

Pathway to Enterprise for Returning Citizens

An entrepreneurship program for improving reentry employment and reducing recidivism

Agency: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

Trial Duration: 03/2018–07/2018

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Context

Most incarcerated people will be released back into the community. Identifying and using reentry programs such as those targeting employment and earning legally obtained wages will increase safe and successful reintegration to the community.

Key Finding

No statistically significant differences were found between reentrants who participated in the entrepreneurship program and those who did not. This could be attributed to poor retention rates as only 12 of the 72 participants in the treatment group completed the program.

*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy "Pracademics" who lead trials.

Background

Finding employment after being incarcerated is an important step to reintegrate into the community. Research indicates that reentrants who succeed in finding steady work are less likely to return to prison than their counterparts who don't. However, obtaining work with a criminal background is challenging. Limited work experience and education can be hurdles to securing a job post-release, and many employers may be hesitant to hire people with criminal records. Reentry initiatives that include vocational and educational training have shown promise for increasing employment and reducing recidivism.

Trial Design

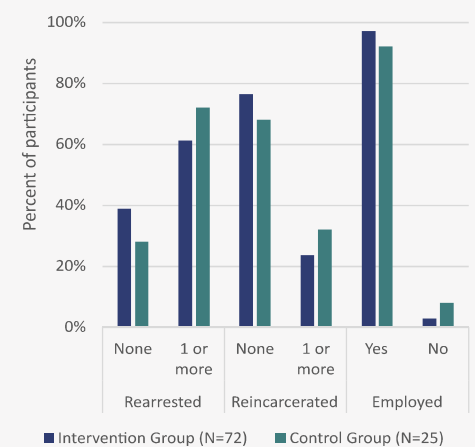
The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority used a randomized controlled trial design to test the effectiveness of the program Pathway to Enterprise for Returning Citizens (PERC), for securing employment and reducing arrest and reincarceration. Men and women released from ten Illinois state prisons were invited to participate in the program. Eligibility criteria included completion of the PERC application, no convictions for specific felony financial crimes or class X sex offenses, be returning to Cook County, and having a release date on or before the first day of class.

Of 124 applicants, 97 were eligible for the program. Those eligible were randomly assigned to fill slots available for the 16-week PERC training class (N=72) or to the control condition (not participating in the program; N=25).

Results

No statistically significant differences in outcomes were found between the two conditions for arrest, reincarceration, and employment ($p>0.05$). The table below shows results for each outcome by condition. Over 60% of each group had been arrested during the intervention and follow-up period, but fewer than 32% of each group had been reincarcerated. Both groups had relatively high rates of employment. It may be that low treatment engagement, hence fewer datapoints, is responsible for the finding of insignificant program results: Only 12 participants in the intervention group completed the 16-week program.

Outcomes by Condition



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