

The Effectiveness of Education Programming in Relation to Recidivism

Rates within Region 5 - Department of Corrections

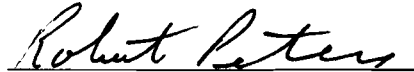
by

Heather Dougherty

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Peters", is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Robert Peters
Research Advisor

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

August, 2006

**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Dougherty, Heather M.
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ABSTRACT

Re-incarceration is a major problem in the corrections system because offenders are being released with inadequate treatment and programs that they need to be successful in the community. Education, including that of the high school equivalency diploma (HSED), is currently one of the most established programs in prisons today.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of inmates leaving prison with an education in relationship to recidivism rates of these offenders. This study will focus primarily on adult, male offenders leaving Wisconsin's prisons and returning to Region 5 in northwestern Wisconsin.

Data was collected during the spring of 2006 from probation and parole agents within Region 5. A data collection tool was sent to each agent who is currently supervising an offender released to that region between January 1, 2002, and May 1,

2004. The data collection tool primarily gathered information about these offenders' education, re-offences, and employment.

Seventy-seven percent of the data collection tools were returned to the researcher. As in previous studies, such as the Three-State Recidivism Study (Smith, Steurer, & Tracy, 2003), this study found that offenders leaving prison with a high school diploma or an HSED were less likely re-offend and more likely to become employed upon release.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout

Menomonie, WI

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background Information

With growing numbers of inmates being released back into society, the issue of prison programming, including that of educational programming, has become an important policy issue. The prison population continues to grow annually, and it is estimated that over 50% of released prisoners each year will return to prison within 3 years (Harlow, 2003).

There has been much discussion in recent years as to the impact of education and the rate of success and decreased recidivism for released prisoners, especially at a time when prisons are becoming more crowded and funding is decreasing. A 2002 Urban Institute study (Lawrence, Mears, Dubin, & Travis, 2002) confirmed that even though the United States has seen a significant growth in prison populations, participation rates and funding for correctional programs have declined. These rates are considerable because education and vocational training can contribute to increased employment and a means of crime control.

There are two main reasons that researchers in correctional education believe prison educational programming can benefit incarcerated criminals and reduce recidivism. Increased cognitive skills leading to changes in cognitive behavior and learning how to live a crimeless life by participating in educational programming aid the efforts of released individuals to find jobs and succeed in society (Bazos & Hausman, 2004). Without an essential education, it is difficult to secure adequate employment. The Bureau of Justice Statistics confirmed that the unemployment rate of high school

educated released inmates is considerably lower and wages are higher than that of released offenders without a high school education (Harlow, 2003).

Comprehensive research has verified that several states such as California, Texas, Ohio, Maryland, and Minnesota have compiled extensive data relating with educational programming in prisons. Texas has consistently analyzed comprehensive data and found education in prisons to be one of the most important programs offered that aided in the reduction of recidivism (Fabelo, 2000). Questions often develop as to whether this conclusion holds true for other states.

Caroline Harlow, a Bureau of Justice Statistician, indicates that over half of Wisconsin inmates read at the eighth-grade level or below and even lower in mathematics (2003). She suggests that this may be due to the fact that 74.5% of the state prison population has not completed high school. This statistic continues to rise as the number of incarcerated individuals rises. Education is a typical program offered to inmates during their sentence, allowing them to complete the education not fulfilled earlier.

High school diplomas not only provide prisoners with the literacy, skills, and knowledge to obtain a credential and secure a job, but the programs also teach socialization and living skills. As James Vacca (2004) concluded in a recent research study, prisoners need skills to write letters of correspondence, fill out forms, read and obtain jobs within the institution, which will further aid in a successful transition upon release. Overall, these skills guide inmates through the necessary transitions needed to return to society's general population.

All of the adult correctional institutions in Wisconsin offer some type of an education program (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2002). For example, Jackson

Correctional Institution, located in northwestern Wisconsin Region 5 is a medium-security, all male facility, which offers the high school equivalency diploma (HSED) program to approximately 300 inmates at any given time throughout the year. Six academic instructors provide instruction year round. Students are enrolled in the basic education classes, followed by the necessary courses of civics, health, and employability to obtain the HSED credential. Individualized instruction is provided according to each student's needs or Program Review Committee (PRC) requirements. The system works as a continuous entry/exit program, allowing students to move throughout the program at an individual pace.

The HSED program has been extremely successful since the opening of Jackson Correctional Institution in the fall of 1996. Approximately 104 inmates graduate from the program each year and are awarded the HSED credential (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2002). However, the question to be explored and answered remains in the correctional educator's mind: "What are the success rates of educated and non-educated prisoners once released into society?"

Statement of the Problem

Although several other states have compiled extensive data, there remains a lack of research on the effectiveness of the HSED education programs within the Wisconsin prison system and the effect that the program has on recidivism. This study will determine the relationship between the attainment of a high school education and the recidivism rates for inmates released from Wisconsin's adult correctional institutions to Region 5.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of inmates leaving prison with an education in relationship to recidivism rates of these offenders. To determine the effectiveness, data from previous educated and non-educated inmates released from Wisconsin's adult correctional institutions into Region 5 will be gathered and evaluated. This study will determine if educational programming reduces recidivism rates in the correctional system. This study will also aid in enhancing education programs already in place within correctional institutions. It will also conclude what services within Region 5's probation and parole may need to be reconsidered.

Research Hypotheses and Questions

1. Literature shows jobs becoming more complex and sophisticated. Also, because jobs are continuing to require more education, research also shows that inmates released from prison who are unable to find employment are most likely to return to lives of crime (Petersilia, 2003). Therefore, the research hypothesis for this study is that inmates released from Wisconsin's prisons with a high school education, HSED, or general education development (GED) certificate are less likely to recidivate than those inmates released without an education.
2. Are inmates leaving prison with a high school diploma more likely to have a job within 6 months of release than those inmates leaving prison without an education?
3. Are the costs to re-incarcerate an individual far greater than the cost to educate an individual in prison?

4. Are there particular education programs, including living skills programs, that prepare inmates more successfully for their return to society than other education programs?

Significance of the Study

1. Despite the fact that the prison population is rising at an alarming rate, education programs within these institutions are decreasing due to several critical factors (Klein, S., Tolbert, M., Bugarin, R., Cataldi, E.F., & Tauschek, G., 2004). The factors may include such issues as funding, availability of resources, greater interest in short-term substance abuse treatment and anger management programs, turnover rate of inmates, and lack of participation among those incarcerated. Previous studies have proven that by eliminating education in prisons because of these and various added reasons, the success rate of released offenders reduces significantly.
2. Education within prisons makes way for more successful individuals who will have a significantly decreased rate of recidivism compared to those individuals without an HSED (Smith, Steurer, & Tracy, 2003). An HSED, furthermore, opens up numerous opportunities for previously as well as currently incarcerated individuals. Additional programming, such as living skills and job preparedness programs, can be implemented and/or reconsidered when considering the programming needs for inmates to be released.
3. Research on the effectiveness of educational programs within Wisconsin Correctional facilities will encourage an increased awareness and attention if these programs are ever at risk of being suspended. State spending and funding of

education programs in correctional institutions remains an important policy issue, just as all education facilities. With research analyzing the benefits to society for sustaining these programs, the programs are less likely to be eliminated in the future.

4. Correctional institutions, such as Jackson Correctional Institution, can use research dealing with the effectiveness of educational programming on recidivism rates in Region 5. Further correctional institutions in the state of Wisconsin, and even elsewhere, may choose to analyze their region's data and survey to revamp the educational programming within their institutions.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

Assumptions and limitations are probable that may limit the results of this research. Depending on the extent, it is expected that these assumptions and limitations will affect the accuracy and totality of this research.

1. Full participation of individuals who were once incarcerated in Wisconsin and released to Region 5 will be a limitation. Without full participation of all past incarcerated individuals, results will be limited and will affect outcomes of the study.
2. Communication to parole agents and other contact persons may be limited because of the high turnover rate in the occupation of these individuals. Also, inmates released without parole agents will not be contacted and questioned as to their whereabouts because of the difficulty in doing so. Because of this, results of the study may be obscured.

3. Another limitation will be that the statistical information provided will be in accordance with one region, such as Region 5 in northwestern Wisconsin. Other regions may have favorable outcomes if researched and analyzed; however, for the purpose of this study only Region 5 will be included. All other regions would require a review on an individual basis.
4. An assumption is that the parole agents contacted will be providing assistance to released inmates in the areas of job placement and re-entry back into society. The results of these offenders may have different outcomes than those released without the supervision of a parole agent.

Definition of Terms

The following are terms used in this study which may already be familiar to the reader, or might in fact, be misinterpreted by the reader. For clarity of understanding, the following terms used within the study are defined.

Incarcerate. “to imprison; jail; to shut up; confine.” (Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 1997, p. 681)

Correctional Institution. Correctional institutions include prisons and youth facilities of the Department of Corrections. They are intended to provide necessary services (housing, food, treatment, education, etc.) to inmates on a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week basis. (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2006).

Recidivism. Policy makers have yet to agree on a uniform definition of recidivism. However, for the purpose of this study the definition used will be criminal acts that result in re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002.).

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the history of correctional education and how the program was initiated in the national prison system. Subsequently, it will provide information regarding current education programs offered within the Department of Corrections – Division of Adult Institutions around the state of Wisconsin and the role of this education within society. Previous studies concerning prison education and recidivism rates will be revealed in relation to probation and parole. Finally the costs to re-incarcerate an individual compared to the cost to educate an individual in prison will be presented and discussed.

History of Correctional Education

The notion of prison, dating back to the fifth century B.C., began as a form of confinement until punishment could be decided upon and served. Later, in ancient Egypt, the thought of work as a form of punishment was initiated. The Book of Genesis discusses how the Hebrew Joseph was ordered to work in a granary for punishment (New American Standard Bible, 1990). Throughout history, there were various forms of work as mean for punishment, including that of workhouses in the 16th century and debtors' prisons in England in the 18th century. The debtors' prisons gave no hope for a prisoner's release unless by repayment of the individual's debt. This concept was brought to the earliest prisons in America, including Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Johnston, 2004).

As prisons developed in America, there were two theories of prison operation: the New York or Auburn model and the Pennsylvania model (Johnston, 2004). The New York model allowed for congregation and interaction between prisoners and staff during meals and work, although silence was enforced. The Pennsylvania model was fashioned

after the prisons in England, including solitary confinement, strict work and discipline, and repentance. It was in the Pennsylvania system that correctional education began. In 1789, William Rogers offered instruction within Walnut Street Jail. Because of concern over riots during this new improvement, the Warden required that guards stand by the class sessions with a loaded cannon aimed directly at the students. Eventually, most states, including Wisconsin, advocated for the Auburn model.

Shortly after becoming a state in 1848, Wisconsin's legislature opened the first prison in Waupun. Inmates were involved in the construction of the facility, in which "instructors" instructed how to cut stone and complete the project (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, n.d.a). This instruction during the first work project of Wisconsin's prisons was the onset of many years of various basic and technical training educational programs throughout the state.

In 1897, when the Green Bay Reformatory opened, Superintendent James E. Heg mandated that inmates complete five hours of productive work for the state, three hours of technical training in which inmates could acquire a trade, one hour of military drill, and one and one-half hours of school where the basics of education could be learned (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, n.d.a). This classroom learning provided for more skilled and social laborers within the prison settings. Considered to be beneficial for the offenders and society, these formal education classes have continued successfully ever since.

Current Education Programs

A variety of education programs exist throughout Wisconsin's prisons within the Department of Corrections today. The most common type of correctional education

programming is that of adult basic education (ABE) (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2002). This program most typically includes inmates who are working toward a HSED, which has come to reinstate the commonly identified general education development (GED) certificate. In Wisconsin the GED is not measured to be equivalent to a high school diploma. The GED is to certify that an individual has only mastered the skills expected of high school graduates. The HSED, however, is comparable to the high school diploma because the Department of Public Instruction awards the credential (Department of Public Instruction, 2005).

Instruction for the HSED credential includes basic level math, reading, writing, science, and social studies; and further, civics, health, and employability. At the end of 2003, 1,157 of Wisconsin's inmates had attained this achievement (NICE, 2003). An HSED credential provides incarcerated individuals numerous opportunities, both within an institution as well as upon release. A study conducted by the Urban Institute summarizes that all individuals surveyed in that particular study identified education as an essential rehabilitation component for prisoners to be released (Lawrence et al., 2002). This finding is due in part to the fact that most inmates have education levels below society's general population.

Prisons consist of the highest disability and illiteracy population, along with the lowest academic skills of the nation's population (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). An offender's work experience and basic skills are typically well below those of the general population. The incomplete education of a typical offender combined with a lack of work experience often makes it difficult for an ex-offender to obtain employment.

Correctional institutions provide education beyond the HSED in order to help prepare these inmates for success when seeking employment.

Many Wisconsin institutions also offer some type of vocational program, accredited by the Wisconsin Technical College System. Programs such as Computer Application Specialist, Food Service, Custodial Service, Automotive Maintenance, and Cabinet-Making among many others are offered to inmates. An HSED is required for admittance to most of these programs. Students who otherwise may never have considered further education have found success in these vocational programs. For the purpose of this study, high school diplomas and HSED programs were the focus; however, post-secondary education was taken into account as well.

Prison educational programs are thought to be a crucial component of re-integrating offenders to the community. In fact, approximately three-fourths of the state and federal incarcerated offenders who held a GED certificate earned it while in prison (Harlow, 2003). Prison may be the offenders' only hope of going to school and earning the diploma. Once released to the community, the support systems and structured routines are typically missing, too often leading the individual back to a life of crime.

Recidivism

Crime rates have been decreasing since 1994, yet prison populations continue to rise. As of June 2002, more than 1.3 million individuals in the United States were in the supervision of a prison system (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Studies have shown that the ascending prison population is due to a revolving door trend in our nation's prison system. More than 95% of offenders return to the community, generally after 2 years of incarceration (Petersilia, 2003). Data released from the Bureau of Justice

Statistics (Harlow, 2003) explains that repeat offender admissions to prison currently surpass new crime admissions. The repeat offender admissions, mostly parole violators, escalated from 27,000 in 1980 to 203,000 in 2000, a 652% increase.

Recidivism of released offenders is due to many causes, which analysts have found to be predictors when analyzing recidivism rates (Smith, et al., 2003). These predictors frequently include prior convictions, age, education, employment, drug use, social atmosphere, and types of supervision. There are countless sources for recidivism, and it seems as though each offender's case and reason is somewhat different, which causes recidivism rates to be complex to analyze.

Carrying out studies regarding recidivism rates is an extensive task because of the numerous differences amongst states' definitions of crime, employment data, sentencing guidelines, and the challenges of obtaining education data from offenders. This is perhaps the explanation for a lack of research and statistics in the areas of correctional education and recidivism rates.

Extensive review of literature has shown education to be beneficial for offenders, both within prison and on the streets (Smith, et al., 2003). Research has also shown that education typically reduces recidivism and promotes success back into society. The largest and most recent study conducted dealing with education and the effects that it has on recidivism rates of individuals released from prisons was that of the Three State Recidivism Study. In 1997, the Correctional Education Association administered a study, researching recidivism rates in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio. The major variable studied was education participation while incarcerated, resulting in a conclusion that correctional education programs reduce recidivism by 29% (Smith, et al., 2003). This

study, released in February 2003, compiled extensive data from probation/parole agents, employment data, and inmates themselves.

Unlike many other studies done on recidivism in the past, the Three-State Recidivism study thoroughly analyzed recidivism rates using many variables (Smith, et al., 2003). The study utilized a quasi-experimental design because of the lack of randomization allowed in criminal justice research. Due to the extensiveness of the data to be collected, researchers chose to generate a release cohort by selecting the entire population of inmates being released within a pre-determined time period. A population of 3,000 offenders was analyzed, 1,000 from each of the participating states. It took about 1 year to gather all data needed for the study. Several databases were created to compile the extensive data, and an assortment of data instruments were used to evaluate that data. However, this study also found recidivism difficult to analyze because of a non-standardized definition and reporting among states (Smith, et al., 2003).

The gathered data conveyed many characteristics of both incarcerated and released prisoners in our society. When questioned about their returns to the community, the prisoners often responded that they were not adequately prepared (Smith, et al., 2003). This under-preparedness frequently stems from a lack of education, employment, family stability, and housing.

Research confirms that a key factor related to recidivism is employment. At their time of incarceration, one-third of all U.S. prisoners were unemployed and only 60% had a high school diploma (Petersilia, 2003). This is striking compared to the 85% of the U.S. adult population that holds a high school diploma. Jobs are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, requiring more education and enhanced communication skills.

Furthermore, employers often hesitate and shy away from hiring ex-cons, fearing the unskilled and untrusting stereotypes of them to be true. In fact, in a recent employer survey in five major U.S. cities, 65% of employers stated that they would not knowingly hire an ex-offender, regardless of their offense and if legally qualified. This then makes it ever so challenging for released offenders to obtain employment.

On the other hand, when ex-offenders do obtain legal employment upon release, those that had a high school diploma tend to earn higher wages than those offenders released without the credential (Smith, et al., 2003). The Three-State Recidivism study further concluded that correctional education participants return to prison at lower rates, commit less serious crimes if they did return to prison, are more positive in compliance with their parole conditions, and have enhanced social skills and behaviors (Smith et al., 2003).

Although offenders without a high school diploma are at a greater risk of recidivism, both them and the offenders with a high school diploma are at high-risk of recidivism based on a selection of risk factors considered in previous research. Because of this, studies such as the Three State Recidivism Study and this one are helpful in determining if education is a program that is beneficial to offer in a correctional setting.

Probation and Parole

Probation and parole, included in the Division of Community Corrections, monitors individuals placed on probation and released from prison on parole or extended supervision. Probation and parole agents supervise offenders in the community, providing them with resources in the area for survival in a law-abiding society. Agents work to strengthen the offenders' families and community relationships, provide them with

treatment programs, and refer them to additional sources of assistance and information. Offenders are held accountable for their actions and behaviors while on probation or parole. The agents can also offer investigative services to the Parole Commission to support sentencing, institutional programming, and planning for parole.

There is often confusion in the difference between probation and parole. Probation and parole agents work with all types of sentences; however, there remains a significant distinction between them. For the purpose of this study, parole and extended supervision sentences will be the focus.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (n.d.b), parole is an early release of an offender after serving part of a prison sentence. The offender is placed back into the community under strict supervision conditions of a parole agent. A violation of the parole conditions can result in a revocation, or withdrawal, from parole and re-imprisonment for the offender. Parole is determined and granted by a Parole Commission through an extensive interview process with the offender.

Sentencing guidelines have changed over the years. Before December 31, 1999, offenders given prison time could be eligible for parole after serving only one-quarter or 6 months of their sentence, whichever is greater (Wisconsin Department of Corrections (n.d.b). This eligibility is dependent on the interview with the Parole Commission and can be deferred for a later time. On the other hand, if the judge had sentenced the offender to prison time without a parole eligibility date, the offender would be required to serve the entire sentence in prison without eligibility of parole.

Parole consideration can be derived from a number of factors brought forth in the interview. Sufficient time spent in prison for the offender's sentence, positive behavior

changes and progress in programming, treatment and education, realistic goals and opportunities for release, and a reduced level of risk to society, among others, are means for parole. Based on these factors, a commissioner makes a decision of a grant for parole of the offender.

Under new truth-in-sentencing laws, any offender being sentenced for more than one year imprisonment after December 31, 1999, will not be eligible for parole (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, n.d.b). The offender is required to serve the entire prison sentence as ruled by the courts, and is not eligible for parole before this sentence is served. After the offender's entire prison sentence is served, he or she must serve a period of extended supervision in the community under supervision of a probation and parole agent. The length of extended supervision must be, by law, at least one-quarter of the time of the offender's prison confinement.

This study will focus primarily on offenders released on parole within Region 5 in northwestern Wisconsin (see map in Appendix A). There are approximately 6,000 offenders on probation and parole in Region 5. Of these individuals, 722 are adult males on parole, extended supervision, or have reached their mandatory release date from prison with supervision. These groups of individuals have served some time in prison because of a felony, and they are now living in the community with a number of challenges to overcome to maintain success.

The Division of Community Corrections lists the most critical success factors to be stable employment, stable residence, alcohol/drug programming, strong connections to family members and others whom will help control the offender's behavior, and cognitive/behavior intervention (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, n.d.b). Without

these factors being attained, offenders are more likely to return to a life of crime and could possibly have their parole revoked. The concentration of this study is in how education is affecting these factors for success. Education can play a vital role in all aspects of success in society, especially when released from prison.

Wisconsin's Region 5 probation and parole division, headquartered in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, consists of 92 probation and parole agents who supervise the extensive number of individuals in the program for that area. The agents meet with offenders regularly and work to monitor the offenders' actions and behaviors in the community. This contact aids the offenders in meeting and developing the critical factors to reintegrate back to the community.

Re-incarcerate vs. Educate

The costs to educate an offender in prison compared to the costs to re-incarcerate an offender are also numbers to be taken into consideration when looking at the effectiveness of educational programming in correctional settings. Correctional educators and government officials continue to face constant inquiry about their value of work with individuals who have committed serious crimes. Some of the general public believes that incarcerated offenders are receiving an unnecessary privilege paid for by taxpayers.

It is estimated that 600 crimes can be prevented for every 1 million dollars spent toward prison education programs (Bazos & Hausman, 2004). Likewise, the public also benefits from prevented crimes and more educated released prisoners to society, providing for safer streets (Smith et al., 2003). So what are the cost comparisons in Wisconsin of maintaining prisons in addition to paying to incarcerate an individual each year and the costs of educating a prisoner in hopes of a decreased recidivism rate?

According to their 2002 annual fiscal report, Wisconsin Department of Corrections administered \$800 million for adults in the department (Kronzer, 2002). This total compiles the monies dispensed for the entire department, not only prisons. During the 2002 fiscal year (July 1, 2001 – June 30, 2002), the average daily population in the adult prison system was 16,994 offenders. During that time, the annual per capita cost for an adult who was incarcerated was \$25,985.04. Between July 1, 2001, and June 30, 2002, just over \$15.0 million was spent on inmate/client education and training. Broken down, this figures to be about \$73.50 per month (\$882.96 per year) that is spent to educate one incarcerated individual in Wisconsin. This figure could vary depending on the type of education or training the offender is involved in. The total funds spent to educate and train inmates seems substantial; however, given the comparison, if projections of recidivism rates decreasing when given more education are accurate, the question remains: Is it worth the extra money to educate and train inmates that some citizens may consider a “privilege”?

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter will discuss how the subjects were selected and a description of the subjects involved in the study. Furthermore, details about the instruments used to collect data, the collection procedures of the data, and data analysis will be included. The conclusion of the chapter will consist of limitations the methodology possibly encountered during the study.

Selection of the Subjects

The Regional Chief of the Division of Community Correction's Region 5 in northwest Wisconsin was initially contacted through the Warden at Jackson Correctional Institution and was asked to participate in the study. The Regional Chief approved the data collection tool for the study prior to disbursement among Region 5 offices.

Of the approximate 6,000 offenders under probation and parole supervision within Region 5, 722 are on parole, extended supervision, or have reached their mandatory release from prison. A causal-comparative design was utilized for the study because the groups used in the research had already been formed according to the variables of interest. It was not known before the start of the study the number of questioned offenders who had a HSED or high school diploma and the number questioned without either of these credentials. The independent variable was an HSED or a high school diploma, and the dependent variable was recidivism rates. For the purpose of this study, 108 offenders were chosen and their parole agents participated in the data collection. The results of this sample can then be generalized, to some extent, to the rest of the population in Region 5.

Because the Bureau of Justice does not allow for complete randomization for security reasons, a release cohort was used. A release cohort means that the individuals selected for the study were those of a group of inmates being released from prison within a particular time frame. For the purpose of this study, the release cohort consisted of offenders released to Wisconsin's Region 5 between January 1, 2002, and May 1, 2004. These dates were chosen because past studies have shown that recidivism of offenders typically occurs 2 to 4 years after being released from prison. The dates used correlate with the time frame from when this study was carried out.

A Department of Correction's database called Corrections Integrated Program Information System (CIPIS) was used to obtain the names, numbers, and agent's names of those offenders applicable to the study. The caseload listings of all of the probation and parole agents were obtained. The offenders' names of those on parole, extended supervision (ES) or mandatory release with supervision were first highlighted to gather accurate population numbers. Those offenders with a release date falling between January 1, 2002, and May 1, 2004, were then highlighted and further used for the study.

Description of the Subjects

The participants of the study were adult male offenders released from the Wisconsin prison system between January 1, 2002, and May 1, 2004. The offenders were currently under the supervision of a probation and parole agent in Region 5. Before the data collection tool was given, demographics other than names, numbers, parole agents, and sentence dates of the offenders were not known.

Instrumentation

A data collection tool was used to perform the research and determine the effectiveness of education in relation to recidivism rates and employment status of inmates released from Wisconsin's prisons to Region 5. A data collection tool was best suited to the nature of the questions for the study. Since an exact study such as this had never been carried out in Region 5, the researcher designed an original collection tool for this particular study. Because it was generated specifically for this study, there were no measures of validity and reliability. The data collection tool was sent to UW-Stout and evaluated by the Institution Review Board (IRB) for approval of face validity and protection of human subjects used in the study. Revisions of the tool were then made accordingly before being sent out by the researcher.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission for the study was sought first from the regional chief, and then from the supervisors of the Region 5 offices. The study took place during the 2006 spring semester. Once permission was granted, the data collection tools (see Appendix B) and cover letters (see Appendix C) were mailed to each Region 5 office on April 17, and distributed to the probation and parole agents of those offenders selected to participate in the study. The offenders' probation and parole agents completed the data collection tools about the offenders. The questions asked were of information that the agent or the offender's file had about the offender, and no contact was made between the researcher and the offenders.

The probation and parole agents were asked to remove the top portion of the data collection tool, providing offenders' names and numbers, prior to mailing them back to

the researcher. This was done in order to maintain confidentiality. The data collection tools were to be mailed back on or before May 17, giving respondents 1 month to complete and return. Self-addressed stamped envelopes were provided to each agent for return. The researcher sent a reminder email one week prior to this deadline to increase the number of responses. Of the 108 data collection tools sent out, 77 were returned to the researcher, yielding a 71.3% return rate.

Data Analysis

After the data collection tools were returned, they were taken to UW-Stout's research department to be compiled into a spreadsheet form for further analysis. The data was analyzed using the computerized statistics program SPSS. The quantitative nature of the categorical (yes or no) dependent variable was measured using percentages. Because the data gathered from the study was nominal and ordinal in nature, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the findings. The analysis of the data was based on percentages of and frequency of responses to the statements. Relationship and association conclusions were drawn from this study.

Limitations

There are several limitations to be mentioned within this study. One limitation is that the instrument has no measure of validity or reliability. In addition, only one region within the Wisconsin Division of Community Corrections was participating in this study. This means that results from this study could be used carefully when analyzing recidivism rates of other regions. However, a thorough study would need to be carried out for each region.

Another limitation of the methodology is in how the sample was selected.

Because the Bureau of Justice does not allow for complete randomization of a sample, a release cohort was used. The release cohort narrowed the sample considerably into a time frame of two and one-half years. Results may have varied if different dates for the release cohort would have been used.

A third limitation is that the amount of time in which offenders took part in education programming while incarcerated is unknown. There are many reasons for recidivism; however, this study can, to some extent, determine the likelihood of offenders with an education not re-offending, regardless of the amount of time spent in such an education program.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of inmates leaving prison with an education in relationship to recidivism rates of those offenders. This chapter will describe the results of the research and study. Subjects for the study were offenders released from Wisconsin prisons on parole in Region 5. A release cohort was used for the study because of the limitations within the Bureau of Justice due to the security concerns involved in random sampling. The release cohort consisted of 108 adult males who were released from a Wisconsin prison to Wisconsin's Region 5 between January 1, 2002, and May 1, 2004. These dates were chosen because as past studies have shown, offenders are most likely to re-offend 2 to 4 years after being released.

The researcher created a data collection tool for the purpose of this particular study. These data collection tools were completed about offenders by the offenders' probation and parole agents and returned to the researcher. Of the 108 data collection tools sent to the respondents, 77 were returned to the researcher, providing a 71.3% return rate. Of the 77 returned, 72 were regarding offenders that were still on the probation and parole agent's caseload. Five of the 77 had been removed from the agent caseloads and were unable to be completed. As a result, a total of 72 data collection tools were completed and were able to be compiled in the following findings.

Findings

The results of the data collection tools provided valuable information about the purpose of the study. The offenders ranged in age from 16 to 66, with an age bracket of 26-33 being the most frequently reported as shown in Table 1. The average time of these offenders' most recent release from prison was 2 years and 6 months.

Table 1

Demographics of age

| Age of Offender | Frequency (N=72) | Valid Percent |
|-----------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 16 or younger | 1 | 1.4% |
| 17-25 | 14 | 19.4% |
| 26-33 | 25 | 34.7% |
| 34-41 | 10 | 13.9% |
| 42-49 | 16 | 22.2% |
| 50-58 | 5 | 6.9% |
| 59-66 | 1 | 1.4% |
| 67 or older | 0 | 0.0% |

Question 3 of the data collection tool asked respondents if the offender holds a high school diploma or HSED and, if yes, where it was received. Sixty-nine of the 72 respondents indicated a yes or no answer for this question. Nineteen (27.5%) of the 69 offenders involved in the study did not have a high school diploma or the equivalent. Fifty (72.5%) did have their high school diploma or an HSED.

The 50 respondents who answered yes to question number three also provided information about where the high school diploma or HSED was received. Table 2 reveals where the offenders received these diplomas. The 8 respondents who reported “Other” specified that the offender received his high school diploma or HSED in an alternative school, juvenile detention center, or a technical college testing center.

Table 2

Where did the offender receive his high school diploma or HSED?

| Facility | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| | (N=50) | |
| Jail | 2 | 4% |
| Prison | 15 | 30% |
| High School | 25 | 50% |
| Other | 8 | 16% |

Question 4 asked respondents if the offender holds any other technical or college degrees and/or certifications. Of the 68 responses to this question, 55 respondents (80.9%) answered “no.” Thirteen respondents (19.1%) answered “yes.” Of these “yes” responses to question 4, 5 (41.7%) reported that the degree and/or certification was received while in prison. Six (50%) of the 12 were obtained outside of prison. One respondent indicated that the offender completed one certification/degree in prison and one certification/degree outside of prison. Another respondent did not answer this portion of the question. When asked what the degree or certification was in, responses included: small engine repair, masonry, associate degree in business, heating/ventilation, welding, medical corpsman/technician, machinist, electronics, culinary arts, and shingling.

Question 5 of the data collection tool asked the probation and parole agents to report on a number of current demographics about the offender on their caseload being studied, which are broken down in Table 3. These demographics include employment, further education, and re-offenses or violations of parole. The responses concluded that

43 (59.7%) of the offenders were currently employed full-time and 7 (9.7%) were currently employed part-time, approximately 30 hours per week. The type of work that these offenders were employed in was most commonly in entry-level positions. Frequent responses included telemarketing, factory work, construction, laborer, lumber sales, truck driving, mechanic, inventory checker, grocery store, farming, welder, and restaurant employee.

A cross-tabulation was completed using the variables of offenders with and without a high school diploma or HSED and full time employment status. Of the 50 offenders who had a high school diploma or HSED, 36 (72%) were employed full time. Of the 19 offenders who did not have a high school diploma or HSED, only 6 (31.6%) had a full-time job.

The data collection tool also asked how many months after the offender's release that he received his job. The time ranged from immediately upon release to 2 years and 2 months after release. Of the 40 respondents that answered this question, 14 indicated the offender being employed 1 month after release.

A cross-tabulation was completed using the variables of offenders with and without a high school diploma or HSED and the length of time to employment. Thirty-one of the 40 offenders had a high school diploma, and 9 did not. Of these 31 individuals, the average length of time to employment was 4.33 months. Of the 9 offenders that did not have a high school diploma, the average length of time to employment was 7.69 months. It was also found that of the 50 offenders who had a high school diploma or HSED, 8 (16%) had been terminated from a job since release from prison. In contrast, of

the 19 offenders who did not have a high school diploma or HSED, 4 (21.1%) had been terminated from a job since being released from prison.

When asked about the number of times the offender had re-offended or violated parole since their FIRST prison incarceration, the responses ranged from 1 offense to many offenses. As shown in Table 3, 27 reported having re-offended or violated parole.

Table 3

Current demographics of the offender: (check ALL that apply)

| Demographic | Frequency (N=72) | Valid Percent |
|--|---------------------|---------------|
| Employed full-time | 43 | 59.7% |
| Employed part-time | 7 | 9.7% |
| Furthering Education | 3 | 4.2% |
| Unemployed, but seeking employment | 6 | 8.3% |
| Unemployed, and not seeking employment | 6 | 8.3% |
| Has left a job since release from prison | 13 | 18.1% |
| Has been terminated from a job since release from prison | 12 | 16.7% |
| Has re-offended or violated parole since being released from FIRST prison incarceration | 27 | 37.5% |

Only 21 of the 27 respondents indicated numbers for re-offenses of violations of parole as indicated in Table 4. The majority (52.4%) of the offenders had re-offended or violated parole two to three times after their first prison incarceration. The 6 who did not

respond numerically answered in the following manner: “many times,” “several,” or left blank. A cross-tabulation was also completed using the variables of offenders with and without a high school diploma or HSED and the offender status of re-offenses and violations of parole. Of the 50 offenders who reported having a high school diploma or HSED, 30% have re-offended. Meanwhile, of the 19 offenders reported not having a high school diploma or HSED, 52.6% have re-offended.

Table 4

Number of times re-offended or violated parole

| Number of times | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|-----------------|-----------|---------------|
| | (N=21) | |
| 1 | 3 | 14.3% |
| 2 | 6 | 28.6% |
| 3 | 5 | 23.8% |
| 4 | 1 | 4.8% |
| 5 | 1 | 4.8% |
| 6 | 2 | 9.5% |
| 7 | 2 | 9.5% |
| 10 | 1 | 4.8% |

Question 6 of the data collection tool asked probation and parole agents to indicate what they believed to be the THREE most important skills that would benefit offenders the most before being released from prison. The three most common responses were living skills, vocational programs, and enhanced programming in the areas of

Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA), Sexual Offender Treatment (SOT), and Anger Management programs. Seventy-five percent of the respondents reported that enhanced programming would benefit offenders the most. Vocational programming was the second most common answer with 63.9% responses. Likewise, 61.1% reported living skills as being a great benefit to offenders coming out of prison. Table 5 indicates the responses received for question 6 of the data collection tool.

Table 5

Indicate what you believe to be the THREE most important skills that would benefit offenders the most when being released from prison: (check three)

| Skill | Frequency (N=72) | Percentage |
|---|---------------------|------------|
| Communication/speech skills | 12 | 16.7% |
| Interview/job skills | 36 | 50% |
| Living skills (ex. finding an apartment, using a bank account, doing laundry, etc.) | 44 | 61.1% |
| Vocational programs (ex. those provided by a technical college) | 46 | 63.9% |
| Enhanced programming (ex. AODA, SOT, Anger Management, etc.) | 54 | 75% |
| Computer classes | 3 | 4.2% |
| Parenting classes | 6 | 8.3% |
| Other | 10 | 13.9% |

Question 7 of the data collection tool asked probation and parole agents for any additional comments regarding the offender's education and employment skills. Several of the common responses are listed in Table 6. Further comments can be found in Appendix D.

Table 6

Probation/parole agents' comments regarding the offenders' education and employment skills

- "Has had many jobs; hasn't kept due to personal problems (i.e. lying, not at work on timely basis, etc.)"
 - "The clients [offenders] usually work low paying, dead-end jobs and cannot afford to live so get frustrated and either go back to using, selling drugs, or other crimes."
 - "There also are no people to help these clients work out issues (i.e. the child support), which frustrates them and makes them more prone to give up."
 - "Offenders, in general, should be made to take programming in institutions, but are not."
 - "Any information [given to offenders] related to relationship issues would be helpful."
 - "This client did not work for a years for fear of interacting with others; finally got a job when assisted by agent, but he was quite scared. He now is doing great."
 - "Education and employment skills play a significant role in an offender having a positive and successful adjustment on supervision."
-

Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter will summarize and discuss the results of this study.

Recommendations related to this study regarding education and recidivism, as well as employment of offenders will also be presented and discussed.

Summary and Results

Recidivism continues to be a constant concern throughout the nation. Reasons for re-incarceration result from a variety of sources. When inmates are released from prison and return to the community, there are many challenges and barriers to overcome. The faster and more easily an offender can overcome these challenges and barriers, the more likely they will become successful individuals in their community. Other states have compiled extensive data; however, there remains a lack of research on the effectiveness of the HSED education programs within the Wisconsin prison system and the effect that the program has on recidivism. This study determined the relationship between the attainment of a high school education and the recidivism rates for inmates released from Wisconsin's adult correctional institutions to Region 5.

It is believed and supported by research that stable employment once offenders are released encourages them to lead a crime-free life and further supports positive changes in attitude and behavior of the individual. In order to gain more in employment, one must have the proper education to be successful. A high school diploma or an HSED can regularly be the "key" to success for released offenders. This particular study researched the impact that education of offenders had on recidivism rates, and further on their productive employment within Region 5.

The findings of this study complement numerous past studies of education and its effects on recidivism. On a much smaller scale than the Three-State Recidivism Study (Smith et al., 2003), this study also found that those offenders who have a high school diploma or HSED are less likely to re-offend than those offenders without that education. Likewise, this study also found that the offenders with an education are more likely to obtain employment 3.4 months sooner than those being released without a high school diploma or HSED, within 6 months. The most typical kinds of jobs were those in entry-level positions.

The research involved in this study further concluded that the cost to re-incarcerate an individual is far greater than the cost to educate that same individual in prison. It was found that it costs approximately \$900 per year, on average, to educate an offender in prison. This figure will change depending on the type of education program and number of classes an offender is involved in. This amount is significantly lower than the approximate \$26,000 per year it cost in 2002 to keep an offender in prison. The savings analysis, combined with the results of numerous other studies, creates a solid rationale for education in prison.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be affirmed by the researcher that could possibly aid in decreased recidivism. Recidivism affects more than the offenders themselves. The entire population, in some way, sees the consequences of offenders returning to prison time and time again. Whether it is in paying taxes to compensate for incarcerations, being victims of crime, or seeing a family member in trouble, the population as a whole can gain from the rehabilitation of offenders.

After analyzing the comments from the respondents on the data collection tools, it is reasonably evident that increased education programming is vital; especially in the three areas of interview/job skills, basic living skills, more vocational programs and communication/speech skills. These classes will notably aid offenders before being released from prison. The already established HSED program is a must to continue offering in correctional settings. This diploma is often times what allows an offender to get a job. The other skills mentioned are what it takes the same individual to maintain the job. The probation and parole agents questioned explained the importance of teaching offenders how to obtain and maintain a job with the limited skills that they have. All of these skills combined provide for a more effective transition to the community for offenders and safer streets for society.

In addition, fundamental motivation classes or seminars would be highly valuable in helping offenders succeed once released. "It is important to address changes in motivation and lifestyle away from criminal activity to positive engagement in the community" (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001, 32). Often upon release, offenders lose the motivation and basic communication system that an individual commonly desires and requires to change. The probation and parole agents involved in this study regularly stated that the offenders who quit jobs or were terminated from a job typically did so because of their lack of skills, or primarily because of their lack of motivation. This lack of motivation not only affects the individual's job performance, but it also influences his social well-being and behaviors. This, in turn, causes a struggle for the individual to adapt successfully back into the community. Motivation classes would allow offenders to restore self-respect and increase the goal to change.

Enhanced programming, such as Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA), Sexual Offender Treatment (SOT), and Anger Management programs were the most commonly checked important skill that probation and parole agents felt would benefit offenders the most prior to being released to the community. Seventy-five percent of the 72 responses received back ranked enhanced programming in the top three skills. Accompanying these programs also needs to be additional support upon release for the offenders.

Another recommendation comes from the comments that several probation and parole agents mentioned when completing the data collection tools. If society wants to change the attitude of crime and incarceration of individuals, a difference ought to be made early in an individual's life. Discussion about the importance of education, effects of crime, and an awareness of outcomes of being incarcerated should be included in high school, middle school, and even elementary school lessons. If such a discussion or program even changed the attitudes of one to five students in a school, the difference would be great enough to sustain such a program. Past studies have shown that lives of crime frequently begin much earlier than adulthood, and sometimes before the high school years. This means that a highly effective time to reach out to those individuals would be in their early years of education.

Further research should be done with a broader sample to get a more representative evaluation of the effectiveness of education programming on recidivism rates. The findings from a broader sample could then be used more effectively to make further recommendations and changes to those already in place and those mentioned in this study.

The same offenders used in this study could also be surveyed again in 1 to 2 years about the status of their employment and re-offenses. Since there are numerous reasons for re-offending, it will always be difficult to determine the complete accuracy of the impact of education on recidivism. However, a general conclusion can typically be drawn from the data collected. The conclusion is that education is especially effective in reducing recidivism rates of released offenders and ought to be supported and maintained in correctional facilities.

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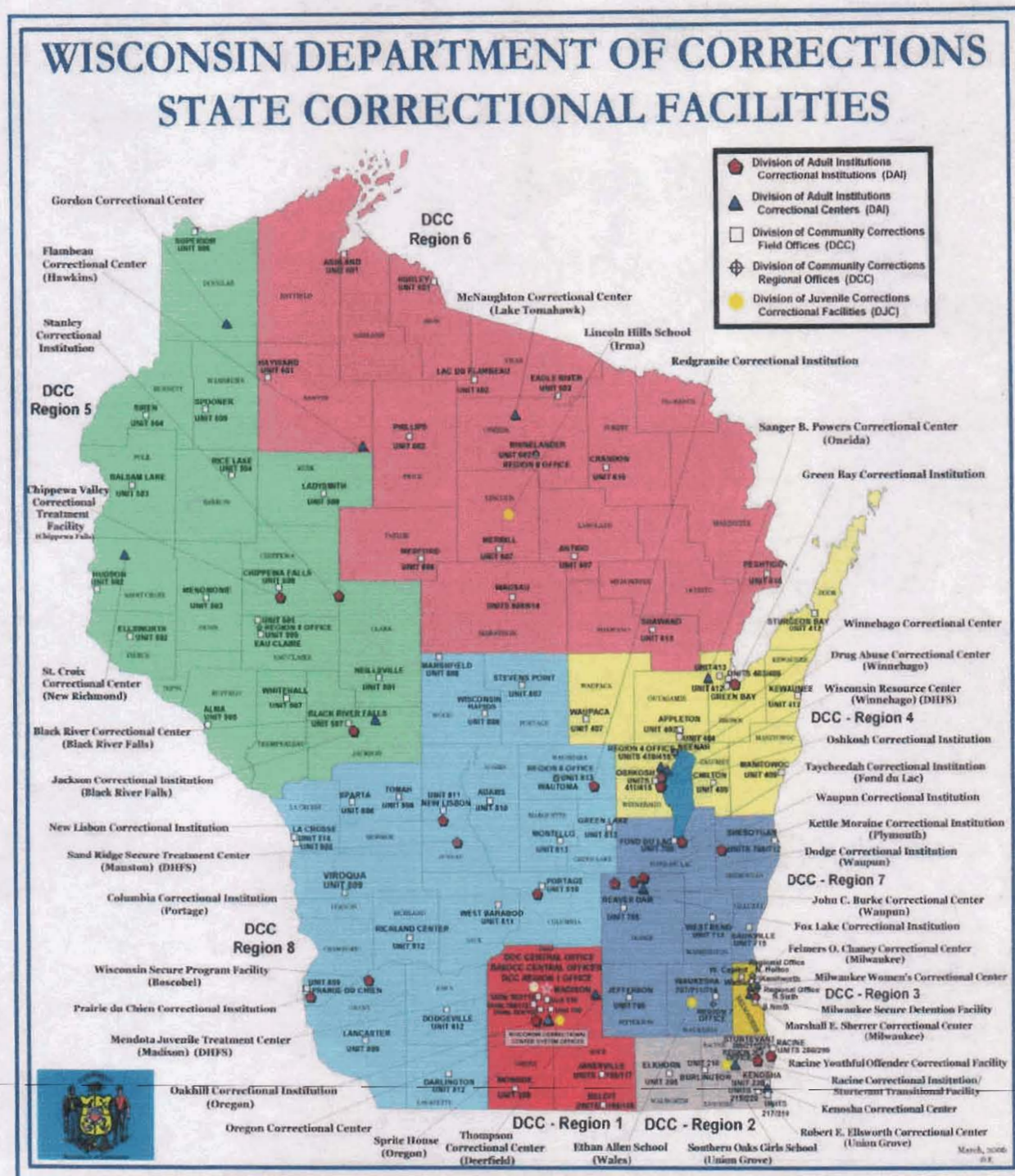
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Appendix A: Map of Wisconsin Region 5



Source: Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Appendix B: Data Collection Tool

Offender Name: _____ Number: _____

(Agent: please remove the offender's name and number prior to sending back to researcher to maintain confidentiality)

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Check here if this offender is no longer on your caseload: _____

Reason: _____

(*please complete the questionnaire to the best of your ability)

1. Age of offender: (check one)

☐ 16 or younger ☐ 26-33 ☐ 42-49 ☐ 59-66
☐ 17-25 ☐ 34-41 ☐ 50-58 ☐ 67 or older

2. How long ago was the offender's most recent release from prison: years ____ months ____

3. Does the offender hold a high school diploma or HSED (High School Equivalency

Diploma)? (check one)

☐ No – skip to question #4
☐ Yes – If yes, where did the offender receive his high school diploma or HSED?
 ☐ Jail
 ☐ Prison
 ☐ High School
 ☐ Other (specify) _____

4. Does the offender hold any other technical or college degrees and/or certifications?

☐ No – skip to question #5
☐ Yes – If yes, what is the degree and/or certification?

Degree or Certification: _____

Was the degree and/or certification received while in prison?

☐ yes ☐ no

5. Currently the offender is: (check ALL that apply)

☐ employed full time – # of hours/week: ____ type of work: _____
☐ employed part-time – # of hours/week: ____ type of work: _____
☐ furthering education – in what trade? _____

Please continue on other side...

- ☐ unemployed, but seeking employment
- ☐ unemployed, and not seeking employment
- ☐ has left a job since release from prison
- ☐ has been terminated from a job since release from prison
- ☐ has re-offended or violated parole since being released from FIRST prison incarceration –
- # of times re-offended/violated parole since FIRST prison incarceration _____

If the offender is currently employed, approximately how many months after his release did he receive the job? _____ months

6. Please indicate what you believe to be the **THREE** most important skills that would benefit offenders the most when being released from prison: (check three)

- ☐ communication/speech skills
- ☐ interview/job skills
- ☐ living skills (ex. finding an apartment, using a bank acct., doing laundry, etc.)
- ☐ vocational programs (for example, those provided by a technical college)
- ☐ enhanced programming (ex. AODA, SOT, Anger Management, etc.)
- ☐ computer classes
- ☐ parenting classes
- ☐ other – please specify: _____

7). Additional comments regarding the offender's education and employment skills:

Please return to the sender in the enclosed, self-addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C: Cover Letter to Probation and Parole Agents

April 11, 2006

Dear Probation/Parole Agent,

I am currently a teacher at Jackson Correctional Institution (JCI) in Black River Falls. I am also pursuing my Master's degree from UW-Stout and am in the process of writing my research thesis. Warden Hepp at JCI suggested that I research the effects that education has on offenders, and in doing so hopefully uncover particular programs that would be especially helpful to offenders upon release from prison. I met with both Warden Hepp and Larry Liegel of Eau Claire to discuss the methodology of the study, and it was recommended that I send a data collection tool to the probation and parole agents in Region 5.

The probation/parole agents' caseload listings were retrieved and narrowed. The offenders were selected using several criteria, such as male, release from prison in the last 2-4 years (parole, extended supervision, MR), and within the state of Wisconsin. Attached you will find a questionnaire/s to complete about the offender/s on your listing matching this criteria. Offenders' names will not be associated with the study in any way. Larry Liegel and the Institutional Review Board at UW-Stout have approved the study in order to maintain confidentiality.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in the study as it will benefit both you and I in the future as we continue to work together to aid in the release of offenders to the community. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is included for the return of the questionnaires. **Please return by May 17th**. Thank you in advance for your participation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Heather Dougherty
Email: Heather.Dougherty@doc.state.wi.us
Phone: (715) 579-9155

Appendix D: Comments of Probation and Parole Agents

- “All his trouble related to his inability to stay sober (alcohol); he’s now sober.”
- “Exceptionally high I.Q., Business Professional of America (BPA) member through WI Technical College, going to nationals, placed 1st numerous times at state this year!”
- “His employment history has stabilized since being placed on supervision. His family became important to him and he was tired of getting in trouble with the law.”
- “I believe the offender’s motivation is the most important factor.”
- “This offender is doing very well. He has made positive adjustments in his life. He wants to remain crime free.”
- “He violated his parole just one week after being released. He cannot hold a job due to his continuous drug use.”
- “This offender has been incarcerated for many years, over much of his adult life. He is a listless, unmotivated individual who is content to “just get by”. Although employed now, doesn’t want to work.”
- “He is a skilled machinist and that skill aided him in obtaining employment upon release. He is also a very skilled carpenter/cabinet maker and is now selling picture frames and doing remodeling projects for additional income. He has purchased numerous new tools. He is probably one of the most skilled carpenters I have ever seen, and his projects give him a sense of pride and a reason to stay out of trouble.”
[He received his certificate as a machinist in prison]
- “CIP (Cognitive Intervention Program) did great things for him.”

- “This client receives payment from the St. Croix Chippewa Tribe each month (per capita); therefore, employment is not very high on his list of things to accomplish.”
- “I feel that this offender would not have been able to obtain employment as easily without HSED completion in prison.”
- “Many offenders being released have no family to help them. Thus, if they have not been employed within prison, they have no money. With felonies on their records and no job skills it is very difficult to obtain employment. Thus, no money, no skills, no job – terrible transition into the community.”
- “Offender had the skills to find a job; however, he lacked the determination to stay out of trouble.”
- “His skills were very saleable at time of parole and he was motivated to make some positive life changes.”
- “High school grad with experience in cooking. Found employment immediately following release from prison, but due to long hours and stress, began using drugs again. Quit work to avoid environment and accompanying stress. Attending outpatient AODA counseling and looking for work. In this instance, AODA is primary skill for success.
- “Has adequate education, but is currently attending college to improve employability.”
- “Lack of effort with regards to improving their overall lifestyle is always a major issue. The bottom line is that most offenders are not honest, responsible, or accountable. They see themselves as victims.”
- “Considering today’s job market, or lack thereof, employers will not even consider anyone who does not at least have a GED. An offender with a GED or higher, coupled with interview skills, greatly increases the likelihood of obtaining employment.”

- “This offender has never had problems with finding gainful employment due to his welding skills. His biggest problem is his alcoholism.”
- “This offender has a low skill level and is working towards obtaining his HSED. This may be too difficult for him to achieve. Despite this, he is usually employed at a minimum wage job (ex. farmhand, fast food worker, etc). A stable residence to place offenders upon release with little to no waiting list would be beneficial.”
- “He was able to get on Social Security Disability due to his bipolar disorder. This is his source of income. He takes several anti-psychotic medications and is not capable of working at this time. It is unlikely that his condition will improve. On the positive side, I have seen only one violation of the rules (drinking) since his release from prison.”
- “The new trend is to collect Social Security and work for cash. Often there is little or no motivation to work.”