

# Education: Turning the Tides of Recidivism

Laurel Molloy

[Third Place]

At some point in most people's lives, they must resocialize into a new way of life. Resocialization is when you must learn or relearn the rules and norms of a new part of society. When convicts exit prison after serving their sentence, they must resocialize back into the norms of society. Many factors influence the resocialization of prisoners into society, and one that needs to be examined is education and its impact on recidivism. Recidivism is the custom for criminals to reoffend and continue breaking the law after getting out of jail. It is a very good indicator of how well an individual is resocializing back into society after prison. This essay will assess the influence education has on the resocialization of people after incarceration especially pertaining to recidivism.

Angela Koo talks about the topic of recidivism closely. If a convict keeps breaking the law, they have not resocialized well into society because they are not following the norms and what is expected of people in that society. A different article, by Liz Benecchi, expounded upon the rates of recidivism showing the significance of the issue. Benecchi wrote, "within three years of their release, two out of three former prisoners are rearrested and more than 50% are incarcerated again" (Benecchi). Koo elaborated on this by saying that there are many factors that influence the rates of recidivism such as education, economic status, and the length of sentenced jail time. Koo said education is especially important to research because it can be participated in while in prison. Prisoners can read, learn, and have programs while in jail. She said, "correctional education

can reduce recidivism by giving inmates the basic educational skills and achievements that they lacked upon entry" (Koo, 242). Koo did secondary analysis on several studies including a meta-analysis by the RAND corporation and a study of 3,170 men and women inmates covering three states. All the studies she looked at pointed out that, in the majority, programs and education helped convicts get jobs after getting out of jail and helped them with not getting back in jail again when resocializing into society. She concluded that even getting high school diplomas and GED's helped convicts get jobs. Getting a job is essential because it is a key step in the resocialization process. It is a norm for all adults to work and have jobs so they can support themselves. Even a basic education is important and helps convicts get a job and ease into normal life after prison.

Koo found that educational programs could cut recidivism by almost 30% in some cases (Koo, 243). Programs like that help give convicts more choices and opportunities in society. Koo found that recidivism is a big issue in today's prison systems. It is especially important when convicts have children and families. A different article by Patricia Gonzalez et al. delved into how education helps family ties and recidivism. They also added that education and job specific programs can help benefit prisoners on the path to resocializing correctly into society.

Gonzalez and two other colleagues analyzed the relationship between recidivism and education programs but more specifically they looked at how it affected incarcerated mothers

in their article. They did a meta-analysis on research done by Gorden and Weldon who were both researchers at Marshall University. This analysis found that inmates who did not receive education programs in prison had recidivism rates of 26%. However, recidivism rates were 8.75% for inmates who completed vocational (skills and training to get a job) programs and 6.71% for inmates who did vocational training along with completing General Education Development (GED) programs (Gonzalez et al. 359).

A secondary analysis of a 2002 study conducted by Fabelo was done by Gonzalez and his colleagues. The study followed over 32,000 inmates for a year (Gonzalez et al. 359). It again found that job specific programs and training along with education programs in general help inmates resocialize into society and not fall back on their old ways. They found that inmates who participated in both educational and vocational programs had less recidivism and could transition better into life and get a job.

Gonzalez and her associates also inspected family ties in prison. When a parent is in prison the child can suffer the consequences in school and have trouble. By keeping strong family ties even in prison, it can both benefit the child's grades and mental health but also the parent's recidivism rates. They explained that "not only can educational programs play an important role in improving family relationships it may also subsequently motivate former prisoners to stay out of prison" (Gonzalez et al. 359).

Gonzalez's team looked at how educational and vocational programs helped keep families close and reduce recidivism. When prisoners are educated and taught basic skills on how to get a job and get by in life recidivism reduces. By teaching them how to get jobs and succeed in life outside prison, the cycle of recidivism and bad choices can be broken. In the next article, John Nally and his associates look

at a specific study in Indiana looking deeper into education and recidivism rates.

In an article Nally along with several other authors wrote about a study of a classic experiment on recidivism rates. It was conducted by the Education Division of the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC). Nally's team wrote that, "the results of this study demonstrate that an offender who has not attended correctional education programs during incarceration is approximately 3.7 times more likely to become a recidivist offender after release" (Nally et al. 69).

The study had a control group and an experimental group both with over one thousand subjects in them. The subjects were convicted criminals in Indiana. The control group, called the "comparison group" by Nally and his colleagues, was randomly selected after meeting a set of requirements. They were not given government funding to have education programs, and so not a single "offender in the comparison group had received the federal funding to attend any correctional education program during incarceration" (Nally et al. 73). While the experimental group, called the "study group," received education while in prison. About 72.7% of the experimental group study participants were of the age twenty to twenty-nine, and 85.5% were male criminals (Nally et al. 74).

This study focused on the direct relationship between having educational programs and the decrease in inmate recidivism. They found that the experimental group had recidivism of 29.7% while the control group had recidivism of 67.8% (Nally et al. 74-75). As stated earlier, prisoners who did not go through education programs in prison were roughly 3.7 times more likely to break the law, break society's norms, and go to jail again (Nally et al. 69). In this experiment the independent variable, the variable that causes the change, was educational programs given to the experimental group. While the dependent variable, the

variable that is impacted and changed, was the recidivism rates of the inmates.

The study Nally and his colleagues looked at found that education helps reduce recidivism without a doubt. The percent difference between the experimental group and the control group was large. Of a little over a thousand inmates for both the experimental and control groups, 410 more people went back to jail from the control group compared to with the experimental group who had educational programs. About 38% more people went back to jail in the control group verses the experimental group.

This shows how education helps recidivism and should be a top priority in helping prisoners. More funding for educational programs could help reduce recidivism rates even more. Brady Duke agrees with these findings and thinks that more should be done to help reduce recidivism. He looks at this and the specific demographics that have more recidivism compared with others to see what groups generally need more help so prisons can know what and whom to focus on.

In his article, Duke did a meta-analysis on five different studies to look at the effect of education and vocational programs on recidivism. He also went further and called for action and reform in the prison systems.

The studies he chose looked at recidivism's correlation to characteristics like race, and education before going to jail. He used an X<sup>2</sup> goodness of fit test to analyze the data. This test is used to see if chosen data represents the greater sets of data. It sees if the smaller set of data embodies the whole population of people in prison. He also used a two-proportion z-test which is a way of analyzing proportions of data and seeing if they are similar.

Duke said that his findings after the meta-analysis showed that “men have lower educational attainment rates than women prior to incarceration and are more prone to recidivate, [so] correctional education would be most ef-

fective when directed toward men” (Duke, 54). He found that men are 1.2 to 1.5 times more likely to have recidivism than women, and that education really does help with recidivism (Duke, 54). The analysis found that the less educational attainment someone had going into prison the more likely someone was to have problems with recidivism. Educational attainment in this case is the highest grade or degree of education someone received before going to prison. Duke found that black men had some of the lowest educational attainment and so need the most educational programs in prison to make sure they do not have high recidivism.

Duke said, “although many factors contribute to this relapse into criminal behavior, a reform of our prison system is necessary to help combat an inmate's chance of recidivating” (Duke, 45). He calls for more educational programs and more funding to those programs. Through a poll in Indiana prisons Duke found that only 4.7% of prisoners had some sort of college education and that 35.4% of prisoners did not even have education up to normal high school standards (Duke, 46). He wants the prison systems to have more money and access education to help reduce recidivism especially in higher risk demographics like men compared to women and black men compared to white men.

All statistics and articles point to the importance of education to help convicts resocialize into society and stop recidivism. Any time someone goes through significant change and has to adapt and resocialize into a new way of life from what they were used to is a sensitive time. The more inmates learn about the world outside of prison and gain the tools they will need to get a job in society through education the better. The Bureau of Justice wrote that in state prisons usually nine out of ten have some kind of education program (Harlow, 4). That number seems high but if education could help recidivism would it not be better if all prisons had an education program. A lot of factors con-

tribute to running prisons and changing them but moving forward education needs to be a high priority in prison systems.

After spending a long time in prison resocializing into society is a tender time. People can either learn and follow the rules of society or they can go back to their old ways of breaking the More norms (laws). Many inmates in prison have little to no education and tend to be from low-income situations. Having minimal education can make it hard for people to resocialize and integrate into society. The link between education and recidivism is because education makes it easier to get well-paying

jobs and fit into society. People with high economic hardship tend to have less education because they must be working for every penny not learning in a classroom. Because of this link between recidivism, education, and income a survey of low-income families and the education system should be done to see if it is helping them enough. Steps and studies need to be taken to examine why and how to reduce the number of people going to prison in the first place. There are many steps to take but it is also clear how vital education is to getting inmates to resocialize into society and stop the high rates of recidivism.

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