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The Impact of Correctional Education on Inmate Recidivism

Excluding lifers, the average inmate will be released from incarceration in less than five years. On average, inmates are released after serving 35% of their sentence.¹

A comprehensive three state recidivism study in 2001 found correctional education had a significant impact on recidivism¹. The researchers gathered data from Maryland (medium-size inmate population), Minnesota (small inmate population), and Ohio (large inmate population) through a pre-release survey, a parole/release officer survey, criminal history files, and an employment survey²:

State & Event	Inmates Surveyed	Ed Program Participants	Ed Program Non-Participants
MD – Re-arrest	840	54%	57%
MD – Re-conviction		32%	37%
MD – Re-incarceration		31%	37%
MN – Re-arrest	1025	42%	54%
MN – Re-conviction		24%	34%
MN – Re-incarceration		14%	21%
OH – Re-arrest	1234	50%	58%
OH – Re-conviction		26%	33%
OH – Re-incarceration		24%	31%
Aggregate Results			
Re-arrest	3099	48%	57%
Re-conviction		27%	35%
Re-incarceration		21%	31%

The same study determined released inmates enrolled in correctional education programs had 30% more in annual salary earnings than non-participants during the first year of release from incarceration. Two years later, participants were earning 11% more than non-participants.²

The Citizens for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE), a national organization that are proponents of correctional reform and education, gathered the following statistics³:

- "In Arizona, probationers with a GED education had a re-arrest rate of 24% compared to a control group's rate of 46%.⁴
- In Texas, the recidivism rate for those without college degrees was 60%. The overall recidivism rate for degree holders was a low 12%, and inversely differentiated by type of degree: Associate 13.7%; Bachelors 5.6%; and Masters 0%.⁴
- In Ohio, while the overall recidivism rate was 40%, college recidivism rates were at 18%. Ohio further calculates that graduating from college programs - vs. no participation in prison education at all - reduces recidivism by roughly 72%.⁵
- In Canada, prisoners who completed at least two university courses had a 50% lower recidivism rate than the norm.⁶
- In New York, only 26.4% of the inmates who earned a degree returned to prison compared to 44.6% of those who participated in the college program but did not complete a degree.⁷
- By lowering recidivism, correctional education more than pays for itself in less incarceration costs and less costs of crime to society. A CURE-NY report, for example, calculates that post secondary correctional education alone would produce net national savings of hundreds of millions of dollars per year.⁸

U.S. Department of Justice research found no evidence supporting the theory that longer prison sentences reduce recidivism.⁹

References:

1. USDOJ: Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994 (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/rpr94.pdf>).
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3. Citizens for the Rehabilitation of Errants Web Site (<http://www.curenational.org/new/index.html>) Position Paper on Correctional Education (<http://www.curenational.org/Position/curepo5.html>).
4. "The Impact of Correctional Education On Recidivism 1988-1994," Office of Correctional Education, U.S. Dept. of Education.
5. Mary Ellen Batiuk, "The State of Post-Secondary Education in Ohio," Journal of Correctional Education, Vol. 48, Issue 2, June 1997, pp. 70-72.
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7. David D. Clark, "Analysis of Return Rates of Inmate College Program Participants," NYS Department of Correctional Services, August, 1991.
8. R. J. Cypser "The Pay-Back" CURE-NY, Box 102, Katonah, NY, October, 1997.
9. USDOJ: Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994 (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/rpr94.pdf>).