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Examining the Effects of Nebraska's Good Time Laws - Research Brief

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NEBRASKA CENTER FOR JUSTICE RESEARCH

EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF NEBRASKA'S GOOD TIME LAWS

Research Brief - December, 2014
Benjamin Steiner, Ph.D. and Calli M. Cain, M.A.



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research brief is to summarize the findings of a study of Nebraska's good time laws conducted by Dr. Benjamin Steiner and Calli Cain for the Nebraska Center for Justice Research at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. An electronic copy of the full report can be accessed through the link at the end of this brief. This brief lists each of the three specific research questions, the primary findings for each question, and the major conclusion from each set of findings. Please refer to the full report for the executive summary, full findings, and methodological details of the research project.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research Question #1

What are the relative effects of incident characteristics (e.g., type of violation) and inmate characteristics (e.g., age) on prison officials' decisions to remove good time credits?

Research Findings:

- In deciding whether or not to remove good time for misconduct, prison officials should make their decisions based on *legally relevant criteria* (what the inmate did) rather than on *extra-legal criteria* (who the inmate is) such as race/ethnicity. The research findings suggest that this is generally occurring in Nebraska's prisons.
 - Prison officials were far more likely to consider characteristics of the misconduct incidents rather than inmates' characteristics when deciding whether to remove good time.
 - The strongest predictors of prison officials' decisions to remove good time credits included legally relevant criteria reflecting the type (i.e., violent, tattoo) and seriousness (i.e., Class I) of the rule violation, as well as the inmate's prior violation history.
 - Compared to inmates convicted of nonviolent rule violations, inmates convicted of violent misconducts had 627% higher odds of losing good time.
 - Inmates convicted of tattoo related violations had 561% higher odds of losing good time.
 - Inmates convicted of Class I offenses had 1,050% higher odds of losing good time relative to inmate convicted of Class III offenses.

- Each unit increase inmates accrued on the prior violation history scale was associated with an 18% increase in the odds they lost good time.

Conclusions for Research Question #1

Prison officials, for the most part, made equitable decisions regarding whether to remove good time in response to prison rule violations.

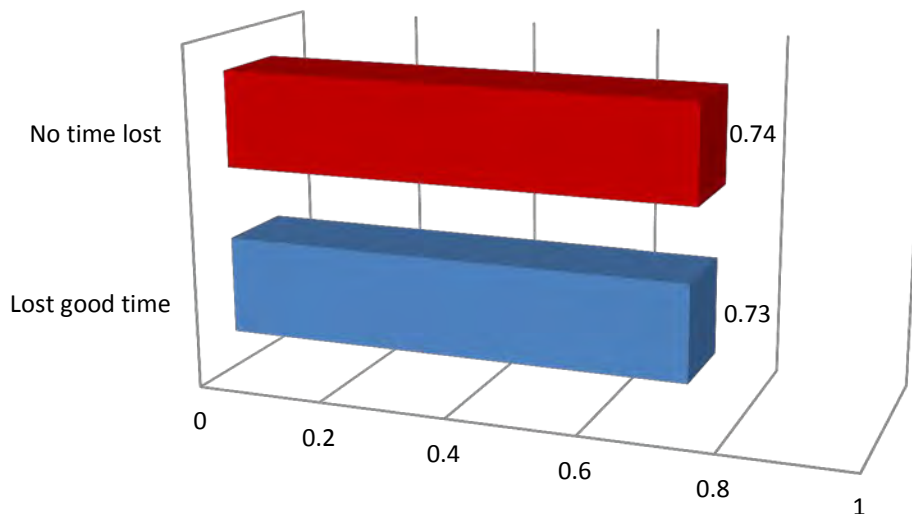
Research Question #2

What is the effect of losing good time credits on inmates' subsequent misconduct?

Research Findings:

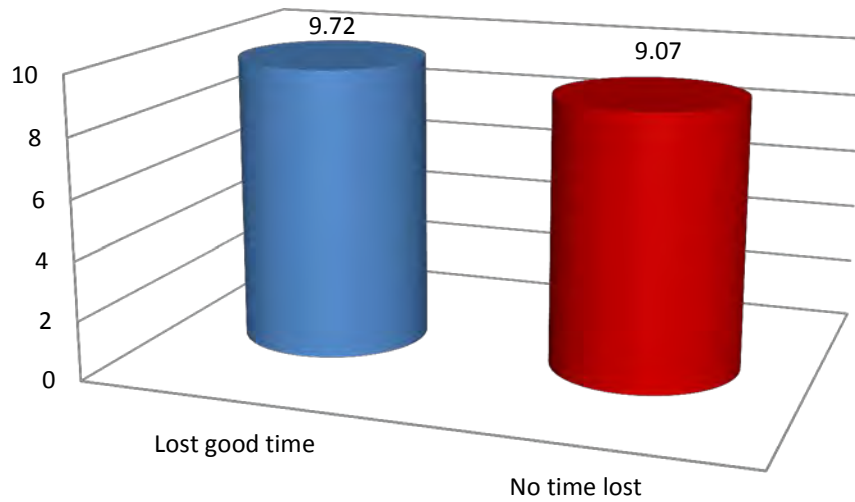
- One intended goal of good time laws is to reduce subsequent inmate misconduct by providing offenders incentive for good behavior and/or deterring them from engaging in antisocial behavior. Adopting advanced quasi-experimental techniques to compare inmates who lost good time to a similar group of inmates who did not lose good time, this research indicates that an overall reduction in subsequent misconduct *did not* result from the removal of good time.
 - Losing good time had no effect on the likelihood of committing subsequent misconduct.

Figure 1. Effect of loss of good time on likelihood of subsequent misconduct.



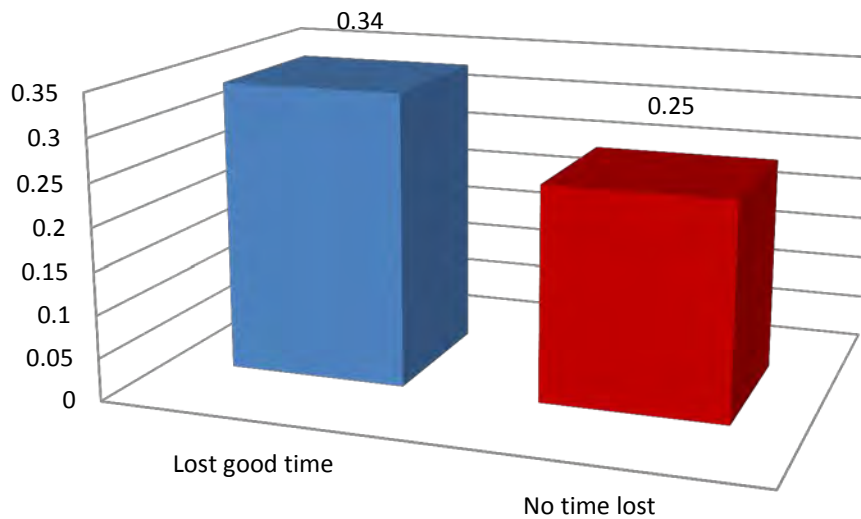
- Losing good time had no effect on the number of subsequent misconducts committed.

Figure 2. Effect of loss of good time on number of subsequent misconducts.



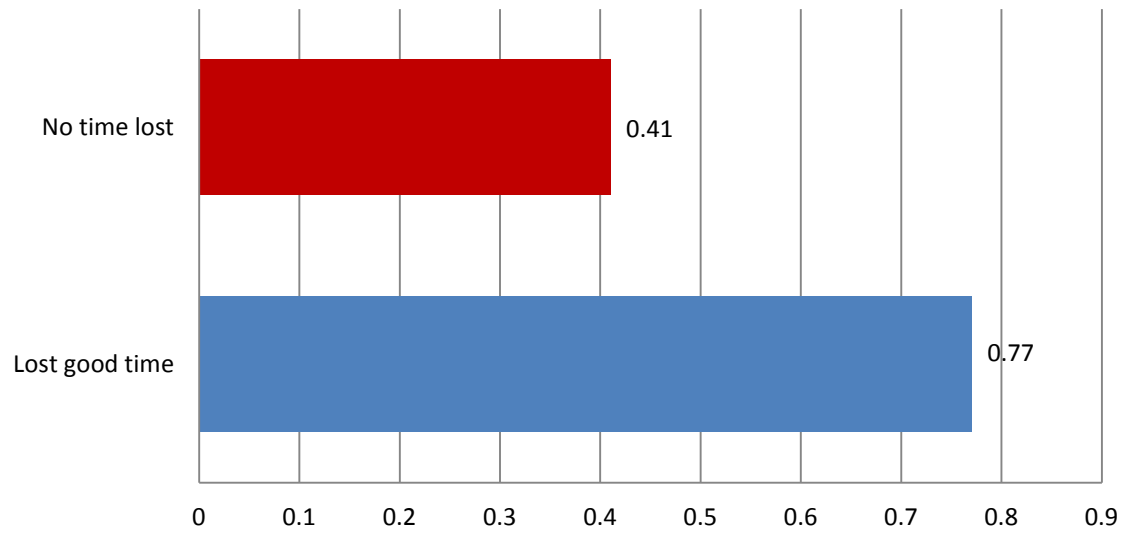
- Losing good time increased the likelihood of committing subsequent *violent* misconduct by 9%.

Figure 3. Effect of loss of good time on likelihood of subsequent violent misconduct.



- Losing good time increased the incidence of violent misconduct by 0.36 acts of misconduct.

Figure 4. Effect of loss of good time on number of subsequent violent misconducts.



Conclusions for Research Question #2

Removing good time credits in response to prison rule violations had no effect on inmates' subsequent misbehavior in general, but removing good time credits did amplify inmates' odds of engaging in additional violence in prison.

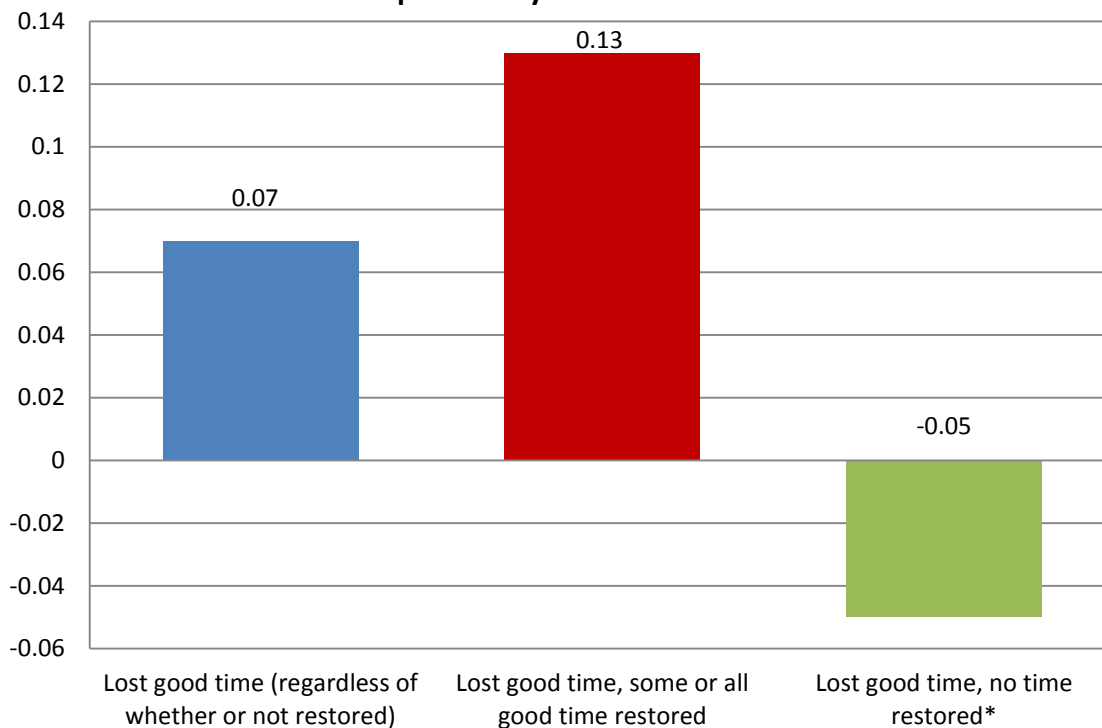
Research Question #3

What is the effect of losing good time credits on inmates' odds of recidivism?

Research Findings:

- The final portion of the study involved the examination of the impact of losing good time during incarceration on criminal behavior subsequent to release (recidivism).
 - Offenders who lost good time had a 7% higher probability of being reincarcerated for a new offense.
 - Offenders who lost good time but had some or all good time restored had a 13% higher probability of being reincarcerated for a new offense.
 - Offenders who lost good time and had none of that time restored had a 5% lower probability of being reincarcerated for a new offense, but this reduction was not statistically significant.

Figure 5. Impact of loss of good time and good time restoration on probability of recidivism.



*This difference is not statistically significant.

Conclusions for Research Question #3

Removing good time credits amplified offenders' odds of recidivism, particularly among those offenders who lost good time and had some or all of their good time restored.

Overall Project Conclusion

Nebraska prison officials' decisions to remove good time are primarily being made in an equitable manner, but removing good time credits in response to prison rule violations has little impact on offender behavior, whether in prison or upon release.

Link to the full report and executive summary:

<http://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-public-affairs-and-community-service/nebraska-center-for-justice-research/documents/examining-the-effects-of-nebraska-good-time-laws.pdf>

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR) was established in 2014 by LB 907. The Center's mission is to develop and sustain research capacity internal to the State of Nebraska, assist the Legislature in research, evaluation, and policymaking to reduce recidivism, promote the use of evidence-based practices in corrections, and improve public safety.

Questions regarding the NCJR should be directed to:

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