

BEYOND THE HEADLINES

At a Glance: Jobs, Workers & the Economy

MARCH 2012 | FOCUS: WASHINGTON STATE

Educational Attainment, Employment and Incarceration

PART 2 of 2

By 2010, roughly 1 in 200 U.S. residents were incarcerated in state or federal prison (about 1 in 107 U.S. males)ⁱ. Moreover, in the U.S. more than 700,000 prisoners are released each year into society, a large proportion of whom have low skill and education levels, limited prospects for securing a living-wage job, and a high likelihood of recidivating.

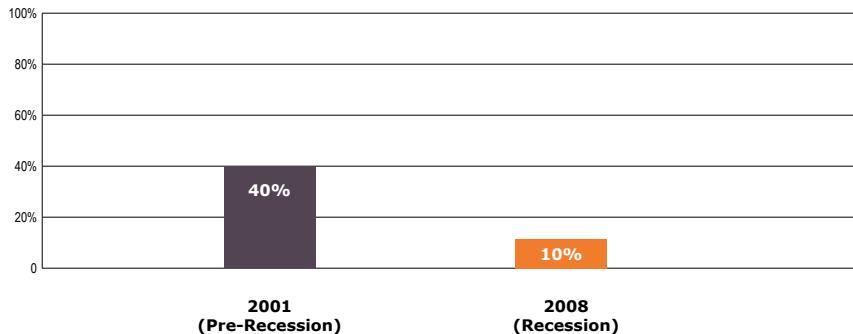
This two-part BEYOND THE HEADLINES explores the nexus of educational attainment, employment and incarceration. The February edition examined the correlation between educational attainment and employment in terms of who goes to prison and who returns to prison once released (recidivates). This edition examines post-release employment patterns among offenders in Washington State, including the impact of correctional educational programs on recidivism rates.

Employment Rates and Earnings of Washington Ex-Offenders

Ex-offenders face numerous barriers to securing employment – particularly in living-wage jobs – including mental health and substance abuse issues, complete or functional illiteracy, low educational attainment, and industry and individual hiring practices that bar them from many jobsⁱⁱ.

The employment rate of ex-offenders is not tracked on a nationwide basis. In Washington State, however, a recent study illustrates not only the low employment rates of our state's ex-offenders, but also the disproportionate impact the recent recession has had on this group's employment and wagesⁱⁱⁱ.

Employment Rates of Washington Ex-Offenders One Year Post-Release



Recessionary Employment Growth: Ex-Offenders vs. All Washington Workers* – 2009



* Includes private employment only

Average Wages of Ex-Offenders vs. All WA Workers – 2008



Industries in Which Washington Ex-Offenders Are Employed

The following depicts the top industries in which ex-offenders in Washington State are employed. Many of these industries – such as construction – have been among those hardest hit by the recent recession.

Where Washington Ex-Offenders are Employed: Top 5 Industries^{iv}

Industry	Percent of Ex-Offenders Employed
Waste Services	15.9%
Construction	15.9%
Manufacturing	12.5%
Food Services	11.5%
Retail	11%

The Impact of Correctional Education on Recidivism

In Washington State, just over 31% of ex-offenders recidivate within three years of release^v. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy has estimated the reduction in recidivism that results from a variety of correctional education programs, as well as the costs and benefits per participant of these programs^{vi}.

Impact of Correctional Education on Recidivism		
Programs for People in Adult Offender System	Reduction in Recidivism	Net Benefits* (Total Benefits less Costs per Participant)
Vocational Education in Prison	-9.8%	\$20,714
General Education in Prison (Basic Education or Post-secondary)	-8.3%	\$17,636
Employment & Job Training in the Community	-4.6%	\$6,351

* Benefits include costs saved from not committing additional offenses (to potential victims and taxpayers for further incarceration), plus other labor market and healthcare benefits from increased employment.

Most national studies examining the positive impact of correctional education on reducing recidivism find that the key influencing factor is increased levels of employment for ex-offenders with greater skills and education^{vii}.

- i. Glaze, Lauren E. *Correctional Population in the U.S. 2010* (NCJ 236319). U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. <http://www.bjs.gov>
- ii. A recently-released report by the National Employment Law Project finds that **more than 1 in 4 U.S. adults** have an arrest/conviction that shows up in a routine employer background check, and that these nearly universally utilized checks – sometimes used by employers as part of illegal blanket no-hire policies – are excluding ex-offenders from many jobs. See December 2011 Legislative Update, *State Reforms Promoting Employment of People with Criminal Records: 2010-11 Legislative Round-Up*. National Employment Law Project at <http://www.nelp.org>
- iii. Washington State Department of Corrections, *Tracking Washington State Offenders Pilot Study: Do Education Programs Affect Employment Outcomes?* Principal author Michael Evans, Research Analyst Susan Koenig. March 2011.
- iv. Ibid.
- v. Washington State Department of Corrections, *Recidivism Revisited*. Principal author Michael Evans. August 2010.
- vi. Drake, E., Aos, S., and Miller, M. (2009) *Evidence-Based Public Policy Options to Reduce Crime and Criminal Justice Costs: Implications in Washington State*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- vii. See, e.g., Lichtenberger, E., O'Reilly, P., Miyazaki, Y., & Kamulladeen, M. (2010). *Direct and Indirect Impacts of Career and Technical Education on Post-Release Outcomes*. Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programming: Blacksburg, VA.; Visher, Christy, Laura Winterfield, and Mark Coggeshall. 2005. *Ex-Offender Employment Programs and Recidivism: A Meta-Analysis*. Journal of Experimental Criminology 1: 295-315; American Correctional Association, 135th Congress of Correction, Presentation by Dr. Art Lurigio (Loyola University) *Safer Foundation Recidivism Study* (August 8, 2005).

BEYOND THE HEADLINES: Policy & Labor Market Updates for Those Working to Help Low-Income and Low-Skill Individuals Advance through Education, Training & Living-Wage Jobs

About Seattle Jobs Initiative

Seattle Jobs Initiative creates opportunities for students, workers and business to succeed by helping education and job training programs meet the demands of a new economy. We find and apply solutions for people to gain the skills they need for good jobs that create prosperity for all in today's marketplace.

Supported by the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development

Contact Information

For questions or suggestions, please email David Kaz, SJI Director of Policy and Development at:
dkaz@seattlejobsinit.com