

Education in the Prison System

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The idea behind my research was to find out if inmates benefit from being educated in prison in terms of recidivism. The parameters of my study are GED and College (Associates Degree) programs in only state prisons. This excludes local jails, federal prisons, and holding facilities. My reasoning for cutting off at only state prisons is to rein in how enormous the study could have been, and also minimize the question of morality in terms of federal criminals or illegal aliens. If inmates go through some kind of education program while in prison, then they are less likely to return to prison.

Definitions

The GED test (General Education Development test)

- four-subject high school equivalency test that measures skills required by high schools and requested by colleges and employers
- The first test was created in 1942 and is updated every 10-15 years.
- equivalent of a high school diploma
- recognized by higher level education and employers in all 50 states
- Mathematical Reasoning, Science, Social Studies, and Reasoning Through Language.
- Each subject costs approximately \$30
- The tests can be taken at any time and in any order.
- None take longer than 3 hours, and can be taken on different days.
- People with a high school credential earn \$568,000 more in a lifetime than people without a high school credential

An Associate's Degree

- completion of 60 semester credits (around 20 college courses) at a private career college or community college
- average tuition for an Associate's Degree is \$2,963 per semester
- technical and trade careers accept Associate's Degrees for entry level positions and career advancement.

Recidivism

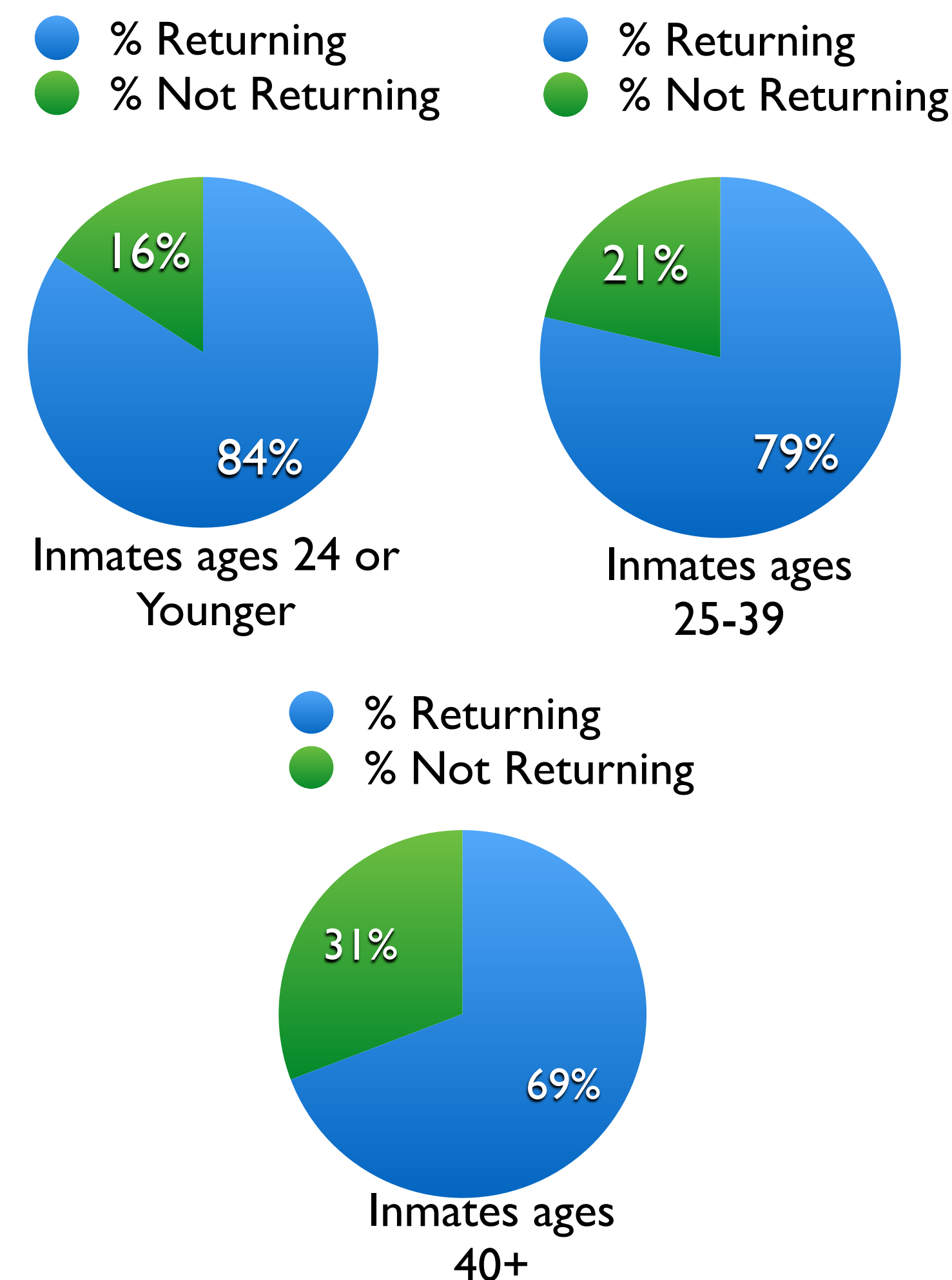
- a tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior, especially relapse into criminal behavior
- According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics who did a study of state prisoners released in 30 states in 2005:
 - About two-thirds (67.8%) of released prisoners were arrested for a new crime within 3 years, and three-quarters (76.6%) were arrested within 5 years.
 - Within 5 years of release, 82.1% of property offenders were arrested for a new crime, compared to 76.9% of drug offenders, 73.6% of public order offenders, and 71.3% of violent offenders.
 - More than a third (36.8%) of all prisoners who were arrested within 5 years of release were arrested within the first 6 months after release, with more than half (56.7%) arrested by the end of the first year.
 - Within 5 years of release, 84.1% of inmates who were age 24 or younger at release were arrested, compared to 78.6% of inmates ages 25 to 39 and 69.2% of those age 40 or older.

Ethical Questions

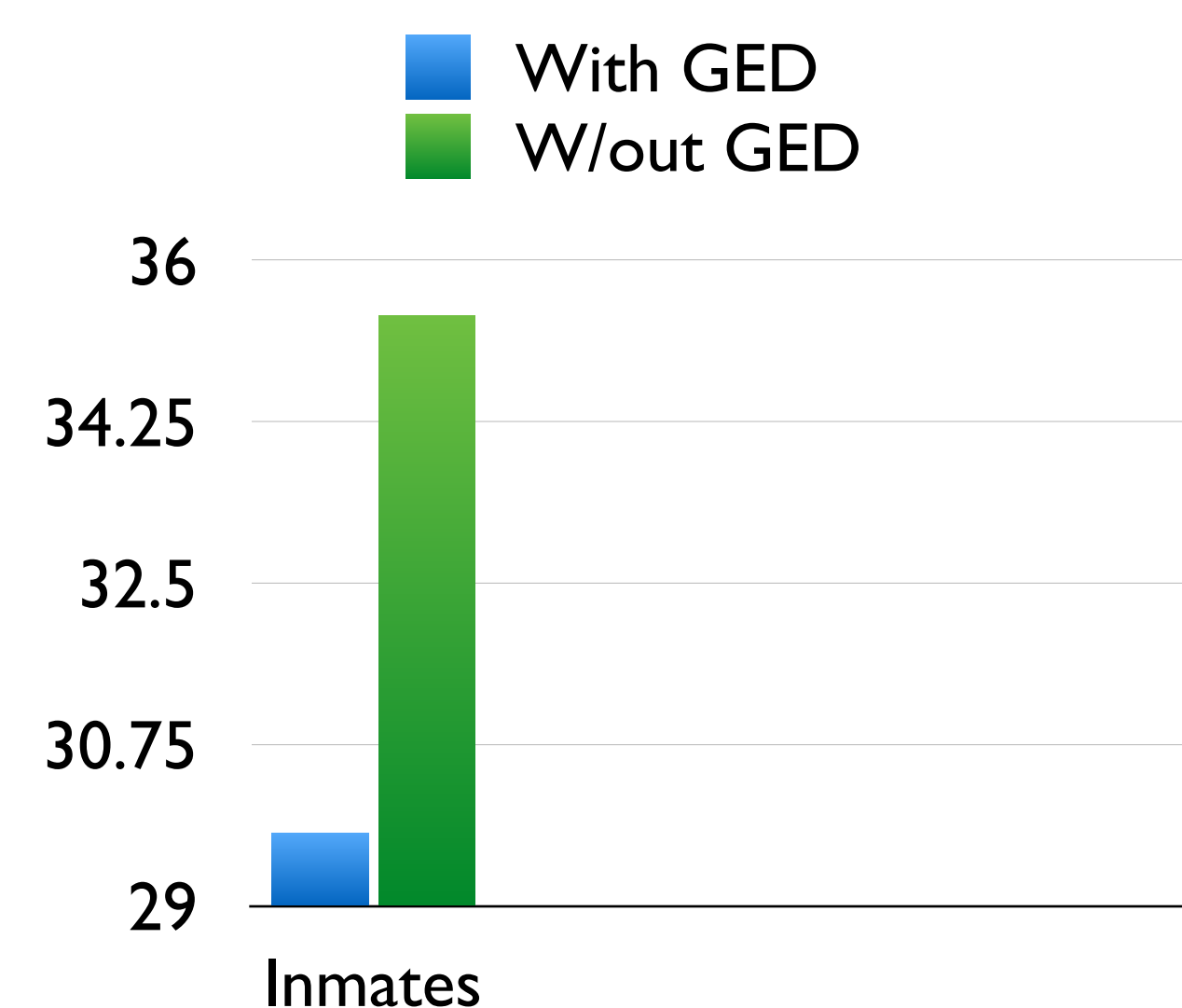
1. What could the prison systems be doing to lower the rate of recidivism?
2. Would we as taxpayers and as a country rather pay to incarcerate the same criminals over and over again for repeated crimes, or spend extra one year to get multiple years of less spending afterwards to educate prisoners while in prison?
3. Why do criminals, after they have committed possibly horrible crimes, deserve this opportunity to educate themselves and reenter society better off than some recent graduates?
4. If President Obama were to initiate his program to allow for free Community College education, would you as a taxpayer be more or less willing to allow inmates the same option?

"Higher education should not be a scarce resources available only to a few. We want to harness the power that education has to engage all who need it to establish productive, responsible lives." -Prisoner University Project

Inmates without GED (BJS)



Inmates with GED (Florida)



External Studies

The Reintegration Academy

- 20-30 parolees chosen by the California Department of Corrections.
- 10 week program
- Designed to teach life skills, academics, and career development.
- Week one: students receive a meal card and a gift card (for purchasing business casual clothing.) week 5: each participant receives a laptop computer.
- Week 8: participants are registered to Mt. SAC Community College & assisted with financial aid forms.
- Week 9: they attend a job fair & a graduation banquet.
- One year post-academy, 92% had a job or were enrolled in school, and 8% had recidivated.
- Two years after completing the academy, 86% were enrolled/working, 14% were re-incarcerated.
- Three years later, 74% remained outside the prison system, while 26% had recidivated

The Prison University Program

- Operates out of San Quentin State Prison in CA.
- Prepares inmates to lead productive lives outside of prison
- Originally fiscally supported by the Tides Center when it started out in 2000
- 2006 it became an independent non-profit organization.
- 100 inmates per semester offered 20 courses in humanities, social sciences, math, and science.
- All faculty (including teachers) are volunteers & not paid to teach
- Students pay no fees or tuition and supplies/books are donated
- Students generally take about 2 classes per semester
- About 3.5 years to get an Associate of Arts degree
- PUP offers the College Prep Program
 - Designed to get students to a GED level before beginning the college program
- Extension of Patten University
- Complete 60 semester units (about 20 classes) in humanities courses.
- Also offered courses in pre-calc, statistics, Spanish, and additional sciences.
- Lead instructors are volunteers
 - Must have a Master's in the field or related field
- All volunteers are expected to commit to at least one day per week for 16 weeks

Bard Prison Initiative

- Begun in 1999 to give college education to prisoners
- Cost of incarcerating one prisoner in the State of New York is approximately \$60,000
- Cost of giving a (free) college education is approximately \$5,000
- Among formally incarcerated Bard students, less than 4% have returned to prison

Conclusion

One of the main problems faced with recidivism rates is that you can try and try to educate and care for people who simply do not want to help themselves. No matter what you do for some people they will continue making bad decisions and ultimately end up incarcerated for the remainder of their lives. However, there are many human beings who deserve a fighting chance and who are open to receiving an education while in prison because they were unable to on the outside. They fear, according to Mrs. Gaines-Cook, intimidated by other inmates who would do harm to them for their intelligence. There ought to be more programs because that would encourage intelligence and education and striving for a goal rather than belittling those who possess skills others do not.