

**Attitudes About Education and Incarceration:
A Cultural Effect**

Sabrina A. La Velle

EDR 610 Educational Research

Northern Arizona University

Flagstaff, Arizona

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to discover the correlation between how communities and families of incarcerated males view education, the level of education that they receive in their youth, and what effect that education has on whether or not they become incarcerated.

Several research studies discussed further in this proposal have been conducted supporting that education type or amount can affect incarceration directly and indirectly. Other studies have shown that the level of parental education has a negative correlation to incarceration. Studies that show; why families decide what type of education their children pursue, when to discontinue that education, or how those decisions can lead to a propensity for incarceration, have not been conducted. Does a disregard for education in the families and communities of male youth predict risk for incarceration?

Discovering how childhood patterns contribute to adult incarceration could set the groundwork for developing a program to help prevent a more significant percentage of children from being incarcerated adults. A prevention program cannot begin to be developed if it is not understood how cultural attitudes about education affect the type and amount of education a person receives. This study proposes to discover the factors that impact the kind of education a person receives, which, in turn, impacts the risk of incarceration.

Literature Review

Searching for relevant literature using search descriptors, such as crime, education, incarceration, criminal convictions, schools, and parents' education, yielded several definitive studies that create a solid foundation on which to build.

Every study mentioned in this article cited Lochner and Moretti's 2004 article "The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports," so it

appeared logical to include that study even though it was over ten years old. Lochner and Moretti (2004) stated that "...schooling significantly reduces the probability of incarceration." which is restated in each article.

Although each of the six studies focused on the correlation between education and incarceration, each focused on specific factors. All but one article {Mulvey, Schubert, and Piquero (2014)} were purely quantitative and had no direct contact with the subjects, but merely pulled from available databases to assimilate the needed data to complete their study. Deming (2011) and Cullen, Jacob, and Levitt (2006), studies on school choice lotteries, suggest that improved school choice may decrease criminal behavior. Holmlund, Lindhal, and Plug (2011) reviewed several studies on the effect of parent's schooling on children's schooling and noted the discrepancies in the studies. Two of the studies {Holmlund et al. (2011) and Meghir, Palme, and Schnabel (2012)} focused on education reform and lowered incarceration rates in Sweden. Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) used international data. Most research agrees that there is a negative relationship between education and incarceration. Further exploration is needed to discover the reasons behind the lack of education to reduce incarceration rates and improve the overall education levels in America.

Method

The study will gather retrospective data from males currently incarcerated in a specific prison in Arizona. This prison houses a rotating population of 3,500 inmates out of the 37,000 male inmates currently incarcerated in Arizona. With an average turnover rate of 50% per year, the researcher should, in a one year period, have access to approximately 15% of the total inmate population of Arizona. Inmates are sent to particular prisons in a way that the researcher would not have control over. Therefore, the sample is automatically random. There will be five sub-

categories based on race and three age groups, with 20 to 200 in each group, using quota sampling based on percentages of inmate population – i.e., only 2% of inmates in Arizona are Native American, Asian or Other. Therefore, only 2% of the subjects should fall into that category. The total number of subjects should be around 2,000.

The researcher plans to devise a 100-item survey in order to log the variables using only closed-ended questions, item stems, and rating scales. Some of the data, such as age, race, education level, marital status, will be verifiable through the Arizona Department of Corrections. Other information will be an opinion and not verifiable. For instance: “Your family felt that education was,” or “As a teenager, education to me was: 1 - very important, 2 - somewhat important, 3 - neither important nor unimportant, 4 - somewhat unimportant, 5 - not important at all.” Some of the questions will have to rely on self-reporting like: “At what age did you have your first alcoholic beverage: 9 or younger, 10-12, 13-15, 16-18, 19-21 over 21, or I have never had an alcoholic beverage.” If the subject was arrested for drunk driving and checked the box labeled “I have never had an alcoholic beverage,” we will know that the item is not a valid answer.

There will be no manipulation of an independent variable making the research non-experimental in nature. Due to the explorative nature of the study for research correlation, more than one dependent variable will be quantified. The dependent variable being studied is incarceration with a mediating variable of education. The independent variables that may affect the study are as follows: level of parental involvement in school and home life, parental attitude about education, peer group attitude about education, community attitude about education, marital status of parents before subjects’ incarceration, adolescent or pre-adolescent drug use of subject, parental drug use, parental attitudes on drug use, socioeconomic status of a family, and

incarceration of parents, among others. As this study is exploratory, the number of dependent variables will depend on the questionnaire.

Using only closed-ended questions will enable the data to be easily quantified, sorted, and allow a pattern to emerge. The data should show some correlation on some of the items: age, race, the highest level of education completed before incarceration and after, level of parental involvement in school and home life, parental attitude about education, peer group attitude about education, marital status of parents before subjects' incarceration, adolescent or pre-adolescent drug use of subject, parental drug use, parental attitudes on drug use, socioeconomic status of the family, and incarceration of parents, among others.

In conclusion, the study should provide some enlightenment as to how attitudes about education in incarcerated males' youth-led them to the choices about education and eventual incarceration.

Reference

Deming D., (2011): “Better Schools, Less Crime?” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126.4

Cullen, J., B. Jacob, and S. Levitt (2006), “The Effect of School Choice on Participants: Evidence from Randomized Lotteries”, *Econometrica* 74, 1191-1230.

Hjalmarsson, R. and Lochner, L., (2012): “The Impact of Education on Crime: International Evidence”

Holmlund, H., M. Lindhal, and E. Plug (2011): “The Causal Effect of Parent’s Schooling on Children’s Schooling: A Comparison of Estimation Methods,” *Journal of Economic Literature*

Lochner, L., and Moretti, E., (2004): “The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports,” *The American Economic Review*, 94(1), pp. 155–189.

Machin, S., Marie, O. and Vujić, S., (2011): “The Crime Reducing Effect of Education,” *The Economic Journal*, 121(552).

Meghir, C., Palme, M., Schnabel, M. (2012): “The Effect of Education Policy on Crime: An Intergenerational Perspective”

Mulvey, E., Schubert, C., Piquero, A. (2014): *Pathways to Desistance – Final Technical Report*