



Research Bulletin

Parole in NSW: The interrelated problems of education and unemployment

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PAROLE IN N.S.W.: The interrelated problems of education and unemployment

(Prepared by Angela Gorta, Research Officer)

A recent study of the conditions under which parole is successfully completed (Gorta, 1982) suggests that employment, both the stability of employment history and job changes during the parole, is related to parole outcome. Others, for example Greenwood, Lipsett and Norton (1980), state that employment is widely regarded as a preventive for crime because of the significant inverse relationship between employment and crime in adult offenders (p. 78).

This Bulletin outlines the educational qualifications and employment history of a sample of parolees released from prisons in New South Wales. A major Research Publication discussing the characteristics of these 250 parolees and their performance while on parole (Gorta, Cooney, George & West, 1982) is currently in press. This Bulletin focusses on those aspects of this research related to the education qualifications and employment history of these parolees.

The Design of the Study

A sample of 250 parolees was obtained from the total 1283 prisoners released to parole in New South Wales in 1974. 1974 was chosen as a common year of release to allow a minimum of a five year follow-up period at the time of data collection. While this long follow-up period seemed advisable to investigate recidivism and parole breakdown, it may have dated aspects of this research. It may be, for example, that the rate of unemployment of the parolees in this study is an under estimate of the rate of unemployment of people currently on parole, reflecting the current higher rate of unemployment in the community.

Parole files provided the sole source of data. Since the parole files provided the sole source of data, problems of unemployment may be understated in this study as parolees may not have brought all their problems to the attention of their parole officer.

Educational Attainment

Most of the parolees in this study finished their formal education in the early years of secondary school. The average parolee would have left school in 2nd form, without receiving a School or Intermediate Certificate, documentation of a basic educational achievement. Completion of a tertiary, such as a University or College of Advanced Education, course which is relatively rare in the community as a

SUMMARY

Employment stability has been found to be related to parole completion. This Bulletin outlines the educational qualifications and employment history of a sample of parolees released from prisons in New South Wales in 1974. The picture painted of these parolees is that most had left school at the minimum leaving age (or before) without attaining the Intermediate or School Certificate, documentation of a basic educational attainment. Very few completed any form of trade training. Most of the parolees were described as having an unstable employment history, almost half were unemployed at the time of the offence and three-quarters were unemployed at some time during their parole period. Furthermore, a lack of marketable skills was identified as the main reason for this unstable employment history. Thus at the time of entering gaol many of the parolees were unskilled. In gaol, the most common employment was "as required", which would not add to the parolee's repertoire of skills. Specialised programmes were recommended for only the minority. Thus on leaving gaol the parolees were still unskilled.

At the end of this Bulletin recommendations are made concerning attempting to increase the parolee's marketable skills while in gaol and assisting the prisoner to find a job to go to on release.

whole is much rarer within the group of parolees, where only 1% had completed such a course. Table 1 shows the distribution of the educational attainment of the parolees.

Table 1: Educational Attainment

Highest class completed	Percentage of Parolees
Primary school only	14
Secondary school:	
1st form	17
2nd form	34
3rd form	24
4th form	7
5th or 6th form	3
Tertiary course	1

In N.S.W. the legal minimum school leaving age is 15 (special exemption can be obtained at 14 years 9 months). Over half the parolees (56%) left school when they were 15 years, about a quarter (23%) left before they were 15 and

the rest (21%) left after this age. As the average age of pupils in 3rd form of secondary school is 15 years, the fact that the average parolee leaves school in 2nd form at the age of 15 would imply that many were old for their form and possibly had had to repeat one or more classes.

Almost half (42%) had attempted some form of trade training after leaving school. However of these, less than a third (27%) completed the training.

Employment

1. Employment History

Almost two-thirds (60%) of the parolees were considered to have an unstable employment history, with the number of jobs held in the past five years ranging from one to twenty. Approximately one-quarter of the parolees (22%) had each had one or two jobs, or three to five jobs (25%) but half (48%) had had more than ten jobs within the five year period. The longest period for which the parolees had held one job is shown in Table 2. The average such period was 13 months with only one-quarter (26%) having held one job for more than two years.

Table 2: Longest period for which parolees had held one job

Length of time	Percentage of Parolees
3 months or less	8
4-6 months	17
7-12 months	24
13-18 months	9
19-24 months	17
More than two years	26

The reasons for this instability, as described in the parole files, are presented in Table 3 in order of frequency of occurrence, together with the percentage of parolees to which they apply.

Table 3: Reasons for unstable employment history

Reasons	Percentage of Parolees
Lack of marketable skills	72
Retrenchment	40
Casual worker/labourer	19
Dismissals	17
Voluntary unemployment	16
Consistent institutionalisation/ imprisonment	9
Itinerant Worker	7

(N.B. Percentages in Table 3 may sum to more than 100% since more than one of these reasons might pertain to each of the parolees).

Lack of marketable skills is by far the most dominant reason for the employment instability, affecting almost three-quarters of the parolees. Such a lack of skills is consistent with the below average educational attainment and the small number who had completed trade training.

When individual job changes are examined the most common reason given is employer dissatisfaction. This and the other reasons are tabulated in order of frequency of occurrence in Table 4.

Table 4: Reasons for individual job changes

Reasons	Percentage of Parolees
Employer dissatisfaction	62
Conflict with employer over conditions or wages	22
Alcohol	22
Drugs	14
Physical or mental handicap	13
Unrealistic aspirations	9
Conflict with other employees	5

(N.B. As with Table 3, percentages in Table 4 may sum to more than 100% since more than one of these reasons might pertain to each of the parolees.

Employer dissatisfaction is a very broad reason for job changes. The employer could, for example, be dissatisfied with the parolee's attitude to his work or with his performance of the necessary tasks. Table 3 however, indicates that "dismissals" is a only minor reason for unstable employment history in comparison with "lack of marketable skills".

2. Employment at the time of the current offence

Unemployment was a problem for almost half of the parolees at the time of the offence. At this time, just over half (55%) of the parolees were employed. Of those working, most were employed by private employers (84%), others (10%) by the government and 6% were self-employed. Two-thirds (67%) of those working were employed in their usual occupation.

3. Employment while on parole

Over three-quarters (78%) of the parolees experienced periods of unemployment while on parole. Most (93%) held at least one job, the number of jobs held ranging from nil to sixteen. On average two or three jobs were held. The total period of unemployment experienced by each parolee ranged from 0 to 56 months, with the average period of unemployment being less than three months.

Education and Employment while in Gaol

No information was available on whether any special programmes were recommended for one-quarter of the parolees while they were in gaol. Where information was available, it can be seen that no programmes were recommended for most of the parolees (84%). For those for whom a special programme is known to have been recommended (81 of the total of 250), the most common were trade training (64%) and high school education (25%). Other programmes recommended included a basic English course (5%), remedial reading (2%), poultry farming (1%), psychiatric treatment (1%) and Project Survival (1%). Only 44 parolees completed their course, of these two-thirds (66%) completed their course successfully.

There was no information available on the gaol employment recommended for one-quarter of the parolees. Those for whom information was available were employed most frequently "as required" (60%). Other jobs included: maintenance (7%), cookhouse (4%), laundry (3%), electrician (3%) as well as a range of jobs pertaining to only one or two individuals, such as: reception shop, tailorshop, blacksmith/welder or frontgate mailroom.

From the small number completing educational programmes in gaol and the unskilled nature of the work they were engaged in, it would appear that very few would have gained any marketable skills while they were in prison.

Discussion

Earlier research has revealed that employment seems related to parole completion. Examination of the parole files reveals that most of the parolees were considered to have an unstable employment history, almost half were unemployed at the time of their offence and over three-quarters experienced some unemployment whilst on parole. This study has been able to examine the reasons given for an unstable employment history. The main reason given for an unstable employment history was a lack of marketable skills. This is consistent with the educational background of the parolees. Most of the parolees had left school at the minimum school leaving age (or before) without attaining the Intermediate or School Certificate, documentation of a basic educational attainment. Many of these parolees may have had to repeat one or more years of schooling. Although a number attempted some form of trade training, very few completed it.

Thus at the time of entering gaol many of the parolees were unskilled. In gaol, the most common employment was "as required", which would not add to the parolee's repertoire of skills. Specialised programmes were recommended for only the minority. Thus on leaving gaol the parolees were still unskilled, with formal gaol experiences having little effect on parole outcome.

Difficulties of and suggestions for training in gaols

Having specialised technical training or industry within individual gaols presents a number of problems. One problem is that the frequent transfer from one gaol to another may prevent prisoners completing programmes offered at only one or two gaols. Another problem is that equipping prisoners with tools may endanger the safety of prison officers or other prisoners. Presently, planning is taking place to try to overcome the problem of prisoners moving between institutions which do not have related work opportunities. For example, the Department of Technical and Further Education has been involved in planning trade training at the reconstructed Bathurst Gaol so that prisoners who acquire woodworking and metal skills will be able to apply them in work situations within lower security institutions.

Another suggestion is that basic literacy and numeracy courses could be continually run in each of the gaols. This would require no tools and prisoners transferring from one gaol to another could continue the programme at the new gaol. While not providing job specific skills this may increase the parolees' confidence and could put them in a position more comparable to other job applicants. Remedial English classes are currently being held in most of the gaols in the state. However these classes only involve about 5% of the prison population. There would seem to be a greater demand for this type of instruction than is presently being met.

The Work Release Programme is another avenue of work experience offered by the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services. The Programme enables prisoners of low security classifications to go into the community to work and so to gain job experience, returning to gaol at

night. This programme could possibly be expanded to include more prisoners. Expansion of the Work Release Programme appears particularly appropriate since recent research has revealed that none of the variables which have been stated as criteria for entry to the programme were in fact related to programme outcome (Turnbull, Porritt & Cooney, 1981). The Work Release Programme has advantages for both the community and for the prisoner. Keeping the prisoner on the Work Release Programme is cheaper for the community than confining him to gaol. For the prisoner an employment situation is established and he is able to earn money to help him on release.

Given that employment is related to parole success, the Department of Corrective Services should attempt to increase prisoners' marketable skills whenever possible. It is important to improve these skills if employment stability is to be improved.

Beside seeking to improve the prisoner's skills special attention should be given to ensuring the prisoner has a job to go to on release. This special attention could take the form of encouraging officers from the Commonwealth Employment Service (C.E.S.) to visit and advise prisoners in their last few weeks of incarceration, increasing the number of weekly telephone calls paid for for these prisoners to arrange employment and having officers from the C.E.S. run workshops on writing a job application, presenting for a job interview and other basic job and job-seeking skills. The Programmes Division of the Department of Corrective Services, in conjunction with the Department of Technical and Further Education, is currently piloting a "Pre-Release Programme" which is intended to help prisoners make a successful transition from institutional life to the world outside. It is planned that this programme is going to concentrate on social awareness, money management, job-seeking and accommodation. It will be interesting to evaluate the effect this programme has on outcome of parole. An effective programme covering job-seeking and interview skills appears well justified from the results of the present study.

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