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## **Barred from employment? A study of labor market prospects before and after imprisonment**

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## Do released prisoners return to their previous employer? A study on a potentially successful pathway to re-employment<sup>■</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This study examines to what extent ex-prisoners return to their pre-prison job and identify factors that facilitate or hinder this outcome. Data of a longitudinal study of Dutch pretrial detainees were analyzed to examine whether those who were employed at the time of arrest returned to their pre-prison employer, found new employment or remained jobless in the first half year after release from prison. A multinomial logistic regression was performed to determine to what extent prisoner and pre-prison job characteristics explain job return. About 55 percent of the previously employed prisoners were employed in the sixth month after release. One in three employed ex-prisoners found employment through their previous employer. Individuals who worked for a longer period of time in their pre-prison job and were satisfied with this job, were more likely to return to that former job. Higher educated prisoners were more likely to find new employment. Post-release jobs are generally of low quality, but return jobs score better in some aspects than new jobs. These findings reveal the relevance of recent employment ties for successful reintegration, nuance the common expectation that employers do not want to hire this group of workers, and encourage incentives for employers to rehire employees, assuming that the committed crime(s) are not work related.

Keywords: incarceration, prisoner reentry, employment.

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Scholars, policy makers as well as the majority of ex-prisoners themselves believe that employment is a chief element for a successful transition to a conventional lifestyle (Graffam et al., 2008; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999; Visher et al., 2008). Yet, ex-prisoners face a number of challenges in attempting to find employment and reintegrate into mainstream society. To start, these individuals generally have a low educational level, accumulated little work experience, and hold many other characteristics associated with poor employment prospects (e.g., Petersilia, 2003; Western, 2006). Beyond these pre-existing labor market disadvantages, imprisonment can further limit prisoners' employment opportunities by disrupting existing work relations, preventing the accumulation of work experience and eroding their human capital or pro-social tendencies. Moreover, certain occupations are closed to offenders under law and many employers conduct background checks to weed ex-offenders out of the applicant pool. These barriers warrant knowledge regarding successful pathways to employment for ex-prisoners (see for instance Raphael, 2011 for a more extensive discussion of these barriers).

The literature pertaining to how and which ex-prisoners do succeed in finding employment is emerging. A consistent finding is that work experience is a crucial predictor of post-prison labor market success (e.g., Berg & Huebner, 2011; Sabol, 2007; Visher et al., 2011; Western, 2006). Especially *recent* work experience seems to speed up labor market integration after release. Noteworthy in this respect is that, despite their relatively weak labor market attachment, a substantial share of the prison population is employed at the time of their arrest. Administrative data from state correctional and unemployment insurance systems show that approximately one-third of American prison inmates are employed in the formal labor market at the time of the arrest leading to their current incarceration (Kling, 2006; Pettit & Lyons, 2007; Tyler & Kling, 2007; Sabol, 2007).<sup>1</sup> When unregistered employment is included (self-employment, out-of-state employment, informal labor) this figure increases. For instance, in the Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities two-thirds of the prisoners reported to have a job before incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999). Hence, prisons house many individuals who would otherwise be working.

A few decades ago, scholars showed that several prisoners found their first post-release job by returning to their last job or revisiting another previous employer (Martin & Webster, 1971; Soothill, 1974). Furthermore, using a recent and larger sample of released prisoners, Visher et al. (2008) concluded that prisoners who contacted a previous employer were most successful in finding employment (see also Nelson et al., 1999). Moreover, they showed that contacting a prior employer shortly after release from prison increased

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1 Average quarterly employment ratio in first year prior to prison admission: Lalonde and Cho (2008): 25%; Jung (2011): 25%; Kling (2006): 33%; Sabol (2007): 35%; Tyler and Kling (2007): 31%.

the percentage of time ex-prisoners were employed in the first eight months out of prison (Visher et al., 2011). Several other studies present other indirect evidence for the importance of former work relations by showing that many (post-release) jobs are found through social networks (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Granovetter, 1995; Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). Also, scholars have interpreted relatively high employment rates immediately after release as indirect evidence of job return (e.g., Holzer et al., 2006; Ramakers et al., 2012). While all these scholars seem to believe in the relevance of job return for successful labor market reentry after release, they cannot offer hard evidence as none of them actually made the distinction between prisoners who returned to a former employer and prisoners who found new employment. Moreover, even less is known about why some prisoners return to their former employer while others do not. Insight into this potentially successful pathway to employment could help to connect more ex-prisoners to jobs.

The current study builds on the prior theoretical and empirical literature by addressing three important questions. First, we examine to what extent released prisoners are able to (a) return to their pre-prison job, (b) find new employment or (c) become non-employed (*Research question 1*).<sup>2</sup> Second, we examine which prisoner- and job characteristics affect the chance to return to the pre-prison job, find new employment or remain non-employed (*Research question 2*). As such, we study whether theoretically derived factors, that have proven to affect employment chances in general, also affect the job return of previously employed prisoners. Examples of such characteristics are human capital, industry of employment and crime severity. Third, we examine to what extent the job quality of return jobs and new jobs is comparable (*Research question 3*). This exploratory comparison will show whether returning to a previous employer is a sensible strategy where job quality is concerned. Based on interviews with prisoners who returned to their old job, Nelson et al. (1999) stated that “The jobs may not be the best they could get but ... many of them decided that any job is better than being unemployed.” (p.14). A comparison between type of jobs will test this expectation and furthermore provide a general insight into the quality of post-release jobs.

In order to answer these research questions we use data of the Prison Project, a unique prospective, longitudinal data collection among male pre-trial detainees in the Netherlands. Detailed self-report data allow us to assess for a subsample of 225 previously employed male prisoners whether they returned to their pre-prison jobs, found new employment or were non-employed in the sixth month after release. While employment is known to play an important role in the reintegration after release (e.g., Sampson & Laub, 1993), to date little is known about specific job strategies that increase employment chances for the ever growing pool of ex-prisoners. By using a

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2 In this study the term “non-employment” refers to both unemployed individuals (searching but unable to find a job) and non-participants (not in search for a job).

trichotomous distinction in outcomes we are the first to shed light on job return as a potentially successful pathway to employment.

## 5.2 THEORY

After release, previously employed ex-prisoners can be classified into three employment statuses; they either return to their former employer, are employed in a new job or remain non-employed. In the latter two cases the pre-prison job is disrupted. Ex-prisoners' placement in any of these three statuses depends partly on two of their own decisions: (a) do they want to work after release, and if so, (b) do they want to return to their previous job or prefer a new job? Evidently, employers also have an important saying in the classification of ex-prisoners in one of the employment statuses: (a) do they want to hire ex-prisoners and (b) do they want to (re)hire that specific ex-prisoner?<sup>3</sup> Theories on the effect of imprisonment on employment probabilities pertain to the general decisions of both actors: prisoners' willingness to work and employers' willingness to hire ex-prisoners. Below, we discuss the role of both prisoners and employers in these theories and apply their notions to the return of released prisoners to their previous job.

### 5.2.1 *The role of prisoners*

Various theories pertain to how imprisonment can either diminish or stimulate prisoners' willingness *to work* after release. We start with the potential negative effect of imprisonment. According to the differential association theory (Sutherland et al., 1992), imprisonment will reduce employment chances because prisoners are likely to become involved with social groups that devalue employment in the traditional labor market (Hagan, 1993; McCarthy et al., 2002; Sullivan, 1989). The second downward process has been referred to as self-labeling or secondary deviance (Lemert, 1951): a prison spell can make a prisoner question his own suitability for a conventional lifestyle and accept his deviant status. Third, human capital theory states that applicants' general (e.g., education, work experience) and specific forms of human capital (e.g., job duration, on-the-job-training) are important predictors of employment success (Becker, 1964). During imprisonment, the accumulation of work experience is restricted. Moreover, skills could even deteriorate over a long period of imprisonment (Kling, 1999) and this erosion could affect prisoners' aspirations and confidence to find employment.

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3 We use the term "rehire" to refer to the situation in which an employer allows a former prisoner to return to work after release. By using this term we do not imply that imprisonment automatically results in dismissal, as employment contracts could be maintained during imprisonment.

Other theoretical perspectives compete with these downward processes. First, specific deterrence, the personal experience of punishment, can discourage criminals (Becker, 1968), leading them to prefer a conventional lifestyle over a criminal lifestyle. Second, the human capital perspective can also be mustered to posit increases in employability after a period of imprisonment. Long-term prisoners, in particular, could try to compensate for their absence from the labor market, and accumulate new skills, by participating in educational programs and interventions in prison.

When we apply the abovementioned competing arguments to prisoners' willingness to return to their pre-prison job after release, we have to consider that previously employed prisoners constitute a selective group of the prison population. Their willingness to work will be relatively high and they are also likely to possess other characteristics associated with employment success, such as a higher level of human capital. It is because of this selectivity that we argue that previously employed prisoners are in general less receptive to any of the mentioned theoretical processes. Nonetheless, processes related to inter-prisoner-contact, self-labeling or the erosion of skills could lead them to disrupt their pre-prison job and become non-employed. Also, processes of deterrence and in-prison skill accumulation could increase their willingness to either return to their previous job or to disrupt their pre-prison job in order to find a new and better job.

### 5.2.2 *The role of employers*

Imprisonment can also affect post-prison employment outcomes by diminishing employers' general willingness to hire an ex-prisoner. Indeed, findings from employer surveys and audit studies consistently show that employers represent one of the greatest barriers for ex-prisoners (e.g., Pager, 2003; Holzer et al., 2006). First, labeling theories state that employers are reluctant to hire ex-prisoners because they associate a prison record with inferior personal characteristics and a generally low work competency. Human capital theory offers a second explanation for how imprisonment can affect employers' hiring decisions as the previously discussed skill erosion may not only affect prisoners' willingness to work but also turns them into less attractive employees. Third, imprisonment can decrease employers' willingness to hire ex-prisoners because of legal restrictions. In many countries ex-offenders face a variety of statutory restrictions that categorically prohibit certain types of employment (see Harris & Keller, 2005; Jacobs & Blitsa, 2008; Jacobs & Larrauri, 2012). As such, hiring decisions are sometimes outside an employers' discretion. In many cases, however, legal restrictions will not hinder employment as most laws merely prohibit work activities that are related to the crime committed.

In applying these general theories to former employers' willingness to rehire an ex-prisoner, we should take into account that, like previously employed prisoners, former employers constitute a specific group. They have access to detailed information about the capabilities of ex-prisoners

and this could influence their hiring decisions. According to the signaling thesis, a theory often used in labor economics, the absence of perfect information about applicants' true productivity forces employers to translate applicants' information into positive and negative signals regarding that productivity (Spence, 1973). As such, signaling theory implies that the negative stereotyping associated with imprisonment might be conditional upon the access to more positive (or negative) information about the employee. In line with this, Pager, Western, and Sugie (2009) found in their recent audit study that "as employers learn more about the person behind the category (e.g., ex-offender, black man), their comfort level with the applicant in question is likely to increase" (p.200). We therefore expect that former employers – having greater familiarity with the characteristics and qualities of the ex-convict – are less influenced by the stigma associated with a prison record and more inclined to rehire an ex-prisoner than new employers. Likewise, we expect that, the more time and costs an employer has invested in an employee, the more likely it is that he will allow this employee to return after release. Hence, we expect that employers will be more likely to rehire prisoners with more job-specific human capital, such as a higher occupational level or longer pre-prison job duration.

Finally, we address the role of legal restrictions in the re-hiring of ex-prisoners. Although countries differ in legislation (see section 5.4), dismissal is always justified when the conduct is job- or industry related (e.g., driving under influence excludes a former taxi driver from returning to his job). Next to this, several prisoner -and job characteristics can also qualify as legally valid reasons for dismissal. Examples are the type of employment arrangement and whether or not the prisoner informed his employer in due time about his imprisonment (Hoge Raad [High Court of the Netherlands], 2010; Legal Action Center, 2004; Sagel, 2011).

### 5.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

We complement the theoretical background with empirical work pertaining to theoretically derived predictors of post-release employment. This overview enables us to derive more specific hypotheses about how prisoner characteristics (general human capital, crime severity and motivation) and pre-prison job characteristics (specific human capital, employment industry) affect prisoners' classification in one of the three employment outcomes. Using job return as the reference category, we derive hypotheses about the likelihood of non-employment versus job return and the likelihood of new employment versus job return (see Table 5.1).

#### 5.3.1 *General human capital*

General human capital is expected to increase employment chances. Holzer et al. (2004) showed that employers were only mildly more enthusiastic



about hiring applicants with a spotty work history (59% “probably will” or “definitely will” hire them) than about hiring ex-offenders (38%). Albright and Denq (1996) furthermore reported that the percentage of employers who expressed willingness to hire an ex-offender increased from 12 to 32 percent when the ex-offender had a college degree. Skill accumulation in prison can also increase employment chances. However, relatively few inmates receive treatment or participate in educational training during as well as after imprisonment (e.g., Travis et al., 2001) and several meta-analyses showed that different kind of programs have few to no causal impact on post-prison employment (or rearrest) (Bushway & Reuter, 2002; Visher et al., 2005). Nonetheless, the completion of voluntary work programs during or after imprisonment can be informative signals and represent a prisoner’s willingness to desist from crime (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Hence, *general human capital is expected to make non-employment less likely than job return.*

However, it can also be argued that high-skilled prisoners put less effort in maintaining their old job, precisely because their human capital can help them to overcome the stigma of a prison record in new hiring decisions (Albright & Denq, 1996; Finn & Fontaine, 1983). Moreover, high-skilled prisoners will be better suited to take on employment in other industries when a criminal history excludes them from their pre-prison job. So, even though former employers would be willing to rehire a skilled ex-prisoner, this individual might prefer to look for work somewhere else; *general human capital is expected to make new employment more likely than job return.*

### 5.3.2 Crime severity

The severity of the conduct can affect employment chances after release. Employer surveys show that the length of a prison spell is interpreted to reflect not only the severity of the crime but also ex-prisoners’ capabilities to adjust to the outside world, resulting in a lower willingness to hire long-term prisoners (Giguere & Dundes, 2002). Remarkably, recent studies, based on administrative data from state correctional and unemployment insurance systems, found that offenders who serve longer prison terms experience short-term gains in employment (e.g., Jung, 2011, Kling, 2006; LaLonde & Cho, 2008). This short-term gain could be conditional on serving very long prison spells as the processes that potentially increase employment prospects (deterrence, skill accumulation) are more likely to be true for such punishments. The Dutch spells considered in this study are considerably shorter than those studied in the abovementioned American studies (as will be discussed in a later section). *A longer prison spell is therefore expected to make non-employment more likely than job return.* It strains the work relationship and increases the chance that employers (are legally allowed to) replace their former employee. Following this line of thinking we also expect that *a longer prison spell makes new employment more likely than job return.* Yet, following the signaling thesis, former employers might not be as put off by the duration of a prison spell as new employers, especially when they were sat-

isified with pre-prison job performances. We therefore also derive the contrasting hypothesis that *a longer prison spell makes new employment less likely than job return.*

With respect to type of crime, results are ambiguous and likely related to the type of job in question. Most studies show that employers favor non-violent offenders over violent offenders (e.g., Albright & Denq, 1996; Giguere & Dundes, 2002; Holzer et al., 2006). It can however also be expected that employers favor violent offenders over non-violent offenders, because the latter group, consisting of drug- and property offenders, shows higher recidivism rates and is therefore more likely to – have offended and will – reoffend against the company (Atkinson, Fenster, & Blumberg, 1976; Helfgott, 1997). As such, competing arguments can be mustered concerning the effect of committing a violent crime on the likelihood of non-employment or new employment on the one hand and job return on the other hand.

### 5.3.3 Motivation

The motivation to work will increase employment chances after release. A substantial part of the prison population lack this motivation. Illustrative of this is that the lower employment rate among ex-prisoners (compared to non-prisoners) stems largely from labor force non-participation rather than unemployment (the inability to find employment) (Apel & Sweeten, 2010).

Research furthermore showed that prisoners tend to be drawn from social groups that are least satisfied with their job (Quinn & Staines, 1979). The current sample may be relative highly motivated and satisfied with their job as they were all employed before imprisonment. *A higher work motivation or job satisfaction before imprisonment is therefore expected to make non-employment less likely than job return.* Moreover, because job satisfaction likely reflects a prisoner's willingness to return to the pre-prison job (versus the will to search for a new job), we also expect that *a higher job satisfaction makes new employment less likely than job return.*

### 5.3.4 Job-specific human capital

Specific human capital – work experience that is useful only to a single employer or industry – increases employment chances. For instance, Visher et al. (2011) reported that individuals with a longer pre-prison job duration spent more time employed after release. A longer job duration and higher occupational level prior to imprisonment implies that job skills may have been accumulated and both the prisoner and the employer invested time in the work relationship. These characteristics make both actors more receptive to continuing the relationship after release. As workers with more job-specific human capital are more valuable to employers, and particular to former employers, we expect that both *a longer job duration and a higher occupational level make non-employment less likely than job return and new employment less likely than job return.*

### 5.3.5 Employment industry

Perhaps because of their fear of negligent hiring, employers base hiring decisions on the link between specific job tasks on the one hand and crime risk on the other hand. In general, industries differ in job tasks and crime risks. Illustrative of this is the finding that large firms in fields with little interaction between customers and workers, such as manufacturing and construction, are much more willing to hire ex-offenders than other industries and small firms (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2007). Earlier work (Martin & Webster, 1971; Soothill, 1974) as well as recent studies (Nally, Lockwood, & Ho, 2011; Stoll & Bushway, 2008) showed that the majority of ex-offenders indeed find employment in low skill sectors with little customer interaction or financial responsibilities. We therefore expect that *when the pre-prison job concerns the handling of money or customer interaction both non-employment and new employment are more likely than job return.*

Table 5.1 Overview hypotheses on prisoner- and job characteristics

		Non-employed versus Job return (ref.)	New job versus Job return (ref.)
<i>Prisoner characteristics</i>			
General human capital	Educational level	-	+
	Work experience	-	+
	Training in prison	-	+
Crime severity	Imprisonment length	+	+/-
	Violent crime	+/-	+/-
Motivation	Motivation to work	-	+/-
	Job satisfaction	-	-
<i>Job characteristics</i>			
Job-specific human capital	Job duration	-	-
	Occupational level	-	-
Crime risk industry	Handling of money or customer contact	+	+

## 5.4 THE DUTCH CONTEXT

Before heading to the data and results we pay attention to the context in which these data were gathered. The Netherlands represents a unique case study and differs from the United States in several important ways. On the one hand, job return might be more prevalent in the Netherlands because prison spells are comparatively short and laws designed to protect ex-offenders from (labor market) discrimination are more stringent, compared to the United States. Approximately 80 percent of all Dutch prisoners spent less than six months in prison (Linckens & De Looff, 2011), whereas the

average American prisoner serves about two years (Guerino et al., 2011). It is therefore best to conceive of these Dutch prison spells as being more akin to American jail sentences. Moreover, where Dutch ex-offenders are, legally speaking, only excluded from jobs that are related to their criminal history, certain American states ban all ex-offenders from public employment and allow private employers to refuse anyone with a criminal conviction (Legal Action Center, 2004). It should be noted however that characteristics of the job (e.g., employment arrangement) and the prisoner (e.g., on-the-job behavior) can offer Dutch as well as American employers legally valid reasons to fire an imprisoned employee (Hoge Raad [High Court of the Netherlands], 2010; Sagel, 2011). Still, these two country differences could result in a relatively higher job return rate in the Netherlands.

On the other hand, the more generous welfare system and the restricted access to criminal background information in the Netherlands, could lead to relatively more job returners in the United States. The Netherlands is long known for its generous welfare regime while the United States is known as a liberal regime with strict eligibility criteria and minimum benefit levels (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Although Dutch social policy liberalized in recent decades, the welfare regimes of both countries remained to produce different levels of social benefits. Dutch ex-prisoners might therefore be less inclined to search for employment, either at former or new employers, than American ex-prisoners. In addition, the job return rate could be higher in the U.S. because the search for new employment is more challenging. In the Netherlands, an applicant's criminal history is difficult to access (Boone, 2011), yet most American employers can search for information in official repositories, online databases or hire private agencies that gather court records (Briggs et al., 2004; Bushway, 2004).<sup>4</sup> Hence, American ex-prisoners might put more effort in returning to a former employer, who might be more likely to diverge from the stereotype of "the ex-convict" than new employers.

## 5.5 DATA

The data for this study were collected as part of the Prison Project, a unique prospective, longitudinal and nationwide effort to collect data about Dutch pretrial detainees. The project targeted male prisoners who entered a Dutch detention facility between October 2010 and March 2011, were born in the Netherlands, between 18 and 65 years old and did not suffer from severe

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4 In the Netherlands, every employer may ask applicants for a certificate of conduct. In certain sectors this certificate is mandatory (education, health service, cab driving, security and transportation). It is granted by the secretary of Security and Justice if a criminal history is not related to the future work activities. In recent years the certificate has become mandatory in more sectors than before. The rules for granting a certificate have become stricter as well (Boone, 2011). In contrast to the United States, Dutch employers have few other possibilities to retrieve information about the criminal history of applicants.

psychological problems. As the current study aims to investigate prisoners' opportunities to return to the pre-prison employer after release, we restrict our focus to the participants who worked as employees in the run up to imprisonment and were reinterviewed six months after release. As a result, the current sample consists of 225 previously employed prisoners.

These prisoners participated in the baseline interview a few weeks after entering detention (P1) (total  $n = 1,909$ ; 65% response rate), and in the reentry interview that took place in the sixth month after release (R1) (total  $n = 842$ ; 52% response rate). Missing data on pre-prison or post-prison employment status resulted in 824 cases for analysis on the R1-sample. Approximately 27.3 percent of these participants worked as salary workers before imprisonment ( $n = 225$ ). Appendix 5.A provides more detailed information about the data collection, and the representativeness of the sample.

### 5.5.1 Measures

*Post-prison employment status* is the key dependent variable examined in this study. It measures if previously employed prisoners returned to their pre-prison job, were employed in a new job or were non-employed in the sixth month after release. The construction of the questionnaire enables us to measure job return for those ex-prisoners who returned to their pre-prison employer immediately after release. The present study focuses on the employment situation in the sixth month after release. Therefore, we consider those who returned to their previous employer immediately after release *and* were still working there in the sixth month after release as job returners.

We also created five indicators for post-release job quality, the second dependent variable. First, *earnings* represent the net monthly salary (after taxes) (mean: €1,622.71; median: €1,425).<sup>5</sup> Second, following the definition of *fulltime employment* of Statistics Netherlands we coded those who worked a minimum of 35 hours per week as full-timers. Third, we distinguish between a permanent and temporary *employment arrangement*. Fourth, using the Standard for Classification of Occupations of Statistics Netherlands (Westerman, 2010), survey information on the job title, type of business and (executive) tasks was used to classify workers into five *occupational levels* ranging from the elementary level to the lower, medium, higher or scientific level. Fifth, average scores on eleven items pertaining to post-prison *job satisfaction* (e.g., "My job gives me confidence", range: 1 "totally disagree" – 5 "totally agree") were combined into a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha is 0.913).

We operationalized a series of pre-prison job- and prisoner characteristics that prior studies have established as predictors of post-prison employment. We start by describing four pre-prison job characteristics. *Job duration* represents the time between the month they started working in their pre-

5 Scores above the 95th percentile (€5,600) were truncated ( $n = 2$ ).

prison job and prison admission (median: 16.4 months; mean: 43.8 months). Pre-prison *occupational level* was assessed the same way as the post-prison occupational level. In addition, survey information on job title, type of business and (executive) tasks was used to categorize jobs into ten different *employment industries*: hotel and catering industry, logistics, construction and maintenance, sales, security, farming, services, manufacturing, cleaning and other industry. One additional variable was created to identify *industries that entailed the handling of money or customer interaction* (hotel and catering, logistics, sales, security, services) (33.6%).

Next, we describe seven prisoner characteristics that relate to post-prison employment. *Education* is included as a dichotomous variable. Lower education characterizes those that did not complete primary school, only completed primary school or graduated from the lower levels of secondary school. Medium and higher education symbolize completion of a higher level of secondary schooling and refers to individuals who completed a higher vocational training or post-secondary education (42.2%). *Work experience* represents the proportion of time a prisoner spent in unemployment since leaving fulltime education (mean: 14%; median: 2%). *Skill accumulation* was measured by asking prisoners after release whether they participated in an educational -or work program during imprisonment (28.9%). *Length of imprisonment* is the actual time between the first day of pretrial detention and date of release from confinement (either pretrial detention or imprisonment) as registered by the Judicial Institutions Department of the Netherlands. This variable ranges from 14 to 538 days and the median spell is 3.8 months (116 days), with a mean of 5.1 months (158 days). The General Documentation Files (GDF) of the Criminal Record Office ("rap sheets") were consulted for information on the index offense, such as *type of crime*. These data were made available by the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Netherlands Ministry of Security and Justice. We distinguish between non-violent crimes and violent crimes (50.0%). *Work motivation* and *job satisfaction* before imprisonment were based on several items and average scores were captured in two scales (Cronbach's alpha of 0.672 and 0.903 respectively).

Finally, the rich survey data allow us to control for many covariates. First, we added information on *demographics* and *social bonds*. Next, we included whether the former *employer knew about the imprisonment* in order to account for the possibility that an employer maintained or terminated the employment contract without knowing about the prison spell. The vast majority of prisoners reported already during the first interview (P1) that they informed their employer about their imprisonment (82.7%). Third, we included whether or not the prisoner had a *permanent employment agreement* with the employer prior to imprisonment (60.4%). Fourth, we controlled for detailed information on *criminal history*, based on the General Documentation Files (GDF) of the Criminal Record Office ("rap sheets"). Next to information on the index offense, these data contain every case that was registered by the Public Prosecutor's Office starting from age twelve, the age of criminal responsibility. Finally, we included the *national monthly unemploy-*

ment rate at time of release (ranging from 4.7 to 6.2%) in order to control for differences in labor demand during the research period (Statistics Netherlands, 2013). Appendix 5.B offers descriptive statistics about all covariates used in this study.

## 5.6 METHODS

The analyses proceed in four separate stages. First, we perform a chi-square test to show the association between pre-and post-prison employment outcomes for the larger sample of prisoners, including those who were not employed before prison. This allows us to examine if previously employed prisoners indeed have higher employment chances after release. Then, the focus shifts to the selection of former employees and their chances to return to their previous employer, find new employment or remain non-employed (RQ 1). Third, the relation between prisoner- and job characteristics and the post-prison employment status (return job, new job and non-employment) is studied using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Fourth, we estimate the effect of each predictor on the dependent variable with other predictors held constant by employing a multinomial logistic regression technique. This technique was selected because it allows for categorical dependent variables, such as our trichotomous measure of post-prison employment status. It estimates one set of coefficients for each category of the dependent variable, minus the reference category (Pampel, 2000). Using job return as the reference category, two comparisons are made: the probability of finding a new job is compared to that of returning to the previous job; similarly, the probability of remaining non-employed is compared to the probability of returning to the previous job (RQ 2).<sup>6,7</sup> Finally, additional difference tests are performed in order to compare the job quality before and after prison for job returners and job changers, and study the mobility in job quality within these two groups (RQ 3).

## 5.7 FINDINGS

### 5.7.1 RQ 1: To what extent are released prisoners able to return to their pre-prison job, find new employment or become non-employed?

Table 5.2 presents the respondents' employment situation before and after imprisonment. The results show that, overall, 34.8 percent of the ex-prisoners were employed in the sixth month after release (29.7%+5.1%). Previously

6 In order to retain the total sample size in the multivariate analysis, the few missing values on pre-prison covariates (see Appendix 5.B) were imputed.

7 Diagnostics indicate that multicollinearity and outliers are no concern in this multinomial logistic regression.

employed prisoners are more likely to succeed in the labor market after release than those without recent work experience ( $\chi^2(15) = 478.815, p < 0.001$ ). Approximately twenty percent of the individuals who were non-participant or unemployed prior to imprisonment found employment after release, 17.1 percent and 20.7 percent respectively. In contrast, self-employed prisoners and previous employees have a more than fifty percent chance of finding employment after release (68.4% and 54.7% respectively).

Another significant observation is that most of the ex-prisoners remain in the same employment category after release: 37.4% of the non-participants, 37.9% of the unemployed, 55.1% of the self-employed and 50.3% of the employees. We furthermore notice the high re-imprisonment rates. Approximately 1 in 4 previously non-employed prisoners were back in prison in the sixth month after release. Lower but substantial re-imprisonment rates are found among the prisoners who were previously self-employed or worked as salary worker (12.2% and 13.8%). Recidivism rates are thus high among our sample.<sup>8</sup>

Of more specific interest to this study are the post-release employment outcomes of the 225 prisoners who were employed as salary workers before imprisonment. Table 5.2 shows that 18.7 percent of them returned to their previous employer, 36.0 percent found new employment and 45.3 percent are non-employed in the sixth month after release. Hence, approximately 34 percent of those who were successful in obtaining employment six months after their release were employed by their previous employer ( $18.7/54.7 = 34.2$ ). This finding demonstrates the importance of pre-prison employment ties for labor market reintegration after release. Additional analyses (not shown) indicated that the prevalence of job return was somewhat higher in the first month after release (27.5% versus 18.7%). Hence, one-third of the individuals who initially returned to their pre-prison employer were unable to retain this job. As such, job return does not seem to assure job certainty and stability. Yet, the majority of returning prisoners were able to retain their job, at least during the first (and crucial) half year after release.

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8 Yet, we do note that the presented re-imprisonment rates might overestimate the actual recidivism rate because approximately 13 percent of all prisoners were sentenced back to prison for the index offense. Recall that ex-prisoners were re-interviewed approximately six months after their *first release* back into society. Sometimes they had to await the trial-decision at home. Approximately 34.8 percent of the prisoners in the current sample were first released before trial and 37.6 percent of them were later sentenced back to prison for the index offense (prison spell was prolonged) ( $34.8 * 37.6 = 0.13$ ). Unfortunately it is outside the scope of this study to examine whether they indeed returned to prison for the index offense or another offense at the time of the reentry interview (sixth month after release).



Table 5.2 Employment status before imprisonment and six months after release

Sixth month after prison	Non-participant		Before imprisonment				All	
	%	%	Unemployed	Self-employed	Employee	%	%	%
<i>Non-employed</i>		82.9	79.3	31.6	45.3			65.2
Non-participant	37.4		13.1	11.2	8.0		17.0	
Unemployed	24.1		37.9	8.2	23.6		27.3	
Back in prison	21.4		28.3	12.2	13.8		20.9	
<i>New job</i>		17.1	20.7	68.4	36.0			29.7
Self-employed	4.8		2.2	55.1	4.4		9.7	
Employee	12.3		18.5	13.3	31.6		20.0	
<i>Return job</i>		-	-	-	18.7		5.1	5.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	187	187	314	98	225	98	824	824

5.7.2 *RQ 2: Which prisoner- and job characteristics affect the chance to return to the pre-prison job, find new employment or remain non-employed?*

Table 5.3 indicates that several prisoner characteristics are associated with job return in the expected direction. Yet, only work motivation increases job return significantly: 36.6 percent of the highly motivated prisoners returned to the same employer after release, compared to only 13.6 percent of the less motivated prisoners ( $\chi^2(2)=11.772, p<0.01$ ).<sup>9</sup> With respect to job characteristics, we find that individuals who worked for their employer for longer than one year prior to their imprisonment, have a significantly higher chance to return to their previous job (25.7% versus 11.2%) ( $\chi^2(2)=6.653, p<0.05$ ). The other pre-prison job characteristics were not significantly associated with post-prison employment status. This lack of significant associations could be attributable to the relatively small sample size.

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9 In Table 5.3 we identify the particular cell(s) that contribute most to the Chi-square based on the standardized residuals. These residuals can be viewed as z-scores, and indicate how many standard deviations above or below the expected count a particular observed count is.

Table 5.3 Chance of job return, new job or non-employment

		Return job n = 42		New job n = 81		Non-employed n = 102		All	
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
All		18.7		36.0		45.3		100.0	225
<i>Prisoner characteristics</i>									
General	Human capital								
	Educational level	Low	19.2	48.5	32.3	100.0	130	100.0	130
		Medium/higher	17.9	41.1	41.1	100.0	95	100.0	95
	Work experience	Unemployed <= 1 year	20.6	37.7	41.7	100.0	175	100.0	175
		Unemployed > 1 year	12.0	30.0	58.0	100.0	50	100.0	50
Crime severity	Skill accumulation in prison	No	20.0	33.1	46.9	100.0	160	100.0	160
		Yes	15.4	43.1	41.5	100.0	65	100.0	65
	Imprisonment length	<= 3 months	17.4	39.1	43.5	100.0	92	100.0	92
		> 3 months	19.5	33.8	46.6	100.0	133	100.0	133
Motivation	Type of crime	Non-violent crime	14.7	36.7	48.6	100.0	109	100.0	109
		Violent crime	22.0	35.8	42.2	100.0	109	100.0	109
	Motivation to work **	Low-high	13.6	38.5	47.9	100.0	169	100.0	169
		Very high	36.6*	29.3	34.1	100.0	41	100.0	41
Job characteristics	Satisfaction with job	Low-high	14.7	37.1	48.3	100.0	143	100.0	143
		Very high	25.6	34.1	40.2	100.0	82	100.0	82
<i>Job characteristics</i>									
Job-specific human capital	Job duration *	<= 1 year	11.2†	39.3	49.4	100.0	89	100.0	89
		> 1 year	25.7	32.7	41.6	100.0	113	100.0	113
	Occupational level	Low	17.4	36.8	45.8	100.0	144	100.0	144
		Medium/higher	22.4	32.7	44.9	100.0	49	100.0	49

Table 5.3 continued

Employment industry	Industry	Return job <i>n</i> = 42		New job <i>n</i> = 81		Non-employed <i>n</i> = 102		All	
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
	Hotel & catering	14.3	21	61.9	21	23.8	21	100.0	21
	Logistics	11.5	26	42.3	26	46.2	26	100.0	26
	Construction & maintenance	21.4	70	31.4	70	47.1	70	100.0	70
	Sales	20.8	24	33.3	24	45.8	24	100.0	24
	Security	20.0	5	40.0	5	40.0	5	100.0	5
	Farming	9.1	11	36.4	11	54.4	11	100.0	11
	Services	20.8	24	29.2	24	50.0	24	100.0	24
	Manufacturing	7.1	14	50.0	14	42.9	14	100.0	14
	Cleaning	41.7	12	8.3	12	50.0	12	100.0	12
	Other	7.7	13	30.8	13	61.5	13	100.0	13
	Money/Customer interaction	17.8	146	33.6	146	48.6	146	100.0	146
	Yes	18.9	74	40.5	74	40.5	74	100.0	74

†*p*<0.10; \**p*<0.05; \*\**p*<0.01

The next step is to examine the joint effect of prisoner- and job characteristics on post-prison employment status in one model, in which “job return” is the omitted reference category. In Table 5.4, we first examine the predictors associated with non-employment versus job return. In line with our hypotheses, (see Table 5.1) we find that those who serve a longer prison spell are more likely to become non-employed than to return to their pre-prison job ( $\text{Exp}(B)=1.01$ ), whereas work motivation and job satisfaction decrease the likelihood of non-employment versus job return ( $\text{Exp}(B)=0.44$ ;  $\text{Exp}(B)=0.45$ ). Contrary to our expectations, indicators of general and specific human capital did not make non-employment less likely than job return. Theory and previous work produced ambiguous results concerning the effect of type of crime on employment chances. We find that type of crime does not affect the chance to become non-employed versus returning to the pre-prison job. Lastly, those working under a permanent contract were less likely to end up non-employed than to return to their previous employer.

The second panel in Table 5.4 presents the coefficients for new employment versus job return. General human capital was expected to increase the likelihood of finding a new job over returning to the previous job because skilled prisoners are relatively better equipped to overcome the stigma of imprisonment in new hiring situations. The results corroborate this hypothesis and show that a higher educational level increases the likelihood of new employment over the likelihood of job return ( $\text{Exp}(B)=2.88$ ). The effects of the other general human capital indicators are in the same direction but not statistically significant. We find that individuals who serve a longer prison spell are more likely to find new employment than to return to their previous job ( $\text{Exp}(B)=1.01$ ). Next, prisoners who were more satisfied with their pre-prison job were less likely to find a new job than to return to their previous job ( $\text{Exp}(B)=0.41$ ). With respect to job-specific human capital, we expected that a longer job duration or higher occupational level would make new employment less likely than job return. The results corroborate the effect of job duration ( $\text{Exp}(B)=0.99$ ), but occupational level has no effect on post-prison employment status and neither has employment industry. Working under a permanent employment arrangement before imprisonment ( $\text{Exp}(B)=0.34$ ) increases the likelihood of returning to this prior job. Finally, a higher national unemployment rate at the time of release ( $\text{Exp}(B)=0.76$ ) decreases the chance to find new employment versus returning to the previous job.

Table 5.4 Multinomial regression for post-prison employment status ( $n = 225$ )<sup>a</sup>

	Non-employment			New employment		
	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)
Intercept	15.50*	7.10	0.00	18.96**	7.29	0.00
General human capital						
Medium/higher educated	0.59	0.50		1.06*	0.50	2.88
Proportion of time unemployed	1.28	1.42		0.60	1.48	
Skill accumulation in prison	-0.10	0.56		0.39	0.56	
Violent crime	0.42	0.49		0.16	0.49	
Imprisonment length	0.01 <sup>†</sup>	0.00	1.01	0.01*	0.00	1.01
Motivation to work	-0.81 <sup>†</sup>	0.47	0.44	-0.27	0.47	
Satisfaction with job	-0.80*	0.37	0.45	-0.89*	0.37	0.41
Duration job	-0.01	0.00		-0.01 <sup>†</sup>	0.00	0.99
Specific human capital						
Lower occupational level ( <i>ref.</i> )						
Medium/higher occupational level	0.13	0.58		-0.14	0.59	
Missing occupational level	-0.77	0.72		-0.66	0.73	
Industry with money contact	-0.27	0.50		0.01	0.50	
Partner	0.33	0.46		0.12	0.47	
Child(ren)	0.21	0.58		0.12	0.60	
Age	0.00	0.04		0.02	0.04	
Non-ethnic background	0.63	0.49		0.69	0.50	
Permanent contract	-1.16*	0.55	0.31	-1.08 <sup>†</sup>	0.56	0.34
Employer knew about imprisonment	-1.31	0.82		-0.78	0.85	
Age of first arrest	0.01	0.04		-0.04	0.04	
Previous prison spell	0.73	0.65		0.33	0.66	
Nr. of previous convictions	0.02	0.07		-0.07	0.08	
National unemployment rate at release	-0.17	0.15		-0.27 <sup>†</sup>	0.15	0.76
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.306					

<sup>a</sup> "Job return" is the reference category of the dependent variable in the analysis

<sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

### 5.7.3 RQ 3: To what extent is the job quality of return jobs and new jobs comparable?

Table 5.5 and 5.6 present descriptive statistics on post-release job quality for job returners and job changers, respectively. A quick glance at these tables indicates that return jobs are of a somewhat higher quality than new jobs. While median earnings are comparable (€1,450 for job returners versus €1,400 for job changers), job returners are more likely to work fulltime (80% versus 66.7%), have a permanent work agreement (90.5% versus 43.5%), a higher occupational level (33.3% versus 21.9%) and are on average more satisfied with their job (average score of 3.3 versus 3.0) than job changers. Yet, difference tests (not shown) revealed that these two groups only vary significantly in employment arrangement. Again, the lack of significant findings could be partly attributable to the relatively small sample size. In any case, both groups of working ex-prisoners work in generally low quality jobs compared to the Dutch labor force. For instance, the average Dutch male worker earns about €2,275 per month and occupies a job of a medium or higher occupational level (Statistics Netherlands, 2011).

Table 5.5 and 5.6 also present figures on the within-group mobility in job quality. We distinguish between individuals who scored similar on a job quality characteristic in the pre-prison job and the post-prison job (immobile) and those whose job quality improved (increase) or worsened (decrease) after release. Earnings represent the most dynamic job quality indicator. Even when we consider all changes below €250 as immobility, approximately 50 percent of the job returners and 80 percent of the job changers experience mobility in earnings after release. For both groups half of this mobility is attributable to a rise in earnings. We find high rates of immobility for the other job quality indicators, especially among job returners. Moreover, half of the working ex-prisoners show immobility on at least three of the five indicators. These exploratory analyses suggest that working ex-prisoners end up in a job that is similar to the pre-prison job and that this similarity is more prominent among job returners than job changers. The latter group experiences more mobility, both downwards and upwards. This reveals the diversity of this group; some individuals might be forced to work in lower quality jobs due to their prison record, while others were able to or strived to find a better job regardless of this record.

Table 5.5 Job quality in sixth month after release for job returners (*n* = 42)

	Job quality			Mobility in job quality			N
	Range	Median	Mean/ %	Similar %	Increase %	Decrease %	
Earnings	€730-€3,300	1,450	1,585	17.1	48.8	34.1	41
	/ €250			51.2 <sup>a</sup>	24.4 <sup>a</sup>	24.4 <sup>a</sup>	41
Fulltime employment	0-1		80.0	90.0	5.0	5.0	40
Permanent employment arrangement	0-1		90.5	81.0	14.3	4.8	42
Occupational level	5 levels	2.0	2.4	75.0	13.9	11.1	36
	2 levels		33.3	77.8	11.1	11.1	36
Job satisfaction	5 categories	3.0	3.3	65.9 <sup>b</sup>	9.8 <sup>b</sup>	24.4 <sup>b</sup>	41

<sup>a</sup> Increase/decrease represents a change in earnings of € 250 or more.

<sup>b</sup> Increase/decrease represents a change in overall category (the continuous scale scores were regrouped in five categories).

Table 5.6 Job quality in sixth month after release for job changers (*n* = 81)

	Job quality			Mobility in job quality			N
	Range	Median	Mean/ %	Similar %	Increase %	Decrease %	
Earnings	€60-€5,600	1,400	1,643	8.5	50.7	40.8	71
	/ €250			19.7 <sup>a</sup>	46.5 <sup>a</sup>	33.8 <sup>a</sup>	71
Fulltime employment	0-1		66.7	69.3	13.3	17.3	75
Permanent employment arrangement	0-1		43.5	61.3	14.5	24.2	62
Occupational level	5 levels	2.0	2.1	59.4	12.5	28.1	64
	2 levels		21.9	79.7	9.4	10.9	64
Job satisfaction	5 categories	3.0	3.0	43.4 <sup>b</sup>	23.7 <sup>b</sup>	32.9 <sup>b</sup>	76

<sup>a</sup> Increase/decrease represents a change in earnings of € 250 or more.

<sup>b</sup> Increase/decrease represents a change in overall category (the continuous scale scores were regrouped in five categories).

## 5.8 DISCUSSION

Despite the overall weak labor market attachment among prison populations, a substantial share is employed prior to imprisonment. A prison spell interrupts existing work relations and might even disrupt them permanently. Previous literature presented job return as a potentially successful pathway to employment for ex-offenders, but offered no hard evidence for this phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent previously employed prisoners returned to their pre-prison jobs after release. A subsample of self-report data of the Prison Project – a unique longitudinal data collection among male pretrial detainees in the Netherlands – allowed us to assess for 225 male prisoners if they returned to their pre-prison jobs, found new employment or remained jobless in the sixth month after release.



Our results showed that 35 percent of all prisoners and 55 percent of the previously employed prisoners were employed in the sixth month after release. Amongst the latter group, approximately 34 percent returned to the pre-prison job and 66 percent found a new job. This finding demonstrates the importance of pre-prison employment ties for successful reintegration after release and aligns the scarce evidence from previous studies (Martin & Webster, 1971; Nelson et al., 1999; Soothill, 1974; Visher et al., 2008). Our results likely even underestimate the prevalence of job return because we were limited to consider only those individuals who returned to their *last* pre-prison job and who returned to their former employer *immediately* after release, as job returners.

One-third of the job returners were unable to retain their job during the follow-up. Still, the vast majority of job returners stayed with their previous employer during the first half year after release, a hectic period in which they are at very high risk for crime. Moreover, while all post-release jobs are of relatively low quality compared to national figures, job returners seem to work in somewhat higher quality jobs than job changers. As such, our findings do not support the observation of Nelson et al. (1999) that job returners chose for job certainty *instead of* job quality. Future research will have to show whether our observation, that job return can increase job retention and job quality, stands when a longer period of follow-up and a larger sample size is used.

The findings imply that many former employers are willing to rehire ex-prisoners despite knowing about their prison record. This potentially aligns signaling theory, which states that former employers are more likely to diverge from the negative stereotypes that are generally associated with a prison record because they have access to more (positive) information about the applicant than new employers (Spence, 1973, see also Pager et al., 2009). From a policy point of view it could be useful to create incentives for employers to hire back employees, assuming of course that the criminal behavior which precipitated incarceration is unrelated to work activities. There is some evidence to suggest that financial incentives do not change the hiring behavior of employers who have previously indicated their resistance to hire hard-to-employ populations (Cove, 2003). In order to reduce employers' concerns, it could be beneficial to match the prisoner and employer to a third party who monitors the activities of the ex-prisoner. Such policy measures connect to a general trend towards community-based reentry interventions, in which resources of the prisoner's network are mobilized to increase the chance of a successful reintegration (e.g., Visher & Travis, 2011).

The overall post-release employment rate of 35 percent in the sixth month is lower than the employment rates found by administrative studies (Pettit & Lyons, 2007; Sabol, 2007; Tyler & Kling, 2007: ~45% in first two quarters), and previous survey research (Visher et al., 2011: 45% in eight month). In addition, even the post-release employment rate of previously employed prisoners (55%) is low when considering that all these respon-

dents were employed before imprisonment. Further analyses (not shown) indicated that 72 percent of the previously employed prisoners had a job *for some time* during the six month follow-up, which implies that more prisoners did work after imprisonment but were unable to keep this job until the sixth month after release. Further research is warranted to investigate which factors are associated with this inability.

The multivariate analyses showed that prisoners who were more satisfied with their pre-prison job, had worked there for a longer period of time and under a permanent employment agreement were more likely to return to their previous job after release than to find new employment or become non-employed. These findings imply, in line with human capital theory, that good and steady employment bonds were the most likely ones to be continued after release. Also, these results might be in line with Dutch laws designed to protect ex-offenders from labor market discrimination. In the Netherlands, imprisonment in itself is never a valid reason for dismissal and a permanent employment contract can be an additional “obstacle” for employers to fire former employees with a prison record. Another key finding was that higher educated prisoners were more likely to find new employment than to return to their previous job. In line with human capital theory and previous work (e.g., Finn & Fontaine, 1983), these higher skilled prisoners seem better equipped to overcome the stigma that is associated with a prison spell than their lower educated co-prisoners. A longer prison spell seems to put an additional strain on the existing work relationship as long-term prisoners were more likely to find new- or no employment than to return to their pre-prison job. Job return is more likely to occur (than new employment) when national unemployment rates are higher at time of release. Possibly, ex-prisoners put more effort in returning to their previous employer during tough economic times. In contrast to our expectation, the type of employment industry did not affect the post-release employment status. A potential explanation is that our general dichotomous measurement (the pre-prison job entails the handling of money *or* customer interaction) does not adequately capture employers’ perception of the crime risk associated with rehiring offenders. Also, our data did not allow for the examination of the more direct link between the nature of the job and the crime.

While this study contributes to the substantial field of reentry research by providing insight into a successful pathway to re-employment, it also has some limitations that warrant further research. A first essential avenue for future research is to examine the reasons why jobs were disrupted by interviewing both employers and ex-prisoners. The vast majority of pre-prison employers were informed by their previous employees about the imprisonment already during the first weeks of detention. It is therefore unlikely that hiring decisions were made without knowledge of the prison record. Still, it remains uncertain whether this record played a decisive role in the decision. Moreover, we do not know whether the crime that led to the incarceration was committed at the workplace and if it legally restricted the prisoner from

returning to his previous job. Another potential reason for job disruption is that prisoners did not want to return. A reason for this reluctance that warrants further research is that this job did not protect them from committing crime(s) prior to imprisonment.

The second limitation concerns the generalization of findings. We used data from the Netherlands, an interesting case study with a relatively mild penal climate, restricted access to criminal history records and a generous social welfare regime. It is therefore a matter of speculation whether we would find similar results using data of other Western countries. Yet, especially countries in Northern Europe resemble the Netherlands in their policies and practices, and this could mean that our findings might apply to these countries. We furthermore discussed that the prevalence of job return might be lower in the United States because prison spells are longer and laws to protect ex-offenders from labor market discrimination are less stringent, compared to the Netherlands. On the other hand, job return rates might be higher in the United States because American prisoners are less likely to qualify for social benefits. Also, they might be more dependent on previous employers for work, since the open access to criminal background information is likely to deter potential new employers (e.g., Stoll & Bushway, 2008). Comparative research is warranted to examine to what extent our results are country-specific.

To close, it is encouraging that a substantial part of the previous employers is willing to rehire ex-prisoners despite knowing about their record. This finding motivates policy measures that help facilitate job return (e.g., help prisoners maintain employment relationships during imprisonment, offer financial incentives to employers). On a more general note, knowledge about the employability of released prisoners could help to ease both former- and new employers' concerns about hiring ex-offenders and as such improve the employment chances of those with and without recent work experience.

*Appendix 5.A Data collection Prison Project*

A total of 2,945 prisoners entered pretrial detention between the research period and met our general selection criteria. No less than 95 percent of these men were successfully approached at P1 and 65 percent of the total sample agreed to participate in the first wave, resulting in a sample of 1,909 prisoners. This sample was generally representative of all prisoners that met the selection criteria in terms of age, marital status, receiving an unconditional prison sentence for the index offense and committing a violent crime (as index offense). Participants and non-participants differ slightly in age of onset (18.9 vs. 17.4), being employed before imprisonment (45.7% vs. 38.7%) and duration of actual time served (5.1 vs. 4.1 months). In addition, a comparison of criminal history measures revealed that participants have a somewhat less extensive criminal history than nonparticipants (on average: 3.4 vs. 5.0 previous spells; 7.7 vs. 9.8 previous convictions). The R1-sample comprises 842 ex-prisoners who participated in P1 and had been released for a minimum of six months when they were reinterviewed (up to January 2013). Some ex-prisoners refused permission to be approached in follow-up waves ( $n = 43$ ). As expected, the particular lifestyle of the sample made it difficult to contact the ex-prisoners who were eligible for participation in the R1-interview. Still, 52 percent agreed to participate in the R1-interview. This led to an overall response rate of approximately 34 percent ( $0.65 \times 0.52$ ). Importantly, difference tests showed comparability between the R1- and P1-samples across a wide range of baseline covariates (e.g., marital status, parenthood, educational level, homelessness, index offense, number of previous convictions, time served) including the selection variable in this study: employed before imprisonment. Yet, some caution is advised when generalizing the results from the R1-sample to the larger sample of P1-participants.

*Appendix 5.B Descriptive statistics pre-prison and post-prison covariates (n = 225)*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
<i>Pre-prison covariates</i>					
Medium/higher educated	225	0.00	1.00	0.42	0.50
Proportion of time unemployed since finishing school	223	0.00	1.00	0.14	0.24
Skill accumulation in prison	225	0.00	1.00	0.29	0.45
Comitted violent crime	218	0.00	1.00	0.50	0.50
Imprisonment length (days)	225	14.00	538.00	157.95	129.72
Work motivation <sup>a</sup>	210	1.89	4.89	3.64	0.49
Job satisfaction <sup>a</sup>	225	1.55	5.00	3.76	0.73
Job duration (months)	202	0.20	398.23	43.77	69.64
Occupational level <sup>b</sup>	193	1.00	5.00	2.23	0.76
Industry of employment	220	1.00	10.00	4.49	2.67
Industry with money/customer contact	220	0.00	1.00	0.34	0.47
Partner at time of arrest	225	0.00	1.00	0.48	0.50
Children	225	0.00	1.00	0.32	0.47
Age at arrest	225	18.00	64.00	28.62	10.59
Non-ethnic Dutch	225	0.00	1.00	0.41	0.49
Permanent contract	225	0.00	1.00	0.60	0.49
Employer knew about imprisonment	225	0.00	1.00	0.83	0.38
Age of first arrest	224	11.74	64.15	20.56	9.41
Number of previous convictions	224	0.00	39.00	4.73	5.91
Previous prison spell	225	0.00	1.00	0.41	0.49
National unemployment rate at time of release (*10)	225	47.00	62.00	51.24	3.42
<i>Post-prison covariates</i>					
Employed	225	0.00	1.00	0.55	0.50
Job return	225	0.00	1.00	0.19	0.39
Earnings	116	60.00	5,600.00	1,622.71	970.75
Fulltime employment	115	0.00	1.00	0.71	0.45
Permanent contract	104	0.00	1.00	0.63	0.49
Occupational level <sup>b</sup>	114	1.00	5.00	2.17	0.72
Job satisfaction <sup>a</sup>	117	1.27	5.00	3.73	0.72

<sup>a</sup> Average score on several items, ranging from 1= totally disagree to 5=totally agree.

<sup>b</sup> Five occupational levels: 1=elementary level, 2=low level, 3=medium level, 4=higher level, 5=scientific level.

