

Effects of prison work programmes on the employability of ex-prisoners

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study that links information from the prison system with information from the Spanish Social Security System in order to study the employability of former inmates of prisons in Catalonia, Spain. Few studies of this type have been carried out in the world and this is the first in Spain. The results show that 43.6 percent of ex-prisoners find a job after serving their sentence, but their integration in the labour market tends to be fragile, confirming that it is a very vulnerable group. It was also found that prison work has a favourable effect on employability and that vocational training has a lesser or no effect.

Keywords

Desistance, employability, jail, prison work, prisoners, Spain

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Introduction

Desistance from crime by prisoners when they have completed their sentence is a major concern for society and has therefore been the subject of many studies. Research on the integration of prisoners in the labour market as a consequence of programmes aimed at increasing their employability is limited by the fact that experimental designs are often not feasible (Wilson et al., 2000). In the present study, the first of its kind carried out in Spain, we approached this subject by matching different databases providing information on the working life of former prisoners.

Our results suggest that work in prisons gives prisoners a greater chance of finding a job, while ensuring order in prisons and providing prisoners with emotional stability. Vocational training has a lesser or no effect, perhaps because it fails to meet the needs of the labour market.

A review of the literature leads us to our working hypotheses. We then describe the study population, explain the research methodology and present the results. We end with a few conclusions and recommendations.

Literature review and working hypotheses

Criminological theory is confronted with traditional dilemmas in social theory, the most important of which is perhaps the tension between structure and subject or agency. In criminology there is a long tradition of studies focusing on the individual, beginning with Lombroso, the father of modern criminology (Lilly et al., 2007). These studies have underscored the idea that 'nothing works' (Martinson, 1974) as regards rehabilitative and treatment programmes in correctional facilities (Travis, 2005) or 'prison works' from the viewpoint of rational choice (Bottoms et al., 2004; Nelken, 2009),

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) propose a concept of control that they see as a permanent inner state rather than a social product: crimes are the response to opportunities available to people with little self-control. Hence, delinquency, which later gravitates towards more serious criminal behaviour, appears in young people alongside the many aspects of their life that are out of control (alcohol, drugs, sex, etc.).

Sampson and Laub (1995) highlight the importance of life course, and in particular the transition to adulthood, in the individual offender's behaviour. After observing the continuity of human behaviour over time, these authors state that certain social controls can be a turning point. They stress the importance of the quality of social ties: adults refrain from criminal behaviour according to the social capital invested in their family and at work. Specifically in relation to work, good relations between employer and employee (obligations, expectations and interdependence) facilitate the development of social control (Sampson and Laub, 1995).

More recent studies (for example, Bottoms et al., 2004; Kivivuori and Linderborg, 2010; LeBel et al., 2008; Wikström and Treiber, 2007) observe that there has been some convergence in the debate on structure and agency. An explanatory model should thus combine subjective factors of propensity to crime with structural factors, paying attention to the quality of the social bonds (Sampson and Laub, 1995). Prison work programmes aimed at encouraging inmates to acquire work habits, work experience and the motivation to desist from crime should be approached from this perspective.

Bushway (2003) puts forward six propositions on the role of prison work and training in the reintegration of prisoners. First, he holds that many prisoners are detached from the legitimate world of work prior to entry in prison. Indeed, many of them have little education and few vocational skills, especially when they come from environments disassociated from the world of legal work, and some of them have no work experience (Hunter and Boyce, 2009). Some studies have associated crime positively with job instability and unemployment, and negatively with pay. For example, Travis (2005) found that 12.5 percent of those arrested in the United States in 1997 had part-time or casual jobs, 22.0 percent were in the illegal labour market and 31.5 percent were unemployed.

Second, Bushway (2003) holds that improving work outcomes is expensive. Prisoners are provided with resources that are not always available to the general population, especially in times of economic crisis, but these resources are expensive in view of the limited results they offer. Because the programmes are useful only to a minority or the results are questionable, it is difficult to justify funding for them (Simon, 1999).

Third, there is some consensus that the first stage of moving away from crime involves the desire to do so (motivation matters). Once the decision is made, in order to succeed in the new situation the individual needs to acquire knowledge and develop skills, such as being a 'worker'. This would suggest that training and work programmes help only prisoners who are motivated to avoid reoffending; in fact, 'work programs may be perceived either as transformative or merely as a means to earn money while incarcerated' (Wilson et al., 2000: 364).

Fourth, Bushway states that the transition matters. The process of building a new life is difficult: old ties must be cut and new ones created (Bales and Mears, 2008; Baskin and Sommers, 1998; Maruna, 2001; Uggen, 2000). Work programmes provide useful knowledge for starting a new life, but the problem lies in the prisoners' ties after release from prison, which are often the ones they had before entry (Travis et al., 2001). Furthermore, Travis (2005) states that prisoners are a population with poor health, so attention should be paid to this problem at the time of release. However, the most pressing problem for released prisoners is housing: many return to the family, although the relationships are often complicated, even more so with the return, and some families have been victimized or harmed by the ex-prisoner. Hence, work is only part of the reintegration process, together with emotional ties, healthcare and housing.

Fifth, Bushway states that nothing succeeds like success. Even when ex-prisoners have professional qualifications and experience, the jobs they find are among the least desired and the worst paid; they rarely have the opportunity to prove that they can carry out a daily job for a long period of time (Hunter and Boyce, 2009; Western et al., 2001). The study of recidivism in Catalonia by Luque et al. (2005) shows that holding on to a job is the most difficult obstacle they face in occupational reintegration. These authors suggest that training and work programmes should focus on the equation 'work + motivation = reintegration'. Therefore, each process should be tailored specifically to each participant, ensuring the passage to the next stage, and avoiding adding frustrations to people who accumulate a heavy burden of failure.

Sixth, Bushway considers that work programmes in prisons are justified not so much by the rehabilitation they offer but rather by the fact that they occupy the time of prisoners, provide them with an income and facilitate prison control. Therefore, although the

work does not aim for rehabilitation, it contributes to it indirectly. The studies by Miguélez et al. (2007) and Guilbaud (2008) reach similar conclusions and confirm the important role of work in structuring the daily lives of prisoners and in teaching behavioural patterns and habits such as self-discipline, punctuality, responsibility and evaluation of effort. Work programmes have an educational and therapeutic function that is at first invisible but is essential for the acquisition of values linked to resocialization and reintegration in society.

In short, work in prisons has a variety of purposes but it has two main functions: to facilitate the control of social order in everyday prison life and to contribute to the inmates' socialization through learning patterns that allow them to internalize values and forms of behaviour.

The above statements led us to make the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Learning a trade, either through training or through work, contributes to the employability of ex-prisoners because it brings them closer to the normality of citizens and holds out the prospect of making a living.

Hypothesis 2. Employability depends on the economic situation, and it could be especially difficult for ex-prisoners.

Hypothesis 3. Middle and higher education favour employability. Conversely, low levels of education decrease employability because of competition with other groups, particularly in situations of high unemployment.

Hypothesis 4. Although antisocial behaviour is relatively stable throughout life, maturity (associated with institutions of social control) can provide emotional stability and a sense of responsibility, contributing to the employability of ex-prisoners. Therefore, older individuals will have better chances of access to employment.

The study population

The study population was the group of people who obtained final release from prisons in Catalonia, Spain, between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2007. According to the Catalan Prison Computer System (Sistema Informàtic Penitenciari Català, SIPC) of the Ministry of Justice of the Catalan government, which manages this information, in the above period there were 6654 final releases involving 6038 individuals (a person may have obtained final release more than once). However, we chose to analyse only the population of Spanish nationality because of large gaps in the data and the difficulty of identifying the foreign population: identification was key to unifying the different databases with which we worked. Therefore, the study focused on the population with Spanish nationality, a total of 3875 ex-prisoners, although accurate identification was available only for 3225 of them (83.2 percent) (see Table 1). Of these, 17.1 percent had received vocational training in prison and 44.1 percent had taken part in prison work programmes.

Methodology used

This study used a quantitative approach to determine the career paths of ex-prisoners from data from the Spanish Social Security System (SSS).¹ It is an exploratory study

Table 1. Ex-prisoners of Spanish nationality in Catalan prisons who are released.

	No. of ex-prisoners with final release	No. of identifiable ex-prisoners	Percent of identifiable ex-prisoners
Women	345	235	68.1
Men	3530	2990	84.7
Up to primary education	1873	1543	82.4
Secondary education or higher	1526	1292	84.7
Up to age 35	1151	978	85.0
36–45 years	1549	1316	85.0
46 years or more	1049	931	88.8
Total	3875	3225	83.2

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC.

because of the complexity of matching the different databases that we used and because of the lack of precedents in similar processes. By merging data from the SSS with those of the prison system, we obtained the relationship between career paths after release and attendance on training courses or prison work. First, we had to make a single database out of the existing three: (1) persons released between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2007 (managed by the SIPC); (2) inmates doing prison work (managed by El Centre d'Iniciatives per a la Reinserció [CIRE], the government agency in Catalonia that supports the reintegration of prisoners through vocational training and productive prison work); and (3) inmates attending vocational training courses (managed by CIRE). In databases 2 and 3 only the individuals found in database 1 were identified. The unified database was then matched with information since the inmates' release in the Spanish National Institute of Social Security, the organization that manages the resources of the SSS. The utmost personal confidentiality was guaranteed.²

The new database contains the following information:

1. Personal variables
 - a. Sex
 - b. Age
 - c. Education: up to primary education, secondary education, tertiary education started or completed
2. Family situation: single, divorced, separated, widowed, married; with or without children.
3. Prison system
 - a. Main type of crime: against persons, sex crimes, against property, against public health (drug dealing was the most common), other crimes (including trading in hazardous or explosive materials, crimes against state security and disturbing public order).

- b. Age at first entry: up to 20 years, 21–25 years, 26–30 years, 31–35 years, 36–40 years, 41 years or more.
 - c. Age at release: up to 30 years, 31–35 years, 36–40 years, 41–45 years, 46–50 years, 51 years or more.
 - d. Previous recidivism.
 - e. Length of sentence: up to 1 year, 2–3 years, 4–5 years, 6–8 years, 9 years or more.
 - f. Total prison time: up to 1 year, 2–3 years, 4–5 years, 6–8 years, 9 years or more.
4. Behaviour of the inmates:
- a. Application of ‘third grade’ regime³: Yes, No.
 - b. Day-release permits in last year of sentence: Yes, No.
 - c. Participation in activities in last year of sentence: Yes, No.
 - d. Positions of trust in last year of sentence: Yes, No.
 - e. Disciplinary sanctions in last year of sentence: Yes, No.
5. CIRE activities:
- a. Prison work: Yes, No.
 - b. Vocational training: Yes, No.
6. Working life (SSS)
- a. SSS affiliation after release: Yes, No.
 - b. SSS system: employee or self-employed.
 - c. Professional category of last job: manager, technician or professional, specialist or technical assistant, administrative, craft or related trades worker (skilled), plant and machine operator or assembler (semi-skilled), and unskilled worker.
 - d. Contract type of last job: open-ended or temporary.
 - e. Duration of contract: up to 30 days, 31–180 days, 181 days or more.
 - f. Business sector: according to international statistical classifications of economic activities (NACE Rev. 2).

Using data from the SSS for each individual from the year of release to 30 June 2010, we generated a variable to explain the successes and failures of integration in the labour market. This variable distinguishes three situations: ex-prisoners who have had a job, those who have not, and recidivists.⁴ Non-recidivists who have had a job are in the most favourable situation for employability and chances of integration, however limited, whereas recidivists are at the opposite extreme. Non-recidivists who have not had a job are in an intermediate position; the available information did not reveal their status subsequent to release, which could include situations of illegal employment and unpunished crime.

Subsequently, in the logistic regression analysis, the number of situations was reduced to two: those who had some integration in the labour market and those with no integration in the labour market, the latter group including recidivists.

Table 2. Distribution of ex-prisoners of Spanish nationality in Catalan prisons according to employment results from final release up to 30 June 2010.

Recidivist	22.9%
Non-recidivist employed at some time	43.6%
Non-recidivist unemployed	33.4%
Total ($N = 3225$)	100.0%

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC and the SSS.

The results of the study

The analysis of the new database reveals that, of the 3225 ex-prisoners, 740 (22.9 percent) had reoffended, 1078 (33.4 percent) showed no record of SSS affiliation, and 1407 (43.6 percent) had obtained some type of employment after final release (Table 2). Just under half had had a job for less than three months a year, and only 313 (22.2 percent) still had a job on 30 June 2010.

The personal and family variables (see Table 6 in the Appendix) always have significant levels of association, but they are generally moderate in relation to employment, with the exception of age on release (Cramer's $V = 0.160$). Men tend to reoffend more and are employed more than women; perhaps among the female population cultural factors play a greater role in keeping them away from formal work. The levels of education and training of the prison population are generally very low, but the highest and most consolidated levels of employment are attained by those with education, and especially by the few who have started or completed tertiary education. The situation and family ties (marital status and children) show some association between being married and not reoffending, in agreement with Sampson and Laub (1995), but these factors do not greatly affect the possibility of finding a job; single persons are more likely to reoffend, and are further from integration in the labour market. Having children is not a determining factor in explaining access to employment. An initial hypothesis would suggest that the vast majority of ex-prisoners are men, who generally have weak ties with their children. It is observed that women with children attain less integration in the labour market than those who do not; mothers may do jobs that are not registered at the SSS, and the database used does not allow these jobs to be analysed.

In line with the literature (for example, Batchelder and Pippert, 2002; Uggen, 2000; Western et al., 2001), our findings also show that age is an important factor associated with employability. In contrast with our Hypothesis 4, younger individuals up to 35 years old are the ones who most reoffend, but also the ones who get the best results in employment. Also in contrast with our Hypothesis 4, individuals over the age of 50 find it more difficult to get a job, perhaps because they are more discouraged about finding work. Furthermore, age is a negative factor in the labour market, especially after a long break.

The penal variables generally show a higher association with employability than the personal and family variables. The younger offenders are when they enter prison, the lower their employability and the higher their likelihood of reoffending. Those who first enter at intermediate ages perform better in employment.

By type of crime (Cramer's $V = 0.114$), those who have committed 'crimes against public health' (in particular drug offences) or 'other crimes' integrate better in the labour market, whereas those who have committed crimes against persons reoffend more and integrate less. The duration of the last stay in prison and the total number of prison stays (if there have been several) also show an association with both employment and reoffending that is always significant (Cramer's $V = 0.152$, 0.176 and 0.147 , respectively). Those who come from a single short stay are the ones who perform by far the best in the labour market, whereas reoffending involves a spiral that favours further recidivism (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Luque et al., 2005; Sampson and Laub, 1995). Individuals who have had longer stays in prison also perform worse than those who spend a short time and do not reoffend. It may be that the longer the sentence, the more likely prisoners are to lose their ties with social networks and the labour market, and problems of this type may reduce the motivation to refrain from crime.

The variables relating to the behaviour of the inmates in the last year of a prison sentence show interesting effects on employability. Experiencing the 'third grade' prison regime (Cramer's $V = 0.190$) involves a higher level of employment and less recidivism. This may be owing to motivation (*motivation matters* according to Bushway, 2003) but also to the preparation that inmates receive in this final stage of their sentence. Participating in cultural or sporting activities and occupying jobs with personal responsibility or jobs that place inmates in a position of trust (such as running the cafeteria or shop and prison maintenance jobs that involve freedom of movement) are associated with more employment, but also with more recidivism; the explanation for this is that some inmates accept the 'normalization' of prison life by adapting their behaviour to the prison rules, but they are unwilling to give up crime. Employment shows a high association with day-release permits and an even higher negative association with having been punished for misbehaviour (Cramer's $V = 0.170$ and 0.277 , respectively).

These results suggest that inmates can be divided into three groups. The largest group, comprising nearly half the total, show a desire for social and occupational integration, and in prison they acquire behaviours suited to that goal. The second group hold attitudes and behaviours that are not conducive to social integration and that lead them to break the rules of the prison system, even in the last stage of their sentence. The third group 'normalize' their stay in prison, abiding by the rules but not wishing to give up crime. The members of the third group tend to be recidivists, possibly with a crime-related social context and social network that make it particularly difficult for them to reorient their lives. This group is close to the life-course-persistent antisocial behaviour identified by Moffitt (1993).

Let us consider the significant variables of the CIRE activities (Table 3). Attending training courses (Cramer's $V = 0.087$) is associated with a slightly higher likelihood of finding a job on release, but also with greater recidivism. The number of courses attended moderately reinforces this trend: the more courses attended, the greater the likelihood of finding a job, but also the greater the recidivism. Prison work offered similar results, although with a higher level of association (Cramer's $V = 0.195$), so it is associated with better performance in employment but also with more recidivism.

At this point we see that the results of attending vocational training courses and doing prison work are mediated by two different and contradictory factors. On the one hand, as

Table 3. Distribution of ex-prisoners according to situation after final release and participation in vocational training and productive prison work.

	Employed	Unemployed	Recidivist	Total	N	Cramer's V
Participation in VT courses	46.7%	25.0%	28.4%	100.0%	553	0.087*
No participation in VT courses	43.0%	35.2%	21.8%	100.0%	2672	
Prison work	45.5%	24.3%	30.2%	100.0%	1421	0.195*
No prison work	42.2%	40.6%	17.2%	100.0%	1804	
Total (N = 3225)	43.6%	33.4%	22.9%	100.0%		

Notes: VT: vocational training. Overrepresentation is indicated by bold type.

* $p \leq .01$.

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC, the CIRE and the SSS.

shown by Bushway (2003), the desire for reintegration predisposes some inmates to participate in these activities. Others develop this predisposition by participating in them because they provide self-discipline, self-control and job skills and bring them close to the status of workers. However, participating in these activities does not seem to be an essential condition for employability.⁵ Persistent criminals adapt their conduct during their prison stay, participating in the activities offered in order to 'kill time' and obtain some income, or to obtain benefits from good conduct; in the adaptation process they preserve the personality that led them to offend. Prison activities are open to all inmates, which means that they are sometimes undertaken by inmates with no desire for reintegration. It should be added that inmates with shorter sentences participate less in training courses and prison work but they are more likely to get jobs, perhaps because their distance in time from the labour market is shorter or because they are less problematic individuals.

A large majority (71.6 percent) of jobs obtained by ex-prisoners are temporary or short term: 18.0 percent of the contracts are for up to 30 days and 37.4 percent for over six months. This explains why the ex-prisoners who work spend long periods unemployed: about half had not worked more than three months per year after release.⁶ For the group contributing to the SSS on 30 June 2010, 36.8 percent can be considered qualified, mostly at skilled or semi-skilled level, while 63.2 percent were doing unskilled jobs, mostly as labourers. Only 2.6 percent of ex-prisoners were managers, specialists or technical assistants, and 8.3 percent were administrative staff. It can be concluded that the jobs done by most former inmates are manual and low status. These results agree with previous research (for example, Wadsworth, 2006; Western et al., 2001).

Of the 1407 ex-prisoners who found a job after release, only 313 (22.2 percent) still had it on 30 June 2010. Of the others, 1080 had lost their jobs and 14 had retired. It is likely that the economic crisis has particularly affected ex-prisoners, whose ties to the labour market are very weak. The negative implication is that many efforts aimed at fostering motivation and expectations of reintegration are frustrated.

Most women ex-prisoners have part-time jobs and they usually have shorter contracts than men. Educational attainment also shows some association with employment status.

Former inmates with high levels of education have more skilled jobs, mainly in retailing, hotels and catering, and industry, and they perform better in employment, with a longer total time in employment and longer contracts. On the other hand, those who did not complete primary education have mainly unskilled jobs, particularly in the construction sector. Unmarried individuals tend to have casual jobs with shorter contracts; family ties reinforce the need for employment. Age is again an important variable: the higher the age, the greater the employment in skilled categories on open-ended contracts or as self-employed workers. By contrast, younger individuals have temporary jobs, short-term contracts and situations of unemployment. As occurs in the general population, age, sex and education also affect ex-prisoners but to a greater extent (for example, Sampson and Laub, 1995; Uggen, 2000; Wadsworth, 2006).

The most significant penal variables in relation to employment are the 'third grade' regime and day release in the last year of imprisonment, both of which are positively associated with longer total time in employment and longer contracts.

Finally, ex-prisoners who have attended vocational training courses and done prison work tend to have a shorter total time in employment and shorter contracts than those who have not. These results are at first sight surprising. However, first, the vocational training courses are mostly attended by younger inmates, who find it more difficult to obtain a stable job. Second, 78.1 percent of inmates with sentences of less than one year do not do prison work, and this is a group with better chances of employment if they do not reoffend. Third, inmates with tertiary education, who perform better in the labour market, do not usually do prison work.

In addition to the associations described in the correspondence analysis, logistic regression can show the degree of influence of the two variables, controlling for the indirect effects of others. To this end, we selected the variables that have a clear association with the dependent variable, which distinguishes ex-prisoners after release according to whether or not they have had a job.⁷

The results of binary logistic regression are shown in Table 4, which contains four models: the first includes socio-demographic variables, in the second we added penal variables, in the third we added motivational variables, and in the fourth we added prison work and vocational training. The results show an improvement in the explanatory power of the models, especially the penal and motivational variables. They also confirm some of the earlier findings: men are more likely to get jobs than women; individuals with education are more likely to get jobs than those who fail to complete primary education; those who are released at earlier ages (up to 35) are more likely to get jobs than those who are released at intermediate ages, and particularly than those who are released at higher ages; divorced or separated individuals are somewhat more likely to get jobs than single ones; those who are not recidivists are more likely to get jobs; those with a total prison time of less than three years are more likely to get jobs than those with longer times; those who go through the 'third grade' regime are more likely to get jobs; and those who show greater motivation in the year prior to release are more likely to get jobs.⁸

Having been punished for misbehaviour reduces the likelihood of getting a job. Training is not significant, but prison work is positively associated with employment. In general these results confirm the earlier ones but the type of the crime for which the last sentence was served and marital status show a lower level of significance. The results

Table 4. Results of the binary logistic regression (reference = at least one job after final release).

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
		Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
Sex	Reference: woman	1.454	*	1.631	**	1.817	**	1.808	**
Education	Reference: up to primary	1.524	**	1.527	**	1.538	**	1.547	**
Marital status	Single		**		**		*		*
	Divorced, separated	1.535	**	1.384	**	1.353	*	1.335	*
	Married, with partner	1.405	*	1.376	*	1.281	ns	1.274	ns
Age at final release	Up to 35 years		**		**		**		**
	36–45 years	0.708	**	0.759	**	0.717	**	0.735	*
	More than 45 years	0.541	**	0.499	**	0.426	**	0.442	**
Previous recidivist	Reference: no			0.709	**	0.688	**	0.691	**
Total prison time	Up to 3 years				**		**		**
	4–8 years			0.724	**	0.701	**	0.650	**
	9 years or more			0.408	**	0.435	**	0.393	**
Latest crime	Other crimes				**		*		*
	Against persons			0.822	ns	0.806	ns	0.796	ns
	Against sexual freedom			1.136	ns	1.030	ns	1.005	ns
	Against property			0.963	ns	0.926	ns	0.916	ns
'Third grade' regime	Against public health			1.764	**	1.422	ns	1.415	ns
	Reference: no					1.764	**	1.802	**
Motivation indicator (0 = less, 3 = more)	Reference: no					1.432	**	1.360	**
Misbehaviour in last year	Reference: no					0.577	**	0.572	**
Vocational training	Reference: no							1.112	ns
Work in workshops	Reference: no							1.329	**
Constant		0.464	**	0.638	*	0.405	**	0.394	**
Chi-square		58.856	**	174.407	**	326.564	**	335.762	**
-2 log-likelihood		3211.290		3095.738		2943.582		2934.384	
Cox and Snell R ²		.024		.070		.127		.130	

N = 3225.

*p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; ns = not significant.

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC, the CIRE and the SSS.

confirm the importance of agency in criminal behaviour, though the interaction of several contextual aspects is often fundamental to the process of desistance (Bottoms et al., 2004; Kivivuori and Linderborg, 2010; Sampson and Laub, 1995).⁹

As stated above, the effects of prison work and training on employment may be distorted by the participation in these activities of professional criminals who ‘normalize’ their prison stay or simulate a change of attitude with regard to their past. To avoid this type of concealment or confusion, the variables of prison work and training are stratified with that of recidivism (see Table 5). This confirms the positive effects of both activities, especially prison work (training is positive but not significant), on the employment of prisoners who are not reoffenders.

Conclusions

The results allow us to contrast the initial hypotheses. Regarding Hypothesis 1, programmes focusing on work are important, especially for inmates who have not been

Table 5. Results of the binary logistic regression (reference = at least one job after final release, distinguishing between recidivists and non-recidivists).

	Exp(B)	Sig.		Exp(B)	Sig.
Non-recidivist without workshop		*	Non-recidivist without training		*
Recidivist without workshop	0.865	ns	Recidivist without training	0.717	*
Non-recidivist with workshop	1.485	*	Non-recidivist with training	1.170	ns
Recidivist with workshop	0.860	ns	Recidivist with training	0.702	ns
Chi-square	339.470	*	Chi-square	336.268	*
-2 log-likelihood	2930.676		-2 log-likelihood	2933.877	
Cox and Snell R ²	.132		Cox and Snell R ²	.131	

* $p \leq .01$; ns = not significant.

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC, the CIRE and the SSS.

reoffenders. As stated by Uggen (2000), work programmes are more important than training, but both activities are more important if accompanied by vocational content. Although much prison work is very simple, it opens an opportunity for those who have never worked or have been unable to keep a job, and for those who have no education, knowledge or job skills, by providing them with work discipline and self-esteem and strengthening the link between work and earning a living (Uggen, 2000; Wadsworth, 2006; Western et al., 2001). The results of the training are more ambiguous because of the low vocational content, as is suggested by our interviews (see endnote 4).

The level of employment (Hypothesis 2) depends on the job supply, and in the current economic crisis the most vulnerable groups of society find it more difficult to enter the labour market. Ex-prisoners who find a job are mostly employed on short temporary contracts with a high likelihood of dismissal (Wadsworth, 2006). Few attain full integration in the labour market (Bushway, 2003; Western et al., 2001), possibly because prisoners have a poorly rooted work culture (Bushway, 2003) that is difficult to change in the closed prison society.

The above issues lead to Hypothesis 3, which states that low levels of education hinder employability. The statistical analysis found that the higher the level of education, the more stable the employment and therefore the greater the chances of reintegration.

For Hypothesis 4, the interpretation of the results is more complex. First, the fact that young ex-prisoners find it easier to get a job than older ones, especially if the latter have been outside work for many years and have a long gap in their CV, is in clear contradiction with our hypothesis. However, older adults get jobs that are slightly more qualified and of longer duration or they choose self-employment. We can therefore conclude that, although age is a determinant of attitude towards employment, according to Sampson and Laub (1995) and other authors, its interaction with personal variables (experience, knowledge and motivation) and structural or contextual variables (family, friends and labour market) explain why the results are more complicated and contradictory than expected.

Furthermore, work is more regular for men and possibly more informal for women. However, our interviewees consider that family ties contribute to employability by instilling a sense of responsibility that is projected onto work (for example, Bales and Mears, 2008; Kivivuori and Linderborg, 2010). The interviewees also suggest that middle age is not necessarily accompanied by emotional stability; it can also be accompanied by a certain disenchantment fostered by the higher barriers to employment found by this age group.

Ex-prisoners show varied behaviours with regard to employment, in which individual provisions and structures intervene and interact in attitudes towards avoiding crime and towards employment. In other words, our results corroborate the importance of combining subjective factors and structural ones in the study of desistance, as stated by Bottoms et al. (2004), Kivivuori and Linderborg (2010), LeBel et al. (2008) and Wikström and Treiber (2007). Prison and reintegration policies should therefore address specific situations. Otherwise employment guidance programmes may help some prisoners to integrate in society, but offer few opportunities of change for others.

Finally, the study allows us to make some suggestions for improving some aspects of prison management related to the employment of ex-prisoners. In particular, we believe, first, that work programmes and vocational training programmes should not be treated separately by managers of penal policies, as tends to happen in Spain. Second, in order to make better use of scant public funds, both programmes should be included within a whole set of actions aimed at re-educating prisoners. Third, improving statistical records by using clear and anonymous identifiers that enable personal, penal and employment databases to be managed in combination would be a considerable step forward for information and control and for future research. We therefore believe, in agreement with Western et al. (2001), that this kind of study opens an interesting path for monitoring the efficiency of specialized public policies.

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Notes

1. The research was complemented with a qualitative approach. In late 2009 we conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with key informants: prison officers, employers and managers of institutions hiring prisoners and ex-prisoners, and experts in occupational reintegration. We also conducted 25 interviews with a typological sample of ex-prisoners and inmates in the last stage of their sentence, with whom we reconstructed biographies of career paths and personal

trajectories, seeking to link participation in prison activities with employability. The results of this study can be found in Esteban et al. (2014).

2. Earlier studies of this type include Grogger (1995) and Needels (1996). This type of study offers some advantages (low cost, information on all prisoners) and some disadvantages, particularly with regard to processing administrative data that are not designed for the study and ensuring confidentiality.
3. 'Third grade' is a semi-open regime that prisoners can benefit from before they finish their sentences, according to their personal and penal circumstances.
4. Although some recidivists may have had a job between their release and their return to prison, in these cases the employment did not keep them away from crime. Therefore, their employment cannot be considered a positive result of participation in vocational training and work during their prison stay.
5. In our interviews some ex-prisoners with previous employment experience and some employment skills stated that these activities had little vocational orientation.
6. It should be pointed out that the instability is a characteristic feature of the Spanish labour market.
7. Some variables are discarded because of their high covariation with others. Having children is discarded and marital status, which has a stronger association with the variable to be explained (employability), is maintained. Having a partner affects the behaviour of inmates, overwhelmingly men, more than having children. The covariance is also high between age at final release and current age, and between the former and age at first entry to prison. Here we select the age at final release variable and we reject the other two, because final release shows a higher coefficient of association with employment, and it is the most consistent variable for analysing employment results after release. Though it is of theoretical interest, as is shown in the literature, age at first entry to prison is to some extent reflected in our analysis of other variables, such as total prison time and recidivism. Between duration of the last prison stay and total prison time, we chose the second, because it shows a greater association with the dependent variable and because prison time or separation from the labour market and life in society are of greater interest to the present study.
8. The variables related to day release, prison jobs and participation in activities in the last year before release were used to build a single variable, indicating motivation, by adding the results of each one.
9. The Heckman two-step method (Bushway et al., 2007) was used to correct the bias that the distribution of inmates doing prison work may introduce in the likelihood of finding a job. After this correction, the results do not vary: both for all ex-prisoners and distinguishing between recidivists and non-recidivists, the lack of lambda significance shows that the potential impact of factors not entered into the model (health, addiction and other motivational factors) does not lead to endogeneity. As Bushway et al. (2007) state, this does not necessarily imply that there is no such effect of selection, but with the data used its potential impact is in theory controlled.

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Appendix

Table 6. Distribution of ex-prisoners by status after final release.

	Employed	Unemployed	Recidivist	Total	N	Cramer's V
Women	35.7%	46.4%	17.9%	100%	235	0.077*
Men	44.2%	32.4%	23.3%	100%	2990	
Up to primary education	37.5%	37.2%	25.3%	100%	1543	0.091*
Secondary education	47.7%	29.2%	23.1%	100%	1292	
Tertiary education started or completed	63.2%	22.1%	14.7%	100%	95	
Single	41.8%	31.8%	26.5%	100%	1958	0.070*
Divorced, separated, widowed	47.7%	34.2%	18.1%	100%	673	
Married	44.3%	37.9%	17.8%	100%	427	
Age at final release:						0.160*
Up to 30 years	48.1%	21.9%	29.9%	100%	775	
31–35 years	46.6%	26.5%	26.9%	100%	672	
36–40 years	42.4%	35.1%	22.5%	100%	667	
41–45 years	41.1%	40.3%	18.5%	100%	491	
46–50 years	39.7%	40.3%	20.0%	100%	290	
51 years or more	36.7%	54.8%	8.5%	100%	330	

Note: Overrepresentation is indicated by bold type.

* $p \leq .01$

Contents

Articles

- Safe storage and thefts of firearms in Sweden:
An empirical study 3
Erik Lakomaa
- Delivering a Victim Impact Statement: Emotionally
effective or counter-productive? 17
*Kim ME Lens, Antony Pemberton, Karen Brans, Johan Braeken,
Stefan Bogaerts and Esmah Lahlah*
- Effects of prison work programmes on the employability
of ex-prisoners 35
Ramon Alós, Fernando Esteban, Pere Jódar and Fausto Miguélez
- Family matters: A cross-national examination of family
bonding and victimization 51
Chad Posick and Michael Rocque
- Gang membership transitions and its consequences: Exploring
changes related to joining and leaving gangs in two countries 70
Frank M Weerman, Peter J Lovegrove and Terence Thornberry
- Punitive attitudes: Towards an operationalization to measure
individual punitivity in a multidimensional way 92
An Adriaenssen and Ivo Aertsen

Research Note

- The life-course offending trajectories of football hooligans 113
Alex R Piquero, Wesley G Jennings and David P Farrington

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