

FORUM

on Corrections Research

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Featured issues

**Offender
Employment**

Perspectives

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FORUM reviews applied research related to corrections policy, programming and management issues. It also features original articles contributed by staff of the Correctional Service of Canada and other international researchers and practitioners.

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FORUM invites contributions to any section of the magazine from researchers in the field. Please send your contributions to

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FORUM

ON CORRECTIONS RESEARCH

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Unemployment risk trends and the implications for Canadian federal offenders

Roger Boe¹

Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada

An examination of employment trends for Canada's labour force shows that rates of unemployment for younger workers — as a group — are invariably higher than for older ones. Moreover, unemployment rates are higher for those workers with the least formal education. In the analysis that follows, we have used the unemployment rate of a person in Canada who has completed high school as a benchmark for comparison with rates for persons with a lesser education.

We found that the risk for youth being unemployed was twice as high for those who had completed grade 8 or less, as compared to the high school graduate. Moreover, the unemployment risk for youth with less than high school appears to have been increasing since 1990.

The higher risk of unemployment for poorly educated youth in Canada has particular significance for the Correctional Service of Canada, where federal offenders tend to be amongst Canada's most poorly educated. For example, as many as 2 in every 3 men admitted to federal institutions were unemployed at the time of their arrest.

Moreover, deficits in education have contributed to the criminogenic history of a very significant proportion of new admissions to federal penitentiaries every year. As many as 8 of every 10 new admissions were found to have completed less than a high school diploma, 5 in every 10 had less than grade 10, and 2 of every 10 new admission had completed less than grade 8.

Fortunately for Canadian public safety, the Correctional Service has a very comprehensive Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process, which means the Service can readily identify offender employment issues. It also has a set of core programs that address basic adult literacy skills training for offenders. Nevertheless, as one can imagine, it remains a challenging task to prepare offenders for their eventual safe and productive reintegration into society as law-abiding citizens.

High employment and education needs

This study looks specifically at the circumstances of the male federal offender. By the time that a new offender has completed the CSC's intake assessment process, assessment staff will have obtained a comprehensive documentation of their education and employment history. Since November 1994, the Correctional Service of Canada has conducted an Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) on every new inmate admitted into federal custody.² These intake assessments serve to identify the appropriate level for initial security placement, as well as the information needed to develop an individual correctional plan tailored to provide correctional interventions targeted towards the most significant contributing factors presented by an offender.³ Maintaining historical research files of all intake assessments has enabled the CSC to develop very comprehensive statistical profiles of its offender population, and to track such changes over time.⁴ Federal women offenders have a somewhat unique education and employment experience, as compared to male offenders and need to be studied separately.

Employment status at admission

In order to establish some baseline statistics on labour force unemployment rates of male offenders at the time of their admission to federal facilities, an examination was made of assessment records from the OIA historical database. This examination found that:

- About 65% of male federal offenders had been unemployed at the time of their arrest
- This proportion increases to 77% for the younger male offenders (i.e., those under age 25 at the time of their admission)

- An additional one-third (32%) overall had been unemployed for 90% or more of the time before their arrest, and this proportion also increases sharply to 50% for males under age 25

Clearly, we see from Table 1 that the unemployment status for male offenders under age 25 differs substantially from the rates for male offenders 25 years and older. The same will be found when we next examine education needs. Therefore, the analysis that follows will concentrate on this younger (i.e., under 25) population and the analysis of trends for those offenders 25 and older will be left for another time.⁵

A major issue for younger federal offenders is their unemployment status at the time of their arrest. Fully, 65% of the males admitted since April 1995 were unemployed at the time of arrest, and unemployment is even greater an issue for those males under age 25, where 77% were found to have been unemployed. Moreover, for this latter group, fully half reported they were unemployed 90% or more of the period leading up to their arrest.

Table 1

Unemployment status of federal offenders at admission			
	Males ages 18-24	Males ages 25 or more	All male admissions
Unemployed at the time of arrest?***	77%	61%	65%
Unemployed 90% or more of the time leading to arrest?***	50%	27%	32%
(N)	7,454	26,131	33,585

*** P < .0001.
Source: CSC Offender Management System (OIA Database), including all male new federal admissions between April 1st 1995 and March 31st 2004.

Education needs at admission

From previous research, we know that the federal offender population was also a very poorly educated group.⁶ Examining the more recent OIA assessment records has revealed this to still be the case today. The offender admission population is found to be severely lacking in the most basic formal education qualifications:

- 78% of all men admitted since April 1995 had not completed their high school at the time they were admitted, and this proportion increases to 89% for men under age 25 at the time of their admission
- Amongst this group of younger offenders, 55% had not completed their grade 10, while 19% had completed less than grade 8

Table 2

Educational attainment of federal offenders at admission

	Males ages 18-24	Males ages 25 or more	All new male admissions
Less than grade 8?***	19%	21%	20%
Less than grade 10?***	55%	49%	50%
No high school diploma?***	89%	75%	78%
(N)	7,455	26,063	33,518

*** P < .0001.

Source: CSC Offender Management System (OIA Database), including all male new federal admissions between April 1, 1995 and March 31, 2004.

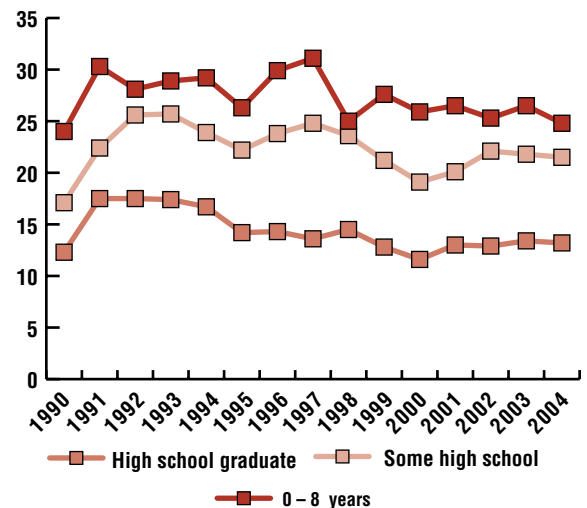
One surprising result from Table 2 is the fact that in recent years there are more younger offenders (89%) than older ones (75%) that have not completed high school. Does this mean that more young people today are dropping out of school, or that more school dropouts are being sentenced to federal prison for some offence?

Canada's unemployment rates for younger men

An examination of results from Statistics Canada's labour force survey over the last one and a half decades has consistently shown much higher unemployment rates for younger men who are without a high school education. As seen in Figure 1 (below), unemployment rates for those under 25 young males with a completed high school

Figure 1

Unemployment rates (%) of men under age 25, by educational attainment



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review, 2004 (Cat. 71F0004XCB).

education has consistently exceeded 10% since 1990. Moreover, the unemployment rate for those younger workers with less than a high school completion has tended to exceed 20%, and for those with grade 8 or less, over a 25% rate of unemployment.

The health of the job market for younger (i.e., under age 25) workers depends significantly on whether these workers have completed a high school education. The risk of being unemployed for a younger person

in Canada, as compared to someone of the same age with a completed high school education, can be estimated by taking the unemployment rates for each education group as the numerator, divided by the rate for a high school graduate (the denominator). The calculated risk rates are shown in Figure 2 (below), with trends since 1990:

- For someone with less than a completed high school education, the risk of unemployment is estimated to be about 1.6 times higher than for a high school graduate, and has increased since 1990
- For someone with a grade 8 education or less, the risk of being unemployed is estimated to be about 2 times higher, and has increased since 1990

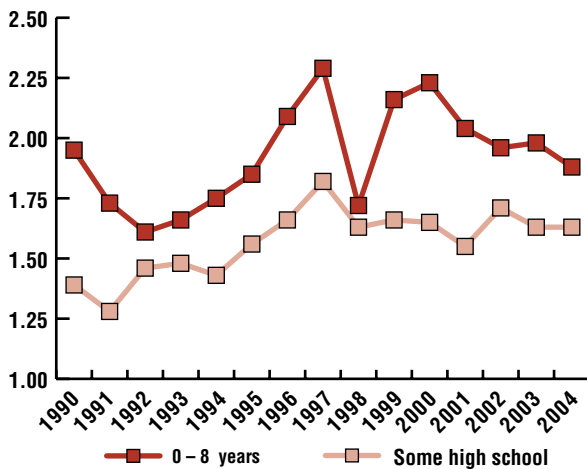
Based on the trends found in Figure 1, it is reasonable to anticipate significant and continuing labour market re-entry problems for younger workers in Canada.

Conclusions

As part of this wider population demographic, younger federal offenders are clearly going to be at an even greater labour force disadvantage than their civilian contemporaries when they return to the community after serving their sentence, if their significant education deficits have not been successfully addressed during the time that they are under federal sentence. Indeed, absent this remedial intervention the risk of young male offenders returning to unemployment can be anticipated to remain unacceptably high. ■

Figure 2

Unemployment risk for men under age 25, when compared to rate for the high school graduate (risk = 1.00)



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² OIA is a comprehensive and structured risk assessment process that the Correctional Service uses to systematically identify each new offender's prior record of criminal conduct (i.e., individual criminal history — or *static* indicators), and also assess the major factors contributing to their criminogenic behaviour (i.e., *dynamic* factors contributing to criminogenic behaviour).

³ Descriptions of the criminogenic factors that are assessed at intake, as well as other aspects of this intake assessment process, have been widely documented in other *Forum* articles and CSC Research Reports.

⁴ An example of an offender population profile can be found in: *The Changing Profile of the Federal Inmate Population: 1997 and 2002*, by Roger Boe, Mark Nafekh, Ben Vuong, Roberta Sinclair and Colette Cousineau, Research Report 132, 2002.

⁵ Education plays a different role for older rather than younger offenders. In many cases, older offenders may also not have completed their high

school, but neither had their contemporaries. However, they may have since acquired much more on-the-job experience so that education no longer presents the same barrier to job entry (or re-entry) as it does for the younger offenders.

⁶ *A Two-Year Follow-Up of Federal Offenders who Participated in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program*, by Roger Boe, Research Report 60, 1997. For example... "Offenders admitted into the custody of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) typically rank among our nation's most poorly educated citizens. Nearly 2 out of 3 offenders (64%) have not completed their high school diploma, of which 30% have not even completed grade eight. Furthermore, inmates may actually lose some of their initial literacy skills if they make little active use of them. Standard literacy testing of offenders entering federal custody confirms these statistics: 70% score below a Grade 8 literacy level; more than 4 out of 5 (86%) test below Grade 10; the average inmate scores at approximately Grade 7.5."

Skills Canadian employers are looking for — A national program

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The Conference Board of Canada

For offenders, a key part of successfully reintegrating into the community is the ability to get and keep a job. Getting and keeping a job, in turn, depends on having and using what The Conference Board of Canada² identified as employability skills. Employability skills are the skills, attitudes and behaviours employers look for in members of their current and future workforce. Conference Board research begun in the early 1990's and shows that employers expect their employees to demonstrate a combination of fundamental, personal management and teamwork skills. Fundamental skills include communicating, managing information, using numbers, thinking and solving problems. Personal management skills include demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviours, being responsible, being adaptable, learning continuously, and working safely. Teamwork skills include working with others and participating in projects and tasks.

Employability skills are enabling skills that:

- Help individuals perform the tasks required by their occupation and other activities of daily life;
- Provide individuals with a foundation to learn other skills; and
- Enhance individuals' ability to adapt to workplace change.³

The skills crunch

Now, more than ever, Canadian employers are recognizing that human capital, including the employability skills of all workers is crucial to increasing innovation, enhancing productivity and ensuring competitiveness and growth.

At the same time, these same employers are quickly realizing that Canada is on the brink of a major skills crisis. The demographic pressures created by flat birth rates, an aging workforce, the rising skill requirements for all workers that have accompanied the infusion of information and communications technologies into all jobs and the increasing competitiveness of the global marketplace have conspired to produce an unprecedented skills crunch.

For the first time in living memory, Canada is facing a decline in the size of its labour force. Demographic

pressures resulting from the declining birth rate and an aging workforce have contributed to greater-than-ever competition for skilled people. The Conference Board is forecasting a labour force deficit of 1.2 million skilled workers by 2025, even assuming aggressive immigration policies. Canadian employers are facing shortages of workers with the right mix of essential skills, employability attitudes and behaviours, education and job-specific competencies. Some of these shortages relate to newly emerging jobs. Others relate to vacancies created by retirees. Still, other shortages relate to existing jobs that have been transformed by the pressures of competition, technological change and rising skill requirements.

Jobs that are in high demand in the economy require not only education and experience, but also essential skills and employability attitudes and behaviours, which are increasingly associated with high performance in the workplace.

Human capital: The challenge

Looming skills shortages present multiple challenges and opportunities. The ability of Canadian organizations to win in a fiercely competitive global marketplace depends on an adequate supply of highly skilled people. The pressure to compete and show value puts pressure on *organizations* to play to their strengths in the market (e.g., by focusing on their core competencies or by closely aligning all of their activities with their mission, vision and values). The pressure to compete and show value also puts pressure on *individuals*, who must constantly benchmark their skills (including their essential skills and their employability attitudes) against the performance expectations of their roles in the workplace.

The issue of skill shortages becomes even more complicated when we factor in the skill requirements of workers who are expecting to remain in the workforce. The pressure to reduce costs, to enhance quality and to innovate raises the skills bar for all workers. Now, more than ever, business success depends on the ability of employees to actively communicate, work in teams, and take responsibility for their own performance in the workplace.

In other words, increasing competition, a shrinking labour force and rising skills requirements means that individual Canadians will need to enter the workforce with a full array of skills (including essential skills and employability attitudes). Individual Canadians will also need to refresh and extend their essential skills and their employability attitudes to keep their jobs and to progress in the world of work. This point applies equally to the public sector and to the private sector. With regard to the public sector, a recent (2002) Conference Board survey of governments across Canada (*Building Tomorrow's Public Service Today: Challenges and Solutions in Recruitment and Retention*) showed that the top six skills in need of improvement (in order of priority) are:

1. Communication skills
2. Creativity and innovation
3. Ability to manage stress
4. Adaptability / flexibility
5. A focus on results (i.e., outcome orientation)
6. Emphasis on customer service

Two noteworthy studies carried out by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business underscore the same trend among small- and medium-sized enterprises in the private sector. *On Hire Ground* concluded that a “disturbingly high proportion” (45 per cent) of firms indicated that “worker indifference and poor work attitudes” were at least partially responsible for firms having difficulty finding the right people to fill available jobs.⁴ A second report dealing with small- and medium-sized enterprises, *Hire Expectations*, found that;

“More important than education, to many small business employers, are specific character traits. Regardless of sector or level of skill required, almost all small businesses contacted during the follow-up phone calls cited ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘willingness to learn’ as key qualities they look for when hiring young people.”⁵

The opportunity: Employability skills

However, in every challenge lies an opportunity. This is especially true for Canadians — including offenders — seeking employment or preparing themselves to enter the labour market. The *National Employability Skills Program* (NESP) combines classroom-based employability-skill-building exercises with employability-skill-focused workplace feedback. The NESP is designed to help offenders identify the employability skills they already have, understand how to use them effectively in the workplace, receive feedback on their employability

skills based on their workplace performance, and make and carry out plans to improve their skills — all while they are still incarcerated. As such, the NESP provides an opportunity for offenders to equip themselves for success as they prepare to re-enter the world of work, and strive to keep a job and advance in employment.

The NESP helps prepare offenders for employment by developing their employability skills, by improving their judgment, building respect, and by strengthening the connection in offenders’ minds between effort and achievement, between achievement and reward, and between reward and the ability to accomplish other life purposes. This approach to preparing offenders for employment is further elaborated below.

Improving judgment

The NESP is built on a philosophical model of human development according to which having and using employability skills depends on improving individuals’ capacity for judgment in practical workplace situations. In pedagogical terms, offenders work individually and collaboratively (in pairs, in small groups, and as a class) through problem-based examples that challenge offenders to reflect on typical workplace situations, identify potential causes of conflict, brainstorm and evaluate options for action, and test solutions.

Improving judgment is different from imparting information about “hot jobs” and the educational requirements to get them, although raising individuals’ awareness of labour market prospects can greatly aid decision making in regards to finding a job. Improving judgment is also different from matching individuals’ interests with potential career paths, although aligning aptitudes and interests with known qualities of high performers in different kinds of jobs can certainly contribute to producing solid job fits.

Improving judgment is more about changing behaviour, or rather helping individuals transform themselves by taking ownership of their futures, developing their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours — their intellectual and their active powers — and by applying these powers of the mind in action to being the best they can be.

With the help of the NESP, offenders are given opportunities to integrate employability skills development into their correctional plans. They learn how to build on the strengths they have, address their challenges openly in light of feedback received from their instructors and work supervisors, and deliberately develop their employability skills.

Through the NESP, offenders are encouraged to mark their progress by building their own Personal Employability Skills Portfolio, which is an important contribution to their work record. When offenders successfully complete the requirements of the NESP they are eligible to receive an Employability Skills Certificate from The Conference Board of Canada.

While the portfolio and the certificate attest to offenders' employability skills achievements, the real payoff is the change offenders see in themselves as they become more self-confident, better able to deal with life's "curve balls", and better equipped to take control of their future.

Building respect

The NESP emphasizes the connection between demonstrating employability skills and meeting workplace expectations. The assumption is that strengthening this connection in offenders' minds will help them develop a *sense of purpose* and to *value* employment as a means of achieving their own personal potential while they are incarcerated. Further, we assume that when offenders take *ownership* of their own skills development, they will be more capable of sustained employment and successful reintegration into the community, and less likely to re-offend once they have been released.

Developing a sense of purpose and valuing employment are essential to building respect and to equipping offenders for *true freedom*. True freedom⁶ and *real empowerment* are not static concepts or one-time-only grants or *acquisitions*; they are the *work* of a lifetime actively employed in developing and deploying one's skills, in achieving one's goals and potential, and in contributing to the sustenance and well-being of oneself and of all those who depend on oneself, whether family, friends, co-workers, employers, or the wider public, whose preservation, maintenance and improvement oblige us all. As human beings, we enjoy freedom best when we *respect* ourselves and others and when we use our skills to achieve our full *potential* as human beings, as members of a family, and as contributing members of society.

Preparing for employment

By helping offenders develop their employability skills, improve their capacity for practical judgment, and generate a meaningful work record while they are still incarcerated, the NESP helps offenders prepare for employment. The NESP's more than 100 problem-based exercises help offenders enhance their "job readiness" by improving their work

performance in supervised employment experiences and by helping offenders bring their employability skills, attitudes and behaviours up to the standards accepted in the wider community outside of the prison system.

Special exercises in the NESP are intended to help reshape offenders' attitudes towards themselves, others, and the workplace. Enhancing or engendering positive attitudes is crucial because an offender can be "job ready" without being "job willing". An offender becomes job willing when he/she respects himself/herself and others, positively values the opportunity to work for a living and believes they have a unique contribution to make in the work world.

Skills have a cognitive as well as an emotional dimension. In other words, successfully demonstrating a skill requires that a person not only understand what a skill is (including when, where, why and how to use it), but also be inclined or motivated to perform effectively, or in a skilful manner. A crucial link in the chain that connects at one end *having the knowledge* (know-how and ability) to use a skill effectively, and at the other *being disposed to apply* one's skills effectively (work ethic and adaptability) is actively *showing respect* and empathy. Other links in this chain include *sympathy* and *interest*.

Accordingly, the NESP emphasizes the importance of respecting oneself and others, as well as investing in, or committing to the success of a joint undertaking (work, for example). Investing in workplace or business success requires a person to be attuned to, or *respectful* of, the needs of internal and external customers. To help offenders develop an awareness of the power and dynamics of respect, the NESP uses skills development techniques that balance self-reflection and peer coaching with formal or informal support from a classroom instructor or workplace supervisor.

Conclusion

The NESP is designed to help offenders take advantage of employment opportunities opening up in the labour market due to skills shortages. It does this by providing offenders with a focused and integrated set of strategies for developing their employability skills, improving their judgment, building respect, and strengthening the connection in their minds between effort and achievement, achievement and reward, and reward and the ability to accomplish other life purposes. ■

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² The Conference Board of Canada is the foremost independent, not-for-profit applied research organization in Canada. The Conference Board helps to build leadership capacity for a better Canada by creating and sharing insights on economic trends, public policy issues, and organizational performance. The Conference Board forges relationships and delivers knowledge through learning events, networks, research products, and customized information services. The Conference Board's members include a broad range of organizations from the public and private sectors. The Conference Board of Canada was formed in 1954, and is affiliated with The Conference Board, Inc. that serves some 3,000 companies in 67 nations.

³ The Conference Board's (CBoC) employability skills are closely related to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's (HRSDC) *essential skills*. The common skill set on which HRSDC and the CBoC agree, and the skill set that forms the basis of the valuable tools and

resources developed by HRSDC and the CBoC, consists of the following nine skills: Reading Text; Document Use; Numeracy; Writing; Oral Communication; Working with Others; Thinking Skills; Computer Use; and Continuous Learning. The CBoC's *Employability Skills Profile and Employability Skills 2000** contain five additional employability attitudes. The CBoC's own research and other survey-based data suggest that both essential skills and employability attitudes are necessary for workplace success.

⁴ Willowdale: Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 1996, pp. xi, 29.

⁵ Willowdale: Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 1998, pp. 32-33.

⁶ Freedom is not the opposite of being in jail or "getting caught"; freedom is a positive way of life. And unlike the line in the popular song *Me and Bobby McGee*, *freedom* is not "just another word for nothing left to lose"; freedom is a gift that repays effort.

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The impact of community-based employment on offender reintegration

Christa A. Gillis and Mark Nafekh¹

Performance Assurance, Correctional Service of Canada

Research findings have solidly situated unstable employment and a lack of conventional ambition as important risk and need factors among offenders (i.e., linked to an increased likelihood of recidivism when not effectively addressed). However, many methodological deficits have been noted in the research methodology exploring the impact of employment on offender reintegration. Given these constraints, we cannot unequivocally claim that employment interventions systematically reduce recidivism. The current research was not undertaken to examine the impact of an employment program in reducing recidivism. Rather, the intent of this study was to explore the specific relationship between employment status and community outcomes for groups of federal offenders: those employed while on conditional release, and a matched comparison group of offenders who were unemployed. Results are presented, and implications discussed as they relate to future research and community employment initiatives for offenders.

Background

Research has identified unstable employment and lack of conventional ambition as important need factors among offenders² with as many as 75% of offenders identified with employment needs upon entry to federal institutions.³ Furthermore, researchers have reported the reintegrative effect of skilled employment, or a history of employment prior to incarceration, for offenders released to the community.⁴ These findings illustrate the importance of assessing factors construed as employment deficits (e.g., lack of employment skills) and competencies (e.g., strong employment history prior to incarceration) for their contributions to community-based outcomes for offenders⁵ and also demonstrate the potential role of employment intervention in contributing to successful community reintegration for offenders. In sum, whether employment is viewed as a protective factor or a deficit, empirical evidence supports the role of employment in contributing to community outcomes for offenders.

Employment programming and outcome

Methodological weaknesses have been noted by numerous researchers attempting to review the employment literature,⁶ including definitional issues (e.g., defining variables in a dichotomous manner), which overlook important factors such as quality of participation, length of time in the program, and reasons for attrition. Additionally, many program evaluations fail to report important information pertaining to offender employment needs and competencies prior to program participation. Moreover, the issue of co-morbidity in offender needs, such as the combination of employment and substance abuse needs, is important to consider for its potential impact on work performance and treatment gain.

The limitations in research methodology designed to explore the efficacy of employment interventions in contributing to reduced recidivism were aptly and succinctly summarized by Ryan:⁷ “problems in research methodology and program development, including comparability of experimental and control groups, selection of participants, tracking of ex-offenders, differentiation between structural and subcultural variables, and definition of job retention”. A comprehensive evaluation of employment program effectiveness must thus consider a variety of factors that may moderate the impact of the program on the criterion of interest (e.g., job attainment and retention, successful community performance).

Findings regarding the impact of employment training have been equivocal,⁸ with some studies reporting positive effects of employment on recidivism, and others reporting limited or no effects. Some reviewers, based on a qualitative analysis of the literature, have adopted a fairly optimistic outlook on the impact of employment training on recidivism.⁹ Pearson and Lipton,¹⁰ in their meta-analytic review of educational and vocational programs, stated: “Although some

types of educational and vocational programs appear *promising* in terms of reducing recidivism, due to a lack of studies using high-quality research methods we are unable to conclude that they have been *verified* effective in reducing recidivism” (Abstract, italics in original).

Method

The present study was designed to explore the impact of employment on offenders’ community-based outcomes (i.e., measures of sustained reintegration, including length of time in the community), while controlling for risk and need variables that impact community reintegration. For the purpose of these analyses, all available data for federally sentenced offenders were extracted from the Correctional Service of Canada’s (CSC’s) automated database (Offender Management System; OMS). Community employment information was available for 23,525 federal offenders released on a conditional release between January 1, 1998 and January 1, 2005. Approximately 95% were men ($N=22,269$) and 5% were women ($N=1,256$)*.

The employment experiences of federal offenders conditionally released to the community was identified through CSC’s Offender Management System. Upon identifying the ‘employed’ group, the matched group was developed using SAS (Statistical Analysis System) software. Next, offender identifiers for both groups were linked to those in the OMS data containing information relevant to the study (demographic information, sentence information, and ratings associated with the static and dynamic levels of intervention).

The population was divided into two groups: offenders recorded as being employed between their release date and the end of their sentence and those who were unemployed. The ‘employed’ group was then randomly matched to the ‘unemployed’ group, with the matching criteria controlling for time, opportunity and tendency. Matching criteria also addressed the issue of co-morbidity in offender needs.

Specifically, the groups were matched on gender, risk level, release year, sentence length, several dynamic factors,** and the regional statistic area classification (SAC)*** groupings which corresponded to the offenders’ designated supervision office. The matching process yielded samples of 4,640 men and 156 women.****

The information was subjected to survival analysis, a statistical technique that estimates the time taken to reach an event and the rate of occurrence of that event. This type of analysis was used to draw comparisons between employment groups across three events or outcome measures: 1) any return to federal custody before the end of sentence; 2) a return to federal custody with a new offence before end of sentence; and 3) a return to federal custody without a new offence before end of sentence. Comparisons were drawn for men and women separately.

Results

The median time to outcome was used as a measure of central tendency for the survival data. An examination of the release cohort revealed that the survival curves for employment were significantly different for men and women [$\chi^2(1, N=24,061)=19.40, p.001$]. The median time to employment was 6 months for men and 10 months for women. However, as illustrated in Figure 1, both survival curves eventually converged, indicating that over time, there were fewer differences in employment rates by gender.

When compared to their matched counterparts, employed men were more likely to remain on conditional release until the end of their sentence [$\chi^2(1, N=4,653)=357.40, p.001$]. The median time to return was also later for the employed group (11 months versus 37 months, respectively). Employed men were also less likely to return to federal custody with a new offence [$\chi^2(1, N=4,653)=86.71, p.001$] or technical revocation [$\chi^2(1, N=4,653)=128.62, p.001$] (see Figures 2, 3 and 4).

For women offenders, the employed group was more likely to remain on conditional release until the end of their sentence [$\chi^2(1, N=156)=9.09, p.01$]. An examination of the survival curves (see Figure 5) reveals that at the end of the study period, approximately 70% of the employed group remained on conditional release compared to approximately 55% of the unemployed group. Low base rates for returns with a new offence precluded any estimation of the median time in the community. However, the employed group was less likely to return with a new offence than their matched counterparts [$\chi^2(1, N=156)=8.54, p.05$]. There were no significant between group differences for technical revocations.

Figure 1

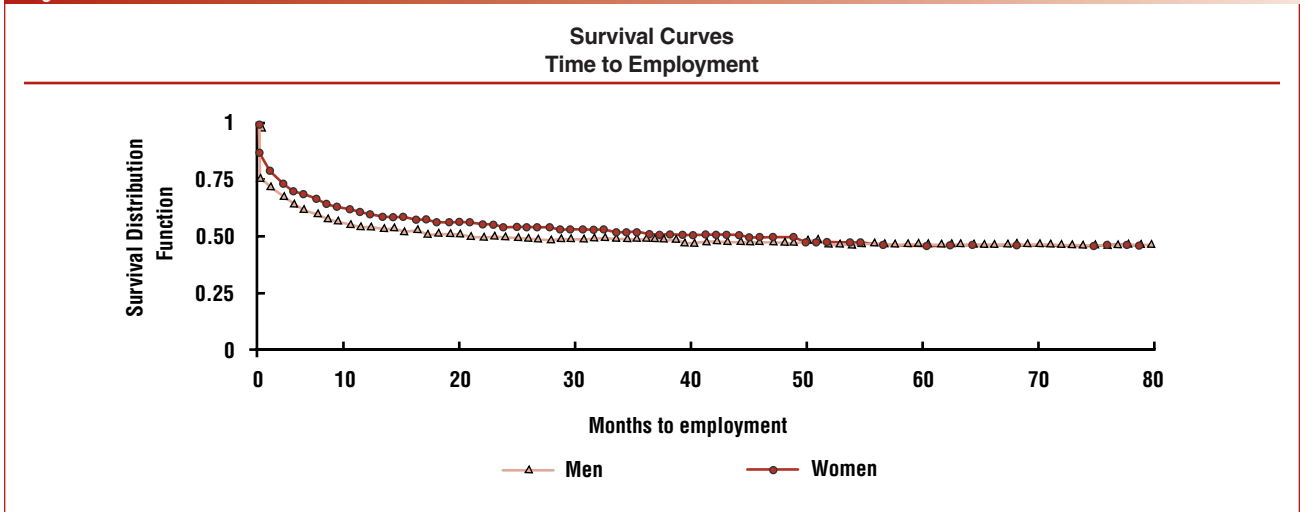


Figure 2

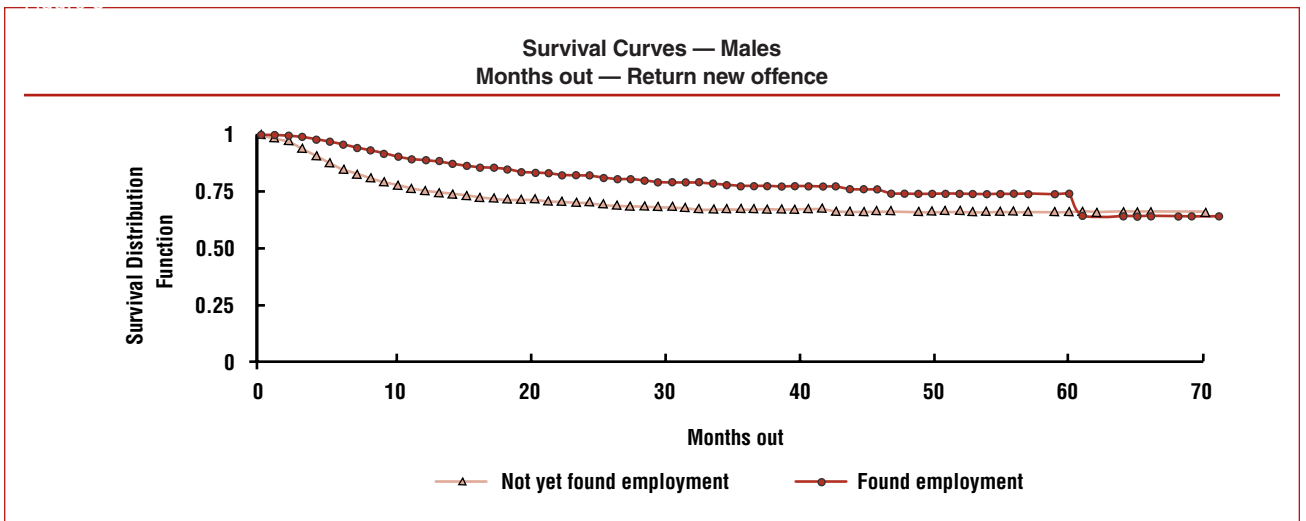
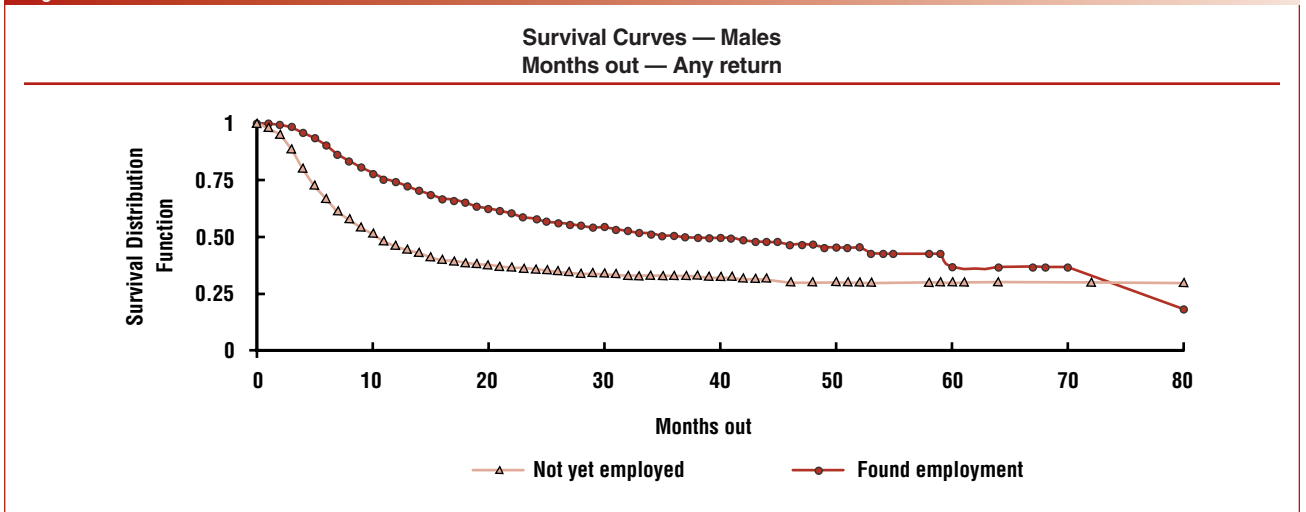


Figure 4

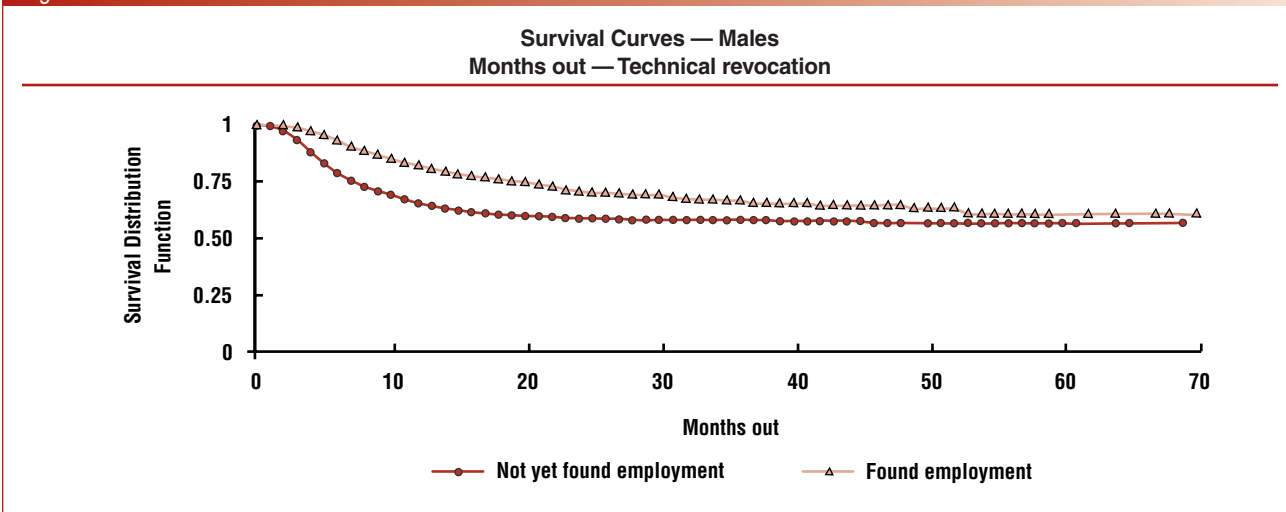
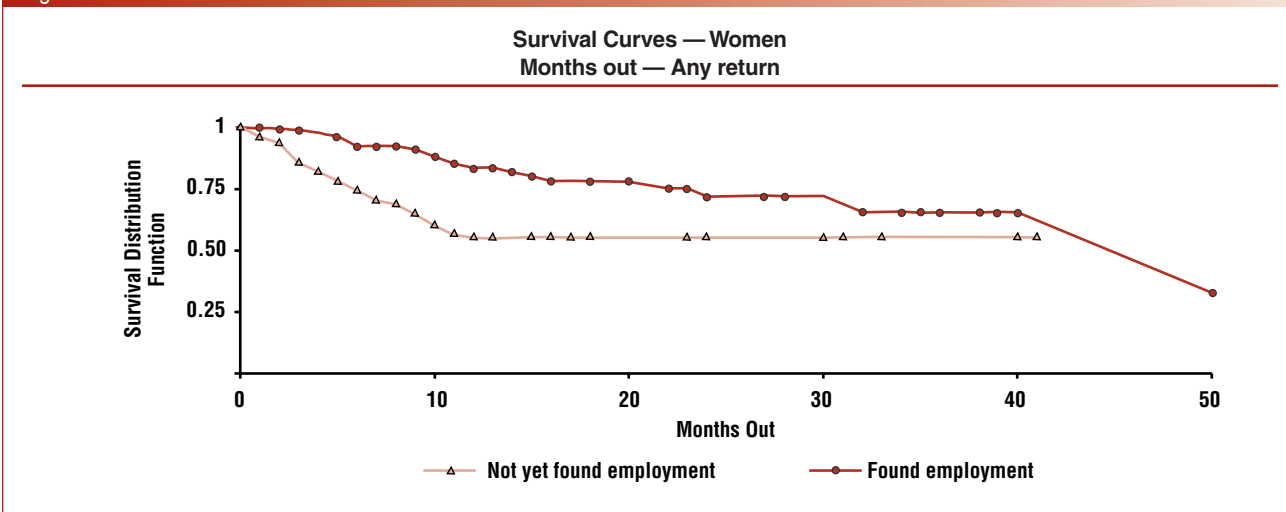


Figure 5



Discussion and Implications

This research provides information on federal offenders' community employment outcomes, yielding data that to date, has not been available. First, the results provide a baseline estimate of the average length of time it takes for men and women offenders to find work while on conditional release. Whereas men who find work take a median time of 6 months, women tend to obtain work after 10 months in the community.

Additionally, this study provides an important contribution to the employment literature, using systematic and controlled data to situate job acquisition in the community as an important factor in offender reintegration. Specifically, the study responds to many of the criticisms levelled at previous employment research, namely, the lack of

a comparison group. Comparisons on community-based outcomes for the offenders in the current sample showed the impact of employment in contributing to an increased likelihood of successful sentence completion, a longer period of time in the community, and a decreased likelihood of returning to the institution for a new offence or technical violation.

These findings have implications for community-based programming, emphasizing the need for readily-accessible employment interventions for offenders as they are released to the community. Although not a program per se, CSC's community employment centres provide employment services to conditionally-released offenders to prepare them to find work. The services focus on providing employment services to offenders, including individual employment assessment, counselling, job search techniques and on-the-job placements

to offenders released to the community. A preliminary exploration of the centres was recently conducted by Gillis & Crutcher.¹¹ This profile, along with recent evaluation findings,¹² demonstrates that the centres are meeting an important demand, responding to the risk and need principles in providing services to offenders with identified employment needs. For offenders with considerable barriers, more intensive employment programming may be necessary, and should be accessible to offenders prior to release, or as they are released to the community.

Employment, as a program, has been eclipsed over the past decades with the advent and wide

distribution of programs designed to address other need areas (e.g., substance abuse and violence). Employment initiatives have existed since the advent of institutions, yet as noted by Andrews et al.,¹³ it can be said that “the employment factor, for all of the traditional attention it has received in corrections, has not received the quality of attention it deserves”. It is hoped that this research will contribute to solidifying the perception of employment as an important factor in offenders’ community reintegration, and to furthering its status as a significant program area. ■

¹ 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1A 0P9

² Enocksson, K. (1981). Correctional programs: A review of the value of education and training in penal institutions. *Journal of Offender Counseling, Services and Rehabilitation*, 5(1), 5–18. Also, see Finn, P. (1998). Job placement for offenders in relation to recidivism. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 28(1/2), 89–106. See also, Gendreau, P., Goggin, C., & Gray, G. (1998). Case need domain: “Employment.” *Forum on Corrections Research*, 10(3), 16–19.

³ Motiuk, L. (1997). Classification for correctional programming: The Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9(1), 18–22.

⁴ Markley, H., Flynn, K., & Bercaw-Dooen, S. (1983). Offender skills training and employment success: An evaluation of outcomes. *Corrective and Social Psychiatry and Journal of Behavior Technology Methods and Therapy*, 29, 1–11.

⁵ Gillis, C. A., & Andrews, D. A. (2002). Understanding employment: A prospective exploration of factors linked to community-based employment among federal offenders. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 14(1), 3–6. Also, see Gillis, C. A., & Andrews, D. A. (2005). *Predicting community employment for federal offenders on conditional release*. Research report, Research Branch, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON.

⁶ Gaes, G. G., Flanagan, T. J., Motiuk, L. L., & Stewart, L. (1999). Adult correctional treatment. In M. Tonry and J. Petersilia (Eds.), *Prisons* (pp. 361–426). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Also, see Gerber, J., & Fritsch, E. J. (1995). Adult academic and vocational correctional education programs: A review of recent research. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 22(1/2), 119–142. See also, Pearson, F. S., & Lipton, D. S. (1999). *The effectiveness of educational and vocational programs: CDATE meta-analyses*. Paper presented at the annual meeting

of the American Society of Criminology, Toronto, ON. Also, see Ryan, T. A. (1998). *Job retention of offenders and ex-offenders: Review and synthesis of the literature*. Unpublished manuscript, College of Criminal Justice, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

⁷ Op. Cit., Ryan, 1998, p. E5.

⁸ Op. Cit., Gaes, 1999; Gerber & Fritsch, 1995; Pearson & Lipton, 1999; Ryan, 1998.

⁹ Op. Cit., Finn, 1998. Also, see Gerber & Fritsch, 1995.

¹⁰ Op. Cit., Pearson & Lipton, 1999.

¹¹ Gillis & Crutcher, 2005, this volume.

¹² Op. Cit., Gillis & Andrews, 2005.

¹³ Andrews, D.A.; Pirs, S.; Walker, J. & Hurge, A. (1980). A theoretical, research and program framework for employment-oriented services in probation and parole: (An interim report). Parts I, II, III, IV, and VI. Ontario: Ministry of Correctional Services. (p. 3).

* The analyses examined unique sentences, thus it is possible for offenders to appear more than once in the population.

** Dynamic factors were those assessed just prior to the offenders’ release dates. They are comprised of the following domains: employment, family/marital relations, associates, substance abuse, community functioning, personal emotional orientation, and attitudes.

*** The SAC’s identify geographic zones based on population counts and densities resulting from the 2001 Canadian Population Census. The zones are classified as being a component of 1) Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA) which have a population over 100,000, 2) Census Agglomeration (CA) areas which have a population that is less than 100,000 but more than 10,000 and 3) Rural Communities (RC) which include all other town, villages but excludes reserve communities. This geographic designation was based on the premise that offenders resided relatively close to the location where they were being supervised.

**** Each sample was comprised of unemployed offenders (50%), and employed offenders (50%).

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Offender employment: A research summary

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Introduction

This article is an abstract of the original Research Report 90 and presents a summary of the research conducted by Paul Gendreau, Claire Goggin and Glen Gray. For a detailed description of their research methods and instruments, see the original report posted on the Correctional Service of Canada website.

Background

Of all the predictors of offender recidivism, the employment/education domain (hereafter known as employment) is probably the most prosaic. Indeed, it has engendered little debate compared to other predictors such as social class of origin, personal distress and personality (e.g., psychopathy).² It has been taken for granted that the employment domain is a moderately good predictor of recidivism. Meta-analyses of the juvenile offender literature have confirmed this. In these reviews, however, it should be noted that the employment domain was made up almost entirely of educational achievement items. A meta-analysis of the general adult offender prediction literature has essentially corroborated the juvenile results. This meta-analysis had a social achievement domain in which a majority of the effect sizes were employment/education predictors. The social achievement domain ranked in the top third of predictors behind companions, criminal history, criminogenic need, and anti-social personality. Furthermore, surveys of adult male and female offenders have also revealed that employment/vocational/financial needs are pre-eminent.³ Additionally, Zamble found that financial gain was a primary motive for a quarter of his offender sample.⁴

Almost all adult offender risk instruments include an employment item. However, to our knowledge, only two risk measures, the Level of Service Inventory-Revised⁵ and the Case Needs Identification and Analysis (CNIA) protocol⁶ have explored the area in any depth. The LSI-R has 10 items in this regard, the CNIA has 35. Given that the Gendreau et al.,⁷ meta-analysis did not examine separately the employment domain predictors and the fact that one of the major risk/need assessment protocols in corrections (the CNIA) is currently

undergoing significant revisions, to that end, a reassessment of the predictive validity of the employment domain is timely. Thus, the purpose of the present study is as follows:

1. To update the Gendreau, et al., meta-analysis vis-à-vis the education/employment items of that study's social achievement domain.
2. To review the psychological test literature for recent psychometric instruments that measure the employment construct.

Method

Sample of studies

A literature search for relevant studies published between January 1994 and December 1997 was conducted using the ancestry approach and library abstracting services. These studies were added to the existing database reported in the Gendreau, et al.,⁸ meta-analysis. As well, studies from two recent meta-analyses of the predictors of recidivism for mentally disordered and sexual offenders were added.⁹ For a study to be included, the following criteria applied:

1. Data on the offender was collected prior to the recording of the criterion measure. A minimum follow-up period of six months was required. If a study reported more than one follow-up period, data from the longest interval was used.
2. Treatment studies that directly attempted to change offender attitudes or behaviour were not included.
3. Recidivism had to be recorded when the offender was an adult (18 years or older).
4. The criterion had to have a no-recidivism category. Studies that used "more" vs. "less" crime categorizations were not used. The criterion measures were arrest, conviction, incarceration, or probation/parole violation.
5. Each study was also required to report statistical information that could be converted into a common metric or effect size (i.e., Pearson r).

Design and procedure

Coding the studies

For each study the following information was recorded:

1. Study characteristics: published document and decade of publication.
2. Study sample characteristics: age, gender, race, type of offender, intake risk level, and history of violent offence.
3. Study methodology: sample size, type of outcome criterion, length of follow-up, extreme groups design, subject attrition, adequate description of subjects, assessment/reporting of multiple recidivism outcomes, and recidivism data assessed by raters blind to assessment of predictors.

Predictor categories

The employment predictor domain was first divided into 7 categories, which were comprised of the following constituents:

1. Employment history — frequently unemployed, ever fired, unstable work history.
2. Employment needs at discharge — no employment plans after release, poor job motivation, employment need.
3. Employment status at intake — unemployed at intake, not employed prior to incarceration.
4. Financial — poor financial management, major financial problems, low income.
5. Education/employment — LSI-R education/employment domain, academic/vocational.
6. School achievement — fewer years of education, less than grade 12, poor school achievement.
7. School maladjustment — ever suspended/expelled, school discipline problems.

Effect size calculation

The procedures for calculating effect sizes in predictor studies have been detailed elsewhere.¹⁰ Briefly, Pearson product-moment correlation (r) coefficients were produced for all predictors in each study that reported a numerical relationship with a criterion. When statistics other than Pearson r were presented, their conversion to r was undertaken using the appropriate statistical formula. Where a p value of greater than .05 was the only reported statistic, an r of .0 was assigned.

Next, the obtained correlations were transformed using Fisher's table. Then, according to the

procedures outlined by Hedges and Olkin,¹¹ the statistic z^{\pm} , representing the weighted estimation of Pearson r , was calculated for each predictor category by dividing the sum of the weighted z_r s per predictor category by the sum of each predictor's sample size minus three across that category.

In order to determine the practical utility of various predictors relative to each other, the common language (CL) effect size indicator was also employed.¹² The CL statistic converts an effect size into the probability that the value of a predictor-criterion relationship sampled at random from the distribution of one predictor category (e.g., education/employment) will be greater than that sampled from another distribution (e.g., offender SES). The CL statistic requires mean and standard deviation values for calculation; thus it is not applicable to the z^{\pm} statistic which lacks variance.

Significance testing

To determine which of the predictor categories predicted criterion significantly different from zero, the mean z^{\pm} values for each group were multiplied by the value of $(\frac{N-3k}{2})^{1/2}$, where N = the number of subjects per predictor category and k = the number of predictors per category.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the Student Newman Keuls (SNK) test using Pearson r were also employed to assess differences in the relationship of moderator variables (i.e., length of follow-up, study characteristics, etc.) with outcome criteria. The CL statistic does not involve significance testing.

Results

Study characteristics

We identified 67 studies as suitable for the meta-analysis which generated 200 effect sizes. For those variables where at least 50% of the studies reported information on sample and study characteristics, the results were as follows: (a) 82% of effect sizes came from studies which assessed males only or mixed gender samples, (b) 76% of effect sizes were associated with adult or mixed adult/juvenile samples, (c) 69% of studies came from the 1980s or 1990's, (d) 62% of effect sizes were associated with subjects of mixed risk levels, (e) 16% of effect sizes were associated with offenders with a violent or sexual offence history, (f) 91% of effect sizes came from studies with a 1 year or greater follow-up period, (g) 75% of outcomes included conviction, incarceration, or a combination thereof, and (h) 82% of effect sizes were associated with non-violent recidivism.

Table 1

Mean effect sizes for predictor domains: First categorization

Predictor (k)	N	M r	CI	M z^+	CI
1. Employment history (34)	23,415	.14(.10)	.11 to .17	.18*	.17 to .19
2. Employment needs at discharge (16)	4,961	.15(.12)	.09 to .21	.19*	.16 to .22
3. Employment status at intake (28)	12,990	.11(.13)	.06 to .16	.10*	.08 to .12
4. Financial (27)	14,457	.13(.10)	.09 to .17	.10*	.08 to .12
5. Education/employment (20)	9,142	.26(.18)	.18 to .34	.10*	.08 to .12
6. School achievement (60)	37,245	.10(.10)	.07 to .12	.10*	.09 to .11
7. School maladjustment (15)	11,822	.14(.08)	.10 to .19	.11*	.09 to .13
Total (200)	114,032	.13(.12)	.12 to .15	.12*	.11 to .13

Note: k = effect sizes per predictor domain; N = subjects per predictor domain; M r = mean Pearson r (SD); M z^+ = $[(z) \times (\pi - 3)] \div (\pi - 3)^{1/2}$ where π = number of subjects per effect size; CI = confidence interval about the mean Pearson r and mean z^+ .

* $p < .05$.

Meta-analysis: predictive validities

The sixty-seven studies generated 200 effect sizes or individual correlations between an employment or education predictor and a criterion (i.e., recidivism). There were seven predictor categories (see Table 1). The results in Table 1 are interpreted in the following manner. Reading from the left of row 1, the employment history category produced 34 effect sizes involving 23,415 offenders. The mean correlation (r) was .14 and the confidence interval (CI) about mean r ranged from .11 to .17. The weighted r (z^+) for the same category was .18 and its CI ranged from .17 to .19. Each of the seven predictor categories predicted recidivism significantly greater than 0.

When examining mean r , the CIs for the education/employment predictor category (5) did not overlap with those of predictor categories 6 or 7, and overlapped only minimally with those of categories 1, 3, 4, and 6. In the case of weighted r (z^+), the

employment needs at discharge predictor category did not overlap with predictor categories 3 to 5 and 6 to 7. The drop in value from a mean r of .26 to a mean z^+ of .10 for the education/employment category reflects the fact that three effect sizes within that group had large sample sizes and produced weak correlations with the criterion ($r < .12$).

As outlined in Table 2, the common language effect size indicator (CL) demonstrated that the education/employment predictor category produced higher correlations with the criterion than did its counterparts, ranging from 66% of the time compared with employment needs at discharge to 83% of the time compared with offender SES. Employment needs at discharge produced higher correlations with the criterion than did seven other predictor categories 55% to 68% of the time. Of the two school-based predictors, school maladjustment outperformed school achievement 61% of the time.

Common language effect size indicators^a

	EN	SM	EH	F	ES	PP	SA	O
EE	66	73	71	73	74	78	81	83
EN		56	55	57	59	64	58	68
SM			51	52	54	61	61	63
EH				52	55	60	62	64
F					53	58	59	61
ES						55	56	58
PP							50	52
SA								52

^a Common language effect size indicators for mean r values. Predictor domains are listed on the left in rank order of number of favourable comparisons. EE = education/employment; EN = employment needs at discharge; SM = school maladjustment; EH = employment history; F = financial; ES = employment status at intake; PP = probation/parole schooling/training; SA = school achievement; O = offender SES.

Table 3

Mean effect sizes for predictor domains: Second categorization					
Predictor (k)	N	M r	CI	M z^+	CI
Education (75)	49,067	.11(.10)	.08 to .13	.11*	.10 to .11
Employment (105)	55,823	.13(.11)	.11 to .15	.14*	.14 to .16
Education/employment (20)	9,142	.26(.18)	.18 to .34	.10*	.08 to .12
Total (200)	114,032	.13(.12)	.12 to .15	.12*	.12 to .13

Note: k = effect sizes per predictor domain; N = subjects per predictor domain; M r = mean Pearson r (SD); M z^+ = $[(z) \times (\underline{n} - 3)] \div (\underline{n} - 3)^{1/2}$ where \underline{n} = number of subjects per effect size; CI = confidence interval about the mean Pearson r and mean z^+ .

* $p < .05$.

The predictors listed in Table 1 were then collapsed into three categories: education, employment, and education/employment combined. The results are described in Table 3.

For mean r , the CIs for the education/employment category do not overlap with the other two groups. Using weighted mean r values (z^+), however, the employment category CIs do not overlap with the education or combined education/employment categories.

The CL index indicated that the education/employment predictor category produced higher correlations with the criterion than employment and education 74% and 79% of the time, respectively.

Meta-analysis: moderators

An analysis of the relationship between mean effect size per predictor category ($k = 9$) by study moderators was also conducted, resulting in few meaningful comparisons. For example, mean effect sizes did not differ by any of the study descriptors (i.e., journal, report, or book, published or not, study decade) or offender demographic characteristics (i.e., age, race, or gender). For all comparisons, $F < 1$.

With regard to study characteristics, the use of high, low, or mixed risk samples resulted in no difference in mean effect size [$F(2, 190) \leq 1$]. Given the limited number of effect sizes associated with designated offender populations (i.e., sex offenders ($k = 30$) versus mentally disordered offenders ($k = 16$) versus all others ($k = 168$)), no comparison of average effect size was attempted. Skewing of the distribution of effect sizes associated with offenders with a history of violence ($k = 34$) versus those without ($k = 167$) also prevented further analysis.

Several methodological variables, including a composite index of quality, were also examined. None showed a significant relationship with effect size, with one exception. That is, effect sizes associated

with an adequate description of subjects (i.e., details on age, race, and gender) were significantly lower than those generated by studies where demographic data was not provided [$F(1, 206) = 7.63, p < .05$].

In addition, effect sizes generated by studies that used a follow-up period of less than or equal to 2 years ($r = .15$) or greater than 5 years ($r = .15$) were significantly higher than those from studies with an “in-between” length of follow-up ($r = .10$) [$F(2, 206) = 4.28, p < .05$]. Similarly, average effect sizes associated with probation/parole violation ($r = .19$) or incarceration ($r = .19$) were significantly greater than those of all other types of outcome criteria [$F(4, 189) = 5.63, p < .05$].

Assessment protocols

In addition to the LSI-R and the CNIA, nine potentially useful “employment” assessment protocols were identified. They are the Australia Work Ethic scale, the Awareness of Limited Opportunity, the Employment Checklist, the Intrinsic Job Motivation scale, the Maladaptive Behavior Record, the Occupational Self Efficacy Scale, the Value of Employment, the Work Beliefs scale, and the Work Involvement scale.

Discussion

This meta-analysis confirmed the utility of the employment predictor domain. The mean effect sizes for both the unweighted and weighted r values (.13 and .12 respectively) were almost identical to the social achievement predictor domain results reported in Gendreau, et al.¹³ In that study, 67% of the social achievement effect sizes ($k = 112$) were in the employment domain which, in turn, produced a mean r and z^+ value of .15 and .13, respectively. Given that the present database consists of 200 effect sizes and 114,032 offenders, the employment predictor domain is solidly established as a moderately strong predictor of recidivism.

Further research may establish that the results reported here have underestimated the predictive potential of the employment domain. Historically, the standard approach to enquiring about employment type questions in offender risk measures has been to limit questions to basic grade achieved/employment history items. Rather, more attention should be focused on assessing the offenders' values, beliefs, satisfactions, etc. with employment and related skill acquisition. In effect, we are advocating that this domain be considered in a much more dynamic fashion similar to what has been argued for the conceptualization of IQ with offenders. In support of this view, inspection of our database revealed that these few items that assessed "non-rewarding work", "poor job motivation", etc. sometimes produced r 's greater than .20. Indeed, in one large scale follow-up of offenders, a measure of work beliefs compared to a wide range of predictor domains, generated the strongest correlations with recidivism.

Finally, it should be noted that the present database contained very few studies on female and native samples. Our review of the studies on females indicated some inconsistencies. For example, in one study, the employment domain was a significant predictor of recidivism, with results similar to that of males. On the other hand, while Lambert and Madden¹⁴ reported sizeable correlations of employment with recidivism, Bonta et al.¹⁵ did not. There were two studies on natives,¹⁶ and for whatever reason, the mean r value obtained for non-natives was higher than for natives ($r = .26$ vs $.18$). Obviously, much more research is needed regarding gender and race.

Recommendations: CNIA

The employment domain of the CNIA consists of 6 principle components and 10 sub-components. The database in this meta-analysis substantiates

the continued use of the first three indicators in the education/skills sub-component, five of the indicators in the history sub-component, as well as all of the indicators in the dismissed/departure, economic gain, and the history (from the interventions principal component) sub-components. Unfortunately, this meta-analysis did not contain effect sizes that addressed the content of the other CNIA employment indicators.

Recommendations regarding possible revisions of the employment domain of the CNIA reflect, in part, clinical wisdom as well as the meta-analysis. They are:

1. Continue to use the above-noted indicators, although some judicious pairing (e.g., choose one of "less than grade 8" or "less than grade 10", etc.) would be helpful. Also, review the necessity of including 35 indicators in the employment domain.
2. Add an item or two on school maladjustment factors.
3. There is a wealth of useful items in some of the "employment" assessment protocols located in our review. Serious consideration should be given to adapting several items from the following scales: Australia Work Ethic, Intrinsic Job Motivation, Occupational Self Efficacy Work Beliefs, and Work Involvement.
4. The final recommendation is controversial. The logic, albeit tenuous, is as follows. The employment domain is a useful predictor of recidivism. Good employment skills are necessary for a successful pro-social re-integration into society. A huge amount of research has shown that the best predictor of job success, by far, is the General Aptitude Test Battery. Nevertheless, these measures would provide information that would assist the case management process considerably regarding offenders' rehabilitation. ■

- ¹ 340 Laurier Ave. West, Ottawa, ON K1A 0P9
- ² Gendreau, P., Little, T., & Goggin, C. (1996). A meta-analysis of the predictors of adult offender recidivism: What works! *Criminology*, 34, 575–607. Also see, Gendreau, P., Goggin, C., & Paparozzi, M. (1996). Principles of effective assessment for community corrections. *Federal Probation*, 60, 64–70.
- ³ Motiuk, L. (1996, September). *Assessment methods in corrections*. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Community Corrections Association, Austin, TX.
- ⁴ Zamble, E. (1993). Expanding the recidivism inquiry: A look at dynamic factors. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 5, 27–30.
- ⁵ Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (1995). *LSI-R: The level of service inventory-revised*. Toronto, Ont.: Multi-Health Systems, Inc.
- ⁶ Motiuk, L.L. (1993). Where are we in our ability to assess risk? *Forum on Corrections Research*, 5, 14–18. Also see, Motiuk, L. L., & Brown, S. L. (1993). *The validity of offender needs identification and analysis in community correction (R-34)*. Ottawa, Ontario: Research and Statistics Branch, Correctional Service of Canada.
- ⁷ Op. cit., Gendreau, et. al., (1996)
- ⁸ Op. cit., Gendreau, et. al., (1996)
- ⁹ Bonta, J., Law, M., & Hanson, K. (1998). The prediction of criminal and violent recidivism among mentally disordered offenders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 123, 123–142.
- ¹⁰ Gendreau, P., Goggin, C., & Law, M. (1997). Predicting prison misconducts. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 24, 414–431.
- ¹¹ Hedges, L. V., & Olkin, I. (1985). *Statistical methods for meta-analysis*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- ¹² McGraw, K. O., & Wong, S. P. (1992). A common language effect size. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111, 361–365.
- ¹³ Op. cit., Gendreau et. al., (1996)
- ¹⁴ Lambert, L. R., & Madden, P. G. (1976). The adult female offender: The road from institution to community life. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Corrections*, 18, 3–15.
- ¹⁵ Bonta, J., Pang, B., & Wallace-Capretta, S. (1995). Predictors of recidivism among incarcerated female offenders. *The Prison Journal*, 75, 277–294.
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Offender employment: What the research tells us

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Education and work programs are the cornerstone of correctional intervention. They have been shown to reduce criminal futures^{2,3} and increase positive behaviour⁴ in prison. Historically, these programs have been a fixture of correctional efforts in North America for more than 150 years. The rationale for providing educational/vocational services and work opportunities to inmates flows directly from the educational/employment skills deficits that many offenders bring with them to prison. For that reason, identifying and analyzing offender employment needs on admission to prison and monitoring offender employment patterns while under community supervision can provide programming targets that could potentially lead to safer returns to the community.

Through offender population profiling and trend analysis, this article illustrates the value of systematically assessing and reassessing employment as a major risk and need factor throughout the correctional process.

Employment needs identification and analysis

In November 1994, the Correctional Service of Canada implemented the Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process⁵ to produce a comprehensive and integrated evaluation of each offender as they enter the federal correctional system.

The OIA process involves the systematic collection and analysis of comprehensive information on each offender's criminal and mental health background, social situation and education, factors relevant to determining criminal risk (such as criminal record) and factors relevant to identifying offender needs (such as employment). The results help determine offender institutional placement and correctional plans.⁶

A major component of OIA is called 'Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis (DFIA)'. It is comprised of seven dynamic factors and indicators within each domain: employment (35), marital/family (31), associates and social interaction (11), substance abuse (29), community functioning (21), personal and emotional orientation (46), and attitude (24). Each factor is subsequently divided

into principal components that are further broken down into sub-components. Moreover, a series of yes/no indicators and, in some cases, 'help messages' accompany the indicators to enhance rating clarity. In total, DFIA consists of seven dynamic factor domains, 35 principal components, 94 sub-components, and 197 indicators. The primary objective of the DFIA is to provide a straightforward yet systematic means for identifying dynamic factors that inform the correctional plan. Specifically, the DFIA identifies and prioritizes factors that are directly linked to an offender's criminal behaviour. The focus of this research is on the employment domain comprised of six principal components and 35 indicators (see Figure 1) and rated using the following guideline:

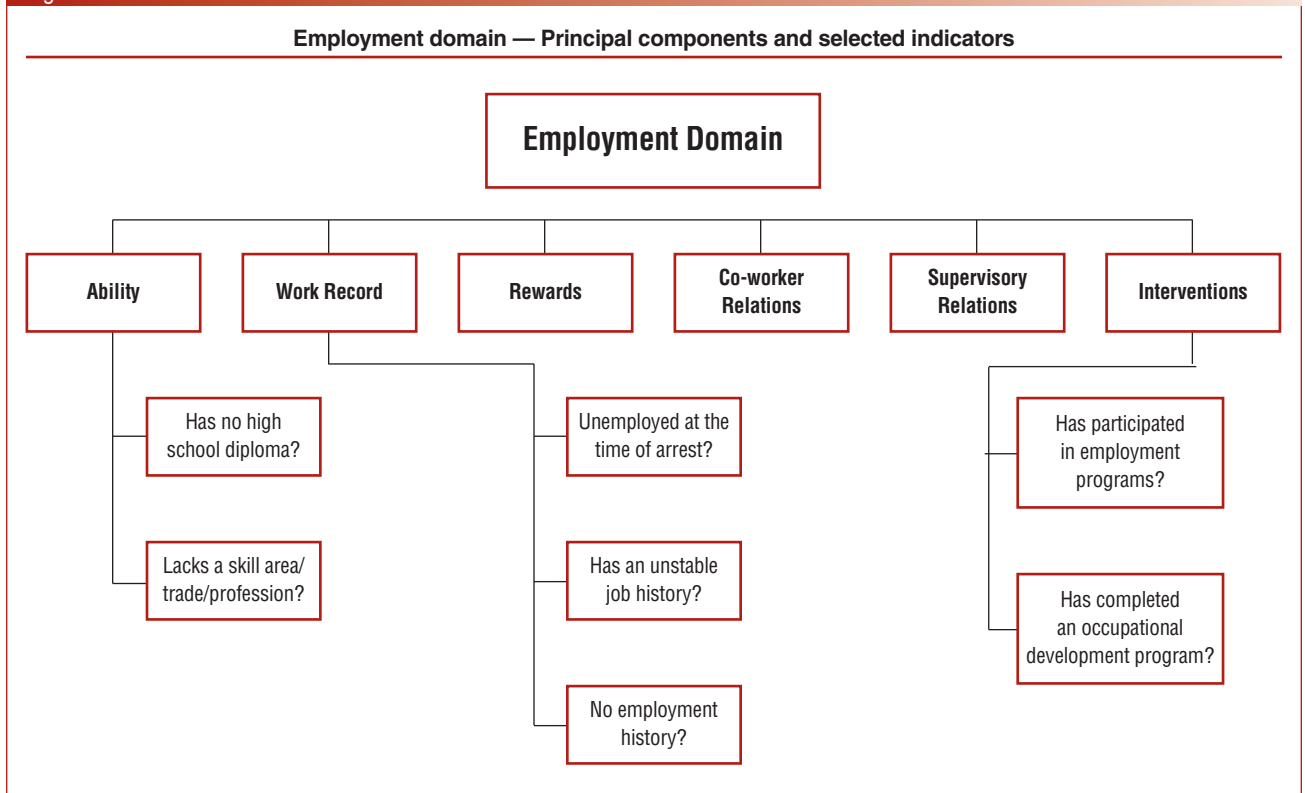
For this category, a rating of "FACTOR SEEN AS AN ASSET TO COMMUNITY ADJUSTMENT" indicates that employment has been stable and has played an important role for the offender. A rating of "NO IMMEDIATE NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT" indicates that neither employment, under employment, sporadic employment, nor chronic unemployment have interfered with daily functioning. An offender receives a rating of "SOME NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT" if any of the aforementioned have caused minor adjustment problems while in the community and "CONSIDERABLE NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT" if the employment situation has caused serious adjustment problems.

Employment domain validity

A meta-analytic review⁷ of employment factors and recidivism among adult offender populations (the authors identified 67 studies that generated 200 individual effect sizes with recidivism) confirmed that employment history and employment needs at discharge were predictive of criminal recidivism. Although education was predictive of recidivism the strength of the relationship was considerably less than employment.

A predictive validity study⁸ conducted on federal release cohorts revealed that unemployment related indicators (e.g., 'unemployed 50% or more', 'unstable job history') along with 'lacks a skill, area, trade

Figure 1



or profession' were strongly associated with the employment domain rating and readmission for men and women. Moreover, unstable job history was a strong predictor of readmission. Interestingly, the indicator 'lacks a skill/area/trade/profession' was also found to be moderately predictive of readmission.

Employment needs of federal admissions

As Table 1 shows, more than half of newly admitted men and women were identified as "needy" (rated as "considerable" need or "some" need combined) in the area of employment (53.8% and 56.2%, respectively). More specifically, Figure 2 presents the proportions of newly admitted men and women

identified at intake with employment needs between 1998/1999 and 2003/2004. As Figure 2 shows, the proportions of newly admitted men assessed to have employment needs have been steadily increasing since 1998/99. However, a consistent pattern emerges where the proportion of newly

Figure 2

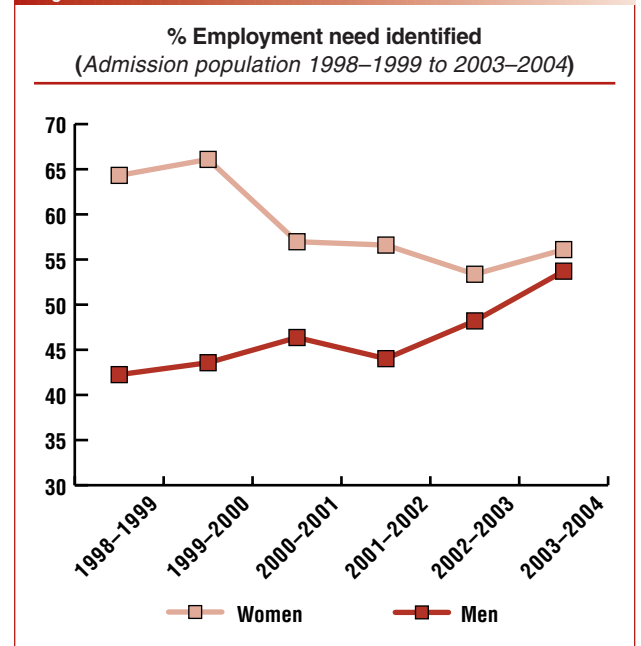


Table 1

Employment needs assessed at intake (Admission population 2003–2004)			
Need level ^{ns}	Men (4,048)	Women (246)	Combined (4,294)
Considerable	10.3%	15.5%	10.6%
Some	43.5%	40.7%	43.3%
No Need	42.9%	39.8%	42.7%
An Asset	3.4%	4.1%	3.4%

Note: ns = non-significant.

Table 2

Selected employment indicators from the OIA Process
(Admission population 2003–2004)

Indicator	Men (3,953)	Women (246)	Combined (4,199)
Has no high school diploma*	75.3%	69.1%	74.9%
Lacks a skill area/ trade/profession ^{ns}	56.0%	52.9%	55.8%
Unemployed at arrest*	62.9%	70.3%	63.3%
Has an unstable job history ^{ns}	64.5%	60.6%	64.2%
No employment history**	8.4%	13.8%	8.7%
Has participated in employment programs*	22.6%	29.3%	23.0%
Completed an occupational development program ^{ns}	12.9%	10.6%	12.8%

Note: Numbers may vary slightly; ns = non-significant; * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001.

admitted women identified with employment needs is higher than men. Furthermore, it appears that the gap between the proportions of newly admitted men and women identified with employment needs has converged in recent years.

A summary of the distribution of selected employment indicators assessed during the OIA process was also obtained for 3,953 men and 246 women (see Table 2). Although women offenders as a group were significantly more likely than men to possess a high school diploma at time of their admission to prison, they were less likely to have been employed at time of arrest or have stable job histories.

Employment needs of federal prisoners

Another way to look at the employment needs of an entire prison population is to take a snapshot. In Table 3, the proportions of men and women in federal custody identified at intake with employment needs were found to be 44.4% and 39.4%, respectively.

Figure 3 displays the proportions of men and women in prison who were identified at intake with employment needs. It would appear that the proportions of men and women who were assessed at intake to have employment needs have declined since 1998/99. Again, a pattern emerges where the proportion of women identified with employment needs in prison is higher than men.

Table 3

Employment needs assessed at intake
(Prison population on March 31, 2004)

Need Level	Men (11,170)	Women (346)	Combined (11,516)
Considerable	4.4%	6.7%	4.5%
Some	40.0%	32.7%	39.8%
No Need	38.5%	42.5%	38.6%
An Asset	17.1%	18.2%	17.6%

Note: * = p < .05.

Figure 3

% Employment need identified
(Prison population 1998–1999 to 2003–2004)

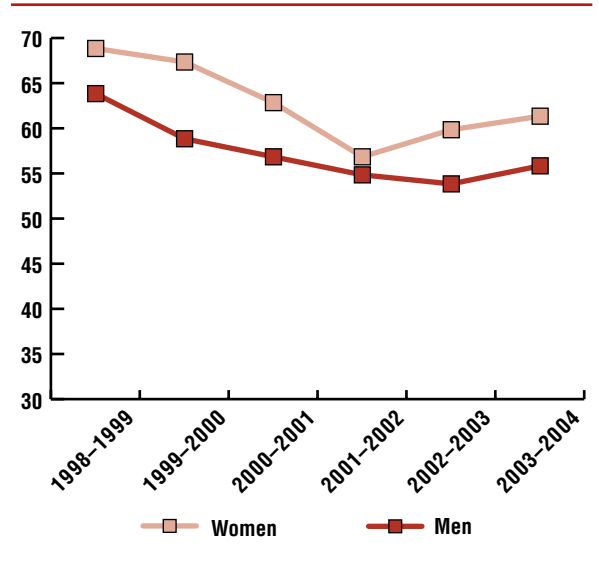


Table 4 presents the distribution of selected employment variables assessed during the OIA process for 9,005 men and 324 women in prison. As found with the admission population, women offenders, as a group, were significantly more likely than men to possess a high school diploma at the time of their admission to prison. In addition, women offenders were less likely to have been employed at time of arrest or possess an employment history.

Discussion

In contributing to safe reintegration, correctional systems need to be able to produce timely and accurate profiles of the education/vocational and work histories of their offender population. This information can be used to raise awareness about specified offender needs of institutional populations. More important, this data can help correctional

Table 4

Selected employment indicators from the OIA Process
(Prison population on March 31, 2004)

Indicator	Men (9,005)	Women (324)	Combined (9,329)
Has no high school diploma*	77.9%	71.9%	77.7%
Lacks a skill area/trade/profession ^{ns}	61.8%	62.3%	61.8%
Unemployed at arrest***	66.5%	78.8%	66.9%
Has an unstable job history ^{ns}	71.5%	72.4%	71.6%
No employment history***	12.0%	24.2%	12.4%
Has participated in employment programs ^{ns}	22.7%	26.6%	22.8%
Completed an occupational development program ^{ns}	11.0%	11.0%	11.0%

Note: Numbers may vary slightly; ns = non-significant; * = p < .05; *** = p < .001.

agencies to direct resources and interventions to particular segments of their populations to reduce risk and need.

The Correctional Service of Canada’s ability to systematically target and monitor the employment need levels of its admission and prison populations has, therefore, moved the Service further toward the delivery of an effective and well-integrated offender rehabilitation and case management program. ■

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Women offenders' employment needs: Research for a gender-informed employment strategy

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Employment as a treatment target for women

Past research has clearly established that a considerable proportion of women offenders has employment-related needs both at intake to federal institutions² and on release in the community.^{3,4} In addition, results of other studies have provided support for the link between employment problems and recidivism. For example, results of a meta-analytic study conducted by Gendreau, Goggin, and Gray (1999), indicated that the level of need in the employment domain was a moderately strong predictor of recidivism.⁵ Other researchers have reported evidence for an association with recidivism specifically for women offenders.^{6,7,8}

Despite evidence that employment is a promising correctional treatment target, several recent reviews of programs and services for women have highlighted concerns regarding the state of employment programming for federal women offenders in Canada. Both the Auditor General's Report (2003)⁹ and the report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2003)¹⁰ noted several gaps in service for women offenders, including the paucity of meaningful work opportunities and employment programs, as well as a lack of community-based work releases for women offenders.

To address these concerns, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is currently in the process of developing an employment strategy for women. The aim of the study described herein was to provide a detailed description of current employment programs and services available to federal women offenders and to examine relevant aspects of women's employment history, needs, and interests. Results of this research will inform the aforementioned employment strategy for women.

Research methodology

Information was gathered related to women offenders' pre-incarceration employment history, current experience with CSC training/employment, employment intentions and interests, and post-incarceration employment experiences. This information was obtained from CSC's automated database (Offender Management System; OMS)

and from questionnaires completed by women offenders in the institutions and in the community.

Participant summary

In order to provide a profile of the total offender population and their needs at intake and release to the community, a snapshot of the women offender population on May 1st, 2004 was obtained from the automated database (OMS). In addition to file information, women offenders residing in federal institution and in the community were asked to complete questionnaires to obtain more detailed information regarding their needs, interests, and perceptions related to current and future employment programming. A summary of the total number of study participants, by data source, is presented in Table 1.

Profile of women's employment needs at intake

Information regarding offender needs at intake was available for the majority of inmates currently incarcerated or under supervision in the community. For the Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis (DFIA) component of the Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process, offenders' criminogenic needs are assessed in seven domains: employment, marital/family, associates/social interaction, community functioning, attitude, personal/emotional, and substance abuse. Multiple indicators are assessed within each domain. For example, the employment domain includes 35 employment indicators which are scored as being either present or absent for each offender. An overall score is also generated for each offender in the employment domain which is scored

Table 1

	Description of study sample	
	OMS data snapshot (May 1st, 2004)	Questionnaires
Women Offenders		
Institution	384	58
Community	459	34
Total N	843	92

as either: 'asset to community adjustment', 'no need for improvement', 'some need for improvement', or 'considerable need for improvement'.

In order to investigate women's pre-incarceration employment histories, women's employment needs were first profiled through an examination of the employment domain ratings at intake. Overall, results indicated that the majority (57%) of women were perceived to have either "some" or "considerable" need for intervention in the employment domain. A little over one-third of women (36%) were perceived to have "no immediate need for improvement", and employment was assessed as an "asset to community functioning" for only 7% of women.

Examination of the specific indicators within the employment domain yielded some notable findings. More than half (58%) of women offenders did not have a skill, trade, or profession. An overwhelming 72% of women were unemployed at the time of their arrest, and almost half (47%) were unemployed 90% or more of the time. Finally, although fairly high percentages of women reported that their jobs were lacking in rewards (e.g., lack of benefits, lack of security, insufficient salary), relatively few women reported any prior employment interventions.

A series of between-group analyses were performed to compare incarcerated offenders to those in the community, younger to older women, and Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal women offenders. Overall, significant results showed that women *incarcerated* at the time of the study, *younger* women, and *Aboriginal* women quite consistently displayed greater educational needs and less extensive job histories than women residing in the community at the time of the study, older women, and non-Aboriginal women.

Questionnaire respondents were asked to describe their own perceptions of their criminogenic needs (i.e., factors that contributed to their involvement in criminal behavior) and also what factors would help to keep them out of trouble with the law in the future. Not surprisingly, the factor noted most commonly by women as a contributing factor to their criminal behavior was substance abuse, followed by difficulties in the personal/emotional domain. Interestingly, although few women identified factors related to the employment domain as contributing to their involvement in criminal behavior, assistance in the employment domain (having a job, job-related training, educational upgrading) was most commonly listed by women as a factor that would help them to *desist from criminal activities* in the future. Other factors commonly

mentioned as helping them to stay out of trouble included assistance with personal/emotional issues (e.g., self-esteem, counseling), positive associations (e.g., good relationships/support, avoidance of negative associates), positive marital/family relationships, and the avoidance of substances.

Pre-incarceration employment history: women's self-reported information

In addition to the overview of women's employment needs that was obtained via the Offender Intake Assessment data, more detailed information regarding pre-incarceration sources of income, education levels, work experience, and salary levels was solicited from women offender questionnaire respondents.

The majority of women (58%) reported that they had achieved less than a grade 12 education level while attending school in the community. However, most (64%) also reported that they had engaged in some upgrading since that time. According to questionnaire respondents, *main* sources of income prior to incarceration included: employment (34%), welfare/social assistance (27%), illegal activities (24%), or other sources such as family, friends, or mother's allowance (15%). Notably, none of the questionnaire respondents indicated a reliance on unemployment insurance or disability as a main source of income. A number of respondents also reported reliance on other legal or illegal sources of income including: the drug trade (32%), prostitution (20%), working "under-the-table" (14%), and/or exotic dancing (8%).

The majority of women (74%) indicated that their salary for their most recent job prior to incarceration was sufficient to meet their basic needs, with a reported average hourly salary of \$11.21 (SD = 5.72). This was fairly similar to the salary that women offenders suggested that they would require in order to meet their basic needs: \$11.63 (SD = 3.88). Notably, non-Aboriginal women reported a significantly higher average salary prior to incarceration (M = 11.55, SD = 4.67) than Aboriginal women (M = 7.92, SD = 2.23), $p < .001$.

Women were also asked whether they were *qualified for any jobs* that would allow them to make a salary sufficient to meet their basic needs. The majority of respondents (77%) indicated that they were. However, more older (93%) than younger women offenders (67%) reported that they were qualified for jobs with a salary sufficient to meet their needs $p < .01$. When asked to describe the types of jobs that they were qualified for (allowing them to make a sufficient wage), women reported mostly

qualifying for jobs in the sales and service areas and in business, finance, and administration.

Education and vocational training

Data regarding any educational or vocational training programs that had been *completed* by incarcerated federal offenders by the date of the snapshot was obtained from the OMS system. Results indicated that 137 of the 384 women residing in CSC institutions (36%) had completed some sort of educational or vocational training, either full-time (15%) or part-time (85%) by May 1, 2004. These 137 women had completed a total of 285 educational or training programs. Of all training programs listed ($N = 285$), the most common program placements completed involved vocational training (54%), secondary education courses such as Adult Basic Education Levels I to IV (22%) or General Educational Development (7%), or employability skills/computer skills training courses (9%). The three most common types of vocational training courses completed by women offenders included: Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, Food Handling and Safety, and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

Institutional employment

Information regarding offender employment was obtained from the OMS system for all offenders employed in the institution on the date of the snapshot. According to results obtained from the automated database, 211 of the 384 women residing in CSC institutions (55%) were employed, either full-time or part-time, on that day. These 211 women were involved in a total of 249 work placements. The majority of placements were recorded in the database as “full-time” (75%), and the remaining placements were considered to be “part-time” (23%) or “other” (2%). Most placements were classified as CSC employment (229/249; 92%), a small percentage were Corcan placements (20/249; 8%), and no women were recorded in OMS as participating in work releases on that date.

Almost all women (98%) reported that they would be *interested* in participating in a work release program. Some work release interests included the trades (15/54), such as construction, welding, or mechanics, and business or administration (13/54), including “office work”, working in a library, or customer service. However, a fair number of women’s responses appeared to reflect interest in care-giving or helping people on work release, although their descriptions were fairly broad, with several women simply noting that they wished to “work with” animals, seniors, or children.

Intentions to work and importance of employment: Incarcerated women

Almost all (57/58 who responded to this question) incarcerated women offenders indicated that it was at least somewhat important for them to have a job. Most also (50/58) reported that they *did intend* to find a job on release, 6/58 reported that they *might* be looking for a job at release, and only 2/58 women indicated that they *did not intend* to find a job on release. Reasons for not seeking a job upon release included: needing to complete other education programming/deal with other needs first, being pregnant, and being past retirement age. When asked about their chances of finding a job upon release, about half of respondents (27/55) thought that their chances were “good” and the other half (28/55) thought that their chances were only “OK” or “poor”.

Incarcerated women were also asked about their future career interests. Overall, the most common areas of interest for future careers were in *sales and service* occupations (45% of women), with the food and beverage industry, retail, sales, cashier work, and animal care or training being some of the most commonly reported interests within this category. This was followed by interest in business, finance, and administration (e.g., administrative, clerical, secretarial), trades, transport and equipment operators (e.g., “trades”, construction), and social science, education, government service, and religion (e.g., social work, counseling).

Income and employment: Women under community supervision

Twenty of 32 offenders (63%) in the community who responded to this question indicated that they were employed outside the home at the time of the study. However, when asked to describe their main source of income at the time, only 40% of women reported that employment was their main source of income. Thus, many of these women have been relying on other sources of income as well. Other main sources of income listed included: unemployment insurance or disability (12%), welfare/social assistance (12%), or spouse/family (12%).

Of the community respondents who were unemployed at the time of the study, 10/12 (83%) reported that they *intended to, or might try to find a job*, and 6/12 (50%) indicated that they were *searching for work* at the time. Unemployed women reported an average of 24 jobs applied for since release and an average of 6 hours a week looking for work. A few of these women (3/11; 27%) thought that their chances of finding a job in the next 6 months were good, but the majority of them (8/11; 73%) thought that their

chances were only “OK” or “poor”. Reasons for unemployment included: being unable to find a job (3/12), attending school (3/12), unable to work for disability or health reasons (2/12), and working in the home caring for children (1/12).

About half of the employed women on release in the community (55%) reported that they were either somewhat or very satisfied with their *current job*. Average reported weekly salaries for women’s jobs in the community at the time of the study (take-home) was \$374.80 (SD = 183.82), and less than half (40%) reported that they were somewhat or very satisfied with their *current pay level*. However, most reported that their current salary was adequate to meet their basic needs (72%) and that their chances of keeping their jobs for the next 6 months were good (79%).

Of those who were employed in the community, the majority (13/20; 65%) reported that their current employment was related to *work experience they had prior to incarceration*. However, women reported little association between their current employment and *institutional work or vocational training programs* (11%), *Corcan work experience* (0%), or *employment skills training programs* (10%).

Summary

Results of the study described herein highlight the importance of offering good quality employment services to women offenders. The majority of women offenders have employment-related needs at intake, and the women themselves highlight the importance of addressing employment-related needs to desist in future offending. Among women who were incarcerated or unemployed in the community at the time of the study, most reported that they did intend to find a job, and about half of those unemployed in the community reported that they were searching for a job at the time. Only about half of incarcerated women and about one-quarter of unemployed women in the community thought that their chances of obtaining employment were really good.

Although only a small portion of the large-scale women’s employment research study has been presented here, results highlight the importance of implementing a national employment strategy designed specifically for federal women offenders. Particular consideration should be given to younger, incarcerated, and Aboriginal women offenders. ■

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Community employment centres for offenders: A preliminary exploration

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The success of offender employment programs and interventions is most often measured by recidivism. Other, more proximal factors, such as job acquisition are important measures of program success but are often difficult to obtain. The current study was conducted as part of a mid-term review of the implementation of Correctional Service Canada's community employment centres, designed to offer employment services to federal offenders on conditional release. This brief review provides a profile of a sample of offenders who used the centres shortly after their inception, and presents results on job acquisition for these offenders. Results are compared to a recent study exploring factors associated with community-based outcomes for offenders. This was undertaken to explore implications to help guide future research on the impact of employment interventions on offenders' reintegration outcomes.

Employment and offender reintegration

Recent research findings provide support for the role of employment in facilitating offenders' successful transition to the community.³ Social support for employment (i.e., resources for finding work and affective ties to employment) was one of the most powerful factors identified by Gillis and Andrews as contributing to offenders' ability to find and keep a job in the community. Importantly, social support for employment was also linked to offenders' ability to remain in the community. These results corroborate previous research findings by Azrin & Besalel, 1980, as cited in Cellini & Lorenz⁴ relating social support to community-based employment outcomes for offenders. Community employment centres have the potential to fulfill this critical social support role by providing required assistance to offenders in their job preparation and job search techniques. Moreover, the centres contribute to the broader mission of the Correctional Service of Canada in their role of facilitating offender job acquisition, with the related intention of enhancing offenders' successful community reintegration. These roles are consistent with Corcan's mandate to aid in the safe reintegration of offenders into Canadian society by providing employment and training opportunities to offenders incarcerated in federal penitentiaries and, for brief periods of time, after they are released into the community.

Community employment centres were established in selected metropolitan areas in each of CSC's five regions, as part of a larger initiative designed to create community infrastructure, to provide increased support to offenders during their reintegration process.⁵ A total of 25 employment centres currently exist, with 6 in the Atlantic region, 8 in the Quebec region,⁶ 2 in the Ontario region, 4 in the Prairie region and 5 in the Pacific region. The centres offer employment services to offenders through Corcan, in partnership with CSC and other government and community partners such as Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, John Howard Society, St. Leonard's Society and the private sector. The primary objectives of CSC's Community Employment Centres are to provide a spectrum of employment services, including individual employment assessment, counseling, job search techniques and on-the-job placements to offenders released to the community. Since the inception of the employment centres in 2001/2002, more than 1000 offenders have been placed in jobs and/or training each year, and more than 3000 provided with employment services.

Method

This interim study* was conducted to provide a profile of offenders who used employment centres shortly after their inception in 2001/2002, focusing on the assessment of offenders' employment-based needs and competencies, for their hypothesized and demonstrated contributions to offender employment outcomes in the community.⁷ Employment counsellors were contacted by a Corcan staff member and asked to conduct the assessment as part of the intake protocol at the employment centres. Given that many centres were not yet fully established, those in existence for a longer period of time (i.e., those in the Atlantic and Prairie regions) participated in the study. A booklet was distributed to employment counsellors which contained the study explanation, informed consent form, intake assessment (comprised of historic employment information and dynamic items, including offenders' opinions about work), employment counsellor questionnaire (containing ratings of the offender on dynamic employment-related factors such as work ethic, motivation to find work, and support for employment), and

a three-month follow-up questionnaire designed to explore offender employment outcomes. A sample of 255 offenders participated in this voluntary research, from the Atlantic ($n=34$) and Prairie ($n=221$) regions.

Results

Employment-related needs assessment

Given that most of the users of the employment centres were male (95.3%), results are presented only for this group. Approximately 75% of the offenders using the centres were not currently married. The sample presented with significant overall risk (75%) and need (80%) levels, based on an assessment conducted prior to offenders' community release. These identified risk and need levels are lower than those of the overall male offender population (with 94% identified as medium to high risk and 95% as medium to high need), recently profiled by Boe and colleagues.⁸ Concomitantly, more than half (54.2%) had 'some' or 'considerable' employment needs identified prior to their release from the institution, consistent with the 56% of men in the overall population identified with employment needs.⁹

Some protective factors were evident; notably, almost 50% of the sample of offenders had a high school diploma or some post-secondary education, and nearly 50% were rated by employment counselors as having a 'significant' or 'solid' employment history. These percentages are higher than those found in the overall population. Specifically, 70% of the male offender population profiled had an unstable job history, and three-quarters (76%) did not have a high school diploma.¹⁰ Conversely, two-thirds of the sample using employment centres had been employed in the year prior to incarceration, with the highest concentration (46.1%) in semi-skilled or unskilled labour. More than half (54%) had participated in employment training/programming during their incarceration period. Of these, a total of 44.0% participated in Corcan programs, with the remaining taking part in vocational programming (15.7%), work release (15.7%), skills for employment programming (21.6%) or other initiatives (28.4%).¹¹ Slightly more than one-third (38.1%) received a certificate or diploma from an external group during incarceration, and a similar percentage (32.8%) had received certificates for employment or vocational training prior to the current incarceration period.

The percentages reported by offenders were corroborated by employment counselors' perceptions of offender needs and competencies, rated on the basis of the employment intake assessment they conducted with the participants. Almost three-quarters (72.9%) of the sample were

rated by counselors as 'motivated' or 'highly motivated' to find work, but only 42.6% were rated as having support (either 'good' or 'excellent') and only one-third with 'good' (25.4%) or 'excellent' resources (8.2%). Nearly one-half (47.1%) of offenders were rated as having a 'high' or 'very high' level of ability to find work, which corresponds to the 47.3% of offenders rated by counselors as having 'good' or 'excellent' work experience, and the 79.4% of offenders rated as having a 'good' or 'excellent' attitude toward work.

Employment counselors rated the following areas as most problematic for offenders: certification in a marketable skill, with fewer than 20% of offenders having completed certification; educational attainment, with only 36.5% rated by counselors as having education 'assisting somewhat' or 'considerably' with the ability to work; and skill level, with less than 50% (44.7%) assessed as having 'good' or 'excellent' skills. Only 12.2% of offenders were rated by employment counselors as having derived 'considerable' or 'excellent' benefits from institutional employment interventions. However, almost half (48.0%) of the offenders in the sample were rated as having 'few' or 'no' barriers to work, and over two-thirds (68.9%) were assessed as 'job ready' or 'extremely job ready'.

Employment status

Approximately one-half (46.6%) of offenders were working at the time of the initial assessment, with more than two-thirds (71.4%) in a full-time position. The average number of hours worked per week was 40.5, with an average weekly salary of \$481.91. The majority of offenders (81.1%) indicated that their salary was sufficient to meet their basic needs, and slightly more than one-half (56.0%) were satisfied with their income. Offenders were asked to rate their likelihood of keeping their job over the next three months. The vast majority (92.7%) said they had a 'good' to 'excellent' chance of maintaining their employment.

Employment services

Offenders can seek services at any of the centres, or may receive services as a function of a referral process. Within this sample, the highest percentage of offenders came to the employment centres through a referral by their parole officer (36.4%), followed by a referral by a friend/acquaintance (21.9%). Referrals by the offenders' CCC/CRC, walk-in and 'other' each accounted for about 11%. Less than 2% of the referrals came from the institution. Recently, CSC developed an Employment and Employability Case Management Bulletin and

process within institutions to better involve case management officers in the employment process (including referrals to the community employment centres), to promote continuity in employment interventions from institution to community.

Offenders reported that they were most in need of interventions in the area of job search techniques (27.3%), followed closely by résumé preparation (26.2%) and computer skills (26.2%). A list of services and the percentage of offenders indicating that they have a need for these services is presented in Table 1.

These areas correspond with the primary functions described by employment counselors in their work with offenders. Résumé preparation and job search were listed most often (21.9%) by employment counselors as their main function. Conducting intake assessment interviews with offenders to determine their level of job readiness was the second most performed function (18.6%). The third function most often listed by employment counselors was communication with parole officers for referrals (15.6%). Employment counselors were asked to list, in order of preference, the areas they would wish to address, given more time and /or resources. Counselors listed the ability to work with a database of community-based employers¹² as the most desirable function, with 44.5% agreeing this should be a priority. Job readiness programming was a close second, with 41.4% of counselors identifying this as an important area for future intervention. Better linkages with community resources were

also identified by 40.2% of the counsellors as an important area for intervention.

Three month follow-up employment status

A total of 139 (of the initial 255) offenders completed the three-month follow-up questionnaire. More than two-thirds (69.1%) of the 139 offenders were employed, and of this group, 83% were employed on a full-time basis. The average number of hours worked per week was 44.7, with an average weekly salary of \$513.80. Of those offenders who reported working ($n = 96$), 88.3% indicated that their salary met their basic needs, and 69.9% were satisfied with their income. Over one-half (51.1%) were employed in a semi-skilled or unskilled labour job, and just over one quarter (26.6%) in skilled labour positions. Almost one-fifth (18.3%) reported working in an area related to training or work experience obtained during incarceration. This sub-sample of offenders was very optimistic about working; 91.6% felt they had a 'good' to 'excellent' chance of maintaining their job in the next six months.

Summary and implications

This research presented information not typically readily accessible regarding offenders' community employment status. Specifically, as part of this profile of offenders using the services of employment centres, information was obtained not only on whether they found work, but on the details of their job, including pay and their level of satisfaction with their salary. The study also explored the various static and dynamic factors associated with employment outcomes, as previous employment research has noted the incremental contribution of dynamic variables to the prediction of employment outcomes.¹³ A research report is in progress, exploring the relationships between the various static and dynamic factors in the current study, for their relative contributions to employment outcomes.

Social support has been identified as an important contributing factor to offenders' job acquisition and retention in recent research¹⁴ and to successful community reintegration.¹⁵ Community employment centres play an important role in supporting offenders in their attempts to find work, and particularly, in areas of need defined by offenders (i.e., job search techniques, resume preparation, and computer skills).

Research conducted by Andrews and Gillis demonstrated a strong positive relationship between offenders' ratings of their chance to find/maintain a job (i.e., their intention) and community-based outcomes (i.e., job acquisition, retention and length

Table 1

Services needed most as identified by offenders¹

Service	% of respondents
Vocational interest	17.6 % (45)
Employment counselling	12.5 % (32)
Résumé preparation	26.2 % (67)
Job search	27.3 % (70)
Interview skills/practice	10.2 % (26)
Computer skills	26.2 % (67)
Basic/generic skills	5.9 % (15)
Forklift	12.5 % (32)
Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System	12.9 % (33)
English as a second language	2.0 % (5)
Literacy	2.3 % (6)
Other program needs	5.9 % (15)
Other	16.4 % (42)

¹These percentages will not add to 100% as individuals may have listed more than one service.

of time in the community). Although the relationship between intention and community reintegration was not explored as part of this profile of offenders who used the services of employment centres, it is encouraging that over 90% of offenders indicated they had a good to excellent chance of maintaining their job over the next six months. However, a comprehensive evaluation of CSC's employment centres, recently conducted by the Evaluation

Branch, showed that offenders report feeling more confident about their ability to find and keep work after using the services of the centres (see Gillis et al., 2005). Future research/evaluation on employment centres should explore the relationship between dynamic competency-based measures, including offenders' confidence in their ability to find/keep work, and community-based employment, and reintegration, outcomes. ■

¹ 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1A 0P9

² 284 Wellington Street, Ottawa, ON K1A 0H8

³ Gillis, C. A. (2002). *Understanding employment: A prospective exploration of factors linked to community-based employment among federal offenders*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON. See also, Gillis, C. A., & Andrews, D. A. (2002). Understanding employment: A prospective exploration of factors linked to community-based employment among federal offenders. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 14(1), 3–6. Also, see Gillis, C. A., & Nafekh, M. (In press). The impact of community-based employment on offender reintegration. *Forum on Corrections Research*, this issue.

⁴ Cellini, H. R., & Lorenz, J. R. (1983). Job club training with unemployed offenders. *Federal Probation*, 47(3), 46–49. See also, Soothill, K., Francis, B., & Ackerley, E. (1997). The value of finding employment for white-collar ex-offenders: A 20-year criminological follow-up. *British Journal of Criminology*, 37(4), 581–591. Also, see Soothill, K., Francis, B., & Escarela, G. (1999). White-collars and black sheep: A twenty-year criminological follow-up of white-collar ex-offenders. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 32(3), 303–314. See also, Soothill, K., & Holmes, J. (1981). Finding employment for ex-prisoners: A ten-year follow-up study. *The Howard Journal*, 20, 29–36.

⁵ Correctional Service Canada (2004). *Effective Corrections Progress Report*.

⁶ An additional 13 centres are in the Quebec region, supported by Correctional Service of Canada. The 8 listed are supported by Corcan.

⁷ Gendreau, P., Goggin, C., & Gray, G. (1998). Case need domain: "Employment." *Forum on Corrections Research*, 10(3), 16–19. Also see, Gillis, 2002.

⁸ Boe, R., Nafekh, M., Vuong, B., Sinclair, R., & Cousineau, C. (2003). *The changing profile of the federal inmate population: 1997 and 2002*. Research Report 132, Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, Ottawa, ON.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ These percentages do not add to 100, as offenders may have participated in a number of different employment programs or interventions.

¹² At the time of the study, the Prairie region had developed and maintained a database of community-employers willing to hire ex-offenders, called Employment for Conditionally Released Offenders (ECRO).

¹³ Op. Cit., Gillis, 2002. Also, see Gillis & Andrews, 2005.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Op Cit., Cellini & Lorenz, 1983.

* Gillis, C.A., & Crutcher, N. (in preparation). *A preliminary exploration of community employment centres*. Research report, Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, Ottawa, ON.

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Date of Publication: 07-2003

By: Ralph Serin, Ben Vuong and Shandy Briggs

Offender employment and employability: An overview

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Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has increased its focus on employment training in order to ensure inmates are job ready at the time of release. Employment and Employability Process (EEP) in CSC, which is strategic in its approach, enhances inmates' chances of finding and keeping employment upon release. EEP provides inmates with a sense of purpose, and develops and maintains the generic competencies needed to be employable in today's market. Research conducted by the Conference Board of Canada suggests that employers are willing to provide instruction and training in the trades. However, they seek potential employees who have acquired employability skills, which include fundamental, teamwork and personal management skills, in order to succeed.

The Employment and Employability (EEP) process begins at intake with an employment domain vocational assessment. This assessment includes, the Offender Intake Assessment (OIA), parole officer and employment assessor interviews, the vocational assessment tests, an employment report and results from a thorough employment domain analysis. This analysis is condensed into meaningful objectives for the offender which are placed in their correctional plan to address the inmate's individual needs. In order to take the vocational assessment, inmates must have a functioning grade 9 education in mathematics and English.

The employment plan's objective becomes, enhancing the employability of an offender through academic upgrading (as reflected from resulting educational assessment tests), employability skills training, short-term, third-party, trade related certification and practical institutional employment opportunities that mirror standards in the community and are reflective of the offenders abilities and interests.

The vocational assessment provides the ability to identify the interest patterns that reflect the offender's personality type, as well as their aptitudes and trainability. The integration of interests, abilities and aptitudes can be related to occupational options. The results of the tests identify clusters of jobs that match the strengths and needs of the individual inmates. These clusters are then linked to the generic work descriptions of employment available at the sites. Work descriptions have been developed for all work opportunities in the institution. Through these work

descriptions inmates can develop the necessary skills, attitudes and behaviours that are transferable when released into the community. The work descriptions include a learning objective, skills to be learned, a recommended length of stay to acquire the skills identified and a measurement strategy. The work description can also be used to assist an inmate in the preparation of a resumé. Work supervisors also use the work descriptions when assessing skill development and performance. Through work assignments, and vocational training opportunities inmates may also obtain short-term trade related third party certification. CSC has added numerous third party certifications to further enhance job readiness at the time of release. During 2003–2004, approximately 4000 vocational certificates were earned by inmates (3,494 by male inmates and 393 by women inmates). Certificates were earned in areas such as Basic Food Safe, Work Hazardous Materials Information System, Industrial Cleaning, Forklift Operation, Construction Safety and many others.

As part of the employment strategy CSC is in the process of piloting an in-class Employability Skills Program to train inmates in generic skills, necessary to find, keep and advance in employment in the community. The Employability Skills Program was designed in conjunction with the Conference Board of Canada. The Board is the foremost independent, not-for-profit applied research organization in Canada and is affiliated with The Conference Board, Inc. that services some 3000 companies in 67 nations. When an offender enrolls in the employability skills program they learn the eleven important skills, attitudes moreover, behaviours that employers value most. As well, they receive a Skills Solutions certification from the Conference Board of Canada. To date, 46 male inmates have completed the pilot program. A unique, employability skill program is presently under development with the Conference Board of Canada for women inmates and is scheduled to commence in March 2005. The employability skills program has a research component attached, that will assist the Service in determining results.

In addition to the employability skills program, a portfolio program is being piloted. This initiative builds on the inmates prior experiences in order to build a personal skills portfolio. This program was delivered by the Nova Scotia Community College

in cooperation with the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Centre of Halifax. The purpose of the program was to test whether such a program could work in an institution by:

- Providing inmates with tools to help them identify their skills and abilities acquired from formal education and life experiences; and,
- Encouraging inmates to establish goals toward the next steps in their personal development.²

The results of the initial skills portfolio program were positive. Twelve (12) inmates were chosen based on a specific criteria and their participation was voluntary. All candidates had work experience. At the end of the program, 10 out of the 12 successfully completed and 8 of the 10 participants formally presented their portfolios to a wide audience. In addition, 8 out of 10 wanted to further their education by:

- Completing their General Education Development (GED) within the institution;
- Attending Community College to attain certification in a specific trade; and
- Beginning a university degree through distance learning.

All the inmates created an action plan to achieve their goals and they turned perceived negative life experience into positive skill development and greater self-confidence.³ The results of the Skills Portfolio Program were deemed significant enough to warrant further analysis. Therefore, CSC is presently negotiating with the Centre in Halifax to run the Program in four institutions in the Atlantic Region.

To enhance job readiness in our communities, there are approximately 34 employment locations where offenders can obtain services in preparation for employment. Services are provided through partnership contracts internally (CSC and Corcan) and externally. External contracts are arrangements with local community-based service delivery agencies recognized for their knowledge of offenders' needs such as, the Elizabeth Fry Society, the John Howard Society, the St. Leonard's Society and the private sector. Through our community partnerships,

hundreds of offenders have been placed in jobs in the community. Links between institutions and the community have been strengthened to ensure inmates with employment needs on release are referred to these employment services. The employment locations provide a variety of employment services including individual employment assessment, counselling, job search techniques, resumé writing training and ultimately on-the-job placements. Over 1,000 offenders have been employed each year, with the number growing from 1,036 in 2001–02 to 1,194 in 2002–03 and by year end 2003–04 1,193 male offenders and 70 women offenders found employment using these services in the areas of construction, general labour, hospitality, janitorial services, manufacturing, call centres and food and beverage services. Preliminary results indicate that the employment locations are fulfilling an important role in the reintegration of offenders into the labour force.

In the simplest of terms, the EEP equals job readiness. The tools being developed and tested are to assist the offender to maximize his/her skills so that, when released, he/she is better equipped to find and retain stable employment. The practical work experience and the innovative programs introduced in federal correctional institutions and the services provided through community employment locations complete what CSC refers to as the job readiness continuum.

CSC's Employment and Employability strategy has recently been cited as a best practice in the *Re-entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community*. The Re-Entry Policy Council is a network of policy makers and practitioners from across the United States guided by staff representing many organizations. While this result is very encouraging continued work is needed to assist offenders with their job readiness in order to assist them in becoming productive members of society. ■

¹ 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1A 0P9

² Mott, K. (2005). *The Graduates, Saltscapes*, 6(1), 71–73

³ Ibid.

Building bridges to hope: A pre-employment program for women with criminal justice involvement

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Introduction

This article is about women with criminal justice involvement and a pre-employment program designed to assist them with inclusion into the community and success with overcoming employment barriers. With the support of Bridges/Aboriginal Employment Program (AEP), women are able to span often unimaginable obstacles, find hope and direction, see themselves as viable and valuable members of the community and realize their employment potential. These women are all too often perceived to be too high needs, too difficult to work with, and too high risk for breaching release conditions. It has been our experience, however, in working together with these women that they have tremendous capabilities of resourcefulness, inspiration and humility in the struggle of finding and being welcomed in community. Although this program focuses on Aboriginal women, the program is inclusive for all women.

This article is based on the experience of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary providing seven years of pre-employment community programming for women who have been processed through Canada's criminal justice system and who have either current or past parole or probation involvement. The purpose of this article is to inform, as well as, create a call to readers to work collaboratively with and for women in the community, and to build bridges of hope, bridges to resources, and bridges to viable and realistic employment opportunities. This article will highlight who the women are who benefit from this service, how the Bridges/AEP program operates, why it works and is a vital community resource, and the philosophical framework of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary within which it operates.

The women and the Bridges/AEP Program

Over half the women we see accessing the program are Aboriginal. To meet the needs of these women, the program offers relevant content and process that encompasses a well-developed curriculum integrating Aboriginal teachings. The program is designed to work with marginalized Aboriginal women who face multiple barriers, such as, poverty,

homelessness, racism, exclusion, substance use, mental health issues, different cognitive abilities, histories of abuse, physical health challenges, low educational levels and criminal records.

There is incredible stigma and shame attached to a criminal record and it must be emphasized that employability is no small feat for many of these marginalized women. In order for women to sustain changes, they require not only the support for personal learning but also the support of increased community inclusion and access to resources.

Bridges/AEP is a comprehensive program that is designed to meet the employment and social needs of participants and the input from the women has been invaluable in designing and maintaining its success. Increasing opportunities, enhancing self-esteem and developing life skills in an environment of acceptance are essential components of the program. Many of the participants have been and still are living with cycles of poverty, abuse, and substance use. The program helps the women to traverse these cycles by empowering them with choices, advocacy and the core belief that they are valuable citizens within our community. The Bridges/AEP program runs four days a week for 3 months. Given the women's realities, the 5th day is left open for them to juggle the many additional life management challenges they face: probation/parole, child welfare, treatment, housing and basic needs appointments. The first two months involve adult group learning of pre-employment and life skills. The final month involves learning in a job shadow placement, allowing women the opportunity to work at a job site of their choosing and practice the skills required for employment, including personal organization, interpersonal and specific job related skills.

Why it works

We utilize principles of feminist pedagogy that incorporate a holistic approach with Aboriginal teachings. In basic terms, the program is guided by feminist pedagogical values of empowerment (providing a learning environment which is

non-hierarchical and collaborative), awareness of context (relevance of the women's life experience and learning styles), and responsibility (assisting the women to achieve capability in their lives). We model interactions and content that is respectful, flexible and relevant to each women's experiences. Their needs, realities and knowledge are central. We value individual strengths and differences, and work to remove barriers and provide opportunities to enhance economical, social and personal well-being. The program utilizes and supports access to Aboriginal traditions and culture as an important pathway to healing. The program is committed to hearing the women's voices and recognizing women's unique ways of learning within an environment that provides safety for the women to connect with each other, share their knowledge, be heard and raise issues important to them. Women are encouraged to become more aware of themselves, and their needs in all areas — physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

Over the past 7 years, an average of 70% of the women participating in Bridges/AEP have gained employment or enrolled in further education. Despite its success, we are aware that many women were often unable to finish the program due to poverty. Bills had to be paid and simply getting to and from the program created transportation barriers. In 2004, we were able to remove this barrier by paying women a stipend to attend, covering their childcare costs and providing them with lunch and transit passes. This well-established and successful program allows women the opportunity to have an income while they gain valuable pre-employment skills and therefore, increased access to sustainable employment. The program specifically is designed for women being released from institutions who, without community resources and support, face increased risk of engaging in criminal activity to survive. They often have additional needs because of institutionalization and so our learning has been to accommodate the program to meet them where they are at, for example, removing criteria and repercussions for haphazard attendance or punctuality. We have found that by working towards realistic goals (i.e., how to get to group on time when sleeping in a park), as opposed to setting rigid criteria, the women move along the continuum to success from starting points that are the realities of their lives at that moment in time. Each woman develops an individual action plan related to employment and learning. It is our experience in working with these women that a plan may have to

be revised many times. We have the flexibility to support women where they are and make referrals to resources that can meet their additional needs.

The women have actively contributed and participated in the program. Their willingness, honesty, passion, trust, tears, laughter, strengths, courage, bravery and humanness have made the program what it is. Without their input and strength we would not have had the opportunity to offer the program we have today. This program is challenging at times, however, what gives us "hope" and "our passion" is that we truly enjoy working with the women and are witness to their success in gaining back their power, dignity and self-worth, thereby moving forward in their lives. With a gentle, caring approach and listening to what the women are saying, it is incredible to watch the growth and learning that takes place for each woman.

Program context

While never denying that individuals must be held accountable for their actions, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary is committed to seeing women as whole people. In practical terms, this means recognizing that women's realities are impacted at the individual, community and systemic level. At an individual level the Society believes the best way to increase a woman's success is to work with her as a whole person. Healing begins by ensuring the physical needs for food, shelter and safety are being met. Once physical needs are met, the deeper problems rooted in poverty, abuse, low education levels, and damaged self-esteem can be addressed to heal the mental, emotional and spiritual issues.

At a community level, the Society works to re-integrate women. This involves reducing barriers for women to access resources. Networking, advocacy and public education with funders, community resources and prospective employers is key in ensuring that a woman feels she is truly a contributing member of her community and able to successfully reintegrate.

At the systemic level, the Society works within the criminal justice system to advocate for a broader understanding of the economic and social inequities that perpetuate the situation of women trapped in cycles of poverty, abuse, etc. The Society works to reduce the system's over-reliance upon the deterrence model of incarceration as the solution to criminal behaviour, in favor of community-based programs and appropriate, workable options to incarceration. These alternative programs have

been demonstrated to be far less costly to run, and hold the promise of long-term reductions in criminal behaviour.

Summary

Trends indicate that women are the fastest growing prison population worldwide and that poverty related offences remain the primary entry point for women getting lost in the justice system. By providing meaningful and effective employment programs to women, the underlying risk factor of poverty can be addressed. It is vital that the programs we provide to women are relevant,

respectful of their realities and accommodating of their needs. We have worked personally with women labeled as some of the most challenging women within the Canadian criminal justice system, and our experience to date is that it is the most rewarding — both in terms of the successes they enjoy today, as well as the privilege in knowing our work really does build bridges to hope. ■

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The importance of employment to offender re-integration

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When we meet someone for the first time it is often asked of us, “What do you do for a living?” When we think of describing someone to others, it is often in the context of defining them through the work they perform. Our work always seems to define us, not only in context of self, but also in the context of others. It gives us status, prestige, and a certain class structure.

We also know how devastating it can be to one’s life if a job is lost or a period of unemployment occurs and the stress it creates. For many, it can lead to feelings of low self-worth, depression, and self-doubt. Work becomes the essence of our being. People, who do not work, seldom have purchasing power or the ability to make important decisions that effect them relative to the world around. They can become powerless without income or status.

People who lose their jobs or positions through incarceration face a greater challenge. They have to serve time in prison and then be released into a community that has little if any empathy for the charged and convicted. Incarceration is a stigma that may follow an individual for life.

The reintegration of a person to the community would be much easier if that community would show tolerance for the individuals, allowing them to prove to themselves and others they can be productive, law abiding citizens again. It is seldom, if ever, an easy task. The stigma of jail has a negative effect on most released offenders and results in having doors closed on them before their skills or strengths are taken into account.

My role at Corcan Employment Services (C.E.S.) for the last eight years has been to assist people on release from prison in finding suitable employment or training. This is a major task as the ones we are trying to help often have multiple barriers to address before they are ready to pursue jobs.

Our services at Corcan, with two counsellors and an administrative person hired through St. Leonard’s, attempt to bridge the gap between the “not job ready” and the “job ready”. We try to focus on needs, strengths, skills, goals, along with many other

things that impact finding work. This is frequently complicated by the fact that there are more pressing immediate needs. Sometimes, the first priority is to deal with the basic needs of people such as food, clothing, and shelter before we can begin to think of job searching for someone. As well, many of our clients are looking for work with incomplete personal identification, no work clothes or proper footwear. All of this combined with no money makes a job search very difficult. It may result in a person finding an entry level job and earning a below market value wage to begin their “employment reintegration.” However, this is only the first step. Soon there will arise all the previous barriers in this person’s life such as family obligations, poor coping strategies or issues such as substance abuse, and program commitments of CSC. The person may realize that all the things present before jail time are still there after release. It is fair to say that people reintegrating must prove themselves twice as much as ones who have not done time.

One way to overcome past and present barriers is through retraining or re-education. But how can an individual afford either when they have few, if any resources? It is also easier said than done and idealistic to think everyone is capable of re-education. Retraining of any kind has value and merit. Employers want to see recent certification that shows prospective employees are adaptable, trainable, and willing to learn.

When people are released from prison with the same skills, education, work ethic and a negative attitude, they have considerable personal challenges to address, not to just succeed, but to stay out of prison. The economics of our society position the value of the individual by their employment/ profession relative to attainable income. Furthermore, today’s labour force requires a person’s ability to adapt to an ever changing market place which is, for many, key to survival in the workforce. Even the gainfully employed must look at refreshing their work skills. For the released offender, the absence of any marketable trade skills significantly reduces the opportunity for successful reintegration.

An example that works for parole releases is how a certificate in driving a forklift opens up a new field of employment. A two year course in chef training may indeed launch a person into careers in the food services. Computer skill upgrading is essential for almost every job. The problem with these choices is they cost money which the parolee does not have. Therefore, a person finds it difficult to visualize the simplest plans when they seem out of reach financially. Our job at CES, when necessary, is to try to convince them otherwise. We try and find what community resources are available and how this person can access them. This, however, is an ongoing problem. There just isn't money available to everyone who needs it for retraining. The person must realize they're required to work and save money to invest in their own future. It becomes a hard message to hear when an individual just wants to earn enough for the necessities of life. The trade unions are other options that can be attractive to the recently paroled. However, the unions and apprenticeships they foster have an aging workforce that needs replacing. Many people on parole seeking union work are not in their twenties and, therefore, not good candidates for long term apprentice training. As well, most union training requires minimum education grade levels and candidates must show up to the training sites with transcripts in hand. There is also an initial cost factor to join unions and training programs.

It is difficult to try to undo years of educational neglect once a person is incarcerated and it is inconceivable that one organization can do it in isolation. However, if further "affordable" community resources were available to deal with adult literacy, learning disabilities, basic skill upgrading, a major need of the incarcerated would begin to be addressed. Most people who supervise parole or work in the field of corrections see this as a major problem. To be tested in the community for learning potential, strengths and interests, the costs exceed \$600. Not to mention trying to have someone assessed for a learning disability. Literacy programs in the community are not always set up to deal with the assessment of learning disabilities. It is enough of a task trying to teach an adult how to read and write without running the battery of testing necessary to determine a learning disability. In many cases, adult upgrading programs are filled to capacity and applicant waiting lists have become necessary. At CES we are constantly reviewing existing resources that would assist us in providing a more effective and efficient employability service to our clients and the reintegration process.

Corcan Employment Services assesses the individual's strengths, job readiness, motivation to work and all available community resources as we try to come up with a workable plan with the parolee. We are able to see much more success of course when someone has skills, work history and is motivated to change. The most successful people are often the ones who, through sheer motivation, overcome barriers that otherwise would remain. Motivation to change must, of course, be absolute as we have frequently seen people with initial success sabotage it through substance abuse or acts of crime. Motivation is one thing that is very hard to teach. It must be a quality that comes from within.

If one's motivation is to succeed based on higher earning power, they often get re-educated, resulting in better jobs. Of course an effective job search becomes much easier when you have something of value to offer the employer. An employer may even overlook a criminal record when the applicant facing them is well prepared for an interview, has skills and a good attitude.

The other reality of the present job market is that employers advertise job postings with the requirements of having not just a resume in hand, but also a criminal abstract. This is even more reason to be skill trained, with job references in hand and certificates of qualifications available. It appears that society as a whole is becoming less tolerant of a criminal record. We need to educate the public more about the successes that have occurred with re-integration, not just the failures. We should somehow balance that with the ones who have turned the corner and made the transition from prison to community successfully.

Unfortunately, these stories are not heard, as the individual who makes it would rather remain anonymous due to the stigma, than reveal their success. People realize they will have an asterisk beside their name if it becomes known they were ever in prison. It has happened occasionally that when an 'on release' worker was up for a promotion, they were subjected to a required security background check. For many, this has resulted in not only the loss of the promotion, but also the loss of their job.

The open mindedness of an employer can turn a person's life around by giving them that much needed chance. Once they realize they are hiring someone who has something to prove, it soon becomes evident that person is a good worker. The employer may need to rely on references from prison-based instructors, community parole officers, employment counsellors in order to be assured they are hiring a good worker. For the majority of those

who do not reveal their backgrounds, their job market shrinks considerably and skills, education and solid work references become even more vital. People most often feel more comfortable revealing their records when they become entrenched in their jobs, after proving their work skills to the employer.

Conclusion

When dealing with released offenders that have incomplete education, poor work history, substance abuse issues and poor coping skills, the task of finding and keeping employment becomes almost insurmountable. The main function of Corcan

Employment Services is not to convince them of what direction to take, but to not give up and help them identify attainable options. Not always, but sometimes an effective resume is all one needs to begin turning the corner. Generally though, it runs much deeper and requires a long-term commitment to deal with employability through retraining and re-education. ■

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The National Employability Skills Program for offenders: A preliminary investigation

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Offender employment has played a pivotal role in correctional programming since the introduction of prisons. While offender employment originally served as a punitive mechanism, it is now recognized as a potential means of rehabilitation and community reintegration.² Research indicates that offenders with a history of unstable employment are at an elevated risk for re-offending compared to offenders with a history of stable employment.³ Employment constitutes a major need area among incarcerated Canadian federal offenders. Approximately 75% of offenders are identified as having employment needs upon admission.⁴ As a result, addressing the employment needs of offenders is an integral component in assisting offenders with their reintegration efforts.

Employability skills

The prevalence of offender employment needs and the link between unstable employment history and re-offending show the importance of providing offenders with employment-specific programs. Research demonstrates that employment programs for offenders are successful in reducing negative offender behaviour during incarceration, reducing post-release recidivism, and increasing employment opportunities in the community.⁵ Traditionally, employment programs in prisons focused on teaching offenders trade-specific skills. In recent years, the focus has shifted to helping offenders develop or improve general employability skills that can be applied to diverse job and work situations.⁶ Teaching offenders these skills increases the probability that they will successfully procure and retain employment upon release into the community.

Employability skills refer to a set of proficiencies, attitudes and abilities considered by employers when examining potential job candidates. These skills include communication, problem solving, managing information, using numbers, working with others, leadership abilities, adaptability, demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviours, being responsible, participating in projects and tasks and working safely. National surveys with employers of all types have identified these skills as relevant to any work situation. Companies of

all sizes and types emphasize the importance of possessing these generic proficiencies as they represent a set of skills and a level of flexibility that are necessary in today's diverse and constantly evolving market place.⁷ Furthermore, survey results indicate that generic employability skills are typically valued above job-specific skills.⁸ In response to these findings, the Correctional Service Canada (CSC) established the National Employability Skills Program (NESP) to help offenders acquire or improve their level of generic employability skills.

Program characteristics

Under the auspice of Corcan, the NESP was created by the Conference Board of Canada to assist offenders with developing their generic employability skills in accordance with the Employability Skills 2000⁹ and accepted community standards. In the program, major emphasis is placed on the areas of communication, problem solving, managing information, developing positive attitudes and behaviours, workplace adaptability, and working with others. The NESP is delivered to incarcerated male federal offenders in a group format composed of approximately ten offenders. The program is divided into 15 sessions of 2 to 2.5 hours for a total duration of 30 to 37.5 hours. Typically, the program is delivered 3 to 4 times per week. As part of the program, over 100 exercises are completed during group sessions or as homework assignments. These exercises are intended to help reshape offender's attitudes towards themselves, others, and the workplace, as well as improve related interpersonal skills and behaviours.

Offenders' work placement supervisors have an integral role in the program. They provide feedback to participants concerning their current level of functioning with regards to employability skills and they suggest areas where improvement may be needed. Furthermore, the supervisors provide an independent assessment and corroboration of the offenders self-ratings of their employability skills. As a result, it is necessary for the offender to be employed prior to and for the whole duration of the program.

Methodology

The 2004 NESP demonstration project included 29 male offenders from four institutions across Canada. Of the 29 offenders who began the program, 24 successfully completed all 15 sessions. Offenders were selected for the program on the basis of grade 9 functioning in English and mathematics, eligibility for release within 5 years, and a need in the area of employment. The majority of NESP participants were rated as high (54%) criminal risk and high (75%) criminogenic needs at intake. Seventy-five percent of the participants were identified as having some or considerable difficulty with respect to the employment need domain, while a minority (25%) were rated as having no current difficulty. Specifically, 19 participants did not have a specific employment skill, trade or profession, 17 were unemployed at the time of arrest, and 18 had an unstable work history.

Each participant was interviewed by the program facilitator to explain the purpose of the NESP and to increase motivation and interest in the program. Once the offender accepted to participate, the *Program Interview Assessment* was completed. The *Program Interview Assessment* is a semi-structured interview completed by the program facilitator. It assesses offenders' understanding of employment planning, knowledge, skills and preparation. Each question is rated on a 3-point scale ranging from "poor" to "good" based on the level of detail and relevance of the offender's responses. Higher scores are indicative of a greater understanding of issues related to post-release employment. The interview was conducted prior to the start of the program to establish the offender's level of employment-related knowledge and preparation. Following program completion, the interview was re-administered to each participant to evaluate gains.

To measure the level of gains in employability skills, program participants and work supervisors completed the *Employability Skills Evaluator*. This instrument was specifically designed for the NESP to provide an assessment of the eleven essential generic employability skills described earlier. There are 2 versions of this instrument. One version is a self-report completed by program participants at the beginning, mid-point, and end of the program. The participant is asked to provide a description for each of the 11 skills and then to rate their competence on that skill ranging from "need to improve" to "really good". The other version is completed by work supervisors at the mid-point of the program. The eleven skills are rated by the supervisors on six common dimensions: awareness; understanding;

comfort level; personal commitment; consistency of application; and leadership. The instrument is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "novice" to "distinguished". Higher scores are indicative of advanced skill levels.

Results

Results from the *Program Interview Assessment* revealed significant increases from pre to post program for three of the four employment areas. Offenders demonstrated gains on their understanding of the importance of planning for post-release employment, resolving problems with employers and colleagues, and developing necessary skills to keep or advance in current employment.

With regards to gains on employability skills, there was a significant increase from pre to post program on 3 of the 11 subcomponents of the participant rated Employability Skills Evaluator. Specifically, offenders showed significant improvement on communication, management of information, and the demonstration of positive work-related attitudes and behaviours. Results on the remaining 8 subcomponents showed an increase in the expected direction but did not reach statistical significance. This lack of significance was most likely due to the small sample size.

Further analyses were conducted to examine the level of correspondence between the offenders' self-ratings and their work supervisors' ratings of their employability skills. The results indicated an overall significant positive correlation between the participants' total scores on their final employability skills self-evaluation and the total scores on their work supervisors' ratings. In other words, towards the end of the program, the offenders' self-perceptions of their own employability skills were in agreement with the independent ratings provided by their work supervisors.

Discussion

The results from this preliminary investigation into the effectiveness of the NESP indicate that the program was successful in helping participants improve their employability skills. Participants demonstrated positive increases in the areas of post-release employment planning, resolving problems with employers and colleagues, and understanding of the skills they need to keep or advance in their current employment. In addition, participants showed gains on all the eleven essential generic employability skills that were determined by employers as necessary to succeed in today's work place.

An important preliminary result is the independent corroboration by work supervisors of the offenders' level of employability skills. There was an increasing level of correspondence from program start to finish between work supervisors assessments and offenders self-assessment of employability skills. This result indicates that in addition to actual improvement in their skills, offenders also became more accurate in their self-evaluations of their employability skills. This preliminary finding indicates that offenders became more realistic in their self-assessment of employment abilities and expectations and consequently better prepared for their future employment.

Conclusion

While preliminary, this investigation showed that the NESP achieved its intended results. Future research is required to ascertain whether these improvements in generic employability skills, attitudes and behaviours will be maintained over time. As well, additional research is still required to determine the ultimate effect of the program on the ability of offenders to secure and retain employment upon their return to the community. At this time, however, the positive results of this preliminary investigation into CSC's National Employability Skills program indicate that it is a valuable intervention to help offenders improve their ability to successfully reintegrate into the community. ■

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