

**Prepared Remarks of**

**Pamela K. Lattimore, Ph.D.  
Principal Scientist  
Crime, Violence and Justice Research Program  
RTI International**

**Before the**

**United States House of Representatives Judiciary Subcommittee on  
Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security**

**Regarding**

***Prisoner Reentry***

**June 9, 2010**



Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to provide information about prisoner reentry. In particular, I will address some implications of our findings from the evaluation of the *Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative—SVORI*. This study was funded through the National Institute of Justice and was conducted by researchers at RTI International and the Urban Institute<sup>1</sup>.

I am Dr. Pamela Lattimore, a Principal Scientist at RTI International. Dr. Christy Visser, Principal Research Associate at the Urban Institute and Professor at the University of Delaware, was the Co-Principal Investigator for the evaluation.

As you may know, RTI International is an independent, nonprofit research organization based in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, that provides research and technical expertise to governments and businesses in more than 40 countries. The Urban Institute, located in Washington, D.C., is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that examines the social, economic, and governance challenges facing the nation.

I have been studying criminal behavior and the effectiveness of correctional programs for more than twenty years. These issues have taken on more importance as the number of people in the criminal justice system doubled from 3.7 million in 1988 when I began a visiting research fellowship at the National Institute of Justice to 7.3 million in 2008 (the latest data available)<sup>2</sup>. During this time, the number of people in state and federal prisons grew from about 600,000 to more than 1.5 million. Our local jails now hold over 780,000—more than double the 340,000 who were jailed in 1988.

These increases have been accompanied by a growing price tag. In 2006, federal, state and local governments spent nearly \$69 billion on corrections—more than three times the \$20 billion spent in 1988. If we add in other criminal justice costs

such as law enforcement and courts, we see total criminal justice costs grew from \$65 billion in 1988 to nearly \$215 billion in 2006.

These numbers represent significant costs at the federal, state and local levels and many lives. The question that confronts us is “Is there a better way?” Since we know that there is considerable state-level variation in incarceration rates—the total incarceration rate of the state with the highest rate in 2008 is more than 5.5 times higher than the state with the lowest rate—perhaps we can identify the appropriate policies that will allow us to reduce incarceration rates, costs to the taxpayer, and impacts to families and communities. This is one objective of the Second Chance Act of 2007.

For the past six years, I directed the evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI)—a predecessor to the Second Chance Act—that provided grants to 69 state agencies across the country in 2003 and 2004. SVORI was the first of recent federal efforts to provide corrections and juvenile justice agencies with grants to develop and implement prisoner reentry programs. A total of \$110 million was distributed that supported 89 programs for adult prisoners and juvenile detainees. Findings from the evaluation can be found at <http://www.svori-evaluation.org>.

### **SVORI Programs**

SVORI grants supported the creation of a continuum of services that started in prison and continued following release. SVORI had four specific objectives:

- 1) Improve the self-sufficiency of released prisoners by improving options in employment, housing, and family and community involvement;
- 2) Improve the health of returning offenders by addressing substance use, and physical and mental health problems;
- 3) Reduce criminality among returning offenders through programming and services, as well as supervision and monitoring; and
- 4) Promote systems change through multi-agency collaboration and case management strategies.

Each SVORI-supported program was developed to reflect local needs and resources. Grantees were encouraged to include five components in their programs: diagnostic and risk assessments, individual reentry plans, transition teams, community resources, and graduated levels of supervision. Further, all grantees were required to support a partnership between institutional agencies, such as the departments of corrections and juvenile justice, and at least one community agency. Within this basic framework, each grantee used the SVORI funding to tailor reentry programming to the needs of their jurisdictions.

Importantly, the SVORI grants focused on “serious and violent” offenders—i.e., those who potentially posed the greatest costs and highest risks following release. This differed from earlier programs that, generally, were reserved for non-violent and, often, for first-time offenders<sup>3</sup>.

The impact of this unprecedented reentry program investment is the focus of the SVORI multi-site evaluation. After a one-year planning grant, we conducted three surveys of the directors of the 89 SVORI programs. These surveys collected information on the nature of each of the locally designed SVORI programs, including the components of the program and the targeted participant population(s), as well as information on the barriers that were encountered and overcome as programs were developed and implemented.

We also conducted interviews with SVORI program participants and comparison subjects from 12 adult programs and 4 juvenile programs located in 14 states. In total, we interviewed nearly 2,500 men, women and boys between July 2004 and April 2007 at four specific points in time: about 30 days prior to their release from prison, and at 3, 9 and 15 months following their release. (We were unable to recruit sufficient numbers of girls to include them in the study.)

The interviews asked for detailed information on criminal and employment history and past substance use; treatment and service needs; services and program receipt; and numerous outcomes in criminal justice, employment, health (including current substance use and mental health), and housing. For those in the community at 3 and 15 months following release, we also conducted oral swab drug tests.

Finally, we received administrative recidivism data from these fourteen states and the FBI that were used to determine official reincarceration and rearrest rates.

All of this information was and is being analyzed to examine the impact of these 12 adult and 4 juvenile SVORI programs. We are able to share with you some of the important conclusions of our work.

## **Findings from the SVORI Multi-site Evaluation**

### **(1) The successful reintegration of individuals exiting prison is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive approach.**

The SVORI legislation specified a joint effort of the Departments of Justice, Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development. This collaboration acknowledges that individuals leaving prison have needs that span multiple domains and that these needs are interwoven. For example, individuals exiting prison generally have little education and few job skills. They are likely to have problems with drugs and alcohol and many suffer from mental illness. Additionally, things that we take for granted—such as a driver’s license, how to fill out a job application, having a place to live—may be out of reach.

For example, among our respondents, only about 60% of the adults (less than 20% of the boys) had finished twelfth grade or had a GED. Less than two-thirds of the men and only about half of the women had worked during the six months prior to their current incarceration (only slightly more than a third of the boys had worked). Further, 95% of the men and women and nearly 90% of the boys admitted to having used illegal drugs. Nearly 80% of the women, about 55% of the men and 50% of the boys had been treated for either a mental health or substance abuse problem prior to their most recent incarceration.

The SVORI program participants also had serious criminal histories. Fully 80% of the adults had been in prison before. Half of the men and 30% of the women also had had at least one juvenile detention. The men reported an average of 13 prior arrests—the women about 11 and the boys about 7. The boys also had prior records—most had been in juvenile correctional facilities before.

**(2) SVORI funding was a significant step forward in the development and continuation of reentry programming in most states.**

SVORI funding boosted the development of reentry programming in most states, according to SVORI program directors. We conducted an email survey of SVORI program directors in 2008—after the programs had expended all of their SVORI grant funds—to determine whether activities initiated with SVORI grant funds were continuing. We received responses from 56 of the 89 programs. More than three-quarters of the program directors said that their agencies were continuing at least some programs or activities that began as a result of SVORI grant funds. A similar proportion said that their states had developed and were implementing other reentry components. Many suggested that the SVORI funds had been instrumental in starting or improving their states’ efforts to develop reentry programming.

**(3) SVORI funds increased collaboration among state and local agencies and organizations.**

An important goal of the SVORI grants was to foster increased collaboration between departments of correction or juvenile justice and other state and local agencies as well as community and faith-based organizations. In interviews with directors of the 16 programs in our impact evaluation, nearly all of the directors reported that the relationship between their agency and the community supervision agency had improved as a direct result of the SVORI grant. One program director said, “SVORI played a part in all the change [that was] going on. It was the catalyst by virtue of providing funds and guidance to put a model in place and demonstrate to the system how this could be done.”

Further, 13 of the 16 program directors reported increased collaborations with community-based organizations (or CBOs), and 9 of the 16 reported increased collaborations with faith-based organizations (or FBOs)—again, as a direct result of the SVORI grant. One director said, “SVORI enhanced awareness both on the part of the Department of Corrections as well as on the part of the CBOs as to how it’s important to work together. We have developed a set of FBOs with

whom the DOC can work. FBOs are also contacting DOC directly to ask if there are things that they can do.”

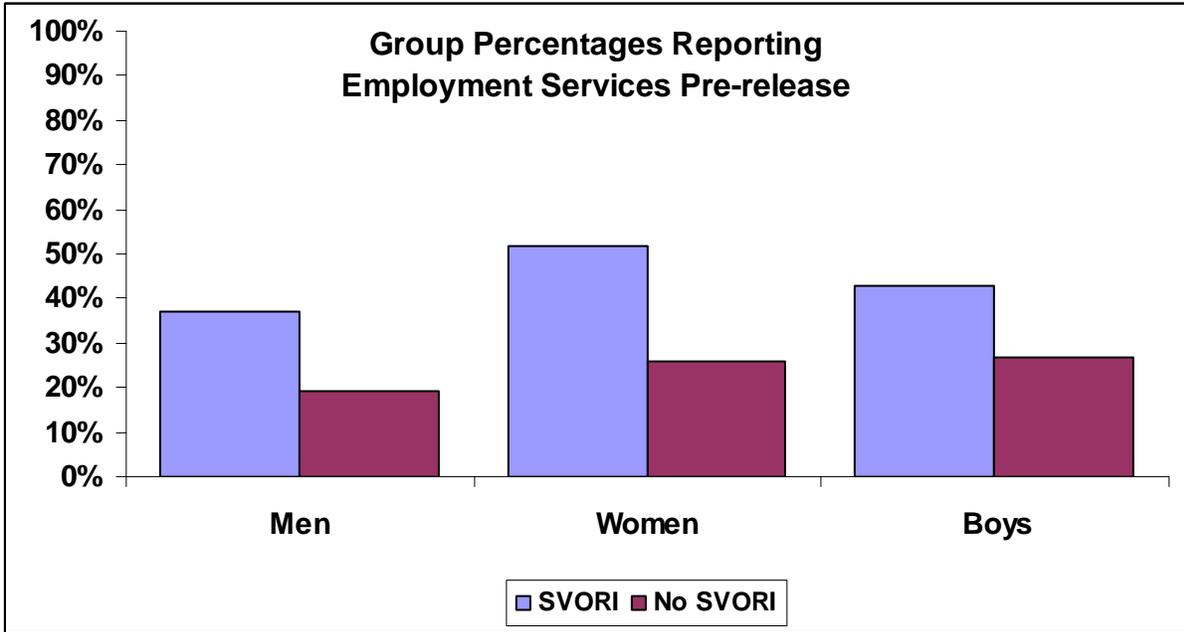
Of note, most of the program directors reported that these new and improved collaborations had continued or expanded after the conclusion of the SVORI grant.

**(4) SVORI funds resulted in the development of local programs that provided an increase in services for participants.**

Overall, participation in SVORI programs greatly increased the likelihood of receiving a wide variety of services, such as reentry planning, assistance obtaining documents (such as driver’s licenses), mentoring, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and educational and employment services. This was true for the men, the women and the boys.

For example, 98% of women and 87% of the men participating in SVORI programs reported receiving at least one of twelve transition services. The most common was services to prepare for release: 90% of the women and 75% of the men reported that they had received services to prepare for release. These percentages were about 50% higher than those reported by the comparison groups (59% of women and 51% of men).

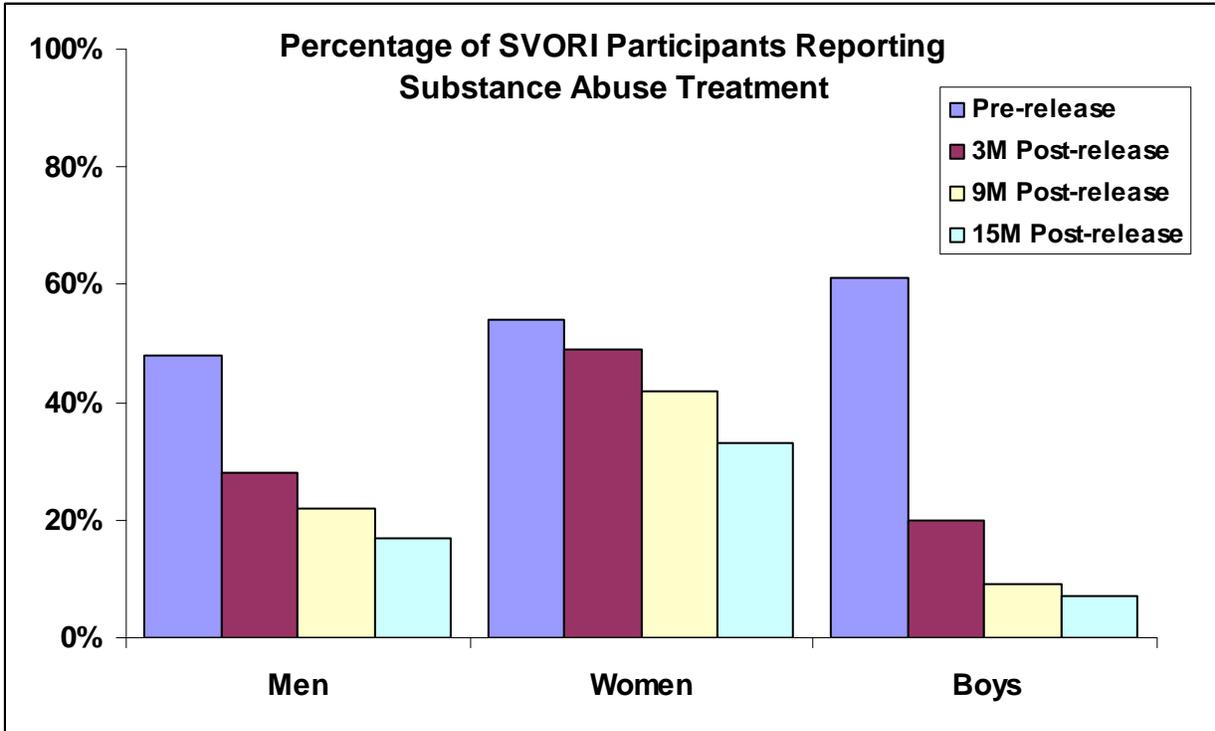
Most of the adult programs identified employment as a primary focus. Most SVORI participants (93% of the women and 79% of the men) reported that they had received at least one of six educational or employment services. However, educational services were more commonly reported with only 37% of the men and 52% of the women reporting that they had received employment services prior to release. These percentages were about twice those of the comparison subjects. So, again, SVORI program participation greatly increased the likelihood of services or programs—but at levels far less than 100%.



**(5) More services were delivered prior to release than after release.**

The level of services and programs provided dropped substantially following release. For example, as the chart on the following page shows, on average, about half of the men in SVORI programs received substance abuse treatment in prison—a percentage that dropped substantially following release. Similar findings were observed for the boys who were in SVORI programs. The women were somewhat more likely than the males to continue receiving services following release.

The drop following release is likely due to the difficulty of providing services or coordinating service provision in the community as opposed to within detention facilities. Particularly in sites where SVORI participants were released statewide, identifying appropriate services across the state would have been particularly daunting.



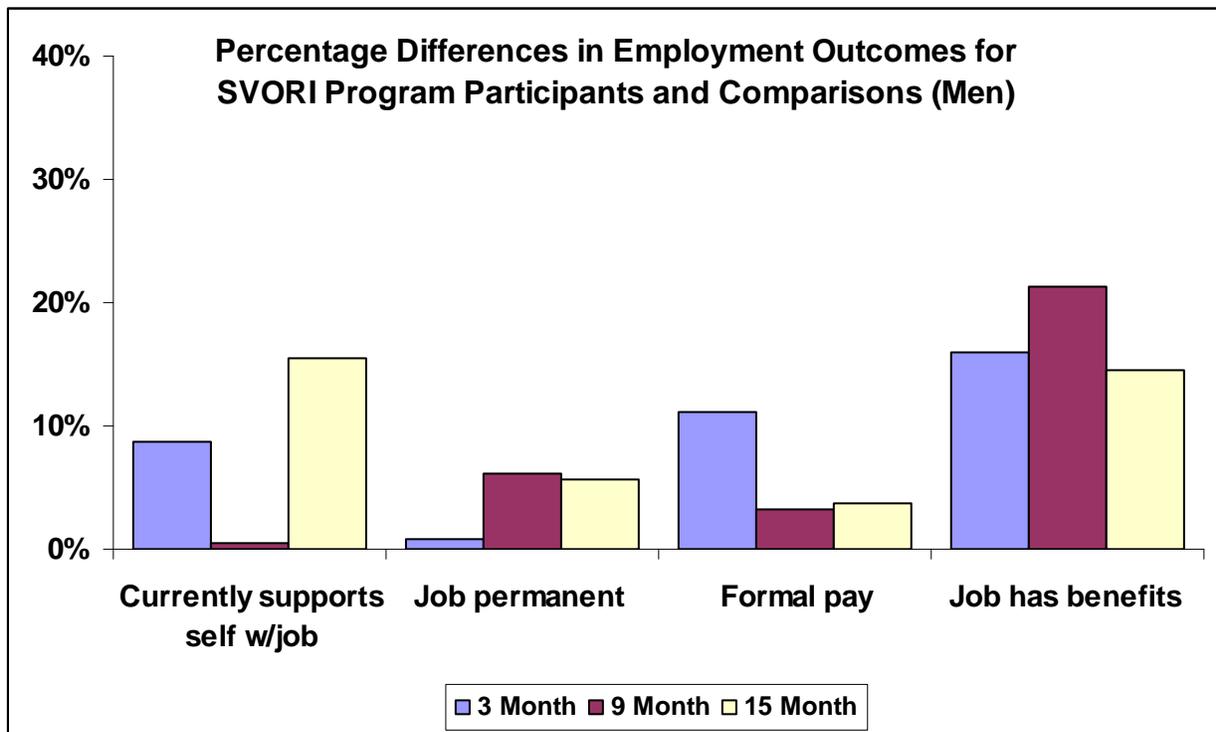
**(6) The \$69 billion question: What was the impact of SVORI on outcomes?**

Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative program participants were much more likely to receive a broad array of services and programming than similar individuals who were not in SVORI programs. However, this was much truer during the pre-release phase than following release. Also, although levels were higher, they were not 100%. These services were expected to lead to reduced societal costs through improved outcomes across a variety of dimensions, including housing, employment, mental health, family relationships, education, substance use, and criminal behavior.

We examined over 100 possible outcomes across the domain areas targeted by SVORI. In most cases, the difference in outcomes between those participating in SVORI programs and the comparison subjects indicates that SVORI program participation resulted in an improvement in outcomes. In many cases, these differences were small, but we know from the literature that effective

correctional programs generally result in improvements of 5% to 15%, so our findings are in line with what we would have expected.

The positive findings span the various outcome areas and the three post-release interview periods. For example, the preliminary results for the adult men in our study on some of our employment measures show that SVORI program participants were about 10% more likely than comparison subjects to report supporting themselves with a job 3 months following release. They were also more likely to report having a job that was permanent, that offered formal pay, and that had benefits such as health insurance and vacation pay.



Other findings showed:

- Housing independence increased over time following release for adult SVORI program participants.
- SVORI programs reduced substance use among program participants, although overall drug use increased over time for all groups.

- SVORI program participation appeared to have little effect on compliance with conditions of supervision.

The ultimate goal of SVORI—and other reentry programming—is to reduce criminal recidivism. We had both self-reported and official record indicators of criminal activity.

- Although men who participated in SVORI programs were more likely than their comparison counterparts to report not committing criminal acts in the period since the most recent interview, there were few differences between program participants and comparison subjects among the adult females and the juvenile males.
- During the first 24 months post release, adult SVORI program participants were less likely to be rearrested based on official records although rearrest rates were high<sup>4</sup>: 24 months following release, among SVORI program participants, 68% of men and 49% of women had at least one rearrest. These percentages compared favorably with percentages for nonparticipants—71% of men and 60% of women.
- There was little difference in the reincarceration rates of the SVORI men, non-SVORI men, and the SVORI women in terms of their chances of being reincarcerated within 24 months of release—42%, 39% and 41%, respectively. For reasons that we continue to explore, women who did not participate in SVORI programs were much less likely to be reincarcerated in state prison than their program participant counterparts (22% compared with 41%)<sup>5</sup>.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The SVORI programs provided increases in services to a population with tremendous needs in education, employment, health and basic living skills—albeit at levels much less than 100%. Overall, service provision declined following release for everyone. In context, the programs had only a three-year grant period to develop and implement their SVORI programs—which entailed multiple services and programs delivered in most cases in multiple institutions and

communities. *The findings suggest that SVORI grants provided a beginning upon which states and communities began to develop a response to prisoner reentry issues, but that a more sustained period may be necessary to fully develop and implement a comprehensive reentry program. Congress and other funders should expect that an effort extending beyond three years may be necessary to develop, implement and sustain programs to meet the employment, housing and treatment needs of serious criminal justice populations. Further, we need to study and develop a better understanding of the issues associated with implementing criminal justice programs and assuring that programs are delivered with fidelity.*

Those participating in SVORI programs overall had better outcomes following release from prison across employment, housing, and health domains than comparable individuals who did not participate in SVORI programs. SVORI program participants also were somewhat less likely to be rearrested, but these improvements did not translate, overall, into a reduction in reincarceration. *The logic model underlying reentry programs is that programs that improve employment, reduce drug use, and address mental health and other needs among justice populations will lead to reduced criminal behavior and recidivism. Although there is some evidence to support this, we do have the full range of information needed to know which types of programs help which types of populations. Further study is needed to identify the effectiveness of programs that are evidenced based and have been carefully implemented. We need to develop a better understanding of the effects on both intermediate outcomes such as employment and drug use and the recidivism outcomes of such concern to the public and policymakers.*

**Finally, I would like to point out that we have come a long way in our understanding of prisoner reentry since reentry was identified as an issue by the Administration and Congress ten years ago. However, the comprehensive, detailed SVORI multi-site evaluation we were able to conduct is highly uncommon for justice research.**

I only touched on some of the highlights of what we have been able to learn by having the luxury to study 16 SVORI programs and thousands of subjects over a number of years. Because of a shortage of funding for criminal justice research,

many justice program evaluations focus on single programs with small numbers of subjects who are followed for short periods of time. Such evaluations often do not provide good statistical tests of effectiveness—particularly, as is often the case, if the evaluation is conducted while the program is being developed and implemented.

Fortunately, under the auspices of the Second Chance Act of 2007, the Office of Justice Program (OJP) agencies including the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the National Institute of Justice are working with agencies and the research community to further our understanding of programs, implementation issues, and outcomes related to prisoner reentry programs. These activities, building on the knowledge gained over the past decade’s efforts on prisoner reentry issues, will provide policy makers independent, objective information to assist them in making important decisions in this vital and increasingly expensive policy area.

Although there are many priorities competing for federal dollars, adequate funding for comprehensive evaluations can lead to improved policy development, improved program implementation and administration, better use of taxpayer dollars, and improved outcomes—returns on investment that will also make us safer.

Thank you.

---

<sup>1</sup>The Multi-site Evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative was funded by NIJ grant # 2004-IJ-CX-002; the evaluation design was funded by a previous 1-year cooperative agreement NIJ # 2003-RE-CX-K101 from the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this testimony are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>2</sup> National and state level statistics reported here are from reports by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the Prisoner Reentry Initiative that was funded by the federal government after SVORI explicitly excludes people who have ever been convicted of violent or sex offenses.)

<sup>4</sup> Records were incomplete for the juvenile males because of state reporting practices.

<sup>5</sup> Since female SVORI program participants were less likely to be rearrested within 24 months—only 49% compared with 60% of the females who did not participate—we have speculated that those who did not participate may have been in jail awaiting trial or serving short sentences and, thus, at less risk of reincarceration in state prisons because they were off the street.