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The C.A.R.E. Model: Dynamical Systems Theory Principles for Reintegrating Individuals Impacted by Incarceration

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reentry programming. Dr. Skinner-Osei is committed to community-engaged scholarship and the mentorship of emerging social work scholars. Her work bridges academic inquiry with practical solutions, advocating for trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and community-based approaches to reducing recidivism and promoting sustainable reintegration. *Peter Claudius Osei*, is a behavioral neuroscientist whose research explores the neural and cognitive mechanisms underlying systems-level behavioral organization. He earned his Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology from Florida Atlantic University, where his dissertation, *Emerging Neural Dynamics in Skill Acquisition*, investigated learning mechanisms using a basal ganglia-inspired neural model. Dr. Osei's research extends beyond neural dynamics to examine how dynamical systems theory can illuminate complex interactions in broader social environments. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, he has contributed to large-scale, interdisciplinary projects that address real-world challenges. His collaborations with faculty in FAU's College of Social Work have led to the development of the C.A.R.E. model, a systems-based framework for enhancing institutional and interpersonal interactions in domains such as education and public policy. Recent work includes research on strengthening father-child relationships through applying the C.A.R.E. model, which has informed grant proposals and co-authored publications in social work and psychology journals. Dr. Osei's scholarly contributions appear in *Developmental Review*, *Educational Psychology Review*, and the *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, among others. He brings a dynamic, systems-oriented approach to understanding behavior and is particularly interested in how behavioral neuroscience can inform community-based interventions and equitable systems change. His ongoing work seeks to deepen the integration of neuroscience with the social sciences, particularly through partnerships with institutes focused on community engagement and translational research.

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Abstract

The process of reintegration into society for individuals impacted by incarceration is intricate and multifaceted. While rehabilitative programs strive to mitigate recidivism through financial and psychological support, many encounter challenges in readjusting to their communities. Acknowledging that these individuals are not isolated but embedded within the broader social frameworks of their families, communities, and the workforce is imperative. Therefore, understanding the psychological determinants influencing justice-involved individuals is pivotal for aligning their conduct with societal norms, as solely attributing their actions to internal factors neglects the array of external environmental influences beyond their control. Given these challenges, we introduce the evidence-based C.A.R.E. model (Collaborate, Amend, Reintegrate, Empower) as a strategic approach. This model, extrapolated from a comprehensive re-evaluation of qualitative research, offers a holistic comprehension of the post-release milieu and advocates for reallocating resources to enhance the interactions between justice-involved individuals and their communities. This manuscript delineates the C.A.R.E. model as a blueprint for reentry programs, underpinned by the tenets of dynamical systems theory, to enrich these interactions.

Introduction

I got re-arrested in 2009 for sales of marijuana, and it almost caused me 15 years in prison. It wasn't because of the charge; it was because of my criminal history. You can't teach the streets. You only learn when you are a part of it. It has to be embedded in a person. It needs to be drilled and drilled into you. Now, with me, I had to understand that teaching a person who's been incarcerated numerous times, he has a reverberating mind. He has the mindset that everything has to be like this over and over. The mind is corrupted already with false images. So, for a person who wants to learn, how do they learn? You can give them answers, and they still may not pick up on it. The reason for that is that their mind is programmed one way, which is crime and getting in trouble using drugs, getting high. That cycle has to be broken (research participant).

In the United States, approximately 2 million individuals are currently incarcerated—a staggering 500% increase over the past 40 years (The Sentencing Project, 2025). This dramatic rise is driven primarily by shifts in sentencing laws and policies rather than changes in crime rates (The Sentencing Project, 2025). Each year, more than 600,000 individuals are released from federal and state prisons, reentering society with limited support and significant challenges (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2024; Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation [A.S.P.E.], 2021). However, the cycle of incarceration persists, as approximately 66% of those released are rearrested within three years, and half ultimately return to prison (A.S.P.E., 2021; Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). Upon release, individuals encounter significant social challenges that hinder their reintegration into society. These challenges include limited access to employment, housing, and healthcare, as well as strained personal relationships and societal stigma (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). Such obstacles often lead to adverse

outcomes, including heightened risks of recidivism and deteriorating mental and physical health (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2022; Keene et al., 2018).

The stress of social factors significantly impacts the process of reentry, which has many complex components that are further exacerbated by restrictions imposed after release (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). Since 2000, parole violations have led to more recidivism than all individuals sentenced to prison in 1980 (Alexander, 2012). Most people under correctional control are on probation—2.9 million individuals—far surpassing the 1.9 million people incarcerated (Widra, 2024). Each year, more than 1 in 10 individuals admitted to state prisons are reimprisoned not for committing new crimes, but for violating conditions of their probation (Widra, 2024). These violations often include failing to secure employment within a required timeframe, missing an appointment with a parole officer, missing court or probation meetings, failing to pay fines or restitution, failing drug and alcohol tests, not maintaining employment, incomplete community service, unapproved associations with felons, and crossing state lines (Santos, 2024). Loic Wacquant, as cited in Alexander (2012), refers to this cycle as a "closed circuit of perpetual marginality," emphasizing the ongoing phenomenon of individuals cycling in and out of prison.

Across the nation, incarceration for supervision violations dropped in 2020 and continued to decline in many states in 2021 (Council on State Governments, 2025). However, despite this reduction—largely attributed to adjustments made during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic—the proportion of the prison population related to community supervision has remained largely stable from 2018 to 2021 (Council on State Governments, 2025). In 2021, 44 percent of all state prison admissions were individuals who violated the terms of their parole or probation, and on any given day that year, one in four people in state prisons were incarcerated due to violations of their supervision terms (Council on State Governments, 2025).

To combat the complexities associated with incarceration and reentry, it must be noted that individuals are not isolated entities operating within themselves. Instead, they are embedded within larger social systems of their families, communities, and workforce. Thus, while psychological factors affecting justice-involved individuals must be considered to adapt their behavior to social norms, solely attributing their actions to internal conditions discounts countless environmental factors outside their immediate control (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). Considering the implications resulting from the influence of ecological factors post-release, the authors developed the C.A.R.E. model. The model was derived from the reanalysis of qualitative research conducted by Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson (2018), which explored incarcerated males' lived experiences pre- and post-release. The data identified five themes: trauma, self-identification, reentry, reunification, and recidivism. The themes concurred that current rehabilitative programs do not address all the needs of incarcerated individuals. Hence, the model aims to fill the gaps identified in the analysis by addressing the environmental factors out of the immediate control of the individual or rehabilitative organization.

Furthermore, the model suggests that reentry programs implement four measures (i.e., collaborate, amend, reintegrate, and empower) to successfully reintegrate justice-involved individuals into a highly dynamic and complex environment with multiple interacting elements (Vallacher & Nowak, 1997). Accordingly, Skinner-Osei & Osei (2020) propose that successful integration requires the improvement of

interactions between justice-involved individuals and their post-release environment. Ultimately, reintegrating individuals impacted by incarceration into society presents a complex issue that requires the coordination of diverse elements at both individual and societal levels. The present article offers a guide for reentry programs to improve such interactions within the framework of dynamical systems theory.

Theoretical Framework

Dynamical Systems Theory

Dynamical systems theory was established in the late 19th century by Henri Poincaré**.** The theory focuses on the qualitative behavior of self-organizing elements in a complex environment (Holmes, 2007). While the mechanisms of dynamical systems theory are rooted in mathematics and physics, its principles are amenable to all levels of organization, including biological, psychological, and social systems (Richardson et al., 2014). In this way, biological and social systems are comprised of self-organizing elements that must coordinate their interactions to fulfill a higher-level goal (Nowak et al., 2013). Nonetheless, gaining insights into complex social interaction is challenging due to the countless external factors (Vallacher & Nowak, 1997) and extended timescales, often spanning months or years (Vallacher et al., 2017). By contrast, many biological interactions occur within seconds (Kandel et al., 2000), potentially revealing patterns not easily observed at longer timescales. Consequently, biological processes, viewed through the lens of dynamical systems theory, may present a useful prescriptive framework for informing complex social dynamics between individuals impacted by incarceration and the various institutions involved in their reintegration into society, as is the focus of the present article.

Dynamical systems are characterized by interactions of multiple independent elements adapting to environmental changes while *emerging* to organize into functional units at higher levels of abstraction (Osei & Bjorklund, 2024a). For example, the intrapersonal interactions of independent neural processes at the lower biological level converge to produce the justice-involved individual's behavior at the psychological level (Grossberg, 2021). Similarly, independent perceptual, emotional, and cognitive processes at the psychological level merge to form another dynamic system, which emerges to the behavior displayed during the interpersonal interactions between individuals impacted by incarceration and their community at the higher social level (Nowak et al., 2013). Notably, while depicted as separate entities, dynamical systems represent a continuous cycle of interconnected networks originating from the molecular level until reaching the highest level of human experiences at the social level (Osei & Bjorklund, 2024b).

Synergy describes the efficiency of interconnected elements converging to become functional units executing context-dependent tasks to achieve higher level objectives (Kelso, 2012). The level of synergy between the different elements results from frequent coordinated interactions in pursuit of shared goals at the next level of organization (Schultze et al., 2021). For example, productive interactions between an individual impacted by incarceration and a social worker might lead to high synergy when their repeated actions produce consistently valued results. On the other hand, interactions

between the same two parties indicate a lack of synergy if their interactions repeatedly fail to achieve higher-level social objectives.

The products of synergistic functional units *emerge* toward *attractors*, which represent higher level goal states, signified by reliable patterns of lower-level interactions that frequently produce satisfactory outcomes (Vallacher & Nowak, 1997). Thus, despite continuously changing perceptions, emotions, and cognitions at the biological level, an individual's behavior generally conforms to stable representations at the psychological level (Grossberg, 2021). Hence, when facing varying stressful situations, individuals often behave in prototypical ways, depending on the strength of the attractor (Sapolsky, 2015). Accordingly, certain individuals frequently respond with aggression when anxious, while others resort to physical or mental withdrawal during stressful situations (Sapolsky, 2015). Nonetheless, higher-level attractors do not control lower-level elements but merely constrain the behavioral options, as all system elements are *self-organized* without the supervision of a higher-level controller (Grossberg, 2021). In addition, the dynamic processes of all systems occur in parallel throughout the individual's lived experience, despite the orderly descriptions outlined above. Hence, simultaneously, a person is part of a community at the social level, an individual controlling their perceptual, cognitive, and emotional behavior at the psychological level, and a collection of interacting cells at the biological level (Nowak et al., 2013).

Notably, each independent element at every level of organization represents a nested subsystem, coordinating lower and higher-level dynamics (Nowak et al., 2013). Therefore, each subsystem must stabilize its own internal activity before coordinating with other subsystems to assemble a functioning network at the next level of organization (Grossberg, 2021). Failure to coordinate activities in lower-level interactions would introduce instability into higher levels, ultimately leading to system failure (Grossberg, 2021). Thus, the "goal" of dynamic systems is to maintain functionality throughout all levels of organization while minimizing energy expenditure (Friston, 2010).

This dynamic systems approach differs significantly from conventional rehabilitative models, such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) and Well-Being Development models, by recognizing social systems as networks of self-organizing elements with complex interactions. In contrast, RNR models focus primarily on modifying individual risks, needs, and responsivity (Bonta, 2023), which is unlikely to create a functioning social environment without addressing other system elements independent from the individual. Similarly, while the Well-Being Development model emphasizes strength-based, holistic, and pro-social interventions to enhance individual well-being (Pettus et al., 2021), it does not target the interdependent elements shaping outcomes within the broader social system. In this way, social system performance is not contingent on improving the circumstances or the behaviors of individuals impacted by incarceration, but depends on the interactions between system elements, which requires a more holistic approach. Ultimately, all system elements self-organize, emerging to become a functioning system through synergistic interactions designed to fulfill a higher-level social goal (See Figure 1.).

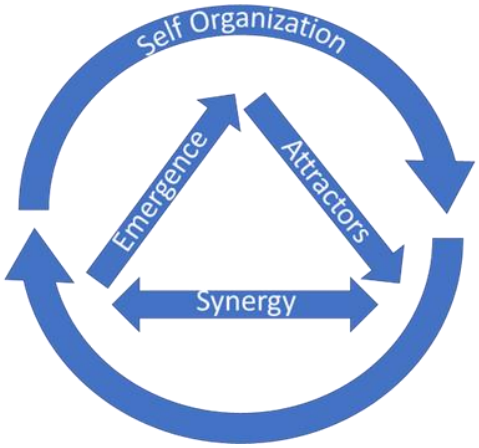

Figure 1. Dynamical Systems

Conceptual Framework

The C.A.R.E. Model

As illustrated in Figure 2, the authors' C.A.R.E. model proposes that reentry programs implement four steps (i.e., Collaborate, Amend, Reintegrate, and Empower) to successfully reunite justice-involved individuals with their families, communities, and the labor market (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020).

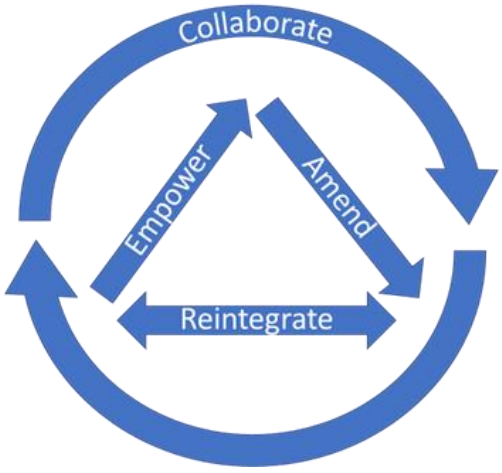

Figure 2. C.A.R.E. Model

The model emphasizes the hierarchical organization of dynamical systems to promote the integration of individuals impacted by incarceration into their communities. Furthermore, it highlights the role of reentry programs in facilitating these social dynamics by mediating the communication between these systems. A description of the model's elements and the functional parallels between the brain's neural system interactions and interpersonal social system interactions follows below.

Collaborate. Collaboration between interdependent elements is essential in any system adapting to a dynamic and unpredictable environment (Grossberg, 2021). Hence the C.A.R.E. model advocates for reentry programs to divert some attention from transforming individuals impacted by incarceration and their immediate circumstances through mental health, substance use, and education/training (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). Of course, these factors along with environmental support, including housing and transportation are essential components of any successful plan to reintegrate justice-involved individuals into their communities and reduce recidivism. Nevertheless, while necessary, these components are not sufficient to create a functioning social system, as they mainly address the individual's psychological level of organization. Importantly, the success or failure of reintegrating back into society does not hinge on any individual's circumstances or the resulting impact on their psychological state. Instead, successful reintegration is determined by the interactions of all interdependent elements at the broader social level to ensure the individual's behavior aligns with the higher-level social goal. Therefore, reentry programs should redirect some of their resources to improve justice-involved individuals' interactions within their social environment instead of transforming their individual circumstances (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020).

Notably, each element of a dynamic system functions as both an independent system

and a component of a larger structure, engaging in lower- and higher-level interactions (Richardson et al., 2014). In this way, every whole is a part and every part a whole, depending on the level of organization that is analyzed. For example, cognitive systems must interact with emotional and perceptual systems before generating a functioning psychological system that in turn interacts with other psychological systems to emerge toward the higher-level social system (Grossberg, 2021). Consequently, it is imperative that reentry programs resolve any psychological issues that would prevent justice-involved individuals from effectively interacting with other elements within the social system. However, for the social system as a whole to fulfill its functional purpose, the individual psychological elements must coordinate their interactions to form a functional unit in service of the higher-level social goal (Nowak et al., 2013). Thus, while coordinating lower-level psychological elements is necessary before ascending to higher levels of organization, it is not sufficient without addressing their larger context within the social dynamics (Vallacher & Nowak, 1997). Consequently, the successful transition into society requires a systemic transformation of all elements to coordinate lower-level individual interactions to achieve higher-level societal goals.

Failing to stabilize interactions within and between these complementary parts will lead to instability and result in the ultimate collapse of the entire system (Vallacher et al., 2017). Avoiding such a system-wide failure requires bottom-up and top-down interactions between higher and lower levels of organization (Grossberg, 2021). However, self-organizing systems must first solve the problem of generating the learning process throughout a hierarchy whose independent elements are oblivious to the entire system's purpose. Direct communication between self-organizing elements would lead to chaos, as lower levels lack an understanding of higher-level dynamics and vice versa (Powers, 1973). Consequently, facilitating the bottom-up and top-down processes between hierarchical levels requires a mediator.

Reentry programs present the ideal mediator at the social level of organization, as they interact with individuals at the lower level and governmental entities, setting the social goal at the higher level (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). Thus, their independence from and proximity to both individual and social systems allows reentry programs to gauge the discrepancies between them. In this way, reentry programs can inform individuals about the efficacy of their interpersonal interactions based on higher-level goals. However, at the biological level of organization, top-down signals from higher levels cannot fully activate downstream networks without corresponding bottom-up inputs to amplify and synchronize signals (Grossberg, 2021). Thus, the biological model suggests that reentry programs cannot rely on higher-level instructions from governmental or judicial institutions alone. Instead, they must also consult with the individuals at the lower level about their experiences in relation to higher level expectations. Ultimately, after comparing lower-level experiences with higher-level goals, reentry programs can improve system interactions by advocating for amendments to governmental restrictions that impact justice-involved individuals' behavioral options (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020).

Amend. Amending restrictions can correct system imbalances if lower-level behavior does not match higher-level expectations (Grossberg, 2021). Currently, higher-level systems attempt to resolve system dysfunctions by altering lower-level

interactions of justice-involved individuals through positive punishment (Barton & Bailey, 2020). Consequently, when individuals deviate from social norms, governmental institutions constrain their freedom to interact with political institutions, potential employers, children, or other individuals impacted by incarceration (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). While these political, economic, and social post-conviction penalties are designed to prevent recidivism, they inadvertently preclude justice-involved individuals from engaging with their communities, thereby restricting their behavioral options (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020).

According to Vallacher et al. (2017), strong forms of control maintained through negative reinforcement discourages individuals from internalizing the desired behavior. Instead, individuals merely operate according to the relevant reinforcement contingencies to avoid punishment when heavily monitored (Vallacher et al., 2017). However, when supervision is minimal or difficult to implement, lower-level interactions will eventually return to their previous attractor state (Vallacher et al., 2017). Thus, justice-involved individuals will eventually return to interacting with those most familiar, despite the desires of governing institutions to restrain such relationships. Alternatively, governmental policies should lessen restrictions to allow justice-involved individuals to discover ways to integrate the higher order social dynamics into their psychological attractor states (Vallacher et al., 2017).

In addition, enforcing strict rules through higher-level control facilitates lower-level dynamics that are inflexible and mandate predetermined behavior in an unpredictable environment. At the social level of organization, this biological strategy supports the notion of implementing less severe constraints to give justice-involved individuals the freedom to control their lower-level interactions. Ultimately, government regulations cannot control the interactions of individuals impacted by incarceration. Instead, reentry programs should advocate for policies that recognize the interpersonal histories of justice-involved individuals while offering a structured framework to support, rather than dictate, their reintegration into the community (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018).

Reintegrate. Reintegrating justice-involved individuals is ultimately judged by the quality of interactions within their communities. The principles outlined in this section are best captured by the iconic phrase of famous neuroscientist Donald Hebb remarking: “Neurons that fire together, wire together” (Munakata & Pfaffly, 2004). Similarly, like-minded individuals develop strong interpersonal relationships through repeated positive interactions (Vallacher et al., 2017) while reducing the likelihood of engaging with individuals of different mindsets. Likewise, even when displaying slight initial differences, individuals can assimilate their behavioral tendencies to accommodate those of others in social interactions (Nowak et al., 2013).

Therefore, any attempts to control social relationships of justice-involved individuals to prevent exposure to criminogenic environments must consider their attractors regarding interpersonal communications. Accordingly, compelling individuals to alter their typical interpersonal behaviors must proceed gradually to avoid wild oscillations from their attractor states that will inevitably lead to conflict (Powers, 1973). Ultimately, individuals are most likely to adopt pro-social changes to their behavioral characteristics when interacting with similarly minded individuals (Vallacher et al., 2017). This point suggests that reentry programs guide interactions with future

employers, community leaders, and correctional staff to partially align with attractors of justice-involved individuals.

Empower. Empowering individuals impacted by incarceration allows their psychological systems to synchronize more effectively with higher-level social systems. This way, successfully integrating into the community through repeated positive communication produces stronger connections. Similarly, in attempting to repair the damage caused by their past infractions, justice-involved individuals must convey real value when interacting with the community.

Unfortunately, post-conviction penalties frequently impede attempts to conform to social standards, thereby restricting communication between returning citizens and their communities (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). In neural systems, repeated failure to sufficiently excite postsynaptic cells results in the pruning of their dendrites (Kandel et al., 2000). Consequently, future signals arriving at postsynaptic cells are essentially disregarded due to insufficient receptors available to accept the message. Similarly, repeated failure to communicate effectively at the social level despite the individual's best efforts ultimately leads to learned helplessness (Grossberg, 2021). In such cases, justice-involved individuals stop attempting to meet higher-level expectations, as previous efforts continually resulted in disappointment. Hence, reentry programs should advocate for justice-involved individuals to regain confidence that their contributions present value at the social level. Individuals and communities would benefit from having returning citizens volunteer at social organizations to facilitate repeated favorable interactions (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020).

However, as with any interaction, success does not depend solely on the sender transferring the information. Instead, to effectively communicate a message, recipients must also attend, decipher, and assign meaning to it. Comparatively, community members receiving messages from justice-involved individuals might perceive them as inherently negative despite best attempts to convey positive meaning. Thus, social stigma frequently impedes renewed efforts of justice-involved individuals to improve communication with their social system. Ultimately, increasing the number of positive interactions and reducing the stigma associated with individuals impacted by incarceration will improve the chances of successfully reintegrating them into their communities.

Discussion

Governmental institutions must recognize that the individuals impacted by incarceration are not separate elements impeding the social system's functionality. Instead, justice-involved individuals are an integral part of the larger social system, contributing to their behavior. Altering any dysfunctional aspects of their conduct cannot be resolved at the individual level but requires a systemic transformation of all elements involved in the social processes. Thus, improving the interactions of the constituent parts is most critical in correcting the current dysfunctional system. The human brain, arguably being the most adaptable and effective self-organizing system on earth, might provide a suitable framework to apply to various societal issues. Consequently, reentry programs might benefit from incorporating some of the insights of the brain's processes to navigate the successful integration of justice-involved individuals into society.

For instance, contemporary theories of the brain suggest that the central nervous system does not control or direct the body's operations but instead is only one of the elements within the larger dynamic system

of the individual.

Hence, rehabilitative programs should collaborate with other regulatory entities to create an environment that gives individuals impacted by incarceration the best chance to avoid recidivism. In this way, reentry programs could advocate for justice-involved individuals to amend policies that prevent them from fully reintegrating into their communities due to political, financial, and social restrictions. Importantly, any efforts to improve the experience of justice- involved individuals must incorporate those impacted by the policies. Thus, individuals impacted by incarceration must join policy discussions to inform regulatory institutions about their struggles to abide by these rules. Ultimately, prosocial behavior is most viable when policies align with the lived experiences of justice-involved individuals.

Additionally, reentry programs should attempt to reduce the stigma associated with individuals impacted by incarceration by promoting frequent positive interactions with their communities through volunteer efforts. Gaining exposure to community organizations and potential future employers allows justice-involved individuals to display their skills and reduce concerns about their past infractions. Ultimately, improving interactions and reducing the stigma of individuals impacted by incarceration will improve their chances of successfully reintegrating into their families, communities, and workforce.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

The previous insights have significant implications for policy, practice, and research related to the reintegration of justice-involved individuals into their communities and society.

Policy. Despite various criminal justice reform efforts, rising recidivism rates indicate that current policies require further amendments to address the needs of justice-involved individuals. Specifically, legislation needs to address employment-related issues restricting justice-involved individuals from participating in the labor market. For example, Umez and Pirius (2018) argue that "blanket bans" and "good moral character clauses" need to be eliminated to allow formerly incarcerated persons to have equal access to employment opportunities. Reforming these labor laws would reduce the likelihood of justice-involved individuals to commit additional crimes to alleviate the financial pressures of parole and probation payments. Additionally, it could empower individuals impacted by incarceration to become valued members of their families by allowing them to support their spouses and children financially.

In addition to employment-related issues, justice-involved individuals frequently struggle with post-conviction penalties, restricting their freedom to function within the communities they enter upon release. While these policies, such as bans prohibiting justice-involved individuals from interacting with other formerly incarcerated persons, are designed to prevent criminal behaviors, it inadvertently isolates them from their community. As previously discussed, successfully integrating into the community requires justice-involved individuals to participate in community functions to increase the frequency of positive interactions. Thus, the efficacy of post-conviction restrictions should be reevaluated to account for the adverse effects of isolation experienced by justice-involved individuals that contribute to their increased recidivism rates. Ultimately, law enforcement, judges, and legislators can improve community relations by amending policies to allow

justice-involved individuals to display their value to the community through positive interactions.

Practice. Various professionals, including social workers, psychologists, probation officers, and correction officers, interact with justice-involved individuals before, during, and after release. To improve their interactions, professionals could communicate through words and actions that their role is to assist and not surveil individuals impacted by incarceration. Thus, instead of monitoring and documenting infractions professionals in the criminal justice system could focus on facilitating positive interactions between justice-involved individuals and their communities. In this way, professionals could collaborate with local businesses, community organizations, and churches to allow disenfranchised justice-involved individuals to volunteer and become valued community members (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). Ultimately, revising interactions between criminal justice professionals and individuals impacted by incarceration allows them to improve their self-image and overcome the stigma that impedes successful communication with their social environment (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018).

Furthermore, practitioners in reentry programs could benefit from applying a more ecological approach to interventions designed to prepare justice-involved individuals for reentry into society post-release. In this sense, the behavior of justice-involved individuals post-release is not exclusively controlled by them but is influenced by countless environmental factors that reciprocally interact with one another and the individual (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020). Therefore, individuals who navigate this complex environment must experience these influences to adapt their behavior to the environmental context. Consequently, programs could shift certain parts of their behavioral training from pre-to post-release programming by taking advantage of the heavily monitored parole and probation period to assist individuals during the challenging post-release period. In this way, justice-involved individuals could report their experiences to trained professionals who can make situational assessments and help improve their interactions with their communities (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020).

Research. Research frequently shows that various attempts to reduce crime rates using "common- sense" principles have failed to produce the desired outcome. A prominent failure is the *Scared Straight* program which attempts to deter juvenile offenders from engaging in criminal activity by exposing them to the adverse effects of their behavior through jail expeditions (Petrosino et al., 2013). Criminal justice reform must be based on empirical research to avoid repeating the mistakes of programs such as *Scared Straight*. The Council on Criminal Justice identified three critical components in any effort to reform the criminal justice system. First, jails, prisons, and courts must share data to base reform decisions on accurate information. Second, research must guide effective intervention strategies. Finally, reform efforts must be coordinated with all groups across the criminal justice spectrum (Head, 2019).

Furthermore, researchers must explore external factors that impact the implementation of reform efforts that operate outside the reentry program's organizational structure but affect outcomes for justice-involved individuals. According to Watson et al. (2018), complex interventions within large systems and communities involving multiple components that reciprocally interact must consider the external context influencing their processes. Watson et al. (2018) also identified several barriers and facilitators that impact program implementation, including (1) professional influences, (2) political support, (3) social climate, (4) local infrastructure, (5) policy and legal climate,

(6) relational climate, (7) target population, and (8) funding and economic climate. All these constructs interact with one another and constrain organizational implementation without being in the direct control of the reentry program. Ultimately, reentry programs could benefit from identifying collaborative opportunities with external entities to improve outcomes for justice-involved individuals during the reentry process (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2020).

Conclusion

Individuals impacted by incarceration enter a complex environment upon release, which is currently not structured to integrate these individuals into the social system successfully. Thus, despite the best efforts of rehabilitative programs to reduce recidivism through financial assistance and psychological interventions, individuals continue to struggle to reunite with their communities. The C.A.R.E. model proposes that successful integration involves the systemic modification of the entire social structure instead of simply addressing deficiencies at the individual level. Consequently, the efficacy of the social dynamics hinges on the interactions within and between individuals impacted by incarceration and social systems.

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