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Research Review

Educational Initiatives in a Correctional Context

KEY WORDS: *education, employment, recidivism, cost-benefit*

What it means

Overall analysis of 58 separate research studies from the US supports the continued use of educational initiatives with incarcerated offenders (Davis et al., 2013). Although a single study specific to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) had less promising results (Conference Board of Canada, 2009) – failing to identify cost savings associated with participation in educational initiatives – CSC is currently undertaking a broad evaluation of correctional education initiatives to better understand their effectiveness and efficiency.

Currently, CSC offers educational upgrading for all offenders who have not completed high school or the equivalent. Overall, the results reported here support this practice. As every four in five offenders under CSC's jurisdiction have less than a grade 10 education (CSC, 2011), many offenders may benefit from these educational opportunities.

What we found

In their analysis of 58 separate studies, Davis and colleagues (2013) found that offenders who participated in educational initiatives were more likely to obtain employment after release than those who did not. Among participants, those involved in vocation-based educational initiatives were more likely to obtain employment than those who participated in academic education, although this difference was not statistically reliable.

Overall, compared to offenders who opted out of participating in education initiatives, those who chose to participate had lower rates of recidivism. Correspondingly, education initiatives were found to be cost-effective. Accounting only for the direct cost of reincarceration, estimated net savings associated with participation ranged from \$70,000 to \$83,000 U.S. dollars per offender over three years.

To date, only one study has examined the cost-effectiveness of educational initiatives with offenders at CSC (Conference Board of Canada, 2009); the

authors concluded that educational initiatives did not lead to cost savings. That said, this examination involved extrapolation from an earlier study which was quite dated and reflected only two of CSC's educational programs. Moreover, benefits were deliberately deflated to provide a more conservative result. An evaluation is underway which will provide a better understanding of the current role of education at CSC in offenders' community reintegration.

What we looked at

In recent years, research on education in a correctional context has been prioritized by the United States Bureau of Justice. Davis and colleagues (2013) conducted a meta-analytic review of 58 studies on education interventions in the US, exploring the associated post-release employment and recidivism outcomes, as well as financial implications.

Given the American focus in this meta-analysis, a 2009 examination of the fiscal benefits of CSC's correctional programs, including education, was also examined.

References

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