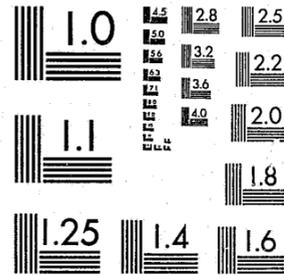


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# Employment, Community Treatment Center Placement, and Recidivism: A Study of Released Federal Offenders\*

BY JAMES L. BECK, Ph.D.

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**T**HE FEDERAL PRISON SYSTEM, with the cooperation of the United States Probation System and the United States Parole Commission, is presently conducting an evaluation of the impact of Federal prison programs on postrelease adjustment. Among the issues being addressed are the employment needs of Federal offenders, the impact of prison programs on employment, and the relationship between employment and recidivism. This article reports the results of the first phase of that research. An overview of postrelease employment for Federal offenders is presented (with particular emphasis on the minority offender), and the effect of Community Treatment Center placement on postrelease employment and recidivism is examined.

of 2,108 randomly selected offenders released during the first half of 1978 and includes all types of release (i.e., parole, mandatory release, and expiration of sentence).<sup>2</sup> Releases to detainees, for deportation, and rereleases are excluded. Short sentence cases (offenders with a sentence of 1 year and 1 day or less) are also excluded because they are generally ineligible for CTC placement. Data on rearrest were collected on parolees by interviewing the supervising probation officer and for all other cases through the FBI.<sup>3</sup> Rearrest information was 97 percent complete. In addition, the Salient Factor Score from the United States Parole Commission was used as a statistical control and is available for 91 percent of the sample.<sup>4</sup>

### Findings and Discussion

#### Sample Selection

Two samples are used in this research. For the employment section of the study, the sample consists of 974 randomly selected parolees released during the first half of 1978. Releasees to detainees, for deportation, and reparolees are excluded. Only parolees are included because the information on employment after release was collected by interviewing the supervising probation officer. This precluded the possibility of collecting information for subjects not under supervision. Data on the various employment measures used range from 95 percent to 99 percent complete and were collected for the first year after release from prison or from a Community Treatment Center. Additional data collected included demographic and offense information from the Federal Prison System and the Salient Factor Score from the United States Parole Commission data system.<sup>1</sup> The Salient Factor Score, a statistical device used to measure risk of recidivism, was unavailable for 13 cases.

**Employment Problems Faced by Federal Offenders.**—For the purpose of examining employment after release, offenders with a "legitimate" reason for being unemployed (e.g., students, retired persons, housewives, or the medically disabled) are excluded from the analysis. The results at 12 months after release (see table 1) show an overall unemployment rate among Federal parolees of almost 25 percent, an average of 184 days worked, and median earnings of \$6,025.<sup>5</sup> (Full time employment is considered to be 240 days per year.)

As a point of reference for these figures, during 1978 (the period covered by most of the present data) the national unemployment rate was 6 per-

The sample for the recidivism analysis consists

<sup>1</sup>The Salient Factor Score (see U.S. Parole Commission, 1977) is a predictive instrument used by the U.S. Parole Commission to assess risk of recidivism and measures such variables as prior convictions, prior incarcerations, heroin addiction, and employment. The Salient Factor Score used is the actual score calculated by the Parole Commission at the time of the parole hearing. Two different (but closely related) versions of the Salient Factor Score were used by the Parole Commission for the study sample.

<sup>2</sup>This sample includes the 974 parolees discussed in the employment section of the report. Both the sample for the recidivism analysis (N=2,108) and for the employment analysis (N=974) were chosen by selecting all cases whose prison identification number ended in an even digit. As prison identification numbers are assigned sequentially on admission, this procedure is assumed to provide a close approximation of random selection.

<sup>3</sup>For parolees not under supervision for the entire year after release, arrest information was collected through the FBI. All cases have a uniform followup period of 1 year after release for both employment and arrest information. For example, followup for a case released during April 1978 would extend through April 1979.

<sup>4</sup>Cases with and without Salient Factor Scores have nearly identical recidivism rates so the missing data should not unduly bias the results.

<sup>5</sup>A median figure for money earned was used rather than a mean or average because the mean was biased by a few individuals earning very large amounts of money.

\*The opinions stated in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of the Federal Prison System.

TABLE 1.—Postrelease Employment of Federal Parolees Released in 1978<sup>a</sup>

	TOTAL	WHITE	MINORITY	SIGNIFICANCE (White/Minority)
A. Employment at Release:				
Percent Unemployed.....	25% (N=907)	25% (N=522)	26% (N=385)	N.S.
B. Employment at 6 Months:				
Percent Unemployed.....	18% (N=864)	14% (N=500)	24% (N=364)	.001
Mean Days Employed.....	95 days (N=864)	100 days (N=500)	89 days (N=364)	.001
Median Money Earned.....	\$3,000 (N=856)	\$3,510 (N=497)	\$2,552 (N=363)	.001
C. Employment at 12 Months:				
Percent Unemployed.....	24% (N=856)	20% (N=498)	29% (N=358)	.01
Mean Days Employed.....	184 days (N=853)	194 days (N=496)	170 days (N=357)	.001
Median Money Earned.....	\$6,025 (N=846)	\$7,200 (N=491)	\$4,942 (N=355)	.001
D. National Employment in 1978 <sup>b</sup>				
Percent Unemployed.....	6.0%	5.2%	11.9%	N.S.

<sup>a</sup>White Hispanics are included in the minority group. Cases with legitimate unemployment (e.g., medically disabled, students, housewives) are excluded from the analysis.

<sup>b</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, 1979

cent (U.S. Department of Labor, 1979) and the poverty level for a family of four was \$6,700 in the city and \$5,700 in rural areas. Although national figures provide an inexact comparison, it is safe to say that ex-offenders tend to be underemployed and that many are living at or near the poverty level. There was, however, a great deal of variability in the postrelease employment success for the offenders studied. Perhaps the strongest differences occurred between ethnic groups. In table 1, the disparity in employment success for minority offenders compared to white offenders (excluding white Hispanics) is also shown. Minority offenders include Hispanics, Blacks, and Native Americans. Those individuals with a "legitimate" reason for being unemployed are again excluded.

It is apparent that minority offenders are at a considerable disadvantage in seeking employment. As members of a group (i.e., ex-offenders) already at a disadvantage, minority offenders seem to have their employment problems compounded. At 1 year after release, for example,

minority offenders in the present study have a 9 percent higher unemployment rate compared to white offenders and are earning over \$2,000 less in salary. It is important to note that white and minority offenders are equally successful in securing employment at the time of release from prison. About 75 percent of both groups had a job at the time of release.

Part of the difference in employment is due to the fact that minority offenders have a somewhat higher rearrest rate. Minorities show a 27 percent rearrest rate at 1 year after release compared to 19 percent for white offenders. However, even when those who were reincarcerated are excluded, minorities still show significantly worse postrelease employment. The results, in fact, are largely unchanged by excluding those reincarcerated.

Another characteristic found to have a strong influence on employment was age. Young offenders (less than 25 years old) had greater difficulty in securing employment than older offenders. And

TABLE 2.—Postrelease Employment by CTC Placement Adjusted for Salient Factor Score Risk Category<sup>a</sup>

	CTC		NON-CTC		SIGNIFICANCE <sup>b</sup> (CTC/NON-CTC)
	WHITE	MINORITY	WHITE	MINORITY	
A. Employment at Release:					
Percent Unemployed.....	13% (N=323)	16% (N=296)	45% (N=199)	51% (N=89)	.001
B. Employment at 6 Months:					
Percent Unemployed.....	14% (N=305)	20% (N=281)	17% (N=195)	31% (N=83)	.05
Mean Days Employed.....	104 days (N=305)	96 days (N=281)	89 days (N=195)	72 days (N=83)	.001
Mean Money Earned.....	\$4,354 (N=301)	\$3,209 (N=280)	\$3,941 (N=196)	\$2,045 (N=83)	.01
C. Employment at 12 Months:					
Percent Unemployed.....	20% (N=305)	24% (N=276)	23% (N=193)	33% (N=82)	.05
Mean Days Employed.....	198 days (N=305)	183 days (N=275)	178 days (N=191)	145 days (N=82)	.001
Mean Money Earned.....	\$8,817 (N=300)	\$6,474 (N=273)	\$8,395 (N=191)	\$4,279 (N=82)	.05

<sup>a</sup>White Hispanics are included in the minority group. Cases with legitimate unemployment (e.g., medically disabled, students, housewives) are excluded from the analysis.

<sup>b</sup>Figures are adjusted using Analysis of Covariance.

among the young, minority offenders were again the most disadvantaged. Among offenders less than 25 years old, minorities had an unemployment rate of 43 percent and earned only \$3,638 at 1 year after release, compared to 28 percent unemployed and \$5,280 earned for white offenders (differences are statistically significant). These findings reflect trends in the general population that are more pronounced among ex-offenders. For example, among those less than 20 years old, the national unemployment figures in 1978 were 35 percent for minorities and 14 percent for whites (Job, 1979).

Although the data are not presented here, differences were also found when sex and prior record are considered. Female offenders and those with extensive prior records have severe problems in finding and holding employment.

**Impact of CTC Placement on Employment.**—Although Federal parolees show a fairly dismal work record, placement in a Community Treatment Center has been found to significantly improve postrelease employment (see table 2). Because there are marked differences in employment success between white and nonwhite offenders, the results are reported for CTC and non-CTC releasees divided by ethnic group. By defini-

tion, CTC releasees include only those who successfully completed the CTC program. To adjust for any background differences between those released through a CTC and those who were not, the Salient Factor Score was used as a statistical control (analysis of covariance). The Salient Factor Score was chosen as a control because it was found to be the single most potent nonprogram predictor of both rearrest and postrelease employment.

The results in table 2 show that those released through a CTC have significantly better postrelease employment. (The figures exclude those with a "legitimate" reason for being unemployed and are statistically adjusted to control for background differences.) Releasees through a CTC show significantly more days employed, more money earned, and lower unemployment. In addition, these findings hold true for both white and nonwhite offenders. Release through a CTC tends to increase the employment success of both groups of offenders.

The most striking finding, however, is in the percent having a job upon release to the community. Overall (i.e., not controlling for Salient Factor Score), 83 percent of all CTC releasees had a job at

TABLE 3.—Percent Rearrested or Warrant Issued at 12 Months After Release Adjusted for Salient Factor Score Risk Category<sup>a</sup>

	CTC RELEASE	NO CTC RELEASE	SIGNIFICANCE <sup>b</sup>
WHITE .....	20.7% (N=676)	18.6% (N=463)	N.S.
MINORITY .....	25.0% (N=598)	35.7% (N=300)	.001

<sup>a</sup>White Hispanics are included in the minority group.

<sup>b</sup>Figures are adjusted using Analysis of Covariance.

release compared to 49 percent of non-CTC releasees.<sup>6</sup> In all probability the employment advantages enjoyed by CTC releasees all reduce to this one variable: CTC releasees were much more likely to have a job at release and the advantage this provided continued, with somewhat diminishing returns, during the first year after release.

Although CTC placement improved the total amount of employment for both white and minority offenders, the quality of the employment (measured by average daily wages) was upgraded only for minority offenders. After controlling the Salient Factor Score, white offenders released through a CTC earned an average of \$42.01 a day while employed during the first year after release compared to \$43.57 for white offenders not released through a halfway house. The difference is not statistically significant. The same figures for minority offenders, however, show that releasees through a halfway house earned an average of \$31.58 a day while employed compared to \$27.04 for minority offenders not released through a halfway house. This difference is significant at the .05 level. These results, then, indicate that for minority offenders released through a halfway house both decreases the amount of time a person is out of work and improves the quality of the employment obtained.

The results on employment support the findings of an earlier study conducted by the Federal Prison System (Beck, *et al.*, 1978; Beck, 1979). The findings of the two studies, in fact, are nearly identical. There is solid evidence that CTC referral greatly increases the chance that an offender will have a job at release and that he will show

<sup>6</sup>These figures include those "legitimately" unemployed.

significantly greater earnings during the first difficult months after release.

**Impact of CTC Placement on Recidivism.**—For the purposes of this article, recidivism is defined as a new arrest or a violation warrant issued during the first 12 months after release from prison or from a CTC. Arrests for minor crimes such as drunk, vagrancy or disorderly conduct are excluded. For the sample studied, 23.7 percent were rearrested or had a warrant issued.

The results show that, overall, CTC placement does not have an effect upon recidivism. After statistically adjusting for differences in the two groups using the Salient Factor Score (Analysis of Covariance), CTC releasees had a rearrest rate of 22.5 percent compared to 25.5 percent for offenders not released through CTC. The difference is not statistically significant. There is, nevertheless, evidence that CTC referral reduces the rearrest rate for minority offenders (see table 3). Among white offenders, CTC releasees had a rearrest rate of 20.7 percent compared to 18.6 percent for non-CTC releasees (not significant). Among minority offenders, however, CTC releasees had a rearrest rate of 25.0 percent compared to 35.7 percent for non-CTC releasees. This finding is significant at the .001 level. In other words, CTC referral (after controlling for risk of recidivism) substantially reduces the rearrest rate for minority offenders but has no impact on the recidivism rate for white offenders.

An alternative method for analyzing the data is shown in appendix A. The results in appendix A are reported separately for the four risk categories identified by the Salient Factor Score. As in table 3, the results show that CTC placement has no effect on recidivism for white offenders but that

minority offenders have lower recidivism rates if released through a CTC.

The inevitable question, of course, is why does CTC referral reduce recidivism for minority offenders but have little impact on the recidivism rate for white offenders? Analysis of the employment information has shown that release through a CTC improves the postrelease employment of both white and minority offenders, so more appears to be involved than a simple correlation between employment and recidivism. Assuming that white and minority offenders are selected for CTC placement according to the same standard,<sup>7</sup> one explanation may be that crime among minority offenders is more likely to be economically motivated than among white offenders. If that is true, any program that improves employment will be more likely to reduce recidivism for minority offenders than for white offenders. A second explanation may be that improving employment up to a certain level or threshold will reduce recidivism, but beyond that point will have diminishing returns. Although CTC placement improved the employment success of both white and minority offenders, white offenders started at a much higher level. The relative increase in employment for white offenders may not have been as critical as it was for minority offenders.

There is one source of evidence that tends to support the explanation that there exists a certain minimal level of employment below which recidivism tends to increase for both white and minority offenders. Employment information available for the parolees only indicates a relationship between employment and recidivism when money earned during the first 6 months after release is compared with the percent rearrested during the second 6 months.<sup>8</sup> The results show that offenders earning less than \$3,000 in the first 6 months had a rearrest rate of 19 percent during the second 6 months (19 percent for white offenders, 20 percent for minority offenders), while offenders earning more than \$3,000 later had a rearrest rate of only 7 percent (6 percent for white offenders, 9

percent for minority offenders). Likewise, the figures measuring the quality of the employment indicate that offenders averaging less than \$25 per day while employed in the first 6 months had a rearrest rate of 17 percent during the second 6 months (16 percent for white offenders, 17 percent for minority offenders) while offenders averaging more than \$25 per day later had a rearrest rate of 10 percent (9 percent for white offenders, 11 percent for minority offenders). In either case, after controlling for either the total earnings or the quality of the employment obtained, the effect of CTC placement on recidivism disappears.

It has been well established that most offenders leave prisons with very meager resources (see Irwin, 1970; Taggart, 1972; Erickson, *et al.*, 1973). In theory, CTC placement supplements these resources by providing short-term support in the form of room and board. With this support, offenders are able to locate employment without the financial press faced by many offenders at release of needing to locate immediate employment. It can plausibly be argued, therefore, that release through a CTC reduced recidivism for minority offenders by giving them the chance to locate more lucrative employment and increasing the proportion earning more than \$3,000 during the initial months after release. The halfway house experience had no effect on recidivism for white offenders because they were more successful in finding employment and most were earning more than \$3,000 during the first 6 months even without the aid of a CTC. Whatever the explanation, the results indicate that there is a link between employment and criminal behavior and that improving employment performance can reduce recidivism for some offenders.<sup>9</sup>

#### Results—All CTC Participants

In analyzing both employment and recidivism, only those who successfully completed the CTC program are included in the CTC release group. An additional 4 percent of the sample participated in a CTC program at some point during their incarceration but were not actually released through a CTC. If those individuals, however, are included in the CTC group, the results on employment and recidivism remain essentially unchanged.<sup>10</sup> For example, if you include all CTC participants and adjust for differences in the groups, minority offenders referred to a CTC had a rearrest rate of 26.3 percent compared to 33.2 percent for non-CTC minority referrals (significantly at the .05 level).

<sup>7</sup>It is at least conceivable that minority offenders with a high risk of recidivism are somehow excluded from CTC placement in a way that white offenders are not excluded. To affect the results of the study, the factor identifying high risk offenders would have to be a variable correlated with recidivism but not already measured by the Salient Factor Score. There does not appear to be any evidence supporting this explanation.

<sup>8</sup>Offenders arrested during the first 6 months after release are excluded from this particular analysis.

<sup>9</sup>For this report, minority and white offenders were studied separately because the data indicated minority offenders experienced severe employment difficulties. Partial data collected during the study was completed indicated that the most powerful predictors of postrelease earnings were employment history prior to incarceration and age at the time of the offense leading to incarceration. The finding that minority offenders have poor employment is due in large part to the fact that minority offenders were younger at the time they committed their offense and showed poorer employment prior to incarceration.

<sup>10</sup>Another 6 percent of the study sample failed to complete a stay at a CTC at some earlier point during their incarceration but were still released through a CTC. These individuals are included in the CTC group for all analyses.

**Summary**

The findings of the study indicate that a substantial number of Federal parolees encounter employment difficulties. At 1 year after release, the unemployment rate was 24 percent and the median earnings were only \$6,025. In addition, minority offenders, particularly those under 25 years old, experienced more severe employment difficulties than white offenders.

On the positive side, however, release through a CTC was found to significantly improve the postrelease employment success of both white and minority parolees. Releasees through a CTC showed lower unemployment rates, more days worked, and more money earned. Relating these findings to recidivism, CTC release was found to be significantly associated with reduced recidivism for minority offenders but not for white offenders. Further analysis supported the hypothesis that release through a CTC was more effective in reducing recidivism only for minority offenders because of the greater disadvantages minority offenders face in gaining employment.

In conclusion, the results of the study support an

earlier report (Beck, 1979) which found that CTC referral increased the employment success of offenders after release from prison. There is strong evidence that Community Treatment Centers are providing a useful service in the area of employment and this help can reduce recidivism for minority offenders, a group found to have great employment needs.

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**END**

APPENDIX A. — Percent Rearrested or Warrant Issued at 12 Months  
After Release by Salient Factor Score Risk Category<sup>a</sup>

	POOR RISK	FAIR RISK	GOOD RISK	VERY GOOD RISK
<b>WHITE</b>				
CTC RELEASE .....	43.1% (N=72)	32.6% (N=141)	19.1% (N=199)	8.4% (N=227)
NO CTC RELEASE.....	45.8% (N=48)	24.3% (N=74)	17.6% (N=108)	7.3% (N=164)
<b>MINORITY</b>				
CTC RELEASE .....	44.2% (N=95)	28.1% (N=128)	19.0% (N=211)	13.3% (N=128)
NO CTC RELEASE.....	60.0% (N=55)	49.2% (N=65)	29.2% (N=72)	14.5% (N=62)

<sup>a</sup>White Hispanics are included in the minority group.

**SIGNIFICANCE (ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE)**

WHITE/CTC versus no CTC = N.S.

MINORITY/CTC versus no CTC = P<.001