Investment in Human Capital During Incarceration and Employment Prospects of Prisoners

Margaret Giles
Faculty of Business and Law
Edith Cowan University
and
Anh T. Le
Business School
The University of Western Australia

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Outline of paper

• Literature
• Data collection
• Summary statistics
• Multivariate results
  – Human capital improvement for investment or consumption
  – Expectations of labour market activity after prison
• Conclusions
Literature

• Crime incidence and recidivism are inversely related to educational attainment and employment (Kling and Kruger 2001, Chavez and Dawe 2007).

• Work and/or study to pass the time (Cook 1990) or to improve employability skills (ANTA 2001).
Data collection

• 2003 survey of five adult public prisons within metropolitan Perth, Western Australia.
  – Female (n = 2) and Male (n = 3) prisons.
  – Minimum, medium and maximum security.
• Face-to-face interviews with 453 sentenced prisoners, representing an overall response rate of 50 percent.
• Different sampling at each prison for security and size reasons.
Demographic characteristics

- Over half (52.1 percent) were aged 26 to 40 years with youngest 18 years and oldest 86 years, **median age of 32 years**.

- Schooling:
  - Two in three had finished school at age 10 or earlier;
  - one in four had finished year 11 or 12 or equivalent;
  - about one in twenty-five had completed undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate studies.

- **21 percent** of the sample were **indigenous** although 35 percent of the (then) prison population were indigenous.
Sentence characteristics

• The modal category of sentence length is 13 – 60 months.
• One in five had sentences under 1 year.
• Three in ten had sentences between 5 and 15 years.
• Over half had previous prison sentences.
• Three in ten had offences against people (e.g. grievous bodily harm); 17 percent had drug offences; 35 percent had property offences.
Study in prison

• Training – anything vocational and technical (VET) including short courses (e.g. forklift driving) or cooking (e.g. Certificate IV).
• Education – school (e.g. year 11 and 12) or university level subjects or courses.
• Other (e.g. anger management).
• Some were doing both education and training subjects or courses; some were doing neither.
Who was studying, by time left of sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Left</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years or less</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5 years</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>324 (100.0)</td>
<td>119 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Future job expectations, by type of prison activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prison activity</th>
<th>No work on release (i) (%)</th>
<th>Work on release (ii) (%)</th>
<th>Better job (iii) (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Multivariate analysis – models

1. Factors affecting whether or not prisoners studied
2. Factors affecting whether or not prisoners participated in Education
3. Factors affecting whether or not prisoners participated in Training
4. Factors affecting job expectations
5. Factors affecting expecting to find a job
6. Factors affecting expecting to find a better job
Factors affecting all study

• Prisoners who are near the end of their prison sentence (two years or less) are more likely to study
  – the more optimistic they are
  – if they intent to start a new job

• Prisoners who are within the final 3 to 5 years of their sentence are more likely to study
  – if they are female
  – the shorter time they have already spent in prison

• Prisoners who have more than 5 more years of their sentence left are more likely to study
  – if their offences are not drug or economic-related
  – if they have already completed some training subjects or courses
Factors affecting education only

- Prisoners who have more than 5 more years of their sentence left are more likely to undertake education subjects or courses:
  - if they are female.
  - if they don’t plan to return to their old job.
  - if they are at a minimum security prison.
  - if their offences are not drug or economic-related.
  - if they have already completed some training subjects or courses.

- Interpretation: prisoners with more than five years to go on their sentence see education as a consumption activity so will undertake a mix of training (vocationally oriented) and education (broader learning) courses.
Factors affecting training only

• Prisoners are more likely to undertake training courses:
  – if they intend to start a new job or look for a better job after release.

• Interpretation: prisoners who have a clear intention of re-entering the labour market when they finish their sentence, use training to improve their labour market potential.
Potential labour market outcomes

• Expecting to find any job or a better job is less likely
  – for males
  – as age increases
  – if offences were drug or economic-related

• Expecting to find a job is more likely
  – if any training courses have been completed (excluding those who had managerial, professional or paraprofessional occupations prior to incarceration)
  – if any education courses have been completed
  – if they have worked in prison industries
Conclusions and further research

• Influences on decisions to participate in education are different to influences on the decision to participate in training

• How much longer they have to serve influences prisoners’ decisions to study

• Prisoners are investing in human capital (needs further data from the labour market experiences of ex-prisoners)
Challenges

– Global economic crisis, higher unemployment rates, a buyer’s labour market

– Focus on efficiency rather than equity improvements in VET delivery

“... there is a risk that publicly funded VET markets will become increasingly inaccessible and inequitable for ... disadvantaged groups” (Anderson 2006)