

Preface

The trajectory of criminal justice is untenable. American society is marred by the highest incarceration rate in the world (International Centre for Prison Studies 2013). More than 1.6 million persons are incarcerated on any given day in state and federal prisons across the USA (Carson and Sabol 2012). One in 31 people is under correctional supervision—that is, persons in prison or jail, on probation or parole (Pew Center on the States 2009).

There is scant evidence that involvement with the criminal justice system is a deterrent to further criminal activity. About four in ten criminal offenders are rearrested, reconvicted, and re-incarcerated within three years of their release from prison (Pew Center on the States 2011). Over 70 % of adults who are rearrested were previously incarcerated in the USA for robbery, burglary, larceny, including motor vehicle theft, and possession of stolen property or illegal weapons (Langan and Levin 2002).

Intervention in the lives of criminal offenders is critical to the viability of the criminal justice system. Persistently high rates of offender recidivism undermine trust in our efforts to alter the lives of criminal offenders. The economic consequences are dire: political responses are often driven more by a sense of urgency than by empirically supported strategies for crime desistance.

Yet, criminal offenders often engage in the process of desisting from licit activity. An understanding of the sociopsychological mechanisms that underlie desistance is critical to the future of the criminal justice system.

This book draws together the most current thinking of leading scholars in the field of interventions in the lives of criminal offenders. More specifically, we are concerned with interventions across the life course that result in the decision to desist from further criminal activity.

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