



DemoSoc Working Paper

Paper Number 2011--43

Effects of Prison Work Programmes on the Employability of Ex-prisoners

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July, 2011

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Abstract

This paper presents the main results of a study that relates information from the prison system with information from the Spanish Social Security in order to study the employability of the former inmates of prisons in Catalonia, Spain who obtained final release from 1/1/2004 to 31/12/2007. The results show that 43.6% of the ex-prisoners find a job after serving their sentences, but their integration in the labour market tends to be fragile, confirming that it is a very vulnerable group. It was also found that prison work has a favourable effect on employability and that vocational training is could be useful for those who have not previously worked and have no education or job skills.

Keywords

Jail, Prisoners, Employability, Prison work, Vocational training

Acknowledgements

This research has been possible thanks to the grants provided by CEJFE (Centre d'Estudis Jurídics i Formació Especialitzada) and the support by CIRE (Centre d'Iniciatives per a la Reinserció), both relied to Departament de Justícia (Generalitat de Catalunya). The authors acknowledges the statistical suggestions of Sebastià Sarasa, Sergi Vidal and Pau Baizan.

Introduction

Reentry into society of prisoners when they complete their sentences is a major concern for society, and has therefore been the subject of many studies. Less attention has been paid to the integration of prisoners in the labour market, possibly because it is difficult to analyze. This article is based on a study on employability carried out in Catalonia in 2009ⁱ for the *Centre d'Estudis Jurídics i Formació Especialitzada* (CEJFE) of the *Ministry of Justice of the Generalitat de Catalunya* in collaboration with the *Centre d'Iniciatives per a la Reinserció* (CIRE), which is the government agency that supports the reintegration of prisoners through vocational training and productive prison work.

In particular, the study was aimed at ascertaining the extent to which the CIRE's efforts to provide inmates with vocational training and employment in prison workshops have a favourable effect on employability. Our results suggest that work in prisons gives prisoners a greater chance of finding a job, while ensuring order in prisons and providing emotional stability to the prisoners. Vocational training has a lesser effect, perhaps because of design problems.

A review of the literature leads us to our working hypothesis. We then describe the study population, explain the research methodology used, and present the results. We end with a few conclusions and recommendations.

Literature review and working hypothesis

Criminological theory is confronted with traditional dilemmas in social theory, perhaps the most important one being the tension between structure and subject. The question is what has a greater impact on the employability of prisoners: the actions of penal or correctional institutions, or criminal path and personal motivation?

The Chicago school of criminology considers that the behaviour of criminals is learned in favourable or unfavourable interaction with others, primarily in intimate groups. This school opened a fruitful line of research, particularly with regard to the concept of "prison culture" (Lilly et al., 2007). Jiang and Winfree (2006) also maintain that inmates take on prison habits and culture through a particular kind of socialization: *prisonization*. Prison culture stems partly from previous socialization and partly from the prison system and it may enhance habits that are not conducive to reintegration on release.

Strain Theories (structural-functionalism), based on the work of Merton, state that the impossibility of obtaining the desired objectives by legal means causes a strong pressure toward deviant behaviours. The tension comes not only from unrealized aspirations, but also from the perception of injustice. The pressure results in crime when it leads to negative emotions in conditions of low social support, limited resources, and association with delinquent peers with little social control (Rebellón et al., 2009). Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) added the importance of power: the American dream, they say, is based on competitive individualism and a universalism that identifies success with

monetary gain. The intersection between this culture and social inequality leads to a society with weak social norms that is favourable to criminal behaviour. There remains the question of how far the reflections of these authors can be extended to European society, currently under severe pressure from market liberalization.

The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by a widespread dissemination of conservative criminological theories presented in various ways, but always focusing on the individual. These theories imposed the idea of *nothing works*, as opposed to the perspectives focusing on rehabilitation of inmates. The principles of these conservative theories can be traced back to the classical school and the positivist school that emerged with Lombroso, the father of modern criminology. In this context, Wilson and Herrnstein (as stated in Lilly et al., 2007) developed a biosocial explanation of behaviour based on constitutional factors—some of them genetic—that predispose the individual to offend.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) propose a concept of control that they see as a permanent inner state rather than a social product: crimes are the response to opportunities available to people with little self-control. Hence, crime appears in the youth of individuals with many aspects of their life out of control (alcohol, drugs, sex, etc.). Years later, Wikström and Treiber (2007) considered self-control as a situational concept rather than an individual characteristic: an individual's capacity for self-control results from the interaction between their ability (an individual characteristic) and their social position (environment).

Several authors focus on the individual offender's behaviour throughout his or her life. Sampson and Laub (1995), after observing the continuity of human behaviour, state that certain social controls can be a turning point. They stress the importance of the quality of social ties: adults refrain from criminal behaviour according to the social capital invested in their family and at work. Specifically in relation to work, good relations between employer and employee (obligations, expectations and interdependence) facilitate the development of social control.

To avoid the dilemma between individual and structure, LeBel et al. (2008) propose an explanatory model that combines subjective factors of propensity to crime with structural factors. Research should therefore consider variables and indicators that detect and explain the desire to give up crime, along with social factors that affect ex-prisoners, such as housing, employment, family and friends. However, attention must be paid to the quality of the social bonds (Sampson and Laub, 1995).

Finally, we must refer to the role of prison work and training in the reintegration of prisoners, which we will consider according to the six propositions of Bushway (2003). First, he holds that *many prisoners are detached from the legitimate world of work prior to entry in prison*. Indeed, many of them have little education and few vocational skills, especially when they come from environments disassociated from the world of legal work. Some studies have associated crime positively with job instability and unemployment, and negatively with pay. For example, Travis (2005) found that 12.5%

of those arrested in the United States in 1997 had part-time or casual jobs, 22% were in the illegal labour market and 31.5% were unemployed.

Second, Bushway (2003) holds that *improving work outcomes is expensive*. Prisoners are provided with resources that are not always available to the general population, especially in times of economic crisis, but these resources are expensive in view of the limited results they offer. Because the programmes are useful only to a minority or the results are questionable, it is difficult to justify funding for them (Simon, 1999).

Third, there is some consensus that the first stage of moving away from crime involves the desire to do so (*motivation matters*); once the decision is made, in order to succeed in the new situation the individual needs to acquire knowledge and develop skills, such as being a “worker”. This would suggest that training and work programmes only help prisoners who are motivated to avoid re-offending (Wilson et al., 2000).

Fourth, Bushway states that *the transition matters*. The process of building a new life is difficult: old ties must be cut and new ones created (Baskin and Sommers, 1998). Work programmes provide useful knowledge to start a new life, but the problem lies in the prisoners' ties after release from prison, which are often the ones they had before entry. Furthermore, Travis (2005) states that prisoners are a population with poor health, so attention should be paid to this problem at the time of release. However, the most pressing problem for released prisoners is housing: many return to the family, although the relationships are often complicated, even more so with the return, and some families have been victimized or harmed by the ex-prisoner. Hence, work is only part of the reintegration process, together with emotional ties, health care and housing.

Fifth, Bushway states that *nothing succeeds like success*. Though ex-prisoners have professional qualifications and experience, the jobs they find are among the least desired and the worst paid; they rarely have the opportunity to prove that they can carry out a daily job for a long period time. The study of Catalonia by Luque et al. (2005) shows that holding on to a job is the most difficult obstacle they face in occupational reintegration. Therefore, training and work programmes should focus on the individual preferences of participants in order to increase their motivation to give up crime under the equation “work + motivation = reintegration”. Each process should be tailored specifically to each participant, ensuring the passage to the next stage, and avoiding adding frustrations to people who accumulate a heavy burden of failure.

Sixth, Bushway (2003) deals with *work programmes in prisons*. He considers this type of work to be justified not so much by the rehabilitation it offers, but because it occupies the time of prisoners, provides them with income and facilitates prison control. Therefore, although the work does not pursue rehabilitation, it contributes to it indirectly. The studies by AUTHORS (2007) and Guilbaud (2008) reach similar conclusions and confirm the important role of work in structuring the daily lives of prisoners and in teaching behavioural patterns and habits such as self-discipline, punctuality, responsibility and evaluation of effort. Work programmes have an

educational and therapeutic function that is at first invisible, but is essential for the acquisition of values linked to resocialization and reintegration in society.

In short, work in prisons has a variety of purposes and ways of assessing and motivating inmates, but it has two main functions: facilitating the control of social order in everyday prison life and contributing to the inmates' socialization through learning patterns that allow them to internalize values and forms of behaviour.

The above statements lead us to make the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Learning a trade, either through training or through work, contributes to the employability of ex-prisoners because it brings them closer to the normality of citizens and opens the prospect of making a living.

Hypothesis 2. However, employability depends on the type of group and the economic situation (more or less demand for employment), and is more difficult for ex-prisoners than for the rest of the population. The limits to integration depend on the time away from work, which creates the gap in their CVs.

Hypothesis 3. Middle and higher education favour employability. Conversely, low levels of education decrease employability because of competition with other groups, particularly in situations of high unemployment.

Hypothesis 4. Although antisocial behaviour is relatively stable throughout life, maturity (associated with institutions of social control) can provide emotional stability and a sense of responsibility, contributing to the employability of ex-prisoners. Thus, older individuals will have better chances of access to employment, although their age is a drawback.

The study population

The study population is the set of people who obtained final release from Catalan prisons between January 1, 2004 and December 31, 2007. According to the “*Sistema Informàtic Penitenciari Català*” (SIPC) of the Ministry of Justice of the Generalitat de Catalunya, which manages this information, in the above period there were 6654 final releases involving 6038 individuals (a person may have obtained final release more than once). However, we chose to analyze only the population of Spanish nationality because of the large gaps in data and the difficulty of identifying the foreign population: identification was key to unifying the available databases. Therefore, the study focuses on the Spanish population, a total of 3875 ex-prisoners, though correct identification was only available for 3225 (83.2%).

As shown in Table 1, the Spanish study population shows little bias in relation to the reference universe, so the results have a close approximation to this population group.

Table 1. Ex-prisoners of Spanish nationality who are released

	Ex-prisoners with final release	Identifiable ex-prisoners	% of ex-prisoners identifiable
Women	345	235	68.1%
Men	3,530	2,990	84.7%
Up to primary education	1,873	1,543	82.4%
Secondary education or higher	1,526	1,292	84.7%
Up to age 35	1,151	978	85.0%
36 to 45 years	1,549	1,316	85.0%
46 years or more	1,049	931	88.8%
Total	3,875	3,225	83.2%

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC.

Methodology used

The study consisted of four parts. In the first part, we analyzed the main findings on the employability of prisoners reported in previous studies. The second and third part of the study involved a qualitative approach. The second part consisted of 11 semi-structured interviews conducted in late 2009 with key informants: prison officers, employers and managers of institutions hiring prisoners and ex-prisoners, and experts in occupational reintegration. The third part of the study consisted of 25 interviews with a typological sample of ex-prisoners and inmates in the last stage of their sentence, with whom we reconstructed biographies of career paths and personal trajectories, seeking to link participation in prison activities with employability.

In the fourth part of the study, which is the focus of this article, a quantitative, experimental approach was used because of the lack of comparable precedents in this field of study. The objective was to determine the career paths of ex-prisoners from data of the Spanish Social Security (SS). By merging data from the SS with those of the prison system, we obtained the relationship between career paths after release and attendance of training courses or prison work. First, we had to make a single database out of the existing three: 1) persons released from January 1, 2004 to December 31, 2007 (managed by the SIPC); 2) inmates doing prison work; 3) inmates attending vocational training courses (both managed by the CIRE). This unified database was then related to the Social Security Treasury, guaranteeing the utmost personal confidentiality.

The set of information contained in the new database is the following:

1. Personal and family factors
 - a. Sex
 - b. Age
 - c. Nationality
 - d. Education
 - e. Family situation (marital status and children)
2. Prison system

- a. Main type of crime
- b. Age of first entry
- c. Age of release
- d. Recidivism
- e. Length of sentence
- f. Total prison time
- g. Application of “third grade” regime
- h. Day-release permits in last year of sentence
- i. Participation in activities in last year of sentence
- j. Positions of trust in last year of sentence
- k. Punishments in last year of sentence
- 3. CIRE activities:
 - a. Prison work
 - b. Vocational training
- 4. Working life (Social Security)
 - a. Affiliation to SS
 - b. SS system (employee or self-employed)
 - c. Professional category
 - d. Contract type and duration
 - e. Business sector

Using data from the Social Security (information from the year of release of each individual to June 30, 2010), we generated the variable to explain the successes and failures of integration in the labour market. This variable distinguishes three situations: ex-prisoners who have had a job, those who have not, and recidivists. Subsequently, in the logistic regression analysis, the number of situations was reduced to two: with and without some integration in the labour market.

The results of the study

The analysis of the new database reveals that of the 3225 ex-prisoners, 1407 (43.6%) obtained some type of employment after final release; just under half of them had had a job for less than three months a year. Of the ex-prisoners, 740 (22.9%) reoffended and 1078 (33.4%) showed no record of Social Security affiliation (Table 2). Of the 1407 who had found some type of job, only 313 (22.2%) still had it on June 30, 2010.

Table 2. Distribution of ex-prisoners of Spanish nationality according to employment results after final release

Employed at some time	43.6%
Unemployed	33.4%
Recidivist	22.9%
Total (N = 3225)	100%

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC and the SS.

The personal and family variables (Table 2) always have significant levels of association, but they are generally moderate in relation to employment, with the exception of age on release (Cramer's $V = 0.160$). Men tend to reoffend more and are employed more than women; perhaps among the female population cultural factors play a greater role in keeping them away from work environments, at least the most public ones. The levels of education and training of the prison population are generally very low, but the highest and most consolidated levels of employment are attained by those with education, and especially the few who have started or completed higher education. The situation and family ties (marital status and children) show some association between being married and not reoffending, in agreement with Sampson and Laub (1995), but these factors do not greatly affect the possibility of finding a job; single persons are more likely to reoffend, and are further from integration in the labour market. Having children is not a determining factor in explaining access to employment. A first hypothesis would suggest that the vast majority of ex-prisoners are men, who generally have weak ties with their children. It is observed that women with children attain less integration in the labour market than those who do not, and having children has a moderate opposite effect on men; mothers may do jobs that are not registered at the Social Security, and the database used does not allow these jobs to be analyzed.

Our findings show that age is an important factor associated with employability. The younger individuals, up to 35 years old, are the ones who most reoffend, but also the ones who get the best results in employment. By contrast, individuals over the age of 50 find it more difficult to get a job; the interviews confirm that individuals of this age group are more discouraged about finding work. Those over 40 also find it difficult to get a job, because age is a negative factor in the labour market, especially after a long disconnection.

The penal variables generally show a higher association with employability than the personal and family variables. The younger they enter prison, the lower is their employability and the higher their likelihood of reoffending. Those who first enter at intermediate ages perform better in employment.

By type of crime (Cramer's $V = 0.114$), those who have committed crimes against public health or other crimes integrate better in the labour market, whereas those who have committed crimes against persons reoffend more and integrate less. The duration of the last stay in a prison and the total of prison stays (if there have been several) also

show a certain association with both employment and reoffending that is always significant (Cramer's $V = 0.152$, 0.176 and 0.147 , respectively). Those who come from a single short stay are by far the ones who perform best in the labour market, whereas reoffending involves a spiral that favours further recidivism, according to studies on this subject (Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1990; Sampson & Laub, 1995; Luque Reina et al., 2005). Individuals who have had longer stays in prison also perform worse than those who spend little time and do not reoffend. It may be that the longer the sentence, the more likely prisoners are to lose their ties with social networks and the labour market, and problems of this type may reduce the motivation to refrain from crime.

The variables referring to the attitude of the inmates in the last year of a prison sentence show interesting effects on employability. Going through the “third grade” prison regimeⁱⁱ (Cramer's $V = 0.190$) involves a higher level of employment and less recidivism; This may be due to motivation, but also to the preparation that inmates receive in this final stage of their sentences. Participating in cultural or sporting activities and occupying a “job of trust” in prison are associated with more employment, but also more recidivism; the explanation for this is that some inmates accept the “normalization” of prison life by adapting their behaviour to the prison rules, but they are unwilling to give up crime. Employment shows a high association with day-release permits and an even higher negative association with having been punished for misbehaviour (Cramer's $V = 0.170$ and 0.277 , respectively).

These results suggest the distinction between three groups of inmates. The largest group, including nearly half the total, show a desire for social and occupational integration, and in prison they acquire behaviours suited to that goal. Other prisoners hold attitudes and behaviours that are not conducive to social integration, even in the last stage of their sentence, which leads them to break the rules of the prison system. A third group (professional criminals) “normalize” their stay in prison, abiding by the rules but not wishing to give up crime.

Let us consider the significant variables of the CIRE activities (Table 3). Attending training courses (Cramer's $V = 0.087$) is associated with a slightly higher likelihood of finding a job on release, but also with greater recidivism. The number of courses attended moderately reinforces this trend: the more courses attended, the greater the likelihood of finding a job, but also the greater the recidivism. Prison work offered similar results, although with a higher level of association (Cramer's $V = 0.195$), so it is associated with better performance in employment but also with more recidivism.

Table 3. Distribution of ex-prisoners according to situation after final release and participation in vocational training and productive prison work

	Employed	Unemployed	Recidivist	Total	N.	Cramer's V
Participation in VT	46.7%	25.0%	28.4%	100%	553	0.087**
No participation in VT	43.0%	35.2%	21.8%	100%	2,672	
Prison work	45.5%	24.3%	30.2%	100%	1,421	0.195**
No prison work	42.2%	40.6%	17.2%	100%	1,804	
Total	43.6%	33.4%	22.9%	100%		

NB: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$. Overrepresentation is highlighted in grey.

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC, the CIRE and the SS.

At this point we see that the results of attending vocational training courses and doing prison work are mediated by two different and contradictory factors. On the one hand, as shown in Bushway (2003) and in some of our interviews, the desire for reintegration predisposes some inmates to participate in these activities. Others develop this predisposition by participating in them, because they provide self-discipline, self-control and job skills and bring them close to the status of workers. However, participating in these activities does not seem to be an essential condition for employability. In the interviews some ex-prisoners with previous employment experience and some employment skills stated that these activities had little vocational orientation. On the other hand, professional criminals adapt their conduct during their prison stay, participating in the activities offered in order to “kill time” and obtain some income, or to obtain benefits for good conduct; in the adaptation process, they preserve the personality that led them to offend. Prison activities are open to all inmates, which means that they are sometimes done by inmates with no desire for reintegration. It should be added that inmates with shorter sentences participate less in training courses and prison work but they are more likely to get jobs, perhaps because of their distance in time from the labour market is shorter.

A large majority of ex-prisoners (71.6%) obtain temporary or short-term jobs: 18% of the contracts are for up to 30 days and 37.4% for over six months. This explains why the ex-prisoners who work spend long periods unemployed: about half had not worked more than three months per year after release.ⁱⁱⁱ For the group contributing to the Social Security, we obtained information only on those affiliated on June 30, 2010: 36.8% of these can be considered qualified, mostly at first-officer or second-officer level, while 63.2% did unskilled jobs, mostly as labourers. Only 2.6% of ex-prisoners were managers, specialists or technical assistants, and 8.3% were administrative staff. It can be concluded that the jobs done by most former inmates are manual and low-status.

Of the 1407 ex-prisoners who found a job after release, only 313 (22.2%) still had it on June 30. Of the others, 1080 had lost their jobs and 14 had retired. The economic crisis has particularly affected ex-prisoners, whose ties to the labour market are very weak.

The negative implication is that many efforts aimed at fostering motivation and expectations of reintegration are frustrated.

Most women have part-time jobs and usually have shorter contracts than men. Educational attainment also shows some association with employment status, because former inmates with high levels of education have more skilled jobs, whereas those who did not complete primary education have mainly unskilled jobs. The former work mainly in retailing, hotels and catering and industry, and perform better in employment, with a longer total time in employment and longer contracts, whereas the latter work mainly in the construction sector. Unmarried individuals and those without children tend to have casual jobs with short contracts; family ties reinforce the need for employment. Age is again an important variable: the higher the age, the greater the employment in skilled categories, on open-ended contracts or as self-employed workers. By contrast, younger individuals have temporary jobs, short-term contracts and situations of unemployment. As occurs in the general population, age, sex and education also affect ex-prisoners but to a greater extent.

The most significant penal variables in relation to employment are the “third grade” regime and day release in the last year of imprisonment, both of which are positively associated with longer total time in employment and longer contracts.

Finally, ex-prisoners who have attended vocational training courses and done prison work tend to have a shorter total time in employment and shorter contracts than those who have not. These results are at first sight surprising. However, first, the vocational training courses are mostly attended by younger inmates, who find it more difficult to obtain a stable job. Second, 78.1% of inmates with sentences of less than one year do not do prison work, and this is a group with better chances of employment if they do not reoffend. Third, inmates with a higher education, who perform better in the labour market, do not usually do prison work.

In addition to the associations described in the correspondence analysis, logistic regression can show the degree of influence of the two variables, controlling for the indirect effects of others. To this end we select the variables that have a clear association with the dependent variable, which distinguishes ex-prisoners after release according to whether or not they have had a job.^{iv}

The results of binary logistic regression are shown in Table 4, which contains 4 models: the first includes socio-demographic variables; in the second we added penal variables, in the third motivational variables, and in the fourth prison work and vocational training. The results show an improvement in the explanatory power of the models, especially the penal variables and the motivational variables. They also confirm some of the earlier findings: men are more likely to get jobs than women; individuals with education are more likely to get jobs than those who fail to complete primary education; those who are released at earlier ages (up to 35) are more likely to get jobs than those who are released at intermediate ages, and particularly than those who are released at advanced ages; divorced or separated individuals are somewhat more likely to get jobs

than single ones; those who are not recidivists are more likely to get jobs; those with a total prison time of less than three years are more likely to get jobs than those with longer times; those who go through the “third grade” regime are more likely to get jobs; and those who show greater motivation in the year prior to release are more likely to get jobs. Having been punished for misbehaviour reduces the likelihood of getting a job. Training is not significant, but prison work is positively associated with employment. In general these results confirm the earlier ones but the motives of the crime for which the last sentence is served and marital status show a lower level of significance.^v

Table 4. Results of the binary logistic regression: reference = at least one job after final release

		Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
Sex	Reference: woman	1,454	*	1,631	**	1,817	**	1,808	**
Education	Reference: up to primary	1,524	**	1,527	**	1,538	**	1,547	**
Marital status	Single		**		**		*		*
	Divorced, separated	1,535	**	1,384	**	1,353	*	1,335	*
	Married, with partner	1,405	*	1,376	*	1,281	ns	1,274	ns
Age at final release	Up to 35 years		**		**		**		**
	36 to 45 years	,708	**	,759	**	,717	**	,735	*
	More than 45 years	,541	**	,499	**	,426	**	,442	**
Previous recidivist	Reference: no			,709	**	,688	**	,691	**
Total prison time	Up to 3 years				**		**		**
	4 to 8 years			,724	**	,701	**	,650	**
	9 years or more			,408	**	,435	**	,393	**
Latest Crime	Other crimes				**		*		*
	Against persons			,822	ns	,806	ns	,796	ns
	Against sexual freedom			1,136	ns	1,030	ns	1,005	ns
	Against property			,963	ns	,926	ns	,916	ns
	Against public health			1,764	**	1,422	ns	1,415	ns
"Third grade" regime	Reference: no					1,764	**	1,802	**
Motivation indicator (0 = less, 3 = more)						1,432	**	1,360	**
Misbehaviour in last year	Reference: no					,577	**	,572	**
Vocational training	Reference: no							1,112	ns
Work in workshops	Reference: no							1,329	**
Constant		,464	**	,638	*	,405	**	,394	**
Chi square		58,856	**	174,407	**	326,564	**	335,762	**
-2 log likelihood		3211,290		3095,738		2943,582		2934,384	
Cox and Snell R2		0,024		0,070		0,127		0,130	

NB: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; ns = not significant.

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC, the CIRE and the SS.

Table 5. Results of the binary logistic regression: reference = at least one job after final release, distinguishing between recidivists and non-recidivists

	Exp(B)	Sig.		Exp(B)	Sig.
Non-recidivist without workshop		**	Non-recidivist without training		**
Recidivist without workshop	,865	ns	Recidivist without training	,717	**
Non-recidivist with workshop	1,485	**	Non-recidivist with training	1,170	ns
Recidivist with workshop	,860	ns	Recidivist with training	,702	ns
Chi square	339,470	**	Chi square	336,268	**
-2 log likelihood	2930,676		-2 log likelihood	2933,877	
Cox and Snell R2	0,132		Cox and Snell R2	0,131	

NB: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; ns = not significant.

Source: Authors, based on data from the SIPC, the CIRE and the SS.

As discussed above, the effects of prison work and training on employment may be distorted by the participation in these activities of professional criminals who “normalize” their prison stay. To avoid this type of concealment or confusion, the variables of prison work and training are stratified with that of recidivism. This confirms the positive effects of both activities, especially prison work (training is positive but not significant) on the employment of prisoners who are not re-offenders.

Conclusions

The results allow us to compare the initial hypotheses. Regarding Hypothesis 1, programmes focusing on work are important, especially for inmates who are not re-offenders. Work is more important than training, but both activities are more important if accompanied by vocational content. Although much of the prison work is very simple, it opens an opportunity for those who have never worked or have been unable to keep a job, and for those who have no education, knowledge or job skills, by providing them with work discipline and self-esteem and strengthening the link between work and earning a living. The balance of training is more ambiguous because of the low vocational content, as are suggested by our interviews.

The level of employment (Hypothesis 2) depends on the job supply, and in the current economic crisis the most vulnerable groups of society find it more difficult to enter the labour market. Ex-prisoners who find a job are mostly employed on short temporary contracts with a high likelihood of dismissal. Because prisoners have a poorly rooted work culture that is difficult to change in the closed prison society, few attain full integration in the labour market.

The above issues lead to Hypothesis 3, which states that low levels of education hinder employability. The statistical analysis found that education and training favour employment, and the higher the level of education, the more stable the employment is.

Hypothesis 4 is partially confirmed. The interviewees consider that family ties contribute to employability by instilling a sense of responsibility that is projected onto work; however, the work is more regular for men and more informal for women. Middle age is not necessarily accompanied by emotional stability; it can also be accompanied by a certain disenchantment fostered by the higher barriers to employment found by this age group. Young individuals find it easier to get a job than older ones, especially if the latter have been outside work for many years and have a long gap in their CVs. Age is thus a determinant of attitude towards training and employment.

Finally, the study allows us to make some suggestions for improving some aspects of prison management related to the employment of ex-prisoners. Improving the statistical records through clear and anonymous identifiers that enable the combined management of the databases would be a considerable step forward for information and control tools and for future research. We believe that this study has opened an interesting path in monitoring the efficiency of specialized public policies.

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Appendix

Distribution of ex-prisoners by status after final release

	Employed	Unemployed	Recidivist	Total	N.	Cramer's V
Women	35.7%	46.4%	17.9%	100%	235	0.077**
Men	44.2%	32.4%	23.3%	100%	2,990	
Up to primary education	37.5%	37.2%	25.3%	100%	1,543	0.091**
Secondary education	47.7%	29.2%	23.1%	100%	1,292	
Higher education started or completed	63.2%	22.1%	14.7%	100%	95	
Single	41.8%	31.8%	26.5%	100%	1,958	0.070**
Divorced, separated, widowed.	47.7%	34.2%	18.1%	100%	673	
Married	44.3%	37.9%	17.8%	100%	427	
Age at final release:						0.160**
Up to 30 years	48.1%	21.9%	29.9%	100%	775	
31 to 35 years	46.6%	26.5%	26.9%	100%	672	
36 to 40 years	42.4%	35.1%	22.5%	100%	667	
41 to 45 years	41.1%	40.3%	18.5%	100%	491	
46 to 50 years	39.7%	40.3%	20.0%	100%	290	
51 years or more	36.7%	54.8%	8.5%	100%	330	

	Employed	Unemployed	Recidivist	Total	N.	Cramer's V
Age at first entry: up to 20	38.7%	25.5%	35.8%	100%	483	0.142**
21 to 25 years	43.5%	27.6%	28.9%	100%	729	
26 to 30 years	45.8%	30.6%	23.5%	100%	565	
31 to 35 years	44.5%	36.1%	19.5%	100%	416	
36 to 40 years	44.1%	37.2%	18.6%	100%	349	
41 years or more	42.3%	45.9%	11.8%	100%	508	
Crime against persons	36.6%	29.1%	34.3%	100%	776	0.114**
sexual freedom	46.4%	30.0%	23.7%	100%	207	
property	42.7%	36.5%	20.7%	100%	1,268	
public health	52.4%	33.3%	14.3%	100%	273	
other crimes	47.8%	29.7%	22.5%	100%	404	
Duration of last stay in prison:						0.152**
up to 1 year	41.1%	31.3%	27.6%	100%	1,363	
2 to 3 years	40.2%	30.2%	29.6%	100%	917	
4 to 5 years	44.7%	41.7%	13.6%	100%	463	
6 to 8 years	62.1%	35.2%	2.7%	100%	219	
9 years or more	58.5%	35.8%	5.7%	100%	123	
Total prison time:						0.176**
up to 1 year	55.5%	36.4%	8.2%	100%	687	
2 to 3 years	47.9%	30.5%	21.6%	100%	689	
4 to 5 years	44.4%	32.7%	22.9%	100%	568	
6 to 8 years	39.7%	29.3%	30.9%	100%	501	
9 years or more	28.6%	35.7%	35.7%	100%	653	
Previous recidivist	32.6%	36.6%	30.8%	100%	754	0.147**
Not previous recidivist	47.0%	33.9%	19.1%	100%	2,127	

	Employed	Unemployed	Recidivist	Total	N.	Cramer's V
Went through “third grade”	59.3%	27.7%	13.0%	100%	799	0.190**
Did not go through “third grade”	38.5%	35.3%	26.2%	100%	2,426	
Day release in last year	53.6%	28.4%	18.0%	100%	1,257	0.170**
No day release	36.7%	36.3%	27.0%	100%	1,841	
Punishment for misbehaviour in last year	32.9%	30.5%	36.6%	100%	1,323	0.277**
No punishment	51.5%	35.0%	13.5%	100%	1,775	
Prison job in last year	46.4%	26.7%	26.8%	100%	1,372	0.124**
No prison job in last year	41.3%	38.2%	20.6%	100%	1,726	
Participated in activities in prison	44.7%	31.2%	24.2%	100%	2,159	0.063**
Did not participate in activities	41.0%	37.6%	21.4%	100%	939	
Total	43.6%	33.4%	22.9%	100%		

NB: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$. Overrepresentation is highlighted in grey.

Source: Author, based on data from the SIPC, the CIRE and the SS.

ⁱ Pedro Lopez and Vanessa Warden also participated in the project.

ⁱⁱ “Third grade” is a semi-open regime that prisoners can benefit from before they finish their sentences, according to their personal and penal circumstances.

ⁱⁱⁱ However, this instability is a characteristic feature of the Spanish labour market.

^{iv} Some variables are discarded due to their high covariation with others. Having children is discarded and marital status, which has a stronger association with the variable to be explained (employability) is maintained. Having a partner affects the behaviour of inmates, overwhelmingly men, more than having children. The covariance is also high between age of final release and current age, and between the former and age at first entry to prison. Here we select the age of final release variable and we reject the other two, because final release shows a higher coefficient of association with employment, and it is the most consistent variable for analyzing employment results after release. Though it is of theoretical interest, as is shown in the literature, age of first entry to prison is to some extent reflected in our analysis from other variables, such as total prison time and recidivism. Between duration of the last prison stay and total prison time, we chose the second, because it shows a greater association with the dependent variable and because prison time or separation from the labour market and life in society are of interest to the present study. Finally, the variables related to day release, prison jobs and participation in activities in the last year before release were used to build a single variable, indicating motivation, by adding the results of each one.

^v The Heckman two-step method was used to correct the bias (Bushway *et al.*, 2007) that the distribution of inmates doing prison work may introduce in the likelihood of finding a job. After this correction, the results do not vary: both for all ex-prisoners and distinguishing between recidivists and non-recidivists, the lack of lambda significance shows that the potential impact of factors not entered into the model (health, addiction and other motivational factors) does not lead to endogeneity. As the cited author states, this does not necessarily imply that there is no such effect of selection, but with the data used, its potential impact is in theory controlled.