

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/opening-the-door-to-healing-for-crime-victims-who-have-previously-been-incarcerated>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Vera's Center on Victimization and Safety, on behalf of the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims (NRC) a national collaboration funded by the Office for Victims of Crime at the U.S. Department of Justice has published a new report, *Opening the Door to Healing: Reaching and Serving Crime Victims Who Have a History of Incarceration*, that explores the realities of survivors who live with a history of both victimization and incarceration.

People who have been incarcerated are also often survivors of violence/harm that may have happened to them before, during, or after their time behind bars. Yet, for many, the shame and stigma of being labeled offenders often eclipses the less visible but painful reality of their experiences of violence.

We are proud to release a new report that shines a light on crime victims and trauma survivors who live with a history of both victimization and incarceration and offers strategies for opening the door to healing for these survivors. The report is called [*Opening the Door to Healing: Reaching and Serving Crime Victims Who Have a History of Incarceration*](#), and Vera's Center on Victimization and Safety developed this resource on behalf of the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims (NRC) a national collaboration funded by the Office for Victims of Crime at the U.S. Department of Justice.

The report is based on an in-depth needs assessment that encompassed informational interviews, listening sessions, and a review of academic and practice literature, and reflects what we've come to understand about this population: For many reasons, survivors who have previously been incarcerated often don't get the help they need to heal.

The stigma of being formerly incarcerated and the stark lines between victim and offender in our society are deep-seated. That stigma can make it extremely challenging for survivors who have previously been incarcerated to seek help. It can also make it difficult for victim service providers to see this population of survivors as crime victims, meaning their outreach and services don't reach them.

On the other hand, a number of formerly incarcerated people do get support from reentry programs during their transition back to the community after a period of incarceration. But, most reentry programs are designed to help people find housing and jobs, not heal from trauma.

Reentry service providers are generally not asking their clients about trauma, and wouldn't know what to do if someone disclosed victimization, the report says. They may only recognize signs of trauma when a client's behavior—for example, substance use—indicates that something is wrong, and the behavior is interfering with the person's ability to keep a job or meet parole conditions. By that time, a crisis may be unfolding that ends with the person's parole being revoked or a new arrest, both of which often lead back to jail or prison.

These realities, examined in the report, help explain why so many survivors with an incarceration history do not get the services they need to heal. They also point to real opportunities for change.

These range from explicitly naming this population of survivors, to help reduce stigma and affirm their humanity, to exploring ways to build skills and collaboration among victim service providers and reentry programs.

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