How Gender of Ex-Offenders Influences Access to Employment Opportunities

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Abstract -- While both male and female ex-offenders face many of the same difficulties while finding employment, some barriers are unique to either males or females, or are more problematic for one gender. The purpose of this article is to review gender differences in barriers to employment for ex-offenders with disabilities. There is little research on disabilities and offending populations – what exists explores the prevalence of mental health, substance abuse, and intellectual or developmental disabilities (James & Glaze, 2006; National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2010). Further, the body of research that examines barriers to employment specifically for ex-offenders with disabilities is extremely limited. Consequently, this review will explicitly reference ex-offenders with disabilities where possible, but generalizations about this justice-involved population are required. The authors hypothesize that many of the existing gender-neutral and gender-specific barriers to employment are exacerbated by the presence of a disability or disabilities. Disadvantages for ex-offenders are compounded in a fashion that makes finding a job a daunting task.

Keywords: employment barriers, gender, ex-offenders, disability

The incarceration rate in the United States has fallen in recent years, but the number of individuals impacted by involvement in the criminal justice system is far from trivial. In 2012, 609,800 admissions were made into state and federal prisons, the lowest number since 1999. At the end of the year 2012, the combined US adult correctional systems supervised approximately 6.94 million offenders, down by about 51,000 from the previous year (Glaze & Herberman, 2013). About 650,000 individuals are released from state and Federal prisons back into the community ever year States (Travis, 2005). In addition, 11.6 million people cycle in and out of local jails and detention centers annually (Minton, 2013). Individuals reentering society are faced with a multitude of challenges that make it difficult to adopt a noncriminal lifestyle.

One of the major challenges facing newly released prisoners is finding employment. Legal employment reduces the risk of recidivism, providing needed income, but also fostering prosocial values, informal social bonds, a daily routine, and the satisfaction of doing meaningful work (Flower, 2010; Petersilia, 2003; Rose, Michelsen, Wiest & Fabian, 2008). For ex-offenders, however, jobs are often difficult to find and difficult to keep. Ex-offenders face many barriers to employment, due to both their criminal records and their demographic characteristics.

The task of locating employment upon prison release is even more problematic for ex-offenders with disabilities. From a legal standpoint, any physical or mental impairment that substantially restricts at least one of an individual’s major life activities can qualify as a disability (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Such impairments include clearly visible disabilities such as those requiring the use of a wheelchair, as well as a wide variety of less observable disabilities such as diabetes, learning disorders, and psychological illnesses. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits employment discrimination based on disability, the general population with disabilities still tend to fare worse in the labor market (Stapleton & Burkhauser, 2003).

Further, men and women do not face identical difficulties while seeking employment. Structural as well as individual-level characteristics give male and female offenders some unique challenges in their job searches. The purpose of this article is to review gender differences in barriers to employment for ex-offenders with disabilities. It will begin with a brief description of the offending population, particularly with respect to gender. It will then move to
a discussion of gender-neutral and gender-specific employment barriers, followed by recommendations and resources for rehabilitation counselors who work with ex-offenders with disabilities.

A paucity of research on disabilities and offending populations explores any topic other than the prevalence of mental health, substance abuse, and intellectual/developmental disabilities (James & Glaze, 2006; National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2010). Further, the body of research, which examines barriers to employment specifically for ex-offenders with disabilities is extremely limited. For example, the authors identified no published research related to the impact of physical disabilities such as blindness, hearing impairment, or paralysis. Consequently, this review will explicitly reference ex-offenders with disabilities where possible, but generalizations about this justice-involved population are required. The authors hypothesize that many of the existing gender-neutral and gender-specific barriers to employment are exacerbated by the presence of a disability or disabilities. Disadvantages for ex-offenders are compounded in a fashion that makes finding a job a daunting task.

**Description of Offenders**

Men have always constituted a far greater proportion of the incarcerated population in the United States than women. In 2009, 18% of the correctional population (prison, jail, and community supervision) was female. In 2010, there were 113,000 women offenders incarcerated in state and federal facilities, compared to 1,500,000 men. Males were imprisoned at 14 times the rate of females in 2011 (Carson & Golinelli, 2013). The large gender gap, however, has been slowly shrinking. Since 2000, the female incarceration rate has increased by 2.2% for women and only 1.6% for men (Carson & Golinelli).

Male and female prisoners differ in the types of offenses for which they are incarcerated. Drug offenders accounted for 25% of female state prison inmates but only 17% of males in 2010, while 29% of women and only 18% of men committed property crimes (Carson & Golinelli, 2013). Men, on the other hand, were more likely to have committed violent crimes (54% vs. 37%), although court commitments of women for violent offenses increased 83% between 1991 and 2011 (Carson & Golinelli).

Pathways into crime also appear to vary by gender. The association between prior victimization and offending is stronger for women. Most female offenders have histories of physical or sexual abuse, and intimate partner abuse is more prevalent for incarcerated women than for both incarcerated men and women in the general population (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Covington, 2007; O’Brien, 2002). Women are also more likely to be introduced to crime, as well as to drugs, through their relationships with family, friends, and significant others (Cobbina, 2009). Romantic involvements with men who are also involved in crime increase criminal opportunities and exposure to criminal values (Mullins & Wright, 2003; Simpson, Yahner, & Dugan, 2008).

**Gender-Neutral Barriers to Employment**

Work as a rehabilitative ideal is based on the establishment of informal social bonds that can increase an offender’s self-control and engender behavioral change from participation in criminal activities (Petersilia, 2003; Uggen, 2000). Despite the documented positive impact of stable employment on desistance from crime, many barriers, both gender-neutral and gender-specific, stand in the way of offenders finding and maintaining jobs. A large proportion of incarcerated and detained individuals, both male and female, suffer from a substance abuse or other serious health-related problem. A report from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) (2010) reports that 85% of prison and jail inmates are substance-involved during incarceration or detention; 1.5 million inmates in 2010 met the medical criteria for substance abuse or addiction, and another 458,000 had histories of substance abuse. Only 11% of all inmates with substance involvement, however, receive any addiction treatment during incarceration (CASA, 2010). In addition, other diseases plague prisoners—it has been estimated that nearly 1.5% of state and federal prison inmates (Maruschak, 2012) and 1.3% of jail inmates (Maruschak, 2004) have HIV/AIDS. Travis (2005) estimated that 18% have Hepatitis C.

Mental illness is also overrepresented among incarcerated offender populations. On a given day in state prisons, 2 to 4% of inmates are estimated to have schizophrenia or another psychotic disorder, 2 to 4% have bipolar disorder, 13 to 18% have major depression, 6 to 12% have an anxiety disorder, 22 to 30% have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and 26 to 45% have antisocial personality disorder (Veysey & Bichler-Robertson, 2002). Research has consistently indicated that the rate of diagnosed serious mental illness among prison populations is between 16% and 18%—approximately three times the rate in the normative, non-incarcerated population (Kubiak & Siefert, 2008; O’Keefe, Klebe, Stucker, Sturm, & Leggett, 2010). However, a report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics evaluated prison inmate self-report questionnaires and concluded that as many as 56% of state prisoners, 45% of Federal prisoners, and 64% of jail inmates have at least one serious mental health problem (James & Glaze, 2006). The incarceration experience may also serve as a stimulus for mental health concerns. One prisoner reentry study interviewed 324 prisoners both prior to and after release, and one in five respondents reported symptoms associated with PTSD in the first months after release (Visher, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). These symptoms include agitation while speaking of prison, repetitive disturbing memories, and avoidance or emotional numbing, which can be highly disruptive during an ex-offender’s transitional period.

The majority of ex-offenders are racial or ethnic minorities; African Americans and Latinos alone constitute more than 60% of imprisoned offenders (Guerrero, Harrison, & Sabol, 2012), and racial and ethnic minorities make up nearly 66% of all inmates held in prison or jail (West, Sabol, & Greenman, 2010) and 64% of adults on parole or proba-
tion (Glaze, Bonczar, & Zhang, 2010). Although the extent to which minorities are disadvantaged by labor market discrimination appears to be decreasing (Pager & Shepherd, 2008), minority status may still make acquiring employment or earning higher wages more difficult (Harwin, 2013; Schmitt & Warner, 2010) (see S.M. Feist-Price in this issue for a discussion of the relationship between disability, ethnicity and ex-offenders). A report by Decker, Spohn, Ortiz, & Hedburg (2014), for example, concluded that for men, being black or Hispanic negatively impacted the likelihood of receiving a callback after an interview. For women, being black negatively impacted the likelihood of receiving a positive response from employers after submitting a resume online.

The offending population tends to suffer from low educational attainment, as well as inadequate literacy and math skills (Blitz, 2006; Harlow, 2003; Lynch & Sabol, 2001). 51% of offenders have either a high school diploma or GED, compared to 76% of the general population (LoBuglio, 2001). There are substantially fewer offenders with developmental or learning disabilities completing a high school education or GED; only 34% of state prison inmates with such a disability reach this level of educational achievement. Further, Hirsch et al. (2002) found that approximately half of offenders are “functionally illiterate.” Overall, low educational achievement, along with reduced cognitive skills, renders an ex-offender both less competitive and restricts the number and types of employment opportunities available to them. While vocational programming may be able to assist offenders in their employment efforts, cognitive, developmental, and mental health disabilities exacerbate the challenges associated with receiving beneficial rehabilitation services (Tschopp, Perkins, Hart-Katuin, Born, & Holt, 2007). Vocational programming requires active participation and learning by ex-offenders in order to be valuable. Disabilities that interfere with the learning and understanding process, or with program performance, can render programming ineffective. Such disabilities are wide-ranging and may include general learning disability and specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, traumatic brain injury, and neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia. Limited work experience further plagues ex-offenders’ opportunities for employment. Offenders’ work experience accumulated prior to incarceration tends to fall short of non-offenders’ work history, and the removal of offenders from the traditional labor market during incarceration periods only widens this disparity. A bulletin by the Bureau of Justice Statistics concluded that 31.5% of prisoners did not have jobs during the month prior to arrest (Harlow, 2003). A study of Maryland prison releasees found that 45% of those who had entered prison had been fired from at least one previous job (Visher, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). During prison, while offenders are removed from the traditional labor market and their social networks, their marketable job skills may deteriorate, and the strength of their professional ties and references may erode. In an increasingly high-skilled, technology-oriented society, ex-offenders with little up-to-date training have few viable job prospects.

Jail detainees and individuals who are not convicted also experience disruptions during and after arrest that may have negative effects on employment. Woefully little research has examined the collateral consequences of short-term detention and incarceration, but work by Weisheit & Mofas (1989) concludes that jail often results in long-lasting problems. Nearly one quarter of detainees in the study reported losing their housing while in jail, and nearly two-thirds who were employed before entering jail lost their job or felt that it was in jeopardy. Pogrebin, Dodge, & Katsampes (2001) call for more research on the often complex costs to the individual associated with short-term incarceration, and report that jail terms destabilize individuals in a variety of ways, including emotional and financial disruption to family members, public posting of the detainees’ arrest record, and repossesion of personal property.

Several systemic barriers, the result of employers and other institutions rather than individual offenders, exist as well. The stigma of a criminal record is itself a barrier to finding employment. Pager (2003) randomly assigned criminal records to actors posing as job applicants and found that a criminal history was indeed a significant barrier to employment; the applicants who were assigned as having criminal records were between one-half and two-thirds less likely than the applicants without records to be given a callback for an entry-level position. Job applications often inquire about whether or not applicants have a criminal record, and this information may be used when making hiring decisions. Although Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids employers from refusing to hire an individual due solely to the existence of a criminal record, concerns about trustworthiness, dependability, or the possibility of future criminal behavior for those applicants who admit to a criminal history may still come into play (Harris & Keller, 2005; Stoll & Bushway, 2008). Employers may further fear negligent hiring claims; if a background check is not conducted, an employer can be held liable for harms caused by employees’ behavior that occurs during or because of work (Clark, 2004).

Ex-offenders are systematically excluded from a number of jobs by law as well. Laws restricting the obtainment of certificates and licenses by ex-offenders remove them from a wide range of occupations (Petersilia, 2003). Individuals with criminal records may be excluded from jobs in child care, health care, education, finance, personal service (e.g. cosmetology, barbering), and some unionized trade industries (Flower, 2010). Ironically, as Petersilia (2003) notes, labor economists indicate that these are some of the fastest growing sectors in the US economy. The job areas in which ex-offenders may have otherwise been most able to find work (particularly personal service and trade industries) are off-limits.

Research has shown that homelessness is both a predictor and consequence of criminal offending (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008a, 2008b) and finding housing is one of the first struggles ex-offenders face. In turn,
this challenge impedes obtaining gainful employment. Public housing laws now prohibit permanently registered sex offenders and individuals who have manufactured or produced methamphetamine in federally assisted housing from utilizing subsidized public housing. Public housing agencies must further ban individuals using any illegal drug while in public housing residence (HUD regulations 24 C.F.R. 960.204, 24 C.F.R. 966.4, & 24 C.F.R. 982.553). Other ex-offenders may lose their housing when they go into prison, and long residential waiting lists prevent them from immediately taking up residence in the same location upon release. This forces some prison releasees to take up residence in crowded shelters, spending their time searching for other living arrangements rather than searching for employment. Moreover, both male and female ex-offenders rely heavily on personal connections to find employment (Visher, Debus-Sherrill, & Yahner, 2011; Visher, Kachnowski, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). Most ex-offenders return to their previous communities, which are frequently neighborhoods with low socioeconomic status that offer few skilled jobs and house peer groups that offer little social and emotional support (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). The social networks on which ex-offenders can depend are small, offering limited connections to the legitimate working world and little access to resources that can assist with job search efforts.

**Gender-Specific Barriers to Employment**

While both male and female ex-offenders face many of the same difficulties while finding employment, some barriers are unique to either males or females, or are more problematic for one gender. Male offenders, for example, are significantly more likely to have committed a violent offense or a sexual offense (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). Relative to criminal records of drug consumption and other minor offenses, violent or sexual criminal histories render ex-offenders less employable. Employers may presume that offenders with a history of these types of serious offenses are less dependable, lack character, or have a higher likelihood to recidivate (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). Sexual offenders are also commonly obscured when their names are permanently listed on publicly accessible sex offender registries, as well as when they are mandated to live a specified distance away from schools and other child-care centers (Barnes, 2011). Employers may choose not to hire such ex-offenders, preferring to avoid the stigma associated with sex offenses and the inconvenience of working around ex-offenders’ geographic restrictions. Men with physical or other disabilities are also more likely to have difficulties finding stable employment in some fields. Jobs requiring manual labor, for instance, which are typically good options for men without extensive work experience, are difficult for individuals with physical limitations.

However, women appear more disadvantaged than men in the search for employment. In general, the majority of female offenders are economically marginalized and face substantial barriers upon returning to the community that make it difficult to obtain and maintain employment (O’Brien, 2002; Zarch & Schnieder, 2007). Similar to male offenders, women offenders are under-and un-employed, but women also work fewer hours, make less per hour than their male counterparts and are often employed in non-permanent low-level or entry level occupations with little chance for advancement (Blitz, 2006; Delveaux, Blanchette & Wickett, 2005; James, 2004; McCampbell, 2005; Rose, et al., 2008; Tonkin, Dickie, Alemagno & Grove, 2004; Zaitzow, 2006). Overall, the employment prospects of most female offenders typically consists of low-wage jobs, but even for those with skills and experience sufficient to obtain a better job, women are challenged by responsibilities as primary caretaker of minor children. The majority of female offenders have minor children and were the custodial parent prior to incarceration (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). As custodial parents, public housing restrictions are particularly problematic for women offenders, who need affordable and safe housing not only to maintain their sobriety and to avoid violent victimization (Berman, 2005), but also to meet the needs of their children. Time spent meeting the needs of their family (Flavin, 2004) and the lack of adequate and affordable childcare (Berman, 2005; Harm & Phillips, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003) are barriers to employment. Other logistical challenges include that daycare providers usually operate only during regular business hours, yet many jobs require alternative shifts. Further, public transportation for alternative shifts may not be available, or women may feel unsafe taking public transportation late at night or in unsafe neighborhoods (Berman, 2005).

The restrictions that preclude offenders from obtaining certain jobs create a disproportionate disadvantage for women. Occupations where female offenders may be well suited (given they are generally low-skill workers with little experience) include the care-giving and service industries of home health care, child care, and cosmetology. These positions are likely to have more flexible hours and allow women to work part-time, providing women with more time to care for children or to seek training and achieve educational goals to improve long-term employment opportunities. However, even for those who are able to obtain these types of positions, prohibitions against higher skilled positions such as nursing, accounting, and trades bar women from advancing up from these care-giving and service positions into a profession which is more likely to provide a living wage and benefits.

In addition to challenges related to skill levels and family obligations, women offenders also have greater psychosocial challenges than male offenders and have higher rates of childhood trauma and sexual abuse. Existing research on incarcerated women suggests that women arriving in the correctional system are far more likely to have psychiatric disorders than their male counterparts (Binswanger et al., 2010; Hartwell, 2001; Williams, Dutta, Kundu, & Welch, 2008). An estimated one-half to three-quarters of all women entering correctional facilities require mental health treatment (James & Glaze, 2006).
In terms of trauma, an estimated 61% of men and 51% of women in the general population experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, but women are at a higher risk than men for parental neglect, childhood abuse, sexual molestation, domestic violence, sexual assault, and sudden death of a loved one (Hartwell, 2001; Norris, Foster, & Weishaar, 2002). For women, the prevalence of trauma is even more extensive among offending populations. For example, between 77% and 90% of incarcerated women report extensive abuse (Messina & Grella, 2006). Those with a greater exposure to childhood trauma experience a younger onset of a myriad of behavioral and health problems including substance abuse (commonly used to self-medicate), depression, PTSD, panic eating disorders, sexually transmitted diseases, poor coping and problem-solving skills, as well as engagement in prostitution and other criminal behavior (Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2005; Covington, 2007; McLean, Robarge & Sherman, 2006; Messina & Grella, 2006; O’Brien, 2002). Women offenders often have poor health outcomes, in part because they do not have the means to access health services in the community. They are “typically impoverished, with inadequate transportation and resources, limiting their access to community-based health systems” (Messina & Grella, 2006, p. 1842). Health issues are also related to substance abuse — women who are dependent on alcohol experience more severe physical consequences, including more heart, muscle, and liver deterioration and faster brain atrophy, than similarly situated men (Mann, Ackermann, Croissant, Mundle, Nakovics, & Diehl, 2005). As the challenges faced by female offenders frequently co-occur (e.g. mental health challenges, poor health, trauma from past abuse, and/or substance abuse (James & Glaze, 2006)), the failure to diagnose and treat these in a comprehensive and coherent fashion contributes to the challenge of finding stable employment for this population (Peters, Strozier, Murnin, & Kearns, 1997).

Overall, the research on women offenders and barriers to employment support holistic approaches (Richie, 2001), which try to address not only the individual’s needs (housing, education, relationship counseling, family support, substance abuse, and mental health treatment), but also to respond to gender-specific needs and risk factors (Berman, 2005; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). As the problems are multiplicative, complex, and comprehensive, the solutions should be likewise. Our recommendations conclude this review.

**Recommendations**

As Flower (2010) discusses, most research indicates a need for contextualized, multisystemic treatment methods. Practitioners assisting ex-offenders, therefore, must be prepared to speak to the full range of an individual’s needs. Lasting employment and rehabilitation depend upon the extent to which all of an ex-offender’s problems are addressed. Appropriately handling some risk factors and ignoring others will likely be less effective.

Accordingly, our first recommendation is that vocational training and employment assistance efforts for women and men differ to address gender-specific concerns, and further take into account disadvantages brought on particularly by disabilities. Men are less likely than women to express interest in and seek out services after detainment or incarceration (Hartwell, 2001; Spjeldnes, Jung, & Yamatani, 2014). Therefore, it is important that practitioners reach out to ex-offenders, particularly men, and inform them of available services. The individuals most in need of help may be ignored if they are not encouraged to take advantage of available programs and if counseling services are not properly advertised.

Job searches for women must also be sensitive to problems that are either unique to or intensified for female ex-offenders. For example, awareness training may enable counselors to assist in neutralizing employers’ negative attitudes toward women and individuals with disabilities (Williams, Dutta, Kundu, & Welch, 2008). Further, given the high rates of trauma among the offender population, we recommend practitioners ensure that all staff — from supervisors to counselors to front-line personnel — practice trauma-informed care. The National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides resources, training and technical assistance to promote the implementation of trauma-informed care. Organization-wide training may be required to ensure that all staff understand the impact of trauma, and learn how to respond effectively in a manner that does not re-traumatize the individual. Another common barrier for women returning to the community is that for those with young children, they may need assistance locating both jobs with flexible schedules and child care, and may also benefit greatly from parental skills training. Women without supportive, prosocial family and peer environments may need assistance to develop these social networks, which in turn will promote positive behaviors and lead to a lifestyle conducive to long-term employment. Women with histories of abuse and trauma may need extensive mental health treatment or access to relationship counseling. Without these services, the task of finding stable employment may be insurmountable for many female ex-offenders with disabilities.

Our second recommendation is focused on supporting family relationships. Research indicates that one of the greatest resources in reentry planning is the family, who may provide housing, financial support, emotional stability, and professional connections for returning prisoners (Visher, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). Hence, the strengthening of family ties, both formal (e.g. family counseling sessions) and informal (e.g. spending family time together), should generally be encouraged. Ex-offenders often report a reliance on personal connections through family and friends while searching for jobs, so fostering greater family bonds is important. The role of family can be especially impactful for female ex-offenders who are less likely than male ex-offenders to have helpful professional networks. However, it should be noted that many female offenders report being initially led into criminal activity and away from legal employment by significant others, family members,
and other peers who were already criminally involved (Mills & Codd, 2008; Cobbina 2009). If the family is at the heart of a female’s offending behaviors, then this woman may need to distance herself from family members’ illegal activities to provide the best chance at finding and keeping legitimate employment.

While opportunities are limited, our third recommendation is that practitioners encourage ex-offenders to accumulate meaningful work experience and as many job skills as possible immediately after incarceration. This will likely involve taking advantage of any available post-incarceration vocational programming and transitional services geared toward helping individuals to rebuild work histories and demonstrate motivation to find employment. Concerns about the erosion of ex-offenders’ job proficiency and social networks, as well as work difficulties caused by disabilities, can be partially reduced if individuals are willing to work and have a desire to accumulate job skills. Research indicates that participation in a vocational program by individuals with disabilities may reduce the impact of personal characteristics such as race, marital status, parent status, education, and history of medical services (Martz & Xu, 2008; Xu & Martz, 2010). There are transitional job programs that assist ex-offenders by providing supportive employment opportunities and services including temporary paid jobs and other types of needed support, including case management and referrals for ancillary services. The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) is one such comprehensive employment program, and a rigorous evaluation found that access to CEO’s job bank and services did substantially increase employment for ex-offenders in the immediate post-release period, although the effects did fade over a three-year time period (Redcross, Millenkay, Rudd, & Levinshin, 2011). Provisional jobs give ex-offenders a source of legal income during the period in which they are most vulnerable to recidivism and other detrimental behaviors. Additionally, transitional programs give trained staff the opportunity to assess and provide counsel on ex-offenders’ workplace issues, better preparing them for stable, productive employment in the workplace.

Criminal records are a formidable barrier, and many workforce development training programs include coaching offenders on how to explain their criminal history to potential employers. Our fourth recommendation is that offenders should be encouraged to attend these types of training programs, and when applicable, emphasize the nonviolent nature of their records with potential employers. A study of over 600 California firms revealed that some employers were willing to hire ex-offenders who had committed relatively minor infractions (e.g., drug rather than violent offenses), suggesting that employers consider more than the existence of a criminal record while making hiring decisions (Stoll & Bushway, 2008). Although having a criminal record is still often detrimental to an ex-offenders’ employment search, it is possible that the harm can be lessened for those with less serious records. In addition, depending on the type of offense or the stage of the criminal justice process (e.g., arrest vs. conviction), justice-involved individuals may be able to petition to expunge part or all of their record. Practitioners can familiarize themselves with state regulations to assist former offenders with this process. It would also be beneficial to help the offender obtain a copy of their criminal record so that they can review it for accuracy. Publically available criminal record databases are often inaccurate due to both mistaken attribution and identity theft (Dietrich, 2006)

Finally, given the many barriers for ex-offenders in obtaining employment (e.g., legal restrictions and the stigma of a criminal record), a number of programs around the country are training ex-offenders to become entrepreneurs. Some programs are conducted while participants are still incarcerated, while others are carried out in the community. The skills required to run a successful business are many and varied – from writing a business plan to networking to applying for loan to start their business. The Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) in Texas is one example of such an effort and has been evaluated by researchers at Baylor University (Johnson, Wubbenhorst, & Schroeder, 2013). Participants in the PEP program had significantly lower rates of recidivism (measured as return to incarceration up to 3 years post release) compared to a control group of those who were eligible, but did not participate in the program. Our final recommendation is that practitioners may wish to review these programs (see the Inc.Com Guide to Prison Entrepreneurship Resources at the end of the article) to see if such an initiative could be implemented within their community.

**Resources**

**Expungement of Criminal Records**


**National Center for Trauma-Informed Care**

Technical assistance center whose purpose is to educate and to assist in the implementation of trauma-informed care. [http://www.samhsa.gov/ntic/](http://www.samhsa.gov/ntic/)

**The Riley Guide**

A website portal listing various references related to employment and workforce development. [http://www.rileyguide.com/exoffend.html](http://www.rileyguide.com/exoffend.html)

**National Directory of Programs for Women with Criminal Justice Involvement**

Searchable list of available programs, by state, for women involved with various stages of the criminal justice system. [http://nicic.gov/WODP/](http://nicic.gov/WODP/)

**National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women**

The National Resource Center on Justice-Involved Women established to assist practitioners in understanding and applying the lessons learned from research, promising
practices, and the insights of justice-involved women themselves, as practitioners strive to transform the criminal justice system into one that is more gender-responsive – and ultimately more effective.  
http://www.cjinvolvedwomen.org/

Inc.Com Guide to Prison Entrepreneurship Resources  
List of programs by state that focus on helping ex-offenders become self-employed  

Wider Opportunities for Women  
Their 2006 publication entitled “Reality Check: Promoting Self-Sufficiency in the Public Workforce System – A Promising Practices Guide for Workforce Boards” provides case studies documenting the efforts of local Workforce Investment Boards to assist women and ex-offenders in achieving economic stability.  

References  


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