

**Workshop 28:**  
**Attitudes toward employability of ex-offenders and  
ex-prisoners: employer, correctional/corrective service  
worker, employment support worker, and offender and  
prisoner perspectives**

**Associate Professor Joe Graffam**  
Deakin University, Victoria

**Lesley Hardcastle**  
Deakin University, Victoria

## **Background**

Approximately 60–70 per cent of re-offenders are unemployed at the time that they re-offend, and lower recidivism has been associated with employment (Infante, 1997; Rahill-Beuler & Kretzer, 1997; Soothill & Holmes, 1981; and Uggen (1999, 2000). Recent policy has emphasized development of employment programs specifically aimed at assisting ex-offenders into employment. Provision of employment assistance to disadvantaged groups generally is recognized as labor-intensive and complex (Cook et al., 1994; Danley & Mellen, 1987; Graffam & Naccarella, 1997; Graffam et al., 2000). To make a successful transition into employment, support is likely to be necessary from corrective services workers, employment support workers, and employers. Ex-prisoners and ex-offenders too must be positively disposed toward their own employment.

There is little literature, older or recent, on attitudes toward the employability of ex-offenders, other than that investigating employer attitudes. That literature presents a somewhat ambiguous picture, rather more negative than positive, but not very detailed. Literature on the employment conditions and performance of ex-offenders suggests work restrictions and poor work conditions. At the same time, ex-offenders have been found to be dependable employees. Literature on employment support programs suggests a need for intense preparation and direct ongoing support along with support to employers in the workplace.

There has been a fairly diverse range of relatively recent employment-related research. Moses (1997) found that exposure to ex-offenders through mock job fairs had a positive effect on employer policies. Allbright and Denq (1996) described employers' willingness to employ ex-offenders as dependent on employer fear of violence in the workplace, employer beliefs about inadequate education of ex-offenders, and the relationship of the crime to the job. Waldfogel (1994) found 5 per cent higher unemployment and 30 per cent lower pay for ex-offenders than for non-offenders. Infante (1997) cited only a 1 per cent default rate in the US federal bonding program that had insured 40,000 ex-offenders. On a much smaller scale, Moses (1997) found one employer who had employed 18 ex-offenders and found them all to be excellent employees. Uggen (1999, 2000), focusing on recidivism, found suitable employment and even marginal employment were associated with lower rates of re-offending.

The need for specialised employment support is evident. A variety of approaches to providing support has been described. Rahill-Beuler and Kretzer (1997) suggested that parole officers referring parolees to employment agencies is not sufficient because support needs of parolees are complex. Unwin, Mayers, and Wilt (1999) described a US pre-release employment program that includes education, tutoring, religious studies, vocational training, apprenticeships, specific job training, community services, and substance abuse treatment. This kind of comprehensive preparation has been referred to as the 'human capital' approach (Gerber & Fritch, 1995). Maitland (2001) cited the need for backup support for employers from corrective and social services to prevent employers becoming quasi-social workers and the value of external job coaches to advise managers and co-workers on assisting the integration of ex-offenders. Maitland (2002) has also emphasised the value of a range of continuing post-placement supports for ex-offender employees and their employers. Soothill, Francis, and Escarela (1999) found that remaining in contact with a specialist employment agency, irrespective of gaining suitable employment, was associated with reduced recidivism.

## **Research methods**

### **Participants**

The study is being conducted with representative samples from four stakeholder groups in Queensland and Victoria: employers; employment support workers; corrective services workers; and prisoners and offenders. The total number of expected participants in each group (half in each state) is: 1,000 employers; 250 employment support workers (half from Centrelink and half from Job Network services); 250 corrective services workers (approximately 2/3 from non-custodial and 1/3 from custodial settings); and 250 prisoners and offenders (approximately 2/3 from non-custodial and 1/3 from custodial settings). The sample has been constructed such that each is representative of its respective population. These numbers represent a response rate of 30 per cent.

### **Procedures**

Identification of prospective participants was managed with the support of employer organisations (Commerce Queensland and VECCI), industry peak bodies (NESA), and individuals occupying key administrative positions in the Queensland Department of Corrective Services, Corrections Victoria, and Centrelink. Questionnaires have been distributed with reply paid envelopes for return to Deakin University.

### **Instrument**

The questionnaire comprises four sections. The first section elicits bio-demographic information such as age, gender, country of birth; size of organisation (employers, employment services), role in organisation, number of years in that role, and highest level of education/training completed. Offenders and prisoners are asked kind and length of sentence, and most serious crime and time spent in employment. The second section comprises 25 items describing a variety of hypothetical jobseekers with a range of characteristics including intellectual and physical disability, non-English speaking background, psychiatric condition(s), and forensic history. Respondents are asked to rate the employability (obtaining and retaining) of each hypothetical jobseeker on a 7-point scale (0–6). The third section includes a list of 21 personal characteristics associated with work that may potentially impact on the employability of ex-offenders. Respondents are asked to rate the importance of these on a 7 point scale. They are asked to rate the

likelihood that ex-offenders, ex-prisoners and 'other' (i.e. non-offenders) would have each characteristic. The fourth section of the questionnaire elicits previous experience with the employment of ex-offenders and the extent to which employment is a positive or negative experience for people with a criminal record.

## **Data analysis**

The questionnaire results are being analysed using SPSS for Windows. Results are being analysed in terms of whole group responses and within group differences. Frequencies, percent distributions, means, standard deviations, and analyses of variance will be the main techniques used for data analysis. Where appropriate, post-hoc Tukey tests will be performed as well. Because of the expected sample sizes involved in most of the analyses, we are hoping to adopt a confidence level of  $p < .01$  as a standard for consideration of statistical significance.

## **Results**

Although at the time of this writing, no data have been analysed, at the time of presentation preliminary analyses will have been conducted, and results will be presented in relation to major findings. The tables and discussion below show and describe some preliminary results that we expect to present at the conference. A complete version of this paper will be available at that time.

The results that will be presented relate to three major findings of the study: the rated employability of various groups of prospective workers; the rated importance to employability of several personal characteristics and behaviours; and the rated extent to which ex-offenders, ex-prisoners, and "other" prospective workers exhibit those characteristics and behaviours. In each case, whole group responses will be presented in terms of modal response, mean and standard deviation, as well as analyses of variance that will identify any group differences and differences related to other variables such as location, extent of previous experience, etc. Respondents provided ratings using the 7 point scale (0–6) described above.

Table 1 will show the respondents' ratings of the employability of different groups of people. Participants were presented with a number of hypothetical people, representing people with intellectual disability, physical and sensory disabilities, psychiatric disabilities and mental illness, forensic histories and communication difficulties. Ratings were obtained for both obtaining employment and retaining employment. In presenting the results, we have grouped those hypothetical people into six categories: intellectual disability; physical and sensory disabilities; chronic illness; psychiatric conditions; forensic history; and communication difficulties.

**Table 1: Rated employability of different groups**

Category of hypothetical people	Likelihood of Obtaining			Likelihood of Retaining			
	N	Mode	Mean	SD	Mode	Mean	SD
Intellectual Disability							
Physical & sensory disability							
Chronic Illness							
Psychiatric Condition							
Forensic History							
Communication difficulties							

The text following Table 1 will describe whole group results for rated likelihood of both obtaining and retaining employment, pointing out the groups rated most to least employable. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) will be presented to describe any differences between the participant groups and differences related to other variables.

Table 2 will present respondents' ratings of the importance of a number of employment-related personal characteristics and behaviours to employability. In presenting the results, we have grouped those characteristics and behaviours into work skills, communication, attitudes, and interpersonal skills.

**Table 2: Personal characteristics and employability**

Personal and work related characteristics	Importance			
	N	Mode	Mean	SD
Work Skills				
Communication				
Attitudes				
Interpersonal				

The text following Table 2 will describe whole group results for rated importance to employability of personal characteristics and behaviours, pointing out the characteristics and behaviours rated most to least important to employability. Analyses of variance

(ANOVAs) will be presented to describe any differences between the participant groups and differences related to other variables.

Table 3 will present participant ratings of the likelihood of ex-offenders, ex-prisoners and 'others' (non-offenders) exhibiting those employment-related characteristics and behaviours.

**Table 3: Likelihood of groups having characteristics**

Personal and work related characteristics	Likelihood ex/offender (non-custodial)			Likelihood ex-prisoner			Likelihood 'other'			
	N	Mo	Mn	SD	Mo	Mo	SD	Mo	Mn	SD
Skills										
Communication										
Attitudes										
Interpersonal										

The text following Table 3 will describe the whole group results for likelihood of each group exhibiting those characteristics and behaviours, pointing out the group rated most to least likely. Again, analyses of variance (ANOVAs) will be presented to describe any differences between the participant groups and differences related to other variables.

## Discussion

The paper will conclude with a discussion that focuses on similarities and differences in group responses, provides explanation for patterns of response, identifies bases for community education and offender/prisoner training, and makes suggestions for future research that will extend knowledge in this area.

## References

- Allbright, S., & Denq, F. (1996). Employer attitudes toward hiring ex-offenders. *Prison Journal*, 76(2), 118-137.
- Cook, J.A., Razzano, L.A., Straiton, D.M., & Ross, Y. (1994). Cultivation and maintenance of relationships with employers of people with psychiatric disabilities. *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 17(3), 103-116.
- Danley, K.S., & Mellen, V. (1987). Training and personnel issues for supported employment programs which serve persons who are severely mentally ill. *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 11(2), 87-102.
- Gerber, J., & Fritch, E.J. (1995). Adult academic and vocational correctional education progrwns: A review of recent research. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 119-142.

Graffam, J., & Naccarella, L. (1997). Disposition toward employment and perspectives on the employment process held by clients with psychiatric disabilities. *Australian Disability Review*, 3, 3-15.

Graffam, J., Smith, K., Shinkfield, A., & Polzin, U. (2000). *Making It Work: Employer Outcomes When Employing a Person with a Disability*. Melbourne: Deakin University.

Infante, V.D. (1 997). The pros of hiring ex-cons. *Management Today*, August, 16.

Maitland, A. (2001). Casting off the shadow of crime: Rehabilitation of offenders: Ex-convicts can be helped into employment with the right support from resettlement agencies writes Alison Maitland. *Financial Times*; London; Jul 17, 2001.

Moses, M.C. (1997). Enterprising offenders: Texas' project enterprise unites business, correction communities. *Corrections today*, 59((3),110.

Rahill-Beuler, C.M., & Kretzer, K.M. (1997). Helping offenders find employment. *Federal Probation*, 61(1), 35-37.

Soothill, K., Francis, B., & Escarela, G. (1999). White-collars and black sheep. A twenty year criminological follow-up of white-collar ex-offenders.

Soothill, K., & Holmes, J. (1981). Finding employment for ex-prisoners: A ten year follow-up. *The Howard Journal*, XX, 29-36.

Uggen, C. (1999). Ex-offenders and the conformist alternative: A job quality model of work and crime. *Social Problems*. 46(1), 127-151.

Uggen, C. (2000). Work as a turning point in the life course of criminals: A duration model of age, employment, and recidivism. *American Sociological Review*, 65(4), 529-546.

Unwin, T., Mayers, J., & Wilt, D. (1 999). Linking offenders and jobs: See the success coming. *Corrections Today* 61(6), 114-116.

Waldfoegel, J. (1994). The effect of criminal conviction on income and the trust "reposed in the workmen". *Journal of Human Resources*, 29(1), 62-81.