

A Partial Test of Life-Course Theory on A Prison Release Cohort

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Abstract

This article examines the thesis put forth by Sampson and Laub (1993) that “social capital” over an offender’s life course positively or negatively impinges upon their success in the community – i.e., ability to avoid criminal re-processing. Using a data set (N= 773) of male Canadian penitentiary inmates released to the community between 1983-1984, a test is made of the impact of both employment and marriage during a three-year supervision follow-up, controlling for race, alcohol involvement, prior juvenile convictions, and prior adult convictions. Because the sample does not represent a classic, longitudinal design, we consider this to be a partial test of the life course thesis.

Regardless of whether the dependent variable is general or violent criminal recidivism, full-time employment and marriage remain significant predictors for male convicts -- employment being the more statistically significant of the two. Ironically, at the very time when the Canadian prison industry was disbanding their offender employment programs, this data suggests otherwise. Today, employment programs for offenders are politically unpopular yet they suggest promise when offenders can find meaningful and stable jobs. Structural intervention in market economies might be suggested. Is it therefore reasonable to ask: who is creating conditions favorable to criminality and are our prisons designed to maintain the employment marginality of offenders?

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Resurrecting decades-old research from the Glueck's (1950) longitudinal research on delinquent careers, Sampson and Laub (1993) have provided us with factors which influence the onset, maintenance, and desistance from crime over a life span. In particular, their research suggests that age, marriage, and employment have suppression effects on delinquency. Defining these changes as both trajectories and *turning points*, Sampson and Laub suggest that such factors influence criminality by affecting one's stake in conformity. In effect, this is a derivation of social cohesion theory as developed by Durkheim (1897) and Hirschi (1969). It is also a variation of Hagan and McCarthy's (1998, 228) notion of "social capital," or the more theoretically sophisticated model put forth by Nan Lin (2001). Where Sampson and Laub differ from Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) is their argument that criminality is not a constant, but affected by the larger social and biological forces which change over a life-course. Indeed, for Sampson and Laub, the relationship between delinquency and unemployment appears to be reciprocal. Early teenage delinquency adversely affects future employment prospects with diminished employment then influencing participation in criminality (Hagan, 1993).

Of historic interest to researchers studying imprisonment, and especially the adaptation of ex-prisoners to the community, is the question of both static and dynamic predictors. Static predictors refer to those legal and social characteristics of the inmate which are embedded in his or her history, and therefore not subject to change. An example might be age at first juvenile arrest or the subject's criminal history of

convictions and imprisonment. On the other hand, dynamic predictors are those features of the environment or individuals who are malleable – i.e., subject to intervention or change. Martinson (1974) and others have assumed that most dynamic interventions on incarcerated offenders have little or no effect (Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks, 1975). More recently, Gendreau, Little, and Goggin (1996) have suggested that the picture is not so bleak. Reviewing some 131 studies, these researchers concluded that dynamic predictors performed as well as static variables. Indeed, they identified companions, substance abuse, interpersonal conflict, and social achievement as factors which correlate with criminal justice re-processing and therefore constitute “social capital.” Of note, Bushway and Reuter (1997) have concluded that job training for older (35+) ex-convicts, vocational training for prison inmates, and intensive interventions such as the U.S. Job Corps show promising effects.

This debate on intervention strategies assumes particular importance, given the current trends – especially in the United States – towards longer prison sentences and rising penal populations (Mauer and Huling, 1995). McDonald (1998) notes that programs to aid the employment of inmates and ex-offenders have been “out-of-favor” since the early 1980’s -- coterminous with the prison boom. In the rush to conclude that “Nothing Works,” incapacitation has been seized upon by the state to justify crime control policies – largely at the expense of poor, young, non-white males. While control theorists such as Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) dispute the efficacy of incapacitation, their theory of low-self control is compatible with such an approach, and may provide the theoretical underpinnings of such an “unintended” effect. Thus, Elliott Currie (1998,12)

in his recent book titled *Crime and Punishment in America* suggests that 1.2 million Americans are now in federal and state prisons, up from only 200,000 in 1971. Critics such as Nils Christie (2000) and Katherine Beckett (1997) warn that the real problem with crime control may reside in the police-prison-industrial complex that we have created to respond to this social problem.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, we analyze the effect of one or more dynamic, life-course factors on the success or failure of a prison release cohort. Our random sample represents about 24 percent (N = 773) of all adult, male prisoners released from Canadian federal prisons in 1983-1984, and followed for a period of about three (3) years. Researchers Robert Hann and William Harman (1992) coded about 600 variables that were thought to have potential significance on parole decisions and recidivism. In this instance, our dependent variable is a re-conviction and imprisonment for an indictable offense within three years of release from penitentiary. Much of this data is concerned with the validation of prediction scales for population management and release decision-making. Our focus, to the contrary, is on the examination of promising life-course *trajectories* that impact upon re-processing, while controlling for static predictors (i.e., prior criminal record, early family characteristics). For this exercise, we will focus on variables suggested by Sampson and Laub (1993) to have empirical as well as theoretical significance: marriage and employment.

However, it is important to note that this secondary data base did not code for several indices deemed crucial to Sampson and Laub (1993). The file coders, working

from paper documents largely recorded by correctional employees, did not code for work habits, educational and economic ambitions, or compatibility and emotional involvement with the family. Much of life course methodology requires the kind of contextualization associated with qualitative methods. The gist of Sampson and Laub's argument is that the quality or strength of bonds to family and employment is the relevant factor. As such, this limited effort can only represent a "partial" test of life course theory.

As noted above, information was coded from quarterly, parole supervision reports, and as such, represents the post-incarceration experience of cohort members. A team of "coders" spent 12 months and about 1,000 person days locating and coding manual data from parole, penitentiary, and RCMP files (Hann, Leroux, and Harman, 1991). Thus, to a limited extent, there is some temporal ordering vis-à-vis data representing pre-incarceration status. Like most studies of this type, data coders were hired to review correctional and parole files, and printouts of criminal record information maintained by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (CPIC system). At this stage, no information is available about inter-coder reliability or whether any of the cases were subsequently audited for error, or what that error rate might be. As well, none of the parolees were personally interviewed for their subjective assessment of what this file material might mean. Finally, there was very little treatment intervention offered to these parolees upon their release to the community. For instance, only 3 percent of the sample was involved in vocational training as a condition of their parole.

At the outset, this dataset is also limited by its design: a combined longitudinal/cross sectional sample. Most life course research requires a much longer

longitudinal design – certainly longer than a three-year follow-up upon release from penitentiary. As well, it was simply not possible to directly test for several classic predictors of offending, such as gender, socio-economic status or the influence of peer groups because that data was not collected. To repeat, while Sampson and Laub (1993) were able to test for the *strength* of measures such as employment and marriage; this dataset did not record such information. We begin with a short survey of the literature, progress to some preliminary cross-tabulations, and conclude with multivariate analysis (principally logistic regression).

LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPLOYMENT AND MARRIAGE

At least until the 1970's, the picture was somewhat gloomy. Very little Canadian research had been done on this question, and certainly not from the perspective of Life Course theory. The National Academy of Sciences (1979, p. 34) had concluded that "there is not now in the scientific literature any basis for any policy or recommendation regarding rehabilitation of criminal offenders." Some years earlier, this same conclusion had been echoed by Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks (1975) as well as Rovner-Pieczenik (1973). Indeed, experiments in subsidized work for ex-offenders such as Wildcat in New York City did not reduce arrest rates for participants (Friedman, 1980). The Vera Institute's Court Employment Project (1977-1978) found that diversion and employment for offenders produced no discernible effect vis-à-vis controls (Baker and Sadd, 1979). A large experiment involving parolees in Texas and Georgia during the 1970's (TARP = Transitional Aid Research Project) failed to reduce re-arrests among experimentals and controls. This occurred even when experimentals were provided with weekly taxable benefits of about \$63.00 for the first six months following their release from prison (Rossi, Berk & Lenihan, 1980, 277). These benefits actually acted as a disincentive to

look for regular employment. Nonetheless, the researchers argued that when parolees did find employment, paid jobs were the "strongest antidote to re-engaging in criminal activities."

One of the better known studies was the supported work experiment undertaken by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor (Piliavin & Gartner, 1981, 1984). This unique experiment involved a sample of some 2,300 ex-offenders subdivided into experimental and control groups. Those in the experimental group received paid, supported employment in seven different cities for periods averaging 12 to 18 months. Data on arrests and drug usage revealed no significant differences between controls and experimentals. Importantly, a large percentage of ex-offenders simply dropped out of the project before their eligibility period had expired; their average length of stay was only 5.3 months.

Notwithstanding the above, many observers have found these conclusions counter-intuitive. They do not mesh with ecological research showing high unemployment to be associated with high-crime rate areas (Shaw and McKay, 1942; Byrne & Sampson, 1986). For example, in his meta analysis of 63 research studies, Chiricos (1987) found a significant correlation between unemployment rates and property crime. More recently, Michalowski and Carlson (1999) surveyed both the literature and data from state and federal (U.S.) prison admissions (see for example, Yeager, 1979). They found a positive correlation between unemployment rates and prison admissions, controlling for different historical periods since 1933. Nor did this conclusion correspond with the disadvantaged backgrounds of prisoners (Waller, 1974; Steinhilper & Wilhelm-Reiss, 1981; Currie, 1985; Crow, Richardson, Riddington & Simon, 1989). If employment has no effect, why is the rate of under employment and unemployment for prisoners so high?

Research which looks at the impact of employment on the recidivism of parolees or probationers has, in fact, produced some opposite findings. Irwin Waller (1974, p. 86) in his study of 423 men paroled from federal penitentiaries in Ontario, Canada, found that: "Within twelve months of release the arrest rate for the employment men was only 29 percent compared to 43 percent for those unemployed." More recent studies conducted by the Canada's federal prison industry on their penitentiary populations suggest fairly strong links between job instability and risk of offending. On CSC's risk prediction scale (GSIR - General Statistical Information on Recidivism), the higher the likelihood of offending, the greater the proportion of offenders who were unemployed (Motiuk, 1996). Indeed, the greater the offender's need for employment services on conditional supervision (i.e., parole), the more likely he or she had their parole temporarily suspended or even revoked ($r = .27, p < .001$). Such was also the case with a study of 205 parolees from Maryland's Patuxent Institution; here post-release employment was inversely related to criminal justice recidivism (Sedlak, 1975; Myers, 1983).

Christopher Uggen (1999), reanalyzing data from the National Supported Work Demonstration, looked at those offenders who dropped out of the program and found their own employment. Here, his focus was on the "quality" of jobs based on a standard text on occupational titles. Using a very sophisticated design (probit estimation) that attempted to control for sample selection, prior criminality, labor market effects, and offender characteristics; Uggen found job quality to reduce both economic and non-economic, criminal recidivism.

A small sample of 79 youthful heroin addicts concluded that two variables were related to parole success: employment and drug use (Platt & Labate, 1976). A follow-up study of more than 2,000 ex-offenders on probation in New Jersey concluded that

employment was one of the few dynamic factors which predicted less recidivism (Whitehead, 1991). Indeed, when researchers from the Rand Corporation in California studied high-rate offenders (robbers and burglars), they concluded that being employed less than half the time during two years before their current arrest was a strong predictor of recidivism (Greenwood & Abrahamse, 1982).

In a similar vein, the Ladino Hills gang project in Los Angeles, California, placed great emphasis on employment as a means to reduce delinquency. Forty-six gang youth were placed in a total of 108 jobs. Although the average job lasted only 53 days, and average income was marginal (\$792 per client), youth were twice as likely to be charged with a new offense when unemployed as when they were working (Klein, 1971, pp. 279, 299-304).

Lipsey's (1995) meta-analysis of nearly 400 different studies involving juveniles aged 12-21 came to a rather surprising conclusion: employment-related treatment for juveniles under correctional supervision showed the highest positive impact in suppressing recidivism. A similar finding was made of high school dropouts in Edmonton, Alberta, documenting the direct relationship between unemployment and self-reported crime (Hartnagel and Krahn, 1989). Both Hagan (1993) and Farrington, et al., (1986) likewise found support for the positive relationship between unemployment and delinquency in a London birth cohort. A similar finding came from a longitudinal study of a birth cohort comprising 1,265 urban children born in 1977. After collecting data each year up to the age of 18, Fergusson, Lynskey, and Horwood (1997) found that rates of both arrest and conviction were 3.0 to 10.4 times higher for youths who had been unemployed for six (6) months or longer. Likewise, two different, but large samples of homeless youth in both Vancouver and Toronto, Canada, found a positive relationship between employment and desistance from street crime (Hagan and McCarthy, 1998).

A recent meta-analysis undertaken for the Solicitor General of Canada (Gendreau, Goggin, and Gray, 1998) found that when employment history and recidivism were examined among adult offenders, they produced an average, weighted *Pearson's r* of 0.14 ($p < .05$). Gillis (2002), in her recent dissertation, actually measured employment status as well as indices on job quality, social support, and work attitudes among a sample of Federal parolees in the Canadian penitentiary system. She found that the unemployment rate among six urban release centers was a significant positive indicator of employment status among parolees after one month and even six months follow-up (Gillis, 2002, pp. 94, 96, 102-103). However, when looking at re-processing rates, based on both technical and substantive parole condition violations, neither the unemployment rate nor employment status or quality predicted re-processing after 20 months (Gillis, 2002: 126, 131). In passing, it should be noted that her study suffered from a severe attrition rate which may have acted to suppress the effect of the main employment variables.¹

When the literature on the effects of marriage on criminal recidivism is consulted, a similar suppression effect is observed. In a review of the literature by Wright and Wright (1992), their analysis suggests that getting married and having a family reduce the likelihood of criminal re-processing. A similar finding emerges for probationers (Morgan, 1993; Gottfredson, Finckenauer and Rauh, 1977). Indeed, in a study of 760 adult parolees from the state of Illinois, both employment and "being married" were correlated with success in the community (Anderson, Schumacker, and Anderson, 1991). In one study of 2,000 parolees who were furnished job placement assistance, those who were employed and married had significantly lower recidivism rates (Milkman, 1985). Interestingly, the job assistance itself was not much of a suppresser. A comprehensive survey of U.S. federal parolees concluded that married offenders had the lowest rate of

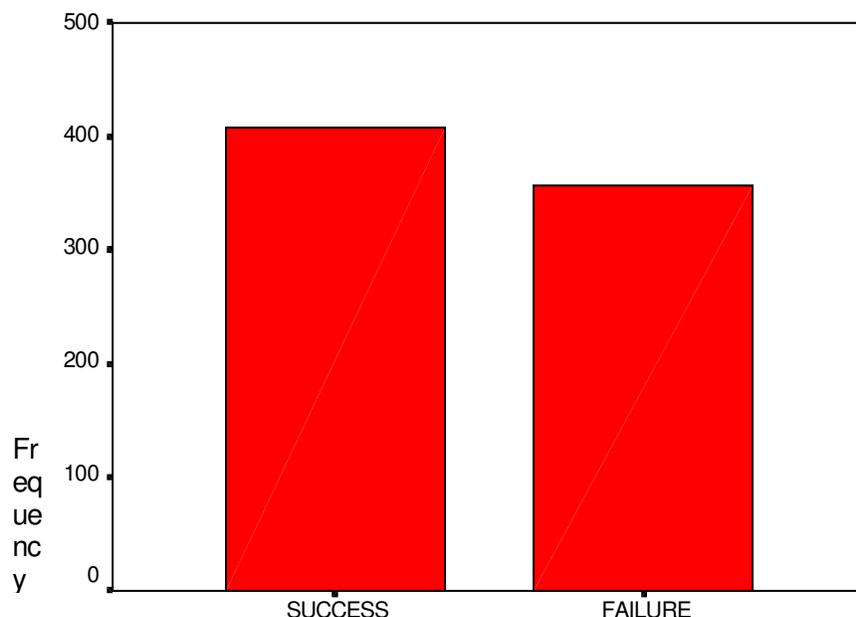
unemployment which, in turn, was related to reduced, criminal re-processing (Pownall, 1971).

Similar findings come from Sampson and Laub's (1993) re-analysis of data collected by the Gluecks, in that attachment to spouse had a robust negative relationship with both official and unofficial offending. To repeat, it was not marriage per se that made the difference, but the strength and nature of that relationship which strongly reduced new criminal recidivism. Indeed, Mark Warr's (1998) analysis of the impact of marriage on delinquent peer attachments has been quite provocative. Here, data from the National Youth Survey (NYS) indicates that marriage suppresses self-reported delinquency by, among other factors, reducing contact with delinquent peers. Unfortunately, this secondary data set does not measure the question of attachment. We now turn to an analysis of a 1983-84 Canadian release cohort to test the effects of these life-course variables on criminal recidivism.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Approximately 53 percent of this release cohort was not returned to either penitentiary or a provincial reformatory for an indictable offense some three years after their release. As depicted in Table 1, well over four out of each ten parolees failed with a new criminal offense that resulted in a sentence to custody. Albeit we will later examine violent recidivism among this sample of parolees, this bifurcated variable (i.e., general success or failure within three years) becomes our dependent variable for analyzing life-course theory.

Table 1
Success-Failure: Indictable within three (3) years



The variable concerning marriage constitutes part of our examination. In this sample, approximately 29 percent of the parolees are either married, living in a common-law relationship, or separated/divorced. When we cross-check this variable by whether the parolee was currently living with a spouse, the figure was 26 percent.

We then inquired into the employment status of these penitentiary releases, and found that only a small portion of them were employed during the follow-up period. Examining Table 3 below, we find that only 23 percent were regularly employed with an additional 17 percent employed on occasion. By and large, 51 percent of the sample were either unemployed or sub-employed -- a figure which increases by an additional 8 percent if we assume that the missing cases were also lacking in stable employment.

Table 2
MARITAL STATUS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	single	470	60.8	67.6	67.6
	married	80	10.3	11.5	79.1
	common-law	123	15.9	17.7	96.8
	divorced/sep	22	2.8	3.2	100.0
	Total	695	89.9	100.0	
Missing	System	78	10.1		
Total		773	100.0		

TABLE 3 : Employment Status on Supervision

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	employ reg	180	23.3	25.4	25.4
	employ occas	134	17.3	18.9	44.4
	casual jobs	75	9.7	10.6	54.9
	unemployed	244	31.6	34.5	89.4
	never employed	75	9.7	10.6	100.0
	Total	708	91.6	100.0	
Missing	System	65	8.4		
Total		773	100.0		

A further proxy for family support is whether there was evidence of family visiting and related help during the offender's prison term. In Table 4 below, we see that about 54 percent of the sample had family support during their prison terms.

TABLE 4: Family Support during Incarceration

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No Family Support	357	46.2	46.2	46.2
Positive Family Support	416	53.8	53.8	100.0
Total	773	100.0	100.0	

As noted in Table 5 below, there is a statistically significant relationship between employment status on release and marriage. The chi-square test is significant at the .001 level ($df = 4, X^2 = 41.73$). We then proceed to test the hypothesis that these measures of “social capital” are strongly related to criminal recidivism among a penitentiary release cohort. As noted above, our focus is on the impact of both marriage and employment as predictors of criminal recidivism.

When we examine marital status by success-failure in the community, this data is consistent with the suggestions of Sampson and Laub (1993): namely, being married reduced the likelihood of return to prison for an indictable offense.

TABLE 5: Offender's Employment by Marital Status

		MARITAL STATUS		Total
		single	married/Com law/Div/Separated	
OFF'S EMPLOYMENT	employ reg	95	84	179
		53.1%	46.9%	100.0%
		13.7%	12.1%	25.8%
	employ occas	80	51	131
		61.1%	38.9%	100.0%
		11.5%	7.3%	18.8%
	casual jobs	58	16	74
		78.4%	21.6%	100.0%
		8.3%	2.3%	10.6%
	unemployed	171	66	237
		72.2%	27.8%	100.0%
		24.6%	9.5%	34.1%
never employed	66	8	74	
	89.2%	10.8%	100.0%	
	9.5%	1.2%	10.6%	
Total		470	225	695
		67.6%	32.4%	100.0%

Table 6 : Marital Status by Recidivism Follow-up

		SUCCESS-FAIL: INDICT RETURN WITHIN 3 YR		Total
		SUCCESS	FAILURE	
MARITAL STATUS	single	210	256	466
		45.1%	54.9%	100.0%
	married/Com law/Div/Separated	159	66	225
		70.7% ^a	29.3%	100.0%
Total		369	322	691
		53.4%	46.6%	100.0%

a. Chi-square = 39.96, df=1, phi = -.241

A similar finding emerged when we examined the relationship between employment and criminal recidivism. Here, we obtain a lambda of .287 which is significant at the .001 level.

Table 7: Employment by Criminal Recidivism

		SUCCESS-FAIL: INDICT RETURN WITHIN 3 YR		Total
		SUCCESS	FAILURE	
OFF'S EMPLOYMENT	employ reg	137 76.5%	42 23.5%	179 100.0%
	employ occas	90 67.2%	44 32.8%	134 100.0%
	casual jobs	38 50.7%	37 49.3%	75 100.0%
	unemployed	99 41.1%	142 58.9%	241 100.0%
	never employed	12 16.0%	63 84.0%	75 100.0%
Total		376 53.4%	328 46.6%	704 100.0%

a. Chi-square = 106.8, df=4, Lambda = 0.287, gamma = .540

We now turn to multivariate analysis in which recidivism is treated as a dichotomous dependent variable. As such, we employ logistic regression to analyze the effects of employment and marriage, controlling for other variables. Four possible control variables were considered: race, alcohol involvement, prior juvenile convictions, and prior adult convictions. In particular, the race variable was collapsed and dichotomized as “White-Asian-Other” or “Native-Black.”² We further re-defined the dependent variable to include only violent offenses (Hann and Harman, 1992, p. 34), and present those findings as well.

Table 8: General Recidivism by Marital Status and Employment

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp(B)
Marital	.8251	.1853	19.8226	1	.0000	.1366	2.2822
Employment	.5627	.0634	78.7033	1	.0000	.2834	1.7554
Constant	-2.3342	.2344	99.1771	1	.0000		

a. -2 LL Chi-Square = 128.4, p = .001; Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.226$.

At the outset, both variables are significantly correlated with recidivism follow-up, employment being the more significant of the two. Thus the odds of an offender being recommitted to jail for a new indictable offense are 128 percent higher if that individual is single, as opposed to married, common law, or divorced – controlling for employment. When the four control variables are introduced, two are statistically insignificant: race and alcohol involvement. The resulting equation still leaves both employment and marriage as substantial predictors, regardless of prior juvenile or adult criminal record.

Table 9: General Recidivism by Marriage and Employment with Controls

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp(B)
Marital	.8436	.1911	19.4936	1	.0000	.1463	2.3248
Employment	.5267	.0653	65.1055	1	.0000	.2778	1.6933
Prior Adult	1.0535	.2936	12.8721	1	.0003	.1153	2.8678
Prior Juv	.6878	.1849	13.8310	1	.0002	.1203	1.9893
Constant	-3.4115	.3691	85.4398	1	.0000		

b. -2 LL Chi-Square = 158.7, p = .001; Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.276$.

We then reconsidered the above two equations substituting violent recidivism for the dependent variable. Here, “broad,” violent recidivism consisted of a re-conviction for a crime of violence (Hann and Harman, 1992, p. 35). Pursuit of this question emerges not only from the recidivism literature but acts as a further control on reliability. Neither alcohol involvement nor prior adult convictions were significant. The resulting equation in Table 10 suggests that employment and marital status are still substantive predictors of violent recidivism, even when considering race and prior juvenile convictions. Regardless of the target variable – general recidivism or violent re-offending – employment emerged as the most significant correlate. Further, creating an interactive variable for marital status and employment made no difference in the results, and neither did age at release.

Table10: Violent Recidivism by Marital Status, Employment & Controls.

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp (B)
Marital	.7593	.2824	7.2277	1	.0072	.0970	2.1368
Employment	.5082	.0905	31.5054	1	.0000	.2305	1.6623
Prior Juv	.4743	.2203	4.6366	1	.0313	.0689	1.6070
Race	.6587	.3083	4.5637	1	.0327	.0680	1.9323
Constant	-4.7195	.5124	84.8240	1	.0000		

c. -2 LL Chi-Square = 72.5, p = .001; Nagelkerke’s $R^2 = 0.169$.

SUMMARY

Sampson and Laub (1993) suggest a theory of “social capital” which impacts directly on the life-course *trajectory*. The two primary factors were marriage and full-

time employment, and both measures were significant regardless of whether the person had a juvenile history. This re-analysis of an early dataset involving a release cohort of male, Canadian penitentiary inmates suggests that the same two life-course measures have a strong suppression effect on general criminal recidivism, including reprocessing for violent offenses. Indeed, it is full-time employment which is the stronger correlate to recidivism, and one of the few dynamic factors subject to intervention. It is thus paradoxical that during this period (1983-87), so few resources were devoted to developing outside employment opportunities for penitentiary inmates. Indeed, circa 1986, the Canadian Federal prison industry's initiative to create private employment opportunities for offenders was disbanded in favor of developing prison industries. The same phenomenon is true in the United States, only that correctional departments have simply cut back or eliminated vocational programs (Petersilia, 2003).

Criminologist John Hagan (1992) and his colleague Ruth Peterson (1995) have suggested that these two, life-course variables are really proxies of class or material conditions. It then becomes a matter of analyzing the origins of structural inequality, and that leads to an analysis of political economy (Gordon, 1971; Reiman, 2004) – a subject beyond the scope of this article.

Inherent in this research are both limitations in the dataset itself (with respect to the measures collected) as well as statistical analysis. It must be noted that this represents only a partial test of the “Life Course” thesis. This sample is not a classic, longitudinal design; and we are not able to test whether criminality precedes employment and marriage, or visa versa. Nevertheless, the results are suggestive that improvements in

the class position of prison inmates do result in less official, criminal recidivism impacting upon the community.

Beyond these impressions lingers the reality that job employment programs for convicts are politically unpopular at this time. This meager effort confirms that developing stable employment for offenders can result in safer communities, at least from the point-of-view of official recidivism. Yet, what few programs that do exist generally providing either vocational or employment “counseling” to offenders; they do not attempt to change the nature of the labor market to enhance the entry of offenders (McDonald, 1998). As well, research during the 1980’s suggested that a majority of offenders seeking employment help do not find it; and even when placed, follow-up service and assistance is minimal (McCarthy and McCarthy, 1984). Is it therefore reasonable to ask: who is creating conditions favorable to criminality? Are our prisons designed to maintain the employment marginality and lower-class status of offenders; and not challenge the existing economic structure (Rusche and Kirchheimer, 1939; Wacquant, 2001; Greenberg and West, 2001)?

For the practitioner and the convict, the results confirm that criminality is not a static condition, and can be influenced by trajectories of “social capital.” Strategies which focus on resource development regarding employment, and which encourage family cohesiveness (such as marriage), should be pursued even when not the “official” policy of the correctional establishment.

Notes

1

The original Gillis sample was based on 666 parolees released to six urban centers throughout Canada (2002, p. 52). However, 46 did not fit the study criteria and another 72 were suspended before they could be interviewed. Thus, only 548 were eligible, with an ultimate participation rate during the first month at 302 (55 percent). Unfortunately, Gillis made no demographic comparisons between the experimentals and those who refused to be interviewed or who were excluded. At six months follow-up, only 106 voluntarily participated, generating a response rate of 16 percent from the original sampling frame. This attrition rate is further compounded by the realization that the vast majority (two thirds) of inmates consenting to the interview were on day parolee – historically considered the best risks for release in the community. This would have the statistical effect of factoring out the impact of employment indices.

2

Both dependent variables (general and violent recidivism) were dichotomized in the form of 0 = success and 1 = failure. Marriage status was collapsed into married, common law, separated or divorced = 0, single = 1. Employment represented a quasi-ordinal scale, beginning with regularly employed (= 1) to never employment (= 5). Race was dichotomized into white and Asian = 0, Black and Native = 1. There were so few Asians in the sample that they could be collapsed into the white category. Blacks and Natives, both of whom are economically marginalized in Canada, were combined to test the effects of race. Finally, the other two control variables (prior adult or juvenile record) were treated as dummy variables: 0 = none, 1 = one or more.

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