

Lettie Prell
Director of Research



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Iowa Private Sector Prison Employment Works

This issue highlights work conducted by Cindy J. Smith, Ph.D., of the University Baltimore and her research associates, Jennifer Bechtel, Angie Patrick and Laura Wilson-Gentry. Their final report submitted to NIJ described findings from a multi-state study, including Iowa. This issue of the ICON Data Download describes highlights from the findings for the Iowa sample, which tracked 1,091 inmates who worked in private sector prison industries jobs and were released from prison between 1999 and 2001, and compared their results with similar offenders who had worked in either traditional prison industries, or other institutional jobs. All offenders were tracked through mid-2003. This results in a follow-up period of slightly less than two years up to four and one-half years.

Finding #1: Private sector prison workers significantly more likely to get jobs following release. 80% of private sector prison workers obtained employment within the first quarter upon release, compared to 60% of the other groups. 11% of private sector prison workers did not have reported earnings on follow-up, compared with 21% and 27% of the other groups.

Finding #2: Private sector prison workers significantly more likely to be continuously employed following release. 49.2% of private sector prison workers were employed for one year or more continuously, compared to 43.9% and 45.6% of the other groups.

Finding #3: Private sector prison workers retained employment significantly longer than the comparison groups, based on survival analysis of the employment data described above.

Finding #4: Private sector prison workers earn more wages and higher wages. Mean wages for private sector prison workers over 6.6 quarters were \$4,381 to \$5,620 higher than the comparison groups.

Finding #5: Private sector prison workers significantly more likely to stay out of prison, compared to offenders who were not involved in prison industries while incarcerated. 95.5% of private sector prison workers, and 95.6% of the traditional prison industries comparison group remained out of prison during the follow-up period, compared to 91.2% of the comparison group who had other institutional job assignments.

Finding #6: Regarding other measures of recidivism – arrest and conviction – there were no significant differences among the groups.

What this means: Iowa Prison Industries' private sector prison employment program helps released offenders become tax-paying citizens quicker and remain employed longer than similar offenders who did not work in private sector prison jobs, and reduces their likelihood of returning to prison. These findings demonstrate private sector prison employment is an effective means to successful offender reentry into the community.

The full report, *Correctional Industries preparing inmates for re-entry: Recidivism and post-release employment, State Report for Iowa* (Smith et. al., University of Baltimore, 2005) is available by contacting the DOC director of research (phone 515/725-5718 or email Lettie.Prell@iowa.gov).