Ex-prisoners and ex-offenders and the employment connection: Assistance plus acceptance

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This chapter reports on two studies that focus on the employment of ex-prisoners and ex-offenders (also referred to as ‘people with criminal histories’). One study evaluated the impact of an employment assistance program for prisoners and offenders in Victoria (2002–05). The outcomes included significantly lower rates of re-offending for those in the program. Rates of re-offending, type of re-offence and number of different kinds of offence were used as measures of recidivism. The second study investigated the perceptions that four stakeholder groups—employers, corrections services personnel, employment service providers and prisoners and offenders—have towards the employability of people with criminal histories. This study found that, of a number of disadvantaged job-seeker groups, people with a criminal history were rated as having less chance of getting and keeping a job than were those with a chronic illness, with a physical and sensory disability, or with a communication disability. However, ex-prisoners with pre-release training were regarded more highly on employability than those with other criminal histories. The study also found that, although ex-prisoners and ex-offenders were perceived as being less likely to possess employment-related skills and characteristics than were members of the general workforce, the differences were not extreme, with ex-prisoners and ex-offenders being rated as ‘fairly likely’ to have such skills. Both studies contributed to the conclusion that education, training and employment assistance, as well as stakeholder perceptions, are important to success in employment for ex-prisoners and ex-offenders and thus for their re-integration into the community and desistance from crime.

Introduction

This chapter reports on two studies. Together, they add to our knowledge about recidivism and the employment of people with criminal histories. One study measured the effects of employment assistance, including provision of education and training, on recidivism. The other investigated stakeholder perceptions of the employability of ex-offenders with a variety of backgrounds, including those with pre-release training.

1 Ex-prisoners have completed a custodial sentence, usually in a prison, while ex-offenders have completed a community-based order.
The need to address the causes of recidivism is clear. In Australia in 2002, approximately 58% of individuals incarcerated had previously been in prison (ABS 2003). At least 31 of every 100 prisoners released from Victorian prisons in 2000–01 returned to prison within two years, while nearly 40 of every 100 returned to corrective services as a whole, to prison or community corrections (Productivity Commission 2003). In the United States, it has been estimated that 62% of prisoners released from state prisons were re-arrested within three years of their release (Burke 2001).

The financial and social costs to the community of recidivism are extensive. Mayhew and Glenda (2003) have estimated the total cost of crime in Australia to be over $30 billion per year when costs of the justice system are added to the material losses incurred by crime. There has been a dramatic increase in corrections expenditure over the last 20 years. In the United States, spending on corrections increased from $9 billion in 1982 to $44 billion in 1997 (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2001). Comparable increases in funding for corrective services are noted in Australia as well, with the system-wide recurrent expenditure increasing from $1064 million in 1997–98 to $1.7 billion in 2002–03 (Productivity Commission 2003). The social consequences of criminal lives include the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities and consequent pressures on health and welfare resources.

Breaking the pattern of re-offending and being able to establish a life within the community requires both getting assistance with the process and acceptance from the community. Employment plays an important part in successful community re-integration. For employment to be successful, offenders need preparation and assistance. Receptivity to their entry into the workforce is also important. That receptivity is especially important from employers, employment assistance program staff, corrections workers, and offenders themselves. In this chapter, two studies are summarised which explain these two important and complementary elements of success in employment.

The first study was an evaluation of an employment assistance program for prisoners and offenders in Victoria, Australia, conducted during the period July 2002 through to October 2004. The program participants, from both prison and community corrections sectors, were eligible to receive assistance for 12 months, with prisoner clients able to register prior to their release. Assistance included work preparation and placement into employment, as well as life skills and personal support. The program’s goals were sustained employment and reduced re-offending.

The second study investigated the perceptions that people have about the employability of ex-prisoners and ex-offenders. The participants in this study came from four stakeholder groups: employers; employment service providers; corrective services personnel; and prisoners and offenders, in both Victoria and Queensland. In one part of the study, employability comparisons were made with other disadvantaged groups. In the second, judgements were made of the relative likelihood that ex-prisoners and ex-offenders would demonstrate 21 different employability skills and characteristics.
The literature reviewed for these studies indicates evidence for a strong relationship between recidivism and unemployment. It also finds that there is a complex web of barriers to the employment of offenders. One identified barrier is the attitude of people in the community, employers in particular. Ex-prisoners and ex-offenders are also noted to have reservations about their own employability.

Literature

Unemployment and recidivism

Knowledge about the relationship between crime and work provides the background to the literature on re-offending and unemployment. Much of the research into causes of crime has centred on notions of poverty and inequality. Although analysis shows that it is simplistic to suggest that more crime occurs in times of economic downturn, this often appears to be the case. However, the literature investigating relationships between the economy and crime rates is inconsistent (Chamlin & Cochran 2000; Chapman et al. 2002). The findings have been complicated by differences in levels of data (that is, neighbourhood or national aggregates), and the fact that national unemployment figures have been designed and collected for purposes other than for the specific research. Other problems include the nature of crimes, the fact that people commit crimes while employed, and the various definitions of employment, as unemployment rates include only people looking for work, excluding those who are ‘underemployed’ or in low-wage, unsatisfactory jobs. Despite these methodological problems, research consistently shows a strong relationship between unemployment and crime.

In contrast, the research on recidivism has produced clearer conclusions. Recidivism, the failure to desist from crime, can be measured. It is typically quantified by an ex-offender’s re-arrest, re-conviction (which may or may not result in a prison sentence), or their return to prison (for example, Blumstein et al. 1986; Langan & Levin 2002). Studies that have used recidivism as the critical outcome measure generally seek to understand the correlates of a return to prison. Unemployment is one of these correlates (Davis 1980; Soothill & Holmes 1981; Fry 1987; Simon & Corbet 1996; Rahill-Beuler & Kretzer 1997; Finn 1998; Uggen 2000; Gillis 2001; Scanlon 2001). When Farrington et al. (1986) compared the self-reported job history and official criminal records of the 411 young males followed up in the Cambridge Delinquency Study, they found that the rate of offending during periods of unemployment was significantly higher than during periods of employment. Later Farrington (2003) in his report on the Cambridge study found that ex-offenders with a reasonably stable record of employment were less likely to re-offend than those without such a record. Consistent with these findings, Corrections Victoria has estimated that approximately 60–70% of people who re-offend are unemployed at the time that they re-offend (Victorian Government 2000).

The research has identified a number of other factors affecting recidivism, such as family stability, race, age and accommodation (Steurer, Smith & Tracy...
An individual's personal situation prior to conviction may also be predictive of recidivism. Personal factors associated with recidivism include employment history, substance use, social support, physical health and mental health. Gendreau, Little, and Goggin (1996) provided a meta-analysis of the recidivism literature relating to adult offenders. While most of the predictors of recidivism were modest, the strongest predictors included criminal background, prison misconduct, identifying or having a close relationship with their criminal peers, anti-social personality, displaying attitudes supportive of a criminal lifestyle, and lack of education or employment skills. Employment status remains a constant consequence of all these factors.

It is not employment *per se* that appears to make a difference between desistance and re-offending; the quality of the job itself is a factor. In an attempt to find out the extent to which job quality rather than a job in itself affected criminal behaviour, Uggen (1999) used a satisfaction-based measure of job quality with a sample of high-risk offenders. Uggen found a high job-quality effect, with 'good jobs' and 'meaningful work' reducing the likelihood of criminal behaviour, both economic and non-economic crimes. Bossler, Fleisher and Kriener (2000), also suggested that ex-offenders with few of the skills required for good jobs are more likely to engage in crimes instead of, or in addition to, low-paying low-quality jobs, whereas individuals in better jobs and earning high incomes are likely to avoid high-risk criminal behaviour.

**Recidivism and offender programs**

Programs for offenders typically range from behavioural, often referred to as 'treatment programs', to education and training programs, including those that are designed to meet specific criminogenic needs, and accredited programs available to the general community. A number of researchers have focused on offender programs and their impact on employment (Soothill 1981; Soothill & Holmes 1981; Soothill et al. 1996; Soothill, Francis & Ackerley 1997; Soothill, Francis & Escarela 1999; Uggen 1999, 2000; Steurer, Smith & Stacy 2001; Sung 2001; Uggen & Staff 2001). Research has generally provided support for the efficacy of prison-based and community-based treatment programs in reducing recidivism (Andrews et al. 1990; Lipsey 1995; Losel 1995; Dowden & Andrews 1999; Wilson, Gallagher & Mackenzie 2000). Reduced recidivism has been associated with program participation in prison, including those aimed at improving employment prospects and job skills, developing cognitive skills, and reducing substance abuse (Inciardi et al. 1997; Cullen et al. 2002; Lawrence et al. 2002; Gaes & Kendig 2003).

The findings from several early large-scale meta-analytic reviews of programs (for example, Lipsey 1995; Losel 1995) identified the most effective elements of programs, for example, a cognitive behavioural focus, a high degree of structure, and being community-based. Andrews et al. (1990) identified the principles of effective programs, based on their meta-analysis of correctional programs. They identified these as considerations of risk, need, responsivity, professional discretion and program integrity. McGuire (2002) combined the 18 meta-analytic...
reviews conducted between 1985 and 2000 in order to provide a ‘review of the reviews’. This analysis comprised over 2000 independent outcomes relating to various types of prison-based and community-based treatment programs. The bulk of these reviews and the studies included for analysis originated from North America and focused largely on young offenders. Some of the individual studies included adult offenders and the majority related to the outcomes of male offenders. Results of the meta-analytic reviews indicate a reduction in recidivism of between five and ten per cent, although some individual studies produced larger-effect sizes, indicating that some interventions are more effective at reducing recidivism than others. Howells and Day (1999) reviewed the international literature and found strong connections between participation in offender programs and rehabilitation. They found a reduction in recidivism rates of 10–36% in the United Kingdom, and 50–86% in the United States.

While the results of the meta-analytic studies on prison-based treatment programs indicate that correctional programs are effective in reducing recidivism, it is important to note that little attention has been paid to the external validity of the studies and the extent to which the results can be generalised to the wider inmate population (Gaes & Kendig 2002). The participant pool in the literature on program effectiveness is comprised largely of volunteers who stand to benefit from the interventions. Selection bias in correctional programs contributes to the difficulty in identifying positive effects related to programs and to the characteristics of the participants, such as their motivation, behaviour, background, and so forth (Lawrence et al. 2002). Other methodological problems identified are the lack of control groups and the difficulties in tracking participants over a long period of time (Wilson et al. 2000; Lawrence et al. 2002).

However, recent research has attempted to avoid these methodological problems. For example, the Three-state recidivism study (Steurer, Smith & Tracy 2001) was a large-scale longitudinal (over three years) study, which included a meta-analysis of the literature, data from a large number of sources (including over 3000 prisoners) and analytical strategies designed to address specific issues. These included selection bias, multiple factors influencing recidivism, variation in recidivism measures, and length of follow-up. The study found that correctional education programs reduced recidivism, resulted in higher wages for those who had participated, and other positive outcomes, such as family stability.

Individual studies have also indicated that lower recidivism rates are associated with the attainment of higher levels of education during incarceration (Harer 1994), with recidivism rates estimated to be in the range of 16–62% (Bearing Point 2003). A number of studies in the United States have reported that recidivism rates are lower for prisoners who have gained college degrees in prison compared with those who did not participate in prison education (Cure 2002, cited in Bearing Point 2003). While not strictly focused on research about recidivism, Australian prisoner statistics support the relationship between re-offending and low education, with prisoners with one prison sentence having typically higher levels of education than those with two or more periods of incarceration (Rawnsley 2003). Recently in Queensland, Callan and Gardner (2005) found
that participation in a vocational education and training (VET) program before release was a predictor of desistance, with 32% of those who did not participate in vocational education and training before their initial release returned to custody within two years, while only 23% of VET participants returned.

Post-release support
Participation in correctional programs may not be sufficient in itself. The personal and social characteristics of offenders create the need for targeted post-release support. These needs relate to physical and mental health, drug and alcohol use, accommodation, financial support, family counselling and job-seeking support. Finn (1998) reported on a program based in New York City designed to assist ex-prisoners to prepare for, find, and remain in jobs. The program provided intensive job-placement services at an early and critical stage of their re-integration and for at least six months following placement into employment. The program reported high job-retention rates. Cox (2002) reported on the evaluation of a Queensland post-release employment assistance program in 2000–01, indicating positive outcomes in relation to stakeholder response to the program and employment outcomes.

In Victoria, the Bridging the Gap program provides post-release support to offenders with high support needs and substance abuse problems. The program includes assistance with employment and training, accommodation, education, health, and access to drug and alcohol treatment. Results of an evaluation of the first two years of the program indicate some success in reducing re-offending by participants, as well as slowing their return to prison, although in the longer-term, these positive effects diminished. In addition, those individuals involved in the program had higher participation rates in drug treatment programs, and improved post-release outcomes when drug dependence was reduced (Melbourne Criminology Research and Evaluation Unit 2003).

The Apex programs in the United Kingdom provide similar support to ex-offenders. Much of Ken Soothill’s work reported on the success of these programs from the 1970s to the late 1990s. For example, Soothill et al. (1996), in their investigation of Apex’s long-term success in preventing reconviction found that 64% of the individuals on the program had not re-offended (resulting in conviction) after 20 years. Thirty per cent of those who were successfully placed were reconvicted, compared with 42% of individuals who were not successfully placed. In a later refinement of the 1996 study, Soothill, Francis and Escarlea (1999) found that continuing contact with the support organisation, irrespective of whether a suitable job was found, benefited those with four to 12 convictions. In an early study, Soothill and Holmes (1981) found that none of the men who worked for at least a year was reconvicted. They concluded that finding suitable work, ‘suitable’ being jobs that were commensurate with the offender’s skills, may be particularly beneficial for offenders assessed as ‘medium risk’.

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Barriers to employment of ex-offenders

Employment has a positive effect on desistance from further crime for ex-offenders and their consequent re-integration. Employment for this group is problematic, however, due to a number of interrelated impediments. These impediments, for example, family support, accommodation, and ethnicity, are closely related and complicate the research on recidivism.

Compared with the general population, ex-offenders experience numerous barriers to finding and maintaining employment. The literature suggests that the barriers to re-integration exist in a number of domains, that is, personal, social, physical, attitudinal, and systemic (May 1999; Rolfe 2001; Webster et al. 2001). The personal domain includes an individual’s physical and mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, level of education, life skills, self-esteem and financial resources. The social environment includes family, friends, workforce participation and training, and social networks. The physical domain relates to place (rural, metropolitan) and access to appropriate and secure housing, and to transport. The systemic context involves the criminal justice system (courts, police, correctional services, solicitors), local government and other authorities. Additional difficulties related to gaining sustainable employment for ex-offenders include a lack of equal opportunity policy among employers, a lack of appropriate recruitment procedures, and the problem of meeting the key skill requirements of employers (Employment Support Unit 2000). In addition, laws that enable employers to access a prisoner’s criminal record (in some cases) may impact negatively on employment outcomes (Mukamal 2001). Corporate policy restrictions on employing ex-offenders add to the difficulties of this group in re-entering the workforce (Taxman, Young & Byrne 2002). These formal and informal restrictions can also make it extremely difficult for the provision of employment assistance and support to ex-prisoners and ex-offenders, as they are exclusive to these populations and not easily dealt with by mainstream employment services.

Overriding these domains, and interacting with each to compound the barriers, are the attitudes of people in the community, their perceptions of people with a criminal record and the extent of their understanding of the culture of crime and criminal justice (Heinrich 2000; Fletcher & Taylor 2001). A significant factor is the attitude of employers toward employing ex-offenders. Studies of attitude and stigma in relation to this group have found relatively negative attitudes on the part of both employers and members of the general population. Albright and Denq (1996) surveyed employers’ attitudes toward hiring ex-offenders. They found an initial unwillingness among employers to hire ex-offenders. However, employer willingness to hire an ex-offender increased when factors such as level of education, government incentives and relationship of the crime to the job were considered. As the level of ex-offenders’ education increased, employers were more willing to hire, with willingness rising from 12% to 32% for those with college degree, 30% for those with vocational trade, and 38% for those who had completed two training programs.
In a British study Fletcher and Taylor (2001) identified employer discrimination as the most common labour market disadvantage, followed by prisoners’ lack of educational and/or vocational qualifications, and low self-esteem. To a less extent, drug and/or alcohol-related problems, health problems, poor work discipline, and low pay were identified as barriers to employment. Problems in adjusting to the routine of work have also been reported as a potential barrier to employment (Visher & Travis 2003). Clearly, these barriers to employment are complex and make it extremely difficult for mainstream employment services to meet the numerous and varied needs of ex-prisoners and ex-offenders.

The attitudes of employers, rather than those of any other group, have dominated the research and there is very little known about the attitudes of others working with ex-offenders, such as workers in employment services and correctional services. As for prisoners and offenders themselves, they appear to have negative attitudes toward their own employability, attributing poor prospects to the negative attitudes of employers and others in the community.

To summarise this review of relevant literature, there is evidence that employment preparation provided within a corrective services context, together with direct assistance in procuring employment, does work, but that the perceived employability of ex-prisoners and ex-offenders is low. Although little is known about the perceptions of other stakeholder groups, employers and offenders themselves appear to consider employment prospects to be poor and employability skills and experience to be low. The two studies described in this chapter provide more specific insights into these two important elements of the employment process, itself an essential ingredient of success in community re-integration.

Study 1: Employment and recidivism outcomes of an employment assistance program for prisoners and offenders

The Corrections Services Employment Pilot Program commenced in 2002 as part of Corrections Victoria’s commitment to reducing re-offending through investment in rehabilitation and prison diversion programs. The program provides direct employment assistance as well as referring clients into other relevant support services through a case management model. The program design recognised the need for long-term support; the likelihood of slow and intermittent progress; the need for basic skill development and pre-employment preparation; and the need for other services such as housing, health services, and personal support. The intended outcomes were employment and reduced recidivism. Both outcomes were achieved to varying degrees, with a demonstrated relationship between the two. The findings for recidivism are reported here.
Method

Program records provided the data for both employment and recidivism outcomes. For employment outcomes there were two points of data collection and analysis; the first included the first two years of the program, the second, the first four months of the third year. The measures were the number of referrals, registrations, placements and employment outcomes (regarded as 13 weeks of employment). The analysis was also able to include the proportion of registrations that were converted to employment placements, giving an indication of the effectiveness of the employment preparation.

In relation to recidivism, the analysis was based on the total program client population. The total number of registered clients for the period of the investigation was 3034. There were 2525 males (83.2%) and 509 females (16.8%). Of the total registered clients, 55.1% were prisoner clients and 44.9% were offender (community corrections) clients. These proportions differ somewhat from the proportions in the Victorian criminal justice system, with approximately 35% prisoners and 65% offenders in the corrections system.

Data for the analyses of recidivism comprised two sets of randomly selected files: the files of 600 employment program prisoner clients; and 600 non-program prisoner clients. Program records were obtained from the Prisoner Information Management System through the provider organisations and through the Department of Justice. Although used for comparison, the two samples differed significantly in terms of time since release, given that the program population from which that sample was drawn comprised relatively recently released prisoner clients, while the non-program population from which that sample was drawn had a much greater range of time since release. This is important because time since release is known to be a reliable predictor of re-offending. For this reason, we treated the results of the additional analyses as suggestive. It is also worth noting that the Prisoner Information Management System records a person’s activity through the prison system and thus is only a partial record of criminal activity. The management system does not capture information about those offences where there is a non-custodial sentence involved, or which go undetected.

Analysis

Analyses of recidivism included simple frequency and percentage of re-offending among registered clients, as well as analyses of variance. Rates of re-offending for registered clients, those clients placed in employment and clients registered but not placed in employment, were calculated and analysed further to determine overall program recidivism rates, and whether there were differences related to gender and prisoner/offender client status.

More advanced analyses of recidivism were also conducted, based on the sample of 600 program client files and 600 non-program client files. For the more complex analysis, three measures of recidivism were used:

- ‘rate of re-offending’ — the number of re-offences per day, calculated by tallying the number of Prisoner Management Information System offence
entries for each client, divided by the number of days between first and most recent offence

- ‘seriousness of re-offending’ — the score of each client’s most serious re-offence, using a five-point scale where 5 = ‘very serious’ (for example, manslaughter, murder, attempted murder) and 1 = ‘minimally serious’ (for example, parking fines, minor road infringements or breaches of parole)
- ‘poly-recidivism’ — the total number of different kinds of re-offences recorded.

Results and discussion

Number and percentage of program clients re-offending

The most basic measurement of recidivism was the rate of re-offending among the program client population as a whole, distinguishing between clients placed into employment and those not placed. Table 1 presents the results in relation to gender, registration as a prisoner or community corrections client, and total program outcomes. It is important to note that the timeframe for program involvement (12 months) is shorter than the two-year timeframe used in many studies of re-offending. However, it is also clear from the research literature that a high proportion of re-offending occurs within three to six months of a prison release.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Placed</th>
<th>Unplaced</th>
<th>Prisoners</th>
<th>Offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>7.61</td>
<td>8.66</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders</td>
<td>10.98</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>12.74</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.46</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>7.73</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the rate of re-offending by registered program clients (7.46%) was well below re-offending rates reported in the literature. It is low both for clients placed in employment (6.4%) and those not placed (7.73%), suggesting a positive program effect in addition to any employment outcomes that may have been achieved. The re-offending rate was lower for clients placed in employment. It shows a relationship between employment and reduced recidivism. There were differences between male and female clients in terms of rates of re-offending. Females had an overall lower re-offending rate compared with males, regardless of whether they had been placed into employment. However, for both males and females, employment placement had a positive effect on the re-offending rate.

Prisoners had slightly more than half the re-offending rate of offenders overall, irrespective of whether the prisoners were placed in employment or not. Male prisoners in particular had a low re-offending rate compared with male offender clients. This difference may be confounded somewhat by location
differences in service provision. It is important to note that prisoners, upon release, may relocate to any one of the community corrections locations. In any case, for both prisoner clients and offender clients, employment placement had a positive effect on re-offending rate.

The effect of employment placement on recidivism was much greater for offender clients than for prisoner clients, but unplaced prisoner clients had a very low rate of re-offending—a lower rate than offender clients who were placed into employment. This result indicates that the program worked very well for prisoner clients, and that there was an overall ‘program effect’ in addition to the positive effect of employment on re-offending. It has also obviously worked well for offender clients, in that their rates of re-offending were also very low, well below non-program statistics within the corrections system and reported in the literature.

Recidivism of program versus non-program clients

Additional analyses of recidivism were conducted to investigate more fully the program effects on re-offending. The measures of recidivism included ‘rate of recidivism’, ‘seriousness of re-offending’, and ‘poly-recidivism’. Table 2 presents those results, showing differences between the program client sample and the non-program client sample on those three measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Program clients</th>
<th>Non-program clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of offences per day</td>
<td>0.0065</td>
<td>0.0089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rated severity of offences</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of different offence types</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of offences per day, although small, is a useful measure because it allows the unit of time to be standardised. Program clients committed fewer offences per day than non-program clients. The difference between program clients and non-program clients was found to be statistically significant, $F(1, 1508) = 5.98, p < .05$.

The relative seriousness of re-offending was calculated by ranking recorded re-offences with a number, from 1 to 5, where 1 = ‘minimally serious’ (for example, minor road infringements, breaches of parole) and 5 = ‘very serious’ (that is, involving death or serious harm to other people). Results revealed that the average seriousness of program client offences was 2.78, just below ‘moderately serious’ (for example, robberies, burglaries, intention to harm). The average for non-program clients was 3.29, somewhat greater than ‘moderately serious’. The difference between program clients and non-program clients in relation to seriousness of re-offending was also found to be statistically significant, $F(1, 1508) = 23.69, p < .001$.

Of the program clients in the sample who had re-offended, the average for different kinds of offences was 2.32, while re-offending non-program clients
averaged 2.49 for different kinds of offences. The difference in relation to this poly-recidivism was also statistically significant, F(1, 1508) = 7.31, p = 0.01.

Recidivism of program clients pre- and post-registration
In addition to comparisons between program clients and non-program clients, we also investigated pre- and post-registration offending within the program client sample. Table 3 presents the results of the three recidivism measures: number of offences per day; rated severity of offences; and number of different offence types.

Table 3 Re-offending by program clients pre- and post-registration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-program</th>
<th>Post-registration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of offences per day</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rated severity of offences</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of different offence types</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a reduction in number of offences for the sample of program clients following their registration in the program. The difference in number of offences per day before and after program registration was statistically significant, F(1, 586) = 61.10, p< .001, indicating that the difference could not be a ‘chance’ result. The decline in the number of offences per day equals a decline of 82% in offending (.002/.011 = .18).

There was also a reduction in seriousness of re-offending following program registration. That difference too was statistically significant, F(1, 586) = 594, p <.001, indicating that the difference could not be a chance result. The decline in seriousness of offences equals a decline of 72% in offending (1.21/4.35 = .28).

For poly-recidivism (the number of different types of offences committed), there was also a reduction in offending by the sample of program clients following their registration in the program, and that difference too was statistically significant, F(1, 586) = 1156, p <= 0.01. The decline in number of offences per day equals a decline of 80% in the range of offences (.77/3.87 = .20).

The results support other findings that programs supporting ex-offenders in employment, in development of work skills, job-seeking skills and placement, can increase rates of employment and encourage desistance from crime.

Study 2: Receptivity and perceptions of the employability of ex-prisoners and ex-offenders
This study, supported by the Criminological Research Council, surveyed four stakeholder groups in Victoria and Queensland, to gauge their perceptions of the employability of a number of disadvantaged job seekers, including those with a criminal history. The survey also asked respondents about the importance
of employment-related skills and characteristics, and the likelihood that ex-offenders and ex-prisoners would possess these.

Method
The 1181 participants in the study were employers (596), employment services providers and Centrelink\textsuperscript{2} staff (234), correctional/corrective services workers (176), and prisoners and offenders (175). A stratified random sampling procedure was used to select prospective participants from Victoria and Queensland, who were sent reply paid questionnaires. The response rate was 21\% overall (employers 18.8\%, employment service providers 32.2\%, corrections 24.6\%, and prisoners and offenders 17.5\%).

The four-part questionnaire had identical items for each response group, with the exception of the items eliciting bio-demographic and background information, such as age, gender, state of residence, highest level of education completed, whether they had experience of the employment of ex-offenders and what the quality of that experience had been. In addition, there was stakeholder group-specific information. There were two sections relating to the employability of people with criminal histories. One section asked respondents to rate the likelihood of a number of hypothetical disadvantaged job seekers getting and keeping a job. The items referred to five disadvantaged job-seeker groups, those with: intellectual or psychiatric disability; physical or sensory impairment; chronic illness; communication disorder; and a criminal history.

The other section presented 21 employment-related skills and characteristics (for example, good work history, works well without supervision, has appropriate grooming and hygiene, speaks English well, communicates effectively, relates well to the public, honest, eager to learn etc.). There were four ratings required for each item: the importance of that skill to employability; the likelihood that ex-prisoners will have that skill; the likelihood that ex-offenders will have that skill; and the likelihood that members of the general workforce will have that skill. The ratings used a seven-point scale (1–7), ranging from ‘not at all important/likely’ to ‘extremely important/likely’. The distinction between ex-prisoners and ex-offenders was important in the study, and was explained on the questionnaire—ex-prisoners have completed a custodial sentence, usually in a prison, while ex-offenders have completed a community-based order.

Analysis
Results were analysed in terms of whole-group responses and in terms of within-group differences. Means, standard deviations, and analyses of variance were the techniques used. We analysed the data for the effect that the characteristics of the disadvantaged job seekers might have on ratings of employability and for the effect that the stakeholder characteristics might have on their views of the

\textsuperscript{2} Centrelink is an agency of the Australian Government Department of Human Services and delivers a range of services to the community. Further information is available from <http://www.centrelink.gov.au>.
employability of these job seekers. We were also interested in identifying the work-related skills considered important to employability and how participants rated ex-prisoners and ex-offenders on those skills.

Results
The results were analysed for the effects of the characteristics of disadvantaged job seekers on perceptions of employability and then for the effects of the characteristics of the respondents on perceptions of employability.

Ratings of employability of disadvantaged job seeker groups
Respondents as a whole group rated people with chronic illness highest on employability, and people with psychiatric or intellectual disability lowest. People with a criminal history were rated second lowest, being seen as having less than a ‘fair chance’ of getting and keeping a job. The difference was statistically significant, F(3.48,4106.39) = 862.73, p <.001.

When the five items relating to a criminal history were analysed, a prisoner with pre-release training was regarded most favourably, followed by prisoners with single conviction profiles, and then those with multiple conviction profiles. Table 4 presents the ratings for each of the five criminal histories presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criminal histories</th>
<th>Employability</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex-prisoner with pre-release training</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>8th of 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single conviction non-violent crime</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>11th of 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single conviction heroin possession use</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>12th of 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple convictions petty theft drug use</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>24th of 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple convictions burglary</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>25th of 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An ex-prisoner with pre-release training was rated highest on employability, and as having a better than a ‘fair chance’ but not ‘a good chance’ of obtaining and maintaining a job. Such a person was rated higher on employability than was a person with AIDS or a person with a stutter (ranked 9 and 10, respectively). A person with multiple convictions for burglary was rated lowest, followed by a person with multiple convictions for petty theft related to drug use, both of these being rated as having a ‘poor chance’ of obtaining and maintaining a job. Both these types of job seekers were ranked lower than a person with drug and alcohol-related brain damage and one who has hallucinations (ranked 22 and 23, respectively). The difference between ratings for each criminal history was statistically significant, F(4.44,5235.64) = 763.91, p <.001.

The second part of the analysis related to the importance of employment-related skills and characteristics and the likelihood that ex-prisoners, ex-offenders and general workers would possess these.
Ex-prisoners and ex-offenders and the employment connection

Likelihood that ex-offenders and ex-prisoners will have employment-related skills

Respondents rated all of the work-related skills and characteristics as being ‘quite important’ (5+ on the scale) or ‘very important’ (6+ on the scale) for employability. With respect to the likelihood that members of the general workforce, offenders, and ex-prisoners will exhibit those skills and characteristics, ratings were mainly between ‘fairly likely’ (4+ on the scale) and ‘quite likely’ (5+ on the scale). On the whole, members of the general workforce were rated most likely to exhibit the skills and characteristics, followed by ex-offenders, followed by ex-prisoners. With respect to most items, the lower ratings for ex-prisoners and ex-offenders, although not unexpected, were also not very different from those for general workers. Table 5 presents the mean scores for each skill/characteristic for importance and for the likelihood of each group possessing each skill/characteristic.

Table 5 Importance of skills and likelihood of the three groups possessing each skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/characteristic</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>General workers</th>
<th>Ex-offender</th>
<th>Ex-prisoner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to work</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes directions well</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates well to public</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>18th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grooming/hygiene</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eager to learn</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty to organisation</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>20th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adheres to practice/rules</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets along with others</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for the job</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicates effectively</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal supervision</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>13th</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works efficiently</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>14th</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works well in teams</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>15th</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task persistent</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good work history</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>17th</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/writing skills</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>18th</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated to excel</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>19th</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>19th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks English well</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>20th</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy lifestyle</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>21st</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>21st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents considered that ex-prisoners would be the least likely to have work-related skills, followed by ex-offenders. Although members of the general workforce were rated only slightly above ‘quite likely’ to exhibit each employment-related skill, those ratings were statistically significantly better than offender and ex-prisoner ratings. Nevertheless, the differences were not large; ex-prisoners and ex-offenders were rated ‘fairly likely’ to exhibit the skills and characteristics considered important to employability. The rank order of these skills is also presented. The skills that were similarly ranked for importance and likelihood were punctuality, willingness to work, grooming/hygiene, getting along with others and effective communication, requiring minimal supervision, motivation to excel, and having a healthy lifestyle. The skills/characteristics that were ranked high in importance, but much lower in likelihood of being demonstrated by ex-prisoners or ex-offenders were: honesty; takes directions well; relates well to public; loyal to organisation; and adheres to work practices/rules.

There are some implications here for the type of employment preparation and pre-employment training that should be provided within a corrective services context. The results in general suggest that, although rated somewhat below members of the general workforce, ex-prisoners and offenders are considered positively by stakeholders in relation to their skill base and work-relevant characteristics.

The extent of statistically significant differences was investigated. Analyses of variance found the differences between ratings of the likelihood of each group having work-related skills and characteristics to be significant, F(1.38,1630.55) = 1157.92, p <.001.

The characteristics of the participants in relation to their perceptions of employability

We also investigated differences in responses related to respondent characteristics. Analyses of variance found significant effects (p< .01) for age, state of residence, level of education, stakeholder group and previous experience.

Participants aged 18–30 years rated people with criminal histories higher on employability than the older age groups.

Participants from Queensland rated employability of a person with pre-release training and a person with a single conviction for a non-violent crime higher than did those from Victoria.

Participants with a tertiary level of education rated a person with a single conviction for possession and use of heroin and one with multiple convictions for petty theft related to drug use higher on employability than did participants whose highest level of education was completion of secondary school. This pattern was reversed for the ratings of the likelihood that these groups would

3 Note: Significant differences are easy to find with large samples. The differences are not large, but the results are highly reliable.
have job-related skills. Participants with post-secondary education and tertiary education rated ex-prisoners and ex-offenders as being less likely to have employment-related skills than did those without post-secondary education. Interestingly, those with post-secondary education also rated general workers as being less likely to have employability skills than did those who had not finished secondary school.

In relation to the stakeholder groups, employers rated people with a criminal history lower on employability than employment service providers, corrections personnel, and prisoners and offenders. There were also significant effects for stakeholder group and rating of employability skill likelihood. Here it was employment service providers rather than employers who rated all groups lower on skill likelihood than did the other stakeholder groups.

Participants with previous experience of the employment of people with criminal histories rated them as having a higher probability of employability than did participants without previous experience. In relation to the reported quality of experience, participants who reported a negative experience rated people with criminal histories as having a lower probability of employability than did respondents with a positive experience. In relation to ratings of skill likelihood respondents with positive experience rated all groups as being more likely to have employment-rated skills than did those with negative experiences.

Conclusion

Taken together, several conclusions can be drawn from these two companion studies. The study of employment and recidivism outcomes of an employment assistance program for ex-prisoners and ex-offenders clearly demonstrates that such a program can and does work. Very credible employment placement and retention rates were achieved and extremely low recidivism occurred as well. The study of stakeholder perceptions of the employability of ex-prisoners and ex-offenders indicates that, although rated somewhat below most other disadvantaged groups and members of the general workforce, ex-prisoners and ex-offenders are considered positively by stakeholders in relation to their prospects for getting and keeping a job, as well as their skill base and work-relevant characteristics. Pre-employment education and training, plus employment assistance (using a case-management model) can play an important role in successful re-integration into the community. However, receptivity to the employment of ex-prisoners and ex-offenders is necessary to complete the connection and make employment a reality. Results of the second study suggest that receptivity is fairly high, but community education, more targeted education and promotion aimed at each of the key stakeholder groups, and a strengthening of policies and programs that support the development and preparation of prisoners and offenders are all needed. The ultimate goal is re-integration within the community. Education, training, and employment assistance provide a foundation for success in employment, and employment is very important to successful re-integration. Collaboration among service providers and
development of integrated services that connect pre-employment preparation, education and training with employment assistance is the preferred approach to providing such supports.

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