

Evaluating Certificates of Employability in Connecticut: A Research Design

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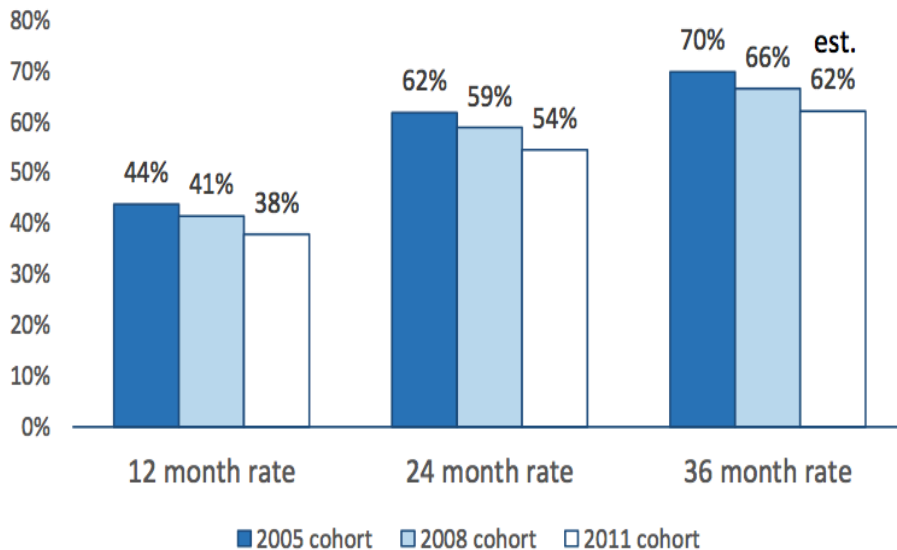
The Unemployment-Recidivism Cycle

- **97%** of inmates are released back into the community
- **1 in 15 individuals** In US estimated to be an ex-offender (2008)
 - Productivity loss from unemployed ex-offenders in US estimated at **\$57-\$65 billion** (2008)
 - Study in Texas found **68% unemployment among released ex-offenders** (2010)

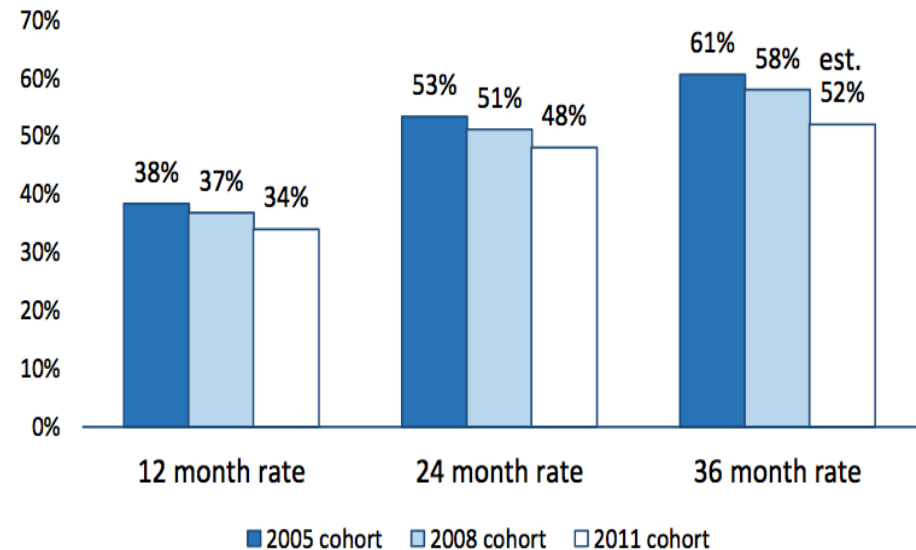
The Unemployment-Recidivism Cycle

Recidivism remains an important challenge

Recidivism rates, new arrests, males

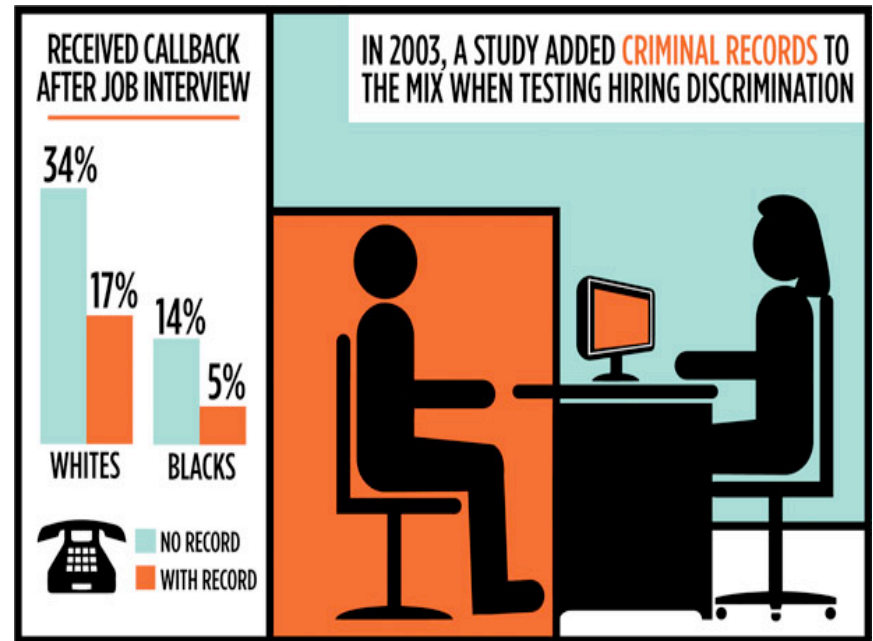


Recidivism rates, return to prison, males



Challenges of Employing Offenders

- Overcoming inmate and employer stigma
- Implementing effective screening
- Dealing with criminogenic peer effects
- Competing with the lure of alternative criminal markets
- Combatting addiction
- Overcoming resistance to “tracking” and interaction with the state



Source: Wright (2013)

Public Act 14-27



Substitute Senate Bill No. 153

Public Act No. 14-27

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO CERTIFICATES OF REHABILITATION.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 54-130a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2014*):

(a) Jurisdiction over the granting of, and the authority to grant, commutations of punishment or releases, conditioned or absolute, in the case of any person convicted of any offense against the state and commutations from the penalty of death shall be vested in the Board of Pardons and Paroles.

(b) The board shall have authority to grant pardons, conditioned, provisional or absolute, or certificates of rehabilitation for any offense against the state at any time after the imposition and before or after the service of any sentence.

(c) The board may accept an application for a pardon three years after an applicant's conviction of a misdemeanor or violation and five years after an applicant's conviction of a felony, except that the board, upon a finding of extraordinary circumstances, may accept an application for a pardon prior to such dates.

- Establishes Certificates of Employability (Rehabilitation)
- Authorizes Court Support Services Division and Board of Pardons and Paroles to administered certificates
- Requires effectiveness of certificates be assessed over first 4 years
- Took effect Oct. 1, 2014

3 Program Evaluation Challenges

1. Increasing program enrollment
2. Optimal COE access (participation requirements, grant rates, etc.)
3. Untangling causation from correlation

Challenge 1: Increasing Program Enrollment

6,154

**Number of offenders under CT DOC community supervision in 2013
(includes parole & transitional supervision releases, and remands).**

Source: Connecticut DOC

Challenge 1: Increasing Program Enrollment

9,716

The number of end-of-sentence discharges in 2013.

Source: Connecticut DOC

Challenge 1: Increasing Program Enrollment

22

**The total number of COE applications from
October 1-December 19, 2014.**

Challenge 1: Increasing Program Enrollment

Low enrollment can result from

- ▣ Low awareness/salience
- ▣ High offender stigma
 - ▣ Resistance to tracking/engagement with the state
 - ▣ Pessimism about outcomes
- ▣ High employer stigma
 - ▣ Scarlet letter effect
- ▣ Limited agency information



Ex-offenders at a job fair in Los Angeles.
Source: Ex-Offender Action Network (2010)

Challenge 2: Optimal COE Access

The Access Continuum

Low entry
barrier

High entry
barrier



Key Tradeoff

- Too low an entry barrier undermines the efficacy of the COE (meaningless signal to labor market)
- Too high an entry barrier can lead to low applications and low aggregate impact

Issues

- Enrollment criteria
- Grant rates

Challenge 3: Untangling causation from correlation

- Critical need to determine the effect of COEs
- Costs of misattributing causation are very high

Why Randomized Program Evaluation?

An Example from Medicine: Postmenopausal Hormone Therapy

- More than 30 observational studies, researchers found postmenopausal hormone therapy (PHT)
 - Reduced heart disease
 - Improved vascular reactivity and cholesterol levels
- Doctors then recommended PHT widely
- Large numbers of reported heart attacks, strokes, and deaths ensued
- Randomized trial is then conducted
 - Found PHT **increased** the risk of heart disease
- PHT is now rarely recommended for many women

Why Randomized Program Evaluation?

An Example from Medicine: Postmenopausal Hormone Therapy

Why the discrepancy between the observational study and randomized trial?

- In the observational study those who took PHT tended to be younger
- In the RCT, PHT likely increased heart disease in women at a more advanced stage of arteriosclerosis

Why Randomized Program Evaluation?

Implications for COEs

If we just compare employment and recidivism of those who have COEs vs. those who do not, there are major issues

- We don't know if we will control for all factors unrelated to the COE that drive unemployment and recidivism
- For example, we could see that COEs observationally increase employment, when they actually are harmful for the population (or vice versa)

The “First Best” for Causal Inference

- Enrollment
 - Randomize messages for COE candidates & examine subsequent enrollment
 - Randomize messages to employers & examine uptake rates

- Employment/Recidivism
 - Randomize assignment of the COE
 - Examine subsequent employment & recidivism

The “First Best” for Causal Inference

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- Examine subsequent employment & recidivism

The “Second Best” for Causal Inference

- Employment/Recidivism
 - Staged rollout of COE allowing for a treatment and control group
 - Examine subsequent employment & recidivism


The “Second Best” for Causal Inference

- Employment/Recidivism
 - Staged rollout of program allowing for a treatment and control group
 - Examine subjects on employment & recidivism
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The “Third Best” for Causal Inference

- Employment/Recidivism
 - Examine recidivism and employment outcomes from the enrollment field experiment for COE-eligible individuals


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Our Study

- Outcomes
 - Enrollment
 - Employment
 - Recidivism
- Interventions
 - Enrollment campaign targeting eligible COE population
 - Information campaign targeting potential employers

Possible Outcomes

		Recidivism		
		Decrease	No Effect	Increase
Employment	Decrease			
	No Effect			
	Increase			

Proposed Research Design

Field Interviews

- Inmates
- Ex-Offenders
- Employers
- Community Groups
- CT Agency Personnel
- Non-CT State Officials
- Other Important Stakeholders

Survey Work

- Determine sampling strategy
- Gather baseline pre-treatment data
- Collect post-treatment data to inform results

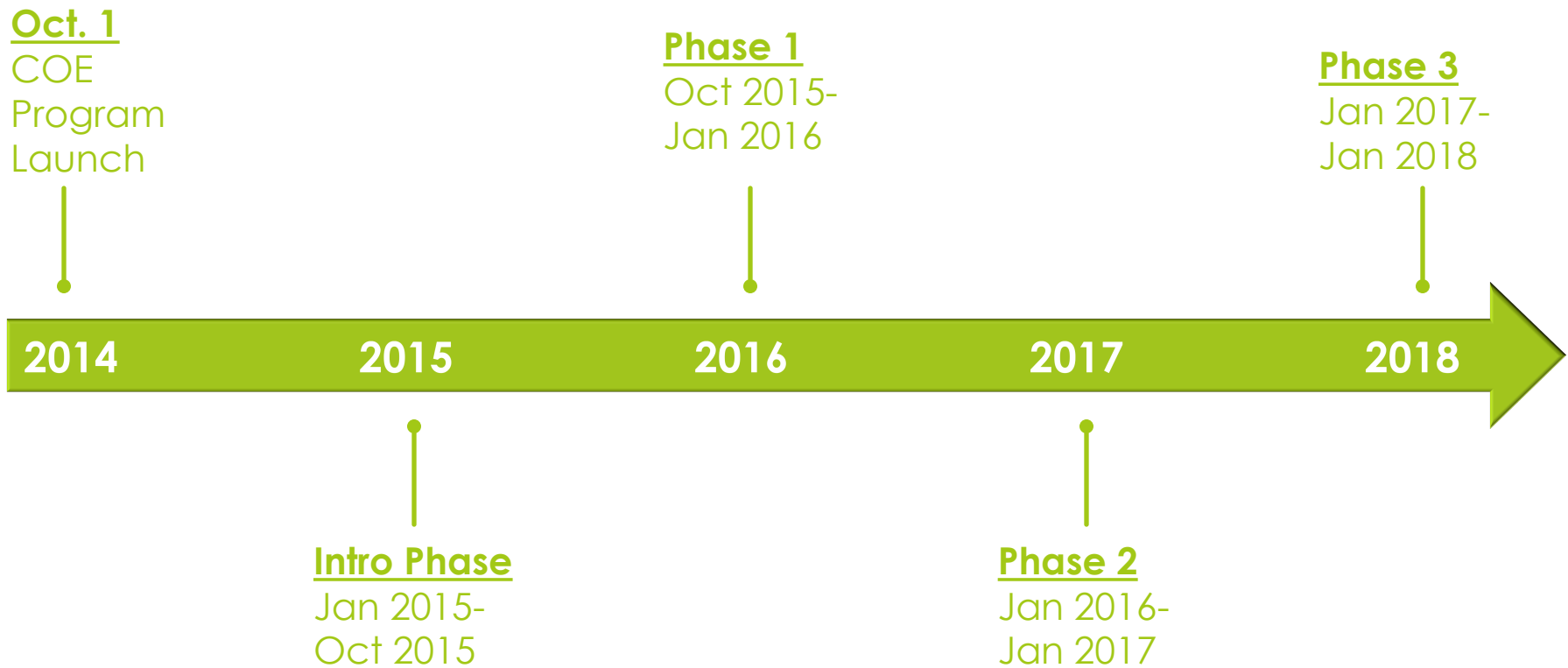
Enrollment Field Experiment

- Randomize messages to potential enrollees
- Randomize messages to potential employers
- Examine enrollment effects

Descriptive Data Analysis

- Report field experimental results and descriptive statistics
- Convey results of qualitative work
- Explore possible program design & evaluation modification

Timeline



Thank You!

Questions?