

Exoffenders and there social life out prison criminology essay



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Employment, family and social life are areas where ex-offenders find most impactful of having a criminal record. Ex-offenders are found suffering collateral consequences; some consequences include being banned from voting during elections, employers' biasness, and being socially out of place. Such discriminations discourage ex-offenders to be repentant and to lead a righteous life. Some these problems lie with several government policies or even the government itself, where many have tried to lead steady lives and were denied the means to do so.

SECTION II: Introduction

The stigma and discriminations against ex-felon/offenders are evident all over the world especially in the United States, who has the highest prison population, with 756 prisoners per 10000 inhabitants (Walmsley, 2008). This report would focus on the current issues on various stereotypes and bans imposed on ex-offenders and look at some solutions for them.

It is an ongoing problem in the United States where crime rates are among the highest, and over 600, 000 people are being released from prison yearly. Many find it very challenging to reintegrate them into society, and the current measures put in place are definitely not enough.

Ex-offenders very often deemed as not trustworthy, dangerous, have bad conduct and generally low-skilled. However, not all these apply for all ex-offenders. These stigmas and deprivation often linger for a long time even after serving their sentences. We would examine how these lifetime consequences of conviction on prisoners affect them and the society.

SECTION III: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US TO TALK ABOUT IT?

Fair treatment to ex-offenders is important because further discrimination would only worsen the crime rates in United States. The prejudice and discrimination against ex-offenders discourages them to correct their ways. These stereotypes do not only affect ex-convicts alone but innocent ones some way or another associated with them, race for example, African-Americans are generally linked to criminals. (BUSHWAY & SWEETEN, 2007)

Employment is an important part of an individual's reentry into the community; studies have shown that having a job and good salary reduce the chances of recidivism. (Travis & Amy Solomon, 2001) (J. Kling, 2000)

However various factors hinder ex-offenders from finding a job; the stigma associated to incarceration, as many as two-thirds of employer surveyed (Travis & Amy Solomon, 2001) would not knowing employ an individual with criminal record.

Furthermore there is the permanent restriction imposed on ex-offenders in certain states of not being able to work in public employment areas. Additionally, ex-offenders which have been out of the society for a period of time would lose out in work competitiveness.

According to various studies, employment rates for people incarcerated are as low as thirty to fifty percent, while earnings of ex-offenders are reduced by anywhere from ten to twenty percent. (Harry, Steven, & Michael, 2003) Even those who are given a job are very much underpaid, and many choose to forgo employment, in favor of other illegal opportunities.

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Ex-offenders suffer much more than being unemployed, they are also deprived of the opportunity to vote during elections. It is estimated that lifetime bans affects one in nineteen adults and one in three black male adults in the United States. (BUSHWAY & SWEETEN, 2007) With the more than four million American being banned, this disenfranchisement could make a significant impact on the outcome on these elections.

Other problem for prisoners include housing problems, laws restrict ex-convicts the right for public housing. Most returning prisoners do not have the financial ability for private houses; furthermore they are ineligible for any federal housing assistance schemes. Those who do not have families to welcome them back would be left hopelessly homeless. Other federal benefits such as education assistance, low-income housing, and public assistance are also out of reach to them. Without these, foundations for a stable family and crime free life are hardly achievable.

Another collateral consequence of incarceration is how ex-prisoners are socially awkward in the community. Being out of touch with the society for a period of time, they would lose their communication skill and would need help reintegrating, some may even feel unwanted or ostracized by their families.

“ Once a con, always a con” is that true? According to survey posted on a prison related forum shows that 67% of the people voted no, 16% for yes while the rest are undecided. (Is a con a con for life?, 2010) However, these results reflect the opinions of those related to the prisoners or individuals who are once in prison themselves. These results tend to be biased, but this

shows the optimism they have for ex-convicts. Unfortunately, the reality is not that optimistic; with all these discrimination and deprivations against them, and how often the current society pushes ex-offenders back into crime, it is no wonder recidivism rates are high. Nevertheless, there is still hope for them as we look into the solutions address the problems.

SECTION IV: Where can we start to address this problem

There are reasons behind the stereotypes of ex-offenders, these includes their high risk of reoffending, having lesser education, limited skills when it comes to relating to people, limited working experience and health and mental issues. About seventy percent of ex-offenders are high school dropouts (Travis & Amy Solomon, 2001) and half of them are illiterate.

Chances are these offenders receive little or no work experience prior to or during their incarceration. Furthermore, a large portion of them suffers from drug abuse and mental and health problems.

The first step would be to take a look at the reasons of these stereotypes and the possible rectification for them. The well being of prisoners lie in the responsibility of the correction department in the Unites States; it is known that America takes a harsh approach to convicts and felons. Some of the strongest obstacles faced by ex-convicts in their route to reentry have been erected by their own government. This “invisible punishments” serve as further condemnation and many of these restrictions are unjustified.

Life-course research on desistance from crimes shows that virtually all ex-offenders eventually desist (BUSHWAY & SWEETEN, 2007) and that the risk of reoffending exponentially drops over the time an ex-offender stays crime

free. The lifetime bans, which hinders one's effort to seek housing, education and impede formation of families, blocks the basic human rights thought to be critical to the desistance process. Although some lifelong bans are justified, like barring child offenders from working with children. However an abolishment to long-term and life-time bans on ex-offenders can mark a great start to reduce the discrimination imposed by the state on ex-convicts.

Taking Finland for example, who once mirrored the policies of the United States 30 years ago, now have one of the lowest incarceration rates in the world, with 64 prisoners per 10000 inhabitants. (Walmsley, 2008) They accomplished this by complete remodeling of its justice system, where a more lenient approach is taken, prisons are more like schools, and guards do not carry guns. ' We believe in the moral-creating and value-shaping effect of punishment instead of punishment as retribution.' -Tapio Lappi-Seppala, director of the National Research Institute of Legal Policy. (HOGUE, 2003)

The various initiatives taken by individual states have helped many ex-offenders abstain (Amy, Jenny, Stefan, Jeff, & Debbie, 2008), however a wide spread scheme could be introduced to state prison. For example the Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) Initiative which promised to deliver support and services to people released from jail. Such solutions include providing structured transitional reentry where employment opportunities are given so that ex-offenders can build positive work experience and further their career. States could also increase and improve training in both soft and technical skills, equipping offenders with the necessary skills to meet the industry needs by having collaborations with employers to match technical training. Lastly, through marketing campaigns could educate employers

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about the availability of qualified ex-offenders, government incentives, and the success stories experienced by employers that have hired ex-offenders. But ultimately it seeks the cooperation of prisoners, as for anyone to be able to help them one must be willing to be helped.