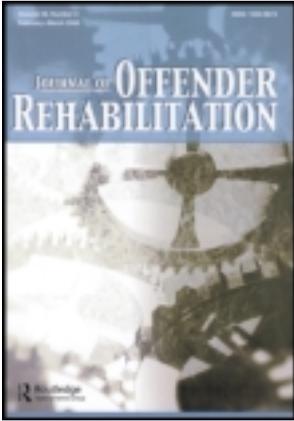


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Postsecondary Educational Engagement Among Formerly-Incarcerated Transition-Age Young Men

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In this study, the authors explore correlates of engagement in postsecondary educational programs (including technical/trade schools, 2-year colleges, and 4-year colleges) among young men who served mandatory probation camp sentences as juveniles. A cross-sectional telephone survey was conducted with a sample of 75 men (average age of 20.5) who had participated in a reentry program associated with the probation camp. Among the sample, 34.7% had not attempted any postsecondary education, 52.0% had attempted but not completed a program, and 13.3% had completed a postsecondary program, most commonly a technical/trade school certificate. Using multinomial logistic regression analysis, the authors found that controlling for high school/GED completion status, age, and months of participation in the reentry program, fathers were significantly less likely to attempt a postsecondary education program than those who were not fathers (OR = .14; $p < .05$). Neither employment history nor subsequent number of times incarcerated had any significant influence on attempting or completing a postsecondary educational program. These results have implications for reentry services, particularly with respect to the types of support that young fathers may need to more consistently engage in postsecondary educational programs.

KEYWORDS *educational attainment, formerly incarcerated youth, post-secondary education, reentry, transition age youth*

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Young people who interface with the juvenile justice system face significant barriers to educational attainment. While a substantial body of scholarship has focused on reentry to high school and secondary school completion among formerly incarcerated youth (Katsiyannis, Ryan, Zhang, & Spann, 2008; McCord, Widom, Bamba, & Crowell, 2000; Stephens & Arnette, 2000), scant research has examined postsecondary schooling for this population. Studying factors that facilitate postsecondary enrollment and retention for this group is important, given that credits and degrees earned in higher educational institutions, including community colleges and technical/trade schools, can buffer the likelihood of incarceration (Raphael, 2007) and increase earning potential (Jacobson & Mohker, 2009) in young adulthood. To begin to address this research gap, this study examines patterns of engagement with institutions offering postsecondary degrees and certificates (i.e., technical/trade schools, 2-year community colleges, and 4-year colleges) among formerly incarcerated, transition age young men. More specifically, among a sample of 75 young men between the ages of 18 and 25 who were remanded to a probation camp sentence as minors, this study seeks to: (a) describe postsecondary educational engagement, including attempts and completed degrees in early adulthood; and (b) explore potential correlates of postsecondary educational engagement, including fatherhood status, employment, and subsequent time spent incarcerated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The bulk of academic and public discussion concerning incarcerated youth and education has centered on high school reentry and completion (cf. Katsiyannis et al., 2008; Stephens & Arnette, 2000). This is in part due to high estimates of secondary school dropout among youth who interface with the juvenile justice system, particularly young people who have spent time in a court-ordered placement such as a correctional facility, boot camp, or probation group home. Although high school dropout rates have steadily declined nationwide, they remain higher among ethnic minority and low-income youth. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) reported that in 2009, 15.8% of U.S. students in the lowest income quartile dropped out of high school or did not complete a General Education Development Test (GED), compared to 2.5% in the highest income quartile. Racial disparities are also present in these high school completion rates, as the 2009 dropout rates for Whites (5.2%) and Asian Americans (3.4%) were significantly lower than for African Americans (9.3%), Hispanics (15.4%), and American Indians/Alaska Natives (13.2%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Scholars have estimated that incarcerated youth fare even worse than many of these groups. A longitudinal study conducted in Wisconsin in the 1980s found that only 12% of youth who were incarcerated in a state facility eventually earned a high school

diploma (Habermann & Quinn, 1986). Since then, other researchers have reported that less than 20% of formerly incarcerated youth eventually achieve a high school diploma or an equivalent GED (Chung, Little, & Steinberg, 2005; Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005), compared to 92% of the general population (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). It is important to note that the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) does not track high school completion rates for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated youth, and thus these estimates are based on more limited, nonrepresentative studies.

Explanations for low educational attainment among formerly incarcerated youth are numerous and difficult to disentangle. The most prevalent argument in the research literature is that many factors associated with school performance, including learning disabilities, grade retention, and suspensions/expulsions are also associated with delinquency (Katsiyannis et al., 2008; McCord et al., 2000). For example, one national study estimated the prevalence of learning disabilities among incarcerated youth to be 33.4%, compared to 8.8% for the general population (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirer, 2005). Moreover, factors such as antisocial peer groups and weak school attachments are known correlates of both low school achievement and delinquency (Huizinga & Jakob-Chien, 1998; Wilson & Howell, 1993). As such, it is possible that low educational attainment and delinquency are interactional (Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnsworth, & Jang, 1991), meaning that youth who struggle academically are more likely to detach from school; this detachment often results in truancy; truancy in turn contributes to delinquency, which then leads to more time away school due to the disruptions of legal system involvement and incarceration. As scholars have suggested, the more entrenched that youth become in the juvenile justice system, the further they stray from a normative developmental trajectory, including high school completion and postsecondary education (Chung et al., 2005).

Barriers to Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education is offered at institutions such as technical/trade schools, community (or 2-year) colleges, and 4-year colleges and universities. Although postsecondary entrance rates for formerly incarcerated youth are unknown, related information on general college entrance rates and disparities can inform our knowledge in this area. In the past 30 years, enrollment in postsecondary educational programs has dramatically increased due in part to the expansion of lower-cost choices such as community colleges. Yet still, low-income and ethnic minority youth are less likely to enroll in any type of college than their middle and upper-income or White counterparts (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Ward, 2006). While the 2009 national 2-year or 4-year college entrance rate immediately following high school

graduation was over 80% for high-income students, it was less than 50% for low-income students (Aud et al., 2011).¹ Moreover, while rates of postsecondary enrollment for ethnic minorities have increased in recent years, the gaps in college completion rates between Whites and African Americans, and between Whites and Hispanics has actually widened since 1971 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Over the past thirty years, it has become increasingly common for students to combine child-rearing and postsecondary education (Fitzpatrick & Turner, 2007). Despite these gains, young people who shoulder the responsibilities of single parenting are at an overall disadvantage in regards to enrolling in or completing a postsecondary educational program (Levine & Painter, 2003). Single parents have very low graduation rates from both 2-year and 4-year colleges compared to their nonparenting peers, and single fathers fare even worse than single mothers in this regard (Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010). These low graduation rates may be partially attributed to the difficulties involved in balancing financial stability, childcare, and higher education; forcing many to choose work over school (Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010).

Maintaining active employment during the early adult years may also pose barriers to college enrollment and/or completion, and combining work and postsecondary education is more common among students in community colleges than in 4-year colleges. In 2007, nearly 40% of full-time community college students in the United States worked 20 hours or more per week, compared to 20% of full-time, 4-year college students (Planty et al., 2009). Evidence concerning the influence of employment on retention and graduation rates in community colleges is currently mixed. Completion rates at 2-year colleges are already quite low. According to national reports, just 46% of students complete a 2-year degree within 6 years, and these rates are even lower for ethnic minority and low-income students (Act Inc., 2010). Examining the institutional characteristics of community colleges that promote completion, Durkin and Kirshner (2010) found that higher percentages of full-time students were associated with an increase in graduation rates. This means that community colleges with higher graduation rates enroll fewer part-time students who are trying to maintain a work schedule outside of school. Yet in contrast to these findings, economists Dadgar and Weiss (2011), using a national dataset, found that the effects of work hours on GPA and credits earned at community college are present, but not significant. Hence the most recent evidence surrounding the association between employment and community college retention and completion is not conclusive.

Postsecondary Education Among Formerly Incarcerated Youth

In addition to known barriers of ethnicity and income status, additional risks for nonenrollment in postsecondary educational institutions include poor

academic record, history of school drop-out in the family, being raised by a single parent, and school transience (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). It is important to note that all of these factors are also associated with risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system (Thornberry et al., 1991). Combined with low high school graduation rates, the presence of these factors place formerly incarcerated youth at great risk for not attempting any type of postsecondary educational program.

In spite of numerous barriers to educational attainment, engagement in postsecondary education is particularly important for formerly incarcerated youth as it can protect against adult criminal justice system involvement. Among the young adult population, higher levels of educational attainment are significantly correlated with lower incarceration rates. For example, African American men who did not attend school at age 16 were four times more likely to be incarcerated between the ages of 19 and 22 than those who were in school (Merlo & Wolpin, 2009). Moving past the secondary school level, educational attainment continues to reduce risk of incarceration. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) data, economist Steven Raphael (2007) found that the likelihood of incarceration in young adulthood is at least three times greater for those who dropped out of high school compared to those with some college, and two times greater for high school completers compared to those with a college degree. Thus, higher levels of education, including even some college credits, reduce the likelihood of criminal justice system involvement for young adults.

Postsecondary schooling also assists young adults in enhancing their earning potential, which in turn reduces risk of incarceration. For example, a comprehensive study of pathways to earnings among low-income young adults in Florida found that both postsecondary degrees as well as certificates from 2-year colleges or technical/trade schools were associated with better-paid careers, particularly among students from low-income families (Jacobson & Mohker, 2009). Additional econometric evidence supports the conclusion that the earnings returns for both community college credits and degrees are substantial (Marchotte, 2010). In turn, wages and earning potential protect against involvement in crime, as studies have repeatedly found that that employment protects against cycles of repeat offending and incarceration in young adulthood (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2005; Western, 2002), including among formerly incarcerated youth (Abrams, Terry, & Franke, 2011; Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002).

Despite the compelling array of evidence that postsecondary education boosts earning potential and protects against risk of incarceration, there is very little published information about rates of enrollment in postsecondary educational programs among formerly incarcerated youth. We located only one recent study that tracked college entrance rates for young adults who had been involved in the foster care or juvenile probation systems (or both) in Los Angeles County. In this study, the authors found a 32% college entrance

rate (including both 2-year and 4-year colleges), but only a 2% completion rate (Culhane, Mettraux, & Moreno, 2011). However, the authors caution that their data on enrollment was confined to certain regional institutions and was limited by available records.

In sum, this review of related literature has found that postsecondary educational opportunities are more limited for low-income and ethnic minority young people, students with poor educational records and family risk factors, and those who are themselves young parents. Evidence also suggests that postsecondary education has an important direct and indirect (via employment) negative influence on incarceration rates for young adults. Despite this knowledge, very little is known about factors that facilitate or inhibit postsecondary educational engagement among formerly incarcerated youth. In this study, we pose the following questions: (a) What educational paths do formerly incarcerated young men take during the transition to adulthood?; and (b) To what extent are fatherhood, employment, and criminal justice system involvement associated with postsecondary educational engagement and completion?

METHOD

A cross-sectional telephone survey of 75 transition age young men (ages 18–25) who were incarcerated in a probation camp as minors was conducted from December 2009 through March 2010. The purpose of the study was to examine relationships between an array of markers of transition to adulthood in domains including education, employment, housing, crime, family status, substance abuse, and mental health. In this article, we focus most specifically on the educational components of the survey.

Study Population

All of the young men who participated in the study were alumni of a community-based program that provided reentry services to residents of an involuntary, county-run probation camp program. Located in a large urban area, the probation camp was a moderately secure six- to twelve-month program for felony-level and/or repeat offenders. Conditions of the camp were dorm-style living (as opposed to locked cells) and a highly structured daily routine including school, after-school activities and chores, and programs geared toward anger management, gang abatement, and substance abuse recovery, among others. High school education was a mandatory part of the camp program, and many residents earned their high school diploma or prepared for their GED exam during their sentence. The reentry program from which this sample was drawn provided general transition support for young men both during and after their release from the probation camp, and

these services often included assistance with enrollment in educational programs. As participation in the reentry program was voluntary, the sample for this study is not representative of the overall population at that probation campsite. Although systematic differences between these youth and those in the general camp population are not known, one can assume that these youth were likely more motivated about their educational goals than those who did not volunteer to participate in the reentry program.

Recruitment and Sampling

All alumni of the reentry program from 2002–2009 who were between the ages of 18 and 25 and had spent at least six months out of camp were included in the potential pool of respondents. The researchers began with a database from that contained names, dates of birth, dates of service, race, and contact information for 491 young men who fit these criteria. Letters were then mailed to this pool of potential participants that provided information about the survey, an option to opt out of the study, a form to update their contact information, and a stamped and addressed return envelope. These letters were mailed to addresses listed in the database as well as those retrieved through public access listings. Following this mailing, 10 young men returned an updated contact information form and no one removed himself from the pool of potential respondents. Toward the end of the study period, a second letter requesting participation was mailed to all unreached participants whose initial mailings were not returned by the U.S. postal service. This follow up letter yielded no responses. The researchers made contact with all potential participants by calling the phone numbers listed in the program database or public access records a minimum of 10 times over a 4-month period, including numbers that were initially recorded as disconnected. The final sample consisted of 75 young men.

SAMPLING BIAS

Formerly incarcerated transition age youth are a difficult population to locate, and the majority of the contact information in the reentry program database was not current (see the following information concerning the “unreachable” population). As such, chi-square and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were used to assess sampling biases. Three groups were compared:

1. Reached and surveyed ($n = 76$). Those who were reached by phone and surveyed.²
2. Not reached/declined ($n = 84$). Those who were potentially reachable (i.e., a connected phone and no returned mail) but who did not answer the phone ($n = 74$), or those who declined participation ($n = 10$).

3. Unreachable ($n = 331$). Those who were unreachable for a variety of reasons, including: nine had no logged contact information; 288 had a disconnected or wrong phone number; 27 were reported by a family member to be currently incarcerated; and seven were reported by a family member to be deceased.

The authors assessed differences between these three groups on the variables of race, average age at service start date, average length of program participation, time since release from camp, and age at the time of survey administration. The detailed results of these tests are reported in a separate published article (Abrams et al., 2011). To summarize, the reached and surveyed group was nearly equivalent to the not reached/declined group on all five of the indicators examined. The only statistically significant differences found were between the reached and surveyed group and the unreachable group on two variables: time since release and current age. On average, time since release and current age were both about 1.5 years less for the reached and surveyed group compared to the unreachable group. This makes sense given that those who were older and less connected to the reentry program were less likely to be reachable by phone or U.S. mail.

Procedures

Once a potential participant was reached by phone, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and proceeded to read an approved consent script. Verbal (and audio-recorded) consent was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the sponsoring institution. The total length of the telephone survey was 30–40 minutes, and only one participant started but did not complete the survey and was later dropped from the analysis. Participants received a \$25 gift card via U.S. mail upon completion of the survey.

Instrumentation

The survey consisted of an array of close-ended questions and scales regarding education, vocation, housing, mental health, substance abuse, and involvement in crime. Questions surrounding education encompassed both secondary and postsecondary experiences and are further explained below.

Dependent Variable

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

The dependent variable was operationalized into three levels reflecting engagement in postsecondary educational programs since the time of camp exit. We classified those who had not attempted any type of postsecondary education as nonattempters, those who had started and stopped or who

were currently enrolled in a postsecondary program as attempters, and those who had completed a postsecondary program (even if they were currently enrolled in an additional program) as completers. In the attempters group, we grouped together those who had started and stopped a program with those who were currently attending a postsecondary program. This decision was guided by the literature, which has found low postsecondary graduation rates among low-income and high-risk youth (ACT, Inc., 2010; Culhane et al., 2010; Durkin & Kusher, 2006) and a great deal of “starting and stopping” (Durkin & Kusher, 2006). Moreover, common to both groups, we could not be sure if they will finish their degree program, making them both attempters at the point in time when we collected the data.

The postsecondary educational programs included in this study were technical/trade schools, community (2-year) colleges and 4-year colleges. We recognize that there are vast differences both in educational experience and influence on future earnings between these various programs. Our reason for combining these programs was based on a small sample size as well as evidence that many types of postsecondary programs can increase earning potential and employment options (Grey & Hare, 2006; Jacobson & Mohker, 2009; Marchotte, 2010), particularly for low-income, young adult men.

Moreover, postsecondary education typically requires a high school diploma or equivalent (GED). However this is not the case for enrollment in many public and private technical/trade schools and 2-year community colleges, which often admit students without a high school diploma if they are over the age of 18. The NCES 2003–2008 study of postsecondary students in the United States noted a growing trend of enrollment in postsecondary programs without a high school diploma or equivalent: “the percentage of beginners [at postsecondary institutions] without a high school diploma was 4 percent at 4-year institutions, 13 percent at 2-year institutions, and 25 percent at less-than-2-year institutions” (Berkner, Choy, & Wunt, 2008, p. 11).

As it possible for students to enroll in some postsecondary educational institutions without a high school diploma/GED, respondents who indicated they did not have a high school diploma/GED but had attempted or completed trade/technical school or community college were included in the attempters or completers group alongside those who did possess a high school diploma/GED.

Independent Variables

The selection of independent variables was based on previously established correlates of postsecondary educational enrollment and completion, including being a young father (Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010) and potentially, employment (Durkin & Kirshner, 2010). In addition to examining fatherhood and employment, we assumed that spending time incarcerated would

prevent consistent engagement in postsecondary education and thus included a measure of “jail time” as an independent variable. In regard to other known correlates of postsecondary educational engagement, we initially examined race (but later dropped it from the model) and we did not have a reliable family income measure. The independent variables were operationalized as described next.

EMPLOYMENT

A measure of employment history since leaving the probation camp was calculated as a ratio of number of months unemployed divided by number of months out of probation camp. Scores ranged between 0 (*fully employed*) to 1 (*fully unemployed*).

FATHERHOOD

Participants were coded as fathers if they reported having one or more children at the time they took the survey (1), and were coded as (0) otherwise.

JAIL TIME

Jail time was continuous variable indicating the number of times that a respondent had been in secure facility (juvenile detention, camp, adult jail, or prison) since release from probation camp. We used this measure (rather than number of arrests or new convictions) with the assumption that time spent incarcerated would likely interrupt educational attempts or progress.

Control Variables

AGE

Age at the time of survey administration was measured according to documentation of date of birth in the reentry program records and was also confirmed with the participants by phone. Age was an important control variable in this study as those who were younger at the time of survey administration had less opportunity to enroll in or complete a postsecondary program than those who were older at the time of survey administration.

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED

This was a dichotomous variable with (1) indicating a respondent had completed a high school diploma/GED and (0) indicating that the respondent had not earned a high school diploma/GED (0). This variable was used to control for previous educational level in the model, as the absence of a high school diploma/GED is a barrier to enrollment in many postsecondary educational programs.

SERVICE LENGTH

Service length was a continuous variable operationalized as number of months served by the reentry program. This information was retrieved from program records. This variable was included to control for differences in the receipt of reentry services that may have helped participants to further their education.

Analysis

Means and standard deviations were calculated for continuous variable and frequencies and percents for all categorical variables. In addition, measures of association were calculated to assess relationships between the dependent variable of postsecondary education, the categorical independent and control variables, and the continuous variables (age, jail time, employment, and service length). For the association with categorical variables Cramer's V is presented and for the relationship with age the Eta is presented (see Table 1). All analyses were performed with Stata v12. Multinomial logistic regression analysis was used to model the impact of the major independent variables (fatherhood, employment, and jail time) on postsecondary education, controlling for age, high school completion, and service length. Both unadjusted (univariate) and adjusted relative risk ratios (full model) are presented along with the associated 95% confidence intervals (see Table 2). The nominal alpha level for all tests was .05. However, in some cases alpha levels $< .1$ are reported in an effort to identify potential patterns in the data.

RESULTS

The sample was comprised of primarily Latino/Hispanic (68%) and African American (18.7%) young men. On average, the respondents were 20.5 years old at the time of survey administration and had spent three years out of juvenile probation camp. The majority (60%) had a high school degree or equivalent and the mean ratio of months unemployed to months out of camp was .25. This means that on average, the young men were unemployed 25% percent of the time since returning home from their juvenile camp sentence. Slightly more than half (56%) of the sample had been incarcerated on at least one occasion since their release from juvenile probation camp and one third (33%) reported being the father of one or more children.

Figure 1 displays the participants' educational pathways, meaning high school/GED completion and postsecondary attempts and completion patterns. At the time of data collection, 60% of the sample reported having earned a high school diploma/GED. Moving beyond the secondary school level, 34.7% had never attempted a postsecondary program, 52.0% had

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics and Associations for Major Study Variables by Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education	Nonattempters <i>n</i> = 26 (34.7%) \bar{x} (<i>SD</i>)	Attempters <i>n</i> = 39 (52%) \bar{x} (<i>SD</i>)	Completers <i>n</i> = 10 (13.3%) \bar{x} (<i>SD</i>)	Total <i>N</i> = 75 \bar{x} (<i>SD</i>)	Association ^a / correlation ^b
Current age	20.4 (1.8)	20.5 (1.9)	20.4 (2.0)	20.5 (1.8)	> .01
Service length (months)	7.04 (4.03)	9.1 (2.95)	8.7 (2.45)	8.33 (3.41)	.08
No. of times in jail or prison since leaving camp	1.4 (1.8)	1.67 (2.7)	1.0 (1.05)	1.49 (2.24)	.01
Ratio of months unemployed/months out of camp	.29 (.33)	.25 (.28)	.09 (.09)	.24 (.28)	.05
Race/ethnicity	N%	N%	N%	N%	
White/other	3	6	1	10	.09
African American	11.5	15.4	10.0	13.3	
	4	7	3	14	
Hispanic/Latino/Mexican American	73.1	18.0	30.0	18.7	
	19	26	6	51	
	15.4	66.6	60.0	68.0	
Education*					
No high school diploma/GED	16	12	2	30	.32*
	61.5	30.8	20.0	40.0	
Completed high school/GED	10	27	8	45	
	38.5	69.2	80.0	60.0	
Fatherhood*					
Not a father	11	31	8	50	.38*
	42.3	79.5	80.0	66.7	
Father	15	8	2	25	
	57.7	20.5	20.0	33.3	

^aCramers V. ^bEta.

**p* < .05.

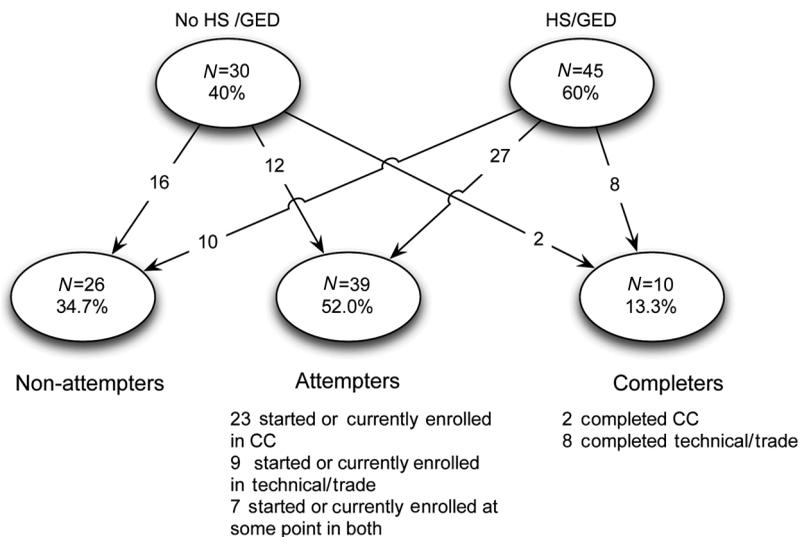


FIGURE 1 Patterns of post-secondary educational engagement.

attempted or were currently enrolled in a program, and 13.3% reported completing a postsecondary program. Among the attempters ($n = 39$), nine had attempted a technical/trade school, 23 had attempted community college, and seven reported attempting both types of programs. Among the completers, all 10 had completed a technical/trade school program, two had also completed a 2-year community college degree, and two were currently enrolled in a 4-year college.

Bivariate Tests

Table 1 presents the results of bivariate tests of association with the main dependent variable, postsecondary education. The status of postsecondary education (i.e., nonattempters, attempters, completers) was not significantly associated with age, race/ethnicity, employment or jail time. As expected, there was a significant association ($p < .05$) between high school diploma/GED completion and postsecondary education. The length of services received following from the reentry program was also significantly associated with postsecondary education, explaining 13% of the variability (.36).² Fatherhood was also significantly associated with postsecondary education, as only 20% of the attempters and completers at the time of the survey had fathered a child compared to 57.7% of the nonattempters. Approximately 14% of the variance in engagement in postsecondary education is explained by fatherhood status (see Table 1).

Logistic Regression Analysis

The multinomial logistic regression analyses presented in Table 2 demonstrate generally consistent findings in both the unadjusted and adjusted models. For these analyses the reference group was the nonattempters, and each of the independent variables in Table 2 were entered into the model one at a time. Comparing the attempters to the nonattempters, high school diploma/GED, service length, and fatherhood were all significant. When comparing the completers to the nonattempters, high school diploma/GED status was significant, and employment and fatherhood approached significance ($p < .1$). In the unadjusted model, participants who had a high school diploma/GED were 3.6 times more likely be an attempter and 6.4 times more likely to be a completer than a nonattempter. Number of times incarcerated and current age were not significant in either unadjusted comparison.

The full model (adjusted relative risk ratios), which is significant ($LR \chi^2_{12} = 32.86$ $p < .05$), displays a similar pattern of results when comparing nonattempters to attempters to and nonattempters to completers. Fatherhood was a significant predictor of postsecondary education when comparing nonattempters to attempters ($OR = .14$, $p < .05$), even after controlling for age, service length and education. The comparison between nonattempters and completers in regard to fatherhood did not remain significant in the full model; however it is worth noting that this comparison is in the expected direction and of similar magnitude ($OR = .22$). Moreover, attempters ($OR = 7.04$, $p < .05$) and completers ($OR = 7.41$, $p < .1$) were much more likely to have completed high school or earned their GED than nonattempters. In the full model, jail time approached significance, but only when comparing nonattempters to completers ($p < .1$). Even in the presence of the control variables in the model (i.e., age, service length, and high school diploma/GED status), fatherhood exerted significant influence on these young men's ability to successfully attempt postsecondary educational programs. It is worth noting that due to the relatively small sample size, particularly in the completers group, that the standard errors can be quite large leading to overly wide confidence intervals.

DISCUSSION

This study explored patterns of postsecondary educational engagement among formerly incarcerated young men. Among the 75 young men who had transitioned out of a juvenile probation camp on average three years prior to survey administration, 60% had completed their high school diploma/GED, and this group was over seven times more likely to attempt or complete a postsecondary program than those without a high school diploma/GED. Our finding of a 60% high school completion/GED rate among

TABLE 2 Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis for Postsecondary Education: Unadjusted and Adjusted Odds Ratios

	Unadjusted OR	Unadjusted 95% CI	Adjusted OR	Adjusted 95% CI
Base Outcome → Nonattempters				
Attempters				
Current age	.99	(.76, 1.31)	.97	(.66, 1.45)
Service length	1.21*	(1.03, 1.42)	1.27*	(1.05, 1.53)
Education				
No high school diploma/GED	1.0			
Completed high school/GED	3.6*	(1.27, 10.2)	7.04*	(1.66, 29.9)
No. of times in jail or prison since leaving camp	1.05	(.84, 1.31)	1.40**	(.99, 1.99)
Ratio of months unemployed/months out of camp	.63	(.12, 3.33)	.85	(.1, 7.58)
Fatherhood*				
Not a father	1.0			
Father	.19*	(.06, .57)	.14*	(.04, .59)
Completers				
Current age	.97	(.64, 1.46)	.76	(.55, 1.56)
Service length	1.16	(.93, 1.46)	1.21	(.92, 1.58)
Education*				
No high school diploma/GED	1.0			
Completed high school/GED	6.4*	(1.12, 36.4)	7.41**	(.85, 64.22)
No. of times in jail or prison since leaving camp	.86	(.58, 1.36)	1.31	(.77, 2.24)
Ratio of months unemployed/months out of camp	.82**	(.67, 1.0)	.82	(.64, 1.05)
Fatherhood				
Not a father	1.0			
Father	.18**	(.03, 1.04)	.22	(.03, 1.66)

Note. Full model likelihood ratio $\chi^2_{12} = 32.86, p < .05$; pseudo $R^2 = .225$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .1$.

formerly incarcerated young men is higher than prior estimates (Osgood et al., 2010), yet still far lower than the national average of 92% (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The difference in high school completion rates between our sample those of other researchers may be attributed to the influence of reentry support, self-selection bias, and/or the presence of older youth in this study. However, we cannot confirm any of these hunches given the data that was collected and the lack of reliable data on high school completion among formerly incarcerated youth more broadly. Nevertheless, the high school/GED completion rate that these young men reported is encouraging.

Our finding that 65.3% of the sample had attempted or completed a postsecondary educational program is likewise promising. However, we must note that the vast majority of these young men were attempters rather than completers, and that the completers were most successful at earning a

degree or certificate at the technical/trade school level (see Figure 1). We were not able to locate other data on postsecondary educational enrollment or completion among formerly incarcerated young men to compare our study results; hence our results should be viewed as exploratory. Prior studies have found low completion rates among young adults in 2-year colleges compared to 4-year programs (ACT, Inc., 2010; Jacobson & Moniker, 2009), and the lowest completion rates for older, African American young men (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001). In the only loosely comparable study that we were able to locate, Culhane et al. (2011) found a 2% college completion rate for former probation and/or foster youth.

As the vast majority of our sample who were engaged in postsecondary education had attempted a two-year degree or technical/trade school program, it is important to note that their chances of completion may be quite limited. These young men appeared to have the greatest success in completing technical/trade school programs, which the literature has suggested can lead to greater employment opportunities (Jacobson & Mohker, 2009; Marchotte, 2010). As an independent variable, employment since release from probation camp did not appear to exert any significant influence on postsecondary education. As in the literature reviewed (Dadgar & Weiss 2011; Durkin & Kirshner, 2010), employment may operate inconsistently in regard to postsecondary education. On the one hand, working can keep young adults out of school due to time constraints, yet on the other hand, may reflect an overall sense of engagement in building a career through a combination of work and school.

We had assumed that young men who were had spent time in jail and who were fathers would be less likely to be engaged in postsecondary education. Controlling for factors such as service length, high school diploma/GED status, and current age, number of times incarcerated since exiting camp was not significant, except when comparing attempters to nonattempters, and then only at $p < .1$ level. Fatherhood clearly stood out as a significant influence on young men's engagement in postsecondary educational programs. Men who were fathers, who comprised one-third of the sample, were 86% less likely to attempt postsecondary education than nonfathers. This is an important finding that warrants further discussion. If it is indeed the case that fatherhood has such a potent influence on postsecondary educational engagement among formerly incarcerated young men, this opens up a large area for future study and potentially for intervention. There is compelling evidence that postsecondary education offers an opportunity for economic stability for young parents. Using the national Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Zhan and Pandey (2004a) found that postsecondary education significantly improves the economic well-being of single mothers, even more than prior employment experience. In a separate analysis, they found this trend to also hold true among single fathers, with even greater effects on earning potential than among mothers (Zhan & Pandey, 2004b). This research suggests that the

economic gains of postsecondary education are just as important—if not more important—for young single fathers than for young single mothers.

With the backdrop of this knowledge that postsecondary education increases future income dynamics among single fathers (Zhan & Pandey, 2004b) and reduces the odds of incarceration among high-risk young adults (Raphael, 2007), our study points to the need to further investigate barriers to postsecondary educational attainment among formerly incarcerated young fathers. Researchers have estimated that more than 25% of incarcerated juveniles are fathers at the time of their confinement (Nurse, 2002; Shelton, 2000). It would be reasonable to assume that additional formerly incarcerated youth in the 18- to 25-year-old range would become fathers in the years following their release. There are many reasons why fatherhood might prevent engagement in postsecondary education, such as the immediate need to support their child/children financially or the absence of childcare resources. While this study did not measure these specific barriers, this finding does open up an important angle of inquiry. Future research should more closely document fathers' custodial status with their children as well as childcare arrangements and fiscal responsibilities. The goal of additional research on these barriers would be to aid in the development of more specific educational interventions for these formerly incarcerated young fathers.

Moreover, although we did not specifically set out to examine the influence of reentry services on educational engagement, our findings concerning service length warrant attention. In the full model, each additional month of service made participants significantly more likely to attempt postsecondary education than those who received a shorter duration of services. When comparing completers to nonattempters, receiving services was not significant, but the odds were still in the expected direction. This means that the longer that the reentry program worked with these young men, the more likely they were to attempt, but not necessarily complete, a postsecondary educational program. Reentry services often focus on supporting the individual offender to achieve a prosocial lifestyle by removing barriers to success and opening up opportunities for employment or education (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). Based on these findings, it appears that reentry programs have the capacity to connect youth with critical postsecondary educational options, yet may need to locate additional supports either in the school itself or in the community to help them to stay in school and complete their program or degree.

There are several limitations involved in this study that warrant mention. As suggested, the study has a relatively small and nonrepresentative sample, given the self-selection bias of the group (i.e., volunteer reentry program participants) and a lack of knowledge of how this group compared with other incarcerated young men at the same probation camp or in other correctional placements. The cross-sectional nature of this study also limits knowledge of longer-term educational patterns. For example, it is unknown at what rates those who had attempted some schooling or who were in

school at the time of the study will eventually complete their degrees. Moreover, the data collection method used was a telephone survey, which we selected as the optimal way to make contact with a hard to reach population, circumvent the likelihood of missing responses, and lessen response bias when asking about sensitive subject matters. Although this method resulted in detailed information and very few skipped items, recall bias may have limited the reliability of the data collected (Fowler, 2009). Relying on self-report, we also did not have access to criminal history variables, such as the number of prior arrests and out-of-home placements that are also known to influence young adult outcomes (Huizinga & Jakob-Chien, 1998).

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study found that among formerly incarcerated transition age young men, rates of postsecondary educational engagement were highest among nonfathers, those with a high school diploma/GED, and those who received a greater length of reentry services. Although this study is subject to methodological limitations, it constitutes one step forward in understanding postsecondary educational engagement among formerly incarcerated young men. Perhaps because of the logistical challenges involved in tracking this very transient population, very little research on college entrance and completion has been conducted with formerly incarcerated youth. Yet as the literature indicates, postsecondary educational progress, including technical/trade school certificates and 2-year degree programs, are an important indicator of future earnings for low-income young people (Jacobson & Moniker, 2009). Postsecondary credits and degrees also reduce the likelihood of imprisonment for high-risk young adults (Raphael, 2007). Whether or not postsecondary education can buffer criminal recidivism for young people who have already spent considerable time in the juvenile justice system remains a critical question for future discovery.

In sum, this study has laid some preliminary groundwork to understand factors that may inhibit postsecondary educational engagement among formerly incarcerated young men, finding that fatherhood and secondary degree completion are major barriers to postsecondary education. We suggest that researchers continue to examine correlates of postsecondary education and completion among formerly incarcerated youth, particularly with larger and more representative samples. In addition, qualitative research with this population would be useful to understand barriers encountered in enrolling in or completing a postsecondary program. With recent public attention to the failure of many juvenile justice programs to rehabilitate youth in correctional care (Mendel, 2011), a focus on improving longer-term educational outcomes will require greater attention from scholars and policymakers alike.

NOTES

1. Although technical/trade school is a form of postsecondary education, it is not included in these national figures unless it is part of 2-year college program.

2. One individual was not included in the final sample due to an incomplete survey, making the total sample size for the study 75.

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