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ABSTRACT

Wilmington College (Ohio) conducted a study to determine if receiving college training during incarceration enhances offenders' post-release behavior. Three hundred residents of Lebanon Correctional Institution in Ohio, a medium-security prison for adults under 30, were studied. Of the group, 95 received associates degrees while in prison. These persons were compared with two groups: 116 offenders at Lebanon who received high school degrees, and 106 who were high school dropouts. The hypothesis of the study, that those offenders who earned associate degrees would be more successful in their reintegration than their non-degreed counterparts, was measured by means of records at the Ohio Adult Parole Authority. "Successful reintegration" was defined as not returning to prison during the first year on parole. Additional indicators of success included remaining arrest-free for this period and being employed on a full-time basis during the first year of release. The study found that by the end of the first year on parole, more than two-thirds of the college graduates were employed, compared to approximately 50 percent of the high school graduates and 40 percent of the high school dropouts. Thus, the employment data suggest that a linear relationship exists between the level of education an inmate acquires while in prison and the likelihood of obtaining and retaining employment on parole. This linear relationship is echoed on the arrest and recidivism (return to prison either because of conviction or parole violation) variables reported. Although the groups were small, the study showed that college education during incarceration contributes to inmates' post-release success. (KC)

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POST SECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION:
AN EVALUATION OF PAROLEE PERFORMANCE

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Introduction

American prison administrators, like their counterparts in Canada and Western Europe, often rely upon academic and vocational programming as a means of rehabilitating offenders. The customary justification for this practice, as articulated by penologists, educators, and public figures, is that such programs facilitate the successful reintegration of offenders through the enhancement of favorable self-concepts and marketable employment skills. This position receives support from the fact that ninety-five percent of all offenders currently behind bars will eventually be returned to society. Use of public monies for these purposes, however, is not without controversy. Legislators and public critics, concerned about the efficacy of rehabilitation programs, argue there is no evidence that correctional education leads to reductions in recidivism rates among inmate-students.

Indeed, much of the early literature supports this position. Perhaps the most definitive study on point is Martinson's survey of six academic and vocational programs for adult male offenders between 1948 and 1965. (Martinson, 1974). Martinson concluded that recidivism was unaffected by academic attainment. His analysis indicated four possible reasons for this outcome: first, that educational programs were irrelevant to life outside prison; secondly, that most such programs used obsolete equipment and techniques; thirdly, that such programs could not reverse the adverse impact of incarceration; and finally, that educational attainment was often completely irrelevant to the reasons for an offender's criminal lifestyle. Other research projects reaching

similar conclusions include studies by the California Department of Corrections Research Division (Greenberg, 1974; Spencer and Berecochea, 1971), studies of juvenile delinquents (Zivan, 1966), studies of skill development programs (Jacobson, 1965), and studies of academic and vocational programs in jails (Kettering, 1972).

The vast majority of the recidivism studies used in Martinson's study concerned vocational, high school, and adult basic education programs rather than college programs. Arguably, differences in skills development, attitude, and value structure in a collegiate setting distinguish college programs from vocational and secondary schools. For example, unpublished studies of recidivism among college level inmate-students conducted by Alexander City State Junior College (Alabama), the Texas Department of Corrections, and the Hagerstown Junior College (Maryland), show college students recidivate at lower rates than their non-college counterparts. Presumably, these studies did not use randomized, experimental methods in comparing inmate-students with the general inmate population, and therefore, they may not be methodologically sound. Nevertheless, the recidivism studies of post-secondary prison education programs at least suggest that a link between higher education and reduced recidivism exists.

Using experimental methods that comply with generally accepted social science standards, researchers have documented relationships between recidivism and a myriad of other social and structural factors apart from participation in educational

programs. One study concluded that recidivism is affected by parole placement (Phannenstiel, 1979), while others noted significant relationships between recidivism and family involvements. (Wolf, 1981; Thompson, 1981). Most of this research stands for the proposition that recidivism is a crude measure of program success. Apart from involvement in treatment programming, a variety of other factors affect recidivism rates. Wolf (1981) reported that there are no consistent definitions or operationalizations in recidivism research, while others have noted the impact of age, family stability, demographics of parolee placement, incidence of substance abuse, and criminal involvements of family and peer group members, among others, on recidivism rates.

The absence of a strong relationship between education and recidivism should not, however, end the inquiry. For if broader conceptions of successful reintegration are used, a more realistic measure of program effectiveness becomes possible. Instead of focusing exclusively on recidivism, other indicia of success, such as employment on parole, and remaining arrest-free, when combined with recidivism data, provide a more complete picture of what occurs to students when they leave prison. Adoption of broader conceptions of successful reintegration may, for example, establish linkages between educational attainment and employability on parole that will, in turn, explain more clearly the role of education in helping offenders to go straight. Studies have documented the relationship between offender unemployment and return to prison (National Institute of Justice, 1981); is it therefore fruitful to explore a chain of

argument linking education to employment and employment to successful reintegration?

In order to answer this question, three hundred residents of Lebanon Correctional Institution in Lebanon, Ohio, a medium security prison for adults under thirty, were studied. The intent of the study was to follow up on the offenders one year after their release on parole to determine if participation in college affected their post-release behavior. Ninety-five of these offenders received associate degrees while in prison. These persons were compared with two groups: one hundred sixteen offenders at Lebanon who received high school degrees and one hundred six who were high school dropouts. The offenders included in this study left prison between January 1, 1982 and October 1, 1983, and each spent a minimum of one year on parole.

The hypothesis of the study, that those offenders who earned associate degrees would be more successful in their reintegration than their non-graduate counterparts, was measured by means of records at the Ohio Adult Parole Authority. "Successful reintegration" was operationalized as not returning to prison within the first year on parole. Thus, for purposes of discussion in this paper, recidivism is defined as return to prison either by reason of conviction for a new offense or through parole violations. Additional indicia of success included remaining arrest free for this period and being employed on a full-time basis during the first year of release.

During the design of the study, researchers noted that ethical considerations played a key role in determining the

methodology that would be used. The strongest test of the hypothesis would be an experimental design whereby an experimental group would be placed in the associate degree program and a control group would be excluded. Such a design, however, contemplated that members of the control group, who would otherwise be qualified and eligible for admission, would be denied access to college.

In view of this consideration, a quasi-experimental design was adopted in which a control group was selected from those inmates who had expressed an interest in being admitted to college. In order to reduce the impact of the program on the control group, the population selected attended no more than two quarters of college. Indeed, half of the control group did not attend college at all. A time frame was selected so all persons were paroled during approximately the same period of time and all would complete a minimum of one year on parole. With these operational definitions in place, the three comparison groups were identified.

The first group consisted of every graduate of the associate program who was paroled during a twenty-one month period during 1982 and 1983. Due to the relatively small number of persons who met these criteria no sample was drawn, and the entire population of 95 inmates was selected for study. A random sample of 116 high school graduates was selected as the quasi-control group for the study. Persons in this group either earned a high school degree or received a G.E.D. outside prison or within the institution. For purposes of comparison, a third group of 106 persons was drawn from the general population of those inmates

reporting no high school diploma or G.E.D. certificate, who were paroled during the time frame of the study. For purposes of clarification, the three comparison groups are identified below.

Definition of Study Groups

GROUP I N=95

Inmate-Students who graduated from an associate degree prison program and were paroled during 1982 and 1983.

GROUP II N=116

Inmates who had a high school diploma or a GED certificate and attended no more than 2 quarters of the associate degree program and were paroled during 1982 and 1983.

GROUP III N=106

Inmates in the general prison population who reported no high school diploma or GED certificate and had no contact with the associate degree program and were paroled during 1982 - 1983.

Pre-Prison Variables

An examination of the pre-prison backgrounds of the three comparison groups was undertaken to determine if their experiences were substantially similar. This data is reported in Table One.

Table One: Pre-Prison Backgrounds of Comparison Groups

Variable	Group I N=95	Group II N=116	Group III N=106
<u>Prior Juvenile Incarcerations</u>			
0	76 (80)	89 (76.7)	60 (56.6)
1	15 (15.8)	11 (9.5)	17 (16)
≥ 1	4 (4.2)	16 (13.8)	29 (27.4)
	<u>95 (100%)</u>	<u>116 (100%)</u>	<u>106 (100%)</u>
<u>Prior Adult Incarcerations</u>			
0	80 (84.2)	91 (78.4)	72 (67.9)
1	15 (15.8)	25 (21.6)	34 (32.1)
≥ 1	<u>95 (100%)</u>	<u>116 (100%)</u>	<u>106 (100%)</u>
<u>Drug History</u>			
Yes	68 (71.6)	82 (72.7)	67 (63.2)
No	27 (28.4)	34 (29.3)	39 (36.8)
	<u>95 (100%)</u>	<u>116 (100%)</u>	<u>106 (100%)</u>
<u>Alcohol History</u>			
Yes	47 (49.5)	75 (64.7)	70 (66)
No	48 (40.5)	41 (35.3)	36 (34)
	<u>95 (100%)</u>	<u>116 (100%)</u>	<u>106 (100%)</u>
<u>Employment at Arrest</u>			
Employed	56 (58.9)	47 (40.9)	36 (34)
Unemployed	39 (41.1)	68 (59.1)	69 (66)
Missing Data	-- (---)	1 (---)	1 (---)
	<u>95 (100%)</u>	<u>116 (100%)</u>	<u>106 (100%)</u>
<u>Grade Upon Admission</u>			
< 12	36 (37.9)	71 (61.7)	106 (100)
≥ 12	59 (62.1)	44 (38.3)	-- (---)
Missing Data	-- (---)	1 (---)	-- (---)
	<u>95 (100%)</u>	<u>116 (100%)</u>	<u>106 (100%)</u>

Groups One and Two experienced a similar incidence of juvenile incarcerations prior to entering Lebanon, with 20 and 23 percent respectively having been incarcerated as juveniles. Group Three experienced a far higher rate of juvenile incarcerations, exceeding 40%. This pattern is repeated in the

prior adult incarcerations category, where Group One experienced the lowest rate of prior incarcerations (15.8%), Group Two a slightly higher rate (21.6%) and Group Three the highest rate (32.1%). The average age at first arrest for Groups One and Two was 18, while Group Three was just under 16. Indeed, a substantial majority of Group Three was arrested before the age of 18 (72%), while only half of Groups One and Two were arrested as juveniles.

Substance abuse (drug/alcohol) histories for the three comparison groups are reported in Table One, Rows Three and Four. Parolees were listed as having a history of substance abuse if they were under the influence of either alcohol or a controlled substance at the time of arrest or immediately prior to arrest. On this variable, all three comparison groups were substantially similar, with over 60% of each group having a history of substance abuse.

Employment status at arrest and educational attainment at admission to prison are reported in Table One, Rows Five and Six. These variables illustrate that a linear relationship exists between education and employment prior to incarceration: the higher the level of education, the greater the incidence of employment.

Group One, which had an incidence of high school graduation or its equivalent of 62%, experienced an unemployment rate of 41%, while Group Two, with a graduation rate of 38%, had an unemployment rate of nearly 60%. Group Three confirmed this trend, by definition, with no high school graduation and an

unemployment rate of nearly 67%.

Looking at Table One as a whole, it is possible to develop a portrait of the "typical" offender prior to his incarceration at Lebanon. An individual drops out of high school and becomes involved with alcohol and/or drugs. Continuing the decline, he experiences difficulty obtaining employment and begins engaging in behavior that leads to his first arrest while still a juvenile. After repeated juvenile infractions, he is convicted as an adult and committed to an adult facility.

Post Release Performance

Once inside Lebanon, inmates who possess a high school degree or its equivalent are eligible for admission into the associate degree program. Instructors for the program are employed by Wilmington College, a private liberal arts school located in nearby Wilmington, Ohio. They enter the prison in the evening to teach classes. It bears emphasis that most of the instructors in the program are private citizens who are not employees of the correctional facility. Inmate students enroll in courses on a full time basis in Business Administration, Computer Science, Human Services and Industrial Technology. It takes them approximately twenty-two months to earn an associate degree.

The college graduates, high school graduates, and dropouts selected for study were examined for their entire parole disposition, which ranged from 12 to 18 months during 1982-83. Post-Release performance data on the three comparison groups are reported in Table Two.

Table Two: Post-Release Performance of Comparison Groups

Variable	Group I N=95	Group II N=116	Group III N=106
<u>Employment Status at End of First Year</u>			
Employed	64 (67.4)	69 (60.5)	42 (40)
Unemployed	31 (32.6)	45 (39.5)	64 (60)
Missing Data	<u>-- (---)</u>	<u>2 (---)</u>	<u>-- (---)</u>
	95 (100%)	116 (100%)	106 (100%)
<u>Arrested During First Year on Parole</u>			
Yes	24 (25.3)	45 (38.5)	51 (48)
No	<u>71 (74.7)</u>	<u>71 (61.5)</u>	<u>55 (52)</u>
	95 (100%)	116 (100%)	106 (100%)
<u>Parole Performance After First Year</u>			
Recidivated	11 (11.6)	18 (15.5)	31 (29)
Did Not	<u>84 (88.4)</u>	<u>98 (84.5)</u>	<u>75 (71)</u>
	95 (100%)	116 (100%)	106 (100%)

Table Two, Row One illustrates employment data from the three comparison groups. By the end of the first year on parole, over two-thirds of the college graduates were employed, compared to approximately 60% of the high school graduates and 40% of the high school dropouts. In order to qualify as being employed on parole, a parolee had to retain a job of thirty hours per week for at least ninety days. This finding illustrates that the college graduates exhibited an ability to maintain their employment over time, an achievement that many ex-offenders find difficult to do. Despite the relative success of the college

graduates in the job market, their unemployment rate of 33% is somewhat disappointing. Viewed in the context of a statewide unemployment rate ranging from 13% in the height of the recession in 1982 to just over 9% by fall, 1984, their unemployment rate was several times above the statewide rate as a whole.

Thus, the employment data suggests that a linear relationship exists between the level of education an inmate acquires while in prison and the likelihood of obtaining and retaining employment on parole. This linear relationship is echoed in the post-release performance of the parolees on the arrest and recidivism variables reported in Table Two, Rows Two and Three. Approximately 75% of the college graduates went arrest-free during the first year of release, compared to about 60% of the high school graduates and slightly over 50% of the high school dropouts. Mere arrest, of course, is not indicative of actual guilt on the merits, or even of the likelihood of a violation of the conditions of parole, but it does indicate a measure, however crude, of the parolees' ability to readjust successfully to the demands of life outside the institution. A more precise measure of successful reintegration, actual return to prison rates, nevertheless confirms the hypothesis that inmates with higher levels of education perform better than their less educated counterparts. As reported in Table Two, Row Three, 11.6% of the college graduates returned to prison by the end of their first year on parole; 15.5% of the high school graduates returned, as did 29% of the high school dropouts. Because many of the parolees in the study were unable to meet the conditions of their parole within one year, an analysis of the study groups

was also made at the end of parole supervision, which for many offenders was up to twenty-two months in length. Examination as of the end of parole supervision, however, did not alter the linear relationships noted above. The college graduates retained their recidivism rate of 11.6%, the high school graduates had a recidivism rate of 17.2% and the high school dropouts increased to 31%. Thus, increasing the length of the examination period led to an increase in recidivism of approximately two percentage points for the non-college populations, but no change occurred for the college graduates.

In order to more fully explore the relationship between education, employment, and successful reintegration, employment rates for the college and high school graduates were compared to recidivism rates. This data is reported in Table Three, below.

Table Three: Employment and Recidivism Data for College and High School Graduates

College Graduates Employed On Parole

Recidivated	Yes	No	Total
Yes	5 (7.8)	6 (19.4)	11
No	59 (92.2)	25 (80.6)	84
Total	$\frac{64}{100}$	$\frac{31}{100}$	$\frac{95}{95}$

High School Graduates Employed on Parole

Recidivated	Yes	No	Total
Yes	3 (4.3)	14 (31.1)	17
No	66 (95.7)	31 (68.9)	97
Total	$\frac{69}{100}$	$\frac{45}{100}$	$\frac{114}{116}$
		missing data	$\frac{2}{116}$

Examining the college graduates, only 8% of those who were employed on parole recidivated, compared to 20% of those who were

unemployed. The high school graduates confirmed this trend: 4% of those who were employed on parole recidivated, compared to 31% of those who were unemployed. The Chi Square test of significance was run on the key variables of the study, and statistically significant relationships at the .01 level were established between education and employment, unemployment and arrest, and unemployment and recidivism for the high school graduates. Likewise, statistically significant relationships at the .01 level were established between unemployment and arrest and unemployment and recidivism for the high school dropouts. The college graduates, however, did not exhibit statistically significant relationships for these variables.

The absence of statistically significant relationships between educational attainment, employment, and recidivism among college graduates, although somewhat counter to the hypothesis under study, is not necessarily conclusive due to the small number of parolees who recidivated from all three groups. Viewed descriptively, however, the conclusion can be drawn that linear relationships between education and successful reintegration, measured in terms of employment and freedom from arrest and subsequent reincarceration, can be said to exist for all three comparison groups. This is illustrated in the following tables.

PAROLE PERFORMANCE

TABLE 4 : EDUCATION AT PAROLE

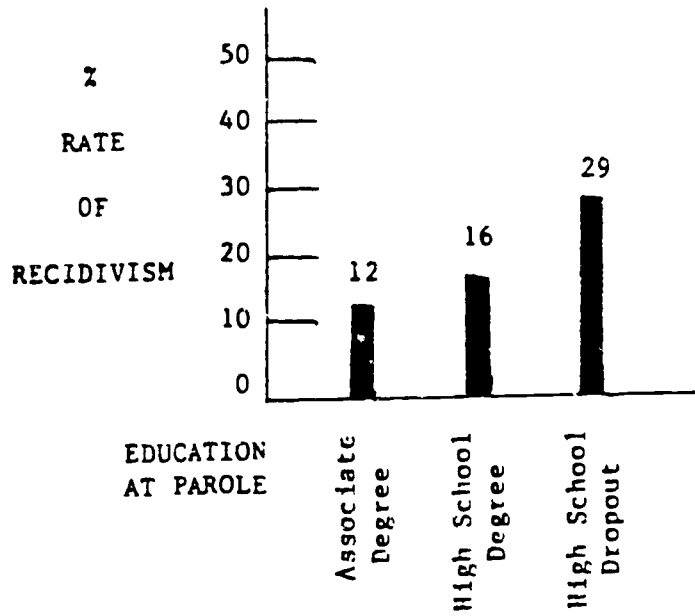


TABLE 5 : ARRESTED ON PAROLE

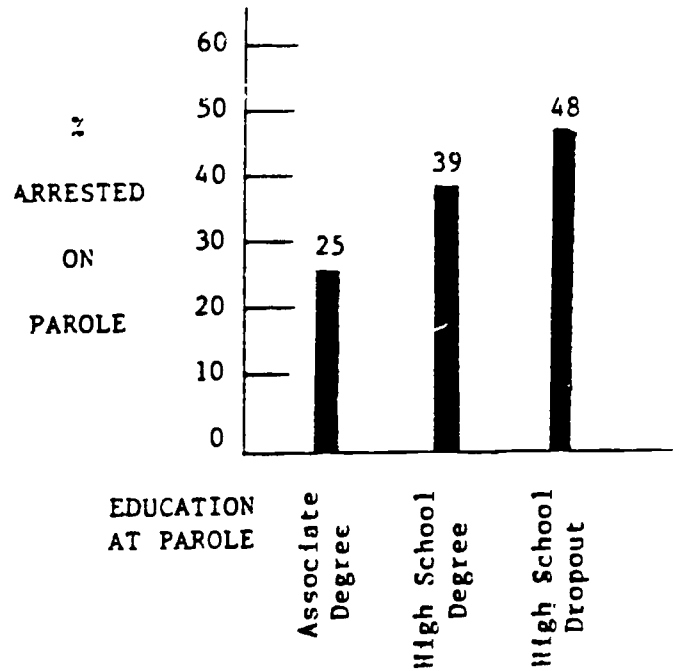
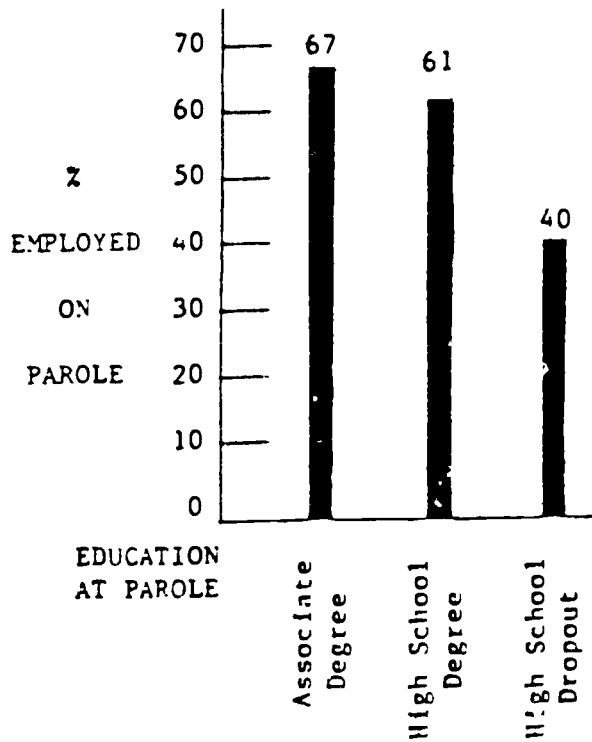


TABLE 6 : EMPLOYED ON PAROLE



Performance of At Risk Parolees

In view of the relatively high achievement levels of the college graduates in the study during their pre-incarceration experience and their imprisonment, it is possible to argue that the successful reintegration of this population is predictable and unnoteworthy. Indeed, perhaps they would have succeeded on parole even without college participation. In order to challenge this type of criticism, a subsample of the college graduates was drawn on the basis of persons whose pre-prison backgrounds indicated they were at risk of future involvement in crime. Fifty-seven persons from among the college graduates were selected who were either unemployed at the time of their initial arrest or were high school dropouts at this time. On this basis, it could reasonably be suggested that these persons would be at risk of failure upon release from prison, given the deleterious impact of incarceration for most prisoners. This subsample of fifty-seven "at risk" parolees was compared to ninety-one of the high school graduates who met these operationalizations. Thus, the subsample attempted to compare parolees who entered prison equally at risk of failure but differed in that parolees from the first group received college level instruction inside the institution, while the second group did not.

Table Seven, below, illustrates the fundamental similarity between the pre-prison backgrounds of subsample Group One and Group Two.

Table Seven: Comparative Data On At Risk Parolees

High School Dropouts or Unemployed At Arrest

Variable	Group I N=57	Group II N=91
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Prior To Incarceration

Educational Attainment Upon Admission

High School Dropouts	36 (63.2)	70 (76.9)
GED/High School Degree	21 (36.8)	21 (23.1)
Missing Data	-- (----)	-- (----)
	<u>57 (100%)</u>	<u>91 (100%)</u>

Prior Adult Incarcerations

Yes	10 (17.5)	22 (24.2)
No	47 (82.5)	69 (75.8)
	<u>57 (100%)</u>	<u>91 (100%)</u>

Prior Juvenile Incarcerations

Yes	16 (28.1)	25 (27.5)
No	41 (71.9)	66 (72.5)
	<u>57 (100%)</u>	<u>91 (100%)</u>

Employment Status At Arrest

Employed	18 (31.6)	24 (26.4)
Unemployed	39 (68.4)	67 (73.6)
Missing Data	-- (---)	-- (---)
	<u>57 (100%)</u>	<u>91 (100%)</u>

Fewer than six percentage points separated the two comparison groups on such key variables as educational attainment at admission to prison, extent of prior institutionalization, and employment at arrest. The only significant difference, then, between these two groups was what they were able to do with their time in prison, Group One earning college degrees and Group Two completing high school/GED then pursuing other institutional job assignments. As the statistics in Table Eight indicate, however, the two comparison groups differ considerably in their post-

release performance. Group One was employed at a higher rate than Group Two, was arrested at a lower rate, and experienced a lower recidivism rate.

Table Eight: Comparative Data On At Risk Parolees

High School Dropouts or Unemployed At Arrest

Post Release Performance

Variable	Group I N=57	Group II N=91
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Employment Status On Parole

Employed	35 (61.4)	49 (54)
Unemployed	22 (38.6)	41 (46)
Missing Data	-- (---)	1 (---)
	<u>57 (100%)</u>	<u>91 (100%)</u>

Arrested On Parole

Yes	15 (26.3)	40 (44)
No	42 (73.7)	51 (56)
	<u>57 (100%)</u>	<u>91 (100%)</u>

Parole Performance

Recidivated	8 (14)	16 (17.6)
Did Not Recidivate	49 (86)	75 (82.4)
	<u>57 (100%)</u>	<u>91 (100%)</u>

Moreover, when contrasted with the complete study groups, the subsample of "at risk" parolees consistently performed less favorably on these key variables. See Table Nine, below. This confirms the reliability of the criteria used to operationalize the "at risk" subsample, and it adds further support for the conclusion that a linear relationship exists between education, employment, and recidivism.

Table Nine: Post Release Performance

Variable	Group I	Group I At Risk	Group II	Group II At Risk
Employed On Parole	67%	61%	60%	54%
Arrested On Parole	25%	26%	38%	44%
Recidivated	11.6%	14%	15.5%	18%

The strength of the evidence in the subsample of at risk parolees brings the criticism that correctional higher education only assists inmates who will succeed anyway into serious question. Indeed, the data supports the hypothesis that even persons who have a high likelihood of recidivating, based on their criminal backgrounds and lack of employment and educational histories, derive substantial benefit from access to college while in prison.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to compare the official records of post release behavior for graduates and non-graduates to determine how they differed, to what extent and in which areas of reintegration they differed. On the basis of empirical data from comparisons of the recidivism rates of college graduates, high school graduates, and high school dropouts, the original hypothesis was confirmed. Linear relationships were established between educational attainment, employment, and freedom from reincarceration among both the complete study groups and the at risk subsamples. While these relationships, for the most part, were not found to be statistically significant at the .01 level of significance, this is attributable to the low number of

persons available for study.

It should be emphasized that the quasi-experimental nature of this study makes it difficult to establish a causal relationship between educational attainment and recidivism. Moreover, the limited amount of time the parolees spent on parole, from one to two years, makes it arguable that second and third year follow-ups of persons in the original study are needed to ensure that their reintegration is, in fact, successful over time.

Nevertheless, as a descriptive study alone, this research adds evidentiary support for the proposition that post-secondary correctional education programs offer valuable resources for inmates to utilize in their effort to reintegrate successfully upon release from prison.

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