



**EMPLOYMENT FOLLOWING RELEASE
SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCES RECIDIVISM FOR
KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS**

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Studies among offender populations have shown that employment following prison release is associated with decreased recidivism (Apel & Horney, 2017; Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010; Makarios, Steiner, & Travis, 2010; Morgan, 1994; Sims & Jones, 1997; Skardhamar & Telle, 2012; Tripodi, Kim, & Bender, 2010; Van der Geest, Bijleveld, & Blokland, 2011; Webster, Staton-Tindall, Duvall, Garrity & Leukefeld, 2007; Welsh, 2007; Zgoba, Haugebrook, & Jenkins, 2008). Limited research, however, has examined the role of employment in understanding successes associated with corrections-based substance abuse treatment following community re-entry. This study examines Kentucky-specific data from a sample of participants who received substance abuse treatment in jail, prison, or community custody substance abuse treatment programs. In particular, differences in recidivism outcomes were examined for those who reported being employed (full-time and part-time) in the 12-month post-release period compared to those who reported being unemployed.

PROCEDURES

Secondary data analysis was conducted on treatment outcomes from the Criminal Justice Kentucky Treatment Outcome Study (CJKTOS), a statewide evaluation focused on 12-month follow-ups with participants leaving prison, jail, and community custody substance abuse programs (SAP). Follow-up data for this analysis was collected one year post-release between July 2015 to June 2016 (N=355). The 355 consenting participants represent a follow-up rate of 83% of those who were eligible¹ and randomly selected into the follow-up sample. The analysis focused on differences in recidivism (defined as being re-incarcerated on a parole violation and/or new charge at any point during the 12 months) based on employment status (employed full- or part-time vs. not employed) during 12 months post-release.

RESULTS

Study participants were mostly male (82.1%), about 33 years old, mostly white (82.4%), and 52.8% were single and never married. Nearly three-quarters (73.4%) have a GED/high school diploma or higher and 78.1% reported being employed full-time or part-time in the 12 months following release. As shown in Table 1 below, age was the only significant demographic difference between the employed and unemployed participants, with those who were employed being older than those who were unemployed (33.39 v 30.86, $p < .05$).

Table 1: Demographics

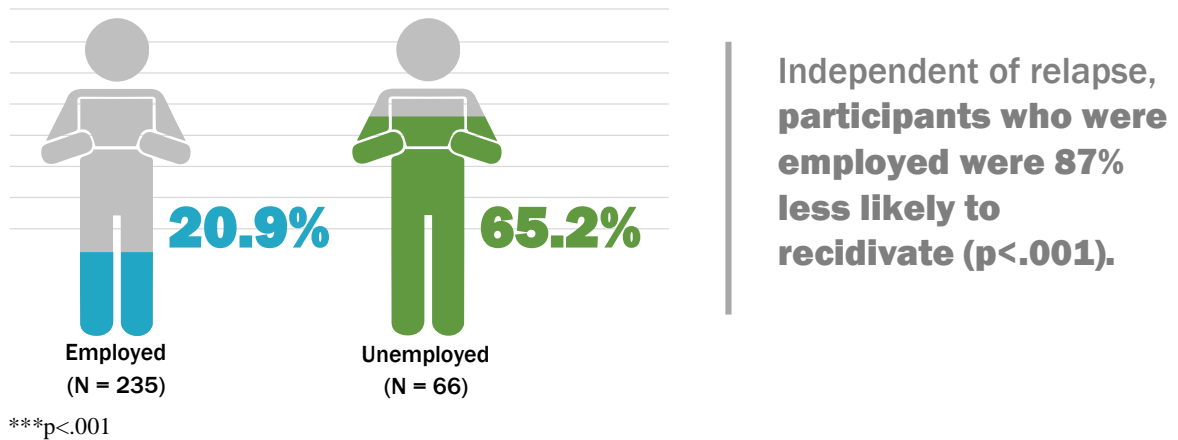
	Employed (N=235)	Unemployed (N=66)	Total (N=301**)
Male	83.8%	75.8%	82.1%
Age*	33.39	30.86	32.84
White	81.7%	84.8%	82.4%
Single, never married	52.3%	54.5%	52.8%
GED/High School Diploma or Higher	72.3%	77.3%	73.4%

* $P < .05$; **Note: For this analysis, participants who reported being unemployed due to disability, being a homemaker or reported never looking for work were excluded, bringing the sample size to N=301.

¹ SAP participants were eligible for inclusion in the follow-up sample if they 1) consented to participate in the follow-up, 2) were released from a jail, prison, or community custody facility within the specified timeframe, and 3) provided locator information of at least one community telephone number and address.

As shown in Figure 1 below, participants who reported being employed (full-time or part-time) were significantly less likely to recidivate in the year following release (20.9% vs. 65.2%, $p < .001$). Also, independent of relapse, participants who were employed were 87% less likely to recidivate ($p < .001$).

Figure 1:
Recidivism 12 Months Post-Release by Employment Status***



It is important to note that, even among those who did recidivate, participants who were employed spent 82 more days out in the community compared to the unemployed group, as illustrated in Figure 2 below (230 v. 148 $p < .001$).

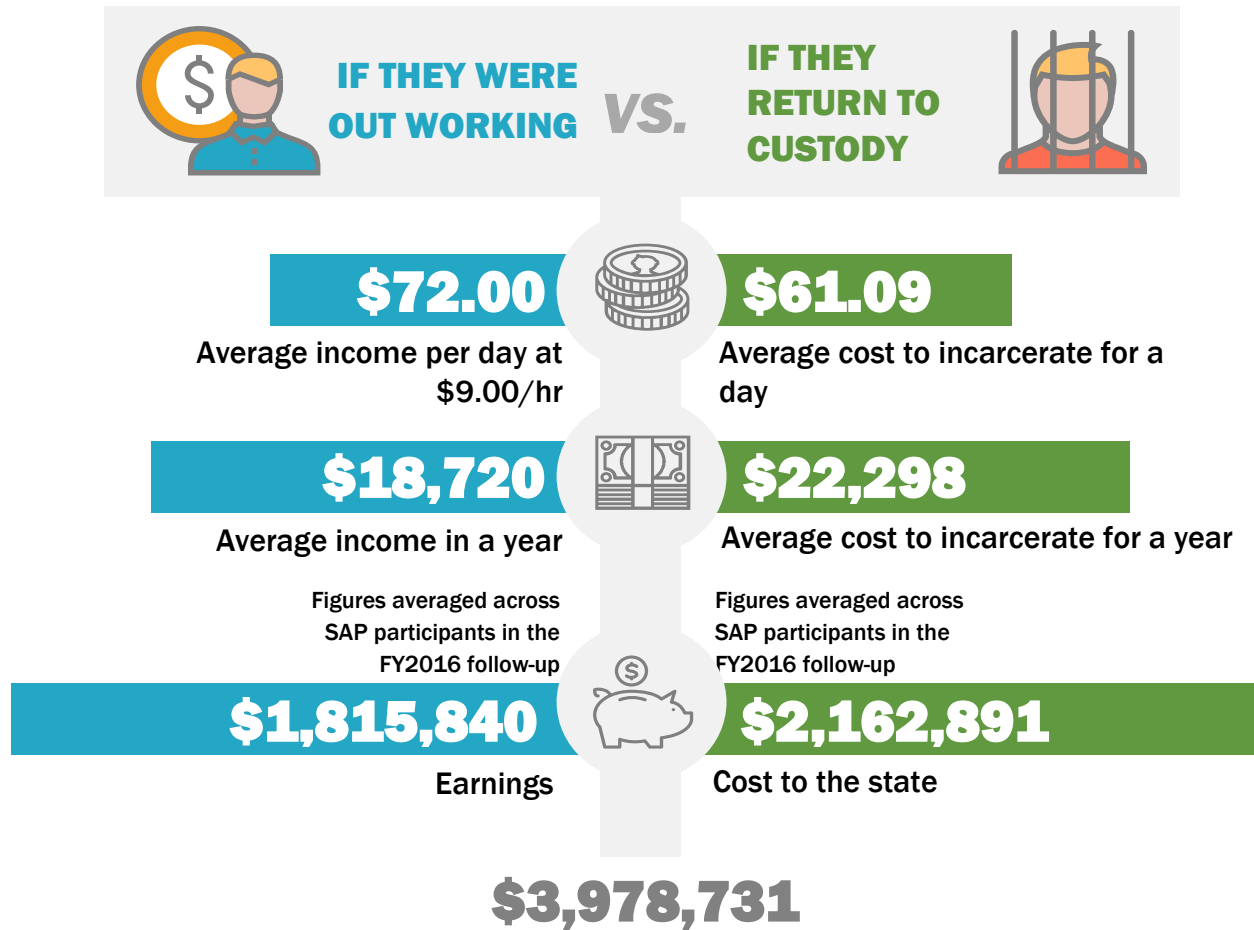
FIGURE 2:
Average Number of Days Out of Custody for Participants Who Recidivated 12 Months Post-Release by Employment Status***



These differences in recidivism highlight the importance of employment during community re-entry in order to sustain treatment successes. There are also cost considerations associated with employment. For example, the annual incarceration cost for a person (using the average state facility cost of \$61.09 per day) would be \$22,298. By being employed at follow-up after treatment and earning an average estimated \$9.00/hour, the individual’s income becomes \$18,720. For this person, this means going from being a net cost unit to the state of \$22,298 to becoming a revenue unit of \$18,720 – a \$41,018 cost “turnaround” difference.

Looked at more broadly across SAP participants, considering the individuals who were drug-free and not re-incarcerated at follow-up 12 months post release from prison, jail or community custody, it is possible to examine the net effect of their employment on the economy (See Figure 3).

Figure 3:
Cost Turnaround



Specifically, the follow-up sample included 301 individuals, 132 of whom were both drug-free and not re-incarcerated at follow-up. Of those, 97 were employed full-time. For economic comparison, if the 97 were still incarcerated at the average state facility cost of \$61.09 per day (Kentucky Department of Corrections, 2015) for a 12 month period, they would cost the state \$2,162,891. By contrast, once released from prison and in recovery, if the 97 were employed full-time and earning an average of \$9.00 per hour, they would earn \$1,815,840 in a 12 month comparison period. That represents a cost turnaround of nearly \$4 million dollars.

CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

This study suggests new directions for public policies aimed at curbing recidivism. In fact, DOC SAP participants who obtained employment (full-time or part-time) during the one-year post-release period were 87% less likely to be re-incarcerated ($p < .001$). In addition, having a job was a significant and robust predictor of spending more days in the community during the one-year post-release period ($p < .001$). Employment following release from custody not only reduces recidivism, it also results in private taxable income contributing to the larger economic life of communities. Many factors affect overall state costs for re-entering individuals. This brief report conceptualizes the transition from state expenditure to economic contribution to the state for re-entering individuals completing SAP.

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