An Evaluation of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative: Final Report

May 2011

1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 200
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108-5219
651/361-7200
TTY 800/627-3529
www.doc.state.mn.us
May 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, the Minnesota Department of Corrections (MNDOC) implemented the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), a pilot project serving offenders incarcerated at the Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF)-Faribault who were released to regular supervision in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. PRI was developed on the premise that recidivism can be reduced by enhancing the delivery of critical services and programming to offenders as they make the transition from prison to the community. To improve service delivery, PRI used reentry coordinators who worked closely with institutional and community corrections staff to help connect offender participants to services and programming in both prison and the community that addressed their individual risks, strengths, and needs. In addition, to help participants find post-release employment—one of the main objectives of PRI—the MNDOC contracted with Goodwill/Easter Seals, which provided vocational services that included a work skills and career interest assessment, job search and placement assistance, transitional employment, and skills training.

To evaluate whether the PRI pilot project was effective in reducing recidivism, the MNDOC used a quasi-experimental design with a historical comparison group. Offenders who participated in PRI were compared with a similar group of offenders who met the eligibility criteria and were released from MCF-Faribault during the 14 months preceding implementation of PRI to supervision in one of the two participating counties. Recidivism data were collected through the end of June 2010. As a result, the follow-up period ranged from 6 to 18 months, with an average of 12 months. Although this evaluation was unable to comprehensively track the provision of services and programming to offenders in both the PRI and comparison groups, data were collected on the extent to which offenders were able to obtain and maintain employment during the first year following release from prison.

Results

What impact did PRI have on recidivism?

- The results indicate that the recidivism rates for PRI participants were slightly lower than those for offenders in the comparison group.

- The data showed that PRI recidivists reoffended more quickly than recidivists in the comparison group.
- PRI did not have a statistically significant effect on any of the four recidivism measures.

What impact did PRI have on post-release employment?

- During the first year after release from prison, the percentage of PRI participants (19%) who found employment was half that of the comparison group (38%).
- Although the hourly wage for PRI participants was slightly higher than offenders in the comparison group, they earned less total wages because they worked fewer hours.
- The results showed that PRI participation significantly reduced the chances of finding post-release employment and that participants worked significantly fewer hours and had significantly less total earnings.
    - An important caveat with the post-release employment findings is that the statistical analyses were unable to control for the effect that changes in the economy likely had on employment. Initially released from prison in 2007 and 2008, offenders in the comparison group faced a far more favorable economic environment than those in the PRI group, who were released in late 2008 and 2009.

Conclusions

The results presented here suggest that PRI was not effective in reducing recidivism. Moreover, the findings indicate that PRI did not help offenders find and maintain postprison employment. Overall, the evidence does not provide strong support for the effectiveness of the case assistant/reentry coordinator model in improving service delivery and lowering recidivism. One possible reason why the additional resources did not appear to make a significant difference may be that the reentry coordinators merely provided relief for institutional and community corrections staff with high caseloads. Future reentry programs using the case assistant model should ensure that the quantity and quality of work performed by institutional caseworkers and supervision agents remains the same for offenders on their caseloads who are receiving assistance from a reentry coordinator.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the issue of prisoner reentry has, for several reasons, attracted a growing level of interest and concern. First, the state and federal prison population has more than quadrupled in size since the 1980s. Second, despite sentencing enhancements that have increased penalties for many crimes, the vast majority of offenders still get released from prison. Therefore, as the state and federal prison population has grown dramatically, so has the number of offenders getting released from prison. Finally, recidivism statistics suggest that many offenders fail to make a successful transition from prison to the community. Most notably, in a Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) study of more than 272,000 offenders from 15 states who were released from prison in 1994, Langan and Levin (2002) found that roughly two-thirds had been rearrested for a new offense within three years.

Prisoner reentry generally encompasses efforts to promote the successful reintegration of offenders in the communities to which they return (Petersilia, 2003). Because prisoners are often undereducated, have little or no prior work history, lack vocational skills, and have lengthy histories of substance abuse (Petersilia, 2003), efforts to improve their chances of successfully reentering society typically include educational, employment, vocational and chemical dependency treatment programming. The "what works" literature suggests that providing these types of programming to offenders in need can significantly increase their chances of making a successful transition to the community (MacKenzie, 2006).

Existing research has generally shown that prison-based educational and vocational programs reduce recidivism and increase the odds of obtaining post-release employment (Saylor and Gaes, 1997; Wilson, Gallagher, and MacKenzie, 2000). In addition, studies on Minnesota prisoners have found that those who obtain post-release employment are significantly less likely to reoffend (Duwe, 2011a; Duwe 2011b; Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2010). Further, the findings from evaluations of prison-based drug treatment suggest that it can be effective in reducing recidivism and relapse (Duwe, 2010; Mitchell, Wilson, and MacKenzie, 2007). The most promising outcome results have

been found for offenders who complete prison-based treatment programs, especially those who participate in post-release aftercare (Duwe, 2011b; Inciardi, Martin, and Butzin, 2004).

Previous Prisoner Reentry Program Evaluations

As interest has grown in the concept of offender reentry, so have efforts to implement programs that focus on helping offenders successfully transition from prison to the community. In general, these programs concentrate on improving reentry by enhancing the delivery of services and programming across several areas. Of the extant program evaluations, most have been either process evaluations, which examine the implementation of a program, or outcome evaluations, which measure the program's impact on outcomes such as recidivism. Of the studies that have included an outcome evaluation, most have used quasi-experimental designs while only a few have used a randomized experimental design (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2006, 2010; Smith and Suttle, 2008).

The findings from most prior process evaluations suggest that the implementation of offender reentry programs has generally been consistent with how they were designed (Holl, Kolovich, Grady, and Coffey, 2009; Knollenberg and Martin, 2008; LaVigne, Lawrence, Kachnowski, Naser, and Schaffer, 2002; Lutze, Bouffard, and Falconer, 2009; Sample and Spohn, 2008). The outcome evaluations, however, have produced mixed results as to whether offender reentry programs can reduce recidivism. For example, findings from evaluations of programs in California (Zhang, Roberts, and Callanan, 2006), Massachusetts (Braga, Piehl, and Hureau, 2009), New York (Jacobs and Western, 2007) and Nebraska (Sample and Spohn, 2008) suggested that they decreased the risk of recidivism. In contrast, the results from evaluations of programs in Indiana (McGarrell, Hipple, and Banks, 2003), New York (Wilson and Davis, 2006; McDonald, Dyous, and Carlson, 2008) and Pennsylvania (Smith and Suttle, 2008) indicated that none of these programs produced a reduction in reoffending. Reasons offered for the inability of these reentry programs to lower recidivism included program design problems (Smith and Suttle, 2008; Wilson and Davis, 2006), low dosage or short program duration (McGarrell

et al., 2003; Smith and Suttle, 2008; Wilson and Davis, 2006), lack of administrative oversight (Smith and Suttle, 2008), poor program implementation (Wilson and Davis, 2006), and the absence of a community aftercare component (Wilson and Davis, 2006).

Previous Prisoner Reentry Program Evaluations in Minnesota

In the wake of the relatively recent rise in interest and concern surrounding prisoner reentry, the Minnesota Department of Corrections (MNDOC) has conducted evaluations of two offender reentry pilot projects: the Serious Offender Accountability Restoration (SOAR) Project and the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP). In 2001 the federal government—under the auspices of the Departments of Justice, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services—created the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI), a large-scale program that provided $100 million in funding to community-level reentry projects across the country. Overall, SVORI provided awards to 69 grantees at 89 different sites in the United States. As one of the 69 grantees, the MNDOC developed the Serious Offender Accountability Restoration (SOAR) project, a reentry program for offenders returning to Hennepin County. Implemented in 2003, SOAR was a two-year pilot project that ended in 2005.

Project SOAR was designed to facilitate offender reentry by helping offenders obtain and retain long-term employment, maintain stable residences, successfully address substance abuse issues and mental health needs, and establish a meaningful and supportive role in the community. To meet these goals, partnerships were formed with various system and community organizations to provide a comprehensive set of pre- and post-release services. Moreover, each SOAR participant was assigned a community reentry coordinator, who was to work with caseworkers in the institution and supervision agents in the community in order to address the offender's educational, employment, housing, medical, aftercare treatment, life skills, and community needs. The results from the evaluation, which used a randomized experimental design, showed that Project SOAR did not have a significant impact on offender recidivism, a finding that was largely attributable to a divergence between its original design and how it was implemented (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2006). In particular, the evaluation findings

suggested that there was an inconsistent delivery of reentry services, a lack of communication and clarity regarding the roles of both partner agencies and stakeholders, a virtual absence of services provided to address chemical and mental health needs, and an insufficient focus placed on long-term transitional needs.

Although Project SOAR was not successful in reducing recidivism, the results from the evaluation offered valuable lessons for the development of future prisoner reentry programs. The opportunity to apply these lessons arrived during the 2007 legislative session when state funding was appropriated for the implementation of the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP) pilot project, a prisoner reentry initiative involving inmates released to Hennepin, Ramsey, Dodge, Fillmore, and Olmsted counties. Based on the premise that offender reentry begins as soon as offenders are admitted to prison, MCORP emphasizes increased collaboration between institutional caseworkers and supervision agents to provide planning, support, and direction for offenders to address their strengths and needs in both the institution and the community. More specifically, the core programmatic theme of this project was the development of dynamic case planning and case management that provided continuity between the offender's confinement and return to the community. Further, MCORP was developed on the notion that the increased collaboration will enhance the delivery of services by increasing the extent to which offenders access employment, suitable housing, and programming in the community. The enhanced service delivery will, in turn, purportedly lead to a reduction in recidivism. Following the project design and development phase during the fall of 2007, MCORP was implemented in early 2008.

Like Project SOAR, the MCORP evaluation was based on a randomized experimental design. The findings from the MCORP evaluation, however, were very different from those for Project SOAR. Indeed, the results indicated that MCORP significantly reduced the risk of recidivism by 37 percent for rearrest, 43 percent for reconviction, and 57 percent for new offense reincarceration (Duwe, forthcoming; Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2010). MCORP did not have a statistically significant effect, however, on revocations for technical violations and any return to prison. The findings showed that

MCORP significantly improved employment rates, decreased homelessness, broadened offenders' systems of social support, and increased the extent to which offenders participated in community support programming (e.g., mentors, restorative justice, faith-based services). In addition, the analyses suggested that recidivism outcomes were significantly better for offenders who secured postprison employment, were involved in community support programming, had broader systems of social support, and received a continuum of chemical dependency treatment from the institution to the community. Overall, the evidence indicated that MCORP was effective in decreasing reoffending largely because it increased the extent to which offenders were employed, involved in community support programming, and able to develop systems of social support (Duwe, 2011b; Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2010).

Present Evaluation

In 2008, at approximately the same time the MCORP pilot project was put into operation, the MNDOC implemented the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), a pilot project that served offenders incarcerated at the Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF)-Faribault who were released to regular supervision in either Hennepin or Ramsey counties. Like the two aforementioned programs (Project SOAR and MCORP), PRI was developed on the premise that recidivism could be reduced by improving the delivery of key services and programming to offender participants.

Similar to the MCORP pilot project, lessons learned from the Project SOAR evaluation were applied to the development of PRI. For example, PRI attempted to enhance service delivery by using reentry coordinators who worked closely with institutional and community corrections staff to help connect offender participants to services and programming that addressed their individual risks, strengths, and needs. Unlike Project SOAR, however, the reentry coordinators were not intentionally placed outside of the criminal justice system. Rather, the reentry coordinators were placed inside the system so as to form a collaborative working relationship with institutional and community corrections staff. Therefore, similar to the MCORP pilot project, the PRI project

emphasized interagency collaboration in its pursuit of improving service delivery for offenders.

In examining the program impact on recidivism, both the Project SOAR and MCORP evaluations used randomized experimental designs. As discussed later, it was not possible to use random assignment in the PRI evaluation. Instead, this evaluation assesses the impact PRI had on recidivism by using a quasi-experimental design with a historical comparison group. Of the two prior reentry program evaluations in Minnesota, only MCORP tracked the provision of services and programming to offenders in both the experimental and control groups. Although this evaluation was not able to fully measure the delivery of services for offenders in both the PRI and comparison groups, data were collected on the extent to which offenders in both groups obtained employment following their release from prison. Given that providing participants with employment assistance was one of the main objectives of PRI, analyses of the post-release employment data will help shed light on whether PRI was able to achieve this objective.

In the next section, the report describes the PRI pilot project implemented in Minnesota in greater detail. After discussing the data and methods used for this evaluation, the results from the statistical analyses are presented. This report concludes by exploring the implications of the results for prisoner reentry policy and practice.

PRI PROJECT: A DESCRIPTION

In 2007, the MNDOC was awarded a grant under the Prisoner Reentry Initiative to develop a prisoner reentry project that reduced recidivism by helping offenders make a successful transition from prison to the community. Implemented the following year, the Minnesota PRI project targeted offenders incarcerated at MCF-Faribault who were released to regular supervision in Hennepin or Ramsey counties. The offenders who participated in PRI were released from prison to the community between December 2008 and December 2009.

In attempting to reduce recidivism, PRI used two reentry coordinators in the pilot counties to help offenders make a successful transition from prison to the community. To better integrate the reentry coordinators within the correctional system, they were placed in offices with the supervision agents from Hennepin and Ramsey counties. Because eligible offenders needed to have, at the time of assignment to PRI, at least four months remaining in prison and at least six months under supervision in the community, it was anticipated that the reentry coordinators would provide offenders with assistance over a minimum 10-month period. In helping offenders make the transition from the institution to the community, the reentry coordinators worked not only with the participants, but also with MCF-Faribault staff and supervision agents in Hennepin and Ramsey counties so as to develop a cross-system transition plan that connected services and provided single points of contact. The reentry coordinators used the SMART (Small, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) planning process to develop the transition plans with the participants. The participant's individual plan was based on their individual risks, strengths, and needs as assessed through the LSI-R and other best practice tools.

The transition plans completed for offenders would be used to help identify priority service needs in both the institution and the community. In the institution, the plans would be used to refer participants to MNDOC educational, life skills, employment and therapeutic services consistent with the prioritized needs indicated on the transition plan. The plans would also be used by the reentry coordinators to enhance communication between offenders and supervision agents, to provide assistance in connecting offenders to priority service needs in the community, and to proactively address concerns through the restructure of release conditions prior to the occurrence of a technical violence or a new criminal offense. The transition plan also identified gaps in basic offender needs, such as identification, transportation and appropriate professional clothing. Reentry coordinators were able to purchase such items (i.e., Minnesota State identification, bus passes, work boots) to assist the participants through limited general funding.

In addition to the transition plans, PRI focused on providing participants with assistance in finding post-release employment. In particular, the MNDOC contracted with

Goodwill/Easter Seals to provide vocational services to approximately 80 of the PRI participants. The vocational services offered by Goodwill/Easter Seals included a work skills and career interest assessment, job search and placement services, work experience training (i.e., transitional employment), and skills training programs.

DATA AND METHODS

This evaluation used a quasi-experimental design with a historical comparison group to determine whether PRI had an impact on recidivism. At the time PRI was implemented, another prisoner reentry project, the MCORP pilot project, was already in operation at seven (Shakopee, Lino Lakes, Stillwater, Rush City, Red Wing, Moose Lake, and St. Cloud) of the eleven state correctional facilities. Because the eligibility criteria for MCORP participation were similar to that for PRI, it was not possible to select offenders housed at these facilities for either the PRI group or the comparison group. Of the four remaining facilities, two (Willow River and Togo) were excluded from consideration because offenders at these facilities participate in the Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP), a correctional boot camp that provides early release to those who complete the program. As noted below, offenders were ineligible for PRI if they participated in an early release program such as CIP. The facility at Oak Park Heights was also excluded from consideration because, as the lone maximum-custody prison in the state, the high level of security at this facility would likely compromise full participation in the PRI project.

The MCF-Faribault was, therefore, selected as the site for the PRI project. Although the MCF-Faribault is a medium-security facility that, relative to the other facilities, houses a fairly large number of inmates, analyses of release data prior to implementation of PRI showed that all eligible offenders would need to be assigned to the project in order to reach the size of the target population (216). Due to the lack of available eligible inmates at the other facilities, combined with the limited number of eligible offenders at MCF-Faribault, it was not possible to either randomly assign eligible offenders to a control group or to assemble a contemporaneous comparison group of similar offenders. Rather, it was necessary to use a historical approach in selecting offenders for the comparison

group. That is, offenders were selected for the comparison group if they met the PRI eligibility criteria, which are discussed below, and were released from MCF-Faribault during the 12 months preceding implementation of PRI.

In mid-December 2008, the first PRI participants began to be released from MCF-Faribault. PRI offenders continued to be released to the community through the end of 2009. As a result, the comparison group consisted of offenders incarcerated at MCF-Faribault who met the PRI eligibility criteria and were released to regular supervision in Hennepin or Ramsey counties between December 2007 and mid-December 2008 (the 12 months preceding implementation of PRI). However, to ensure the number of comparison group offenders matched the number of PRI participants, it was necessary to expand the release window for inclusion in the comparison group by two months. The comparison group offenders therefore consisted of offenders who were released from prison between October 2007 and December 2008.

Offenders were considered eligible for participation in PRI if they met the following criteria: 1) have a commit from one of the two pilot counties (Hennepin or Ramsey), 2) be incarcerated at the participating correctional institution (Faribault), 3) have at least four months remaining at MCF-Faribault, 4) have at least six months of community supervision remaining on their sentence and 5) not have a requirement to register as a predatory offender. In addition to these requirements, there were four additional eligibility criteria: 1) be released from prison to one of the two counties, 2) not participate in one of the MNDOC's early release programs such as the Challenge Incarceration Program (i.e., the adult boot camp) or work release, 3) be released to regular supervised release rather than intensive supervised release (ISR) and 4) not have any detainers, warrants, or holds that would jeopardize participation in the project. Whether offenders met these four criteria was seldom known until after assignments were made. For example, the decision to place an offender on ISR was often made shortly before release. As such, incarcerated offenders assigned to the PRI group were removed from the project once it was later determined that they did not meet all of the eligibility criteria. Because

offenders did not have a choice as to whether they wanted to be involved in PRI, participation was compulsory.

Eligible offenders were assigned to the PRI group on a monthly basis between April 2008 and June 2009. During this 15-month period, 427 eligible offenders were assigned to the PRI group. However, of the 427 selected offenders, 262 (61 percent) were determined to be ineligible prior to their release from prison. The three most common reasons for exclusion were that offenders were placed on ISR, selected for an early release program (primarily work release), or released to supervision in a non-PRI county.

Outcome Measures

Recidivism and postprison employment are the two outcome measures considered in this evaluation. Recidivism was defined as: 1) a rearrest, 2) a reconviction, 3) a new offense reincarceration and 4) a revocation for a technical violation. It is important to emphasize that the first three recidivism variables strictly measure new criminal offenses. In contrast, technical violation revocations (the fourth measure) represent a broader measure of rule-breaking behavior. Offenders can have their supervision revoked for violating the conditions of their supervised release. Because these violations can include activity that may not be criminal in nature, technical violation revocations do not necessarily measure reoffending.

Recidivism data were collected on offenders through June 30, 2010. The follow-up time for the offenders examined in this study ranged from 6-18 months, with an average of 12 months. In using the BCA and COMS to track recidivism, the main limitation with using these data is that they measure only arrests, convictions, or incarcerations that took place in Minnesota. Because neither source includes arrests, convictions, or incarcerations that occurred in other states, the findings presented later likely underestimate the true recidivism rates for the offenders examined here.

In the recidivism analyses for the three variables (rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration) that strictly measured reoffending, it was necessary to deduct the amount

of time offenders spent in prison due to supervised release revocations from their total follow-up periods in order to accurately calculate how long they were actually at risk to reoffend. Failure to deduct time spent in prison as a supervised release violator would artificially increase the length of the at-risk periods for these offender. Therefore, to accurately measure an offender's "street time", the amount of time that an offender spent in prison as a supervised release violator was subtracted from his/her follow-up period, but only if it preceded a rearrest, reconviction, reincarceration for a new offense, or if the offender did not experience any of these three types of recidivism events.

Data on post-release employment were obtained from the Minnesota Department of Employee and Economic Development (DEED). The main caveat with using these data is that it does not capture any labor (or compensation for that labor) not reported to DEED, which can occur in situations where employees are paid "under the table" for their labor. Still, the DEED data provide important information not only on whether offenders obtained employment, but also on how much they worked and the extent to which they were compensated. Because the employment data are compiled on a quarterly basis, information was not available on the specific date(s) when offenders entered and/or exited a job. As a result, the post-release employment measures included: 1) any employment (dichotomized as "1" for employment and "0" for no employment), 2) total number of hours worked, 3) hours worked per quarter, 4) total wages earned, and 5) hourly wage.

Independent Variables

Because the primary goal of this evaluation involves assessing the impact of PRI on recidivism, participation in PRI is the principal variable of interest. Offenders who participated in PRI were given a value of "1", whereas those in the comparison group were assigned a value of "0". The statistical analyses also included independent variables either known or hypothesized to have an impact on recidivism. The following lists the control variables and describes how they were created:

Control Variables

Offender Race: dichotomized as minority (1) or white (0).

Age at Release: the age of the offender in years at the time of release based on the date of birth and release date.

County: to measure the county or geographic area where offenders were released and supervised, this variable was dichotomized as either Hennepin (1) or Ramsey (0).

Prior Felony Convictions: the number of prior felony convictions, excluding the conviction(s) that resulted in the offender's incarceration.

Prior Supervision Failures: the number of prior revocations while under correctional supervision (probation or supervised release).

LSI-R Score: the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) is a risk assessment tool designed to predict an offender's risk of recidivism. In general, the higher an offender's LSI-R score, the greater the risk of recidivism. The total score, which ranges from a low of 0 to a high of 54, was used from the most recent LSI-R administered in prison before an offender was released.

LSI-R Education/Employment: because pre-incarceration employment history data were unavailable, this domain score derived from the LSI-R was used as a proxy to assess education and employment needs.

Offense Type: five dichotomous dummy variables were created to quantify offense type; i.e., the offense on which an offender's release date was based. The five variables were person offense (1 = person offense, 0 = non-person offense); property offense (1 = property offense, 0 = non-property offense); drug offense (1 = drug offense, 0 = non-drug offense); felony driving while intoxicated (DWI) offense (1 = DWI offense, 0 = non-DWI offense); and other offense (1 = other offense, 0 = non-other offense). The other offense variable serves as the reference in the statistical analyses.

Admission Type: three dichotomous dummy variables were created to measure prison admission type. The three variables were new commitment (1 = new commitment, 0 = probation or release violator), probation violator (1 = probation violator, 0 = new commitment or release violator), and release violator (1= release violator, 0 = new commitment or probation violator). Release violator serves are the reference in the statistical analyses.

Length of Stay (LOS): the number of months between prison admission and release dates.

Institutional Discipline: the number of discipline convictions received during the term of imprisonment for which the offender was released.

Education Level at Release: this variable measures whether offenders had either a general equivalency diploma (GED) or high school degree at the time of release. Offenders who had either a GED or high school degree at released were assigned a value of "1", whereas those without either degree were given a value of "0".

Chemical Dependency (CD) Treatment: this variable measures whether offenders participated in CD treatment during their current term of imprisonment. Treated offenders were given a value of "1", whereas untreated offenders received a value of "0".

Analysis

In analyzing recidivism, survival analysis models are preferable in that they utilize time-dependent data, which are important in determining not only whether offenders recidivated but also how long it took them to either reoffend or "survive" in the community without committing a new offense. Survival analyses are designed to handle censored observations and varying lengths of time until a terminal event. Given that a number of the offenders studied here never experienced a recidivism event and that the lengths of at-risk periods varied among offenders, survival analysis is ideally suited to examine the effects of PRI on recidivism. To statistically control for the observed differences between offenders in the PRI and comparison groups, Cox regression, a multivariate survival analysis model, was used to analyze the data.

As noted above, the DEED data are compiled on a quarterly basis and, thus, do not provide specific information on the specific date(s) when offenders entered and/or exited employment. Because employment start date information would be needed to use Cox regression, multivariate logistic regression was used to assess the impact of PRI on finding any employment. Considering that logistic regression assumes the lengths of follow-up periods do not vary among offenders, the follow-up period was capped at 12 months, or four quarters, for all offenders (i.e., for the most recently released offenders,

four was the maximum number of quarters for which DEED data were available). Because the four remaining employment variables (total numbers of hours worked, hours worked per quarter, total wages earned, and hourly wage) were ratio-level measures, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to estimate the impact of PRI on these four outcomes.

RESULTS

The results presented in Table 1 compare the 165 PRI participants with the 165 offenders in the comparison group. Offenders in the two groups are, to a large degree, similar to the extent that the only statistically significant difference was county of commitment. Comparison group offenders were significantly more likely to return to Hennepin County, whereas PRI offenders were more likely to return to Ramsey County.

Table 1. Comparison of PRI and Comparison Group Offenders

Covariates	*Comparison*	*PRI*	*t test/X^2 p Value*
Minority	75%	80%	0.238
Age at release (years)	36.71	38.31	0.144
County (Hennepin)	75%	57%	**0.001**
Prior felony convictions	5.55	5.04	0.260
Prior supervision failures	1.52	1.55	0.904
GED/High school diploma	75%	66%	0.070
Education/Employment (LSI-R)	5.00	4.55	0.086
Admission type			
New commit	73%	76%	0.453
Probation violator	25%	22%	0.438
Release violator	2%	2%	1.000
Offense type			
Person	18%	24%	0.137
Property	28%	25%	0.620
Drugs	29%	25%	0.460
DWI	4%	7%	0.239
Other	21%	18%	0.405
Prison-based CD treatment	8%	13%	0.148
Number of discipline convictions	2.04	1.67	0.148
LSI-R score	27.84	27.93	0.903
Length of stay (months)	22.06	22.23	0.926
N	165	165	

Overall, the data in Table 1 show that the vast majority of offenders in both groups were minorities who were, on average, in their 30s at the time of release. The offenders in this sample had a moderate recidivism risk, as reflected by the findings that the average LSI-R score was 28 and the average number of prior felony conviction was five. A little more than 70 percent of the offenders had a GED or high school degree at the time of their release from prison. Roughly three-fourths of the offenders had most recently entered prison as a new court commitment, and a little more than half of the sample was in prison

for either a property or drug offense. Approximately 10 percent of the sample entered chemical dependency treatment in prison. The offenders in the sample had, on average, nearly two discipline convictions during their confinement, which was slightly less than two years (22 months) per offender.

Impact of PRI on Recidivism

As shown Table 2, the PRI offenders had lower recidivism rates than the comparison group for three of the four measures. By the end of the follow-up period (June 30, 2010), 42 percent of the PRI offenders had been rearrested for a new offense compared to 52 percent of the comparison group. PRI's rearrest rate was, therefore, 19 percent lower than that of the comparison group. At 17 percent, PRI's felony reconviction rate was 11 percent lower than the comparison group's rate of 19 percent. The new offense reincarceration rate for PRI (11%) was the same as it was for the comparison group (11%). Finally, at 27 percent, the technical revocation rate for the PRI group was just seven percent lower than it was for the comparison group (29%).

Table 2. Recidivism Comparison of PRI and Comparison Group Offenders

Recidivism Measures	*Comparison*	*PRI*	*Percentage Difference*
Rearrest	52%	42%	-19%
Felony reconviction	19%	17%	-11%
Reincarceration for a new offense	11%	11%	-0%
Revocation for technical violation	29%	27%	-7%
N	165	165	

The analyses presented later examine not only whether offenders recidivated by the end of the follow-up period, but also how long it took them to reoffend or how long they were able to "survive" in the community without reoffending. As shown in Table 3, PRI offenders who did not recidivate generally survived as long in the community as comparison group non-recidivists. Among the recidivists, however, PRI offenders typically reoffended more quickly than those in the comparison group. For example, PRI offenders were, on average, rearrested after having been in the community for six months, which is two months less than the average at-risk period for comparison group. Similarly, compared to the recidivists in the comparison group, the average at-risk period

for PRI recidivists was 1.3 months less for felony reconviction and 2.7 months less for new offense reincarceration. The average at-risk periods were very similar for technical violation revocations, however, as the averages were 4.9 months for PRI release violators and 4.8 for those in the comparison group.

Table 3. Average Number of Months at Risk for Recidivism in the Community

	PRI		*Comparison*	
Rearrest	Average Months	N	Average Months	N
Months at risk prior to rearrest	5.91	70	7.90	85
Months at risk without a rearrest	11.05	95	11.87	80
Total average	8.87	165	9.64	165
Reconviction				
Months at risk prior to reconviction	8.85	28	10.18	32
Months at risk without a reconviction	11.30	137	11.76	133
Total average	11.17	165	11.45	165
New Offense Reincarceration				
Months at risk prior to reincarceration	8.13	18	10.80	18
Months at risk without a reincarceration	11.33	147	11.86	147
Total average	10.98	165	11.74	165
Technical Violation Revocation				
Months at risk prior to revocation	4.86	45	4.79	48
Months at risk without a revocation	11.47	120	11.73	117
Total average	9.67	165	9.71	165

The findings shown in Tables 1 and 2 are reflected, to some extent, in the results from the Cox regression models presented in Tables 4. As noted earlier, Cox regression looks not only at whether offenders recidivate, but also how long they spent in the community either before, or without, a recidivism event. Moreover, despite the similarity between the PRI and comparison groups, there was at least one statistically significant difference between the offenders in these two groups. Because Cox regression is a multivariate statistical model, it is able to statistically control for these observed differences. Therefore, Cox regression provides an estimate (the hazard ratio) of the extent to which the PRI offenders survived in the community without a recidivism event relative to the

comparison group, controlling for the impact of the other predictors in the model on recidivism.

Table 4. Cox Regression Models: Impact of PRI on Time to First Recidivism Event

	Rearrest		*Reconviction*		*Reincarceration*		*Revocation*	
	Hazard Ratio	SE	Hazard Ratio	SE	Hazard Ratio	SE	Hazard Ratio	SE
PRI	1.173	0.160	1.424	0.235	1.924	0.421	0.910	0.221
Minority	1.290	0.255	0.692	0.285	0.506	0.442	1.151	0.271
Age at release (years)	0.966**	-0.035	0.973	0.014	0.967	0.024	1.008	0.013
County (Hennepin)	1.075	0.072	0.806	0.233	0.733	0.378	0.705	0.227
LSI-R score	1.014	0.014	1.036	0.019	1.060	0.037	1.022	0.019
Education/Employment	1.002	0.002	1.044	0.054	1.203	0.104	0.973	0.053
GED or HSD at release	1.491	0.400	0.918	0.273	0.733	0.466	1.013	0.262
Prior felony convictions	1.081**	0.078	1.121**	0.036	1.090	0.060	1.008	0.035
Prior supervision failures	1.130*	0.123	1.097	0.074	1.170	0.125	1.141	0.073
Admission type								
New commitment	1.540	0.432	1.593	0.771	1.042	1.295	0.926	0.763
Probation violator	1.428	0.356	0.714	0.786	0.692	1.320	1.087	0.760
Offense type								
Property	0.843	-0.171	0.618	0.384	0.585	0.592	1.054	0.301
Drugs	0.965	-0.036	0.699	0.368	0.598	0.561	0.525*	0.325
Felony DWI	0.890	-0.117	0.359	0.701	0.842	1.320	0.439	0.710
Other	0.879	-0.129	1.305	0.375	0.531	0.637	0.670	0.360
CD treatment	0.952	-0.049	0.646	0.519	0.310	0.915	1.315	0.543
Institutional discipline	1.035	0.035	1.039	0.051	0.950	0.095	1.175**	0.051
Length of stay (months)	1.002	0.002	1.016	0.009	1.042**	0.014	0.974*	0.011
Supervised release revocations	1.195	0.178	0.712	0.190	0.636	0.354		
N	330		330		330		330	

** $p < .01$
* $p < .05$

The results in Table 4 suggest that, compared to the comparison group, participation in PRI did not have a statistically significant effect on any of the four recidivism measures. Although PRI offenders had lower recidivism rates than comparison group offenders for three of the four measures, the PRI participants who recidivated generally failed more quickly than comparison group recidivists, which helps explain why PRI participation did not have a significant effect on recidivism in the four Cox regression models presented in Table 4. The results showed that prior felony convictions increased the risk of rearrest and reconviction, whereas prior supervision failures elevated the risk of rearrest. Further, the risk of revocation was significantly greater for offenders with longer confinement periods and those with more discipline convictions.

Impact of PRI on Employment

The results presented in Table 5 show that PRI offenders were, compared to those in the comparison group, not only less likely to find employment after release from prison, but they also worked fewer hours and earned less wages during the first 12 months in the community. For example, only 19 percent of the PRI participants secured post-prison employment compared to 38 percent in the comparison group. Whereas PRI offenders worked, on average, 52 hours for $611, offenders in the comparison group were employed for an average of 273 hours, resulting in more than $2,800 in total wages. The average hourly wage for PRI participants was, compared to the offenders in the comparison group, nearly a dollar higher at $10.59, although this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 5. Employment Comparison of PRI and Comparison Group Offenders

Recidivism Measures	*Comparison*	*PRI*	*t test/X^2 p Value*
Employment	38%	19%	0.000
Total wages	$2,835.75	$611.42	0.000
Hourly wage	$9.66	$10.59	0.392
Total hours	272.61	52.29	0.000
Hours per quarter	70.03	20.47	0.000
N	165	165	

Although the data presented in Table 5 are not promising, the findings do not control for observed differences between the PRI and comparison groups. To statistically control for these differences, a multivariate logistic regression model was estimated to determine PRI's impact on finding any post-prison employment. OLS regression models were estimated to examine the effects of PRI on total wages, hourly wage, total hours worked, and hours worked per quarter.

The results presented in Table 6 show that, controlling for the effects of the other covariates, participation in PRI significantly decreased the odds of finding post-prison employment by 66 percent. The only other covariate that had a statistically significant effect was educational level at the time of release. Offenders who had a GED or high

Table 6. Logistic Regression Model for Post-Release Employment

Predictors	*Odds Ratio*	*Standard Error*
PRI	0.343**	0.294
Minority	0.599	0.340
Age at release (years)	0.981	0.016
County (Hennepin)	0.871	0.300
LSI-R score	0.990	0.026
Education/Employment	0.944	0.070
GED or HSD at release	2.667**	0.366
Prior felony convictions	0.978	0.047
Prior supervision failures	0.921	0.108
Admission type		
New commitment	0.686	0.928
Probation violator	1.417	0.927
Offense type		
Property	0.750	0.422
Drugs	0.794	0.398
Felony DWI	0.720	0.795
Other	0.531	0.449
Institutional discipline	1.701	0.666
Entered CD treatment	0.979	0.067
Length of stay (months)	1.022	0.011
Constant	1.932	1.347
N	330	
Log-likelihood	335.434	
Nagelkerke R^2	0.228	

** $p < .01$
* $p < .05$

school degree at the time of release were 2.7 times more likely to find employment after their release from prison.

The results in Table 7 show that participation in PRI did not have a significant impact on hourly wage. PRI participants, however, earned significantly less total wages and worked significantly fewer total hours and hours per quarter. Minority offenders worked significantly fewer hours per quarter and earned less total wages. Those with a GED or high school degree at the time of release worked, on average, 28 more hours per quarter. Property offenders worked fewer total hours, hours per quarter, and earned less total

Table 7. OLS Regression Models: Impact of PRI on Post-Release Employment

Predictors	*Total Wages*		*Hourly Wage*		*Total Hours*		*Hours Per Quarter*	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
PRI	-2140.1**	574.2	1.5	1.1	-211.8**	52.3	-45.6**	11.5
Minority	-1633.9*	734.1	-1.8	1.2	-112.1	66.9	-31.7*	14.7
Age at release (years)	-0.9	32.3	0.1	0.1	-1.1	2.9	-0.4	0.6
County (Hennepin)	417.8	597.9	0.5	1.2	34.5	54.5	10.9	12.0
LSI-R score	2.5	51.8	-0.1	0.1	0.2	4.7	-0.1	1.0
Educ./Employment	-76.6	142.0	0.7*	0.3	-9.3	12.9	-1.6	2.8
GED/HS degree	1099.0	654.5	0.7	1.6	104.1	59.7	28.0*	13.1
Prior felonies	-64.1	96.0	-0.2	0.2	-5.0	8.8	-1.3	1.9
Supervision failures	-88.2	205.3	-0.1	0.5	-3.4	18.7	-0.7	4.1
Admission type								
New commitment	-3431.0	1881.4	-0.1	3.8	-326.8	171.5	-68.6	37.7
Probation violator	-3197.6	1898.1	-0.3	3.9	-294.3	173.0	-55.1	38.0
Offense type								
Property	-1780.9*	866.3	0.1	1.6	-160.2*	79.0	-36.4*	17.4
Drugs	-1493.1	816.0	2.9	1.5	-144.6	74.4	-30.0	16.4
Felony DWI	2588.8	1733.3	0.6	3.1	248.5	158.0	46.5	34.7
Other	-26.6	899.5	0.8	1.8	-17.7	82.0	-19.4	18.0
Drug treatment	-1690.2	1379.9	1.3	2.7	-176.6	125.8	-39.4	27.6
Institutional discipline	-54.0	139.4	-0.2	0.3	0.3	12.7	0.8	2.8
Length of stay (months)	43.8	22.8	0.0	0.0	4.2*	2.1	0.9*	0.5
Constant	7144.2**	2712.4	6.5	5.4	679.6**	247.2	163.4**	54.3
Adjusted R^2	0.11		0.03		0.11		0.13	

** $p < .01$
* $p < .05$

wages. Lastly, longer lengths of stays in prison were associated with more total hours worked and more hours worked per quarter.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this evaluation suggest that PRI was not effective in reducing recidivism. Although recidivism rates for PRI participants were slightly lower than those for the comparison group for three of the four measures examined, PRI participants tended to reoffend more quickly. The results further suggest that PRI participants were, compared to the offenders in the comparison group, significantly less likely to find employment during their first 12 months in the community. Although PRI offenders had, on average, a slightly higher hourly wage than comparison group offenders, they worked significantly fewer hours, resulting in less total wages.

The employment findings showing that PRI participants did significantly worse than the comparison group is likely due, to some extent, to the use of a historical comparison group and, more broadly, to changes in the economy. Although the recent financial crisis began prior to 2008, it did not reach its critical stage until the fall of that year, when the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act was enacted in October. Recall that offenders in the comparison group were released from prison between October 2007 and December 2008, whereas those in the PRI group were released between mid-December 2008 and December 2009. Finding postprison employment is often a challenge for released offenders, even under the best of conditions. Yet, because PRI participants were exposed to worse economic conditions than offenders in the comparison group, it likely made the challenge of obtaining post-release employment even more difficult. And the difference in time periods during which offenders from both groups were released from prison, which roughly coincides with the peak of the financial crisis, likely helps explain the statistically significant results for post-release employment.

Although these economic considerations strongly suggest that PRI did *not* exacerbate participants' chances of obtaining and maintaining employment, the results still indicate that PRI was not effective in helping offenders find work. Indeed, barely one-fifth of the offenders who participated in PRI were able to obtain post-release employment. Moreover, offenders who worked were generally underemployed, as reflected by the total average number of hours worked (52) and wages earned ($611).

In addition to a declining economy, the ineffectiveness of PRI with respect to post-release employment may also be due to the fact that less than half of the participants received the vocational services provided by Goodwill/Easter Seals. It is unclear, however, whether the findings for post-release employment are indicative of the extent to which other services were effectively delivered. Still, given the null findings for recidivism, it is reasonable to infer that PRI did not significantly improve the overall delivery of programming and services to participants.

One reason why PRI was not effective in enhancing service delivery and, by extension,

reducing recidivism may have to do with the limitation of the case assistant/reentry coordinator model itself. As noted earlier, both PRI and Project SOAR used reentry coordinators to improve service delivery. Yet, neither program appeared to enhance the provision of services, which is reflected in the null recidivism findings for both programs. In using the case assistant/reentry coordinator model, both Project SOAR and PRI adopted more of a piecemeal, auxiliary approach in attempting to enhance the provision of services. In contrast, the MCORP pilot project, which reduced recidivism and increased the services and programming offenders received, promoted broad, systemic change. More specifically, MCORP entailed changes in correctional philosophy and practice by not only considering that offender reentry begins at admission to prison, but also by requiring institutional and community corrections staff to apply evidence-based strategies and forge a more collaborative partnership in order to provide dynamic case planning. In light of the findings from this evaluation and the one completed for Project SOAR, the evidence suggests that a relatively modest increase in resources—either inside or outside the system—may not be sufficient to engender the level of change required to improve service delivery above and beyond what is currently provided.

One potential reason why additional resources did not appear to be particularly helpful for either Project SOAR or PRI may be due to the possibility that these resources were used more as relief for institutional caseworkers and supervision agents with high caseloads. A regular caseload size for institutional caseworkers is approximately 80-90 inmates at a given time, whereas agents who provide standard supervision generally have a caseload size of 75-80 clients. In providing assistance to institutional and community corrections staff, the PRI reentry coordinators may have been perceived as a welcome relief to the burden of managing large caseloads. If so, then the PRI participants may not have received more or better services and programming than those in the comparison group who were subject to “business as usual” case management and supervision practices.

If the lack of improved service delivery is due to the use of additional resources as relief labor, then the apparent ineffectiveness of the case assistant/reentry coordinator model

may have less to do with its conceptual validity than with how the model is executed. Accordingly, for prisoner reentry projects that use the case assistant model, one area of emphasis should be to ensure that the quantity and quality of work performed by institutional caseworkers and supervision agents remain the same for offenders on their caseloads who are receiving assistance from a reentry coordinator. In doing so, the efforts provided by reentry coordinators would then be more likely to enhance the services and programming provided to offenders.

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