

Using Mixed Methods to Inform Reentry Policy & Practice

Lila Kazemian, Ph.D.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine
July 27, 2021



The mixed-methods approach to the study of desistance from crime and reentry

- Use of both structured scales & open-ended questions
- Survey data: ensure that baseline information is collected for all study participants
- Interview data: allow participants to steer the conversation in any direction that is deemed relevant
- The mixed-methods approach enables within- and between-individual comparisons

Research findings that could only be explored with qualitative data

- The root cause of sustained violence is unresolved trauma and suffering.
- Individuals who achieve positive transformation in prison make a conscious decision to extract some positive outcome out of painful & traumatic experiences.
- Prison misconduct is not always an accurate indicator of risk.

Features of the desistance narrative in prison that are relevant to successful reintegration

- Coping with past trauma
- Identity shift: not from 'criminal' to 'non-criminal'
 - Belief that the person is worthy of a good life, and this is perceived to be an achievable outcome.
- Change and growth efforts rely on factors that are within the control of the individual.
- Change efforts are anchored in the present, not postponed to a later time.

Successful reentry is at least in part dependent on efforts to prepare for release on the inside.

What positive outcomes reflect successful reentry?

Seemingly objective turning points can be experienced in a very subjective manner.

The ability of life events to shape behavior depends on the extent to which they enable individuals to find meaning and purpose to their lives.

The disconnect between desistance theory and desistance-promoting policy and practice