

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) recently completed an outcome evaluation of MINNCOR's EMPLOY program, a prisoner reentry employment program. The evaluation, which assessed the impact of EMPLOY on recidivism and post-release employment, examined 464 offenders released from Minnesota prisons between 2006 and 2008. The average follow-up period for the 464 offenders was a little more than two years.

Minnesota prisons have provided inmates with employment opportunities since the late nineteenth century. In 1994, however, the state's prison industry program, MINNCOR, was formed to integrate and centralize administration and sales functions of the DOC's various industry operations. To help inmates capitalize on the work experiences and skills acquired as MINNCOR employees, the EMPLOY program was implemented in 2006. Designed to help offenders locate, gain, and retain employment at a livable wage, EMPLOY provides incarcerated participants with assistance to enhance their readiness for post-release employment and offers them community support for one full year following release from prison. The program is entirely voluntary and offenders must complete and submit an application for consideration.

To evaluate the effectiveness of EMPLOY, the DOC examined recidivism and post-release employment outcomes among 464 offenders released from prison between 2006 and 2008. During the 2006-2008 period, 232 EMPLOY participants were released from prison. Offenders released during the 2006-2008 period who did not participate in EMPLOY were matched to those in the EMPLOY group on commonly-known risk factors. Multivariate statistical analyses were performed to further control for other factors besides EMPLOY participation that may have had an impact on recidivism and post-release employment. These measures were used to ensure that any observed differences in recidivism and/or post-release employment between the 232 EMPLOY participants and the 232 offenders in the comparison group were due strictly to participation in EMPLOY.

Key Findings

- ❑ Participation in EMPLOY significantly decreased the risk of recidivism from 32-63 percent. The reductions in recidivism were:
 - 35 percent for rearrest
 - 32 percent for reconviction
 - 55 percent for new offense reincarceration
 - 63 for reincarceration for a technical violation revocation
- ❑ Participation in EMPLOY significantly increased the chances of securing post-release employment by 72 percent.
- ❑ EMPLOY participants worked over 400 more hours during the follow-up period than offenders in the comparison group.
 - Due to the greater number of hours worked, EMPLOY participants earned nearly \$5,500 more, on average, than offenders in the comparison group

Recidivism Results

The data in Figure 1 show that EMPLOY participants had lower recidivism rates than the offenders in the comparison group. For example, 42 percent of the EMPLOY participants had been rearrested for a new offense by the end of June 2010 compared with 50 percent of the comparison group offenders. The results also show that 25 percent of the EMPLOY participants were reconvicted for a new offense compared to 31 percent in the comparison group. In addition, 9 percent of the EMPLOY participants were reincarcerated for a new criminal offense compared to 14 percent of the comparison group offenders. Lastly, compared to the offenders in the comparison group, who had a technical violation revocation rate of 38 percent, EMPLOY offenders had a rate of 21 percent.

The results from the multivariate statistical analyses, which controlled for time at risk and other rival causal factors, revealed that participating in EMPLOY significantly lowered the risk of recidivism by 35 percent for rearrest, 32 percent for reconviction, 55 percent for new offense reincarceration, and 63 percent for reincarceration for a technical violation revocation.

Post-Release Employment Results

Table 1 shows that 76 percent of the EMPLOY participants obtained employment during the first year following their release from prison. By comparison, 67 percent of the offenders in the comparison group found post-release employment. Although there was little difference in the average hourly wage between the two groups, EMPLOY offenders worked nearly 400 more hours, on average, than those in the comparison group. As a result, total wages earned during the follow-up period were, on average, more than \$5,000 greater for EMPLOY participants in comparison to those in the comparison group.

Summary

Why did EMPLOY increase the likelihood of employment and lower the risk of recidivism? Previous research has shown that providing a continuum of care from prison to the community is critical in helping offenders successfully reenter society. Operating on the continuum of care principle, EMPLOY not only provides post-release employment assistance to offenders while they are in the institution, but also during the first year after they are released from prison. The results from this evaluation suggest that providing programming in both the institution and the community over a relatively lengthy period of time (approximately 15 months) helped offenders find and retain employment.

Figure 1. Recidivism Rates for EMPLOY and Comparison Group Offenders

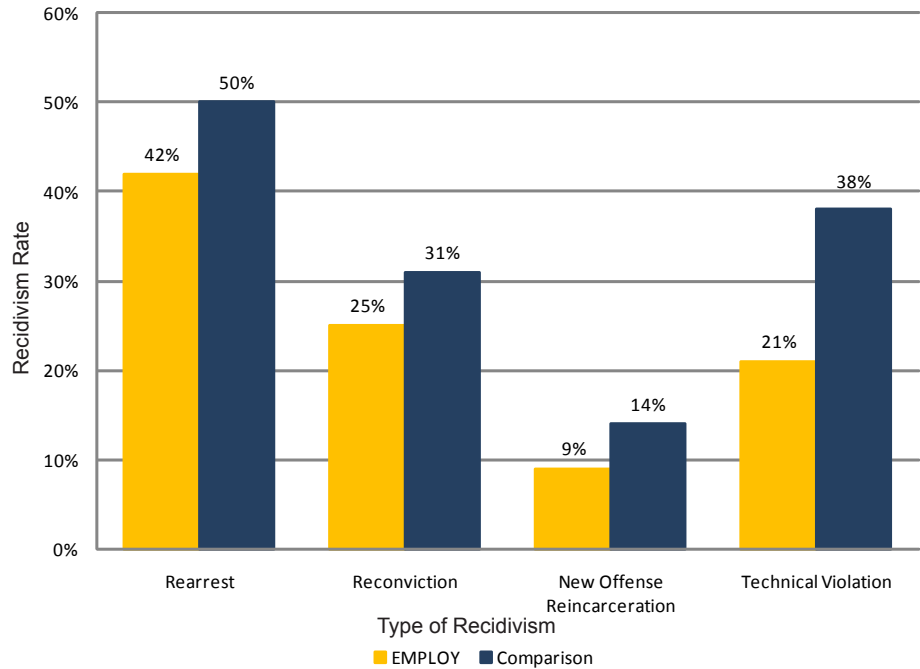


Table 1. Post-Release Employment for EMPLOY and Comparison Group Offenders

Post-Release Employment	EMPLOY	Comparison Group
Obtained Employment	76%	67%
Average Hourly Wage	\$8.94	\$8.46
Average Total Hours Worked	1,288	904
Average Total Wages	\$16,523	\$11,478
N	232	232

The findings further suggest that by increasing the extent to which offenders found and maintained employment, EMPLOY reduced recidivism. That employment lowered the risk of recidivism is consistent with the growing body of literature that has demonstrated the protective effects of employment against crime. While employment reduces economic need, it also expands informal social control by giving individuals a greater stake in conformity and involvement in conventional activities, which inhibit opportunities for criminal behavior. Further, associating with others who are employed increases the likelihood that offenders will develop or maintain pro-social values, beliefs, and attitudes.