

**The Effects of Career Development on Employment and Recidivism
Among Juvenile Offenders**

by

Leendert Roos

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SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

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Leendert E. Roos

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2005

ABSTRACT

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Leendert E. Roos

M.A., Prairie View A&M University, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Psychology

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A major failure of the juvenile justice system is to provide youth with career development skills that will ensure their successful entry into the workforce and reduce recidivism. This study had two purposes, which were to first examine the impact of career development on the formation of mature attitudes and competencies for realistic career decision-making for incarcerated youthful offenders, and second to determine the likelihood of gaining employment and the probability of recidivism for this population from participation in career development. A random sample ($N = 50$) was selected from a population of incarcerated youth offenders, approximately half of which participated in an employment program. The Career Maturity Inventory (CMI) was administered to both groups as pre- and posttests to measure the development of mature attitudes and competencies for realistic career decision-making. Logistic regression analysis was used to test the relationship between 6-month and one-year recidivism and employment with career development training in a sample of 1500 youth assigned to an incarceration facility. The first portion of the study did not produce significant differences from the two t test analysis, however, descriptive differences were noted between the groups. Regression analyses demonstrated that youth participating in a career development program were more likely to be employed at 6 months and one year post-intervention; however, there was no difference in recidivism. While the study had mixed results, this research enriches the ability of juvenile justice officials to prepare juvenile offenders for productive lives through career development programs; thus, increases in employment rates for youthful offenders represents a return on investment for the community.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Youth adjudicated as delinquents face uncertain futures on release from residential juvenile programs (Modrcin & Rutland, 1989). They frequently return to environments characterized by family dysfunction, poverty, and peer pressure to continue a delinquent lifestyle (Dembo, Williams, & Schmeidler, 1994). Adding to these circumstances is the fact that many of these juveniles have psychological/emotional problems (Sikorski, 1991). The extent to which they can achieve the socially desired goals of community assimilation, educational development, and successful employment is dependent on the availability of effective, integrated treatment services.

Many juveniles who enter the criminal justice system can be characterized in two ways. These are inadequate educational attainment and less than satisfactory preparation to enter the workforce (Clark & Davis, 2000). To ensure that youthful offenders receive the necessary skills to enter the workforce, it is important that they are exposed to a broad range of services. These include employability skills training, occupational skills training and for many with learning and emotional disabilities, specialized training opportunities that prepare them to successfully enter the workforce.

Currently, information about availability and value of skills training programs for youthful offenders is limited. In a survey of juvenile justice educational programs, conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996) it was determined by responses from 39 states that little attention was give to these programs.

There is a need to better understand how career development for youthful offenders affects their maturity and competency development. In addition, it is important to understand whether career development and maturity enhance their opportunities for obtaining employment and reducing recidivism after adjudication. This study will address the development of incarcerated youthful offenders' attitudes and competencies for realistic career decision-making. It is important to note that this study is not being conducted as a program evaluation; rather it seeks to broadly examine the development of career maturity and competencies in this population. The problem statement of the study follows in addition to background information, research questions, purpose statement, and theoretical base, definition of terms, limitations, scope, and significance.

Background of the Problem

Between 1979 and 1989, the number of youth held in public juvenile correctional facilities in the United States rose from approximately 43,000 to more than 56,000 (an increase of 29.8%), and the number in private facilities grew by 31.8%, from almost 29,000 to nearly 38,000 (Flanagan & Maguire, 1992). According to the 1999 National Report on Juvenile Offenders and Victims, youth held in juvenile facilities numbered approximately 106,000 in 1997 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).

These numbers reflected the public's increasing call for punishment at the expense of treatment for young offenders (Rutherford, Nelson, & Wolford, 1985). This punitive philosophy led to a focus on the youth as the source of the problem rather than on the family and environment that may have produced and supported a delinquent lifestyle.

Many variables related to family dysfunction have been found to correlate consistently with delinquency (Veneziano & Veneziano, 1992). Often, however, the family is virtually ignored by the correctional system. More than 95% of youth who are detained in the juvenile justice system are returned to their families, and the positive changes that the youth may have made while in that system frequently disappear upon their return home (McGaha & Fournier, 1988).

Cheney, Hagner, Malloy, Cormier, and Bernstein (1998) reported the following:

Education programs in many juvenile correctional facilities are inadequate.... Juvenile correctional institutions often have limited capacity to support appropriate educational interventions for the youth confined to their care and custody. Major systemic impediments include overcrowding, insufficient financial resources, ineffective governance structures, isolation of correctional schools from education reform practices and from public schools, inadequate transition and aftercare services, and lack of collaboration and coordination with treatment and security components within the juvenile facility (p.18).

A major failure of juvenile justice authorities is the failure to provide youth with career preparation programs. Many youth paroled back to the community return without an employable skill and many will never return to school and receive a high school diploma (Cahill & Pitts, 1997).

A study of formerly incarcerated youth by Bullis and Yovanoff (2002) indicated that services focusing on educational placement and securing appropriate competitive work should be provided to incarcerated youth immediately after their return to the community. The authors suggested that these services should include the following components: (a) allow staff the flexibility necessary to serve youth outside of the school setting and in the community; (b) place emphasis on service coordination with other agencies, job and alternative educational placements; (c) utilize functional skill

assessments (i.e., assessments of work, living, and social skills); (d) involve each youth in a meaningful way to plan and develop his or her own transition services and placement options; and (e) provide social skill instruction addressing specific work and living skills and setting requirements. The Texas Youth Commission (TYC) provides many of these components.

TYC is the state agency charged with the incarceration and rehabilitation of the state's most serious juvenile offenders. Its mission is to "protect the public, habilitate youth to become productive citizens, rehabilitate delinquent youth and help prevent delinquency" (TYC, 2002, p. 1). Among the many rehabilitative programs within TYC, are the Workforce Development Programs that provide youth with the employability and occupational skills that enable them to locate gainful employment when they return to the community.

In 1985 the Texas legislature created Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders) in order to assist adult offenders assigned to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) locate employment upon their return to the community. While incarcerated in a TDCJ facility, adult offenders were provided employability skills training along with instruction in occupational skills. Upon release, these offenders were referred to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the state employment service, for assistance in locating employment opportunities. The adult program demonstrated a high degree of success with respect to reduction of recidivism and an increase in employment among adult offenders. During 74th legislative session in 1995, the state legislature mandated that the TYC implement the Project RIO-Y (Re-Integration of Offenders – Youth)

program for juveniles assigned to TYC, and who were 16 years of age and older. While assigned to a TYC facility, volunteer RIO-Y participants receive an assortment of program services. These include aptitude and interest assessment to determine career fields in which the student can conduct career exploration activities and preemployment and job readiness skills training that prepare the youth to search for employment, apply for and interview for a job, and the skills necessary to maintain employment. Project RIO-Y Workforce Development Counselors provide these program services and students usually graduate after 30 days of instruction. When a Project RIO-Y graduate returns to the community they are referred to TWC for employment assistance and/or other workforce development services. These other workforce development services can include referral to apprentice programs, additional occupational skills training opportunities funded by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and provided by local workforce development boards, referral to Job Corps programs, and the military and other employment and training opportunities (TYC, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Education has been traditionally regarded as just another service for incarcerated youth (Cheney, Hagner, Malloy, Cormier, and Bernstein (1998). Furthermore, the pedagogical focus has been on acquiring skills and obtaining employment, with little attention being paid to life skills (Bullis and Yovanoff, 2002). As a result, most traditional career development services for youthful offenders fail because they are based on conventional attitudes toward the value of education and work. Vocational programs seem to be most effective; however, they have a short-term focus on acquiring skills and

obtaining employment. The problem, then is, a long-term focus on the maturation process and acquiring life skills for career development is needed to enhance rehabilitative efforts and reduce recidivism of adjudicated youthful offenders. If a link between career maturity and employment and recidivism among juvenile offenders can be established, this may provide evidence of the importance of such programs.

Research Questions

To resolve the study problem as stated above, several questions were posed.

Specifically, this study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Does participation in career development that incorporates Super's (1990) and Crites' (1978) approaches to career exploration increase the career maturity attitudes and competencies of a random sample of youth in a juvenile justice environment? Two null hypotheses will be generated from this question as follows: First, there will be no significant difference between the CMI attitude difference scores of youth in a juvenile justice environment who do or do not participate in a career development program and secondly, there will be no significant difference between the CMI competency difference scores of youth in a juvenile justice environment who do or do not participate in a career development program.

2. Will incarcerated youthful offenders' participation in career development that incorporates Super's (1990) and Crites's (1978) approaches to career exploration and a set of 17 demographic factors estimate the probability of their employment at 180 and 365 days after placement on parole? Two null hypotheses will be generated to test the above question as follows: First, incarcerated youthful offenders' participation in career

development that incorporates Super's (1990) and Crites's (1978) approaches to career exploration and a set of 17 demographic factors will not significantly estimate the probability of their employment at 180 days after placement on parole and secondly, incarcerated youthful offenders' participation in career development that incorporates Super's (1990) and Crites's (1978) approaches to career exploration and a set of 17 demographic factors will not significantly estimate the probability of their employment at 365 days after placement on parole.

3. Will incarcerated youthful offenders' participation in career development that incorporates Super's (1990) and Crites's (1978) approaches to career exploration and a set of 17 demographic factors estimate the probability of their recidivism at 180 and 365 days after placement on parole? Two null hypotheses will be generated to test the above question as follows: First, incarcerated youthful offenders' participation in career development that incorporates Super's (1990) and Crites' (1978) approaches to career exploration and a set of 17 demographic factors will not significantly estimate the probability of their recidivism at 180 days after placement on parole and secondly, incarcerated youthful offenders' participation in career development that incorporates Super's (1990) and Crites' (1978) approaches to career exploration and a set of 17 demographic factors will not significantly estimate the probability of their recidivism at 365 days after placement on parole.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold: the first, to examine the impact of career development on the formation of mature attitudes and competencies for incarcerated

youthful offenders and second, to explore the likelihood of gaining employment and the odds of recidivism for incarcerated youthful offenders based on career maturity level and participation in career development. Coffey and Gemignani (1994) maintained that in addition to vocational and academic programs, juvenile justice practitioners must provide youth with awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes required to obtain and succeed in entry-level jobs. Therefore, the development of mature attitudes and competencies is critical to realistic career decision-making, the likelihood of gaining employment, and recidivism.

Career Development

One of the most prominent theories of career development is that of Super (1957). Super's theory of career stages uses a life-span approach to describe how individuals evidence their self-concept through vocational choices. Super suggests that the process of choosing an occupation that permits maximum self-expression occurs over time and in four stages: (a) exploration, a period of engaging in self-examination, schooling, and the study of different career options; (b) establishment, a period of becoming employed and finding a niche; (c) maintenance, a period of holding on to one's position and updating skills; and (d) disengagement, a period of phasing into retirement. In addition, he introduced the concept of career maturity to denote "the place reached on the continuum of vocational development from exploration to decline" (p. 153). The model has expanded over the years and has come to encompass the reality that adults today have multiple roles and do not follow the linear pattern of organizational advancement that was predominant when the initial framework was formulated in the 1950s. The present

investigation sought to incorporate the theory of career maturity as a conceptual framework for improving the employment chances and decreasing the recidivism rate of incarcerated youth. The focus of this research was on Super's stage of exploration and his concept of career maturation that begins with the dimension of orientation to vocational choice.

Definition of Terms

Several terms are unique in the study. The following are defined to convey the meaning and the operational definition that was given to them in the research investigation:

At-risk youth (Briscoe, 1997): Those who experience personal, family, economic, or community situations that may increase the possibility of negative behaviors, such as criminal activity.

Career development: As defined by the American Counseling Association, "is the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total life span of any given individual"(Engles, 1994, p.2)

Career readiness skills: Transferable skills that represent the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities required for individuals to locate, apply for, secure, and maintain employment. According the United States Secretary of Labor's SCANS committee (Secretary's Committee on Achieving Necessary Skills), "workers must be creative and responsible problem solvers and have the skills and attitudes on which employers can build."

Cognitive and decision making skills training according to Clark and Davis, (2000) training that is designed to concentrate on correcting specific cognitive areas that inhibit an offender's capacity to examine situations and to make responsible and prosocial decisions about his or her behavior.

Juvenile offender: A person whose age is within limits established by state statutes and who has been found guilty of having committed offenses against the law (Rush, 2004).

Life skills: Those competencies that enable a person to live as a healthy and pro-social member of society. They include skills in understanding human behavior and character, as well as the ability to live independently, to locate and maintain employment, and to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Essentially, they include a wide range of knowledge and skill interactions believed to be essential for adult independent living. (Brolin, 1989),

Outreach programs (Bocarro & Estes, 2002): Programs that provide educational and support services to youthful offenders for the purpose of helping them acquire life skills for career development and reduce recidivism.

Mature attitudes: Include decisiveness, involvement, independence and compromise in, as well as orientation to, career decision making. (Crites & Savickas, 1995)

Mature competencies: Include self-appraisal, (knowledge about oneself), occupational information (knowledge about jobs), goal selection (choosing a job), planning (looking ahead) and problem solving (what should a person do). (Crites & Savickas, 1995)

Meaningful skills (Batavick, 1997): Skills that are meaningful to society and that allow an offender to make contributions to the public good and to live as an asset to the community.

Psychoeducational and social learning techniques (Brown, DeJesus, Maxwell, & Schiraldi 2001): are techniques that focus on changing cognitive and behavioral developmental deficits of an offender and replacing these with new, more prosocial techniques for living.

Recidivism: The repetition of criminal behavior. In statistical practice, a recidivism rate may be any number of possible counts or instances of arrest, conviction or correctional status change related to repetition of these events within a given period of time. (Schmalleger, 2004)

Service learning (Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002): Doing work in the community that serves a purpose for society, is meaningful for the juvenile offender and provides the delinquent youth with skills and competencies that can be utilized in permanent employment opportunities.

Specific predictive variables: Used in hypothesis 2 and 3 are provided in the following table.

Table 1
Definitions of Demographic Predictor Variables

Variable	Definition
Age at release	The age at which youth is removed from a secure placement and placed on parole status.

(table continues)

Age at 1 st referral	The age at which a juvenile offender was first referred to a juvenile justice system.
ACBS	Assessment center behavior score: A numerical score that rates an offender's behavior while assigned to the TYC's Assessment.
PCCCO	Penal code chapter of classifying offense: The chapter number within the Texas Penal Code for the classifying offense that the juvenile offender was adjudicated.
Citizenship	The country of citizenship for youth assigned to the TYC.
Commitment county	The Texas county that committed a juvenile offender to the TYC.
Escape history	The number of successful escapes from juvenile justice facilities.
Ethnicity	African American, Hispanic, or Anglo origin.
Gang member	At the time of commitment to TYC, was the youth a gang member either by self-disclosure or by county probation department report.
Previous placements	The number of placements in county and state facilities. Does not include temporary assignments, assessment centers, and emergency placements.
Felony adjudications	The number of times an offender was adjudicated for a felony offense.
Felony referrals	The number of felony arrests.
RVO	Referrals for violent offenses: The number of arrests for violent offenses.
On probation	Was the youth offender on county probation status at the time of commitment to TYC? (table continues)

EDN	Emotional disturbance need: There is a diagnosis of emotional disturbance.
CDN	Chemical dependency need: There is a diagnosis of chemical dependency.
SON	Sex offender need: Youth who were adjudicated for a sex offense, for which they will have to register as a Sex Offender when they return to the community.
EDT	Emotional disturbance treatment: Youth who received specialized treatment for emotional disturbance while assigned to TYC.
CDT	Chemical dependency treatment: Youth who received specialized treatment for chemical dependency while assigned to TYC.
SOT	Sex offender treatment: Youth who received specialized treatment for sex offenders while assigned to TYC.
Incidents 1 st 30 days	The number of reported behavioral incidents in the first 30 days of commitment to TYC.

Youth development (Collins, 2001, p. 279):“A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and competences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.”

Assumptions

The following assumptions underlie this study:

1. The Career Maturity Inventory (CMI) is an appropriate instrument to measure the maturity of attitudes and competencies critical to realistic decision-making.
2. The respondents will be able to read and comprehend the questions.
3. The respondents will answer truthfully.
4. The respondents desire to make realistic decisions about their careers to obtain suitable employment.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The conclusions of the study were limited by the amount of information and data discovered in the documents, reports, and studies comprising the literature review. However, as Babbie (1990) noted, similar limitations inhibit the validation of findings of any study or research project. In addition, the findings, while important, do not necessarily generalize to all programs for offenders because the data collected from this study was descriptive of only a selected number of programs and individuals. Additionally, many of these youthful offenders were characterized by low educational achievement, substance abuse, and mental and emotional disorders. All of these can have an adverse impact on employment. With regard to sample size, the first portion of this research, which investigated the impact of career development on career maturity scores, utilized a random sample of 50 incarcerated youthful offenders who were 18 years of age or older and who had been assigned to the care and custody of the TYC for adjudicated offenses against persons or property. The Research Department of TYC randomly generated 25 numbers of youth who received Project RIO-Y program services (experimental group) and 25 non-RIO-Y youth (control group). While this sample size

should be large enough to make generalizations back to the larger population, the study was limited by the sample size. Any significant findings resulting from this portion of the study should be confirmed via additional research. The second portion of the study, however, did use a large sample size ($N = 1,500$) and should be adequate to reach conclusions based on the statistical findings. However, with respect to the second research question, it should be noted that the estimate the probability of employment was based on the last point of contact with the parole officer on or before the 180th day and the 365th day on parole. The third research question concerning the estimate of recidivism was based on the data at the 180th day and the 365th day on parole.

An additional threat to any study using psychological inventories is the problem of respondents completing items in a manner in which they think they are expected to answer. The CMI, which is described in detail in chapter 3, has excellent psychometric properties, including good reliability, and thus this threat should not pose a large problem in this research.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for the following reasons:

1. It is not enough for juvenile justice professionals to develop strategies to prevent behaviors that place youthful offenders in jeopardy. There must be equal attention paid to stating and implementing goals for offenders to achieve, such as postsecondary education, preparation for employment, community involvement, and development of appropriate life skills. This research will generate new knowledge in the area of career development and maturity for juvenile offenders.

2. Development of a method to predict juvenile offenders' likelihood of employment and their odds of recidivism will enrich the ability of professionals to prepare this population for productive lives.

3. Measuring increases in the competency and maturity of youthful offenders enhances community support for the juvenile justice system and for the social change agents who seek to turn juvenile offenders into prosocial members of society.

4. This research will be a benefit to juvenile justice professionals who must develop effective programs that enable this population to become prosocial and self-sufficient members of society.

This study, therefore, will have significance for social change in the community.

Summary and Overview

Education for incarcerated youth has traditionally focused on acquiring skills and obtaining employment, with little attention being paid to life skills. However, successful reentry into employment and the community when youth are released from residential programs is a multidimensional process. To be effective, transitional services must take a longer-term focus on the critical elements of education, mental health, vocational education, and training in social and community functional skills. The maturation process and acquiring life skills for career development must be considered if adjudicated youthful offenders are to be rehabilitated and recidivism reduced.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to the topics of models of juvenile justice, youth development and resiliency, correctional education, and workforce and career development. This literature review is intended to support the purpose and answer