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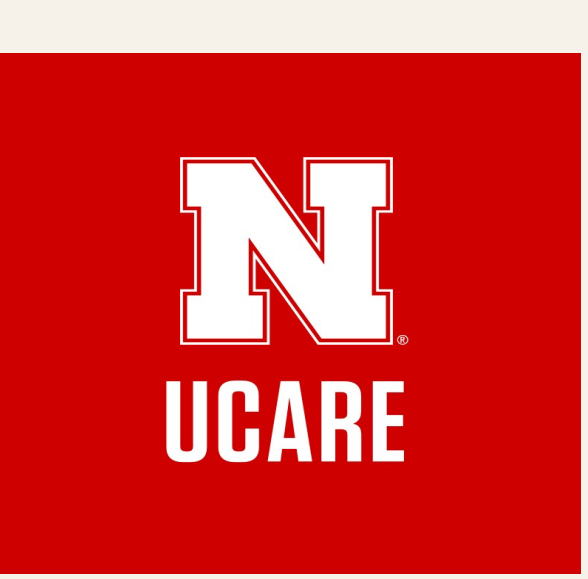
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The Effects of Prior Education on the Success of Inmates in Prison Education Programs

Jayden Barth & Faculty Advisor Dr. Lisa Kort-Butler, UNL Sociology Department



Purpose

This study examined the relationship among an inmate's prior education level, work history, and his/her success in a prison education and training program. Success in prison education and training programs in this study was defined as a positive change in job readiness skills, self-control, and self-esteem.

Background

According to Brazzell et al. (2009), the United States leads the world in incarceration rates:

- 2.3 million people behind bars
- Within 3 years of release, 68% of people are rearrested

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research (2016) reported:

- Average daily prison population across the 10 state facilities was 4,838 people

Effectiveness of education programs:

- May lead to employment after release
- Demonstrated to reduce re-arrest rates for formerly incarcerated people
- Helps curb financial burdens on the justice system (Brazzell et al., 2009)
- Reduced re-arrest rates may help maintain the recent slow-down in Nebraska's prison populations and reduce costs (NCJR, 2016)
- Success in programs, however, may be impeded by participants' prior education or job training histories (Duwe, 2017)

Methods

The study took a mixed-methods approach, based on secondary data analysis. Data came from a faith-based organization which currently facilitates a life skills/job readiness program in some Nebraska prisons and jails. (244 men, 193 women)

Data:

- Data included both pre- and post-class surveys, as well as exit essays written by course participants
- Included details about prior education, training, work histories, and prior incarceration
- Asked about self-esteem, self-control, money management skills, and job readiness
- Essays asked participants to describe what they gained from participating in the program

Analysis:

- Analyzed the quantitative data to determine variations in inmates' self-esteem, self-control, and readiness skills by prior education level or past incarceration
- Analyzed the qualitative essay data to understand what inmates themselves say they learned from the class, even in light of their past histories

Results

Percent of Inmates with a Diploma or GED by Gender

	None	Diploma	GED
Female	18.23%	46.35%	35.42%
Male	14.94%	43.57%	41.49%
Total	16.40%	44.80%	38.80%

Results Cont.

Percent of Inmates with at least some College or Technical Training by Gender

	No	Yes
Female	37.28%	62.72%
Male	38.63%	61.37%
Total	38.06%	61.94%

Both men and women who completed the program saw statistically significant improvement in self-esteem, self-control, money management skills, and job readiness (t-tests, p<.05).

Percent of Inmates that Improved in the Prison Education Program

	Self-Esteem	Self-Control
Female	75.0%	81.6%
Male	58.9%	70.4%

Percent of Inmates that Improved in the Prison Education Program

	Money Management	Job Readiness
Female	91.9%	72.2%
Male	86.1%	78.7%

Conclusion

Quantitative Data:

- No significant relationship between prior education or prior incarceration and the success in the program
- The level of prior education, whether it be high school or post-secondary training, did not seem to be important to the success of the inmates

Qualitative Data:

- Essays written by inmates greatly emphasized the support system from volunteers and other classmates, and new relationships they formed
- Inmates described a range of skills they either learned for the first time, relearned, or improved (e.g., budgeting, goal-setting, writing resumes, preparing for interviews)
- For example, one inmate said, "With all the feedback from you guys I feel so so confident and ready to get out and go to as many [interviews] as I have to with no stress or worry."

These relationships could be a major reason why there was a high success rate in the life skills/job readiness program offered by the faith-based prison education program, regardless of inmates' prior experiences (Yoon & Nickel, 2008).

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