

Education and Ex-inmates

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Abstract

Introduction: Prison education in principle is acknowledged to serve diverse needs of inmates. It is generally argued that education has varied life course benefits especially in the case of inmates and more specifically upon their release. Education in prisons is not a new or a novel issue, but it appears that its relevance and purpose has been distorted in its inability to fully explain its relationship with offending or to that matter in how it is able to assist ex-inmates to live crime-free. Several studies have attempted to measure recidivism in terms of inmates participation in and/or completion of education programs, without establishing any relationship between education, offending behaviour, or to that matter crime-free living. In other words, very few studies have measured or quantified the "role" of education in the lives of inmates and more so, whether it is related to ex-inmates living crime-free. Importantly, very little is known about how precisely education comes to directly and/or indirectly assist ex-inmates in the community. **Current Research:** A study was undertaken at the University of Queensland to explore various factors that were supporting ex-inmates to live crime-free and one such factor was education. **Aim:** In particular the focus of the study was to investigate the role of education within the criminogenic literature in its relevance and relationship to crime-free living. **Participants** in the study were male ex-inmates (n=20) living crime-free in Queensland. **The role of education** (i.e. formal schooling) was measured in three stages: pre-incarceration, during incarceration and post-incarceration. **Method:** Phenomenology was used as methodology and information was collected through face-to-face interviews using Violence Risk Appraisal Guide. Comprehensive education related information in terms of school experiences, learning trajectories and educational history/background was collected for each of the participant. **Findings:** Education prior to incarceration showed that most ex-inmates have low levels of education with deficits and gaps in knowledge, had negative school experiences and were either regularly suspended or expelled from school. Education during incarceration revealed that some inmates engaged in ad hoc prison programs, with the premise that learning is likely to lead to employment upon their release. Education during post-prison revealed several gaps in ex-inmates learning pathways. In some cases education appeared to have provided a positive pathway and if it was consistently pursued as a lifelong pathway, it was a salient factor in assisting ex-inmates to live productively. However, education independently and directly does not seem to assist ex-inmates to live crime-free or sustain a crime-free life. Prison Education for inmates should be understood within a multifaceted lifelong pathway sustained through scholarships and stipends.

INTRODUCTION

Education is presumed to have several life course benefits to various individuals. While the benefits of education are irrefutable to a great majority of the population, it is questioned whether the same benefits are transferred to inmates and ex-inmates (Hart et al., 2004; Lochner, 2004). Moreover, since education is generally provided in various prisons in order to address rehabilitation and reduce recidivism, question remain pertaining to how education is related to crime and/or crime-free living and how education provides protection from perusing criminal pathways and desisting from crime and/or anti-social behaviours?

From a criminogenic view, the above questions demand an adequate response in terms of what are the educational benefits for inmates and ex-inmates. This is even more urgent due to the prevailing assumption that higher levels of educational achievements are inversely correlated to crime, criminality and mal-adaptive behaviours (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Lochner, 2008; Mackenzie, 2009). It is commonly claimed that individuals who end up in prison are the “least” well educated in society and that lack of education directly contributed toward their criminality (MacGuinness, 2000; Pawson, 2000).

Examining the role of education from a criminogenic view is likely to provide critical insights into the role of education and its relationship with crime and/or crime-free living. One of the strongest arguments that links education and crime emanates from an economic paradigm which is primarily based on a productivity (i.e., employment) principle and performance (i.e., outputs) (Lochner, 2008). The assumption is that higher levels of education create positive opportunities (e.g., employment) and outcomes (e.g., labour market skills) alongside positive self-gain (e.g., income) and societal advantage/s such as regularly exercising civic responsibility and positive socio-cultural positioning (Lochner). This inadvertently sets up the argument for a negative correlation between education and crime, such that individuals with lower levels of education are perceived to be unproductive (e.g., unemployed) and hence not effective members of society (e.g., as unemployed individuals are perceived to have no social status) and are presumed to engage in illegal, anti-social and maladaptive behaviour; and such behaviours are claimed to be directly related to crime (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Mackenzie, 2009). This suggests a linear consequential link that lack of education (leading to unemployment) is directly related to crime. Such views are further substantiated by studies that argue that there is a relationship between unemployment and crime (Freeman, 1996; Gould et al., 2002; Machin & Meghir, 2004).

Lochner (2004) found that individuals are likely to engage in crime, however, even when they are being productive and are engaged in education and employment. Using the findings of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) which has followed 12,686 individuals since 1979, Lochner reported that over 34% of these individuals in their early twenties, who had at least 11 to 12 years of completed schooling, revealed that they made income through criminal activities. Further, Lochner stated that around 17% who were continuing college studies reported receiving income from criminal behaviours and illegal activities. Equally, Lochner reported that high-school drop outs were more likely to engage in criminal activities far /more than others but that it is very unlikely that education alone is likely to deter one from crime or criminal activities. Lochner acknowledged that it is “...*impossible to disentangle the effects of background characteristics...*”

such as age, ethnicity and family background, in terms of one's involvement in criminal behaviour over and above levels of education (p. 827).

Education prior to incarceration

Most studies that claim that there is a negative correlation between education and crime are based on the findings of educational levels of individuals in prison (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Correctional Service Canada, 1991a; 1991b; Freeman, 1996; Harer, 1995; Harlow, 2003; Greenberg et al., 2007; Gwynn et al., 1997; Mackenzie, 2009; Macomber et al., 2010; Newman et al., 1993; Ryan, 1991; Stevens, 2000; Taylor & McAtee, 2003; Tewksbury & Vito, 1994; Vacca, 2004). Even though these studies do not explicitly investigate or measure how educational deficits lead or led inmates to crime, they simply make the claim that somehow poor reading, writing, literacy and numeracy levels of **individuals already incarcerated** contributed toward their offending. From this an argument appears to be made to suggest that there is a negative correlation between lower educational levels and crime. Hence, serious caution must be exercised in how such results are interpreted because reading them in isolation could present a distorted view that lower educational levels and educational difficulties, gaps and/or deficiencies directly contribute toward crime. Further, the above mentioned studies are even more problematic for they do not take into account that education can equip individuals with knowledge to commit crime (Lochner, 2008).

Indeed, education can reward crime, especially in the case of white collar crime/s, it is equally likely that education can teach one to be opportunistic, cover up schemes, engage in insider trading, and/or falsify profits and accounts (Lochner, 2008). While it is highly unlikely that all individuals with high levels of education are susceptible to criminal behaviours, it is equally possible that educated people are easily overlooked and further, less likely to be readily suspected (i.e., charged or convicted) for crime due to their social status and positive socio-cultural positioning. In addition, if it is claimed that educated people are far more productive and exercise positive values and have greater civic responsibility, could this then suggest that an educated person has less of a propensity to commit an offence compared to a person with no or little education? If this is the case, then the level of education perhaps is more related to the kind of crime than crime itself. Perhaps then unskilled crimes (e.g., assault and drug dealing) should be negatively correlated to education and conversely skilled crimes should be positively correlated with education (Lochner, 2004). Irrespective of the arguments that lack of education or having higher levels of education do/don't lead to crime, education by itself can in itself present many benefits for individuals, inmates and ex-inmates alike such as learning new skills and acquiring the latest information (Mackenzie, 2009).

Education during incarceration

In terms of benefits of education for inmates, Mackenzie (2009) unequivocally notes that both the public and policy makers acknowledge that "... *education has benefits in its own right...*". Hence, the main "...*goal of prison education programs is to increase the educational levels of prisoners...*" (Rose, Reschenberg, & Richards, 2010, p. 294). Studies on educational level of inmates prior to incarceration show that they have: learning difficulties, disabilities, difficulty in reading and writing; special education needs; gaps in educations, deficiencies in learning content, illiteracy, low levels of literacy and numeracy, minimal levels of formal schooling, and experienced school failure (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Correctional Service Canada, 1991a; 1991b; Freeman, 1996; Harer, 1995; Harlow, 2003; Greenberg et al., 2007; Gwynn et al., 1997; Mackenzie; Macomber et al., 2010; Newman et al., 1993; Ryan, 1991; Stevens, 2000; Taylor & McAtee, 2003; Tewksbury & Vito, 1994; Vacca, 2004). But Mackenzie goes on to argue "...*that education programs such as basic education, General Educational Development (GED), Postsecondary and Vocational Training are effective in reducing later recidivism and increasing future employment...*" (pii). In this it appears that the same economic productivity principle is applied in program delivery and measurement of benefits in terms of outputs and outcomes (i.e., reduced recidivism). Further, given that Prison Education Programs are based on inmates acquiring functional educational knowledge, labour market skills and job ready skills, it is unclear then how inmate participation in such programs can be measured in terms of rehabilitative needs or reduced recidivism.

It appears that the philosophical approach in terms of measuring benefits of Prison Education Programs are also based on a productivity principle, whereby benefits of education appear to be measured against clearly set criterion (e.g., re-incarceration, parole violation) and at a particular point in time (e.g., post-prison) with quantifiable outputs (Lochner, 2004, 2008). Perhaps it is this economic approach that warrants the delivery of Prison Education Programs within **Correctional and Prison contexts to be a productive (i.e., therapeutic) agent and understood to address: rehabilitative needs and reduce recidivism** (Mackenzie, 2009). Historically, prison education was mainly religious (e.g., indirectly addressing rehabilitative needs and recidivism) (Gerber & Fritsch, 1995). But contemporary Prison Education Programs over the past five decades have become more focused on equipping inmates with basic literacy and numeracy skills, vocational skills, computing skills, labour market skills, industry trade skills and job ready skills. Hence Prison Education Programs do not directly address any of the criminogenic needs, recidivism or rehabilitative (therapeutic) needs, which are necessary to reduce recidivism (Bhatti, 2010; Harlow, 2003; Mackenzie). Most Prison Education Programs in general are not

positioned to explicitly or directly address basic moral or offending behaviour let alone reduced recidivism or rehabilitative outcomes or criminogenic needs (Andrews & Bonta, 2003).

A number of educational programs are delivered within the context of prisons e.g., Literacy and Numeracy Short Courses, Vocational Training Courses, Computer Courses, Certificate Level Trade Skill Courses and Open Learning Courses to complete High School level education and University level courses and even extending to Doctoral programs (Bhatti, 2010; Harlow, 2003; Mackenzie, 2009). Qualitatively determining the benefits of participating in Prison Education Programs across time should be in terms of: what knowledge has been learnt and to what extent educational deficits and educational gaps are addressed. Such documentation is perhaps an accurate way of measuring the benefits of Prison Education Programs. Further, documenting qualitative increments and learning trajectories in terms of benefits for participating in Prison Education Programs, is a better way to capture how Prison Education Programs come to benefit inmates rather than trying to quantify the benefits of Prison Education Programs against recidivism or rehabilitation.

Productivity driven measures are inaccurate tools to assess the benefits of Prison Education Programs as there is no rationale to support how Prison Education Programs are linked to **rehabilitating inmates and/or reducing recidivism**. In this, Prison Education Programs should not be viewed and/or delivered under an economic paradigm as a productive therapeutic agent addressing criminogenic, therapeutic concerns and recidivism. The aim of Prison Education Programs is to “...*increase the educational levels of prisoners...*” (Rose et al., 2010, p.294). But if Prison Education Programs were to be explicitly based on the idea of transformability, where education unequivocally creates opportunities for a positive self-change and is delivered with a vigorous optimism that education can lead to crime-free living, then perhaps a hypothesis can be concurred that education aligns itself as a therapeutic agent (Hart et al., 2004). Further, given that prison education does not explicitly teach moral values, pro-social behaviours and personal development or address offending behaviour, it difficult to appreciate why inmates’ participation in prison education program is measured against reduced recidivism (Harlow, 2003; Mackenzie, 2009; Rose, et al.). Irrespective of the shift in Prison Education Programs, prison education by itself has several benefits to inmates and ex-inmates alike such as learning content knowledge and skills (Mackenzie; Rose, et al.).

Education in post-prison

Measuring reduced recidivism to gauge the effectiveness of participation in Prison Education programs even though inaccurate, is very much based on the productivity principle

in terms of human capital (Lochner, 2004). Even though an argument can be made that education can increase human capital in terms of wages, productivity and market wages, it still does not explain how education is related to crime (**Lochner**). Equally though inmates and ex-inmates see a great need to gain human capital for themselves in terms of equipping themselves with education to address their own deficits and lack of knowledge. This should not be mistaken as the **only, salient and necessary factor** in “re-entry” or as a risk factor or even as a criminogenic factor (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Linton, 2010). In line with the productivity principle, **the role of education in post prison is measured in quantifiable outputs (i.e., reduced recidivism) at specific set time/s (Lochner). Studies** that have claimed to have found that inmates’ participation in education programs lead to reduced recidivism, merely capture the relationship between inmates’ participation and non-participation in education programs, without making any link as to how participation in education program is related to crime and/or reduced recidivism (Batiuk, Moke & Rountree, 1997; Batiuk, et al., 2005; Chappell, 2004; Leibrich, 1993; Mackenzie, 2009; Porporino & Robinson, 1992; Steurer & Smith, 2003; Steurer et al. 2001). How can reduced recidivism be claimed to be an outcome for participation in education programs, when no valid connections are made between education and crime or crime-free living?

Gaining post-secondary qualifications within corrections or outside of corrections has been found to lead toward or result in employment which has been found to reduce recidivism; it is not clear, however, whether this leads to crime-free living (Batiuk, Moke & Rountree; Batiuk, et al.; Chappell; Steurer, & Smith). In addition, it is perhaps employment (i.e., income) that appears to be more related to desistance and recidivism than education. In the case of juvenile offenders Macomber et al. (2010) strongly argues that “successful schooling” (i.e., quality education) leading to employment is perhaps the “major” determining factor in desistance and anti-social behaviour. While this may be accurate for juvenile offenders, it is not clear to what extent this can be generalized to adult offenders as recent recidivism figures are around 55% within the first 12 months for juvenile offenders and young adults (Macomber et al.). This suggests that one in two offenders return to jail within the first 12 months, while a great majority eventually return back to the prison at a slower rate.

Equally there are studies that have found no significant relationship between participation in education programs and post-prison benefits or criminal involvement or reducing recidivism (Grogger, 1998; Wilson et al., 1999; Witte & Tauchen, 1994). Further, Tyler and Kling (2006) noted that ex-inmates who had completed their formal education (GED) in prison had little or no significant benefit in post-prison in terms of income or earnings. However, Tyler and Kling do report that there was an increase in **earnings by \$800 a year** for a small group of ex-inmates which

virtually disappeared in about two years. Is it likely that if education was pursued actively by ex-inmates in post-prison with a shift toward wanting a positive change it can perhaps create a positive pathway? Very few studies if any have adequately conceptualized a relationship between participation in a Prison Education Programs and living crime-free. It is unclear “... *what works for whom, when, why and in what circumstances...*” (MacKenzie, 2009).

A comprehensive meta-analysis study done by Wilson et al. (1999) on correction based-education programs (i.e., which included 33 studies and 53 programs) found no significant difference in reduced recidivism between participants in education programs compared to those who did not participate. They merely claim that “...*participants’ recidivate at a lower rate than non-participants...*” but they still did recidivate (p. 16). Wilson et al. do not claim that education directly assisted participants to live crime-free but used the outcome measure of recidivism for participation in prison education programs. Wilson et al. claimed that “...*program participants may be more motivated toward positive life changes. It may be this motivation and the engagements ... [that] are critical to success rather than the specific skill learned...*” (p16). This finding and Lochner’s (2004) recognition of individuals’ backgrounds are in line with Maruna (2001) who found that willingness and readiness to change were two important factors in reducing recidivism over and above program participation. Perhaps then it is important to understand that the process of desistance, reduced recidivism and/or engagement in crime or human behaviour in general is perhaps a multifaceted phenomenon over and above educational achievements, gaps and deficits (Peterson, 2010).

Context of study

Given that no studies have been conducted on the precise role of education in terms of its relationship with crime, crime-free living or the benefits inmates and ex-inmates are likely to have, it is still unclear as to what role education plays in the lives of inmates and ex-inmates and the relationship of education with crime. Hence, rather than asking the question “has the lack of education led you to offending?,” perhaps a more constructive way of inquiring was to investigate how education was contributing toward ex-inmates living productively and crime-free? Exploring the role of education in the lives of ex-inmates living crime-free provides a holistic view into the role of education, its benefits and whether it is directly or indirectly related to crime or crime-free living. This study was part of a larger research project (*Male Ex-inmates living crime-free: A phenomenological study*) undertaken at The University of Queensland to explore various factors that were supporting ex-inmates to live crime-free (J-F, 2010). However, this study reports only one such factor i.e., education and draws on findings in terms of the role of education. This study will also report on some of the findings on the role of education through a Case Study (i.e., a participant

referred to as Mr. X) as an example to qualitatively and precisely capture the role of education across the life course in the life of an ex-inmate.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 20 participants met the eligibility criteria for the present study and agreed to participate. To be eligible for the study, participants were required to: be male; have served at least a two year prison sentence within a prison; be living crime-free for over two years without committing any offence or misdemeanour. All participants lived in Queensland and were aged between 27 and 65 years with a mean age of 44.25 years. Most participants (n=18) identified themselves to be Caucasian with two identifying themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Start Islander.

Design

A phenomenological method was adopted to collect information from participants was collected through face-to-face, open-ended semi-structured interviews. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. All data were collected in a descriptive manner inviting participants to describe their lived experience in their own words, metaphors and meanings from childhood to adulthood. In particular, the role of education (i.e., their formal schooling) was measured in three stages: pre-incarceration, during incarceration, and post-incarceration. Participants were invited to quantify (by giving a score of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest) and then to describe in what way education had assisted and is assisting them to live crime-free across their life to date.

Measures

Data on the role of several support factors were collected using a three phase schedule. Phase I comprised an Exit Checklist about Educational experiences on departing from prison. Phase II comprised open ended descriptions of factors assisting ex-inmates to live crime-free. In this phase, participants were first invited to qualitatively describe the role of education (i.e., formal schooling) prior to incarceration, during incarceration, and post-incarceration. Secondly, participants quantified (by giving a score of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest) the role of education and were asked to describe in what way (if any) education had assisted and is assisting them to live crime-free. In Phase III, a modified version of the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG) was used to collect information related of school experiences, learning trajectories, and educational history/background for each of the participant.

RESULTS

Results are reported in two sections: descriptive information on the participants and background information of education at the three stages; and a qualitative description of Mr. X's life course journey from childhood to adulthood.

Descriptive Information on Education

Time spent in prison, age at the time of release, time spent living crime-free and offence history

The mean age of inmates (n=20) spent in prison was 8.74 years (range 2 to 20 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 8.74 years (range 2 to 17 years). Nature of Index offence included: property damage, armed robbery, murder, break-in and enters, drugs (possession, dealing and trafficking), fraud, theft and assault.

Education Exit Checklist

The *Exit Checklist* which measured the transitional post-prison support received by inmates prior to their release, revealed that their transitional educational needs were not fully met. Most reported that they were released into the community, without any proper post-prison support mechanisms to assist them in their training or education.

Education Prior to Incarceration

Most participants (n=15) reported having low levels (e.g., middle school) of education prior to incarceration. They also reported that they had various behavioural problems, reading difficulties, special needs and were regularly suspended and/or expelled from school. In addition they reported that school was a negative experience and that they did not receive adequate support.

Education During Incarceration

Participants reported participating in several ad hoc and structured educational programs. They reported participating in various courses such as: basic literacy, numeracy, computing skills, Adult Tertiary Preparatory Course, Certificate I and II level courses and doing open learning course and also Bachelor Level courses.

Education in Post-Prison

Very few (n=3) reported that their educational skills led them to employment. However, when ex-inmates pursued post-prison tertiary courses in post-prison, they reported having several benefits and that this assisted them. Only a few ex-inmates reported actively pursuing post-prison education. Those ex-inmates (n=4) who actively pursued post-prison tertiary education appear to have created positive life-pathways for themselves, such that it has placed them in a more constructive and affirmative environmental context of learning.

Role of Education and its relationship with crime and crime-free living

Over half of the participants (n=12) reported that education was independent of a crime-free pathway. Further, they reported that education did not (M=2.1) assist them to live crime-free and does not directly contribute toward them living crime-free. **While all participants see a need for a good education and recognize positive gains, they are equally determined to report that education is not related to crime. In this**, participants did not associate education with crime or crime-free living but claimed that education was important and that they are better off having formal education as it assisted them to: read, write, spell and add. In this, education could be indirectly assisting them in successfully living in the community but it does not appear to directly assist them in post-prison through suitable or appropriate skilled based employment.

However, for a small group of ex-inmates, who pursued education at a post-prison tertiary level and continued in education, did end up creating a positive pathway of continued education. **However, one participant notes that education as a system (i.e. due negative school experiences of regularly being punished and failing school) led him to crime rather education in terms of formal learning.** Further, it appears that the nature of crime is not related or associated with the levels of education, such that there was no evidence to suggest that low levels of education led to unskilled crimes and higher levels of education leading to white collar crimes. Perhaps then, the connection between education and crime is neither linear nor consequential nor correlated. In general, education in the case of inmates and ex-inmates appears not to positively position within the labour market as education did not lead to employment in most cases.

Role of Education in the life of Mr. X

Exploring the role of education across the lifespan of MR. X provides a deep and realistic insight into the role of education and highlights what role education has come to play over his life course.

Profile of Mr. X

MR. X (32 years) has been living crime-free for the past 5 years and was released on parole. He reported that he was convicted for various offences (e.g., drug-related offences) since the age of 10 and that includes his Index Offence (over 40 drug-related charges) for which he spent in total 7 years incarcerated. MR. X reported that he is currently unemployed and had only completed Grade 3 prior to incarceration and that he completed Grade 10 while in prison. He reported, at the time of the interview, that he had been married and was living in a rented house. He further reported having hepatitis C and that he started using drugs (e.g., cannabis) at the age of 9. He currently does not drink or smoke or take any illegal drugs.

Family Background, Criminal History, and Education

MR. X reported that he did have a positive relationship with his parents, even though some of the experiences were negative. He reports that his parents were divorced when he was nine years old and that his mother had remarried. MR. X reports that they were a poor family and that his father and mother were alcoholic, regularly smoked marijuana and had criminal values at home (i.e., encouraged him to steal and break and enter from a very young age). He further describes that some of his later drug addiction could perhaps be due to pre-natal exposure to nicotine, alcohol and methadone as his mother was a regular consumer of these substances prior to and during pregnancy.

In terms of childhood experiences MR. X reports a troubled childhood and growing up in a violent home. He reports as a child, *"... I remember one night waking up as he (father) was bashing me and I was walking in my sleep ..."*. He also recalls an experience where as a child he was walking on hot cigarette butts that were just left burning on the floor. As a child he would wake up to fights between his parents with blood oozing out and seeing them beat each other. He was regularly beaten and was encouraged to fight others (e.g., brother and friends) for no apparent reason. He goes on to note that whenever adults were drunk in the house, they would encourage him to fight with his brothers and friends just for fun.

MR. X reports being labelled at school as difficult and being moved over six times in his primary years due to behaviour problems. He reports not completing school and that he was very difficult to manage. He was sent to Child Guidance and other support services but reports that nothing assisted him.

With respect to his family history MR. X reports that he was never close to his family stating,

“... there are six of us in the family and four from my Dad’s side are heroin junkies and drug addicts ... my brother and younger sister are on methadone ...”

He goes on to report,

“... my brother is on a pension because he was diagnosed that he was psychiatrically unstable, my sister who committed suicide had OCD ... my mother has clinical depression and is in and out of hospital”

MR. X further adds that his family had a history of suicide, that his grandfather went in front of a train and that his mother unsuccessfully attempted suicide several times and that she has also self-harmed several times and even that his sister was also self-harming prior to her suicide. When discussing his criminal, anti-social and juvenile history, MR. X also reports early involvement in criminal activity, that is, stealing (e.g., shop lifting) and being involved in sexual activity at the age of 10 years. He further recounts that he was living on the streets by the age of 14 years and that he started to run away from home from the age of 10. By the age of 16 he was taken to a boys’ home and recalls being in different detention facilities and boys’ homes. He goes on to note that as he got older (i.e., early adulthood) he was doing drugs regularly, had no job and was a loner living on a pension. His then partner was also addicted to drugs. They had a child together but she was unfaithful in the relationship.

He also reports,

“... I was regularly seeing a psychiatrist and was on heaps of medication and was paranoid of bombs dropping ... was emotionally disturbed ... I could not get on with life back then basically ... my whole life was difficult back then and it was really bad ... life was a big mess ...”

Drug addiction appears to be perhaps the most influential aspect in MR. X’s offending and criminal history. MR. X reports smoking marijuana at the age of nine years and sniffing petrol and glue at the age of 10. He goes on to describe that eventually his drug addiction was so bad that doing any

kind of work would physically hurt him, to the extent that even standing up would hurt him because his body was so drugged up.

He reports,

“... I was on drugs and pretty much every night I had to go out and get money...” for drugs.

Overall, he reports that his life in general was very difficult back then and that the only way of getting money for drugs was by stealing or selling the drugs. He recalls an occasion when

“... a guy was after me with a gun as I ripped him off with a heap of heroin ...”

As part of describing his Index Offence he recollects that he was on *“... speed/heroine ...”* on the night of his offence. MR. X reports,

“... I was on drugs and ... I went into the city and climbed up a pole outside the building broke in through a window, and once I was inside the building I started to break into all the offices at night time ... the care taker was there and he called the police. I started running and climbed under the door that I half kicked out and I ran into this room that had a mirror. In one hand I had a bag full of money and in the other hand I had a big screw driver ... and apparently I started running and then I stabbed him (police officer) I don't remember but I still got charged for that ... next thing is I don't remember anything ... and I got up and was hand cuffed ...”

Consequently, he was charged and convicted for break-and-enter, stealing and for assaulting a Police Officer and received a seven year sentence. He goes onto report,

“... all up there were up to 50 charges ... I was sent to prison and then they sent me to a mental institution ...”

MR. X reports that the doctors informed him that he had Hepatitis C but also that he was suffering from schizophrenia and drug induced psychosis. MR. X reports he could feel the vibrations in the air on his skin and has heightened sensation and that he was paranoid and fearful for a long time. He now reports that some of these symptoms are not as vivid and dramatic as they used to be.

Prison Experience

MR. X reports that his life in prison was very difficult as he was in lots of fights. However, he recalls one event that appeared to change his life. He recalls, "... my sister committed suicide ..." when I was in Prison. He goes on state,

"... that was a major turning point ... now looking back I know that was a major turning point for me because I rang her the day before she did it and she told me that she tried that and I felt so helpless because I was like straight (drug free) and she was telling me that she could not get off it (drugs) and I could see how hopeless she was and I could not do much about it and when she committed suicide – that was it, I just made up my mind that I had enough of the whole thing (using drugs and being involved in crime) and started to get on with life ... stopped blaming everyone else and started to take responsibility ..."

MR. X goes on to report,

"... I was supposed to go her funeral (and the) paper work (in jail) was done and everything (was ready) ... the funeral was at 10 so at 9 o'clock I went up to the desk and said, 'I'm ready to go, what is happening they (i.e., officers in jail) told me just get f-- - and get out of here' and I was very anxious and kept going back, as my sister's funeral was at 10 o'clock and the Senior Officer came back to me said, 'we lost the paper work' and it was at that point where, I just felt like going off and you know fighting them and they would love that but I got to that point where I said, 'NO' I said, 'I put myself here and I have given them this power to do this to me', so that was like, if there was one moment in time, it was then that I just changed. I just said, 'I am never giving them that power again. Then they sent down the Chaplain and told me I could take one friend to sit and talk ..." but I missed her funeral and I stood back by myself and thought about it and said to myself NO MORE ... as I had enough of loss in my freedom and then I said to the Senior Officer 'OK' and so I went down with the Chaplain and sat down ... and had a funeral in the Prison with just my mate and the Chaplain ..."

Even though the enormity of this loss and a tragic experience can never be fully quantified, it appears that MR. X chose to turn this negative event into a positive life changing experience, perhaps even motivating him to live crime-free.

Post-Prison Experiences

Overall, MR. X reports that he had more positive and productive post-prison experiences. MR. X reports what helped him the most was that he was given a phone number for a Chaplain

whom he contacted as soon as he got released and that this Chaplaincy service played a significant role in setting up post- prison support such as: organising contact with support groups; introducing him to a football team; baptizing him; and introducing him to a Church group. He also reports having a biology teacher who has continued to assist and support him through mentoring and counselling. MR. X also reports totally changing his behaviour since being released into the community; he reports that he maintains a good routine and has taken up education, plays sport regularly and that he is involved in his Church. After his last release from the prison, MR. X reports that he has completed his Grade 11 and 12 and then secured a scholarship to complete his TAFE course. He then took up tertiary studies and he is currently in his last semester of a dual degree in Environmental Studies from QUT. MR. X reports of doing various kinds of jobs (i.e., manual labour and cleaning) and goes on to report that one of his professors even got him a job as an Environmental Health Officer for the local council. MR. X comments,

“... life is just one routine ... and that there is hardly anytime where there is nothing to do ... my life is very structured and University keeps me very busy ... if I am not at University I am working ... I go to the University, I come home, I clean, I cook dinner ... spend time with my wife ... it is football or go and visit someone ... there is hardly anytime where I have nothing to do ...”.

He further comments that it is important to maintain discipline in terms of having a positive structure away from past behaviours and associations. He also reports getting married to a person whom he met at the university and his marriage and relationship is another supportive factor which has made him feel far more secure and stable in his everyday life, something that he did not have before. In terms of his relationship with his mother and family, he reports that she still makes him feel guilty and consequently he keeps the rest of his family at a distance and reports adopting his Church family as his own.

Crime-Free Living

In responding to what assisted MR. X to desist from crime, he reports “... education and his spirituality and just having a sense ‘of having enough’ has helped him to live crime-free. In terms of how he is able to sustain his crime-free live MR. X reports,

“... I know I did wrong (but) now I am (a) better person - for now I respect the Law and respect the society and respect people ... I know now that it is not right to take things off people ... I take responsibility for my actions now - from what I have learnt at the university...”.

He reports receiving support from various agencies such as: church, friends, sporting clubs and that by keeping a structured routine and having a supportive wife assists him to gauge his behaviour. In terms of what is motivating and supporting him to live crime-free MR. X reports,

“... my faith is the first, education, employment, individuals, acceptance by community members, community involvement, joining a sports group and the counselling I get from my Christian family ...”

All of these collectively and independently appear to sustain his crime-free life. But more importantly MR. X reports that his post-prison life has been a forward moving journey because he does not do drugs anymore. In other words for him being drug-free is being crime-free. He also notes that he is a hard-worker, good partner and a family man and that these qualities are equally essential for him to live crime-free.

Summary of findings of Mr. X

It appears that MR. X spent most of his early years in an unsupportive family with criminal values. He reports, *“... when I was little I would do crime and give money to my mother and she would take it ...”*. And consequently, it would appear that MR. X had very few positive experiences as a child or as an adolescent or even as a young adult. However, now being drug-free and having a structured life not only seems to protect him from crime but his ability and willingness to change and his desire to change appear to have greatly assisted him to live crime-free over and above the role of education, which is minuscule, given the trauma and life pain narrative. It is also clear that taking up tertiary studies in post-prison and being committed to his education assisted him in not only having a structured positive pathway but also appears to have rewarded him with jobs and allowed MR. X to have positive interaction with peers of his age, something he had lacked before in his life.

DISCUSSION

Education is not directly related to crime or crime-free living. Education has no direct explicit societal benefits in the lives of ex-inmates apart from qualitative progress in learning. The findings of the study in general suggest that education alone is neither a deterrent nor necessary for one to live crime-free or for one to continue in offending. This is because ex-inmates even with higher levels of education in post-prison did not have any personal, social or societal gain (i.e., positive social status), because their educational achievements or qualitative progress of living crime-free appeared to be overshadowed by their criminal history. This is not to say that education does not

work for all inmates or all ex-inmates. It appears education indirectly does assist ex-inmates to be successful in the community by improving their abilities to read, write, add and spell. Education, however, appears to have limited and/or ad hoc fringe benefits to certain kinds of inmates and ex-inmates in prison and post-prison, such that those who continue to engage in education at a post-prison tertiary level appear to be better positioned to continue to use education as a positive pathway away from an environment of anti-social peer groups, violent communities and/or gang related culture. Perhaps participation in post-prison education should be coupled with ongoing incentives (i.e., stipends or scholarship) to encourage a wider group of ex-inmates to engage in ongoing study as it is likely to lead to a positive pathway rather than merely rewarding performance (i.e. output).

While the concept of prison education is neither a novel nor a new one, using an economic rationale to measure its effectiveness against reduced recidivism appears to distort the purpose and role of education in the lives of inmates and ex-inmates. Living crime-free or offending is a complex phenomenon and needs to be understood in a multifaceted manner, as a number of factors (e.g., faith, family, individual temperament) all come to influence human behaviour (Peterson, 2010). Further, caution must be exercised in how these results are interpreted given the limited number of participants in the study.

Perhaps a more valid way of measuring the role of education and its relationship with crime or crime-free living, would be to assess educational levels of all members in a given society and then to examine as to what proportion of them have low levels of education. Then to investigate how many from this category (i.e., low levels of education) actually end up offending or deliberately choose an anti-social as a result of low levels of education and end up in prison. Such a study is inconceivable given the logistics and the scope for its demands, but is a needed study, if a connection is to be claimed that low educational levels, gaps and deficiencies lead directly to criminality. A study of this nature has the capacity to systematically capture educational history and the role it has played in the lives of individuals throughout their lifespan.

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