Housing Needs of Adults Post-Incarceration in Edmonton

FINAL Report

A Research Project by:

The Mustard Seed Edmonton and
The University of Alberta

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Mustard Seed is a humanitarian organization that delivers basic services, housing, and employment programs to those in need and partners with the community to address the root causes of poverty. As the organization develops and expands its housing programs it recognizes that one of its strengths is the ability and experience to work with the correctional population. This research study is an investigation into the housing status and plans of adults being discharged from correctional facilities into the Edmonton area. Headed by the Mustard Seed, the project was conducted in collaboration with researchers from the University of Alberta.

Aside from one recent study conducted by the John Howard Society in Toronto it appears that very little research has been conducted on this topic in the Canadian context and virtually none has been done in Edmonton. This exploratory study aims to address a gap in the research on the challenges faced by incarcerated populations and their post-incarceration housing status in Edmonton and surrounding area.

Context

There are five federal institutions (Edmonton Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women, Stan Daniels, Buffalo Sage, Grierson) in Edmonton, another a federal institution that releases into Edmonton (Bowden Institution), a Remand Centre, and a Provincial Centre in a suburb near Edmonton. The consequence of being home to or near to these institutions is a high number of offenders settling in the Edmonton area post-incarceration. The implications for housing-related issues and challenges to reintegration are significant. Although research specific to the Edmonton area is lacking other research suggests that the first 90 days after release is the critical period that can 'make or break' the reintegration effort (Oregon Re-entry, 2011). Numerous studies acknowledge the link between incarceration, reintegration, and homelessness. In a recent study of homelessness and incarceration among Aboriginal women in Canada, Walsh et al. (2012) pointed out that Aboriginal women who are incarcerated are at an increased risk to be homeless and those who are homeless are at an increased risk for being incarcerated. A 2004 study in the United Kingdom acknowledged that the risk of re-offending is linked to a former prisoner's housing situation and that accommodation issues can increase the likelihood of reoffending by up to 20% (Home Office, 2004a, p. 9, from Harding & Harding, 2006).

In Canada, the link between incarceration and homelessness has been most fully described by a recent Toronto study. According to *Homeless and Jailed: Jailed and Homeless,* a study conducted by the John Howard Society of Toronto (2010) being homeless increases the likelihood of ending up in jail, while imprisonment increases the risk of homelessness. As Padgett et al. (2006) have argued, a 'housing first' approach to addressing the needs of those dealing with homelessness, mental illness, and drug addiction – common challenges to many leaving prison – is much more successful in dealing with mental illness and drug addiction issues than standard models of care.

Research Questions

The research questions informing this project are:

1. What is the housing status of adults transitioning from correctional facilities into the Greater Edmonton Area into the community?
2. Do releases from correctional facilities impact the homeless count in the Greater Edmonton area?
3. Does this demographic require additional support around issues pertaining to housing?

Methodology

A total of 93 interviews were conducted at the Edmonton Remand Centre and the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre. Of the 93 participants, 12 were female and 81 were male. Of the 93 participants, 44 (47%) self-identified as Aboriginal, 36 (39%) identified as white, 10 (11%) identified as belonging to other ethnic groups (Jamaican, Somali, etc.) and three (3%) participants did not specify. Interviews lasted between two and five minutes and consisted of a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions recorded demographic information (age, gender, self-identified ethnicity, length of time incarcerated). Open-ended question probed participants to describe in their own words the living arrangements/accommodation plans in place following release from their current institution and challenges to reintegration they anticipated facing. The findings are cautiously reported since this is not a representative sample.

Significant Findings

Several key findings emerged from this exploratory descriptive study. They include the following:

- A series of categories which captured the diversity in housing-related issues emerged from the data. “Homeless” refers to participants with no place to stay (even temporarily) upon release. “Unstably housed” refers to housing situations described as very temporary but with friends, family or associates, similar to “couch surfing”. “Stably housed” participants have their own house or shared house to return to upon release. In most cases, the participants would be returning to the same housing situation they had prior to incarceration.
- Of the participants 17 (18%) described their post-incarceration housing expectations as “homeless”, 35 (38%) as “unstably housed” and 41 (44%) as “housed”.
- Participants noted a number of challenges to reintegration. These include: addictions, social ties, housing, employment, legal, other needs (which included money, clothing, transportation and health).

Implications

The small sample size of the current study, including the inability to access federal offender populations as originally intended, makes more detailed analyses untenable. Based on the findings of this exploratory study we suggest areas for future research which include:

- A focus on the potential for age, gender, and ethnicity of offender to impact on reintegration and housing related needs in unique ways, with implications for policy, programs, and service provision.
- A more in-depth look at the challenges faced by offenders post-incarceration and how these challenges interact with housing-related issues.
- Future research would do well to investigate the prevalence and impact of mental health concerns as they impact housing and reintegration among offenders.
- The most successful reintegration approaches will likely combine policies and programs that work to address the multiple and varied needs and characteristics of offender populations, giving primacy to housing-related needs.

I. Introduction

As has recently been pointed out by Edmonton's mayor, Edmonton is home to a significant number of Canada's prisons (Kent, 2011). In addition to the five federal institutions pointed out by Mayor Mandel (Edmonton Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women, Stan Daniels, Buffalo Sage, Grierson), there is also a federal institution that releases into Edmonton (Bowden Institution), a Remand Centre, and a Provincial Centre in a suburb near Edmonton.

The high numbers of offenders leaving these prisons and settling in the Edmonton area should be of interest to those interested in homelessness and housing issues in Edmonton. Research indicates that reintegration is a difficult period for men and women transitioning from incarceration to the community (Vischer and Travis, 2003; Oregon Re-Entry, 2011), and it is critical to consider the impact these releases have on resources and services within our community and on the rates of homelessness in our city (John Howard Society, 2010). However, despite what may seem to be an obvious relationship – release of offenders into the community and housing-related issues - to date research has not been conducted on the relationship between incarceration and homelessness within Edmonton or Alberta more generally.
While the particular question of the relationship between incarceration and homelessness in Edmonton has not been explored, the relationship between incarceration, offender reintegration, and homelessness more generally has been studied from a number of angles.

Visher and Travis (2003) highlight that "most of the existing research on prisoners' lives after release focuses solely on recidivism and ignores the reality that recidivism is directly affected by post-prison reintegration and adjustment" (p. 89). Some research on the topic suggests that the first 90 days after release is the critical period that can 'make or break' the reintegration effort (Oregon Re-entry, 2011). Difficulties experienced during this period (and afterward as well) contribute to what Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel (2004) refer to as the "re-entry problem" or the barriers associated with successful reintegration.

Statistics from Canada and elsewhere confirm the reality of this 're-entry problem'. Statistics from the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) indicate that approximately one-fifth of federally sentenced inmates experience a parole violation within the first year of release (Correctional Service of Canada, 2009) though this does not necessarily mean a return to prison. Studies from the United States indicate that, of the nearly 700,000 men and women released from prison to communities, two-thirds are arrested within three years and one-half of this demographic is returned to prison for parole violations or new crimes (Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008, p 1; Visher and Travis, 2003). Statistics are similar in the United Kingdom, where it is reported that 47.3% of adults are reconvicted within one year of being released; for those serving a sentence of less than 12 months, this number increases to 56.8% (Prison Reform Trust, 2012, p. 26).

II. Context

It is difficult to get a complete picture of the challenges facing those leaving prison; a recent Australian study concluded that the effects of imprisonment are "complex" and "wide-ranging" for ex-prisoners and their families, making a healthy lifestyle and successful reintegration difficult to achieve (Shinkfield and Graffam, 2009). In a 2008 American study, nearly all returning prisoners, eight in ten men and nine in ten women, had pre-existing chronic health conditions requiring treatment or management, including physical health conditions, mental illness, and substance abuse (Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008, p. 1). Prisoners returning to the community with these health concerns experience distinct challenges related to finding housing, obtaining employment, facilitating a reconnection with family members, abstaining from substance use, committing crime, and ultimately avoiding a return to prison (Mallik-Kane & Visher 2008, p.1). Richie similarly describes the diverse needs of women returning from prison to their communities: treatment for substances abuse problems, health care, mental health issues; resources to address violence prevention and post-traumatic stress disorder; resources to address education and employment; safe housing; child advocacy and family reunification (Richie, 2001). Further, studies indicate that the neighbourhoods that many parolees move to upon release have high rates of social disorganization, poor economic wellbeing, family dysfunction, mental and physical illness, political alienation, and homelessness, all of which make the transition from prison to community more challenging (Petersilia, 2001). The growing numbers of inmates with serious mental illness pose a particular problem for reintegration, with little adequate reintegration planning or support for this segment of the prison population (Lurigio, 2001).

The costs of unsuccessful reintegration to society are high. Canada's Ministry of Public Safety estimates that it costs $110,786 per year to incarcerate a male inmate for one year, and $211,093 for a female, and approximately $29,537 per year to supervise an individual in the community (Ministry of Public Safety, 2011). While exact statistics are not known, it can be assumed that these costs are only slightly lower in the provincial system. These costs are additional to the recognized social costs of unsuccessful reintegration and subsequent incarceration, including negative effects on the well-being and cohesion of families and communities, neighbourhood safety, economic security, and mental and physical health (Petersilia, 2001; Maruna, Immarigeon and LeBel, 2004).

Supporting successful transitions from prison to the wider community is clearly an important yet challenging task. Central to this task is addressing issues of housing and homelessness.

Numerous studies acknowledge the link between incarceration, reintegration, and homelessness. Many have noted the experience of incarceration among those who are homeless. For example, Petersilia has noted that according to an American census, 25% of America's 230,000 homeless had served prison sentences (Petersilia, 2001), while in a recent study of homelessness and incarceration among Aboriginal women in Canada, Walsh et al. (2012) have pointed out that Aboriginal women who are incarcerated are at an increased risk to be homeless and those who are homeless are at an increased risk for being incarcerated. The link between unsuccessful reintegration and housing has also been made, most notably by the UK government; a 2004 study acknowledged that the risk of re-offending is linked to a former prisoner's housing situation and that accommodation issues can increase the likelihood of reoffending by up to 20% (Home Office, 2004a, p. 9, from Harding & Harding, 2006). In a study by the UK's Prison Reform Trust, 97% of inmates expressed a desire to stop re-offending, but 60% of those

inmates stated that 'having a place to live' would be important in stopping them from re-offending in the future (Prison Reform Trust, 2012, p. 26).

In Canada, the link between incarceration and homelessness has been most fully described by a recent Toronto study. According to *Homeless and Jailed: Jailed and Homeless,* a study conducted by the John Howard Society of Toronto (2010) being homeless increases the likelihood of ending up in jail, while imprisonment increases the risk of homelessness. The result is a situation in which some men and women are caught up in the system, repeatedly admitted and discharged rather than remaining in the community upon release from custody (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010). The researchers conducted interviews with 363 sentenced adult males who had spent a minimum of five consecutive nights in custody and were within days of scheduled release (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010). Their findings indicate that 22.9 % of participants were homeless prior to incarceration: either completely homeless or unstably housed (couch surfing[1], staying in a shelter, etc.). In reviewing the participants' housing plans it was discovered that upon release their rate of homelessness would increase by 40%; half would return to their pre-custody housing situation (couch surfing, shelters, etc.) and of those homeless prior to incarceration, 85.5% anticipated being homeless again on discharge (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010). Of those housed prior to incarceration, 16.4% anticipated being homeless upon release (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010).

Addressing the housing situation described by the *Homeless and Jailed: Jailed and Homeless* study may also do much to confront many of the other challenges experienced by those leaving the prison system. As Padgett et al. have argued, a 'housing first' approach to addressing the needs of those dealing with homelessness, mental illness, and drug addiction – common challenges to many leaving prison – is much more successful in dealing with mental illness and drug addiction issues than standard models of care (Padgett, Gulcur, and Tsemberis, 2006).

These studies confirm what many have already suspected: there appears to be a 'revolving door' between correctional institutions and the street. Whether one wants to confront the 're-entry' problem among inmates in Edmonton or address homelessness in the city, it will be important to have an understanding of the housing situation of inmates transitioning into the Edmonton area. The present study is an initial step in this direction. Broadly speaking, the objectives of the current study are to explore the relationship between the housing situation and needs of adult post-incarceration in the Edmonton Area, to identify areas where support for this population may be required, and to suggest possible avenues for future research on the topic. More specifically, the research questions informing this project are: 1) What is the housing status of adults transitioning from correctional facilities into the Greater Edmonton Area into the community? 2) Do releases from correctional facilities impact the homeless count in the Greater Edmonton area? 3) Does this demographic require additional support around issues pertaining to housing?

[1] Couch surfing refers to a practice of temporarily staying with friends, relatives, family and sometimes with complete strangers. This arrangement would not necessarily be for any agreed upon time period which creates a level of instability.

III. Methodology

Our research questions are based largely on the absence of relevant research exploring the relationship between housing and post-incarceration experiences of adults in the Edmonton Area and the need to address this gap in research (and practice/policy). As we alluded to at the outset of this report, Edmonton has the most correctional institutions per capita in Canada. Since offenders are typically released into the community in which they were last incarcerated, this means a significant number of offenders are regularly released into the Edmonton area. As a result there is a need for more research into the topic of homelessness and its impact on reintegration post-incarceration. Our objective was to gain insight into the reintegration experience and its relationship with homelessness in Edmonton with the ultimate goal of increasing understanding surrounding the need for housing-related programs and resources that might facilitate reintegration post-incarceration. Offenders (including participants in this research project) working to reintegrate into the community post-incarceration may as a result have greater access to safe housing which in turn would be a protective factor against recidivism.

Sample

Our initial plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews with approximately 120 male and female adult offenders from six federal and provincial institutions in the area. The proposed breakdown of the sample by institution was as follows: Edmonton Remand Centre (n=40); Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre (n=40); Edmonton Institution (n=5); Edmonton Institution for Women (n=15); Bowden Institution (n=20). Stan Daniels Healing Centre, Grierson Centre, and Buffalo Sage Wellness House (the last three combined for n= 20).[2] Unfortunately, we were unable to attain research approval from the Correctional Service of Canada in time to conduct this study in federal institutions. As a result we have relied solely on the interviews from the provincial institutions with both remanded and sentenced offenders. A total of 93 interviews were conducted at the Edmonton Remand Centre and the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre. Of the 93 participants, 12 were female and 81 were male. Forty-seven participants – all sentenced offenders - resided in the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre; 46 participants resided at the Edmonton Remand Centre as remanded offenders. Sentenced offenders have been found guilty whereas remanded offenders are typically awaiting court although it could be the case that they are "working off fines" or awaiting immigration court.

The restriction of our interviews to offenders incarcerated in provincial institutions presents some limitations to our findings. This restriction reduces the generalizability of the findings to the broader incarcerated population. However, offenders housed within provincial centres are released at faster rates as a result of shorter sentences. As a result of this quicker "turn-around" time, it may be especially important to interview this demographic. Additionally, the argument could be made that offenders housed in federal institutions receive more assistance with their housing needs because they have access to an institutional parole officer and a caseworker. Provincially housed offenders do not receive this type of support. Interestingly, multiple participants in our study indicated that they have received assistance in finding housing from the Alberta Health Services "Transitions Team". We were unable to find formal information on this resource.

[2] Bowden Institution, though located about 200 kilometers south of Edmonton is included because many offenders are released to Edmonton.

Inclusion criteria for offenders/subjects

The inclusion criteria required that participants be incarcerated in one of the institutions included in the study and must be within three months of their release date. It was important to speak with participants near release, otherwise they may not have been considering housing post-incarceration. We spoke with both men and women. We required that participants be over 18 years of age which was not an issue since we attended only adult institutions.

Recruitment

The offenders were recruited differently at the two participating institutions. At the Edmonton Remand Centre (ERC), the research assistant was located within the Admissions and Discharge area and as inmates were being discharged, they had the opportunity to participate in this research.[3] Because offenders residing at a Remand Centre are not sentenced, it is often difficult to predict when they will be released. Therefore it was best to interview them as they were being released.[4] At the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre (FSCC), staff alerted inmates who met the inclusion criteria of the opportunity to participate in this study and posted a sign-up sheet on the various living units. Those interested signed up voluntarily (using their CoMIS numbers which essentially is an anonymous identifier) and were escorted to the cafeteria on the dates and times the research assistants were available to conduct interviews. Staff acting as intermediaries at FSCC emphasized that participation is voluntary. Knowing of at least some potential participants in advance of the interview date helped researchers to schedule how many days they were required to attend FSCC in order to interview all interested offenders. At both Centres, the research assistants reviewed both the information sheet and the consent (please see Appendix A) form prior to commencing the interview.[5]

Interviews

We anticipated interviews taking between 15-30 minutes to complete however most interviews lasted between two and five minutes. The interviews consisted of a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions (please see Appendix B for the interview schedule). Closed-ended questions were used to document demographic information (age, gender, self-identified ethnicity, length of time incarcerated). Open-ended questions were also included; one open-ended question probed participants to describe in their own words the living arrangements/accommodation plans in place following release from their current institution. In situations where an offender had been incarcerated more than once, a second open-ended question asked them to reflect on their accommodation experience following release from their most recent previous term of incarceration. A third and initially the final open-ended question explored what they felt was a challenge that might impact both housing options and opportunities for successful reintegration. Upon conducting several interviews it was determined that this final question related to challenges ended the interview on a negative note so the research assistants added an additional question, “what are you looking forward to most upon release?” to encourage positive thinking in the participants.

[3] The Remand Centre is a high security facility which makes it difficult for non-staff members to move about the Centre. It made the most sense for the research assistant to conduct interviews in one area.
[4] In fact, management at the ERC requested that the interviews be conducted with inmates as they were being released because of this fact.
[5] This research project received approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board.

In terms of analysis, closed-ended question responses were entered into a spreadsheet in Excel which was then exported and analyzed using SAS statistical software. Responses were cross tabulated to examine whether there were connections between housing status and gender, ethnic background and age. Participant responses to open-ended questions were typed into a word document and were subjected to thematic analysis using the constant comparative method of analysis, with the goal of identifying key themes relating to accommodation issues. Rather than imposing a pre-set series of categories regarding housing options (or not), the goal was to have participants describe in their own words their accommodation experiences; in comparing their experiences, a series of categories which captured the diversity in housing-related issues emerged from the data - homeless, unstably housed and stably housed. “Homeless” referred to participants who had no place to stay even temporarily upon release. “Unstably housed” refers to situations described as very temporary but with friends, family or associates, similar to “couch surfing”. More specifically, participants indicated they had a place to stay but had no guarantee for how long or what type of accommodation they would have. The third category was “stably housed”. Participants who were considered “stably housed” described themselves as having their own house or shared house to return to upon release. In most cases, the participants would be returning to the same housing situation they had prior to incarceration.

Confidentiality

To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, other than their signature on the consent form, names were never listed on any of the research assistants’ notes. The signed consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet during the research and were never matched up with the audio recordings. We had originally anticipated having a list of potential participants but we were never given a list because the intermediaries facilitated the movement of the participants so there was no need for such a list.

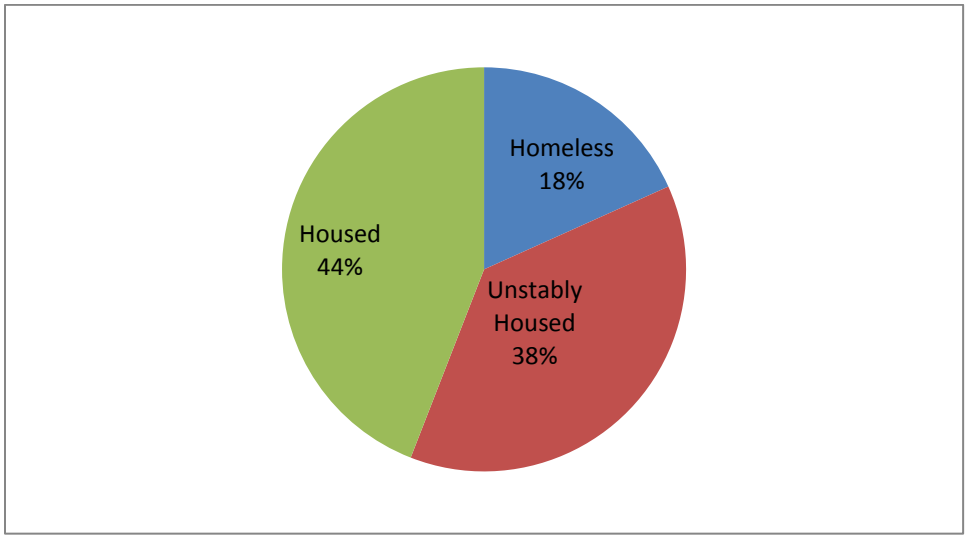
IV. Results

During our interviews with participants we asked a number of questions intended to explore: the housing status of adults transitioning from correctional facilities into the Greater Edmonton Area into the community; whether releases from correctional facilities impact the homeless count in the Greater Edmonton area; whether this demographic require additional support around issues pertaining to housing. Additionally, we asked participants to comment on the challenges they felt might jeopardize remaining out of custody. Before discussing the thematic patterns that emerged from participant responses, we describe our sample in some detail.

Demographics

There were 93 participants in this study: 12 females and 81 males. Forty-seven of the participants were interviewed at the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre and 46 of the participants were interviewed at the Edmonton Remand Centre. Of the 93 participants, 44 (47%) self-identified as Aboriginal, 36 (39%) identified as white, 10 (11%) identified as belonging to other ethnic groups (Jamaican, Somali, etc.) and three (3%) participants did not specify. As Figure 1 illustrates, 17 (18%) described their post-incarceration housing expectations as “homeless”, 35 (38%) as “unstably housed” and 41 (44%) as “housed”.

Figure 1 – Housing Stats



Age and Gender

The respondents were divided into four age groups; 18-24 years, 25-34 years, 35-49 years, and 50 years plus. Of the 93 respondents, 19 (20%) were between 18 and 24, 31 (33%) were between 25 and 34 years, 37(40%) were between 35-49 and 6 (7%) were 50 years or older. Of the 12 females that participated, five (42%) were between 18 and 24 years, two (17%) were between 25 and 34 years and five (42%) were between 35 and 49 years. Of the 81 men that participated, 14 (17%) were between 18 and 24 years, 29 (36%) were between 25 and 34 years, 32 (40%) were between 35 and 49 years and 6 (7%) were 50 years or older.

Housing and Age

Of the participants between the ages of 18 to 24, two (11%) indicated they would likely be homeless upon release, eight (42%) indicated they would have likely unstable housing arrangements and nine (47%) indicated they would likely have stable housing, upon release. Of the participants between the ages of 25 to 34, six (19%) indicated they would be likely homeless upon released, sixteen (52%) indicated they would have likely unstable housing arrangements and nine (29%) indicated they would likely have stable housing, upon release. Of the participants between the ages of 35 to 49, seven (19%) indicated they would be likely homeless upon released, ten (27%) indicated they would have likely unstable housing arrangements and twenty (54%) indicated they would likely have stable housing, upon release. Of the participants between the ages 50+, two (33%) indicated they would be likely homeless upon released, one (17%) indicated they would have likely unstable housing arrangements and three (50%) indicated they would likely have stable housing, upon release. Table 1 depicts the frequency of housing status based on age.

Housing and Gender

Of the 12 female participants, two (17%) indicated they would be likely homeless upon released, four (33%) indicated they would have likely unstable housing arrangements and six (50%) indicated they would likely have stable housing, upon release. Of the 81 male participants, 15 (19%) indicated they would likely be homeless upon release, 37 (46%) indicated they would likely have unstable housing arrangements and 29 (36%) noted they would likely have stable accommodations, upon release.

Housing and Ethnicity

Of the 44 Aboriginal participants, nine (21%) indicated they would likely be homeless, 16 (36%) indicated they would likely be unstably housed, and 19 (43%) indicated they would likely be stably housed, upon release. Of the 36 participants that described themselves as white, eight (22%) indicated they would likely be homeless, 13 (36%) indicated they would likely be unstably housed and 15 (42%) indicated they would likely be stably housed, upon release. Of the ten participants self-identified as an 'other' ethnicity, six (60%) indicated they would likely be unstably housed and four (40%) indicated they would likely be stably housed, upon release. Of the three participants whose ethnicity is unknown, all three participants indicated they would likely be stably housed upon release.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

Our quantitative results are, as evidenced above, primarily descriptive in nature. The sample is not representative, since we relied on offenders coming forward and volunteering to participate. Unfortunately, the small sample size makes any more detailed analyses untenable. Certainly the finding that 56% of the 93 participants describe their post-incarcerating housing situation as either "homeless" (18%) or "unstable" (38%) is significant and warrants the attention of policy makers and future research. Considering the exploratory and descriptive nature of this study, a very cautious, tentative, summary of the descriptions provided above would also suggest that relationships between age and housing needs of incarcerated individuals may warrant further research. In our, albeit small, sample it appears that the younger categories of incarcerated individuals may require more attention and assistance with their post-incarceration housing needs. In the 18-24 year old group an almost-equal proportion of individuals

indicate “unstable” (42%) and “stable” (47%) housing expected upon release. This may be indicative of a somewhat ‘bifurcated’ population reflective of young adulthood as a time of significant change in the life course (i.e. moving out on one’s own): ‘youth’ with familial support (still living at home at the time of incarceration) and those without such support (homeless youth, youth with unstable family ties). Within the 25-34 year old age group, the majority (52%) of participants fall into the “unstable” housing category, suggesting again, that an age-post-incarceration housing relationship may warrant further examination. It may be that younger adults face numerous challenges related to both incarceration and housing needs. Interestingly, while all four age groups are characterized by significant representation in all three types of housing categories (homeless, unstable, stable), there is some indication that relative housing stability may be related to increasing age.

An equally tentative observation of the descriptive results relates to ethnicity. Again, keeping in mind the small sample size, it is difficult to ignore the almost equal representation in all three housing conditions for both Aboriginal and Caucasian participants: 21% and 22% respectively for “homeless”; 36% and 36% for “unstable”; 43% and 42% for “stable”. This might be a result of the size and composition of our sample but might also indicate an area worthy of future research attention[6].

The descriptive analysis provided above points to a need for more research on the topic of housing needs for offenders post-release. We turn now to the words of the offenders themselves as they describe their anticipated housing situations post-release. Following this, some of their insights on the challenges they face post-release and how this impacts their housing situations are discussed.

Homeless

The participants that indicated they had no housing, not even temporary housing, were categorized as “homeless” upon release from custody. When asked to describe in his words where he would live upon a release, one participant described “I am not sure. All of my stuff was thrown on the street when I came in here… He [landlord] just threw my stuff on the street. I’ll deal with that stuff when I get out. Where I’m going to live, I don’t know.” Similarly, another participant noted, “I don’t have any arrangements. I am not from Edmonton. I don’t know anybody. I am trying to find information about starting all over again. I need clothes. I need ID.” Several other participants indicated that they would be homeless until they were able to find work in Ft. McMurray where they could then live in camps. One participant explained, “I am a scaffolder and when I work I live in camp but when I’m not working, I’m homeless in Ft. McMurray.”

Unstably Housed

The participants that indicated they had a place to stay upon release but were not sure for how long or whether they would have an actual space to themselves were categorized as being “unstably housed”. When asked to describe his accommodations post-release, one participant noted, “Not where I wanna be. Probably stay with my mom for a bit but I don’t want to. I’ve got a family and we’ve always had a home together for the last five years. But not anymore.” A female participant indicated she would be staying with a friend and when asked how long she would be able to stay there she responded, “I don’t know. She’s got a boyfriend staying there, her youngest son who’s going to be 18, and she’s got her other daughter and her boyfriend there. So, this has just happened recently so I don’t know, she said I can stay there as long as it takes for me to get back on my feet.”

[6] Research on Aboriginal peoples in this country points to a number of social and economic indicators that reveal high levels of poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, family-related violence, issues relating to inadequate health care, low levels of education, discrimination, and general disadvantage compared to non-Aboriginal populations. Based on this research, the expectation might be that rates of homeless and unstable housing post-incarceration should be higher for Aboriginal individuals than for non-Aboriginal individuals.

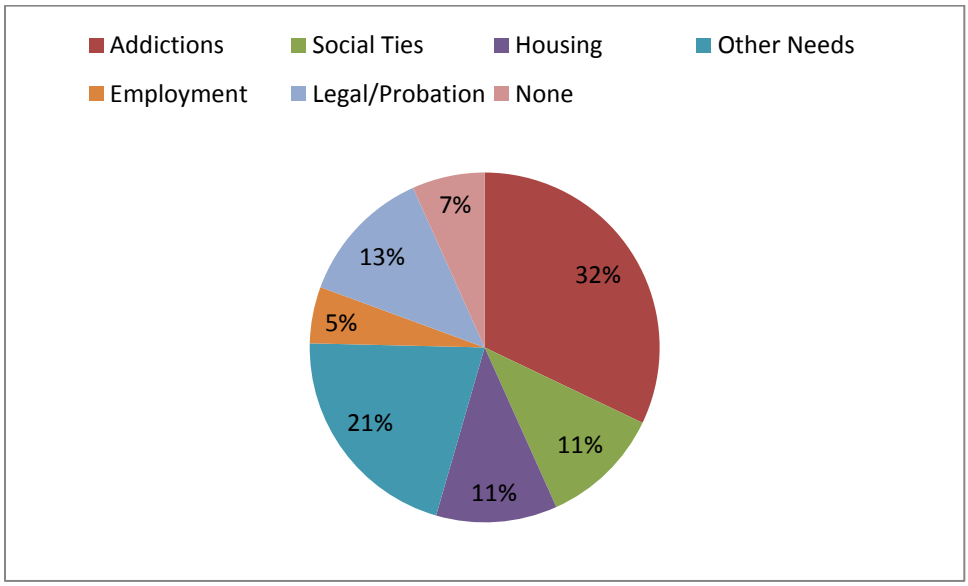
The precarious nature of both of these examples of housing conditions post-release shed light on the difficulties faced by offenders and the limited housing options available to them.

Stably Housed

As indicated in the descriptive quantitative analysis above, less than half of participants (44%) are considered to be "stably housed" post-incarceration. Participants that described themselves as having a stable place to live post-release often indicated that they would be returning to where they lived pre-incarceration. For example, one participant noted, "I have a five bedroom house in Camrose", and another said, he would return "to the place I own".

Challenges[7]

Figure 2: Challenges to Reintegration



The challenges cited by participants were coded into seven themes; addictions, social ties, housing, employment, legal, other needs (which included money, clothing and health) and no challenges. The following is an example of a participant that described multiple challenges to his reintegration,

> *Basically I think it's just when you have, after you get out and finding a job and getting back on your feet. If you can't get back on your feet, you can just you'll fall into a deeper hole. Because you're homeless, you've already got low self-esteem because you're just coming out of jail and you've got no money. So, it's either you're gonna hit some lucky thing and get a job real soon…like if I didn't have my parents, if I didn't have my mother, I don't know what I'd do, right? But it's about luck right? If you somehow find someone to stay with then you're gonna make your way up. But if you can't, of if you have too much pride or whatever, to look for help, then you're just gonna go into a deeper hole."*

[7] Participants often cited more than one challenge to their reintegration so the number of challenges represented exceeds 93

Another participant that described himself as having multiple challenges said,

> *…addictions problem, my health and welfare, probably shelter, clothing, just about everything. I know in the '90s when I started doing time, I got out of jail, you could go to social services and they would help you right away. They would give you money for clothes. If you had a job they would give you little expenditure money say for a bus pass to buy work clothes, work boots. Now you get nothing. You get outta here and you go and ask for help and they basically slam the door in your face. So what's a guy supposed to do, right? So naturally, me, I'll go do things that are not law-abiding just to get money in my pocket to get me on the right foot. And I usually end up back in jail, right? Like, I'm not a bad guy, I'm just, you know whatever, I'm battling an addiction problem. I've asked for help and I'm just tired of coming to jail. I got probation so I'm trying to get into a transitions program.*

Addictions

Addictions were the most commonly challenges cited by participants. About 32% of participants cited addictions as a major issue that would impede their reintegration. When asked what may jeopardize his reintegration, one participant indicated "Quit my drinking. That's what brings me here every time." Other participants noted, "My boozing" or "Just alcohol".

Social ties

Eleven percent of participants cited their social ties, more specifically, the individuals they associate with as impacting their reintegration. One participant described in detail his biggest challenge as

> *Breaking old connections. Going to the same old places. Boyle street co-op. It's all drugs. It's where all the drugs are at in that whole section. The hardest part is to stay away. But unfortunately when you're homeless and you try to get help you got to go through all that crap over there to get help. All the help you're trying to get is in the middle of where all the drugs are. You're trying to get there to meet your appointments and then when you meet all those people. It's hard to straighten yourself out. You've known those guys for ten years. Ten years. It's hard. It's in your brain. It's all you know. You get up day one, day two, day three. And you wake up and you're like I need to go get high. I don't know what else really to say. That's just the way I look at it. Housing has been such a big issue. I always have good ideas when I walk out of jail. Good ideas and I get some help at first but I don't know. There are transition programs through Alberta Health Services. They can help arrange a house and give you all the resources but like I said, making it there is the hardest part. Making it from the train station to the welfare office or to wherever you got to go. CN tower. The community keeps forgetting that's where all the drugs are. Ya, I guess it's better to keep it localized but I don't know, there's got to be a lot more done.*

Housing

Eleven percent of participants also cited housing as a major obstacle to their reintegration. One participant described his challenges as, “Getting on welfare, getting money, finding a place with a criminal record. That’s really hard. Umm…basically any rental companies won’t take you. Basically trying to get yourself back on track since you’re not in jail anymore.” Another participant said,

> *I think they should have accommodations for people when they get out of here. A lot of people have a place to go but it’s not a place they really want to go but a place they have to go. And it gets them back in here because they go to bad people who are doing the same shit. Doing drugs and all that shit. Excuse my language.”*

Employment

Five percent of participants cited employment as an obstacle to their reintegration. When asked to describe what might bring him back to jail, a participant noted, “staying gainfully employed”. Another said, “having a home and a job” and a third participant described, “trouble finding a job”.

Legal/Probation

Thirteen percent of participants cited their legal situation such as needing to comply with probation or legal restrictions as potentially impeding their successful reintegration. For example one participant noted, “I lost it all now. I know I’m going to struggle and that’s going to be difficult. I have 48 hours to go and see my probation officer. And I know I’m going to breach it. I don’t know what to do. I don’t want to come back to jail”. When asked what might bring him back here one participant said, “Probation, probably. Probation”. A third participant noted that housing and probation were his biggest obstacles, “Well I would say, not having my own place, for one, and then, the probation thing, you know. Being under watch I guess. Not being able to do what I wanna do. It’s more or less just not having my own place, living by other people’s rules.

Other needs

There were a number of other needs that participants cited as presenting challenges to their reintegration. Twenty one percent of participants noted various other needs such as money, transportation and health as potentially jeopardizing remaining out of jail. For example one participant noted, “direction. I have lots of issues to sort out from the past. It’s not just one or two times that I’ve been here. This is 10 or 15 times with the same pattern. That’s why jails are so fucked. So many people following the same pattern.” Another participant described a challenge for her as:

> *Not having my own transportation I guess would be one of the main things. Not being able to get myself around, and still having to work and support myself at the same time. I was supposed to have a friend show up for my court the last time and that’s why I’m in here again for failure to appear and a promise to appear, but I had to work and that’s why my friend was supposed to show up for me and they never did.*

Another participant noted that historically he did “not make enough money to pay for rent and bills and all the stuff that goes with it, so I have to crime on the side.”

None

About 7% of participants felt they had no challenges to their reintegration. For example, when asked if he could think of anything that might hinder him staying out of jail one participant responded with “Actually, nothing. I’m one of the few lucky ones. I have a job, I have a house, I have a wife. Yeah.” Another participant said “Not really because I’m in here for something I didn’t do this time.”

V. Implications and Future Research

This research is situated within a small but growing body of literature which has found a relationship between housing issues and incarceration. The broad objective of this research project was to explore the housing situation of inmates transitioning into the Edmonton area and to improve our understanding of the needs of adult post-incarceration in the Edmonton Area. The three specific research questions informing this project are: 1) What is the housing status of adults transitioning from correctional facilities into the Greater Edmonton Area into the community? 2) Do releases from correctional facilities impact the homeless count in the Greater Edmonton area? 3) Does this demographic require additional support around issues pertaining to housing?

It is clear from this exploratory, descriptive study that adults transitioning from correctional facilities into the Edmonton area indeed experience housing-related concerns. Over half (56%) of the 93 participants in this study indicates expectations of homelessness (18%) or unstable housing (38%) upon release from incarceration. It would seem, then, that releases from correctional facilities do in fact contribute to the homeless count in Edmonton.

We are cautious about making any observations regarding the interaction of offender status, housing related needs, and age, gender, and ethnicity, primarily because the relatively small numbers of participants falling within these categories make more sophisticated analysis problematic. We note however, it would be worthwhile for future research on this topic to focus on the potential for these different categories of the incarcerated population to experience housing needs post-incarceration in different and unique ways. For example, we tentatively and cautiously noted that perhaps younger offenders (18-24 years old) are unique as a category because some of these young adults may have stable housing arrangements as a result of living at home/with their parents at the time of incarceration. At the same time, it is possible that a sizeable portion of this population may not have such familial support and may have been couch surfing, living on the street, living with friends (essentially living in 'unstable' housing conditions) prior to incarceration, partly as a result of the types of changes often associated with this stage in the life course (leaving home, 'striking out' on one's own). This is, of course, largely speculation at this point. However, similar reasoning might help explain the rather large percentage of 25-34 year olds (52%) who indicated "unstable" housing arrangements expected upon release from incarceration. It may be that age presents specific issues when it comes to post-incarceration housing needs that are worth exploring further (i.e. the housing and related needs for a 19 year likely are quite different than those for a 57 year old offender).

The relationship (or lack thereof) between ethnicity and housing issues, notably the similarity between expectations for housing situations upon release among Aboriginal and Caucasian offenders also warrants further examination. It would seem, based on the generally more disadvantaged social and economic position of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society, that their housing needs would be more unstable than their white counterparts. Further research, in the form of a semi-structured interview might reveal whether this is in fact the case. The experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders post incarceration may provide another opportunity for service providers to tailor programs and services to suit the specific needs (or not) of these groups.

The number of women in this study was also too small to draw any conclusions. One would suspect however, that the needs of women post-incarceration differ from those of men. The role of women as primary care-givers for children is one area that has implications for appropriate housing for them post-

incarceration. It would be worthwhile for future research to explore the possibility of gendered differences in housing needs and how they can best be addressed.

Answers to the open-ended questions in the interviews reveal multiple needs on the part of adult offenders post-incarceration. Housing-related needs are intimately connected to challenges related to addictions, social ties, employment, the legal system/probation, and other needs such as transportation and health. It is significant that while 'only' 11% of participants list 'housing' as a challenge to reintegration, comments pertaining to housing-related issues emerge throughout the comments made by participants. For example, one participant, in a comment that focuses primarily on 'social ties', reveals that it is actually being homeless that forces him to visit an area of the city where both assistance with housing *and* old friends and drugs are located. It is clear from participant comments that housing issues, while a significant impediment to successful reintegration, complicate and exacerbate other barriers to success 'on the outside'. Ideally housing services/resources, combined with support for problems related to addictions, employment, transportation, and social support are required for many adults post-incarceration in this city.

An issue that emerges in the literature but is not mentioned by the participants in this study is that of mental health. This likely is a direct result of the nature of our method; offenders might be reluctant to disclose such personal and potentially stigmatizing information to an interviewer with whom s/he has only spent a few minutes. Based on the literature concerning offender populations, mental health is a salient issue, one that affects reintegration and housing, and one that, within the context of the current research questions, would be worthwhile exploring in future research.

We would be remiss if we did not note that some assistance with housing needs does exist. Participants mention a transition program offered through Alberta Health Services. It would be worthwhile for future research to explore the effectiveness of this program, awareness of its existence among the offender population, and accessibility to adults post-incarceration. One of the participants mentioned "trying to get into a transitions program" which suggests that while the program exists, there is either a long wait list or the entry requirements limit access to perhaps those who are most in need of such assistance. Another participant alludes to the location of the transitions program (e.g. being in the heart of areas that are "where all the drugs are") and the difficulty in avoiding the temptations of these problematic areas and successfully physically 'making it' from the train station to the program office.

In sum, over half (56%) of the participants in this study expect to either be homeless or unstably housed upon release from the correctional facility. Although ours was not a representative sample by any means, the proportion of the soon-to-be released offender sample we interviewed likely underestimates the extent of homelessness and unstable housing faced by the overall (provincial and federal) post-incarceration population in the area. First, the category "unstable housing" is by definition a rather "tumultuous" categorization. In other words it is a category that includes individuals who expect unstable housing upon release but who may very likely end up in a *stable* housing situation. However, the category also includes individuals whose "unstable" housing circumstances post-release may very well result in a *homeless* situation. Considering some of the challenges faced by our sample, and by offenders more generally, the likelihood of offenders falling into the homeless category from the "unstably housed" category is probably a more realistic outcome than the alternative – moving 'up' into a stable housing situation.

Second, we suspect the extent of homelessness and unstable housing is under-estimated in our study because of the focus on provincially incarcerated offenders. As mentioned earlier in this report, the offenders we interviewed resided in either a provincial correctional facility or a Remand Centre. Both facilities house offenders with relatively short sentences/incarceration periods. Because of these shorter

periods behind bars (compared to federally incarcerated offenders whose sentences are a minimum of two years), it is more realistic for an offender with pre-incarceration housing to maintain that housing (or have a family member, friend, or spouse do so). A federally incarcerated offender who spends five, eight, or 20 years behind bars, for example, will have a more difficult time maintaining a home/living arrangement in the community and will face additional challenges in obtaining housing upon release after a long sentence. For these reasons, and considering the number of federal institutions in the Edmonton area, we suspect that if further research was to include federal offender populations, the rate of expected homelessness and unstable housing among offenders post-incarceration will be significantly higher.

To conclude based on our findings housing-related issues are a definite concern for incarcerated populations in the area. These housing-related issues exacerbate and/or are exacerbated by a number of other challenges to reintegration including addictions, employment, social ties, transportation, health and difficulties with the legal system. We also suspect that there are specific housing-related needs based on the age, gender and ethnicity of offenders; further research would do well to explore how these factors interact to either ameliorate or exaggerate housing-related needs and challenges. The most successful reintegration approaches will likely combine policies and programs that work to address the multiple and varied needs and characteristics of offender populations.

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Appendix A: Homelessness Research Project Information Sheet

Homelessness Research Project Information Sheet

The Mustard Seed-Edmonton is conducting this study in partnership with researchers from the University of Alberta. This is a study on homelessness. We want to find out whether people who have been incarcerated are more likely to face homelessness or unstable housing. We will use the information from the interviews to write a report discussing our findings. This report will be shared with Homeward Trust Edmonton, The Mustard Seed, University researchers, as well as people working in corrections and in the community. We would like to ask you some questions.

We will ask questions about your age, gender, your ethnicity and the length of time you have been in jail. We will also ask you where you plan to live after jail. If you have been in jail before, we will ask you where you lived after you were released. We will also ask questions concerning other issues that might affect your post-release accommodations.

You are invited to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary. Your name will NOT be in any report. This questionnaire will NOT be put on your file. You may say "no" to answering any questions. The interview will take up to a half hour.

- **Voluntary Participation**
- Your participation is voluntary. There is no reward for doing this interview. There is no punishment for refusing to do it. Your interview will occur in a private room/office, so no one will know you are participating in the study unless you decide to tell them yourself. You may decide to end the interview at any time during the interview. The information that you provide will not affect your dealings with the system in any way.
- **Confidentiality and Access to Information**
- Your identity and any information that you provide will be kept **confidential**. Only the researchers asking the questions will know your answers. Any written record of this interview will be kept in a locked cabinet. Your name will not be connected to any report written about this project. There are **limits to confidentiality which you must be aware of. You must NOT discuss any threats of harm to you or others and reports of child abuse. You must NOT discuss any unreported criminal behaviour you have engaged in.** You should **not discuss** your current charges or any potentially illegal activities during this interview.

A report will be written about all answers to the questions. Your answers will be put with other people's answers. Your name will not be in the report. You will not be linked to your answers. The report may be used to start more research about homelessness. Or it may be used to start to build resources related to homelessness in Edmonton. The report will be shared with professionals and community groups, as well as University researchers and students.

The plan for this study has been approved for its adherence to ethical guidelines by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615.

Please sign the attached consent form if you are willing to be part of this study. If you have any concerns, please contact the University of Alberta Ethics Board at the number listed above.

Thank you for your time.

Do you have any questions about the research so far?

Homelessness Research Project Consent Form

Do you understand that this is a study being conducted by the Mustard Seed-Edmonton and researchers from the University of Alberta?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you understand that you will be asked to answer questions to learn more about homelessness related to the incarcerated population?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you understand that your participation is voluntary?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you understand that you can stop the interview at any time?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you know that there is nothing for you to gain or lose by either agreeing to do this or by saying “no”?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Have you read or was the paper called the Homelessness Research Project Information Sheet read to you?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Have you had the chance to ask questions and talk about this study with the researcher?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you understand that you can say “no” to answering any question at any time?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you know this will not change how you are treated by the system?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Has the privacy of the study been explained to you?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you know that the only people who will know your answers are the people who are asking the questions?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you know it will take about 30 minutes to answer the questions?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you understand that you must not discuss any current charges or disclose any unreported criminal activities you may have been involved with in the past?	☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you understand that the information gathered during this study will be used by researchers, and community workers to help understand more about the relationship to incarceration and homelessness?	☐Yes ☐No
I know all of this and I am willing to answer questions.	☐Yes ☐No
I know that some of my answers to the questions may be used in reports but my name will not be used.	☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Your Name (Printed)	Your Signature	Date

_____	_____
Researcher Name	Researcher Signature

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Preface: Set the interviewee at rest: explain the purpose of the interviews and the study; have the interviewee sign the consent form and ask if they have any questions about it; give the participant a copy of the form.

Preamble: So our interest is in the housing plans for those near release from a period of incarceration. We are here interviewing people who are within three months of release from this institution to learn about their housing plans post-incarceration and if they have been incarcerated in the past, where they lived after that period of incarceration.

1) What is your age?

2) What is your self-identified ethnicity?

3) When were you admitted to custody? or: How long have you been in custody?

4) Can you please describe in your own words the living arrangements/accommodation plans you have in place following your release from jail?

5) Have you been incarcerated before? If yes, can you describe your living arrangements after your last term of incarceration?

6) Can you describe what you see as challenges to your reintegration (such as familial support, employment, lifestyle characteristics (ie. Gang involvement)?

Close by thanking them very much for their time.