

# THE ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT/TRAINING AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CRIME-FREE LIVING THROUGH THE VOICES OF FORMER AUSTRALIAN INMATES

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## Abstract

This study explores employment/training experiences of adult Australian ex-inmates living crime-free. Little is known in terms of how employment/training comes to assist ex-inmates in living crime-free and, equally, what role employment/training has played in the lives of ex-inmates prior to and during incarceration. Integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, employment/training was measured at pre-incarceration, during incarceration and post-incarceration to explore its relationship with crime-free living. All participants (n=20) reported having employment prior to incarceration, but only a quarter reported that it was stable and secure. Participants also reported having ad hoc jobs during incarceration with less than one-fifth having post-prison employment. However, for a small group of participants who persisted with employment/training, they reported increased self-esteem. They also reported that employment/training was an informal social control alongside inherent social incentives of being a productive citizen. Therefore, employment may perhaps be a notable catalyst for successful transition/reintegration for those ex-inmates who actively seek out and persist with it. Importantly, over half of the participants reported that employment was not related to recidivism and/or safeguarding them from re-offending or in living crime-free.

**Key Words:** Employment, Ex-inmates, Incarceration and Post-Prison

## Introduction

Employment is argued to be a key factor in reducing recidivism (J-F, 2010; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson 1998; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; Myers, 1983; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Uggen, 2000; Uggen & Staff, 2001; Visher, Debus-Sherrill, & Yahner, 2011). However, it is uncertain how employment as a construct comes to motivate inmates toward desistance and, further, how employment directly comes to assist ex-inmates to live crime-free (Rakis, 2005; Uggen & Staff, 2001; Visher et al., 2011). It is, therefore, necessary to explore established links that may exist between employment/income, crime, and crime-free living (Krienert & Fleisher, 2001). Notably, very little is known about the role of employment in the lives ex-inmates living in Australia and how it comes to assist them in their post-prison life; and, consequently, this study adds to the work of Maruna and Immarigeon's (2013) by providing an Australian perspective to the subject in an attempt to explore what happens to individuals once they are released from prison, especially within the narrow confines of employment. More specifically, it is important to understand whether employment (or earning some sort of legal income) helps ex-inmates stay crime-free (which is the operational definition for this study) or does it hinder them? The question is, does employment mean something else entirely to ex-inmates? To this end, this study reports on the role of employment prior to incarceration, during incarceration and post-incarceration through the voices of former Australian inmates living crime-free.

Employment in general terms, be it part-time, full-time, or ad hoc is defined as having a job (skilled and/or unskilled) irrespective of the duration, wherein an ex-inmate makes income in a legal manner. It is commonly framed that employment and crime are associated and that unemployment, unstable

employment, lower levels of employment, low earnings/income can lead to crime, and equally that having employment safeguards one from crime (Fahey, Roberts, & Engel, 2006; Lynch & Sabol, 2001). Fahey et al. (2006), using Andrew's and Bonta's (1994) notion for predictors of crime, argue that unstable employment is one of the major predictors for criminal conduct. Using this view, it is possible that those without employment and/or extended periods of unemployment perhaps have a greater risk of engaging in maladaptive and criminal behaviours compared to those who have employment; but how exactly unemployment as an independent construct directly leads to crime or becomes a predictor of crime has not as yet been clearly articulated or conceptualized.

Aaltonen (2015), Krienert and Fleisher (2001) argued that employment and crime may not be directly or necessarily linked, but that having employment or income could, to some extent, minimize the risk of anti-social behaviours and crime. While the benefits of stable employment with good income are obvious, how unemployment or low levels of employment comes to be associated with crime and anti-social behaviour needs to be critically explained and challenged. A study by Grogger (1998) on income and crime found that individuals who had low levels of income were more involved in crime. However, Grogger's (1998) study also found that 95% (N=274) of those employed did make some kind of income from wrong doings (i.e., illegally) and that only 5.5% of those unemployed made income from them. This did not suggest that the vast majority of employed engage in crime or that they earn income through wrongdoings, but it does present the case that having employment does not always necessarily safeguard one from the wrongdoings or crime. Therefore, perhaps unemployment may put some individuals at a greater risk of crime than others and equally, employment as a construct may not directly safeguard all from offending. Thus, it is necessary to capture the role of employment and determine whether it safeguards ex-inmates from maladaptive behaviours prior to incarceration and how jobs in prison and post-prison assist them to live crime-free (Farrall, 2005; Hodgson & Heckbert, 1996; Leibrich, 1993; Maruna, 2001; Webster, MacDonald, & Simpson, 2006). Thus, it is important to independently explore employment prior to incarceration, during incarceration, and post-incarceration to learn the role of employment and its relationship to crime, crime-free living, and reintegration.

## Employment Before Incarceration

While the nature of employment and the context of employment might vary among inmates, it is possible that most ex-inmates would have had some kind of employment prior to incarceration be it sporadic, part-time, full-time, stable, temporary and/or an ad hoc job. A number of studies have reported inmates as having employment prior to incarceration (Andrews & Bonta, 1994; Blassingame, 2001; Brown, 1988; Bushway & Reuter, 2002; Coffey & Knoll, 1998; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 1998; Heckbert & Turkington, 2001; Hodgson & Heckbert, 1996; Jenkins, 1988; Leibrich, 1993; Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Rhodes, 1988; Thornton, 1988; Tiberi, 1988; Tully, 1988). A study by Visher et al. (2011) found that two-thirds of inmates (N=740) had worked in the six months prior to incarceration and that some had even worked in the same jobs for over two years. To this end, Graffam, Shinkfield, Lavelle, and Hardcastle (2004) in an earlier study asserted that irrespective of the kind of employment, most inmates prior to incarceration could have become aware of workplace expectations (i.e., responsibility and accountability), accumulated work experience, gained employable skills, had become familiar in observing rules/norms and would have developed self-discipline and a work ethic. Perhaps those inmates who had employment were productive citizens and civic members with a pro-social routine; however, the question still remains as to why employment prior to incarceration did not safeguard or shield these individuals from offending in the first place, especially those who had good and stable employment. Further, in the case of those inmates who did not have employment, to what extent did not having employment directly lead them to crime?

## Employment During Incarceration

During incarceration, a number of employment opportunities and employment programs are made available to inmates, such as working in the woodwork industry, commercial laundry, kitchen, horticulture, and landscaping, etc. Also, a number of job training programs and job readiness courses are also made available to inmates to assist them in post-prison reintegration (Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride, 2004). In particular, the primary aim of the above-mentioned employment opportunities, courses, and programs are designed to equip inmates with skills to increase their chances of post-prison employment (Visher et al., 2011; Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie, 2001). A comprehensive review (i.e., a meta-analysis of 53 studies) of employment opportunities and prison employment programs (e.g., prison/work re-entry programs) undertaken by Wilson et al. (2001) found that participants in a work re-entry program were less likely to recidivate compared to non-participants; but Wilson et al. (2001) noted that these results were extremely complicated due a weak methodology and they believe that caution must be exercised in interpreting these results to suggest that employment leads to reduced recidivism.

Importantly, Wilson et al. (2001) could not show a direct link between participation in employment opportunities and programs (i.e., prison/work re-entry programs) leading to post-prison employment or reduced recidivism (Krienert & Fleisher, 2001). Therefore, the efficacy of employment opportunities and prison programs should thereby be rightfully measured against skill acquisition, suitability of jobs and job readiness rather than in terms of recidivism, as reduced recidivism is a by-product and secondary measure of employment. Thus, in evaluating prison employment programs, it becomes important to determine to what extent these programs and opportunities not only come to assist inmates while incarcerated but more importantly, whether they lead to post-prison employment before attempting to account for reduced recidivism (Solomon et al., 2004). It is equally contended that jobs in prison can be ad hoc, contextualized and menial, and are argued to have no particular significance to jobs acquired in post-prison (Blassingame, 2001; Brown, 1988; Bushway & Reuter, 2002; Coffey & Knoll, 1998; Gysbers et al., 1998; Heckbert & Turkington, 2001; Hodgson & Heckbert, 1996; Jenkins, 1988; Leibrich, 1993; Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Rhodes, 1988; Thornton, 1988; Tiberi, 1988; Tully, 1988). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that jobs during incarceration may benefit inmates at different levels, but to what extent they directly translate into employable skills post-prison leading to employment and how employment then leads to reduced recidivism needs to be captured from the experiences of ex-inmates: this research is currently unavailable.

## Employment Post-Prison

Post-prison employment is argued to be a prime catalyst for successful transition as it provides direct and positive community reintegration (Graffam et al., 2004; Laub et al., 1988; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Stoll & Bushway, 2007; Uggen, 2000; Visher et al., 2011). However, very little is known in terms of what employment actually means (e.g., full-time or part-time) post-prison; for example, it is not clear whether employment refers to white collar jobs or manual labour jobs or whether it implies other constructs such as work ethic, routine, or income/structure. Carlsson (2012) and Cook, Kang, Braga, Ludwig, and O'Brien (2014) have argued that the available jobs should not be unappealing and/or unattractive in post-prison. Nonetheless, in the case of ex-inmates obtaining any job, let alone sustained, stable, secure, legal, full-time, part-time, stable or even an appropriate job, is a goal that is elusive to a great majority of ex-inmates (Visher et al., 2011; Visher, Winterfield, & Coggeshall, 2005; Western, Kling, & Weiman, 2001). Moreover, in reaching the goal of a sustained and/or appropriate job, ex-inmates must overcome several hurdles such as employer attitudes towards them and restrictions endured due to their own criminal history (Bowker, 1994; Fahey et al., 2006; Taxman, Young, Byrne, Holsinger, & Anspach, 2002).

In exploring employer attitudes, a study by Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll (2004) found that over 40% of employers (N=600) were reluctant to employ ex-inmates and, more importantly over 90% refused to employ ex-inmates with a history of violence or sex offenses; but that some of these employers were willing to consider employing those ex-inmates with property or drug offenses. One explanation,

according to Pager, Western, and Sugie (2009), is that employers are very likely to quickly associate criminal history with dishonesty, violence, unreliability and poor job performance and, therefore, are reluctant to give an opportunity to ex-inmates irrespective of the nature of the offense. Holzer et al. (2004) also found that of those companies/firms that had no contact with people and those that were confined to unskilled categories (e.g., areas of manufacturing, factory line work, construction, and transportation), some were more willing to employ ex-inmates. Holzer et al. (2004) also reported that when companies/firms hire ex-inmates, they primarily hire those ex-inmates who had already been living in the community with some kind of post-prison work experience; these companies/firms were very reluctant to hire ex-inmates who were recently released from prison (i.e., *fresh* out of prison). This finding of Holzer et al. (2004) partially supports the view that employment is independent of reduced recidivism and that living crime-free is almost a precursor to gaining post-prison employment. To this end, the belief of Visher et al. (2011) that personal and situational characteristics are more likely to forecast improved possibilities of employment rather than employment by itself is warranted.

Equally, for a great majority of ex-inmates, criminal history is detrimental as it accounts for their differential treatment in the labour market (Pager, Western et al., 2009). To test the labour market's response to criminal history, Pager and Western (2009) used everyday African Americans and Anglo-Saxon Americans (N=10) and matched them on all employable criteria and randomly assigned some individuals to have a criminal history (e.g., drug possession with intent to sell) and others with no criminal history. Of those randomly assigned to a criminal history, the likelihood of employment fell by 50% and this worsened for African Americans relative to Anglo-Saxon individuals. However, these findings are hardly surprising as they have been documented by a number of studies and as such confirm that criminal history alone can be one of the biggest barriers to employment over and above other factors (Pager & Quillian, 2005; Pager, Western et al., 2009; Pager, Bonikowski, & Western, 2009). Travis (2005) and Petersilia (2003) also found that 60 to 75% of ex-inmates reported no employment after a year of living post-prison irrespective of employable skills. The above findings are also similar to that of Waldfoegel (1994) who also found that ex-inmates incarcerated for crimes such as larceny and fraud had greater difficulty securing employment compared to those who were convicted but not incarcerated. Even given this limitation, if an ex-inmate does succeed in getting employment, how it can safeguard them from crime is not clear.

## Social Control Theory

Social Control Theory is based on the premise that employment creates a positive social identity, economic independence, self-reliance and that these together can deter individuals from pursuing maladaptive, anti-social and criminal behaviours (Albright & Denq, 1996; Gendreau, Goggin, & Gray, 2000; Webster et al., 2006). In terms of employment and crime-free living, Social Control Theory takes a more constructive view by arguing that positive "turning points" (e.g., employment and education) and positive "bonds" (e.g., family relationships) can lead to a life away from crime (Sampson & Laub, 1993). To this end, Rakis (2005) noted that employment can be a deterrent to engaging in criminal behaviour due to the inherent social incentives of being a crime-free and becoming a productive member of the community. Perhaps, then, employment to some extent may indirectly serve as an informal social control, preventing one from perpetrating criminal behaviour and exposing individuals to disciplined routine, methodical structure, responsibility, work ethic, pro-social values and norms (Fahey et al., 2006; Myers, 1983; Visher et al., 2011;).

Employment, therefore, may indirectly provide social control and deter individuals from crime post-prison; and such a view implies that individuals without a job or with low levels of income are more at risk of offending (Rakis, 2005; Sampson & Laub 1977; Uggen & Staff, 2001). However, there is no evidence to show a causal link between employment and crime and/or crime-free living (Krienert & Fleisher, 2001). Further, in the case of ex-inmates, how employment can suddenly translate to "*social control*," particularly in the case of those ex-inmates who already had employment prior to incarceration, is not clear. In particular, it is possible that these ex-inmates are familiar with

appreciating/valuing social norms, adherence to accountability and conscientiousness toward achieving goals. However, it is still unclear to what extent these benefits did not safeguard them against offending to begin with. Thus, the assertion postulated by Social Control Theory in retrospection does not account for how employment in the first place could not safeguard and/or protect these individuals from offending (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

It is thereby necessary to question to what extent post-prison employment is likely to "*prevent*" and/or act as a "*social control*" for reoffending and to explore whether crime decreases in the years preceding employment (Skardhamar & Savolainen, 2014). However, this is not to disqualify employment as having no role post-prison, as it can play a useful role in reintegration; but what role it plays in the lives of ex-inmates through their own voices is lacking (Holzer et al., 2004; Krienert & Fleisher, 2001). Visher et al. (2011) argued that sustained employment is perhaps an important *component* for ex-inmates post-prison than any kind of employment. Farrall (2005), Hodgson and Heckbert (1996), Leibrich (1993), Maruna (2001) and Webster et al. (2006) add to the above and note that ongoing and regular income over and above employment is perhaps more crucial and necessary post-prison. Thus, the aim of the current study is to explore the role of employment in the lives of former inmates.

This study explored the role of employment (from prior to incarceration and during incarceration to post-prison) in the lives of ex-inmates living crime-free to gain meaningful insight into how employment benefited them and/or is benefitting them post-prison. This study reports on employment and draws on findings from the voices of ex-inmates in terms of the role of employment. To date, no study has been conducted on the precise role of employment in terms of its relationship with crime-free living within an Australian context. Hence, rather than asking the question, "has the lack of employment (unemployment, underemployment or no employment) led you to offend?" the more constructive method of inquiry would be to investigate how employment is contributing toward ex-inmates living productively and crime-free.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 20 male participants were involved in the study. All participants served a minimum of a two-year sentence within a prison and were living crime-free for a period of at least two years without having committed any offense (e.g., fine, arrest, or new charge) or misdemeanour, apart from isolated minor incidents such as parking tickets or speeding tickets that may be unrelated to the previous criminal offenses for which they served time (Heckbert & Turkington, 2001). Two years in the community was chosen because recidivism is noted to be high in the first 24 months post-prison (Beck, & Shipley, 1983; J-F, 2010; Kershaw, 1997; Kershaw & Renshaw, 1997; Langan & Levin, 2002; Maruna, 2001; Walters, 2005). At the time of data collection, all participants (i.e., former inmates) lived in Queensland, Australia and were aged between 27 and 65 years with a mean age of 44.25 years. A total of eighteen participants identified themselves to be Caucasian with two identifying themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

### Design

Data was collected from participants through a face-to-face open-ended semi-structured interview, which allowed participants to describe their lived experience in their own words from childhood to adulthood. Participants were recruited through newspaper advertisement. All participants provided full consent to take part in the study and interviews were conducted on university campuses during office hours and work days. The researcher of this study conducted all interviews, collated data and analyzed the data. There was no incentive nor monetary reward for participation. All interviews were tape

recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The primary role of the researcher was to document, through note taking and tape recording, the various experiences of the participants by asking relevant open-ended questions and to facilitate discussion in identifying the role of employment. The primary role of the participants was to share their experiences with regard to employment. The role of employment was measured in three stages: pre-incarceration, during incarceration, and post-incarceration.

## Instrument

The questionnaire had three phases. Phase I and II were self-developed and are exploratory in nature. Phase I requested baseline information as to what support the participants had at the time of their release i.e., Exit Checklist (See *Appendix A*); Phase II invited participants to articulate how employment was assisting them to live crime-free (See *Appendix B*); and in Phase III (See *Appendix C*), participants completed a Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG) which collected background information (Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 2001).

## Measures

Data in Phase I comprised of a self-developed Exit Checklist to capture transitional needs at the time of departing from prison. This checklist had 18 questions and participants responded by either YES = 0 or a NO = 1 to indicate whether the particular employment-related transitional need was met; a high score on the Exit Checklist implies that transitional support was not adequately met. This is evidenced by participants responding NO to a majority of the questions; however, if a participant responded YES to all questions that would end up with an overall score of 0 suggesting that the employment transitional needs were met (*Appendix A*). In Phase II, participants were first invited to quantify the role of employment by giving a score of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest and then to describe in what way/s employment had assisted them, and was assisting them, to live crime-free (See *Appendix B*). Phase III collected demographic and background information (See *Appendix C*).

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data on demographic details were presented through descriptive statistics. Qualitative data analysis explored and identified broad and unique themes. Using Tesch's (1990) understanding of analysis, a general description was obtained by comparing all specific participants' responses; and from this a general theme was formulated/constructed whereby commonality in the general theme was directly validated by the individual's description, such that the meaning of each unit was an accurate description of one's own experience (J-F, 2010; Spiegelberg, 1975).

## Results

Results are reported in two sections: (i) demographical descriptive information on the participants and background information on employment at the two phases (i.e. role of employment and background information) and (ii) qualitative descriptions of the role of employment. Qualitative results primarily reported on the major themes found in terms of the participants' experiences with regard to the role of employment.

### Demographic data

The age of ex-inmates at the time of release from prison (n=20) ranged from 26 years to 65 years, with a mean age of 44.25 years. The range of time spent in prison was between 2 and 20 years, with a mean

age of 8.74 years. The average age at the time of release was 44.25 years (range 26 to 65). The average time spent in the community living crime-free was 8.27 years (range 2 to 17 years). The Nature of Index offense included property damage, armed robbery, murder, and break-in and enters, drugs (possession, dealing and trafficking), fraud, theft, and assault.

## Judicial Sentence and Types of Offenses Participants Committed

The mean judicial sentence served by participants was  $M = 8.74$  years with a range of 2 to 20 years. In terms of types of offenses, participants reported the following: 35% of the participants were convicted of drug trafficking, supply, and possession ( $n = 7$ ); 20% of the participants were convicted of murder and attempted murder ( $n = 4$ ); 15% were convicted of violent offenses and assault ( $n = 3$ ); 15% were convicted of armed robbery ( $n = 3$ ); and a further 15% had various other offenses. Over and above index offenses as part of participants' criminal histories, other offenses included fraud, assault, unlawful entry, possessing stolen goods, possession and cultivating cannabis and drink driving. The accuracy of the index offenses and the consequent charges leading up to convictions were not verified against official records.

## Employment Exit Checklist

The Exit Checklist assessed transitional post-prison support received by participants at the time of exiting from a correctional facility. Responses to this checklist were forced choices (yes or no) from a questionnaire which contained 18 questions related to their transitional post-prison employment support prior to release (see Table 1).

Table 1

### *Participants' (N = 20) Mean Scores Against Employment Exit Domain at the Time of Leaving the Correctional Facility*

Transitional Exit Domain	Number of questions in each of the domains	Group Mean Scores M
Employment	18	10

The average score for all participants was 10/18, which suggested that for many participants transitional employment needs were not fully met prior to release. In other words, at the time of leaving prison, participants had fewer than half of their transitional employment needs not yet met, i.e. knowing what jobs they could apply for, where to find a job, how to find a suitable job, what a job interview entailed, what a trial/probationary period was. To this end, most reported that they were released into the community without any proper post-prison employment support and indicated that they had no knowledge of the kinds of jobs to look for, where to look for jobs, and what jobs were suitable for them given their criminal history.

More importantly, they also indicated that they lacked knowledge about what employers were looking for, how to inquire about a job with potential employers, the kinds of questions they would be asked in an interview or even how to speak to a prospective employer post-prison. This result is alarming because most participants being released into the community do not have a job and sometimes it is a condition of their release to have a job; they are expected by parole boards to have a job within a limited period of time.

## Employment Prior to Incarceration

All ex-inmates reported having jobs prior to incarceration. They reported having worked primarily in temporary and part-time jobs, but over 25% reported having stable and secure employment and working in those positions for over 2 years prior to incarceration. The range of jobs included: working in a retail store, labourer, working as a motor mechanic, painting, and carpentry. Most of these jobs were *blue collar* jobs with a low skill level. Most participants reported being familiar with workplace health safety requirements and having a work ethic and meeting various workplace expectations. In terms of how employment assisted them prior to incarceration, almost all report unequivocally that it did not protect or safeguard them from crime or wrongdoings.

## Employment During Incarceration

Most ex-inmates reported undertaking several prison jobs during their incarceration; these included working in the bakery, the laundry, the kitchen as a junior chef or cook hand, landscaping, an administration support role in the library, a teacher's aide, in the beef cattle industry, making oilskin coats for gold mining companies and work in the textile industry. In terms of how employment assisted them, most reported that prison jobs did not assist in any particular way while incarcerated or post-prison, but rather that those in-prison jobs helped them to use up their time whilst in prison.

## Employment Post-Prison

Table 2

*Group Responses to Factors Assisting Participants to Live Crime-free*

Factors	Self-rating*					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>
Employment	2	3	2	4	9	3.7

\*Participants (n = 20) self-rated (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) on how each factor was assisting them to live crime-free (5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest).

Only 45% of participants recorded a score of “5” to indicate (M = 3.7) that employment (i.e., income) was assisting them and contributing to living crime-free. However, most ex-inmates reported having a number of short-term and episodic periods of employment while others reported that they were in receipt of pensions, social security benefits and/or disability pensions. Participants also reported that their criminal history had limited their employment possibilities. The following list indicates the jobs that participants were involved in post-prison included taxi driver, backyard motor mechanic, volunteer worker with the Drug Arm (Drug Rehabilitation Services in Queensland), bus driver and courier delivery driver. Only three participants were in professional jobs: drug and alcohol counsellor in a church, trainer for heavy machinery use and a journalist in a small country town. In terms of how employment assisted them post-prison, the majority reported that employment did not protect or safeguard them from crime or wrongdoings post-prison and that it did not directly assist them in living crime-free.

## Ex-inmates Employment Experiences Post-Prison

The following section reports qualitative responses to highlight and showcase some themes; however, no particular coding mechanism was adopted given the qualitative data and all data were used to

accurately document and capture their own description of their experience. Most of these jobs were obtained through “word of mouth.”

One participant reported,

*Since I have been out I have worked as a surveyor's assistant, labourer (my mate got me this job) and environmental officer... the council needed environmental officers... and my lecturer gave me the contact.*

Another reported,

*I was driving trucks... I work(ed) at Buttercup bakeries ... then worked for Salvation Army... and now I drive a taxi*

In terms of employers creating ad hoc positions, one participant reported,

*What happened was that when I first came here... The guy that owns the company he virtually created a job for me.*

There is recognition that it is hard to get a good, suitable and appropriate job due to high competition and low skill level. One participant reported,

*No matter... how good you are if you come up against somebody better in every interview you go to, you (will) never get employed.*

Even though participants reported gaining employment through different, unconventional ways (i.e., word of mouth) they all collectively recognized that it increased their self-esteem, made them feel like valued citizens and gave them a positive boost. One participant reported,

*Now, having a job and providing for yourself and bringing your own money in and stuff like that it gives you self-esteem, self-respect and more so makes you feel like... that you are a valid member of society... And increases your self-worth... it (employment) provided for my family.*

Another reported,

*Job is a boost, you know, it keeps you going... it gives you a hoist, it gives you an encouragement, it gives you like the light at the end of the tunnel.*

*I guess it is fulfillment you know, like security... by giving me enough money to get Whatever I want to..... it helps you get by... in the community.*

In terms of long-term rewards one participant commented,

*I could spend 10 hours doing pretty physical work (for example) break-and-entry into doors and safes and all that and at times, I would not make (any money)... (but) at least, when you go to work you know you are going to get paid and you know you are not going to jail for that... it is not about external but it is building the belief that I can function in society. I can work these jobs. I can work with people, I can interact with the community. I can be fair and I can be honest. I can be trusted... and it gives a belief for my future... and all of this makes me... feel pretty good.*

Another participant reported,

*Employment helped me a lot because when the money was coming in I did not have to go out and do anything wrong; so I had to pull my socks up... it (employment) actually turned me*

*around from the criminal person that I was... the money (through employment) came to support my family... and we were able to buy things without having to put them in a hock shop... so it helped me... the good thing was the blokes all took a liking to me and I ended up becoming a union Representative.*

Employment not only seemed to provide a much needed emotional boost, but also appeared to assist in practical ways such as paying bills, buying household commodities and also created positive leadership opportunities. In terms of having regular money over and above employment, one participant reported,

*I am on the pension... I only buy things on special... I wait till I see specials and Everything I own is dirt cheap and that is how I go... have always been on disability support because I had sure income for my rent and for my food... and this makes me feel like a member of society... a constructive and a productive member of society.*

The same participant stated,

*There is no point in rehabilitation it does not work without money.*

Recognizing the importance of having the regular income one participant also stated,

*You cannot do much without money.*

Even though some participants were content with social security and/or pension benefits, others observed that their pension and/or social security were not enough to live in the community,

*I certainly couldn't handle living on the dole (i.e., social security)... well, put it this way, if I did not have employment, I'd have to get my money (from) somewhere (else) so you give it a 5 (being the highest) in assisting me to live crime-free... well (employment) gives(s) you security... you actually have to go out and do something for extended hours... it makes you appreciate money a whole lot more once you get used to the idea that you have got a secure job... I see employment as I am working toward something you know (as in a goal)... I have two full-time jobs.*

Another participant reported,

*But see 2½ for 3 years ago I was on an invalid pension from a car accident... I told Centrelink or the Government to shove their pension where it fits because it wasn't enough to feed my family.*

This need to feed the family and to pay the necessary bills appears to have driven some participants to full-time employment or to secure more than one job.

In addition, even though most participants reported that employment was useful in many ways and indirectly assisted them to live crime-free, there were also some participants who noted that employment by itself did not directly assist them to live crime-free; however, they recognized that having employment was essential and necessary for them to live in the community. To this end one participant reported,

*Most people commit crimes when they are employed anyway... it hasn't really helped me to live crime-free... because I was unemployed for a long time and I was still living crime free... (but) it does help to pay bills.*

In terms of employment and criminal history, in some cases, participants had lost their jobs due to their previous criminal history. One participant reported,

*I applied for a job at the Youth Detention Centre at Wacol. I got a job as a youth worker and I told them straight up front that I had a criminal record. I should have shut my mouth but I didn't. I got the job and had done my four weeks training... got my Senior First Certificate and everything. I was rapped. I was on the top of the moon because I was there helping the young fellows... (because) their next stop is the big house (jail). I worked for five days in there with the young fellows... (they looked) at my tattoos and said, 'oh you look like you have done a bit of time'... I said yes... because I have been there and done that I know what I am talking about and I had a good rapport with the young people... And then I rang up again to see when my next shift was... they said, 'we can't employ you anymore... because of your criminal record.'*

The participant went on to report that he was devastated by the loss of his job for no apparent reason other than because of his criminal history. He described his loss with great sadness and reported feeling hurt and upset. The participant went on to report,

*I (then) applied for a job as a taxi driver and they knocked me back. They said 'because of your criminal record because you are dealing with public' (we cannot give you permission to directly deal with the public). Three months later... I wrote back another letter and said, 'no'... so I went to the member of Parliament and (he) wrote (a letter) on my behalf to Main Roads and as soon as Main Roads (received it), they said, 'we are willing to give you a chance now,' so they gave me 6 months' probation. If I had done anything wrong in that 6 months, then I would have no chance of getting a license ever for taxi... and now I have been driving for two to three years and we own our own taxi.*

Even though his criminal history had stopped him initially, he still positively pursued and created a sustainable pathway for himself and resolved the issue positively.

In terms of how criminal history limits opportunities, one participant reported:

*"... No one has given me a go - as soon as you tell them that you have a criminal record that is it and if you are honest enough and tell them what it (criminal history) is since they can't wait till you get out of the door... you are gone.*

Another participant reported,

*A friend of mine was working selling luxury cars and one day he accidentally told his workmates that he was in prison for about three months in his past life, and the next thing you know he was fired from the job. As far as trying to get jobs where you have to declare the fact that you were convicted of an offense, you cannot lie about it because they do a police check, so there is no point in applying for some work. This can be frustrating because you might be very good at the job and perfectly suited except that you've got a criminal history and even more frustrating is that I am 26 years... and I was convicted of crimes when I was 18 years now at 26 they are still preventing me from getting certain types of employment... I was a bloody teenager when I did it (crime)... I cannot get employment as a security guard.*

The same participant went on to explain that he eventually got a job as a journalist and even while working as a journalist, his past had come to influence his day-to-day work. He stated that,

*My boss actually found out after two months that I had been inside (the jail) ... I've since found out that the police actually told him ... and they (police) didn't want me working as a full-time journalist ... (my boss) ... kept me anyway he could have kicked me after three months but for about the first year he had really hard time interacting with me ... I wanted to go and do a Court story ... nothing to do with police or anything to do with crime ... (but) he assumed I had loaded motions and motives (and would not let me) ... and still now it is difficult for me to write about anything to do with police or law or the justice system in my job*

*as a Journalist ... he scrutinizes it just wondering if I've got a hidden agenda ... now it is real difficult ... if people find out I am from jail ... they don't want to associate with me.*

Another participant reported,

*I got a job with the government it was really amazing, but I had to go to another city, so I went to the parole office as I was still on parole. I remember going up to the parole office and walked in and the parole officer came in and he said, 'what are you doing here,' but he knew (that I was in this new Town because I got a proper job) ... I said, 'I am working here' and he said, 'who you working with' I said, 'with the Council' and he said, 'What are you doing.' I said, 'EHO (Environment Health Officer) work.' He said, 'You can't do that' and I said, 'why, I have been given a job and have been asked to come here' and he said, 'You have official corruption on your rap sheet (i.e. criminal history)' and I said, 'No I haven't. Somehow he copied and pasted it and I said that is not mine and (looking through my record) I said, 'Well these are mine stealing and break and enter are mine and that is not mine.' He was just playing games with me and he said, 'Oh, I better go check then and he walked out' ... for me that was big fear ... but I had in my mind I paid (my) dues.*

## Summary

Employment, in terms of income, appears to be useful at a personal level and some of the indicators are an increase in self-esteem, feeling like a valued citizen, providing for practical/financial needs, achieving long-term rewards, gaining regular money, gaining employment through networking, finding one's pension not to be enough, using employment as an indirect assistance in living crime-free. In terms of negative implications, criminal history appears to lead to the possibility of losing jobs and limiting opportunities. All participants recognized having a regular income, be it through employment and/or a pension that play a significant role in how well they are able to adjust, reintegrate and live post-prison. Even though there is the recognition that employment/income may not directly in casual terms assist in living crime-free, all participants recognized that without regular/stable employment/income, post-prison living would be very difficult. There was also the recognition by participants that most criminal activities were to gain money illegally; so by having a legal and proper employment/income, it employment was likely to counter such criminal activities (e.g., stealing). Overall, what it was difficult to ascertain the kind training that was undertaken by participants as no one commented or provided any insights into the role of training, perhaps training is implicit in employment (i.e., on the job learning) or perhaps having employment was more important than training.

## Employment, Crime-Free Living and Crime

No participant reported that a lack of money, unemployment or lengthy periods of employment led to anti-social behaviours, crime or offending. Rather, participants regarded employment and crime as two unrelated constructs and realities.

## Discussion

Even though the sample size of the study was small, the findings strengthen the argument that employment is both useful and can be a notable catalyst for successful transition and reintegration for ex-inmates for at least a small group of participants. In the case of this small group of participants, employment came to assist them in different ways. For example, employment contributed towards increasing their self-esteem and allowing them to be recognized as valued citizens. Further, employment assisted these ex-inmates in paying for their own practical needs by having regular

money/income and led them to develop positive pathways, allowed them to work towards long-term rewards, created positive opportunities and, importantly, provided a realistic experience that criminal history limits opportunities. In many cases, it appears that training is implicit in employment; in other words, most inmates do not provide an insight into the kind of training that was unspoken in attaining employment and its association with living crime-free.

Employment leads to a positive emotional boost, increased self-esteem and makes ex-inmates feel accepted as valued citizens, as well as provides a unique and novel link for community re-integration and a positive transition into the society. Importantly, for this small group of ex-inmates, post-prison employment did "*prevent*" and act as a "*social control*" against offending when they actively pursued employment. However, what is not clear is whether a certain kind of an ex-inmate is more likely to pursue employment more than another or whether employment opportunities are greatly limited for ex-inmates; hence, one needs to continually pursue all opportunities. But employment in these participants' subjective reflective process seems to indicate a positive psychological and social gain. However, caution must be exercised not to infer a causal claim, but that to appreciate that qualitative analysis exposes subjective meanings and experiences through the participants' world.

It is important to note that, even though this study partly claimed that employment has the ability to "prevent" and act as a "social control" against offending, a majority of participants acknowledged that employment and crime were unrelated constructs and realities. In line with Social Control Theory that employment was positively (i.e., prevents or acts as a social control against offending) contributing toward ex-inmates living productively and crime-free was not confirmed for a majority of participants. Qualitative findings did not support employment to be directly assisting ex-inmates to live crime-free, even though it clearly has important benefits in the lives of ex-inmates. Importantly, no participant reported that a lack of money, unemployment or lengthy periods of employment led to anti-social behaviours, crime or offending, which is contrary to Aaltonen (2015) and Krienert and Fleisher's (2001) notion on the role of employment. Also, as mentioned, the fact that each participant reported having employment before incarceration raises questions as to the role of employment and how it can now suddenly come to assist them post-prison to live crime-free. To this end, much of the qualitative data presented only documents concerns and barriers to employment experienced by ex-inmates, making these insights rich realities.

While this study documented that ex-inmates did have several jobs prior to incarceration, it was not clear to what extent these jobs actually translated into or contributed towards post-prison employment; similarly, to what extent jobs during incarceration translated directly to post-prison employment was also not clear. This observation was also noted by other studies (Andrews & Bonta, 1994; Blassingame, 2001; Brown, 1988; Bushway & Reuter, 2002; Coffey & Knoll, 1998; Gysbers et al., 1998; Heckbert & Turkington, 2001; Hodgson & Heckbert, 1996; Jenkins, 1988; Leibrich, 1993; Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Rhodes, 1988; Thornton, 1988; Tiberi, 1988; Tully, 1988). In line with Carlsson (2012) and Cook et al (2014), most ex-inmates reported that most of the jobs available to them were unappealing and unattractive.

For a small group of participants who did pursue post-prison employment, they noted that the process of getting employment was very difficult and that it was greatly restricted by their criminal history (Holzer et al., 2004; Pager & Western, 2009; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Pager, Bonikowski et al., 2009; Pager, Western et al., 2009). It appears that for ex-inmates, criminal history not only limits the scope of employment but can be a stressful, fearful and shameful reminder of their past. Even though the scope of employment opportunities was restricted by criminal history, those few who did pursue employment one way or another (e.g., by word of mouth or through contacts) did succeed in getting post-prison employment and were able to live crime-free and sustain a productive and constructive life in the community. Perhaps this is indicative of some positive personal strength and other situational characteristics among these particular ex-inmates in line with Visher et al. (2011). Future studies must closely examine personal and situational characteristics in post-prison success among ex-inmates.

Further, the findings suggest that crime did decrease in the years preceding employment for these small group of ex-inmates; future studies must explore to what extent employment independently facilitates such process (Skardhamar & Savolainen, 2014).

This study, along with the findings of Farrall (2005), Hodgson and Heckbert (1996), Leibrich (1993), Maruna (2001) and Webster et al. (2006), argues that ongoing and regular income over and above employment is both crucial and necessary for ex-inmates. To some extent, regular income (by legal means) can safeguard ex-inmates from offending. Regular income allows ex-inmates to buy essential goods and pay immediate bills without having to adopt maladaptive or illegal/deceitful behaviours. In line with the above, this study observes that unemployment or lengthy periods of employment are not associated with anti-social behaviours, crime or offending and that employment perhaps could be a frivolous or inconsequential deterrent in some cases. Again, this must not be causally inferred but should be used to recognise that those ex-inmates who did pursue employment were able to make a positive social contribution.

In line with the findings of Holzer et al. (2004) and Petersillia (2003), this study argued that living crime-free is an essential prerequisite for gaining any kind of post-prison employment. Perhaps living crime-free is a situational characteristic that indirectly supports ex-inmates gaining post-prison employment. It appears that while employment is necessary post-prison, it alone cannot fully shield ex-inmates from offending, nor can it directly come to influence ex-inmates to remain crime-free. This finding strengthens Krienert and Fleisher's (2001) notion that employment and crime may not be directly related, implying that employment and crime are complex matters that should not be reduced to simple constructs examined in a vacuum. Thus, employment as a key stand-alone strategy for successful reintegration and re-entry resulting in reduced recidivism cannot be attested (Graffam et al., 2004; Laub et al., 1988; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Stoll & Bushway, 2007; Uggen, 2000; Visher et al., 2011).

Given the small sample size of the study, caution must be exercised in generalizing these findings across various population groups or contexts and in making causal inferences between employment and crime. However, even though the sample size of the study was small, the findings should not be discarded as this study adds to the literature by capturing the voices of male Australian ex-inmates with regard to employment. In terms of recruiting participants, future studies must explore what percentage of those unemployed at a particular time and in a particular context may engage in offending relative to those who are employed during the same time and share a similar context. Such a comparison will then provide critical insight into the extent that employment can safeguard one from offending and to what extent unemployment can account for being involved in crime. Such a study will provide clarity as to whether employment and crime are linked or associated to safeguard one from crime. Further studies should focus more on what makes certain ex-inmates pursue employment against all odds; in other words, it is important to capture positive strengths and capacities that are unique to these individuals that help them succeed post-prison.

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