

## Former inmates need social supports to maintain mental health, study says

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Men released from prison who receive social, community and spiritual support have better mental health, according to a study by researchers at Rutgers School of Public Health.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, found that former offenders, particularly those of color, who had access to and used [social resources](#) had better [mental health](#) and a more successful reentry back into society than those who did not. The findings suggest that without such supports, incarcerated men could face significant challenges as they try to regain their lives.

More than 1.5 million people are incarcerated in federal and state prisons with about 700,000 offenders released each year. About 93 percent of incarcerated individuals are male—with an estimated one in every 15 [black men](#) and one in every 36 Latino men incarcerated, in comparison with one in every 106 non-Hispanic white men.

"Inmates are 10 times more likely to suffer from [antisocial personality disorder](#) and two to four times more likely to suffer from psychotic illnesses and major depression. When these inmates, especially those of color, are released, they enter a world with weak support networks that do not allow them to get the assistance that they need to reintegrate or seek mental health treatment," said lead author Pamela Valera, assistant professor at the Rutgers School of Public Health. "It is well established that people who have stable support systems are better positioned to

accomplish a successful reentry and maintain a sense of well-being and better mental health."

The study is significant to the conversations taking place throughout the country on [mass incarceration](#) and criminal justice reform, Valera said.

"Improving social supports is more important than ever as the rate of former offenders is growing. There are currently more than 100 million Americans who have a criminal record," she said. "We need to involve personnel inside the criminal justice system, such as [prison staff](#) and community reintegration offices, in providing and encouraging the use of social, community and religious support services for inmates upon reentry."

**More information:** Pamela Valera et al, Perceived Social Ties and Mental Health Among Formerly Incarcerated Men in New York City, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0306624X19832239](https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X19832239)

Provided by Rutgers University

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