

As defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, recidivism is the tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics on December 31, 2016, there were over 6.5 million people within the United States correctional system. With that large number, it is important to consider how society may assist these folks and eventually (hopefully) decrease the correctional population. Those who have been incarcerated or are supervised on probation/parole may have made mistakes, but by helping them learn and understand the reasoning behind their actions, society can help those people work for a better future and leave criminal behavior in their past.

One important consideration include how a person's economic situation can lead them to criminal behavior. As shown in the Dessie Woldiya Correctional Centers (DWCC) study (year), over half of incarcerated individuals were unemployed before their imprisonment. For repeat offenders, when asked if being unemployed was the factor that led them to re-offending, over half of them answered "yes." When asked about income in regard to fulfilling their necessities after their first prison sentence, almost 80% answered "no." As a more general question, repeat offenders were asked if they believed economic problems are what led them back into criminal ways; over half of them answered "yes." Unemployment, poverty, and lack of income are all factors that lead people to use criminal activities to fulfill basic human needs. Individuals released from prison/jail tend to find it more difficult to obtain a job due to fear and suspicion from employers, making it that much harder for those people to gain the financial means of living. One incarcerated individual who participated in the DWCC stated, "I was released from prison, but it was difficult to find employment because of my criminal background." As discussed by Reporter Lottie Joiner about Policing in the USA, "The first 72 hours that people are released from prison are the most crucial. Not having a job will send someone back, not having a place to live will send someone back, and not having transportation will send someone back." This means, without the economic means of survival, released individuals are often led back into criminal behavior to make ends meet and get the funds required for life's necessities. Additionally, according to *The Role of Supervised Community Service and Socio-Economic Status in Recidivism Pertaining to Financial Crimes among Ex-Convicts*, (year) "Unemployment leads to financial distress, which in turn contributes to recidivism pertaining to financial crimes." When having to take on all of this stress when just being released from prison, it is easy for one to resort back to a life of crime in hopes of gaining the financial stability they need in order to survive life outside of the prison.

Though unemployment and lack of economic resources is one cause of recidivism, the psychological factors within a person also play a role in repeating criminal activities. Once again referring to the study conducted through the DWCC repeat offenders, almost a third of incarcerated individuals said they had psychological problems prior to imprisonment. Although 31.7% may seem like a small percentage, that's over 2 million people in the U.S.. The most common psychological factors are anxiety, depression, stress, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and psychosis. Due to psychological issues, individuals may not respond to imprisonment, programs for rehabilitation, or other punishments for their crimes. In fact, they may continue to have reoffending tendencies until improvements are made to their psychological health. In Melitta Schimideberg's *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* article (year), she discusses three specific types of reoffenders: 1) individuals who act out of passion or emotion; 2) neurotic delinquents - those influenced by "overwhelming irrational forces", and 3) antisocial criminals -

those who have “no satisfactory relations and therefore no consideration for others, making things or physical pleasures the center of their interest and suffers from an overwhelming need for immediate satisfaction with no thought of the future.” Psychological factors such as the ones discussed today influence a person’s decision to engage in criminal behavior, and may lead them toward repeat offending.

Finally, addiction also has a major impact on a individual’s decisions to re-engage in criminal activity. When asked if they had any addictions prior to imprisonment, 60.6% answered “yes.” The most common substances used were: alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis. These percentages do not exactly add up to the 60.6% who answered yes in the interview because many incarcerated individuals had multiple addictions. The recidivists were also asked if they had enough income to satisfy their addiction, to which 70.3% answered “no,” and 77.5% admitted that they committed crimes as a tactic to satisfy their addiction. People who are addicted to drugs tend to be exposed to criminal activities due to motivation from the drugs themselves or as a means to finance their drug addiction. Costly illegal drugs influences substance often users to commit property crimes such as robbery, theft, and burglary to get the finances they need to satisfy their need for drugs. According to Pix11 News, “Often times, thieves linger outside to wait for the right opportunity to rush in to steal... Often, it is an addict looking to grab cosmetic or nutritional products to sell for a few dollars’ worth of drugs.” This means that addiction influences individuals so heavily that when desperation for satisfaction of addiction sets in, they are willing to commit crimes to gain the financial means to obtain drugs or alcohol, leading them to not only encourage their addiction, but to engage in continuous criminal behavior and becoming repeat offenders.

In conclusion, there are many reasons that a person may choose to engage in criminal behavior, even following the release from correctional sentence. Although there are programs and services available both in-custody and in the community all three problems remain. We are simply not doing enough! Formerly incarcerated individuals may be serving time for their mistakes but without the help they need they continue to serve time even after release. However, by learning and understanding the reasoning they have behind the crimes they commit; society can help those people work for a better future and leave criminal behavior in their past.