



**COLLEGE OF CRIMINOLOGY
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

Research Brought to Life.

Education, Post Release Return to School, Employment and Crime Desistance Among Incarcerated Youth

Thomas G. Blomberg

William D. Bales

Courtney A. Waid

November 3, 2006 – Los Angeles

American Society of Criminology Conference



Introduction

- ◆ Prior research has demonstrated that educational achievement does increase individual's prospects for employment.
- ◆ Further, graduating from high school has been shown to significantly decrease involvement in serious crime largely because of the greater capacity of high school graduates to gain employment.
- ◆ These findings on education and employment suggest that incarcerated youth who experience educational achievement and post release return to school may be more likely to be employed and to experience desistance from crime.
- ◆ Largely absent from the desistance research have been studies focused upon such adolescent life events and relationships between educational achievement while incarcerated, post release return to school, employment and crime desistance.
- ◆ The present study addresses these adolescent life experiences and potential relationships between educational achievement while incarcerated, post release returning to school, employment and crime desistance.



Prior Literature

Life Course

- ◆ In the past decade, a number of life course studies have focused upon several different life experiences that contribute to desistance from crime for young adults.
- ◆ It has been reported, for example, that marriage, employment and military experience can lead to desistance from crime for a number of young adults (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Warr, 1998; Sampson, Laub and Wimer, 2006).
- ◆ The capacity of adolescent life events to result in desistance from crime has not received the same level of attention as have young adult life events although several have called for such study (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Farrington, 2003).
- ◆ However, prior studies employing survey data of adolescents drawn from the general population have found that juveniles report much less involvement in crime when they are committed and attached to school, spend significant time studying, and make good grades (Cernkovich and Giovdano, 1992; Massey and Krohn, 1986; Steward, 2003; Thaxton and Agnew, 2004).



Prior Literature Employment

- ◆ Studies of the role of employment in reducing recidivism, have reported that employment does, in fact, reduce recidivism.
 - For example, Sampson and Laub (1993) found the job stability from ages 17 – 25 significantly reduced recidivism.
 - Bernburg and Krohn (2003) reached a similar conclusion.
- ◆ Among the research questions that can be drawn from this prior literature on education and employment is which of the two is the most promising in leading to crime desistance.
- ◆ While there is no conclusion evident favoring education over employment, there is some evidence to suggest that education may play a more prominent role. For example, Wilson, Gallagher and MacKinzie's (2000) meta analysis of correctional programming evaluation studies included separate analyses for education and employment programs. They found the education programs had a significant overall effect on recidivism while employment programs had effects that were in the predicted direction (employment training reduced recidivism) but failed to be significant in the aggregate.



Prior Literature

Interaction between Education and Employment

- ◆ It could be, however, that there is a potential interactive relationship between education and employment.
 - For example, Bernburg and Krohn (2003) report that graduating from high school decreased crime in young adulthood precisely because of its positive effect on later employment.
 - Further, Harrison and Schehr (2004) report that employment training in prison has its greatest effect in reducing recidivism when it is followed by post-release services including education.
- ◆ Clearly, the potential interactive relationship between educational achievement and employment in crime desistance is a timely and important area of life course study.



Data & Methods

- Cohort of 4,147 youths released from 115 juvenile institutions throughout Florida during FY 2000-2001
- Cohort data was gathered from the Florida Departments of Education and Law Enforcement
- Three years of data were used including the youths' year of release (2000-2001) and two follow-up years (2001-2002 & 2002-2003)
- Logistic regression was the statistical method used
- Outcomes include return to school following release, employment after release and rearrest within 12 and 24 months, and
- Interventions include academic achievement while incarcerated, attendance in school within 12 and 24 months following release, and level of employment post release
- Control variables include age, race, gender, prior record, SES, age/grade level, disability, length of incarceration, age at first arrest



Research Questions

To address the relationship between educational achievement and employment upon post-release desistance from crime among incarcerated youth, the following research questions are addressed

1. Does above average educational achievement, as measured by the number and proportion of academic credits earned, increase the likelihood among incarcerated youth of returning to school following release?
2. Are youths who attend school regularly following release less likely to be rearrested as compared to those youths who do not return to school or who return to school but attend school less regularly?
3. Does returning to school following release increase the likelihood of employment and length of employment?
4. Does employment reduce the likelihood of re-arrest within 12 and 24 months?
5. Does the length of employment reduce the likelihood of re-arrest within 12 and 24 months?



Descriptive Findings

Age at release	16.8
Race (minority)	57%
Female	14%
Low socioeconomic status	39%
Length of incarceration	8 months
Number of prior arrests	3.2
Age at first arrest	14.1
Learning, behavioral and cognitive disabilities	38%
Below appropriate age/grade level	84.6% / 2 yrs.
Return to school within one semester following release	36%
Number of school days in attendance following release	86
Employment within 12 & 24 months following release	
Rearrest within 12 & 24 months following release	48% / 64%



Findings

1. Those youth who return to school post-release are significantly more likely to be employed. The odds of obtaining employment increases by 48% for those youth who return to school post-release.
2. Youth who are employed post-release are much less likely to be re-arrested (need to run numbers).
3. As the length of employment post-release increases, the likelihood of re-arrest declines over the first 12 and 24 months after incarceration. With each additional quarter of employment in the first 12 months post-release, the odds of re-arrest decreases by 10%, and by 6% for each quarter employed within 24 months.



Findings

4. Higher educational achievement while incarcerated significantly increases the likelihood of youth returning to school following release. Youth with above average educational achievement while incarcerated exhibit a 69% increase in their odds of returning to school.
5. Youth who stay in school longer post-release are significantly less likely to be re-arrested within 12 and 24 months after release from incarceration.



Summary and Discussion

1. Higher educational achievement during incarceration was found to significantly increase the likelihood of post-release return to school and youth who returned to and stayed in school were significantly less likely to be re-arrested within 12 and 24 months.
2. Youth who return to school are significantly more likely to be employed and less likely to be re-arrested within 12 and 24 months.



Summary and Discussion

These findings raise several empirical and policy implications.

1. There appears to be an empirical relationship between educational achievement, employment and crime desistance among incarcerated youths.
2. In terms of life course criminology, criminal desistance can result from not only young adult experiences but a series of adolescent life experiences, namely educational achievement, school attachment and employment.
3. Findings on the relationship between educational achievement, school attachment and employment provide empirical and theoretical support for the current No Child Left Behind Act that mandates the same high quality and accountable education services for juvenile justice students as for all other students in public schools.