as FS⁵.

Restricted Accommodation. Some parolees were released to restrictive residential rehabilitation programmes and half-way houses, such as Salisbury Street Foundation, Hanmer Clinic, The Salvation Army’s Bridge Programme, or Odyssey House. Parolees entering such facilities were restricted (or completely prohibited) from leaving the premises for the duration of their stay. Parolees were therefore very limited in their ability to participate in community life or pursue opportunities to reoffend, so they were arguably not fully released into the

⁵ If an offender was moving with his parents or partner but they were antisocial, this would have counted against his making a fresh start. However, if this were the case, the offender’s application to live with them after release would most likely have been rejected. The Parole Board typically aimed to separate offenders from their strongest antisocial influences, and rarely accepted release proposals involving living with individuals with criminal records.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

community, per se. Rather than coding as DK or FS, I assigned offenders released to these facilities to a third category, called *Restricted Accommodation* (RA). The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and behaviours of offenders who were truly ‘at risk’ in the community and completely free to reoffend, so participants in the RA category were removed from analyses after inter-rater reliability was calculated.

Inter-rater reliability. Raters were blind to recidivism outcomes while coding for release destination. I coded all files for release destination. To calculate inter-rater reliability, a second rater independently re-coded 36 participant files (19 comparison and 17 treatment participants); 11.8% of the total sample. The overall unweighted *kappa* was 0.793 (with a 95% confidence interval of 0.568 to 1.00), indicating a substantial level of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Unweighted *kappa* values were used for release destination because all disagreements between raters were of equal importance. Disagreements between raters were of equal importance in this study, because two raters categorising the same parolee as DK and FS was no closer to agreement than two raters categorising another parolee as DK and RA.

Fresh Start subcategories

While conducting release destination inter-rater reliability analyses, we noticed participants’ pre-release interview comments about their release destination suggested FS parolees were divided in two clear categories: those who were making a fresh start voluntarily, and those making one under duress. Common comments from parolees making a voluntary fresh start were: “It’ll be good to move away from the old neighbourhood,” and, “I’m pretty nervous because I won’t know anyone, but I’m looking forward to a fresh start.” Representative comments from parolees making a fresh start under duress included: “I’ll only stay a day; I’ll leave and go to a motel instead,” and, “I’ll hate it, I’ll move back home as soon as I’m off conditions.”

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Those making a voluntary fresh start had not necessarily arranged their accommodation themselves (they may have been assigned a place at a supported accommodation facility, for example), but they accepted the situation and were willing to make the move to the new location. Those making a fresh start under duress, however, showed minimal or no commitment to, or acceptance of, moving to a new area. These parolees often reported that they were unwilling to live in their approved accommodation at all, and that they planned to move back to their old neighbourhood as soon as Community Probation would allow. The situation of parolees being compelled to move to a new area often arose because proposed accommodation arrangements had been rejected or had fallen through. Based on research with offender relocation and residential restrictions of sex offenders, being forced to move somewhere new against one's will could be hypothesised to have a detrimental effect on one's behaviour. Undergoing an enforced fresh start under duress might lead to a poor outcome in the community, and could contribute to higher recidivism rates.

Recoding FS parolees. I recoded FS parolees into two categories: voluntary and under duress. Categorisation criteria came mainly from pre-release interviews, and hinged on whether the parolee supported his own fresh start, or whether it seemed that he was only moving somewhere new because he had to. An FS under duress parolee might be compelled to make a fresh start because his original release location proposal had been vetoed by Community Probation or another agency (because of proximity to victims, perhaps), because he had no contact with his family, or because his family was heavily antisocial. Specifically, I looked for evidence the parolee was open to or even excited about new opportunities, and committed to making the most of his new circumstances.

Hypotheses for three-category release destination. In terms of whether release destination affected the quality of participants' release plans, hypotheses were that DK

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

parolees would have the best quality release plans for accommodation, employment, prosocial support and the best quality release plans overall, and that voluntary FS parolees would have the best quality release plans for managing antisocial associates and idiosyncratic risks.

With regards to post-release community experiences, I expected DK parolees to score significantly lower on avoidance of criminal peers, use of leisure time, and community support than the other two groups, and significantly higher on accommodation quality, prosocial support, employment, finances and health. I hypothesised that DK parolees would be more likely to live with family members than both voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees. I also expected both FS parolee groups to be more likely to live alone, and to have lower accommodation stability, than DK parolees. Finally, I addressed the research question of whether release destination affects participants' rates of recidivism. I expected voluntary FS parolees to reoffend at a lower rate during the first year post-release than either DK or FS under duress parolees.

Inter-rater reliability. I re-coded all files into voluntary and under duress subgroups, and a second rater re-coded a subset of 17 FS files (20% of the total number of FS files) to calculate inter-rater reliability. The *kappa* was 0.76, with a 95% confidence interval of 0.45 to 1, indicating a substantial level of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Release plan quality measure development

Two aims of the current study involved assessing the quality of parolees' release plans, so a means of assessing offenders' release plans was developed. We adapted our coding protocol from a scheme developed by Dickson and colleagues (Dickson et al., 2013; Dickson & Polaschek, 2014). Dickson and colleagues' (2013) original coding scheme included seven items: Employment/Training (rated 0-3 on a 4-point scale, with higher scores reflecting better quality plans), Safety Plan, Accommodation, Post-Release Treatment, and

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Prosocial Support (all rated 0-2), and Antisocial Associates and Release Environment (both rated 0-1). Item scores were added together for total release plan quality.

We found that Dickson and colleagues' original protocol, which was based on Willis and Grace's (2008; 2009) release plan quality assessment criteria for use with sex offenders, did not display adequate robustness with our sample. We therefore made two amendments to Dickson et al.'s (2013) scale. First, we removed an item assessing the quality of offenders' safety plans, because men in our sample had not completed an HRSTU treatment programme, and so may not have created a safety plan. Second, because Dickson et al.'s (2013) original items were 2-, 3-, or 4-point rated, we modified item score ranges so all items were rated on a 4-point scale. All but one of Dickson et al.'s (2013) original items were rated on a 3-point scale or smaller, so this wider range enabled us to capture more variance within the data. Furthermore, for four of Dickson et al.'s scale items, the middle rating was used as a default score, if raters were undecided or if insufficient information was available. Rating all items on a 4-point scale removed this 'middle' code, so raters were forced to select a rating (of either '2' or '3' on a 1–4 scale). The author and a second rater coded a selection of files using the draft protocol, then discussed the ratings and how well the scale matched the factors we were aiming to capture. RPQ items were refined until ratings accurately represented the quality of parolees' plans for post-release.

Release Plan Quality coding protocol

The final Release Plan Quality (RPQ) coding protocol is included in the Appendix of this report⁶. I coded 60% of the sample, and the second rater coded 40%. We coded independently and met regularly throughout the coding process to discuss ambiguous cases and protect against rater drift. We coded file data on five items: Accommodation,

⁶ RPQ item ratings were not used to allocate release destination category, or vice versa. Processes for categorising parolees by release destination and for assigning RPQ ratings were kept separate.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Employment, Prosocial Support, Antisocial Associates, and Idiosyncratic Risk Management.

We added together scores on RPQ items to find the total RPQ score. For considerations used when rating items, please refer to the full RPQ scale in Appendix.

Inter-rater reliability. Raters were blind to recidivism outcomes while coding for release plan quality. Two raters independently coded a subsample of 50 participant files to obtain inter-rater reliability (20 treatment and 30 comparison files; 16.4% of the total sample). I used VassarStats' (2014) online calculator to compute weighted *kappa* values. Conventionally, weighted *kappas* are used when discrepancies between raters are of unequal importance, and some discrepancies are more problematic than others. RPQ ratings signified actual ranked values, as opposed to simply representing categories of dummy-coded discrete variables. If numbers were used to signify categories of a variable (such as 1 = *blue*, 2 = *red*, 3 = *yellow*), the difference between two ratings of 1 and 3 would be no more dissimilar than two ratings of 1 and 2. However, using the current scale, two raters scoring one item with ratings that were adjacent to each other (i.e. ratings of 2 and 3) would be more similar than disparate ones (i.e. ratings of 1 and 4; Cohen, 1968); thus, weighted *kappa* values were used.

Table 1.

Inter-rater reliability for Release Plan Quality (RPQ) items

RPQ item	<i>Kappa</i>
Accommodation	0.796
Employment	0.900
Prosocial Support	0.578
Antisocial Support	0.704
Idiosyncratic Risk Management	0.708

We used linear *kappa* weightings, rather than quadratic weightings. Linear weightings are used when differences between each rating are of equal importance (i.e. the difference

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

between ratings of 1 and 2 was as important as the difference between 2 and 3; MedCalc Software, 2014). The overall linear weighted *kappa* was 0.79, with a 95% confidence interval of 0.74 to 0.85. As shown in Table 1, weighted *kappa* values for individual items ranged from 0.58 to 0.90, indicating a substantial level of agreement on most items (Landis & Koch, 1977). Inter-rater reliability was lowest on the RPQ Prosocial Support item ($\kappa = 0.58$), indicating raters showed the most variability when assessing the strength and influence of parolees' relationships with their prosocial supports.

Results

Analyses were conducted using SPSS version 20. First, I will describe the release plans, experiences in the community, and recidivism behaviour of the sample as a whole. Next, I will examine release destination and compare the release plan quality, community experiences, and recidivism rates of parolees being released to an area they are familiar with (*devil you know*; or DK) with those of parolees moving somewhere new (*fresh start*; or FS). I will then revisit release destination to divide the sample into *DK*, *voluntary FS* and *FS under duress* parolees. Finally, I will compare these three groups on release plan quality, experiences in the community, and recidivism rate. All figures are reported to two decimal places, except for significance figures (*p*-values), which are reported to three decimal places for clarity.

Recidivism

Recidivism figures were extracted from the Department of Corrections' Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS) database in October 2014. In the six months following release, 34% of the sample (96 participants) breached their parole conditions, and 38% (108 participants) were convicted of a new criminal offence. Ten percent of the sample (28 participants) were convicted of a new violent offence, and 29% (82 men) were reimprisoned. In the 12 months following release, 43% of the sample (120 participants) breached their parole conditions, 61% (173 participants) were reconvicted, 20% (57 participants) were convicted of a new violent offence, and 42% of the sample (118 participants) were reimprisoned.

Release plan quality

We used the finalised RPQ coding protocol, (RPQ; please see Appendix for full RPQ protocol) to code parolees' plans after release. Disagreements between raters arising during inter-rater reliability coding were resolved by discussion. We coded release plans in the

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

domains of Accommodation, Employment, Prosocial Support, Antisocial Associates, and Idiosyncratic Risk Management (IRM), as well as overall release plan quality. Table 2 shows mean (average score), median (middle scores) and mode (most frequently reported score) RPQ item and total scores. Higher scores indicate better quality plans.

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics of total RPQ score and Accommodation, Employment, Prosocial Support, Antisocial Associates, and Idiosyncratic Risk Management item scores for 282 released offenders

Item	<i>M (SD)</i>	Median	Mode
Accommodation	3.19 (.93)	3.19	4.00
Employment	1.74 (1.12)	1.74	1.00
Prosocial support	2.61 (.84)	2.61	2.00
Antisocial associates	2.25 (.72)	2.22	2.00
Idiosyncratic Risk Management	2.29 (.91)	2.00	2.00
Total RPQ score	12.01 (2.89)	12.00	11.00

Note: Range = 1-4 for Accommodation, Employment, Prosocial Support, Antisocial Associates, and Idiosyncratic Risk Management item scores. Range = 5-20 for Total RPQ score.

The average total score was approximately 47% of the maximum possible RPQ score. Parolees' plans were strongest for Accommodation, with the modal Accommodation score describing living with family or with people identified as prosocial supports. Very few parolees (3.5%) reported having no accommodation options available at pre-release. Men had the weakest plans for Employment; the modal Employment score indicated that most participants were not working upon release.

The modal Prosocial Support score suggested that most men in the sample had limited social support available to them (limited in range and influence, provided by agency workers, or by associates who were not necessarily anti-criminal). The modal score for Antisocial Associates indicated that most offenders had ceased active gang involvement but retained

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

ongoing contact with criminal peers, or had undefined plans to manage antisocial associates.

The modal Idiosyncratic Risk Management (IRM) score indicated weak or non-existent plans to manage criminal risk.

Table 3.

Mean ratings of parolees' community experiences at two months post-release, rated by parolees and probation officers

Item	Parolee ratings (n)	Probation officer ratings (n)
Accommodation	4.9 (196)	4.2 (241)
Employment	5.0 (61)	3.5 (218)
Finances	3.7 (195)	3.8 (238)
Social support	5.1 (189)	3.5 (241)
Community support	4.6 (119)	3.2 (235)
Avoiding antisocial associates	4.8 (193)	3.8 (228)
Use of leisure time	4.7 (196)	3.7 (241)
Physical health	5.2 (190)	5.4 (212)
Mental health	4.7 (195)	4.9 (212)
Time in the community ^a	4.6 (193)	-
Concern about criminal thoughts ^a	5.2 (187)	-
Seriousness of post-release criminal behaviour ^a	3.0 (62)	-
Overall compliance ^b	-	4.5 (238)

^a Only parolees rated the overall quality of their time in the community, concern about criminal thoughts, and seriousness of post-release criminal behaviour.

^b Only probation officers rated parolees' overall compliance.

Community experiences at two months post-release

I analysed two-month interview data collected from approximately 195 of the 282 parolees and their parole officers, to describe the lives of parolees who had been in the community for two months. Two-month interview responses were missing for some participants for various questions, because not all participants were successfully interviewed at two months in the community, and of those who were, not all participants answered all

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

interview questions. Results were calculated using valid responses only. Ratings were made on a 6-point Likert scale, anchored at 1 (indicating poor performance or low satisfaction on the item) and 6 (excellent performance). Average Likert scale ratings are presented in Table 3.

Accommodation. At two months post-release, the sample reported being relatively satisfied with their accommodation overall. Most parolees were renting a house or apartment (58%) or owned their own home (32%). The rest reported living in a rented room (2.5%), non-rehabilitation shelter or hostel (2.5%), other accommodation (2.5%), a residential programme hostel (1.5%), or having no fixed address (1%). Most were living with parents (29%), other family (24%), alone (23%), or with a partner (13%). The majority of the sample were living where they had planned to live pre-release (72%), and most had not moved house since release (77%). A minority reported having moved once since release (20%), and a small group (3%) had moved two or more times since release.

Employment. Most parolees were unemployed (69%) and on benefits (40% unemployment benefit, 24% other benefits). Employed participants reported being satisfied with their work situation (only participants who were employed provided responses on job satisfaction). Of the 31% who were employed, 56% were working full-time, and 53% were employed where they had planned to work pre-release. The main sources of income reported by parolees other than benefits were employment (20% of parolees), 'other' (3%), family (2%), illegal activity (1%), and a combination of main income sources (9%).

Prosocial support. Half of the sample (44%) were in a romantic relationship at two months post-release, and, of these, 60% were in an established, long-term relationship.

Antisocial associates. Half of the sample (58%) kept in contact with criminal peers, and slightly less than half (42%) had seen their criminal peers in the fortnight prior to interview. Parolees still rated themselves as relatively successful in avoiding their criminal

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

peers. A very low percentage (14%) reported having other sources of negative influence in their lives.

Community life. Around a third of parolees (31%) reported drug use in the fortnight prior to interview, and 39% had used alcohol in the same time period. Both the sample and their probation officers rated parolees' health relatively highly.

Offending behaviour. The sample rated themselves relatively highly on avoiding criminal behaviour. Most participants (65%) reported committing no criminal offences in the two months since release; 11% reported one offence since release, 6% reported two, 8% reported three, and 10% reported committing four or more criminal offences in the two months since leaving prison. Those who had offended in the follow-up period rated their criminal behaviour as moderately serious.

Predictive validity of the RPQ

The first aim of this study was to ascertain whether the quality of offenders' release plans, as measured by total RPQ score, was predictive of recidivism. I performed binary logistic regressions to assess the predictive validity of total RPQ score on eight recidivism indices (breach, reoffending, violent reoffending, and recidivism, within the first 6 and 12 months post-release). As shown in Table 4, RPQ score was significantly predictive of three of the eight indices of recidivism; namely, breach at 6 months post-release, and reconviction and violent reconviction at 12 months post-release. Logistic regression models were not statistically significant for breach at 12 months, reconviction at 6 months, violent reconviction at 6 months, or reimprisonment at either time point, indicating that RPQ score did not distinguish between parolees who did reoffend within these parameters and those who did not. However, the RPQ score was approaching significance (with a p -value between .05 and .10) for predicting reconviction at 6 months.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Table 4.

Logistic regressions predicting likelihood of breach, reconviction, violent reconviction and reimprisonment at 6 and 12 months post-release using total RPQ score

	B	S.E.	Wald (df = 1)	Sig	Exp(B)	Odds Ratio 95% C.I.
Breach						
6 months ^a	-.15	.05	10.04	.002**	.86	[.79, .95]
12 months ^b	-.03	.04	.65	.422	.97	[.89, 1.05]
Reconviction						
6 months ^c	-.07	.04	2.73	.098 [†]	.93	[.86, 1.01]
12 months ^d	-.09	.04	4.57	.033*	.91	[.84, .99]
Violent conviction						
6 months ^e	-.06	.07	.84	.360	.94	[.82, 1.08]
12 months ^f	-.10	.05	3.87	.049*	.90	[.81, 1.00]
Reimprisonment						
6 months ^g	-.08	.05	2.63	.105	.93	[.85, 1.02]
12 months ^h	-.04	.04	1.02	.311	.96	[.88, 1.04]

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

^a $R^2 = .04/.05$

^b $R^2 = .00/.00$

^c $R^2 = .01/.01$

^d $R^2 = .02/.02$

^e $R^2 = .00/.01$

^f $R^2 = .01/.02$

^g $R^2 = .01/.01$

^h $R^2 = .00/.01$

Note: R^2 = Cox & Snell/Nagelkerke.

For breach at 6 months, the regression model was statistically significant, indicating that RPQ score was able to distinguish between those who had breached their parole conditions at 6 months in the community and those who had not. The model explained between 3.7% (Cox & Snell R-square) and 5.1% (Nagelkerke R-square) of the variance in recidivism status, and correctly classified 66% of cases. Odds ratios less than 1 are associated with a decreased rate of recidivism. The odds ratio of the RPQ for breach at 6 months was

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

.86, indicating that for every additional point in RPQ score, respondents were .86 times less likely to breach their release conditions in their first 6 months in the community (Pallant, 2010).

The logistic regression model was also statistically significant for reconviction at 12 months, indicating that RPQ score was able to distinguish between those who were convicted of a new criminal offence within their first year in the community and those who were not. The model explained between 1.6% (Cox & Snell R-square) and 2.2% (Nagelkerke R-square) of the variance in recidivism status, and correctly classified 60% of cases. The odds ratio of the RPQ for breach at 6 months of .91 was less than 1, indicating that for every additional point in RPQ score, respondents were .91 times less likely to be convicted of a new offence in their first year in the community.

Finally, the logistic regression model was statistically significant for violent conviction at 12 months, indicating that RPQ score was able to distinguish between those who were convicted of a new violent offence within their first year in the community and those who were not. The model explained between 1.4% (Cox & Snell R-square) and 2.2% (Nagelkerke R-square) of the variance in recidivism status, and correctly classified 80% of cases. The odds ratio of the RPQ for breach at 6 months of .90 was less than 1, indicating that for every additional point in RPQ score, respondents were .90 times less likely to be convicted of a violent offence in their first year in the community.

Thus, the answer to my first research question ('does the quality of offenders' release plans predict rates of recidivism?') was a qualified 'yes'. Total RPQ score was predictive of breach of conditions at 6 months, reconviction at 12 months, and violent reconviction at 12 months post-release. Each 1-point increase in overall RPQ score was associated with a decrease of between 9% and 14% in breach at 6 months post-release, in reconviction at one

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

year post-release, and in violent reconviction at one year post-release (Olver, Wong, Nicholaichuk, & Gordon, 2007).

Release destination: Two categories

Next, I classified the sample based on release destination, and ran comparisons between parolees returning to the devil they know (DK) and those making a fresh start (FS). Of the sample, 64.8% (197 participants) were categorised as DK, and 28.0% (85 participants) were categorised as FS. Twenty-two participants (7.2% of the sample) were removed from analyses due to being coded as having fulltime Restricted Accommodation (RA; that is, they were released to a heavily restrictive residential facility with very limited scope to participate in the community).

A chi-square analysis indicated that the proportion of treatment and comparison men in DK and FS categories was not significantly different: $X^2(1) = .032, p = .857$. This non-significant result shows that there were equal proportions of treatment and comparison men in DK and FS categories, suggesting that treatment effects of the HRSTU programme were unlikely to influence results. Treatment and comparison group differences will not be addressed again in this report.

Two-category release destination and demographic characteristics

I compared DK and FS groups to examine whether they were significantly different from each other on demographic or criminal history variables that may relate to reoffending. First, I used chi-square analyses to compare distribution of ethnicity and index offence within the two groups. DK and FS groups exhibited similar distributions of ethnicity and index offence. Chi-square analyses confirmed that no group differences in either composition of ethnicity ($X^2(3) = 6.64, p = .084$), or in index offence ($X^2(6) = 7.46, p = .281$), were significant. Nor did index offence differ across release destination in terms of whether or not parolees in each group were serving sentences for a violent offence: $X^2(1) = 1.49, p = .222$.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Next, I conducted independent samples *t*-tests to compare DK and FS subgroups on age at parole, risk of reimprisonment (measured by RoC*RoI score), risk of future violence (measured by VRS score), age at first conviction, number of prior convictions (including prior violent and sexual offences), days on parole, sentence length, and days served. As shown in Table 5, there were only two significant differences between the two groups. FS participants were significantly older than DK participants at release: $t(280) = -2.05, p = .041$. Cohen's *d* was used as a measure of effect size, and the Cohen's *d* value for age at parole was .25⁷. This value represents a small effect size, suggesting that FS parolees were likely to be slightly older than DK parolees at release.

Table 5.

Means and standard deviations of Devil You Know (DK) and Fresh Start (FS) parolee characteristics

Parolee characteristic	DK <i>M (SD)</i>	FS <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Age at parole	31.09 (8.13)	33.26 (9.50)	-2.05	.041*	[-4.47, -.09]	0.25
RoC*RoI	0.74 (0.11)	0.74 (0.13)	-.08	.935	[-.03, .03]	-
VRS	52.17 (8.50)	53.02 (9.48)	-.72	.471	[-3.17, 1.47]	-
Age at first conviction	16.23 (1.86)	15.89 (2.01)	1.35	.178	[-.15, .82]	-
Prior convictions	66.92 (54.31)	72.61 (48.53)	-.83	.406	[-19.14, 7.76]	-
Prior violent convictions	4.64 (4.31)	5.35 (4.71)	-1.23	.219	[-1.84, .43]	-
Prior sexual convictions	0.29 (1.13)	0.48 (1.29)	-1.23	.221	[-.49, .12]	-
Days on parole	319.44 (229.17)	315.09 (200.57)	.15	.882	[-53.24, 61.96]	-
Sentence length (days)	1306.37 (875.77)	1521.30 (1034.22)	-1.76	.080	[-456.07, 26.22]	-
Days served	1248.92 (1062.11)	1725.74 (2067.65)	-2.02	.047*	[-946.20, -7.43]	0.29

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

⁷ Cohen's *d* represents the difference between two means as a proportion of the standard deviation. Conventionally, $d = .20$ is considered a small effect size, $d = .50$ a medium and $d = .80$ a large effect size.

FS participants had also served a significantly greater number of days in prison ('Days Served') than DK participants: $t(280) = -2.55, p = .047$. The Cohen's d value for days served was .29. In this case, being in the FS category was moderately related to having spent a longer period of time in prison than being in the DK group. However, neither Age at Parole nor Days Served was significantly predictive of recidivism, so it was not necessary to control for these variables in subsequent analyses. DK and FS groups were not significantly different on risk of reimprisonment (RoC*RoI), risk of violent offending (VRS), age at first conviction, number of previous general, sexual or violent convictions, days on parole, or sentence length.

Two-category release destination and release plan quality

I then compared DK and FS groups on RPQ item and total scores to see if one of the two groups had significantly better quality release plans, prior to their release from prison. As reported in Table 6, DK and FS groups did not differ significantly on RPQ item scores for Employment, Prosocial Support, Idiosyncratic Risk Management, or on total RPQ score. However, DK and FS groups did differ significantly on average scores for Accommodation and Antisocial Associates items. FS parolees were rated as having significantly poorer accommodation plans, and significantly stronger plans to manage antisocial associates, than were DK parolees. Calculations of effect size revealed Cohen's d values for both item differences of just over .30, indicating a low-medium effect size.

Overall, these results provided partial support for hypotheses of the current study. DK parolees were hypothesised to have better quality release plans for accommodation, and poorer release plans for management of antisocial associates, than FS parolees. These two hypotheses were supported, but no other differences were significant. Thus, hypotheses that DK participants would score higher on release plans for employment and prosocial support,

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

and that FS participants would score higher on release plans to manage idiosyncratic risks, were not supported.

Table 6.

Comparison of DK and FS parolees on Release Plan Quality (RPQ) item and total scores

RPQ item	DK <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	FS <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i>	Sig	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Accommodation	3.28 (.93)	2.97 (.90)	2.65	.009*	[.08, .55]	.34
Employment	1.76 (1.13)	1.70 (1.11)	.40	.686	[-.23, .34]	-
Prosocial Support	2.65 (.82)	2.51 (.86)	1.28	.202	[-.08, .35]	-
Antisocial Associates	2.15 (.72)	2.37 (.67)	-2.41	.016*	[-.40, .04]	.32
IRM	2.19 (.92)	2.38 (.87)	-1.64	.103	[-.42, .04]	-
Total RPQ score	12.03 (2.89)	11.93 (2.91)	.27	.789	[-.64, .84]	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

Two-category release destination and community experience

Next, I addressed my third research question: How do the post-release community experiences of offenders returning to the devil they know differ from those making a fresh start? To identify significant differences between DK and FS groups, I examined information collected from parolees and their probation officers at two months post-release. Again, results calculations used valid responses only.

Comparisons of parolees' ratings of their experiences at two months in the community are reported in Table 7. Independent samples *t*-tests revealed the only significant difference between the two groups concerned parolees' ratings of how successfully they were staying away from criminal peers. Parolees in the DK category rated their success at staying away from criminal peers significantly lower than did those in the FS category. The effect size for this comparison (Cohen's $d = .56$) indicates parolees in the FS group rated their success in avoiding criminal peers half a SD higher than did parolees in the DK group.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Table 7.

Comparison of DK and FS parolees' experiences at two months in the community (self-rated)

Community experience	DK <i>M (SD)</i>	FS <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Accommodation	4.9 (1.2)	4.9 (1.2)	.06	194	.950	[-.35, .37]	-
Employment	5.0 (1.2)	5.1 (1.0)	-.15	59	.883	[-.66, .57]	-
Overall finances	3.7 (1.5)	3.7 (1.4)	.03	193	.978	[-.45, .46]	-
Personal support	5.1 (1.2)	5.2 (1.1)	-.33	187	.739	[-.44, .31]	-
Community support	4.7 (1.4)	4.6 (1.4)	.50	117	.618	[-.40, .67]	-
Avoiding criminal peers	4.6 (1.7)	5.4 (1.1)	-3.58	150	<.001**	[-1.15, -.33]	.56
Physical health	5.2 (1.1)	5.2 (1.0)	.09	188	.928	[-.31, .34]	-
Emotional health	4.7 (1.2)	4.8 (1.0)	-.83	127	.409	[-.48, .20]	-
Use of leisure time	4.7 (1.3)	4.8 (1.2)	-.40	194	.691	[-.46, .30]	-
Overall time in community	4.6 (1.3)	4.6 (1.2)	.12	191	.908	[-.38., .43]	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

Comparisons of probation officers' ratings of how parolees were managing in the community in the two months since release are reported in Table 8. The only significant difference between the two groups was probation officers' ratings of parolees' community support. FS parolees were rated by their probation officers as having significantly better community support than DK parolees. The effect size (Cohen's $d = .33$) indicates probation officers rated the community support of FS parolees a third of a SD higher than that of DK parolees.

Next, I assessed whether DK and FS groups differed in who they were living with at two months post-release. As hypothesised, a greater proportion of DK group members were living with parents (33%) or other family (26%) at two months post-release than were FS parolees (20% and 17%, respectively). Similar proportions of DK and FS parolees were living with their partner, wife or children (13% and 14%, respectively), and a small proportion of both groups (between 4% and 7%) reported living with friends or flatmates. Also consistent with hypotheses, a greater proportion of FS group members were living alone

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

(36%, as opposed to 18% of DK parolees). However, a chi-square analysis confirmed that differences in household make-up between DK and FS groups were not significant: $X^2(6) = 10.18, p = .117$. Thus, parolees returning to the devil they know were no more likely to be living with parents, with family, with a partner, or on their own than parolees making a fresh start, and hypotheses were not supported.

Table 8.

Comparison of DK and FS parolees' experiences at two months in the community (rated by probation officers)

Community experience	DK <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	FS <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Accommodation	4.2 (1.5)	4.2 (1.4)	-.42	239	.675	[-.49, .32]	-
Employment	3.4 (1.4)	3.7 (1.5)	-1.40	216	.163	[-.72, .12]	-
Overall finances	3.7 (1.5)	4.0 (1.3)	-1.50	236	.134	[-.69, .09]	-
Personal support	3.5 (1.4)	3.5 (1.5)	.01	239	.991	[-.39, .40]	-
Community support	3.1 (1.4)	3.6 (1.6)	-2.25	233	.026*	[-.89, -.06]	.33
Avoiding criminal peers	3.7 (1.5)	4.0 (1.3)	-1.53	144	.127	[-.71, .09]	-
Physical health	5.4 (1.1)	5.4 (1.0)	-.36	210	.722	[-.36, .25]	-
Emotional health	5.0 (1.1)	4.9 (1.3)	.53	107	.595	[-.27, .46]	-
Use of leisure time	3.6 (1.5)	3.9 (1.2)	-1.56	160	.121	[-.67, .08]	-
Overall compliance	4.5 (3.7)	4.5 (1.1)	.13	236	.894	[-.84, .96]	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

I then addressed the final hypothesis of my third research question by investigating the stability of parolees' accommodation during the follow-up period. To do this, I compared DK and FS parolees on how many different addresses they reported during their first two months in the community. Approximately two-thirds of DK and FS parolees reported living in only one place since release (78% and 74%, respectively). Around one-fifth (19% and 23%) of DK and FS parolees reported two addresses since release, and fewer than 1 in 20 reported living in three or more places since their release from prison (3% and 4%). A chi-

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

square analysis indicated that the number of post-release addresses reported by DK and FS parolees was not significantly different: $X^2(6) = 4.39, p = .624$.

Overall, analyses of community experience provided minimal support for hypotheses. FS parolees were predicted to score significantly higher than DK parolees on avoidance of criminal peers, use of leisure time and health. It was also hypothesised that DK parolees would score significantly higher than FS parolees on accommodation quality, prosocial support, employment and finances. Results of the current study supported only two of these hypotheses: FS parolees were, indeed, rated higher on avoidance of criminal peers (self-rated) and community support (rated by probation officers) than DK parolees. Results therefore failed to support the hypotheses that DK parolees would be more likely to live with family, and the FS parolees would be more likely to live alone. Hypotheses for the current study also predicted FS parolees would have less stable accommodation at two months in the community than DK parolees. This hypothesis was not supported; FS parolees were no more likely to move house in the two months after release from prison than DK parolees.

Two-category release destination and recidivism

Next, I addressed my fourth research question: Does release destination affect rates of recidivism? To do this, I conducted Kaplan-Meier survival analyses to compare recidivism rates of DK and FS parolees on breach of parole conditions, reconviction, violent reconviction, and reimprisonment. I compared proportion of parolees in each recidivism category at both 6 and 12 months post-release by capping follow-up periods at 180 and 365 days. As reported in Table 9, chi-square analyses indicated that no comparison between recidivism rates of DK and FS groups was significant. These analyses indicated that average recidivism rates were not affected by release destination. Results of the current study therefore do not support the hypothesis that FS participants would exhibit significantly lower recidivism rates than DK participants.

Table 9.

Comparison of recidivism rates of DK and FS parolees at 6 and 12 months post-release

Recidivism category	Men		Chi-square (<i>df</i> = 1)	
	DK (<i>n</i> = 197)	FS (<i>n</i> = 85)	<i>X</i> ²	Sig
Breach				
6 months post-release	32%	39%	.94	.333
12 months post-release	40%	48%	1.24	.265
Reconviction				
6 months post-release	39%	36%	.16	.688
12 m months post-release o	61%	61%	.06	.814
Violent reconviction				
6 months post-release	9%	13%	1.19	.276
12 months post-release	19%	22%	.52	.473
Reimprisonment				
6 months post-release	29%	29%	.02	.890
12 months post-release	41%	45%	.35	.556

Two-category release destination: Summary

Overall, DK and FS groups differed on very little, exhibited few differences on release plan quality, experience in the community at two months post-release, and recidivism. DK parolees had significantly better plans for accommodation following release than FS parolees, and poorer plans to manage antisocial associates, but quality of plans for employment, prosocial associates, idiosyncratic risk management, and overall release plan quality were no different between groups. There were also few differences between the community experiences of DK and FS parolees. The only significant differences between DK and FS groups were that FS parolees rated themselves as better at avoiding antisocial associates than DK parolees, and probation officers rated FS parolees as having better community support than DK parolees. No significant differences existed between DK and FS

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

groups as rated by parolees or probation officers on accommodation, employment, personal support, physical or emotional health, or use of leisure time. DK parolees were no more likely than FS parolees to be living where they had planned to live, and DK and FS parolees did not differ in terms of who they were living with at two months in the community.

Taken in aggregate, analyses so far indicated that returning to the devil you know is not inherently any more risky than making a fresh start for reoffending after release from prison. Although several differences between DK and FS groups were significant, these features did not translate to lowered levels of recidivism during parolees' first year in the community. DK and FS groups showed similar rates of reoffending during the follow-up period, and analyses of both 6- and 12-month post-release data revealed extant differences to be non-significant. Given these results, I turned my attention to a more nuanced analysis of the characteristics of parolees making a fresh start, to see whether differences within this group could explain the low number of significant differences between the release plan quality, community experiences and recidivism rates of DK and FS groups.

Release destination: Three categories

I used the three-category release destination coding criteria described in the Method to classify 85 FS parolees into those making a voluntary fresh start (*voluntary FS*) and those making a fresh start under duress (*FS under duress*). The voluntary FS group encompassed 21.6% of parolees (61 participants), and 8.5% of parolees (24 participants) were classified as FS under duress. One hundred and ninety-seven participants (69.9% of the sample) remained categorised as DK. Then, as before, I compared the three groups of DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress on demographic characteristics, release plan quality, community experiences, and recidivism.

Three-category release destination and demographic characteristics

I implemented one-way ANOVAs to compare DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress groups on age at parole, RoC*RoI and VRS score, age at first conviction, number of previous convictions, days on parole, sentence length, and days served. ANOVA results are reported in Table 10. No significant differences were found between the three groups on any risk or criminal history variables examined⁸. It was therefore not necessary to control for any variables in subsequent analyses.

Table 10.

Comparison of demographic and criminal history characteristics of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees

Characteristic	DK <i>M (SD)</i>	FS voluntary <i>M (SD)</i>	FS duress <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	Sig
Age at parole	31.1 (8.1)	33.2 (8.8)	33.9 (11.2)	2.16	.117
RoC*RoI	.74 (.11)	.73 (.14)	.75 (.09)	.10	.906
VRS	52.2 (8.5)	51.8 (9.9)	56.0 (7.9)	2.13	.121
Age at first conviction	16.2 (1.9)	16.0 (2.0)	15.7 (2.0)	1.15	.319
Prior convictions	72.1 (49.3)	73.8 (47.5)	68.6 (52.6)	.35	.702
Days on parole	319.4 (229.2)	313.8 (191.8)	318.3 (225.7)	.01	.986
Sentence length (days)	1306.4 (875.8)	1564.8 (1046.6)	1411.6 (1016.7)	1.76	.174
Days served	1248.9 (1062.1)	1714.3 (1857.1)	1754.9 (2572.1)	3.25	.040*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

Three-category release destination and release plan quality

Next, I revisited my second research question: Does release destination affect the quality of parolees' release plans? I compared DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress groups on RPQ item and total scores, using an ANOVA. Results indicated significant differences

⁸ A significant difference was found between the groups on the Days Served variable; however, this analysis violated Levene's test of homogeneity of variances. When robust tests of equality of means were examined, the difference between groups was no longer significant.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

between the three groups lay with RPQ Accommodation, Prosocial Support, Antisocial Associates and Idiosyncratic Risk Management items, along with RPQ total score (Table 11).

Table 11.

Comparison of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees on RPQ item and total scores

RPQ item	DK <i>M (SD)</i>	FS voluntary <i>M (SD)</i>	FS duress <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i> (<i>df</i> = 2, 279)	Sig
Accommodation	3.28 (.93)	3.08 (.90)	2.71 (.86)	4.70	.010*
Employment	1.76 (1.13)	1.69 (1.12)	1.75 (1.11)	.09	.918
Prosocial Support	2.65 (.82)	2.64 (.82)	2.21 (.93)	3.06	.048*
Antisocial Associates	2.15 (.72)	2.48 (.65)	2.13 (.68)	5.19	.006**
IRM	2.19 (.92)	2.57 (.87)	1.92 (.72)	6.11	.003**
RPQ total score	12.03 (2.89)	12.46 (2.80)	10.71 (2.87)	3.22	.042*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

Post-hoc tests using Bonferroni adjustments⁹ revealed that DK parolees scored significantly higher on Accommodation than FS under duress parolees. The average Accommodation rating of voluntary FS parolees was not significantly different from either the DK or the FS under duress group. DK parolees also scored significantly higher on Prosocial Support than FS under duress parolees. The average Prosocial Support rating in the voluntary FS group was not significantly different from that of the DK group or the FS under duress group.

Voluntary FS parolees scored significantly higher on Antisocial Associates than DK parolees. FS under duress parolees were not rated significantly differently on Antisocial Associates from those in the DK group, or the voluntary FS group. Voluntary FS parolees

⁹ Bonferroni post-hoc tests give a more conservative estimate of group difference than Tukey post-hoc tests. Bonferroni post-hoc tests were used in this case to compensate for multiple comparisons and minimise the likelihood of a Type 1 error.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

significantly higher on Idiosyncratic Risk Management (IRM) than FS under duress parolees. The average IRM rating for the voluntary FS group was significantly higher than that of the DK group. DK and FS under duress groups did not differ from each other on IRM. Voluntary FS parolees scored significantly higher on total RPQ score than FS under duress parolees. The average total RPQ score of DK parolees did not differ significantly from voluntary FS, or FS under duress parolees.

Results of the current study provided good, although not global, support for hypotheses. I predicted DK parolees would have the best quality release plans overall, as well as the best quality release plans for accommodation, employment, and prosocial support. Results indicated that DK parolees did indeed have the highest scores on Accommodation, Employment, and Prosocial Support RPQ items, and for Accommodation and Prosocial Support score (but not for Employment), differences were significant. Post-hoc analyses revealed DK parolees had significantly better plans for accommodation and prosocial support than FS under duress parolees. Ratings of voluntary FS parolees were not significantly different from either other group. Plans for employment did not differentiate between the three groups.

As predicted, voluntary FS parolees exhibited the best quality release plans for Antisocial Associates and IRM. Voluntary FS parolees had plans to manage antisocial associates that were significantly better than those of DK parolees, and plans for idiosyncratic risk management that were significantly better than those of FS under duress parolees. Contrary to hypotheses, voluntary FS parolees also had the best quality release plans overall. The average total RPQ score of voluntary FS parolees was significantly higher than that of FS under duress parolees.

Three-category release destination and community experience

To examine the three release destination groups in the context of research question three (how do post-release experiences differ across release destination?), I compared DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees on experiences in the community, as rated by parolees and their probation officers. As reported in Tables 12 and 13, ANOVA results indicated the only experience in the community on which the three groups differed significantly was parolees' self-reported success at staying away from criminal peers. Bonferroni post-hoc tests revealed voluntary FS parolees rated their success at avoiding criminal peers significantly higher than did DK parolees. Ratings of the FS under duress group on avoidance of criminal peers did not differ significantly from DK or voluntary FS groups.

Table 12.

Comparison of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees' experiences at two months in the community (self-rated)

Community experience	DK <i>M (SD)</i>	Voluntary FS <i>M (SD)</i>	FS under duress <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig
Accommodation	4.88 (1.17)	4.91 (1.14)	4.73 (1.44)	.13	(2, 193)	.882
Personal support	5.13 (1.20)	5.29 (.98)	4.83 (1.47)	.77	(2, 186)	.467
Community supp.	4.68 (1.44)	4.81 (1.26)	3.83 (1.53)	2.27	(2, 116)	.108
Employment	5.00 (1.24)	5.00 (1.06)	5.20 (.84)	.07	(2, 58)	.935
Finances	3.74 (1.52)	3.86 (1.53)	3.33 (.90)	.71	(2, 192)	.492
Physical health	5.20 (1.08)	5.28 (.96)	4.93 (.96)	.62	(2, 187)	.541
Mental health	4.69 (1.22)	4.89 (1.06)	4.64 (.93)	.53	(2, 192)	.591
Use of leisure time	4.69 (1.27)	4.93 (1.15)	4.27 (1.03)	1.72	(2, 193)	.182
Criminal peers	4.63 (1.66)	5.56 (.934)	4.79 (1.53)	6.20	(2, 190)	.002**
Time in community	4.64 (1.34)	4.86 (1.15)	3.93 (1.16)	2.89	(2, 190)	.058

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

The similarity of these results provide minimal support for the hypotheses that DK parolees would score significantly lower than voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees on avoidance of criminal peers, use of leisure time, and community support, and significantly higher on accommodation quality, prosocial support, employment, finances, and health. Only the hypothesis that DK parolees would score significantly lower on avoidance of criminal peers was supported, and only this difference between DK and voluntary FS parolees was significant.

Table 13.

Comparison of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees' experiences at two months in the community (probation officer-rated)

Community experience	DK <i>M (SD)</i>	Voluntary FS <i>M (SD)</i>	FS under duress <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig
Accommodation	4.15 (1.49)	4.48 (1.31)	3.67 (1.35)	2.43	(2, 238)	.090
Personal support	3.45 (1.38)	3.54 (1.45)	3.24 (1.67)	.34	(2, 238)	.715
Community supp.	3.08 (1.42)	3.54 (1.61)	3.60 (1.60)	2.53	(2, 232)	.082
Employment	3.40 (1.42)	3.87 (1.34)	3.24 (1.68)	2.22	(2, 215)	.111
Finances	3.71 (1.46)	4.06 (1.23)	3.90 (1.38)	1.22	(2, 235)	.299
Physical health	5.36 (1.06)	5.45 (.82)	5.33 (1.24)	.16	(2, 209)	.851
Mental health	4.96 (1.09)	4.75 (1.33)	5.10 (1.18)	.80	(2, 209)	.451
Use of leisure time	3.56 (1.53)	4.04 (1.21)	3.43 (1.25)	2.36	(2, 238)	.097
Criminal peers	3.72 (1.53)	4.15 (1.19)	3.75 (1.65)	1.56	(2, 225)	.213
Overall compliance	4.52 (3.74)	4.50 (1.06)	4.35 (1.23)	0.24	(2, 235)	.976

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$.

Three-category release destination and recidivism

Finally, to readdress research question four (does release destination affect recidivism rate?), I compared the three release destination groups on rates of reoffending. Kaplan-Meier chi-square statistics are reported in Table 14. Chi-square analyses revealed differences between DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress groups were significant for violent

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

reconviction at 6 months, and for reimprisonment at 12 months (although overall effect sizes were small; Cramer's $V = .15$ and $.13$, respectively). Follow-up analyses indicated FS under duress parolees reoffended at a greater rate than both DK and voluntary FS parolees.

Table 14.

Comparison of proportion of DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress parolees who reoffended at 6 and 12 months post-release

Recidivism category	DK	Voluntary FS	FS under duress	Chi-square			Effect size	
				X^2	df	Sig	Cramer's V	
				(Tarone- Ware)				
Breach								
6 months	32%	34%	50%	3.40	2	.182	-	
12 months	40%	44%	58%	4.07	2	.131	-	
Reconviction								
6 months	39%	33%	46%	1.92	2	.384	-	
12 months	61%	57%	71%	2.70	2	.259	-	
Violent reconviction								
6 months	9%	8%	25%	7.06	2	.029*	.15	
12 months	19%	18%	33%	4.67	2	.097	-	
Reimprisonment								
6 months	29%	25%	42%	3.60	2	.166	-	
12 months	41%	38%	63%	6.63	2	.036*	.13	

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .005$.

Specifically, a significantly larger proportion of FS under duress parolees than voluntary FS parolees had been convicted of a violent offence by six months ($X^2(1) = 4.47$, $p = .034$), and reimprisoned by 12 months ($X^2(1) = 5.81$, $p = .016$) in the community. Additionally, a significantly larger proportion of FS under duress parolees than DK parolees had been convicted of a violent offence by six months ($X^2(1) = 6.40$, $p = .011$), and

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

reimprisoned by 12 months ($X^2(1) = 5.48, p = .019$) post-release. No differences between recidivism rates of DK and voluntary FS groups were significant, or approaching significance, for either violent reconviction at 6 months ($X^2(1) = .02, p = .898$), or reimprisonment at 12 months ($X^2(1) = .33, p = .564$).

Not all comparisons were significant at $p \leq .05$ level, but the differences in recidivism rate for the three groups shown in Table 12 indicate that a greater proportion of FS under duress parolees than either DK or voluntary FS parolees breached conditions, were reconvicted, and were reimprisoned, during their first year in the community. In most cases, the voluntary FS group performed better than both other groups. Voluntary FS parolees exhibited the lowest recidivism rate of the three groups for reconviction, violent reconviction, and reimprisonment, at both 6 and 12 months post-release. DK parolees showed the lowest rate of breach of parole conditions at both time points. FS under duress parolees exhibited the highest rates of reoffending on all recidivism indices, at both time points. I predicted voluntary FS parolees would reoffend at a lower rate during the first year post-release than would DK or FS under duress parolees. This pattern of results therefore provides tentative support for the hypotheses of the current study.

Kaplan-Meier curves of significant comparisons between DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress group recidivism rates are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Kaplan-Meier charts represent the ‘survival’ over time of members of a given group, represented by a sloping line. ‘Survivors’ are parolees who were at-risk (that is, in the community with the potential to reoffend) for the entire follow-up period, but who did not reoffend. The downward slope of the Kaplan-Meier curve indicates the proportion of individuals who ‘failed’ (or reoffended) during the follow-up period, and how long it took them to do so. All parolees are ‘surviving’ at Day 1; a steeper line represents quicker failures, and a deeper drop (from 100% survival at Day 1) indicates a greater proportion of failures.

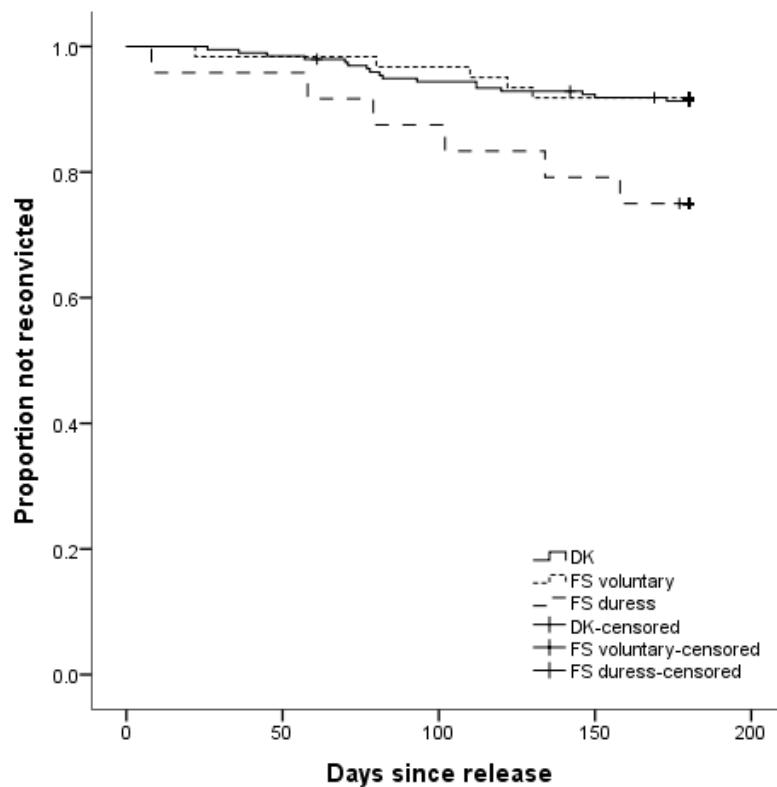


Figure 1. Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing violent reconviction at 6 months post-release for DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress groups

Three-category release destination: Summary

Analyses of two-category release destination revealed few differences overall between the experiences and recidivism rates of the two groups, but analyses of three-category release destination told a different story. Release plan quality differed between the three groups; significant group differences were exhibited on all items except Employment. Voluntary FS parolees had the highest total RPQ scores, as well as the highest scores on Antisocial Associates and Idiosyncratic Risk Management items. DK parolees had the strongest plans for Accommodation and Prosocial Support. FS under duress parolees had consistently poorer quality release plans than voluntary FS or DK parolees. The three groups differed significantly on release plan quality at pre-release, but few factors continued to differ

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

between the three groups in the initial post-release period. At two months in the community, the only significant difference was that voluntary FS parolees rated their avoidance of antisocial associates significantly better than DK parolees.

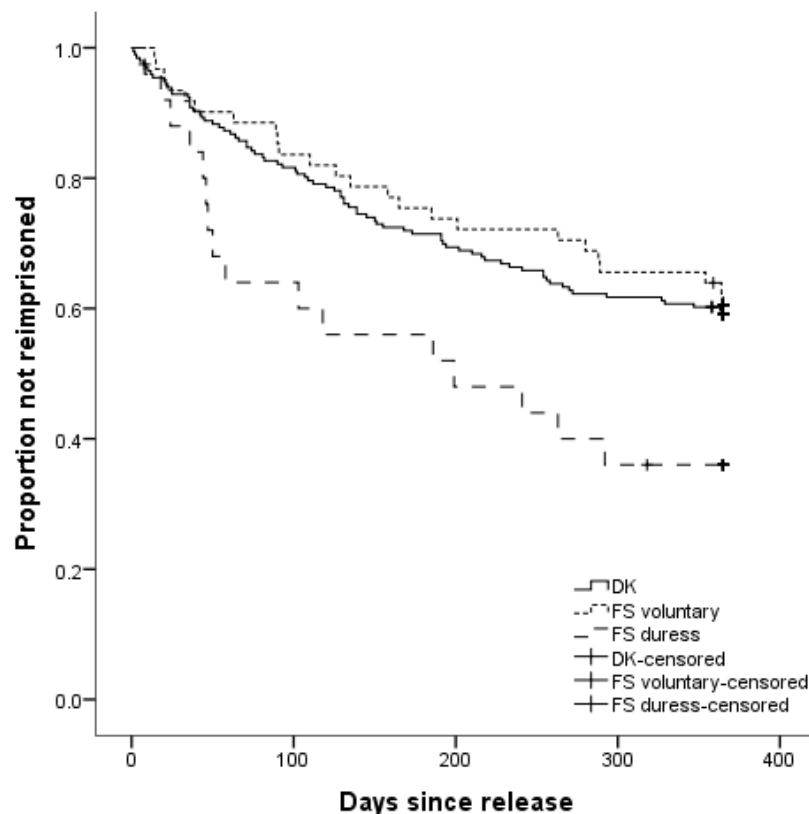


Figure 2. Kaplan-Meier survival curve showing reimprisonment at 12 months post-release for DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress groups

FS under duress parolees exhibited higher recidivism rates on violent reconviction at six months, and reimprisonment at one year, than DK or voluntary FS parolees. Differences were not significant for breach or reconviction, or for violent reconviction at one year or reimprisonment at six months in the community. However, voluntary FS parolees exhibited the lowest recidivism rates of all three groups on reconviction, violent conviction and

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

reimprisonment, and DK parolees showed the lowest rate of breach. FS under duress parolees exhibited the highest recidivism rates of all groups at both time points. Comparisons of DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress parolees on release plan, experience in the community, and recidivism indicated success in the first year post-release may be affected by whether or not a parolee is making a residential relocation voluntarily, or under duress.

Discussion

The focus of the current study was to investigate whether or not moving to a new area following release from prison was associated with lower levels of recidivism than returning to one's old neighbourhood. I divided a sample of high-risk male ex-prisoners into two groups based on their release destination: those returning to a familiar neighbourhood (*devil you know*, or DK), and those moving to a new area (*fresh start*, or FS). I then divided the FS group into those who seemed to be relocating to a new area voluntarily (*voluntary FS*), and those who were relocating but wanted to return to a familiar area instead (*FS under duress*). I compared the two groups of DK and FS, and the three groups of DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress, on demographic and historical variables, release plan quality, experiences in the community, and recidivism (specifically, breach of parole conditions, reconviction, violent reconviction, and reimprisonment). I will first reiterate findings of the current study, then discuss implications, strengths and limitations, and possible directions for future research.

Release destination

Results of this study suggested that recidivism rates are not affected simply by whether an offender returns to his previous location or moves somewhere new after release. Parolees who returned to their old neighbourhood in the first year after release from prison did not offend at a significantly higher rate than parolees who made a fresh start in a new area. This finding did not support the hypothesis that FS parolees would exhibit lower recidivism rates than DK parolees in the first year post-release. The two release destination groups of DK and FS did not differ significantly on any index of recidivism, suggesting that making a fresh start does not reduce the likelihood that a parolee will reoffend.

Beyond recidivism, parolees returning to the devil they know and those making a fresh start had approximately equal quality plans for life after release, with parolees returning to their old neighbourhoods having better plans for accommodation, and parolees making a

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

fresh start having better plans to manage antisocial associates. Participants returning to the devil they know did not differ significantly from those making a fresh start on demographic or criminal history variables except age at parole and days served, but differences were unrelated to recidivism. At two months in the community, FS parolees appeared to be more successful at avoiding criminal peers, and DK parolees seemed to make better use of community support resources. These findings are consistent with hypotheses, but DK and FS parolees did not exhibit hypothesised differences on other measures of community experience at two months post-release, such as leisure time, health, accommodation, prosocial support, employment, or finances. Comparisons of DK and FS parolees on release plan, experience in the community, and recidivism indicate that release destination does not have a strong influence over their success in their first year post-release. Overall, whether an offender returns to their previous neighbourhood or makes a fresh start in a new place is unlikely to affect their success in the community after release from prison.

Although few differences were found between DK and FS, it seems that making a fresh start of one's own volition may lead to more favourable outcomes than returning to one's old neighbourhood, and that making an enforced fresh start might be related to less favourable outcomes. The three groups of DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress did reoffend at different rates in the first year post-release. A significantly larger proportion of parolees making a fresh start under duress had been reconvicted of a violent offence by six months in the community, and had been reimprisoned by one year post-release, than either parolees returning to a familiar neighbourhood or making a voluntary fresh start. Group differences on remaining indices of recidivism were not statistically significant, suggesting the study may have lacked statistical power. This limitation will be discussed further below. However, result patterns suggested that parolees making a fresh start under duress performed

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

more poorly the community than both other groups; a greater proportion of FS under duress parolees reoffended across all recidivism indices.

Comparisons of release plan quality between DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress parolees revealed a similar pattern. Total release plan quality was highest for voluntary FS parolees, as were antisocial associate and high-risk situation plans. DK parolees were highest on accommodation and prosocial support plans. FS under duress parolees' release plans were consistently poorer quality than the plans of both voluntary FS and DK parolees. Despite DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress parolees differing significantly on release plan quality at pre-release, few factors continued to differentiate the three groups in the initial post-release period. At two months in the community, the only significant difference was that voluntary FS parolees rated their avoidance of antisocial associates significantly better than did DK parolees. Recidivism rates differed, despite comparisons of demographic characteristics, criminal history and risk level indicating no group was inherently more high-risk than any other (the only difference being that DK parolees had served less time in prison than both other groups). Results of the current study therefore suggest parolees making a voluntary fresh start might be more successful on parole than parolees returning to their old neighbourhoods or making a fresh start under duress.

Release Plan Quality coding protocol

One goal of this study was to develop a coding scheme to assess offenders' plans for life in the community following release from prison. We developed the Release Plan Quality (RPQ) coding protocol, which incorporated ratings on plans for accommodation, employment, prosocial support, antisocial associates, and idiosyncratic risk management. Quality of offenders' release plans partially predicted rates of recidivism, but only three of eight recidivism indices were predicted by RPQ score. In general, parolees' release plans were not strong. In the current study, the average total Release Plan Quality (RPQ) scale

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

score was just 12. Total RPQ score could range between five and 20, so a score of 12 is less than half (47 percent) of the maximum possible score. This finding is consistent with previous research that also found release plans of released offenders to be generally poor. Dickson and colleagues (2013) found participants' release plan quality was, on average, only 64 percent of the total possible score.

The RPQ coding protocol is short (only five items), and was partially predictive of recidivism over the first year post-release in its current form. RPQ scores of the three release destination groups showed a similar pattern to recidivism rates (with voluntary FS parolees performing best overall, and FS under duress parolees performing worst), indicating that factors measured by the RPQ may be directly related to predictions of recidivism. Although the RPQ was moderately predictive of recidivism in the first year post-release, there were some issues. Inter-rater reliability was particularly low for one item (Prosocial Support), indicating raters struggled to agree on coding criteria for this item. Further, the coding protocol was developed in a rather ad hoc manner, wherein the only validation procedure to which the RPQ was submitted was inter-rater reliability. More rigorous validation procedures could calculate AUC values for the RPQ, and re-test on a population other than that on which it was developed. Future research could refine and validate the RPQ further to see if improvements, especially in coding agreement on the Prosocial Support item, can improve its predictive ability. In practice, if fully validated, the RPQ coding protocol could be a useful tool for easy, quick assessment of release plans and prediction of recidivism.

Implications

Results of this study suggest it is not whether parolees return to their old neighbourhoods or make a fresh start in a new area that might affect their likelihood of recidivism, but rather whether they are relocating voluntarily or under duress. Parolees making a fresh start under duress exhibited considerably (although not significantly) greater

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

recidivism rates across all indices. Further, it was not the case that parolees compelled to move to a new area simply breached their parole conditions, neglecting to fulfil requirements, but were otherwise compliant with the law. Being compelled to move to a new area against one's will may lead to greater rates of recidivism than returning to a familiar location. Conversely, making a fresh start voluntarily may lead to lower recidivism rates than returning to one's old neighbourhood.

Moving to a new neighbourhood to make a voluntary fresh start may lower an offender's risk of reoffending, compared to returning to a familiar location. These results show tentative support for prior research, which has found that residential relocation after release from prison can lead to lower offending rates (Kirk, 2009, 2012; Sharkey & Sampson, 2010). Results of the current study also suggest being compelled to make a fresh start under duress may leave offenders at a higher risk of recidivism than returning to an old neighbourhood. This is consistent with research on the effects of enforced residential restrictions for sex offenders, which suggests being compelled to make a fresh start under duress may result in unfavourable outcomes and elevated recidivism rates (Burchfield, 2011; Nobles et al., 2012; Willis, 2010).

Returning to one's old neighbourhood could be conceptualised as a high-risk, but also high-protective factor situation, whereas moving somewhere new could be thought of as low-risk but low-protective factor. In the context of returning to a familiar area, protective factors might include a supportive family, a job, and stable accommodation. The current study suggests offenders who strongly prefer to return to their pre-prison neighbourhood might be inappropriate candidates for residential relocation, and that an enforced relocation may result in elevated reoffending rates and reduced success in the community. Yet, an offender might have to move somewhere new because their accommodation plans were deemed inappropriate by a criminal justice or welfare agency. Parolees in the current study had

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

proposed accommodation rejected because of proximity to victims or known criminal associates, or because it would involve a volatile parolee cohabitating with vulnerable family members (for example, young children). Agencies may also recommend a persistent offender relocates after release if they have lived in the same area for a long period of time, because a prolific offender is likely to have strong criminal connections and entrenched antisocial habits inextricably tied to the location. Relocating to a new area might help that offender break some of those criminal ties.

A voluntary residential relocation could play a major role in the desistance journey of a persistent offender. This makes sense; a vast array of experiences and influences may have contributed to the offender's criminal past, and it seems likely that multiple influences acting in concert may best support a decrease in offending behaviour. An offender could gain a clutch of prosocial friends, a great job and a supportive new girlfriend, but if his personal commitment to a prosocial lifestyle is weak, and his commitment to his gang associates is strong, it should not be surprising if his criminal behaviour remains prolific (Serin & Lloyd, 2009). Similarly, an offender can hardly expect his internal commitment to a new, crime-free life to carry him through his journey to desistance if his environment, relationships, and risk-management strategies remain unchanged. Kirk warned that "residential change is an important step in reducing recidivism, but it is not the only step" (2012, p. 352). A combination of environment and personal factors may best support a move towards desistance.

Offenders in the current study may have sought to avoid the bad habits and criminal associations formed in their previous neighbourhood, and for this reason may have wanted to move to a new location. Some offenders may have recognised the potential of making a fresh start to support their desistance journey. In the current study, participants categorised as DK might have actually wanted to make a fresh start, but may have been compelled returned to

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

their old neighbourhood nonetheless. Such parolees may constitute a fourth subgroup: *DK under duress*. However, criminal justice agencies might have vetoed the proposed release addresses of DK under duress parolees, perhaps because they had no social support in the area, and may have instead recommended a return to the area in which the offender had the most social support. Anecdotally, we did find support for a DK under duress subgroup in the file data. Unfortunately, time constraints prevented us from recoding DK parolees into voluntary and under duress groups. This four-category release destination paradigm is a possible focus for a prospective study.

So if release plan and experiences at two months in the community fail to strongly influence recidivism behaviour, what might? Differences might exist between the three groups on other factors relating to recidivism. For example, a history of domestic violence could be the reason why an offender was not released back to their previous home, even though they may have wanted to return there, and might also increase an offender's risk of offending after release. Future research could investigate whether parolees making a FS under duress were more likely than the other two groups to be perpetrators of domestic violence.

The factor most important for recidivism rate could be the level of motivation involved in release destination after release from prison, rather than the location itself. Under duress parolees, whether returning to their old neighbourhood or moving somewhere new, may exhibit greater recidivism rates than voluntary subgroups. Effects of enforced versus voluntary release destinations could be explored by assessing how much parolees want to return to their old neighbourhood or move to a new town, and comparing the recidivism outcomes of participants whose accommodation plans are voluntary, and those whose are under duress. Future research could explicitly investigate whether release destination plans

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

are voluntary or under duress, both for offenders making a fresh start in a new location, and for those going back home.

Another possibility is that undetected differences in dynamic risk variables may have led to the higher rates of reoffending observed in the FS under duress group. Thus, the higher rates of reoffending exhibited by FS under duress participants could, in fact, be attributable not to offenders' levels of motivation to make a fresh start or remain in their old neighbourhood, but rather to pre-existing but unquantified dynamic risk variables. These variables may have been relatively inaccessible from the information sources used in the current study, and may have related to such dynamic risk factors as criminal associates, alcohol and drug problems and mental health issues. Therefore, FS under duress participants may have been more likely to suffer from substance abuse issues or mental illnesses, or been more firmly entrenched in gang situations, and these factors, rather than their motivation to make a 'fresh start' or not, may have been the main drivers in their persistence regarding criminal behaviour.

Some participants did not consent to be interviewed at two months post-release and, of those who did, not all answered every question. This meant that some data were missing from analyses, and we do not know how non-responding parolees were faring in the community. It may be, for instance, that those participants who failed to consent to be interviewed at two months post-release were those who were struggling the most. Non-responders may have been more likely to have poor accommodation and negative experiences in the community. The participants most settled in their release location may have also been those most likely to consent to be interviewed after release. Shinkfield and Graffam (2009) noted that the high stability of accommodation found in their study may have been a result of an attrition bias, whereby participants with stable accommodation were more easily located for the purposes of subsequent questionnaires. The current study may also have had this

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

issue, where parolees with unstable housing and poor community experiences may be underrepresented in results, artificially making the sample's average scores on indices of accommodation and experiences in the community appear more favourable. However, recidivism data were available for all participants, as were demographic information, release plan quality data, and probation officers' ratings of parolee experience.

The lack of differences between probation officers' ratings of DK, voluntary FS, and FS under duress parolees' experiences in the community suggest that, in fact, there may not be a large difference between the accommodation and experiences of those who did and did not respond to questions about life at two months post-release. Further, less than 5 percent of our sample had no accommodation available at pre-release, and only 1 percent reported having no fixed address at two months post-release. Further, parolees' accommodation ratings were relatively high, both at pre-release and at two months in the community. These results are cheering, and indicate that although going back to one's old neighbourhood may furnish a parolee with a stronger social infrastructure, including positive social influences and people to stay with, it is not necessarily the case that all alternative options available to offenders making a fresh start were unsatisfactory. However, future research could further investigate possible attrition biases by comparing parolees who failed to provide two-month interview data and those who did provide such information.

The present study indicates that data collected from high-risk violent offenders may reveal the same patterns as would be expected based on research with released sex offenders. Sex offenders and high-risk violent offenders are not analogous; these two groups are distinct from each other in risk level and recidivism rate. Despite public and professional concerns about the harm caused by sexual offences, sex offenders tend to be relatively low risk (Willis & Grace, 2008; 2009). Reconviction for sexual offences commonly has a low base-rate, and does not occur as quickly as general or violent reoffending. Hood, Shute, Feilzer and Wilcox

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

(2002) reported a sexual recidivism rate of just 7 percent over a four-year follow-up period. Only 31 percent of Hood et al.'s sample had been reconvicted over six years, and only 18 percent had been reimprisoned. Future research could repeat the current paradigm with released sex offenders, to see whether making a non-voluntary residential relocation (as required by residential restrictions, for example) has a detrimental effect on the quality of released sex offenders' release plans, experiences in the community, and rates of recidivism.

Other than recidivism rate, differences between the three release destination groups related mainly to criminal peers. Voluntary fresh start parolees rated themselves as better at avoiding antisocial associates in the community than both other groups. Prior to release, voluntary fresh start parolees also had better release plans to manage antisocial peers. These findings are consistent with prior findings that antisocial associates can contribute to greater engagement in criminal behaviour (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009; Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999; Warr, 1993).

Warr (1998) investigated changing patterns of peer relations as the mechanism through which marriage reduces recidivism, and found evidence suggesting that marriage led to lower exposure to delinquent peers, which in turn led to lower rates of criminal behaviour. Marital status was significantly related to number of delinquent friends, with married participants reporting fewer friends who had committed offences (including drug use, assault and burglary) than unmarried participants. After controlling for exposure to delinquent peers, Warr found that the association between marriage and delinquent behaviour was no longer significant. Warr (1993; 1998) argued that antisocial peers are the single most important factor in the acquisition and maintenance of criminal behaviour.

Even the best release plans created by offenders preparing for release are likely to be of relatively poor quality. Dickson et al. (2013) commented that the initial quality of offenders' release plans is variable; some plans may require a large amount of staff input to

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

be satisfactory, some may be acceptable from the start, some may begin inadequate and remain that way, despite efforts of rehabilitative workers. If an offender had no family available, there were several other options for making a fresh start. Released offenders might be housed at unstructured supported accommodation at hostels or night shelters. Churches and other not-for-profit organisations offer accommodation in facilities that also run training courses for offenders to learn basic living skills such as cooking and budgeting.

Results of the current study emphasise the importance of re-entry success. The re-entry phase following release from prison is an important feature of the desistance process. Göbbels and colleagues (2012) provide a helpful way of conceptualising re-entry as part of their Integrated Theory of Desistance from Sex Offending, or ITDSO. The first two phases are ‘decisive momentum’ (where experiences lead an offender to become dissatisfied with crime and to begin to consider cessation of offending behaviour), and ‘rehabilitation’ (where an offender might start to reconstruct their sense of self and build a new, prosocial new potential persona). The third phase of the ITDSO, ‘re-entry’, relates to a period of managing challenges and barriers to successfully re-join the community. The ITDSO proposes that a successful re-entry phase permits an offender a chance to move to the next and final stage: normalcy. In the ‘normalcy’ phase, desistance from crime is maintained as one’s usual behaviour. Investigation of factors that increase an offender’s likelihood of moving from re-entry to normalcy should be a priority for desistance research.

One mechanism that could explain why parolees making a fresh start under duress perform poorly in the community after re-entry is the phenomenon of reactance. “Reactance” refers to an actor’s tendency to respond to a perceived threat to his or her freedom of action with a strong sense of resistance (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Forcing a given outcome upon an individual may result in that outcome becoming less attractive to that individual, and an alternative but unavailable outcome gaining in appeal. The more easily

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

attainable an option is, the less appealing it becomes. If an actor feels that the freedom to choose has been denied him or her, he or she will fight to reassert that freedom, and place more value on the unavailable choice. In the current study, parolees categorised as ‘fresh start under duress’ may have experienced stronger reactance responses than those making a voluntary fresh start, wherein FS under duress individuals resist the implementation of release plans that would send them to a new location. Conversely, parolees making a fresh start voluntarily may not have perceived their new location as a threat to freedom to the same extent as did parolees with higher reactance.

Some commentators have proposed that goal orientation is important for successful reintegration into the community after release from prison. Research has suggested that framing a task as an approach goal increases the likelihood of success and positive appraisal of one’s performance, whereas avoidance goals reduce that likelihood. Further, the detrimental effects may be stronger for those who were particularly unsuccessful (Coats, Janoff-Bulman, & Alpert, 1996). Desistance, or avoiding criminal involvement after release from prison could be viewed an avoidance goal. Criminal risk assessment typically focuses on identifying offenders’ deficits (e.g. deviant sexual arousal, poor problem-solving skills; Scoones et al., 2012; Ward & Marshall, 2007). But strengths-based approaches to rehabilitation “assert that individuals’ strengths as well as environmental factors are pivotal in the rehabilitation process” (Scoones et al., 2012, p. 223).

Results of this study suggest that approach versus avoidance goals might not have a strong effect on plan success. I found a pattern wherein parolees making a voluntary fresh start had better release plans, including plans to manage antisocial associates and risk factors, than parolees returning to the devil they know. Management of antisocial peers and personal risk factors could be termed avoidance goals, as they focus on avoidance of criminal peers, offending, and breaching parole conditions. Conversely, parolees returning to the devil they

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

know had better plans for accommodation, employment, and prosocial support than those making a voluntary fresh start. These variables could be reframed as approach goals, as they relate to gaining a house, a job, and friends. Therefore, DK parolees could be characterised by having stronger approach goals, and voluntary FS parolees by having stronger avoidance goals. FS under duress parolees had poor quality release plans across all measures, and could be categorised by having both weak approach goals and weak avoidance goals, or as having a general dearth of any goals at all.

The current results indicate a focus on avoidance goals could be just as effective as a focus on approach motivation in reducing recidivism. Previous research supports this possibility. Dickson and Polaschek (2014) found, after controlling for release plan quality, approach goal-oriented release plans were more strongly related to reconviction than avoidance goal-oriented release plans (plan valence was not differentially predictive of reimprisonment). Avoidance goal-focused release plans could be just as strongly related to lower levels of recidivism than approach goal-focused release plans, and release plans with a low focus on both approach and avoidance goals could be least effective of all. It may not be the valence of release plan goals that influences recidivism post-release, but the sheer existence of reasonable plans in at least some aspects of life. Future research could further investigate the effects of release plan valence on recidivism.

Strengths and limitations

One of the strengths of this study is the multitude of data sources, collected at several points in time. Data sources included demographic and historical information, records from participants' time in prison, self-report interview data (collected before and after re-entry into the community), and official recidivism statistics. Studies using primarily retrospective data are reliant on participants' memories to provide accurate observations of something that was happening at a previous moment. However, people do not always recall thoughts and feelings

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

accurately so long after the fact, and participants may report feelings and awareness mistakenly (Bottoms et al., 2004).

In the current study, pre-release interviews were conducted close to parolees' release dates, so could provide more up-to-date information (especially plans concerning accommodation, employment, and rehabilitation programmes) than existing file data. Interviews were conducted at two separate occasions, and referred to relatively recent experiences, so did not rely heavily on the accuracy of offenders' recollections of distant time points. Further, interviews were administered by Victoria University research assistants, so offenders may have been comfortable disclosing information and attitudes that they might not have shared with Prison or Probation staff (for example, their release address). Indeed, some parolees stated this was the case. The current research paradigm may therefore be more reliable and accurate than a purely retrospective study design.

Despite the breadth of data utilised in the current study, the only recidivism index used was a series of dichotomous measures of whether parolees had been reconvicted or breached. This means that the only information collected about reoffending behaviour during the first year post-release was a 'yes/no' measure for each of the four outcomes. The absence of a new conviction does not necessarily signal that an offender has permanently desisted, and may instead represent a "crime-free lull while a committed offender regroups and plans a serious crime" (McNeill et al., 2012, p. 41). Focusing only on legally defined criminal behaviour means decreases in offence seriousness and offence-related behaviours are obscured from scrutiny (Gadd & Farrall, 2004; Stouthamer-Loeber, Wei, Loeber, & Masten, 2004).

Identifying an individual's pattern of offending could help to elucidate their criminal trajectory, and enable criminal justice agencies to intervene most effectively. Using indices able to detect decreases in offending seriousness and rate, along with official measures of

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

recidivism, could find “indicators of behaviours that may reflect positive change and positive predictors” (Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2004, p. 899). Future research could investigate the effects of voluntary and involuntary release destinations on frequency of reoffending, and seriousness compared to previous offences, as well as ‘recidivism: yes/no’.

Few group differences reached statistical significance, which may have been the result of low statistical power due, in part, to uneven group sizes. DK, voluntary FS and FS under duress groups were distinctly unbalanced, with the DK group containing 197 men, and the FS under duress group containing only 24. The three release destination groups did show significant differences on release plan quality, and on two recidivism indices (violent reconviction and reimprisonment). However, differences in group size may mean analyses lacked the statistical power needed to identify differences in recidivism rate between the three groups. Future research could repeat analyses with larger, more even group sizes to see whether current result patterns continue and reach statistical significance.

A further limitation of my study is that no indices of neighbourhood characteristics were included. Neighbourhood factors can affect both self-reported and official rates of criminal behaviour (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005). Disadvantaged release neighbourhoods have been associated with higher recidivism rates than more affluent release neighbourhoods, even after controlling for individual demographic and criminal history factors (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). Socioeconomic and crime-related neighbourhood characteristics may have created a confound within the current paradigm. It may be that parolees making a voluntary fresh start may have relocated to relatively more advantaged areas, whereas parolees returning to the devil they know could have returned to less favourable neighbourhoods with higher overall rates of crime and disadvantage. The release destinations of parolees making a fresh start under duress may have been less favourable still. Future research could investigate neighbourhood characteristics, to see

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

whether differences between origin and destination neighbourhood disadvantage is related to recidivism rates for released offenders making a fresh start, either voluntarily or under duress.

Conclusions

Re-entry and reintegration into the community after release from prison is a difficult time in an offender's life. High-risk, violent offenders might report a desire to desist from criminal activity, but might revert to criminal ways before any skills they have learnt in the hopes of 'going straight' can become second nature. Moving away from one's home could enable released offenders to break antisocial ties and habits, and support them in lowering their reoffending rates. Kirk observed that "knifing off through residential change, then, may be a crucial first step in a sequence of turning points that characterise the process of desistance from crime" (Kirk, 2012, p. 353). Residential relocation following release from prison could help offenders move towards a prosocial life.

Results of the current study lend tentative support for the notion that moving to an unfamiliar area may support released offenders as they endeavour to desist from crime, but suggest that residential relocation alone may not be the most important factor in an ex-prisoner's release destination. Results were in the hypothesised direction, but not all differences were significant. Analyses indicated that recidivism behaviour was not affected purely by release destination, but that whether an offender is relocating voluntarily or under duress could play a major role in the offending behaviour of that individual. A voluntary fresh start may help offenders remain crime-free, but those making a fresh start, but doing so under duress, may be more likely to reoffend.

In order to effectively rehabilitate offenders, we need to be able to understand the factors acting on the offender in the transition period between criminal behaviour (the caterpillar), and desistance (the butterfly); or "what lies within the cocoon" (Serin & Lloyd, 2009, p. 348). The current study provides findings that could contribute to reductions in

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

reoffending rates and help to close the “revolving door” of prison (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 1). Future research should investigate more specifically the phenomenon of re-entry as it relates to release destination to determine the effects of voluntary and involuntary residential relocation on reoffending behaviour.

A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

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A FRESH START AFTER RELEASE OR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW?

Appendix

Release Plan Quality coding protocol

Accommodation:

1 =	Homeless, banned from shelters/supported living, no options
2 =	Unstructured supported accommodation, shelter, hostel Accommodation vetoed by government agency
3 =	Structured supported accommodation, Bridge Programme, rehabilitation programme Living with individual(s) not identified as prosocial supports
4 =	Living with family/individual(s) identified as prosocial supports

Employment:

1 =	Not working upon release (regardless of reason)
2 =	Unconfirmed employment (may be more than one option, but <u>must</u> be upon release) Confirmed plans to study immediately following release
3 =	Has a job but not going to enjoy it, not motivated, will not provide sufficient income
4 =	Confirmed employment upon release. Position will displace offender's time, provide sufficient income, and offender is motivated to undertake the work

Prosocial support:

1 =	No social support in offender's life, some estranged family
2 =	Prosocial support limited in range AND influence Support available but not necessarily anti-criminal Established contact with charity workers and/or CJS professionals who will continue to support offender
3 =	Prosocial support limited in range OR influence (unable to list three sources of support)
4 =	A number of sources of strong personal support from those with good a relationship with offender, and evidence of ability to influence offender

Antisocial associates:

1 =	Active gang involvement, no plans to manage
2 =	Has ceased active gang involvement, likely to have contact with gang members/antisocial associates Friends/family still in gang, minimal plans to manage Vague on topic, likely to have some contact with pro-criminal associates
3 =	Explicit intention not to socialise with gang members/co-offenders, likely to still socialise with antisocial peers
4 =	Can generalise 'antisocial associates' beyond current peer group. Plans to avoid antisocial individuals in general and to seek new prosocial peer group

Idiosyncratic Risk Management:

1 =	No plans to manage his particular risks. Nothing in situation has changed, no application of release plan/relapse prevention strategies
2 =	Plans to manage mostly weak/non-existent
3 =	Some strong plans to manage, others weak/non-existent
4 =	Rehabilitation/maintenance programme/s in place or already completed, acknowledges and has management plans for potential high-risk situations.