

# **Recidivism: Employment Opportunities after Incarceration**

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## **Abstract:**

This article reviews evidence linking incarceration and the likelihood of obtaining employment after serving time in prison, with particular focus on African American men. Data come from Sumter's (2001) Religion and Post-Release Community Adjustment Survey. This research explores the predictors of post prison employment. Findings show that the length of time served, marital status, post-prison programs and whether an ex-convict attends religious services after being released increase the chances of obtaining and maintaining employment.

**Key Words:** *incarceration, recidivism, religion, post-prison, ex-convicts.*

## **Introduction**

The alarming growth of incarceration in the United States over the past few decades has lead to countless studies on the causes and effects of this growth. Since the early 1970s, the incarceration rate has risen precipitously in the United States, and this growth and expansion has profoundly impacted African American men. According to International Centre for Prison Studies, The United States, consist of only five percent of the world's population, but houses 25 percent of the inmate population (Loury, 2007). In time, the majority of these inmates will be released from prison and have to reintegrate into society. What are the possibilities for social and economical mobility for theses ex-inmates? In order to be productive and not face returning to prison these inmates will have to find and maintain employment. It is evident that the sentences inmates serve keep them out of the labor markets for extended periods of time; consequently influencing the type of job and pay that they will be able to obtain post-prison. The prospect of their social and economic mobility is seriously moderated by the prison label.

The present study examines factors that predict post-prison employment in a sample of male inmates from 12 prisons (Sumter, 2001). The data comes from telephone and individually completed surveys as well as from the prison history of the inmate. Variables that are examined

to determine predictors of post-prison unemployment include age, race, education, length of incarceration, and religion.

### **Patterns of Incarceration**

Loury (2007) examines why the incarceration rate is so high in America. Loury suggested that the rate has increased because America moved from rehabilitative model to a tough on crime model. America no longer wanted to rehabilitate criminals but is determined to keep them out of society. In doing so, the number of prisoners increased because there were individuals that were being given longer sentences and at the same time, new people were being admitted, adding to the number of those already incarcerated. A significantly large proportion of minorities were incarcerated because of the ease with which they could be caught committing crimes or breaking the laws in public view, as oppose to their White counterparts who usually broke the laws in their homes or cars. According to Fagan, West and Holland, for instance:

Buyers may come from any neighborhood and any social stratum, but the sellers at least the one who can be readily found hawking their wares on the street corners and in public vestibules - come predominantly from the poorest, most non-white parts of the city and the police with arrest quotas to make, know right where to find them. (p.8)

During the time of the prison boom in the 1980's, the police had arrest quotas that had to be met, so they patrolled the neighborhoods that they knew would bring them arrests. This played a major role in the racial disparity in the prison systems across America. Minorities were being incarcerated at a higher rate than whites. An estimated 11% of black males and 4% of Hispanic males in their 20's and early 30's were in prison at midyear 1999 (Beck, 2000). More than one-third of black male dropouts aged 20 to 35 were in prison on an average day in the 1990's (Western et al., 2001). There were more minorities in prison than there were in school. Minority males were incarcerated at much younger ages than White males due the fact that they lived in poor neighborhoods and high crime areas. Bruce Western (2006) points out that the incarceration ratio of black to whites was eight to one. Policies such as the three strikes law, and mandatory minimums added to the incarceration levels, as well as the fact that states began to do away with limited parole. These policies led to an increase in the prison population and consequently, more people were returning to society with prison records. In order to reduce the prison population and the numbers of ex-convicts that recidivate, it is important to determine which factors contribute to successful functioning outside of a prison. The most important of these may be the ability to get a job upon release. The factors that increase the likelihood that inmates will get jobs post-prison, is the focus of the present study.

According to Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow* (2010), drug offenses are one of the most important causes of increased incarceration in the United States. She points out that when looking at drug offenses there is a racial bias in prisons. 1 in every 14 African American males was behind bars in 2006, compared to 1 in every 106 Whites. Alexander goes on to state that two-thirds of federal inmates are made up of people serving time for drug offenses and one-half of state inmates are serving time for drug offenses. Alexander identifies police discretion, legal misrepresentation, bad deals and time served as reasons why so many people are currently incarcerated. The police have been given more discretion to stop and frisk

individuals that they feel are committing crimes; discretion given to them by cases such as the *Terry v. Ohio* (1968). In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the Fourth Amendment prohibition on unreasonable searches is not violated when a police officer stops a suspect on the street and frisks him without probable cause to arrest, if the police officer has a reasonable suspicion that the person has committed, is committing, or is about to commit a crime and has a reasonable belief that the person may be armed and presently dangerous. This discretion allowed police to stop and search individuals that the police found to be suspicious and the police no longer needed probable cause. Legal misrepresentation is also a factor because people charged with crimes were not advised of their rights, especially their right to counsel. Most individuals were worried about being given the mandatory minimum sentence for the crimes that were committed and agreed to plea bargains without consulting an attorney. Because of mandatory minimums, innocent people were taking deals so that they would not go to jail for extended periods of time (Alexander, 2010). Sentences that were being given to individuals for committing drug crimes began to be lengthier than the sentences given to people who committed crimes such as murder or other violent crimes. First time drug offenders were being given life sentences because of bad deals and mandatory minimums. These factors have all contributed to the increase in the high rates of incarceration.

### **Employment and Recidivism**

The focus of this study is on factors that contribute to employment after prison. Researchers have focused on the relationship between being released from prison and gaining employment as well as chances of recidivism. Tripodi, Kim and Bender (2010) examined whether released prisoners who obtained employment have a lower likelihood of being re-incarcerated than released prisoners who did not obtain employment. They also examined the prisoners who did recidivate, and determined whether or not the prisoners that did have employment, remained crime free, longer than those that did not obtain employment. This study was conducted over the course of 4 years with a random sample of 250 male parolees in Texas. Tripodi et al. (2010) found that individuals that obtained employment when released lowered their recidivism risk by 68.5% and averaged 31.4 months before being re-incarcerated, with a range of 9 to 60 months. Individuals that did not obtain employment averaged 17.3 months before being re-incarcerated with a range of 4 to 47 months, showing that employed ex-prisoners remain crime-free for a longer period of time than those that are unemployed. This study provides support for the idea that an individual that finds employment after being released is less likely to recommit and even if they do commit another crime, they will not do it as quickly as someone that is not employed. Prisons cost citizens billions of dollars a year. To house one inmate is about \$ 22,650 (Expenditures/Employment, 2001) year, when multiplied by a population of 2.2 million, there are staggering consequences for society as a whole. By providing inmates and former inmates with adequate programs and services that they need in order to obtain and maintain gainful employment, it is likely that there will be less individuals returning to prisons. This demonstrates the importance of examining issues which can decrease recidivism and employment has the potential to contribute to a reduction in recidivism.

Another focus of post-prison adjustment research is the inmate's view of factors that would contribute to their post-prison success. Malott and Fromader (2010) study was conducted to determine if current inmates believed that additional resources would be beneficial to them and what they thought would help reduce the recidivism rate. The results of this study showed

that the inmates felt that they are not given the proper resources they need in order to survive and remain crime free. The Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory was applied to this study. The Ecological Theory supports that changes in societal environment have a notable influence on individuals (Santrock, 2004). This study suggests that inmates feel that if they are provided with better resources such as post-incarcerate employment, education, family life education and therapy that they would be better prepared to function as productive citizens in society. With a sample size of only 102 participants and the lack of diversity this study cannot be generalized to all people serving time in a prison. The findings do, however, support the idea that there is a need for better resources for individuals during incarceration and upon release. The current research examines the effects of prison opportunity experience and based on this research, I would expect that such opportunities would have an effect upon release from prison.

Support from re-entry programs is another factor which can contribute to post-release success and is examined in current research. Nixon, Ticiento-Clough, Staples, Johnson-Peterkin, Zimmerman, Voight, and Pica (2008) examined the efficiency of re-entry programs. The programs include such issues as educational and vocational training. Their study reveals that the programs that are currently in place are not sufficient enough to help people released from prison to integrate back into society. They affirm that these programs lack the most beneficial things, such as basic skills. Re-entry programs may help individuals obtain a GED, or may even certify them to do a certain type of job, but they do not help them with socialization into work and family. These individuals are taken out of society and reconditioned to live the way of the prison, where they are told when to eat and work. When they return to society they are expected to conform to the ways of society and be productive. The ones that do obtain employment suffer because they do not know the norms of a work environment, which include things such as reporting to work on time, being productive and being able to take instruction from superiors. Individuals that have been incarcerated do not always respect these norms because they tend to resent authority figures and, for the most part, despise rules. While they were incarcerated they had no choice but to follow the rules of the institution for fear of reprimand. In the world outside of prison, workers are given a select amount of chances and then are fired with the consequence of losing a paycheck. According to David K. Shipler (2005) most employers would prefer to hire employees that at least have "soft skills" (p126). Soft skills such as diligence, punctuality, and a can-do attitude, are skills that some employees lack. Shipler explains that these things are usually learned within the family, but the family forfeited this responsibility and passed it on to school. In turn, schools forfeited the responsibility and passed it on to employers! If an ex-inmate was never taught these things, how can he/she be expected to know to do them?

Another problem that the inmates face is being overly aggressive. In prison, inmates have to continuously be alert from other inmates trying to harm them or do something wrong to them that, when they are in society, they tend to feel as though everyone is out to get them. This can be a bad trait to a place of business, because it can cause tension with co-workers and may reflect poorly on the employer if the ex-convict addresses clients/customers in the wrong manner. In order to help ex-convicts to be employable, the inmates should be required to take some courses on work etiquettes that will be beneficial to sustaining employment and not only just obtaining it. Although the current study does not include information about work socialization, it does include factors which could assist socialization such as religiosity.

Robert Riggs (2010) also examines the prison re-entry industry (PRI). The PRI is setup to help formerly incarcerated individuals who have some education and a certification in a

particular field. Riggs claims that this program does actually work to help employ ex-convicts that meet the qualifications. As time goes by, the need for employees who can relate to the high number of people that are being released will increase. Education and certification are only one portion of what you need to qualify for help from the PRI; an individual must also have experience with being around and working with former inmates. The jobs that are obtained thru PRI include opportunities such as a substance abuse counselor in a half way house. Riggs uses a hypothetical scenario to explain how the PRI functions when it comes to hiring for positions like this, with his hypothetical scenario about the need for a counselor of a program that is mandatory for former inmates that are on parole and probation. In this scenario, there are three people that apply for the position and the choices are a college graduate that majored in psychology and minored in substance abuse counseling, a formally incarcerated person with certification and 10 years experience running a prison substance abuse program, and third person who also majored in psychology and minored in substance abuse counseling but had 10 years experience in counseling. (p.580) According to Riggs the person that was formerly incarcerated would obtain the job because he has experience working with people that were previously incarcerated. Riggs is a former inmate that found employment through PRI because he qualified; he took certification courses and some college courses while incarcerated. Riggs example would suggest that his views on this particular program are in fact biased. A successful re-entry program should be made in a way that they would be beneficial to all individuals that are released from prisons. This research may not be able to be generalized since it is based on the experiences of one person.

## **Predictors of Post-Prison Employment**

### *Age*

When using age as a predictor of post-incarceration employment, several studies confirm that as an inmate ages, they are less likely to engage in criminal activities (Shover 1996; Freeman 2008; Uggen 2008). The age curve suggests that criminal activity peaks in the late teens. Growth in the U.S. prison population however, has been accompanied by a significant aging of the prison population. This is due to sentencing policies that require prison time for crimes such as nonviolent property or drug crimes. The lengthy sentences that are given have caused inmate population mean age to be higher (Pettit & Lyons, 2009). In most cases as an inmate matures the likelihood of committing crimes decreases and the attitude shifts. As an inmate ages, being employed and participating in society becomes more important. “Older offenders are more willing than younger men to accept employment –even at low wages- in exchange for the legitimacy attached to working in the legal labor market” (p. 730). The older that an individual gets, the more likely he is, to realize the importance of responsibilities and the things missed while incarcerated. Family and freedom outweighs the benefits of crime when the individual compares the two. A younger inmate is less likely to look at these things as important because to such inmates, the benefits of criminal activity outweigh that of working a job paying minimum wage. I expect that age will have an effect upon whether or not an inmate obtains a post-prison job with older inmates having a greater likelihood than younger inmates.

## *Race*

Using race as a predictor of post incarceration employment studies have shown that an African American male is less likely to obtain employment than their white counter-part (Pager 2007; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). These studies conclude that employers predetermine whether or not they will hire an individual based on their criminal record and factors that signify the applicant's race. Race can contribute to the outcome of employment because Blacks are often portrayed as criminals by the media and societal stereotypes. When doing a matched pair study for applicants without any previous criminal record, Pager (2007) found that African Americans were less than half as likely to receive callbacks as equally qualified Whites. Pager suggests that blacks would have to apply to double the amount of jobs than Whites apply to in order to obtain the same prospective as their counterparts. Pager also discovered that a white applicant with a felony criminal background had equal callback opportunities as a black applicant without a criminal record. Employers see the White applicant as "no more risky" (P.91), than a Black applicant without a criminal record. This study demonstrates that race has an influence on employment opportunities.

While many companies claim that they are equal opportunity employers, it is not hard to move away from the stereotypical image that is portrayed in the media today. In the news, African Americans are usually shown to be aggressive criminals. They are usually shackled and led away by white officers; if there is a picture used, it is usually a mug shot that was taken when the individual was taken into custody. The media usually shows more coverage of African American crime and trial than that of a White individual that is usually not shackled in most cases, but standing among family members. White suspects do not receive as much media coverage as Blacks. Such things enhance society's perception of African Americans, and therefore cause people to fear the angry Black criminal. Consequently, Pager (2007) states that even African Americans with no history of criminal involvement are likely to suffer some of the same penalties as do ex-offenders of any race (p.95). While media representation could be seen as a major influence; it is by no means the only influence of racist attitudes and beliefs.

Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) conducted a study to determine whether or not markers such as an applicant's name would play part in whether or not they received a call back for a job interview. Employers may assume the race of a person based upon the person's name. In this study the researchers sent out two sets of resumes to companies that were hiring for administrative support, clerical and customer service positions. One set of resumes contained names such as Emily and Greg to suggest that the applicant was White and another set of resumes with names such as LaKisha and Jamal to suggest that the applicant was African American. The findings of this study were that while only 5 percent of the companies call back all applicants, Whites to Black call back ratio was 9.19 percent to 6.16 percent respectively, supporting once again that race does in fact influence employment.

The studies focusing on race and employment clearly show that Blacks as compared to Whites have a far more difficult time obtaining a job. I expect to find a similar pattern in this research with whites having a higher chance of post-prison employment than Whites.

## *Education*

Education is another possible predictor on whether or not an individual can obtain employment after incarceration. Usually the more education that one has, the better the job that individual is assumed to be able to obtain. Ex-inmates with education still face problems such as working in fields for which they have been trained. Many inmates face applying for one job and being told to accept jobs of lower positions. Case and Fassenfest (2004) conducted a qualitative study that focused on ex-felons that were a part of a post-incarceration program. This study suggested that the justice system had began to move from punitive justice back to restorative justice because prisons offered educational programs and inmates were allowed to apply for Pell grants, which today is not the case. They found that White males felt that a degree was more beneficial to them than anything else and Black men felt that it was more beneficial to have vocational or trade training. This study included 29 ex-inmates of which 27 were male and 2 were female. The males consisted of 15 Black males and 14 White males. There was only one white male that was unemployed and two-thirds of the black males were employed (p.31). When the white males were asked about the stigma tied to being incarcerated, they usually said that they lost their job for reasons other than their previous record such as a personal characteristic. A great majority of the Black males including ones that had been previously employed said that their employers always found a reason to terminate them without saying it was because of their record. While these types of programs may be beneficial to ex-inmates, they still face barriers even when they are trained to do specific jobs and even earn degrees. In the current study, I examine the relationship between education and post-prison employment. I expect that those inmates with higher levels of education will be more likely to be employed, post-prison, than those with lower levels of education.

## *Length of Incarceration*

Length of time in prison is another predictor of employment that has received empirical attention. Orsagh and Chen (1998) focused on theories that explain the relationship between length of sentence and income. Rational theory suggests that the longer an individual stays incarcerated, their legitimate earnings decrease because of their extended time away from the labor market, and their illegitimate earnings increase because they learn how to do more crimes while incarcerated. Another theory that was looked at was Hirshi's (1969) control theory which states that an individual's inclination towards crime weakens the bonds to society. The more time an individual serves and more crime that he commits, the weaker his connection is to family, the community, employers, and legal economic opportunities (p.160). These two theories support the fact that increase in sentence lengths can cause an ex-felon's to have a higher chance of incarceration than at gaining employment. If an ex-felon is released and cannot find a legal job, they will then resort to doing crime and they will be more knowledgeable because of the knowledge gained while incarcerated. If the individual has no connection to society, family, etc. then they will not care about being re-incarcerated. They have less of a reason to be productive and try to obtain legal employment. Based on this research, it is possible however, that those with longer prison sentences are older when they are released from prison and less likely to be influenced by former friends and thus be more likely to get a job.

## *Religion*

The relationship between religious participation and employment post-prison release has received minimal amount of empirical attention. There has been however, considerable examination of the relationship between participation in religious programs while in prison and recidivism. A study by Johnson (2004) focused on whether religious programs have an effect on recidivism. The Bureau of Justice Statistics website points out that “religious activities attract more participants than any other personal enhancement program offered in prison” (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991). Religion was categorized into two types: organic religion and intentional/ programmatic religion. Religious practices were among the top programs offered in prisons, along with work, education and vocational training. Organic religion examines the relationship between measures of religiosity and measures of deviance. Organic religion is the examination of the influence or impact of religion on an array of social and behavioral outcomes (Johnson, 2004). Intentional/ programmatic religion is the assessment of the effectiveness of faith-based organizations or interventions (p.330). This includes things such as faith-based drug treatment and spiritual restorative justice programs. The difference between the two is that organic religion is practiced on a day to day basis, while intentional religion entails becoming religious or following religion after an event takes place. Both forms of religion show evidence that they decrease crime; faith-based programs have been associated with a lower recidivism rate for ex-convicts. Having religious aftercare programs can be beneficial to helping individuals remain crime free. Johnson (2004), also points out that the parolees who successfully completed parole; religion was a significant factor in gaining and retaining employment. Religious participation can provide both emotional and social support for a person and thus increase opportunities for employment through the religious network. Religion can also provide socialization into work by emphasizing honesty, motivation and hard work. I expect that respondents who participated in religious programs will have a greater chance of obtaining post-prison employment than those who did not participate.

## *Incarceration and Future Employment Earnings*

Another issue relating to serving a prison sentence and employment is how much money is made in post-prison employment. Although this does not directly address the research question, it does deal with a related set of variables, in that people convicted of a crime, even when they are able to get a job, may be paid less than their counterparts. Western, Kling, and Weiman (2001) conducted a meta-analysis to look at the effect that incarceration has on the labor market. They looked at whether or not being incarcerated had any effect on potential earnings of someone that was previously incarcerated. This study examined variables such as age, education, race, prior work history, as well as criminal record, and found that serving prison time can lower the individual’s earnings but not affect whether or not they can get employment. People in white-collar jobs are affected more negatively, because they will have a potential loss anywhere from 10% to 30% (Western, Kling, & Weiman, 2001). They also stated that they could not differentiate the impacts according to racial-ethnic groups. Incarceration does have an effect on whether or not a person will be paid a fair amount of money after incarceration. Former inmates may get employment but may not make enough money to survive. In order to survive, former inmates have to work almost double that of someone that has not been incarcerated; they have to

work more hours and often more jobs in order to maintain for themselves as well as their families.

Western (2002) also examined the impact of wages after incarceration with a life course analysis on whether or not incarceration contributes to the drop in wages after incarceration. This survey was administered to one-quarter of Black non-college incarcerated males, between 1979–1998. Western, (2002) found that the when White, Blacks, and Hispanics were compared using pre-incarceration, post-incarceration, and age, there was only a slight difference in wages. When adding the time served to the model, there was a significant difference between those that had never been incarcerated and those that have. Western states that inmates wage growth is slow and that one day they will get the pay that non-inmate were receiving when they were released, but by the time that happens non-inmates are making much more. While incarceration plays a role in the gap among wages, education is a major factor in this wage gap. Education among Black males during the time of the study was low compared to that of White males. This may be due to the fact that Black males were being incarcerated at much younger ages than their counterparts. Considering that more African Americans were going to prisons instead of schools, the disparity among incarcerated males increased.

## **Hypotheses**

The main function of this research is to examine factors which may influence the likelihood of post-prison employment

I will test the following hypotheses in this research.

1. Inmates that attended church after incarceration are more likely to be employed than inmates that do not. A previous study has shown that ex-inmates that attend religious services are more likely to obtain and maintain employment after incarceration (Johnson, 2004). This is due to the fact that ex-inmates may have morals and values consistent with mainstream society.
2. Race will likely influence employment. The influence of race on employment has been supported by numerous studies. African Americans are less likely to obtain and maintain gainful employment than their White counterparts, adding on a criminal history only intensifies the obstacles faced by this race.
3. Controlling for type of crime committed, those former inmates with higher levels of education will be more likely to get a job than their counterparts. I expect that ex-inmates with higher levels of education will find it easier to obtain employment than those with lower levels of employment. The more time that inmates serve the less likely they are to find employment. Being away from the labor market for extended periods of time can cause the individual to have gaps in work history, lower work ethics, and employers will be less willing to give these individuals employment based on these things.

## **Methods**

The data for this study comes from The Religiousness and Post-Release community Adjustment in the United States, 1990-1998 data set in a study conducted by Melvina T. Sumter (2001). Data were gathered through self-enumerated questionnaires and telephone interviews of

males in 12 prisons in the United States. The official criminal history reports of the males were also used to verify information provided by the respondents. The respondents were given a pre-release questionnaire, and a three-month post-release follow-up phone survey. The response rate is unknown.

### *Study Design*

Sumter (2001) carried out this study by adding official criminal history information to an existing database that was assembled by Clear, Stout, Dammer, Kelly, Shapiro, and Hardyman. Clear et al. (1992) studied the relationship between prisoners' religiousness and adjustment to the correctional setting. Three types of information were gathered by the original research team, through an inmate values and religiousness instrument, a pre-release questionnaire, and a three-month post-release follow-up phone survey. A fourth type of information, official criminal history reports, was added to the original dataset by the principal investigator. The study was based on a quasi-experimental design of two groups of prisoners, a religious group and a non-religious comparison group. In the original data collection, inmates completed a battery of questionnaires about their background characteristics, religious beliefs and activities, and institutional experiences during the last weeks before their release from prison. Within three months after their release, surveys were conducted with inmates who could be reached by telephone. However, the original study contained no measures of post-release criminal behavior. The principal investigator of this study added criminal histories obtained from the Federal Bureau of Investigation for 320 subjects in the original dataset. This dataset also includes a six-year follow-up period, making it possible to assess the relationship between an inmate's religiousness in prison and his post-release community adjustment.

The prisoner values survey collected information on the types of morals they value. An example of this type of question would be whether or not the respondent would do if a friend sold drugs from the cell or if inmates of his race attacked others. The respondents were asked questions about their religious beliefs and practices. The investigators asked whether or not they took part in religious services. The Pre-release questionnaire included what he plans to do as far as employment is concerned, whether or not he would attend church, participate in any types of treatment programs etc. Each inmate was also asked to describe their criminal history and tell investigators if they felt that they could do things as well as others, whether religion was talked about at home, whether they had friends that were religious at home or in jail. The three-month post-release follow-up phone survey collected information on the activities of the inmate after incarceration. The now ex-convict was asked about employment, whether or not they attended church, the types of income that the household was receiving and whether or not they were attending any treatment programs. Official post-release criminal records include information on the offenses the respondent was arrested and incarcerated for, prior arrests and incarcerations, rearrests, outcomes of offenses of rearrests, follow-up period to first rearrest, prison adjustment indicator, self-esteem indicator, time served, and measurements of the respondent's level of religious belief and personal identity.

The sample in the Sumpter (2001) study, were given questions about: involvement with church groups, release status and whether they feel that they can solve the problems that they have. When looking at whether or not they were involved in church groups, there were two categories: Yes (13%), and No (87%). Response categories having to deal with the release status of the inmate was broken down into five categories: on parole (62.1%), on probation (14.2%), supervision (17.7%), house arrest (.9%), and other (5%). There were five categories for when the

individual was asked if they agreed that there was no way that they can solve the problems that they have: strongly disagreed (45.6%), disagree (17.9%), unsure (8.6%), agree (22.1%), and strongly agree (5.8%)

### *Independent and Dependent Variables*

My independent variables are the number of violent crimes committed, total prior conviction, how far the respondent went in school, race, whether or not the respondent was in a relationship, measured as married and cohabitating versus not, and attend religious services since release. The number of violent crimes committed were broken up into three categories: no violent crimes (62.3%), one violent crime (25.6%) and two or three (12.1%). The total number of prior conviction category was broken down into nine categories, 0 prior convictions (51.9%), 1 prior conviction (32.4%), 2 prior convictions (8.3%), 3 prior convictions (4.9%), 4 prior convictions (4.9%), 5 prior convictions (.9%), 7 prior convictions (.3%), 8 prior convictions (.6%), and 11 prior convictions (.3%). The response categories for how far they went in school were placed into eight categories: never went to school (.7%), some grade school (grades 1-8) (7.7%), completed grades school (8.1%), some of high school (31.3%), finished high school or GED (32.6%), some college (16.5%), completed college (2.4%), postgraduate work or degree (.7%) Race was broken down into three categories: white (38.8%), black (50.9%), and other (8.6%). Whether or not the ex-inmate was currently married and cohabitating versus not were placed into two categories: single (74.8%) and married and living together (25.2%). The amount of times the individual attended church was also broken down into two categories: less than once a week (77%), and once a week or more (23%)

My dependent variable is whether or not ex-inmates were employed. When asked if inmate was employed response category is broken up into two categories: yes (37.4%) and no (62.6%)

## **Findings**

Table 1 presents the correlations, mean and standard deviations for the variables in the model. Getting a job upon release, the dependent variable in this analysis, is significantly positively correlated ( $p < .01$ ) with time served, being married, post-prison program participation and attending religious services.

**Table 1.** Correlation Table of the variables in the analysis, N=312.

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Employed (1=yes; 0=no)	Total prior incarceration	Number of violent crimes committed	Time served on this sentence	Number of treatment programs while incarcerated	How far did you go in school	Age	Black	Other	Married/cohabiting versus not	Attending post-prison Treatment Programs	Attended religious service since release			
Employed (1=yes; 0=no)	.3814	.48651	1														
Total prior incarceration	.83	1.306	-.078	1													
Number of violent crimes committed	.5256	.69863	.004	.128	*	1											
Time served on this sentence	2.08	2.762	.104	.145	.291	***	1										
Number of treatment programs while incarcerated	3.1058	1.44069	-.016	.018	.008	.084	1										
How far did you go in school	4.50	1.255	.039	.010	-.095	.004	.164	**	1								
Age	28.55	7.433	.027	.339	***	.116	*	.258	.030	.149	**	1					
Black	.5577	.49746	-.085	-.034	.135	*	.096	-.065	-.165	**	-.043	1					
Other	.0737	.26173	-.070	.000	-.037	-.070	-.080	.024	.014	-.317	***	1					
Married and cohabiting versus not	.2212	.41569	.122	*	.041	-.043	.036	.163	**	.102	-.085	.027	1				
Attending post-prison Treatment Programs	.2212	.41569	.392	***	.000	-.036	-.049	.154	**	.114	*	.033	-.179	**	.027	.032	1
Attended religious services after release	.26	.441	.356	***	-.038	.051	.162	**	.042	.029	.096	.048	-.113	.085	.331	***	1

\*significant at the .05 level

\*\*significant at the .01 level

\*\*\*significant at the .001 level

The findings for the logistic regression analysis of the dependent variable, employed post-prison or not employed post-prison are presented in Table 2. Model 1 presents the crime experience variables. Only one variable significantly influences employment. For each year an inmate spends in prison, they are 1.1 times more likely to get a post-prison job ( $p < .05$ ). Model 2 includes the influence of participation in prison programs which does not have a significant effect upon employment. Years spent in prison continue to be significant ( $p < .05$ ). Model 3 includes demographic characteristics of the inmate. Years served continues to be significant ( $p < .05$ ). The other two variables which are significant are race and marital status. Blacks are 44 percent less likely to get a job after prison as compared to whites ( $p < .05$ ). Married and cohabiting inmates as compared to not married inmates have a 1.8 percent greater chance of getting a job ( $p < .05$ ). Model 4 presents all of the variables in the analysis. Years in prison remains significant ( $p < .05$ ). Marital status is also significant with married respondents 1.9 percent more likely to get a job than their counterparts ( $p < .05$ ). Post-prison release programs also had a significant effect upon employment with those participating in a program having a 6.4 times greater likelihood of getting a job than those not participating in any programs ( $p < .001$ ).

Finally, regularly attending religious services significantly influences employment ( $p < .001$ ). Those who attend services are 3.3 times more likely to be employed than those who do not.

**Table 2.** Logistic regression of control and independent variables on post-prison employment, N=312.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
Total prior incarceration	-.168	.845	-.168	.846	-.207	.813	-.217	.805
Number of violent Crimes	-.063	.939	-.064	.938	-.049	.952	-.065	.937
Time served on this sentence	.093	1.098 *	.095	1.100 *	.104	1.109 *	.110	1.117 *
Number of treatment programs while incarcerated			-.037	.964	-.073	.930	-.183	.833
How far did you go in school					.009	1.009	-.034	.967
Age					.006	1.006	-.003	.997
Black					-.539	.583 *	-.421	.656
Other					-.913	.401	-.891	.410
Married/cohabiting versus not					.615	1.850 *	.647	1.910 *
Attending post-prison Treatment Programs							1.887	6.597 ***
Attended religious services after release							1.176	3.243 ***
Constant	-.514		-.0403	.668	-.281		-.332	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.28		0.28		.077		0.319	

\*significant at the .05 level

\*\*significant at the .01 level

\*\*\*significant at the .001 level

## Discussion

It is important to recognize the barriers and obstacles that an ex-inmate will face upon their release into society. With the incarceration rate being so high, it is inevitable that a great portion of offenders will be released. Upon release, they are expected to become productive members of society. Employment is one of the greatest factors of being productive post-incarceration. In order to find employment, ex-inmates have to deal with the stigma of being incarcerated. These individuals face a variety of obstacles including having to announce to potential employers that they served time, many have limited education, and very little societal support. When determining the factors of whether or not they will recidivate, employment plays a major role.

The predictors examined in this study were age, race education, length of incarceration, and religion. When examining age, my findings show that the older an inmate is when released the more likely the individual is to obtain and maintain employment. This could possibly be because as the inmate matures he begins to value his freedom more and has a higher desire to be a productive citizen and not return to prison. As an inmate gets older, he has a lot more to lose than that of a younger inmate. An older individual may also be able to maintain employment because the employer may feel that he served his sentenced and he is older and more mature and will make better decisions.

The factor of race presented its self in numerous studies. Many of these studies have supported my hypothesis that race does influence employment. Some of the findings in these studies include the fact that a White ex-felon has the same chance of gaining employment as an African American that has never been incarcerated. African Americans were less likely to get call backs from potential employers because of the stigma attached to the image of being African American (Alexander 2010; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Pager 2007; Sumter 2001). Studies have suggested that the media plays a major role in the way that African Americans are perceived and this affects not only potential African American employees that have criminal records but also those that do not. (Pager, 2007) The findings in the current study are consistent with the literature. African Americans are 44 percent less likely to obtain employment when compared to Whites.

Education was not found to be statistically significant in this study. This could be due to the fact that people that have higher education levels return to society and are not able to work in the field in which they are certified. Many states do not allow you to maintain or obtain certain licenses or work at certain jobs if you were convicted of a crime. Those that are allowed to work in their field find it difficult to obtain employment in most cases because they are no longer considered trust-worthy by the people that are in their field. These individuals may obtain employment but it may be a job outside of their field for wages below what they would have acquired, if they were working in their field.

Length of incarceration was found to have a significant effect upon post-prison employment. For every year that an inmate spent in prison, this inmate was 1.1 times more likely to get employment after incarceration. This did not support my hypothesis the more time that inmate serves the less likely they are to find employment. From findings in this study this could be connected to affect of age on employment. Inmates serving longer sentences have a greater likelihood of being older at the time of release than their counterparts. As an inmate gets older, he matures and decides that his freedom and productivity in society is more valuable than the fast rewards that he would obtain from criminal activity. Also, research shows that older people are less likely to commit a crime than younger people (Freeman 2008; Uggen 2008) and that may make the older inmate more attractive to an employer.

Another predictor that was explored was religion. Individuals that participated in and attended religious programs after incarceration had a 6.4 greater likelihood of getting jobs than the individuals that did not attend religious programs. This could be due to the fact that individuals that attended religious services had support from fellow worshipers, or they were able to network with other individuals that were attending these services. This may have given them a greater opportunity to get a job since they knew more people and were considered to be stable due to their religious participation. Also, religious beliefs as a whole are consistent with the norms of overall society and this may increase conformity leading increased job opportunity.

## **Limitations**

One of the major limitations- of my study was - that women were not included in my research. Likewise, the data set that I had access to this was not as current as I would have wanted, from 2001. The focus of this research was to look at employment after incarceration. The questionnaires were only given to male inmates in 12 prisons. This study focused on male incarceration and whether or not religiosity had any effect on their life after prison.

Like many other studies that have been previously done in the criminal justice fields, this study did not include women. If more studies are done with female inmates, it would contribute to the knowledge that we currently have and could also design programs that will not only cater to men but women as well. Information on female ex-convicts would have enhanced this study as it would contribute to the understanding of the patterns and needs of both genders. This study could have compared whether employment is only a problem for males as well as whether females felt that the programs they are offered are beneficial to their integration back into society. This is an area that needs to be looked into because of the increasing number of women that are being incarcerated and the consequent number of children that are affected by the imprisonment of their mothers

The fact that the data set that was used is ten years old, limits the study in some ways... Unfortunately, when looking for data, this study was the only one that was publicly available. While there is up to date data, it is not available to the public because of the sensitive nature of the information and the chance that specific inmates may be able to be identified based on the type of questions included in the survey. This data set also did not have a known response rate which influences whether or not the findings can be generalized to all inmates released from prison

## **Conclusion**

The study findings indicate that the greatest predictor of finding a job after imprisonment is regular religious service attendance and race of the inmate. Although a whole body of research has identified discrimination in the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010), it is clear that post-release discrimination is also prevalent. Researchers should consider ways to lessen the incarceration stigma of being a former inmate with special focus on race. It is important to realize nonetheless, that this is a difficult task because racism is a pervasive part of overall society, especially the criminal justice system.

The Post incarceration religiosity effect holds some promise for policy implications. Encouraging inmates released from prison to attend religious services may reduce the likelihood of recidivism. Religiosity is more than simply attending a church and believing in a higher being. It also represents integration into a group or community and conformity to the norms in particular society. These are factors that would increase the possibility of an employer taking a risk and hiring former inmates.

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