

**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA**  
**Department of Corrections**  
**Office of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants**  
Phone: (717) 731-7149

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**SUBJECT:**     *Research in Review*

**TO:**           Executive Staff  
                  Superintendents  
                  Other Readers



**FROM:**       Gary Zajac, Ph.D.  
                  Chief of Research and Evaluation



Kristofer Bret Bucklen  
Senior Research and Evaluation Analyst

Enclosed please find Volume 9, Number 3 of *Research in Review* (RIR). This issue presents reviews dealing with topics including offense specialization of sex offenders, post-release impacts of prison industry programs and the Urban Institute's Cleveland reentry study. The first review, on sex offender specialization, was prepared by PRSG's Dr. Michael Antonio. The other two reviews, on a recent NIJ-funded evaluation of the Prison Industries Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP), and on the reentry experiences of released prisoners in Cleveland, Ohio, were prepared by PRSG's Jennifer Pawling. We welcome their contributions to RIR and look forward to their continued participation in RIR.

The piece on the PIECP program, although not drawn from a peer-reviewed journal, warranted inclusion in RIR as it is a very recent example of federally funded research into prison industries job preparation programs. Such programs have received relatively less attention in the research literature than some other types of offender intervention, such as drug treatment. Post-release employment is recognized as a factor in successful reentry, both in national research and in studies conducted within the PADO. We at RIR thought it valuable to focus some attention on a new study that looks specifically at the contribution that prison industries programs make to desistance and successful offender rehabilitation. The full report is available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. The Cleveland reentry piece bears some parallels to our own ongoing parole study, so we thought it worth bringing to your attention. The piece on sex offender specialization touches upon a topic of current public policy interest, both in Pennsylvania and nationally.

Upcoming issues of Volume 9 will continue to present findings from the ongoing study of parole violators and parole successes conducted by Bret Bucklen. RIR will also continue with article reviews and briefing papers on topics relevant to corrections, as well as discussing findings from PADO evaluation studies as they are completed.

As always, we welcome your feedback on RIR. We also welcome your suggestions for specific topical areas for future issues. While we cannot promise that we can produce an issue in response to all suggestions offered, we are very much interested in knowing what questions and topics are most interesting to our readers.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in *Research in Review*.

# Research in Review

Office of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants

Editors: Gary Zajac and Kristofer Bret Bucklen (717)731-7149

## *Summary and Major Findings of Articles Reviewed*

Terance D. Miethe, et al. 2006. "Specialization and Persistence in the Arrest Histories of Sex Offenders: A Comparative Analysis of Alternative Measures and Offense Types." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 43(3), 204-229. Page 2

This study examined the level of specialization and persistence among individuals imprisoned for sex offenses. Results uncovered from multiple measures indicated that sex offenders had lower levels of specialization and persistence compared to offenders who committed other types of crime. These findings call into question the appropriateness of current law and policies that were created to manage and deter sex offenders.

Cindy J. Smith, et al. 2006. *Correctional Industries Preparing Inmates for Reentry: Recidivism & Post Release Employment*. Washington, DC: Report to the National Institute of Justice. NCJRS 214608. Page 3

This NIJ-funded study examines the impact of prison industries employment on post-release recidivism and employment outcomes in five states. This research finds that inmates participating in the Prison Industries Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) had notably better employment outcomes than inmates participating in traditional prison industries or not participating in prison industries at all. Impacts of PIECP on recidivism were less marked.

Christy A. Visher, et al. 2006. *Cleveland Prisoners' Experiences Returning Home*. Page 7  
Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

This report presents findings from a study of prisoners' reentry experiences in Ohio. Similarities and differences are noted with a comparable study done in Pennsylvania by PRSG. In both studies, family support and substance use emerged as key variables. Both studies found some degree of unrealistic expectations by released offenders. Employment seemed to be somewhat more of a problem for the offenders in Ohio than those in Pennsylvania.

Terance D. Miethe, Jodi Olson and Ojmarrh Mitchell. 2006. "Specialization and Persistence in the Arrest Histories of Sex Offenders: A Comparative Analysis of Alternative Measures and Offense Types." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 43(3), 204-229.

A highly publicized and emotional debate currently wages among the media, criminal justice researchers and practitioners, and politicians about the true nature of sex offenders. A common belief is that sex offenders will repeatedly commit the same offense unless arrested or controlled, including being tracked or monitored. Current public policy initiatives, such as Megan's Law, were developed in reaction to these beliefs. Recent studies that examined the arrest histories of sex offenders, however, have begun to challenge the image of the persistent sexual predator. Indeed, a growing body of literature suggests that convicted sex offenders are less likely to commit future acts of criminality compared to other types of offenders. These findings question the prevailing ideology that sex offenders are chronic and persistent career criminals with repeat instances of sexual misconduct. The purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of crime types to determine whether sex offenders are truly specialized and persistent across their criminal careers as depicted through current law and policies.

The data used in this analysis were gathered by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The data file was obtained for secondary analysis from the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan ("Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994"). Some of the variables examined included demographic information and criminal histories associated with offender arrests, adjudications, and sentences before the 1994 release date and for three years after release.

The sample of offenders considered in this analysis included over 38,000 prisoners released from prisons in 15 states in 1994 (approximately 10,000 were convicted sex offenders). The authors employed several interesting and highly focused analytical techniques to compare rates of specialization among offenders who were arrested for sex offenses with offenders who were arrested for other types of crime (i.e. violent offense, property offenses, and public-order offenses).

Comparisons about differences among offenders in these general crime categories revealed that sex offenders averaged fewer separate arrests during their criminal careers (6.8) than did violent (9.9), property (13.6), and public-order (11.2) offenders. Also, sex offenders were approximately two-years older at the time of their first arrest, and they served longer prison terms (approximately 18 months longer) than did property and public-order offenders.

A series of analyses were conducted which focused on the rate of specialization for adjacent arrest cycles, that is, whether offenders repeated the same offense at their next arrest period. One analysis, using diagonal probabilities, showed low rates of specialization among sex offenders, only one in four (26%) of sex offenders repeated a sex offense at their next arrest period. This rate was much lower compared to the rate of specialization among offenders arrested for violent offenses (33%), property offenses (56%), and public-order offenses (61%). Of all the offense types studied, results showed that sexual offenders retain substantially lower specialization across arrest cycles. Findings

from another analysis, forward specialization coefficient, showed similar results including a lower rate of specialization among sex offenders and “a significant reduction in specialization” across arrest cycles as compared to other offense types.

Another series of analyses were conducted for rate of specialization over offenders’ entire criminal careers. Findings from this analysis revealed that 5.2 percent of sexual offenders committed *only* sexual offenses during their criminal careers. Compared to the other offense types examined, only public-order offenders rated higher (6.2%), indicating these offenders committed *only* public order crimes. Overall, findings showed the percentage of offenders who did not repeat the same offense again during their criminal careers was higher for sexual offenders (60.6%) compared to violent offenders (36.1%), property offenders (22.9%), and public-order offenders (18.2%). These findings suggest that for a majority of sexual offenders, it was a one-time only offense.

In order to better understand patterns in the data, the authors separated the large offense types (sex, violent, property, and public-order) into specific subcategories or individual crimes. The offense type “sex offender” was broken down into two sexual offenses: rape and child molestation. Findings showed that 70 percent of offenders from these groups were arrested only once during their criminal careers for that crime, however, it appeared that child molesters exhibited more specialization than most other specific crimes examined. The authors noted that findings based on these specific crimes should be viewed with caution as results vary depending on how specialization and arrest cycle is measured.

Findings revealed from official arrest data should always be examined carefully. For example, the data used in this analysis only document acts of sexual misconduct that were reported to the authorities. Obviously, some sex offenses go unreported which would impact the true number of sex offenses that have occurred as well as the arrest cycle time between offenses. Of course, the same could be postulated for other types of offenses, such as property crimes which are relatively easy to commit in large numbers. Despite such limitations, however, the consistency in findings for specialization and persistence across multiple measures should cause policy makers to re-examine their beliefs about the true nature of sex offenders. Findings shown here indicate that sex offenders have less extensive arrest histories than other types of offenders and, contrary to public opinion and contemporary policies, appear less likely to become repeat sexual predators or persistent specialists.

Cindy J. Smith, Jennifer Bechtel, Angie Patrick, Richard R. Smith and Laura Wilson-Gentry. 2006. *Correctional Industries Preparing Inmates for Reentry: Recidivism & Post Release Employment*. Washington, DC: Report to the National Institute of Justice. NCJRS 214608.

This research takes a first-time, national look at the effects of the Prison Industries Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) on post-release employment and recidivism. Given the nature of PIECP, state or local inmates who voluntarily participate in one of these federally approved programs can earn local prevailing wages. Program eligibility and industry criteria may vary

depending upon the specific state, institution, and/or industry, and programs are typically constructed according to a customer, employer or manpower model.

PIECP has employed state inmates in private-sector jobs since 1979. With the exception of PIECP, the Ashurst-Summers Act of 1935 prohibits the sale of goods on the open market if they are produced in United States' prisons and jails. Since PIECP's inception, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has enlisted agencies to ensure that states comply with the mandates set forth in the Act; subsequently, the National Correctional Industries Association (NCIA) has been receiving BJA grant monies that are being used to assist and monitor PIECP programs since 1995.

While PIECP programs have remained unevaluated for effectiveness, the number of inmates who have been trained and the amount of funds that have been appropriated have both increased. Despite an absence of a national evaluation, statistics show that from 1995-2005, inmates have returned (e.g. room and board, taxes, family support, victims' compensation) \$162.3 million of the approximate \$276.5 million in earnings as a result of PIECP. The program not only returns money to states since it is self-funding, but also, it benefits stakeholders such as corrections administrators, inmates and the general public.

Through this study, the authors seek to evaluate the effects of PIECP, according to its legislative intent, by answering the following research-related questions:

- *Does PIECP participation increase post-release employment as compared to traditional industries (TI) work or other than work (OTW) activities?*
- *Does PIECP reduce recidivism as compared to traditional industries (TI) work or other than work (OTW) activities?*

TI is defined as including two types of work, one which is similar to PIECP but workers are not paid a prevailing wage and goods are not sold in the open market and the other which is institutional maintenance-related work (e.g. office support staff).

Inmates who are classified in the OTW category may be participating in any program (e.g. drug treatment) other than an industry one, or they may even be in an inactive status. Furthermore, due to the way in which states classify tasks, an OTW task (e.g. laundry) in one state may be considered TI in another.

While employment is specifically stated in PIECP's legislative intent, recidivism is not, however, the authors maintain that unemployment is linked to and a predictor of criminal activity, so it too should be examined. This study hypothesizes that participation in PIECP significantly increases post-release employment and reduces recidivism when compared to TI and OTW participation.

The research was conducted by using a quasi-experimental design with matched samples consisting of a PIECP group and two comparison groups, one comprised of TI inmates and the other of OTW inmates. The authors collected agency data and looked at other characteristics that could affect outcome (e.g. family effects).

Site selection was performed through cluster sampling, and five (unnamed) states were chosen as a result. Criteria for selection included the number of workers in PIECP programs, and states that were PIECP certified prior to 1996 and had the highest worker numbers were selected. In order to ensure nationwide representation (e.g. region, rural vs. urban), other factors, such as a state's willingness to participate and the availability of data, were considered.

The inmate populations in the five states were then categorized into one of the following groups:

- 1) Those inmates with the defined matching characteristics who participated in PIECP at least one day and were released between January of 1996 and June of 2001.*
- 2) Those also with the defined matching characteristics not defined as PIECP participants but defined as TI participants during the same period.*
- 3) Inmates during the defined time period and with the appropriate matching characteristics who were neither PIECP nor TI and not excluded from consideration because of administrative segregation, illness or incapacity.*
- 4) All other inmates not meeting the matching characteristics.*

The matching criteria for the selected inmates were as follows: *race, gender, crime type, age, time served, and the number of disciplinary reports received.* Only the variables *time served* and the *number of disciplinary reports* showed statistical differences between PIECP and TI and between PIECP and OTW. This was found to be a result of the PIECP group consisting of fewer releasees with 30 or more disciplinary actions while incarcerated.

The PIECP sample group consisted of all inmates (n=2,333) who participated in PIECP in the selected states. To be considered a PIECP participant for purposes of this study, an inmate had to serve any length of time in a PIECP program and had to be released between January 1996 and June 2001. Inmates could have participated in additional programming as well. TI (n=1,863) and eligible OTW (n=2,268) unemployed individuals were also identified and grouped.

One-hundred matched triplets were then randomly selected from each of the five represented states (n=1,500) so that a file review of the triplets could provide a more complete list of variables and data. There were some challenges (e.g. admission and release dates were not included) in collecting the data.

In order to answer both research questions, the follow-up time period was accurately measured. Specifically, the time to obtain employment, measured by reported earnings in a given quarter, and the time to loss of employment, measured by no earnings in a given quarter, were calculated in order to satisfy the first research question, which refers to post-release employment. The following information was also gathered in order to respond to this question:

- 1) Proportion of time employed during the follow-up period (e.g., the time from release from prison until the end of data collection)*
- 2) Time to first employment after release*

- 3) *Duration of first employment*
- 4) *Wage rate during the follow-up period*
- 5) *Occupations within prisons versus free world occupations*

To answer the second question related to recidivism, a survival analysis determined how long releasees remained in the community before recidivating, which was measured by arrest (not including any technical violations), conviction or incarceration. When offenders were released into the community between January 1, 1996 and June 30, 2001, their follow-up periods began and ran until mid 2003 with a minimum follow-up period being less than two years and a maximum period extending up to seven and a half years.

A key finding of this study is that those inmates who participated in open market PIECP jobs were significantly more successful in post-release employment and were more likely to have reduced recidivism rates when compared to those who worked in TI or were involved in OTW. Particularly, those who had participated in PIECP were significantly more likely to obtain employment post-release within a shorter time frame and remain employed longer than those in IT or OTW programs. Additionally, "PIECP participants recidivated significantly more slowly and less frequently as measured by any of the three measures; arrest, conviction or incarceration."

Statistical highlights of the authors' findings:

- Approximately 26 percent of the total sample had no reported earnings during the follow-up period.
- Within the first quarter post-release, approximately 55 percent of PIECP participants (compared to 40% of TI and OTW individuals) obtained employment.
- Almost 49 percent of PIECP participants were employed for one year or more continuously and 13.7 percent were continuously employed for over three years (while only 40.4% of the TI group and 38.5% of the OTW group were continuously employed for one year or more.)
- PIECP releasees earned significantly more than OTW releasees.
- By the end of the first year, 80 percent of all releasees remained arrest-free, however, during the follow-up, PIECP releasees remained arrest-free for longer periods of time than the IT and OTW releasees.
- Although PIECP releasees remained conviction-free longer than IT and OTW releases during the follow-up period, overall, 90 percent of all releasees were conviction-free by the end of the first year.
- As with arrests and convictions, PIECP releasees remained incarceration-free for longer periods of time than IT and OTW groups.

Given these findings, the authors summarized that of the matched sample of 6,464 releasees, PIECP participants were more successful in society than the TI or OTW releasees. As hypothesized, PIECP participants had more success in obtaining post-release employment and experienced slower and reduced recidivism rates when compared to the TI and OTW groups.

Limitations of the research include possible self-selection effects for PIECP and the inclusion of offenders who had participated in PIECP for even a very short period of time (inclusion of subjects receiving very little of the intervention being studied can often suppress the measured treatment effect of the intervention). Additionally, PIECP releasees may have benefited by an additive effect (e.g. participation in TI in addition to PIECP), but a determination could not be made based on the available data.

Second, the generalizability of the findings can only be applied to those inmates who would be eligible for PIECP. It is also cautioned that generalizing results to include all TIs or OTWs is not recommended since, for purposes of this study, TIs and OTWs were selected for the comparison sample because they would likely be hired by the PIECP. Lastly, “creaming,” the practice of selecting inmates who would most likely be successful despite prison programming, was a possible concern. However, those inmates selected for PIECP and for TI or OTW were matched by characteristics in order to minimize any effects.

Based on this study’s suggestion that work plays a vital role in successful offender reentry, a policy recommendation would be to “increase the number of private industry partnerships with the appropriate program monitoring and continued evaluation.”

Several other recommendations, regarding the direction of future PIECP research, were made. Specifically, in order to answer the authors’ sub-question, *Under what conditions and for which inmates is PIECP more effective than TI and OTW?*, further research was suggested. Although the current study obtained some information related to this topic, subsequent research may include looking more closely at the effects of PIECP on gender or on inmates of varying security levels.

Christy A. Visher and Shannon M.E. Courtney. 2006. *Cleveland Prisoners’ Experiences Returning Home*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

The Urban Institute’s 2001 *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* study looked at released prisoners’ experiences as they returned to neighborhoods in Maryland, Illinois, Ohio and Texas. Specifically, in Phase 1 of the Ohio study, data from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) was collected in order to examine incarceration and reentry characteristics. Phase 2 consisted of conducting pre and postrelease interviews with male offenders who were returning to Cleveland. In addition, focus groups were conducted with residents of Cleveland neighborhoods that receive large numbers of released offenders to probe residents’ perceptions of the challenges of reentry for their communities.

The focus of this summary is the fourth report, *Cleveland Prisoners’ Experiences Returning Home*, in the *Returning Home* Ohio study. It describes ex-offenders’ experiences after release and incorporates both official and self-reported data. Eighty-four percent (n=357) of the 424 men who were included in the prerelease sample also participated in the first postrelease interviews.

In order to prepare for reentry, at six months prerelease, prisoners in the ODRC system may begin participating in a Release Preparation Program consisting of workshops, services (e.g. obtaining photo identification, finding employment) and community service provider referrals. Of the 64 percent of the respondents who stated that they had received some form of ODRC prerelease programming, 58 percent reported that it had been mandated. In addition to in-prison reentry programming, almost 90 percent of the offenders participated in other programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Residential Substance Abuse Treatment.

In order to gain an understanding of the respondents' attitudes and beliefs along with their level of motivation to change, the men were asked questions in reference to their *readiness to change*, *self-esteem*, *perceived control over their lives*, *feelings about the legal system and police* and *spirituality*. In relation to *readiness to change*, nearly all respondents reported that they "wanted to get their lives straightened out." Seventy-five percent described an increase in their self-esteem a few months postrelease whereas only 57 percent rated their self-esteem as being high prior to release. There was no change in *perceived control over their lives*, and for most, their *spirituality* remained the same from prerelease to postrelease. The authors found that the likelihood of substance and/or alcohol use was greater for those who were more cynical about the legal system.

By category, the authors explored several issues in relation to an ex-offender's reentry into the community. Some of the key findings are detailed below:

### **Family and Peers**

Family and friends were noted as being important to the men especially in terms of providing emotional and financial support and housing. Prior to release, the men indicated that in order to reduce their chances of recidivating, employment, housing and sobriety would play a larger role than family relationships and support would. Conversely, after release, 26 percent (the largest percentage) reported that family support was the *most* important factor that helped them to avoid prison. However, despite the assistance that family and friends offered, these relationships were not always positive due to some family and friends' histories of substance abuse and/or criminal offending.

### **Substance Use**

According to their own accounts, 72 percent of the respondents had used drugs and 60 percent had been intoxicated six months prior to imprisonment. Almost two-thirds of the men *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that parole supervision after release would help them to avoid relapse.

The authors found that the men were less likely to use drugs or to be intoxicated postrelease if they had received in-prison counseling, had less negative views of the legal system and had to undergo random drug testing as a condition of supervision. And as predicted, those who had a history of substance use were more likely to engage in postrelease use.

## **Financial Obligations and Support**

Over half of the respondents worried that they would be unable to financially survive. As a result, 38 percent said that they would like to take advantage of financial support services. Of those men who were unemployed, the majority stated that they depended on a spouse, family or friends to provide for them financially while a third relied on public assistance.

## **Employment**

When asked about needing job assistance postrelease, almost 90 percent of the men said that they would like *some help* or *a lot of help*, and only 39 percent had postrelease employment at any given time. Of those who were employed, most were satisfied with their jobs but almost half were dissatisfied with receiving low wages.

The authors found that the men who either had a job while in prison or were required to find employment as a supervision condition were more likely to gain postrelease employment.

## **Health**

Eighty percent of the men said that while they were incarcerated, they were in *good* or *excellent* health. Similarly, 79 percent had the same response at one to three months postrelease. While most respondents were optimistic about their health after release, access to health services was cited as an issue, which is most likely indicative of the 84 percent of the men who lacked health insurance.

Although optimistic, a little over half responded that they had been diagnosed with a chronic physical health condition. In terms of mental health, only one in five reported that they were depressed or had another mental health condition. However, depression and other mental illness screenings revealed that even more respondents were afflicted with depression and in some cases, post traumatic stress disorder as a result of incarceration. Additionally, the respondents who had mental health conditions were found to be more likely to have physical conditions as well.

## **Post Release Supervision**

Of the 76 percent of respondents who were under community supervision when they were interviewed one to three months after release, most had positive attitudes regarding the relationship with their parole officers. Furthermore, 87 percent of the respondents reported compliance with supervision conditions and 89 percent indicated that it “had been easy to avoid a violation after release.” Despite half of the men stating that no supervision condition was “particularly difficult to comply with,” employment was cited as being the most challenging condition, with sex offender registration and personal contact with parole officers following employment.

## **Criminal Involvement**

Despite the men's extensive criminal histories, (as indicated by 83 percent who had at least one prior conviction), 77 percent of the respondents stated that it would be *pretty easy* or *very easy* to avoid prison. The authors found that those who were least likely to be arrested or violate supervision conditions after a few months postrelease were those who were older or who had:

- less extensive criminal histories.
- no technical violations.
- not relied on illegal sources of income prior to incarceration.
- been confident about staying out of prison postrelease.
- been medicated for a health condition while incarcerated.

## **Community**

Citing an avoidance of trouble, a loss of housing and the departure of family and friends from former neighborhoods, over half of the respondents stated that they did not return to their previous areas of residence. Although 77 percent of the men stated that after their release, they lived in safe neighborhoods, almost half indicated that drug dealing was rampant.

This report also incorporated results of focus groups that were conducted with 69 residents in Cleveland neighborhoods into which the greatest number of prisoners were released. The authors found that residents were "generally sympathetic" in realizing that inmates returning home encounter barriers but may lack the support and resources necessary for success. They cited a need for a variety of services and support such as establishing earlier reentry planning while offenders are incarcerated and engaging families and communities in the reentry process. Residents mentioned that an advantage to having ex-offenders in their communities is that these individuals can mentor other returning ex-offenders as well as errant juveniles.

## **Housing**

Given the realization that finding a place to live upon release is important to an ex-offender's success, 70 percent of the respondents knew where they would live upon their release. In interviews after release, almost all of the men responded that they "felt safe where they lived," but many did consider their housing arrangements to be on a temporary basis.

In summary, the authors noted that their findings offer insight into the factors that contribute to short-term successes among ex-offenders reentering the community. For example, those who participate in prison programming are less likely to abuse substances and are more likely to obtain employment upon release.

The findings of the Cleveland study parallel findings from Pennsylvania's ongoing study of parole violators to some extent. Both studies found some evidence that parolees had unrealistic

expectations about the ease of their reentry experience, which may have contributed to problems for these offenders. Indeed, the unrealistic expectations seemed to extend to the community in the Cleveland study, where residents felt that ex-offenders in their communities could serve as mentors for at risk youth. There is little support in the broader research for a positive impact by ex-offenders on delinquent youth.

Offenders in both studies experienced problems with relapse to drug use, but neither group encountered serious problems with housing. Offenders in both groups seemed to rely on family for support and assistance during the reentry process. The Ohio offenders seemed to report somewhat more difficulty with job search than did the offenders in Pennsylvania, although they did seem to have better relations with their parole supervisors than was the case in Pennsylvania.

Volume 8, Number 1 of RIR featured a summary of Phase I of the PADOc's parole violator study. Upcoming issues will feature summaries of Phases II and III.