



Research at a glance

Offender Perceptions On The Value Of Employment

KEY WORDS: *Employment programs, Offender perceptions, Correctional interventions*

Why we did this study

Offenders who obtain and maintain employment generally have lower rates of recidivism. As a result, preparing offenders for the workplace is an important need to address prior to their release to the community; especially given the histories of employment instability of the individuals entering the federal correctional system. It has been reported that 70% of offenders coming into federal institutions have an unstable work history at admission, 60% or more have no trade or skills knowledge, and 70% have not completed high school.

Despite the importance of employment in reducing recidivism, there is a gap in our knowledge about offender perceptions toward employment and how they weigh the costs and benefits of working as well as engaging in crime. Better understanding these values will enable the Service to develop interventions that better respond to these needs.

What we did

This study examined offender perspectives regarding the perceived value of employment and crime. Results are presented for 294 male and 14 female federal offenders who had returned to the community. Offenders completed two questionnaires: three to six weeks following release, and after they had lived in the community for approximately six months.

What we found

Financial security and material gain were the two most commonly reported advantages to working; however benefits such as self-development, personal satisfaction and wanting to provide for family and friends suggest the value assigned to employment is not entirely extrinsic. Respondents most often reported that insufficient leisure and recreation time and the structure and/or schedule of the job were disadvantages of employment. In addition, offenders also expressed apprehension over the possibility of becoming involved in conflicts with co-workers and their employers.

The majority of offenders did not assign a positive value to committing crimes; however the common advantages

listed by those who did respond to these questions identified the appeal of quick and easy money without the responsibility of working. By contrast, the most often reported disadvantages to engaging in crime were being incarcerated and lost time.

Analyses of the responses to the questionnaires across the two time periods showed that offender perceptions about the value of employment and crime were generally consistent over time.

What it means

In order to develop correctional programs that best respond to the needs of offenders, it is important that we are aware of their perceptions and values. The attitudes toward employment and crime identified by the participants in this study show that most of their perceptions are fairly conventional. In order to increase the likelihood of obtaining and keeping a job, correctional interventions might address issues that offenders identified as challenges, such as taking direction from employers, establishing positive relationships with co-workers and working toward a healthy work and life balance.

For more information

Scott, T, & Gillis, C. (2011) *Offender perceptions on the value of employment*. Research Report R-243. Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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