

Understanding the effects of carceral employment programs in Canada:
Exploring the perspectives of former federal prisoners

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to understand how former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their reintegration into the labour market upon release. Following a social constructivist approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen men living in Ottawa, Canada, who had participated in employment programs while incarcerated in Canadian federal prisons. Content analysis of the transcribed interviews showed that participation in work programs was perceived as beneficial for reintegration into the labour market if the individual received a provincially-recognized trade certificate, could count hours worked in prison towards an apprenticeship, or if engaged in a field of work that matched their aspirations in terms of future employment plans. Most participants noted additional advantages for engaging in work activities in prison, such as the use of work as a strategy to cope with feelings of idleness and estrangement from society while incarcerated. Participants who did not perceive participation as helpful mentioned that returning to the labour market was not desirable or was made difficult by plans to retire, to receive a government pension due to disabilities, mental health conditions experienced during and after prison, the stigma for being a former prisoner as overriding any potential benefit from the program, and parole conditions limiting or preventing the search for jobs in the community.

Future studies investigating reintegration into the labour market upon release and seeking to understand how former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs could focus on individuals who have completed their sentences and are not subjected to parole conditions. This would allow an investigation of the perceptions and experiences of those who are not impeded in seeking employment and have been actively searching for or engaging with employment upon release.

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study was to understand how former prisoners made sense of their experiences with prison jobs in federal corrections in Canada as potentially affecting their lives upon release. In particular, we sought to understand the perceived effects of carceral employment programs on individuals' transitioning into the labour market. Rooted in a constructivist epistemological framework, in which reality is constructed through interactions (Delanty, 2005; Neuman, 2011), the study produced knowledge through semi-structured interviews with male former prisoners who engaged in employment programs in federal prisons. Their accounts of experiences with carceral employment programs and with life upon returning to the community were the main source of data used to answer the research question, which asks: *In what ways do former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their reintegration into the labour market upon release?*

The first chapter of this thesis presents documented challenges faced by the prison population and the evolving rationales for using incarceration and prison labour in Canada. Main findings from research and evaluation studies conducted by the Canadian correctional system (Correctional Services Canada) on carceral employment programs are also discussed.

The second chapter of this thesis presents the theoretical framework and research assumptions regarding what social reality is and how it can be known. The research objectives are also presented, namely to understand and to evaluate the perceived effects of participation in carceral employment programs in individuals' reintegration into the labour market. Next, the methodological approach is presented, including how the study was designed, sampling procedure, as well as procedures carried out for collecting data and analyses (Chapter 3).

The fourth chapter of this thesis presents the findings resulting from the data analysis process. Four main themes emerged from the analysis: work-related aspirations in the community after prison; employment experiences inside and outside prison; perceptions of the carceral employment program; and the perceived influence that this experience might have had in attempts to find jobs in the community. Quotes from participants were included to expose their own formulations when making sense of and reconstructing their experiences.

Next, the findings are discussed with relation to the broader literature (Chapter 5). Limitations in achieving the secondary research objective, that of evaluating how employment programs in prison affected participants in trying to find jobs in the community, are also discussed. Lastly, limitations of the research strategy are discussed.

Finally, the thesis concludes by identifying the main issues found regarding former prisoners' experiences with employment programs and in the community, and areas for future research are identified. In sum, participants who perceived their experiences with carceral work programs as valuable for finding jobs in the community were those who had something tangible to use upon release (e.g. trade certifications, hours counted toward an apprenticeship), or if they worked in a field they considered meaningful considering their own aspirations. Besides the potential impact upon release, the majority of participants used prison work as form to alleviate tensions associated with the experience of being imprisoned. Prison work may therefore be beneficial for individuals in terms of serving as a coping mechanism and for maintaining a sense of belonging as a contributing member of society (Hunter & Boyce, 2009; Silva & Saraiva, 2016), regardless of post-release transition into the labour market.

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM DEFINITION

Participation in the labour market has long been seen as an important factor to foster solidarity and a sense of belonging among society members (Fenton et al., 1984; Western, 2007). More specifically, it is argued that the social influence of employment upon individuals lies in the fact that social attachments are formed and encouraged within occupational spheres, so labour ideally performs a ‘solidarity’ function in the modern social order (Fenton et al., 1984).

Many former prisoners face barriers when trying to enter or return to the labour market (Hunter and Boyce, 2009). Some of the difficulties to find employment for this group are related to having limited educational background (Greenberg et al., 2007; Hunter & Boyce, 2009; Richmond, 2014; Waldron, 1975), a prevalence of learning disabilities (Zabel & Nigro, 2007), contextual factors leading to instability immediately after release, prospective employers’ attitudes toward this group (Hunter and Boyce, 2009), and ultimately to laws prohibiting the employment of a convicted individual in specific careers (Bushway et. al, 2007). Added to that, the prison population has a considerable incidence rate of mental health challenges (e.g., chronic self-injury, history of mental and physical abuse, suicidal acts, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder) (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013; Ricciardelli et al., 2014), and is largely identified as coming from poor, employment deficient neighborhoods (Western, 2007), contributing to their vulnerability.

Upon the end of their incarceration, immediate contextual factors faced by former prisoners such as homelessness and unstable housing (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2006) can have a negative impact on their employability. The challenge is not only the lack of stability that secure and stable housing provide in order to maintain a work routine, but there are also difficulties in being hired without having a fixed address to provide to the employer.

Further, the stigma attached to this group leads to a resistance from employers to hire former prisoners (Hunter & Boyce, 2009; Western, 2007). For example, employers may resist hiring these individuals for fearing potential risks to other staff and customers, due to potential bad publicity, or for perceiving them as unreliable or unable to work hard (Hunter and Boyce, 2009). In this sense, former prisoners face barriers particularly if attempting to enter positions which require a higher level of trust between the employee and the organization. Thus, many resort to temporary positions, low wage jobs, and positions with limited prospects for occupational promotions (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013; Hunter & Boyce, 2009; Western, 2007).

In light of the relevance of stable employment for the reintegration of former prisoners into the community and realizing the barriers many of them will most likely find when trying to accomplish that, governments have allegedly focused on designing policies and implementing programs that aim to increase the employability prospects of such individuals upon release. In Canada, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, from 1992, provides a legislative framework within which Correctional Service Canada (CSC) operates. As defined in the Act, the purpose of CSC is to “contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society”, by (1) “carrying out sentences imposed by courts (...)” and (2) “assisting the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community” (*Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, section 3).

Among the programs available to federal prisoners, the most frequently offered cover topics like substance abuse, anger management, family violence, and particular challenges faced by specific populations, such as women, Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit), and sex offender prisoners. Throughout the 2013-14 fiscal year, 6,523 federal prisoners (or around 45%

of the average in custody in that fiscal year) were enrolled in such programs, with an average successful completion percentage of 78% (OAG, 2015). Measuring successful program completion is relevant for it indicates the proportion of participants that are expected to receive all the benefits and planned results from completing the program.

In addition to correctional programs targeting specific populations, there are others that aim to address prisoners' educational and employment needs, by providing GED courses (High School equivalency) and employment and employability programs, including certified vocational training, and actual employment experience inside correctional institutions (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a; Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014). In the 2013-14 fiscal year, a total of 15,652 prisoners were enrolled in either employment (4,218, roughly 29% of the prison population) or education programs (11,434, roughly 79% of the prison population)¹. For these, CSC does not have a measure for successful completion, as is the case for the other types of correctional programs (OAG, 2015).

Federal prisoners in Canada who are assigned to work may be doing either 'institutional work' – contributing to corrections maintenance and operations – or working for CORCAN (a Special Operating Agency within CSC that is mandated to offer employment and employability programs to prisoners) (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a). CORCAN can be situated in the context of prison industries, encompassing both employment experience and "on the job" training for prisoners (Richmond, 2014). Among the male prison population in the Canadian federal criminal justice system as of April 15, 2012 (13,876 individuals), 62% were assigned to work – 12% assigned to CORCAN (1,648 individuals) and 50% assigned to institutional

¹ The calculated percentages of prisoners enrolled in employment and education programs are based on the average number of males in custody in penitentiaries in the 2013-14 fiscal year (14,550), as published by the OAG Report, 2015. The total number of those enrolled in either employment or education programs (15,652) is higher because some individuals participate in both education and employment programs.

employment (6,880 individuals) (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a). With regard to vocational training and certification, federal prisoners participating in employment programs can be enrolled and receive a certification in trades such as construction, food industry and food safety, cleaning and maintenance, horticulture, textile, among other fields (CSC, 2013b).

To better contextualize the prison population in terms of their experiences in carceral employment programs and the challenges faced when transitioning back into the community, the following section discusses additional challenges that the prison population faces.

1.1 Recurrent challenges experienced by the prison population

The numerous challenges faced by those who experience incarceration are well documented in the literature. The most prominent factors that can hinder their attempts to a successful transition back into the community are related to the levels of formal education, mental health issues, ethnicity and overall socio-economic status.

Socio-economic status, which is commonly measured by one's economic achievements, is argued to serve as either an "insulator against or another contributing factor to contact with the criminal justice system in the form of arrest or sentencing" (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p.28). In fact, it has been argued that the poor are more likely to be arrested, charged, convicted, and sentenced to prison for the same act than members of the middle and upper classes (Saleh-Hanna, 2008). Research shows that many individuals released from prison come from economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and are not likely to return to families who can support them (Clear, 2007).

While there are various aspects that might intersect with one's economic status, contributing to further marginalization and eventual contact with the criminal justice system

(Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014), low educational attainment and employment history are often highlighted in the literature as the main challenges. It has been found that approximately 70% of individuals entering Canadian federal prisons have not completed high school (Scott & Gillis, 2011) and similarly, almost two-thirds of prisoners and former prisoners dropped out of high school in the US (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013). Further, in 2001, it has been found that 19% of the adult state prison population in the US were completely illiterate and 40% functionally illiterate, compared to 4% and 21% respectively for the general population (Petersilia, 2003).

When looking at the employment history of the prison population, research has found that almost 60% of a sample of incarcerated men in Canada were unemployed at the moment of their arrest (Waller, 1974). When asked what their main concerns were at the moment of release from prison, ‘finding employment’ was the most cited issue of concern by prisoners (p.68). In the US, an analysis of a self-reported survey conducted in 1997 indicated that almost one-third of both federal and state prisoners were unemployed in the month prior to their arrest (Petersilia, 2003).

Mental health is also an aspect of concern for the prison population. A 2001 study in the US found that prisoners are overall less healthy – both physically and mentally – than the population that do not experience incarceration. Conditions compared in the study include learning abilities, speech, mental, and any condition that limits the ability to work (Petersilia, 2003). Some of the reasons for the high prevalence of prisoners with some form of mental illness include the fact that if an individual stop taking a given medication, symptoms of the mental illness may return and trigger situations in which the person is more likely to be in contact with law enforcement (Petersilia, 2003). This situation might have become more common since the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill in the US in 1963, with the enactment of the *Community Mental Health Centres Act* (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013). Also, substance abuse is known to

intersect with mental health issues amongst prisoners and the former prisoner population (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013). In Canada, research indicates that 35% of federal prisoners require treatment for a mental health need. At the moment of incarceration, 13% of males and 29% of women were assessed as having mental health issues (Sapers, 2012).

Those who experience incarceration are more likely to suffer from low educational achievement, unstable employment history, mental health distress, and a low socio-economic status, which can have consequences in terms of increasing the barriers that an individual with a criminal record will find when trying to find jobs in the community. In order to explore how former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their reintegration into the labour market upon release, the following subsection presents the trends observed in the changing reasoning for the activities held by the Canadian correctional system since the early 19th century. More specifically, I discuss the different rationales used for implementing interventions such as employability programs. Following that, I outline the carceral employment programs that exist in Canada and review the main findings from government-led research and evaluation studies conducted on employment programs.

1.2 Canadian corrections' rationales and the use of prisoner labour

The contemporary carceral system in Canada has made increasing use of notions of risk, including risk assessment and risk management in its operations and reports (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014). This 'risk' perspective can be observed in how correctional programs are planned, implemented, and evaluated, both for in-prison programs and for programs offered in the community. For instance, CSC provides the Parole Board of Canada with each prisoner's assessed risk to reoffend in the community before they can be considered for parole. Because

the philosophy of a carceral system in a given period is often embedded in broader social, political, and economic issues, the way corrections' treats prisoners and the types of activities and programs offered to them also varies (Ricciardelli et al., 2014). On that note, the following section discusses the evolving rationales or perspectives on the roles of prison, transitioning from the ideal of 'transforming' individuals (19th century) to the notions of 'new-managerialism' and risk in the 21st century.

Inception of penitentiaries in Canada: aim to 'transform'

In June of 1835, the first Canadian penitentiary was built in the city of Kingston, Southeast region of Ontario, named the Provincial Penitentiary of Upper Canada. Its inception can be understood as the result of both local and international influences. Deficiencies in local jails to properly house convicted individuals and those awaiting trial were increasingly denounced, particularly due to overcrowding. This was a period marked by the growth of towns that experienced rising incidences of violence (Edmison, 1976). The academic context in the United States and Britain, since the end of the 18th century, understood crime as a consequence of community disorder and family disruptions. In these Western countries, the old prison model was being revolutionized by the notion of *penitentiary* houses, directed toward reforming the individual, not just punishing them (Cellard, 2000). Under such local and international influences, the Kingston penitentiary was built in alignment with what is called the classic or conservative perspective on crime and the criminal justice system. It was designed as a government tool to overcome the perceived causes of crime at the time (e.g., laziness and lack of moral values) and to transform individuals through hard labour, commitment to religion, and discipline (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014). Individuals who breached prison regulations could be

tortured through techniques such as flogging and solitary confinement. The inhumane conditions in this penitentiary building prompted the creation, in 1848, of a Royal Commission to investigate its administration. Known as the Brown Commission², it led the Kingston Penitentiary warden and other prison officials to be dismissed, although it was unable to establish the institutional and cultural changes necessary to eradicate the use of corporal punishment. Practices considered inhumane continued to take place until the 1930s (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014; Ricciardelli et al., 2014).

Since the building of Kingston Penitentiary, operated as a provincial jail for over thirty years, other provincial prisons were constructed in Canada during the 19th century, such as in Saint John (1841) and Nova Scotia (1844). By the time of Confederation, they would begin serving the federal jurisdiction (Ricciardelli et al., 2014).

The judicial division between federal and provincial correctional systems

The *Constitution Act*, 1867, which established the union of provinces into one federal dominion – the Government of Canada – also shaped the country’s justice system. From that year on, the Canadian criminal justice system was divided in two jurisdictions: the federal government, and the provincial or territorial correctional authorities. The distinction was based primarily on sentence lengths handed down by the court to the accused. Adult individuals sentenced to two years or more of incarceration would be a responsibility of the federal system, while those sentenced to less than two years, youth, those on remand (awaiting trial or sentencing), or those serving non-custodial sentences (e.g. probation or community services) would fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014; Ricciardelli et al.,

² The Commission is referred to as the “Brown Commission” or “Brown Report” due to its dominating member being the secretary of the Legislative Council and editor of the ‘Toronto Globe’, George Brown, who was later one of the Fathers of the Confederation (McGrath, 1976:355).

2014). This make-up of the Canadian correctional system contributes to fundamental differences between the federal and provincial systems in terms of the services offered to prisoners and the availability and depth of the support system provided when they are released from incarceration (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2006).

In addition to the three existing provincial prisons in Kingston, Saint John, and Halifax, newly constructed penitentiaries in Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia, and New Brunswick would also come to serve the federal correctional system (Edmison, 1976; Ricciardelli et al., 2014). Even though it was clear that the administration and monitoring of prisons across the country was growing to be more structured and consistent in its practices, and that there was an increased drive to provide the necessary services for prisoners, prison conditions continued to deteriorate with scarce funding, serving more as instruments of punishment than rehabilitation (Ricciardelli et al., 2014).

The emphasis on 'rehabilitation'

During the 20th century, events can be seen as strengthening the movement away from the punitive approach taken to that point in Canadian corrections. For example, the *Penitentiary Act*, 1906, aimed to address the perceived need to house separately youthful prisoners and those with mental disorders from the general prison population (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014). Later, in the early 1920s, the Department of Justice appointed a Committee which fostered changes regarding the living conditions of prisoners, such as the mandatory monetary compensation for their work performed inside corrections, being allowed more time outside their cells, and the improvement of conditions of libraries and educational materials (Ricciardelli et al., 2014). More importantly, in 1938 the Archambault Royal Commission of Inquiry concluded that the goal of prisons was

not only to protect society, but also to *rehabilitate* prisoners, stressing the need to expand and develop vocational and educational training programs (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014). Particularly after World War II, the Canadian federal prison system began to implement and offer vocational training, education and therapeutic interventions for prisoners, demonstrating the apparent start of a movement toward a treatment-based model of corrections. The medical model of corrections, as the approach became known, was most prominent during the 1960s, when the country expanded the number of small minimum and medium security prisons with the intent of better addressing prisoners' needs (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014). In 1958, the first full time psychiatrist working in a penitentiary was appointed in Canada and by the early 1970s the country had three regional psychiatric facilities (Ricciardelli et al., 2014).

Traditionally, the modern project of rehabilitation aimed not only to offer the prisoner a better chance of succeeding in society, but also to bring about 'social goods' (e.g., employability and reducing re-offending). Rehabilitation was perceived as a "productive investment", both for the individual (e.g., increased employability) and society (e.g., reducing re-offending) (Robinson, 2008, p.430). The first crisis with the rehabilitation perspective for prisons came with the realization that they were not delivering reduced recidivism rates. Facing the 'nothing works' framework that emerged at the end of 1970s and into the 1980s, the rehabilitation project turned to emphasizing its welfare ideals, such as that of guaranteeing prisoners' rights upon returning to the community (Robinson, 2008). This distancing away from rehabilitation can be partly attributed to Martinson's research in 1974. Upon reviewing a comprehensive number of rehabilitation programs, the author stated that 'nothing works' in terms of prisoners' treatment (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013).

By the 1990s, the political climate was such that the public's attention was directed towards protecting victims rather than prisoners' rights. In this context, new forms of rehabilitative interventions were developed, focusing particularly on cognitive-behavioural principles and methods. The ideal of rehabilitation was transformed from being grounded on a welfarist rationale to a utilitarian one, where the main beneficiaries would be potential victims and the communities (Robinson, 2008). As an indication of such transformation in the rehabilitation ideal, there was a decline in the availability of mental health services to the US prison population in adult correctional facilities between the years of 1988 and 2000 (Milkman and Wanberg, 2007).

The Rise of Sociology in the 1960s: New lenses for criminological problems

Correctional changes in the 1960s coincided with an important shift in the theoretical approaches used to investigate criminological problems. Specifically, there was a movement away from the fields of biology, social work and psychology, and a greater emphasis on sociological approaches. In addition, research on correctional programs and their impact began to flourish in Canada, as criminology emerged as a new discipline (Mohr, 1976). With the impact of social work research on criminological problems, the academic focus was to identify and support the delivering of adequate help and treatment to the given population. In this sense, it was believed that prisoners' recidivism rates would decrease if one increased the amount of services and treatment offered. Later, with the introduction of sociology as a new epistemological locus for research in criminology, it is argued that the interest in "linking correctional problems to problems in the community" gained strength (Mohr, 1976, p. 557). This would potentially impact the types of rehabilitative programs or treatments developed for

prisoners in the country, including job readiness programs and gradual reintegration into society. In this train of thought, prison work, first conceptualized as a form of punishment under the goal of retribution, was gradually transformed by practitioners into a treatment and rehabilitation tool, demonstrating how the same phenomenon can be interpreted differently depending on the dominant philosophy of the time.

‘Tough on crime’ policies: populist punitiveness

Despite evidence of the inefficacy of the use of incarceration to deter or reform individuals, North America and Britain have witnessed an increasing use of imprisonment and ‘tough on crime’ policies since the 1970s. One can argue that ‘tough on crime’ policies took longer to appear in Canada. During the 1970s, Canadians saw the establishment of the Office of the Correctional Investigator – giving voice to prisoners’ problems – among other instruments for public accountability, and also the extinction of the death penalty in the country (Ricciardelli et al., 2014). Further, the passage of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (CCRA) in 1992 ensured that the federal system provided adequate programming to assist in prisoners and former prisoners’ rehabilitation and reintegration into the community (Corrections and Conditional Release Act, section 3). In fact, Canada displayed a more balanced and liberal set of values compared to the United States and England, valuing the rehabilitation of prisoners, making less use of mandatory minimum sentences, and experiencing a decrease in incarceration rates of approximately 10% since the mid-1990s (Matthews, 2009).

In the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century however, Canadians witnessed legislative changes that indicate a shift in correctional philosophy similar to that which was already happening in the United States. An important indicator is the passing of legislative

amendments in *Bill C-10, Safe Streets and Communities Act*, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, in September 2011, under a Conservative Party government. The Act led to increased sentence lengths and mandatory minimum sentencing practices, as well as more restrictions for the application of conditional sentences (i.e., sentences served in the community) (Matthews, 2009; Ricciardelli et al., 2014).

This harsher approach to crime in the Canadian criminal justice system indicates a turn to what some designate ‘penal populism’ or ‘populist punitiveness’, when politicians, the media, and the general public display more punitive responses to crime, creating a demand for harsher sentences (Matthews, 2009). The process of mass incarceration, however, cannot be confirmed as occurring in Canada – even though it did lead to an increased number of individuals being held on remand (i.e., awaiting trial or sentencing) under the provincial system (Deshman & Myers, 2014; Gaetz & O’Grady, 2006). Concerning individuals convicted and incarcerated, if one analyses the period from 2004 to 2015, it is observable that incarceration rates of adults in federal custody on an average day varied from approximately 50 per 100,000 adults in the 2004-05 fiscal year, to a rate of 53 per 100,000 in the 2014-15 fiscal year. For this 11-year period, incarceration rates for adults under custody in federal prisons in Canada demonstrate a notable stability (Statistics Canada, 2015), which indicates that the country was able to contain or limit some forms of punitive expression (Doob & Webster, 2006).

‘New managerialism’ in Canadian corrections

Even though the harsher approach to sentencing may not have contributed to a steep increase in incarceration rates, it impacted other aspects of the criminal justice system. The use of longer sentences, harsher mandatory minimum sentences, and the building of barriers to

community sentences and conditional release that Canada is currently experiencing is in congruence with the not so new trend in correctional management of ‘new-managerialism’ or ‘New Public Management’. New-managerialism in prisons is characterized by the introduction of market principles into how prisons are managed. Administration is typically more concerned with achieving set targets and specific outcomes (e.g., ultimately the reduced risk of recidivism) than with the past goal of retribution through punishment (Matthews, 2009). To achieve the expected targets set by prison administrations, a greater focus is applied on surveillance of former prisoners in the community. Also, prisoners are constantly assessed in terms of the potential effects of participating in educational, employability, among other correctional programs aimed at reducing their likelihood to recidivate.

This perspective started to develop in the 1970s with the growing skepticism regarding the notion of prevention and the rehabilitation framework. Focusing on protecting the victim and on the “incapacitation of the dangerous” (Simon, 2005), the practice of actuarial and probabilistic risk assessments, as observed in more recent times, accommodated the need for accountability and replicability across institutions (Dolan & Doyle, 2000).

In most cases, educational and employment programs are not the sole approach used for reducing recidivism. Considering the number of complex situations in an individual’s life that are related to a given state of incarceration, it will not be solely the lack of a good employment history or a low educational background that are the main targets to reduce offending behaviour. The target is more complex and is the result of a “developed pattern of adaptation [by the individual], sometimes expressive of a whole philosophy of life” (Mohr, 1976, p. 491).

Summary

Federal corrections in Canada have been scrutinized since the beginning of the 20th century in terms of how prisoners are treated and which forms of interventions are seen as helpful in reducing their chances of recidivism. Prison labour has historically been a common prison activity, but the regulations and the reasoning attached to it have changed. The current attention to managing prisons in an efficient and effective way could be impacting how prison labour is implemented, how criminal justice system's targets are measured, and ultimately how prisoners experience it.

In light of the challenges faced by Canadian carceral programs in effecting change in former prisoners' life choices after custody, the following section discusses the development of the use of prison labour and the implementation of employment programs inside prisons.

1.3 Carceral employment programs in Canada

Prison work was performed by Canadian prisoners since the inception of penitentiaries in the country. Historical accounts on the experiences of prisoners by the end of the 19th century indicate that the products and goods produced inside penitentiaries were, however, soon seen as an unjust competition toward employers and labourers in the community, and thus prison work was limited to daunting activities, such as breaking rocks (Cellard, 2000). Provincial jails in Ontario, known as 'common gaols', were apparently in tune with the notion of using work as a rehabilitative tool for individuals lacking "habits of industriousness, self-discipline and (...) a trade", as well as a way to reduce the costs of imprisonment. This was especially the case of the Central Prison³ in Toronto's Parkdale neighbourhood, built in 1874 (Wetherell, 1979). However,

³ In the provincial Central Prison at the end of the 19th century, prison labour took the form of what is currently performed through CORCAN in the federal correctional system. At this jail in Toronto, businesses in the community were able to rent prisoners' labour per day, building shops inside the prison property so prisoners could work (Wetherell, 1979: 152-3).

by the 1880s, the use of prison labour in provincial jails in Ontario was already being pushed toward trades and occupations that would interfere as little as possible with those of free workers in the community. The fear that prison labour would remove opportunities from businesses in the community was significant, to the point that legislative proposals were issued to limit its use (Wetherell, 1979).

Public reactions perceiving prison labour as an unfair market competitor are rooted on a principle known as ‘less eligibility’. This principle maintains that living conditions of those in prison must be below the minimum living conditions of those living outside prison (Sieh, 1989). This principle is argued to have influenced the design and implementation of carceral programs, being also aligned with the logic of punishment. In this sense, the living conditions offered to prisoners, including the forms of work imposed on them, should reflect some form of punishment when compared to practices one would engage with in the community (Sieh, 1989).

Recognizing existing issues: Early 20th century

In the early 1920s, the Biggar-Nickle-Draper Committee was appointed by the Minister of Justice to review and make reform recommendations regarding the *Penitentiary Act* and its *Regulations*. As a result, mandatory payment for prison work was advised, as well as the provision of meaningful instruction and labour (Hannah-Moffat, 2001). It is argued that it was only by 1938, in the event of the Archambault Royal Commission of Inquiry, that the federal correctional system began to conceptualize and attempt to implement labour as a central tool for the reintegration of former prisoners. The focus on training, education, and other programming opportunities was apparently a response to persistent overcrowding issues reported in Canadian prisons during the Depression years of 1930s (Ricciardelli et al., 2014). However, in face of the

outbreak of the Second World War, few recommendations made at the Archambault Commission report were ever implemented. During that period, instead, prison labour began focusing on growing vegetables to feed the armed forces, as well as on manufacturing necessary articles to meet their needs (Correctional Service Canada, 2014).

Starting to implement recommended changes: second half of the 20th century

Among the subsequent commissions of inquiry on identified problems within Canadian federal prisons, the 1953 Fauteux Commission was the most significant in terms of bringing about changes to corrections. More than a hundred of the recommendations in the Fauteux report – which duplicated many of those included in the previous Archambault report – were implemented by the correctional service Commissioner (Cellard, 2000; Correctional Service Canada, 2014; Ricciardelli et al., 2014). Parallel to that, an organization of volunteers working to assist former prisoners with regards to housing, clothing, and employment started in many Canadian provinces, mainly between the years of 1946 and 1960; the John Howard Society Ontario office was established in 1946 (The John Howard Society of Canada, n.d.).

The focus on rehabilitation through work opportunities in federal corrections in Canada became evident during the 1960s. In 1962, Collins Bay Institution opened in Kingston, Ontario. It housed the first gradual release program, where prisoners could go outside the penitentiary to work during the day and return to the facility in the evening. By 1969, prisoners were more commonly allowed to be in the community during the day for educational, volunteering, and work purposes under what is now known as ‘day parole’ (Correctional Service Canada, 2014).

As part of the Ouimet Commission of Inquiry (1969), members of the Commission visited several federal penitentiaries across the country and sent questionnaires to all of them in

order to assess prison work programs. It was observed that Canadian prison industries were, at that time, restricted to the use of old methods of production and machinery, limiting the potential of duplicating working conditions that prisoners could have had in the market. The reasons for such conditions identified would be the restrictions for prison goods to compete in the open market, as well as to allow the highest number possible of prisoners to work in the prison shops. In the report, the commission members make a few recommendations to improve prison labour. One recommendation points to the need of implementing modern methods of production, so to achieve the intended benefits of work programs. The authors also recommended seeking other clients besides government departments (Canadian Committee on Corrections, 1969). Further recommendations included adopting a payment system for prisoners. By 1969, the recommended payment system for prisoners originally proposed by the Biggar-Nickle-Draper Commission (1921) was still not implemented. The Ouimet Commission (1969) advised that every prisoner who participates in meaningful activities – being education, therapeutic sessions, or any form of work – should be allowed to receive at least a basic wage. To stimulate those willing to learn a trade or to improve their education, a remuneration scale would allow those to receive higher pay rates (Canadian Committee on Corrections, 1969).

New managerialism and rehabilitation: the inception of CORCAN

Since 1976, Canadian corrections has had a new management path distinguished by the need for public accountability over its services. Prison work programs would have to meet provincial standards for professional trade certification, with the assumption that these would support prisoners in finding employment upon release (Correctional Service Canada, 2007). In this context, considering the perceived benefits for transitioning prisoners to the labour market

and realizing the challenges for sustaining sufficient funds to adequately implement employability programs in corrections, CORCAN was created in 1977 (Correctional Service Canada, 2003). It was only in 1992 that CORCAN became a Special Operating Agency, which was believed to result in a number of benefits, such as a more transparent access to costs, “more businesslike financial management, an easier means of embarking on joint ventures with private sector firms, a better ability to respond to market needs and demands, and developing offender skills closer to private-sector standards” (Correctional Service Canada, 2013b).

By the mid-1990s, CORCAN experienced a shift in its programming focus, moving from strictly offering job participation, to adding activities that should improve generic employability skills (Gillis & Muirhead, 2004). This logic implies that work experience inside prisons is not only useful to generate revenue for the program or to provide prisoners with work experience. It would also provide an opportunity for the prisoner to develop positive work habits and personal management that could potentially be transferred to employment activities in the community upon release – contributing to the CSC’s missions (Gillis et al., 1998).

CORCAN production shops, also referred to as ‘prison industries’ in the literature (Richmond, 2014, p. 232), were present in 31 of 52 CSC’s institutions, as of 2014. In terms of main available activities, besides working in CORCAN shops, prisoners can participate in vocational training, receive trade certifications, enhance generic employment skills through the National Employability Skills Program, and work in maintenance-oriented positions within the correctional institution (Nolan et al., 2014). Employment and employability programs’ administration relies not only on the Assistant Commissioner, Correctional Operations and Programs (at the national level of management), but also on regional and, ultimately, institutional

staff, who are responsible for its implementation, delivery, and monitoring (Correctional Service Canada, 2015).

Regulating carceral employment programs in federal corrections

Until May 2017, there was no policy – or Commissioner Directive (CD) – specific to employment programs for incarcerated individuals in the federal system. Commissioner’s Directive on Correctional Programs (CD 726) created in June 2015, designated responsibilities and procedures for staff at all levels (federal, regional, and institutional) dealing with varied correctional programs at CSC, which included employment programs. Under the CD 726, three documents with more specific procedures were developed: Standards (CD-726-1), Referral Guidelines (CD-726-2), and Management guidelines (CD-726-3). Also, the Commissioner’s Directive on Education Programs and Services for Offenders (CD 720, from 2007), paragraphs 25 to 29, set the goals for vocational education programs, the conditions for assigning vocational courses or third party certifications, and ‘custom work’ regulations reliance on Treasury Board Secretariat’s Values and Ethics Code (Correctional Service Canada, 2007).

In May 2017, the first policy piece in Canada dedicated to carceral employment programs came into place: the Commissioner’s Directive on the Employment and Employability Program (CD 735). Its development was supported by the results of an internal audit conducted by CSC in 2013, which recommended the completion of a policy on employment programs in order to address, among other issues, the then missing common vision and strategic objectives for the program (CSC, 2013a).

The overarching employment programs in Canadian federal corrections today

The two main employment programs for federal prisoners in Canada are the Employment and Employability Program (EEP) and the National Employability Skills Program (NESP) (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a). The availability of these programs varies by region and correctional facility, since each facility assesses and decides whether to implement programs considering their particular resources and priorities.

The Employment and Employability Program (EEP) is implemented and delivered by CORCAN, established in 1992 as a SOA (Special Operating Agency) with the responsibility for all work-related employment within CSC (Correctional Service Canada, 2003). The purpose of the EEP is to “enhance the job readiness of every offender”, doing so by aiming to develop employability skills that could improve prisoners’ capacity to find and retain employment once their sentence of incarceration finishes. The working hypothesis behind the EEP is that the goal of increasing job readiness is achieved mainly through two sets of activities: work experience in the institution, and basic employability skills courses. To better address the needs of each individual, EEP sets intake assessments designed to guide the application of the program to each prisoner⁴ (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a, p. 14).

Alternatively, since 2006, incarcerated individuals can be assigned by their correctional case management team to the National Employability Skills Program (NESP), which is a component of the EEP. This program is coordinated and funded by CORCAN, and its delivery is a shared responsibility between CORCAN and CSC’s Reintegration Programs sector. An internal audit on CSC’s employment programs identified that correctional facilities also assisted to fund NESP activities implemented in their institutions (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a). This program provides employability skills training to incarcerated individuals with identified employment needs. While doing the skills training, they must also be assigned to an institutional

⁴ See [Appendix 1](#) for a visual description (Logic Model) of EEP’s activities, activities, outputs and outcomes.

work or educational program, which would contribute to the program's main goal of improving prisoners' employability skills, attitudes, and behaviours toward work. Employability skills training activities consist of 30 to 37.5 hours distributed through 15 sessions of classes with approximately 10 participants, and over 100 exercises that need to be completed during the sessions or on the participant's own time (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a).

The work performed by prisoners in CORCAN shops is believed to improve not only job specific skills, for example welding, but also generic employability skills, such as problem solving, communication, and team work. In this sense, work supervisors take on the function to serve as professional role models for prisoners. Workers should be able to observe the supervisor's behaviours and to transpose it to their own work practices inside corrections, internalizing the job ethics learned and applying other behavioural skills taught in adjacent correctional programs (Correctional Service Canada, 2013b). Within this perspective, both institutional jobs and CORCAN jobs have the potential to benefit participants by providing transferable skills that could assist them to retain employment in the community and, ultimately, have a successful return to their communities.

In the past few decades, studies exploring the achievements or evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of carceral employment programs were carried out by the Canadian federal government, more specifically by the Correctional Service Canada. These studies reflect the expanding management framework in public service that aims to increase public accountability over this field of operations. Publicly available in the form of research or evaluation reports, such studies provide a deeper understanding of the state of employment programs implemented in Canadian federal corrections, and inform how programs lead or not to the outcomes observed inside prisons and in the life conditions of former participants. The next

section presents the most significant research findings produced in this context regarding employment and employability programs offered to Canadian federal prisoners.

1.4 Research on Employment and Employability Programs in Canadian federal prisons

The following sub-section provides an overview of research findings produced by the Research Branch at the Correctional Service Canada (CSC). Overall, studies focused either on work benefits to the incarcerated individual or on potential outcomes after the individual's transition back into the community. Next, evaluation reports' main findings on carceral employment programs conducted and published by the Evaluation Branch, CSC, are presented. Gaps and limitations identified are discussed.

1.4.1 Research Findings conducted internally by the federal government

In 1993, the CSC released a research report of a case study conducted over CORCAN activities at Warkworth Institution, located in Campbellford, Ontario. This site was selected because it was the most profitable prison industry across federal penitentiaries in Canada at the time (Getkate, 1993). The report did not specify the methods carried out in the case study but described characteristics of CORCAN activities at Warkworth penitentiary. First, it was noted that prisoners expressed considerable interest in becoming CORCAN employees. Also, there was a significant effort from staff and the CORCAN Operations Manager to maintain the production quality as well as the involvement of employees in all stages of production. Another finding was that CORCAN was very much involved with correctional practices in that institution, for instance, individual case management processes would consider the prisoner work performance observed at a CORCAN shop. It was suggested that the success of this particular CORCAN site

was connected to the type of leadership displayed by CORCAN instructors, which emphasized the advising role and trusting relationships built with employees, and a foundation on team work at the workshops. Findings suggest that more important than the fact of having work experience in prison, the type and quality of such experience while working may have a substantial impact in rehabilitation following release (Getkate, 1993).

In 1996, research examined post-release recidivism of former CORCAN participants in federal penitentiaries (Motiuk & Belcourt, 1996). To that end, a sample of 277 men who participated for at least 6 months in a CORCAN employment program between 1992 and 1994, and who would be available for a 1-year follow-up study in the community were selected to participate. The former CORCAN participants came from 32 federal penitentiaries and were compared considering their type of release (full parole, statutory release, or day parole) and their assessed risk of reoffending (based on the measurement of their probability of re-arrest within three years, using the Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale – Revised). The follow-up period consisted of collecting information on any form of readmission to prison (for technical violation or for commission of a new offense). It was found that participation in a CORCAN program reduced the chance of recidivism more prominently for individuals assessed as low risk (mostly for those released on full parole).

Two years later, in 1998, a study expanded on previous findings, factoring in individual employment status after 6 months of release, as well as an additional year to track participants' potential recidivism (Gillis et al., 1998). With a sample of 99 individuals, this study investigated the impacts of CORCAN participation over community employment status (employed or non-employed) and recidivism. Results suggested that individuals previously assessed as not having

employment needs (as identified through the ‘Community Risk/Needs Management Scale’⁵) were employed following a 6-month period and none were readmitted to prison. In contrast, individuals assessed as having ‘considerable’ employment needs were not employed, and 44% of these were eventually reconvicted for a new offence in the follow-up period. The authors suggest that employment status interacts with recidivism, stressing the relevance of implementing employment related activities, particularly to those assessed with higher employment needs. It was suggested that future research consider using different employment indicators to explain recidivism, such as attitudes and motivation toward work (Gillis et al., 1998).

In response to previous studies, the Correctional Service Canada gradually implemented a training program for CORCAN instructors, aiming to increase their leadership skills, and thus the overall achievements of CORCAN. The impacts of the instructors’ training program on prisoners’ work attitudes and outcomes are presented in a research report released in 2004 (Gillis & Muirhead, 2004). The data was collected via questionnaires applied to both instructors and prisoners, completed before and after instructors’ training which took place in 17 CORCAN sites across Canada. The main finding points to a strong relationship between instructors with a ‘transformational’ type of leadership, and a high level of prisoners’ self-reported job satisfaction. However, the study was not able to confirm that training activities implemented by CSC effectively changed instructors’ leadership orientation. Some of the issues that could have impacted the ability of researchers to assess the effects of training activities were (1) the high attrition rate for participants (only 20% of initial participants got to answer the post-training

⁵ The Community Risk/Needs Management Scale (CRNMS) is a tool developed to assess individuals in terms of varied dynamic factors, such as ‘academic/vocational’, ‘financial management’, ‘companions/significant others’, ‘mental ability’, among others. Each factor can be rated as low, medium, or high needs. Deriving from the CRNMS, the Case Needs Identification and Analysis, assesses seven ‘need’ areas, including employment. This area is assessed by considering aspects such as ‘unstable job history’, ‘unreliability on the job’, ‘difficulty with workload requirements’, and ‘poor interpersonal skills at work’.

questionnaire), and (2) the interruption of the instructors' training program in most of Ontario CORCAN shops while the study was being conducted (Gillis & Muirhead, 2004).

A study investigating community employment outcomes of former prisoners collected information regarding male individuals at two points in time: upon 1 month of release and 6 months of release from Canadian federal prisons (Gillis & Andrews, 2005). Using a multi-methods approach for data collection, the researchers were able to measure personal (e.g. employment history, attitudes), interpersonal (e.g. social support for employment), and broad social factors (unemployment rate), in order to assess their relationship with employment status, quality of employment, and duration of employment (number of weeks). Analyses of the data collected at one-month of release indicated that an individual's intention to find a job, the availability of social support (CORCAN work sites in the community or employment counselling), history of employment prior to incarceration, and unemployment rates, positively correlated with employment outcomes upon release. Upon 6 months after release to the community, measures of intention to find a job, employment history prior to incarceration, perception of employment benefits, and unemployment rates were able to predict employment outcomes. On the other hand, employment training inside corrections was not correlated to employment status or employment quality in the community at one month of release or at 6 months in the community. The authors noted the limitation of not capturing other potential impacts of the program such as improving soft skills, generic skills, among other less evident impacts (Gillis & Andrews, 2005).

As discussed in the previous subsection, one of the identified employment programs implemented by the CSC is the National Employability Skills Program (NESP), with its main goal being to increase prisoners' generic employability skills. In 2005, a study examined the

extent to which the pilot implementation of NESP in Canadian federal corrections was effective in producing the expected outcomes in terms of improving prisoners' skills, attitudes and beliefs related to employment (Latendresse & Cortoni, 2005). Researchers gathered information on 29 men through the Offender Management System database and completed assessment instruments and interviews with participants and instructors. Results suggested that the program had significant positive impacts on participants' post release employment plan, solving issues with colleagues and employers, and on skills considered fundamental to retain or advance in their current employment. Self-assessed improvement of participants' skills before and after the program suggested it was significant to improve communication, management of information, and demonstration of positive attitudes and behaviours. Some of the study's limitations included not having captured community employment outcomes to assess the extent of program impacts.

More recently, researchers aimed to assess the effectiveness of CORCAN by looking at the relationships between CORCAN participation and both institutional (e.g. number of institutional charges and of admission to segregation) and community outcomes (finding employment, retaining it, and recidivism) (Nolan et al., 2014). Three samples were compared, one with CORCAN employment participants only, a second sample with general institutional employment participants, and a third including prisoners who were not employed. Results indicated that CORCAN-employed individuals and those not working had a significantly lower rate of institutional incidents compared to prisoners doing institutional work. Regarding the proportion of the sentence served in prison before any type of release, CORCAN-employed and non-employed participants had significantly shorter incarceration periods before release compared to those working institutional jobs. However, the study could not determine if these differences were due to pre-existing characteristics of individuals in each sample. In terms of

community outcomes, CORCAN participants were better able to find employment after 90 days of release, compared to institution-employed individuals and those not working while in prison, even when controlling for pre-existing differences across the 3 samples. With regards to maintaining employment, the study found no significant differences across the groups. Analysing the impact of working at CORCAN and also receiving a vocational certification, researchers found that those who did both were more likely to find employment than those who worked at CORCAN but did not receive a vocational certification. Looking at information on any revocation on conditional release, the better predictor was whether the individual was employed at the community. In light of such results, the different outcomes observed between those working institutional positions and those working at CORCAN, indicate the need to explore potential challenges faced by individuals that are more likely to engage with institutional jobs, such as assisting in kitchen work, with laundry duties, or maintenance. The challenge of fostering community employment stability among former prisoners continues to be a topic in need of further investigation.

Even though it was found that having a vocational certification modestly increases the chances for prisoners to find employment in the community (Nolan et al., 2014), it was not clear whether the jobs attained were in fields matching the trade of the certification acquired. To explore this issue, the number of prisoners having a congruence, or ‘match’, between vocational certification received and the type of job obtained in the community were examined (Nolan & Power, 2014). Participants included those serving the remainder of their sentences in the community between April 2010 and March 2011, followed until July 2012 or the end of their sentences. All participants had received a vocational certification during their most recent incarceration and had found employment in the community upon release. Information was

collected using CSC's Offender Management System, which categorizes and documents the type of employment acquired by former prisoners in the community. This is done using codes from the National Occupational Classification (NOC), a tool to classify occupations in Canada. The study did not include individuals with certifications in areas that could not be classified under a specific NOC category (e.g. 'managers' and 'professional occupations'), which resulted in a sample of 834 individuals out of 2,114 who obtained a vocational certification.

As an initial description of the population, the researchers observed that those with a vocational certification had a modest advantage on finding employment compared to those with no certification (53% vs. 42% respectively). Examining results for those individuals who received a certification and found employment upon release, 68.5% had a match in the occupational area for these activities. The majority of matches was in the area of 'Trades, Transport, and Equipment Operators and Related' (58.3%), where individuals received a certification in 'Construction Safety', 'Construction Techniques', or a 'Forklift Certification'. For areas other than 'Trades' and 'Sales and Services', the congruence was found to be considerably low, leading the authors to question the usefulness of providing vocational certifications in other areas (Nolan et al., 2014).

Using a different approach from past studies at CSC, a second study conducted in 2014 explored how the quality of community employment impacts former male federal prisoners (Power & Nolan, 2014). To that end, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 10 former federal male prisoners whose current employment in the community was perceived as having a positive impact upon their rehabilitation process in the community. Transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews were content analysed. Results show that 8 out of 10 individuals had worked for CORCAN while in prison, from which 2 had

found it helpful to have CORCAN supervisors as references for community employment. One of those who worked at CORCAN had benefited from having a welding certificate. Less than half of the total (4 individuals) considered working in prison to have prepared them for community employment. For example, one interviewee mentioned that some certifications received in prison are not recognized by some businesses. One benefit mentioned regarding general institutional employment was the opportunity to establish a daily routine. The majority (6 of the 10 individuals) received some form of assistance to find employment once in the community, specifically from the John Howard Society and CSC's Community Employment Services (CES) program. The majority of interviewees (8) reported that their employers in the community knew about their history of incarceration, and only 2 individuals who did not disclose it to employers indicated that it was difficult to keep that information from others. For example, they would use techniques like not allowing themselves to maintain close relationships with colleagues at work.

When exploring the quality of former prisoners' jobs in the community, all 10 interviewees reported positive levels of satisfaction with their managers, which appears to be related to individual positive self-esteem. Nine out of 10 had a good relationship with coworkers, but the majority (7) avoided being friends outside the work environment. Regarding the perceived impacts of employment on recidivism, 9 interviewees reported that it helps to keep them from committing new offences. Also, participants consider that working allows to keep them "busy", to feel well succeeded, and of accomplishing something positive in their lives (Power & Nolan, 2014, p. 17).

1.4.2 Evaluation Findings conducted internally by the federal government

The first internal evaluation of CSC's Employment and Employability program was finalized in the 2002-2003 fiscal year. National in scope, the evaluation had three objectives: 1) to assess the extent to which program's objectives were realistic, attainable and relevant; 2) the extent to which services were provided in an optimal way; and 3) if participants' skills and qualities identified were developed as a result of the program and if these were transferable when individuals were released into the community. Visiting various institutions in each region, the evaluation team conducted interviews with CSC's staff and prisoners, and conducted a review and analysis of the documentation available (Correctional Service Canada, 2003).

Results related to the first objective indicate that the roles and responsibilities of involved parties in implementing the program were not clearly communicated, creating a situation of disconnect between CORCAN and CSC – thus limiting the progress of the Employment and Employability Program (Correctional Service Canada, 2003). Another factor limiting the potential of the program was that the Offender Management System (OMS) database lacked accurate records on results achieved by institutions, reducing the ability to produce reliable analyses for decision-making purposes (Correctional Service Canada, 2003).

Within the scope of the second objective, results showed that employment programs were not considered as relevant as other correctional programs within CSC's operations. For example, among the sample of 83 prisoners interviewed, employment needs assessed at the intake process were often not documented in the prisoner's Correctional Plan. Some staff expressed concerns regarding work supervisors hiring prisoners who already had employment skills, only aiming to meet production demands. Also, it was noted the lack of a clear policy to enforce the inclusion of employment needs and strategies to address it in the Correctional Plan (Correctional Service

Canada, 2003). With respect to the amount of time designated to each prisoner for employment activities, all staff interviewees found it was not realistic to achieve 7.5 hours of meaningful work each day. Several operational and resource constraints were discussed. Prisoners' scheduling operations and management were assessed, and results show that OMS was not designed to record and display individual prisoners' schedules, but only schedules and timetables of CORCAN's shops. This posed challenges in identifying the time spent in each activity by each individual, as well as difficulties in tracking a prisoner's history of work activities if they are transferring to other correctional institutions (Correctional Service Canada, 2003).

With respect to the evaluation's third objective – assessing if the program contributed to assessed performance skills and if these were transferable to the community – results showed a lack of data to allow such examination. This limited the ability to assess prisoners' actual performance skills learned and the program's impacts (Correctional Service Canada, 2003). Recommendations were made addressing all evaluation findings, and best practices identified were also documented from other government departments.

In 2008, a second evaluation report was released on the state of the Employment and Employability Program in terms of its relevance, success, cost-effectiveness, and observed unintended outcomes. Two major components of the program were examined, one being the intake assessment and assignment processes, and the other institutional intervention processes related to employment activities and correctional outcomes (Correctional Service Canada, 2008, p. 8). The evaluation approach used quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyse the data collected through document review, automated data collection (N=20,067), surveys with staff (N=860) and community partners (N=21), and interviews with prisoners (N=302) (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

Results are divided into four findings in the evaluation report. When assessing the program's continued relevancy, findings consider that EEP is still consistent with governmental priorities and addresses prisoners' employment needs. Prisoners' pay and incentive pay policies were considered relevant and in line with other countries' practices in that field. However, employment opportunities inside prisons and for work releases were assessed as not responding to labour market needs. Overall, staff do not consider that vocational assessments done during the prisoner intake assessment process as a relevant activity. That would be due to the limited variety of meaningful employment opportunities both in prisons and in the community for this population (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

The second and third objectives of the evaluation were to assess the program's successes in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. When addressing EEP efficiency, meaning the extent to which the program achieved intended outputs considering resources used, it was found that vocational assessments at intake are administered to few prisoners and some assessment tests are not considered adequate to the prison population (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). Most prisoners, however, indicated that vocational assessments are useful to help them reflect upon and search for future employment. It was also found that assignment to employment interventions is not solely based on the employment needs of prisoners. Lack of job placements or vocational programs, and additional individual priorities, e.g. other treatment programs, were reasons mentioned by staff as limiting access to the EEP (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

Still on the matter of efficiency, prisoners and staff indicated, overall, a high level of congruence between vocational interests assessed at intake and employment interventions inside corrections, particularly for those working in CORCAN positions and work releases (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). EEP was assessed as efficient in terms of reducing

institutional incidents (i.e., violations of prison rules), particularly for prisoners working in CORCAN shops or doing vocational training. Prisoners also expressed that their job placement is a productive contribution to society, and a good use of their time while incarcerated (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

When assessing success in terms of effectiveness, the extent to which the program achieved intended outcomes was explored. Prisoners working in CORCAN shops tended to agree more, compared to those working institutional jobs, that skills and abilities acquired would be useful to help find employment in the community (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). This finding was corroborated by staff, who found that employment activities reduced prisoners' employment needs, more so for participants of CORCAN and vocational programs than to those working institutional positions (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). The majority of prisoners interviewed were motivated to participate in third party certification programs inside prison and to continue the certification program in the community upon release (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

Regarding job attainment, it was found that the proportion of time spent participating in employment programs predicted job attainment in the community. This was more so for CORCAN, the vocational program and work release participants, compared to prisoners working institutional positions (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). When discussing the greatest barriers to accessing employment in the community, prisoners, staff, and community partners identified issues such as low employability skills and having a criminal record as the main roadblocks (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). Some of the skills most cited by prisoners as essential for securing a job in the community were 'interpersonal communication skills', 'punctuality', and 'ability to work with others' (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). Prisoners perceived that

correctional work positions that better prepared them for community employment are CORCAN manufacturing shops, kitchen/food services, institutional maintenance, and CORCAN textiles shops (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). When it comes to job retention, staff indicated that participation in CORCAN, vocational programs, and work release increased prisoners' ability to retain employment in the community. Measures of involvement in the EEP, however, did not appear as significant predictors of job retention upon release (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

Considering one of the program's goals of reducing recidivism, it was found that former prisoners working in the community in the same vocational area of their correctional employment programming tended to remain in the community longer, compared to other former prisoners who were not employed or that were employed in areas different from that in which they participated in the EEP. However, when assessing the proportion of time spent in employment programs, it was found to be associated with a slight increase in one's chances of being reconvicted for a new offence and of being readmitted to a federal correctional institution within a two-year period after release (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

The fourth objective of the EEP 2008 evaluation was to assess the program's cost-effectiveness. Overall, it was found that EEP is cost-effective in increasing participants' chances of early release and finding employment in the community. The program was assessed as being delivered in a cost-effective manner compared to other correctional interventions (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). The fifth evaluation objective was to assess unintended outcomes, some of which refer to documented suggestions to improve the EEP. Staff and community partners believe, for example, that EEP should offer more vocational and skills programs, more options for third party certifications and accreditations, and more meaningful and diverse job

opportunities (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). Prisoners also suggested ways to improve the program, for example, increased job opportunities, skills training, more meaningful jobs, and better pay for employment positions (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). While many prisoners highlighted positive results for participating in employment programs (e.g., learning new skills, improving self-esteem), 12% (20 individuals) stated they had not benefited at all from having worked while in prison (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). Finally, regarding work releases, community partners stated that while they were beneficial in assisting prisoners to find and to retain jobs, the number of work release opportunities was not enough to attend the population of individuals that could benefit from them (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

In May 2010, a third evaluation report focused on the National Employability Skills Program (NESP) – a component of CSC’s Employment and Employability Program. The NESP was designed to fill gaps in correctional programming related to many prisoners’ lack of generic employability skills seen as beneficial for securing employment in the community. The program’s curriculum is comprised of 12 specific employability skills that can be arranged under three topics: fundamental, personal management, and team-work skills (Correctional Service Canada, 2010). NESP main activities, outputs, immediate, intermediate, and long-term outcomes are represented in [Appendix 2](#).

The evaluation objective was to examine the impact NESP had over the federal prisoner population, considering this group’s risks and needs profile. More specifically, it aimed to evaluate the program’s relevance, implementation, success, and cost-effectiveness. Results were expected to provide program managers with information that allowed them to make strategic policy decisions. Information of program participation and prisoners’ characteristics and profiles were collected using the OMS database. Other sources of data included an online survey sent out

to CSC staff who had contact with the program and electronic assessments of NESP participants filled out by NESP facilitators before and after participation. Information collected on community outcomes included reincarceration rates and job attainment and job maintenance (Correctional Service Canada, 2010).

The evaluation found that NESP was consistent with government and correctional priorities outlined in a 2007 report entitled “A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety”. In this document, one of the five areas identified as in need of improvement was prisoners’ employment and employability (Correctional Service Canada, 2010). The majority of individuals (59%) incarcerated in federal corrections as of February 2010 were assessed as having some or considerable employment needs, and 74% did not have a high school diploma (Correctional Service Canada, 2010), an issue that could be addressed by correctional interventions. The evaluation also found that the employability skills targeted by NESP are consistent with the needs identified in the literature as important to employers (Correctional Service Canada, 2010, p. 23).

With respect to the implementation of NESP, the evaluation found that while the program was implemented nationally, it displayed variations in availability and enrolment across the regions (Correctional Service Canada, 2010). Most NESP participants were found to have some, or considerable, employment needs (except in Quebec, where 75% were assessed as having ‘no/low employment need’). The proportion of individuals with ‘no or low’ employment needs was higher among NESP participants than in the comparison group (those referred to the program but who did not enrol). Also, the proportion of those with a history of unstable employment was higher in the comparison group than in NESP participants (Correctional Service Canada, 2010). This finding raises questions over the program’s criteria for enrolment.

An area found to require improvement was the expected ongoing communication between NESP facilitators and prisoners' work supervisors. About 38% of program facilitators indicated that they 'rarely or sometimes' had contact with prisoners' supervisors. While the majority of program facilitators were familiar with NESP (89%), only 32% of work supervisors were familiar with the program (Correctional Service Canada, 2010). While NESP was designed to integrate the material learned in classes with work experiences in the prison, program facilitators and work supervisors believed that employment in the institution did not allow the individual to apply what had been learned with the NESP curriculum (Correctional Service Canada, 2010).

When evaluating the success of NESP, findings were organized based on the program's efficiency and effectiveness. In terms of efficiency, it was found that most program participants completed the program (80%), and 16% had dropped out. The lowest completion rates were observed among individuals with employment needs assessed as 'considerable' (74%). No significant differences in completion rates were observed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals (Correctional Service Canada, 2010). Another indicator of efficiency was that the majority of participants (98%) who completed the program also received a nationally-recognized employability skills certificate (Correctional Service Canada, 2010).

In terms of effectiveness, or the program's ability to reach its planned results, a few findings were discussed. Participants were more aware of the relevance of employability skills by the end of their participation in NESP. Program facilitators and work supervisors reported an increase in participants' demonstrated employability skills after participation in NESP (Correctional Service Canada, 2010). Regarding chances to find and maintain employment, NESP participants had no advantage in finding or keeping a job in the community when compared to those in the control group. Participation in Community Employment Centres was

found to almost double former prisoners' chances to retain employment in the community. However, only 30% of former NESP participants received support services from CECs upon release. Participation in NESP was also linked to a reduced likelihood of reincarceration for men and for Indigenous individuals (Correctional Service Canada, 2010). The evaluation found no relevant unintended outcomes and was not able to conduct an appropriate cost-effectiveness analysis due to data limitations.

1.5 Main findings, identified gaps, and next steps

This chapter discussed some of the documented barriers that prisoners commonly face upon release to the community, such as limited formal education, a prevalence of mental health issues, and an unstable or lack of employment history. In particular, challenges are common when trying to enter or return to the labour market, both in terms of being hired and of retaining an employment position. In order to better contextualize prisoners and former prisoners' experiences, we discussed the evolving rationales and practices surrounding the carceral system for housing and managing those sentenced to incarceration in Canada. I also provided an overview of the use of prison labour in Canadian penitentiaries and presented available government-produced research on employment programs in Canadian federal corrections.

Even though 'penitentiaries' were initially conceptualized to serve as an environment to bring about individual 'reformation', Commissions of Inquiry since the 19th century identify a systematic use of punishment and torture in Canadian corrections. After several recommendations from Commissions of Inquiry and appointed committees regarding the use of prisoner employment for rehabilitation purposes⁶, CORCAN was established in 1977. Its goal

⁶ E.g., the Biggar-Nickle-Draper Committee in 1920, the Archambault Commission in 1938, the Fauteux Commission in 1953, and the Ouimet Commission in 1969.

was to implement the notion of prison work as a rehabilitation tool, as a way to ease the prisoner transition back to the community, and to generate revenue to support and fund carceral employability programs. In the 1960s, the medical model of corrections encouraged ‘treating’ the prisoner using social, therapeutic, and medical resources. By 1992, the *Correctional and Conditional Release Act* determined the need to provide prisoners with programming that will assist their rehabilitation process.

A current trend in the administration of the criminal justice system, particularly in corrections, is ‘new managerialism’. It entails an increasing need for the public service to control and account for activities and expenditures within the correctional system. Therefore, prisoners are experiencing a higher degree of assessment of their performance in prison and increased surveillance in the community upon release. In terms of prison administration, information record keeping and tracking systems are increasingly used to enable the assessment of program effectiveness. In this context, research and evaluation studies are conducted to support decision making at the Correctional Service of Canada.

Nine research reports were produced by the Research Branch at CSC between 1993 and 2014 exploring federal prisoners or former federal prisoners’ employability. Only one (Power & Nolan, 2014) was based on employment program participants’ perceptions of program’s impacts in their lives, demonstrating a research tradition that is overall framed under a realist perspective and that often favours the measurement of indicators that can be quantified and generalized to the broader prison population.

Between 1996 and 1998, researchers identified the need to include measures for employment outcomes for former prisoners in the community, which was believed to aid in explaining recidivism. In the early 2000s, researchers identified the need to also explore

prisoners' attitudes and motivations toward work, finding that the intention to find employment, availability of community support, employment history and unemployment rates in the community were better able to explain employment in the community than just looking at carceral employment program participation. In the 2010s, research found particular challenges faced by those who engaged in institutional work. It was also found that receiving a certificate in a trade while in prison contributed to higher chances of finding a job in the community in the same field. Finally, research also explored success cases with the labour market in the community.

Evaluation studies conducted by CSC indicate the role of CORCAN in increasing the chances of former prisoners to find employment in the community, the importance of matching 'carceral training' with outside 'employment' to reduce recidivism (CSC, 2008), and the role of community centres in offering support to former prisoners in finding employment (CSC, 2010).

Evaluation studies of carceral employment programs have also been conducted outside the realm of government organizations. One of the issues found by the majority of these evaluations is that of 'attribution', the inability to determine that program activities are causing the achievement of program goals. Even though evaluation studies find that employment program participants are employed at a higher rate and recidivate at a lower rate compared to non-participant prisoners, they fail to eliminate the possibility of alternative explanations causing the different outcomes observed between groups (Wilson et al., 2000). In addition, because many evaluations attempt to grasp employment programs' effectiveness by measuring whether participants are more likely or not to be employed or to reoffend upon release, participants' perceptions and experiences with the program are often overlooked (Miller et al., 2012; Richmond, 2014). Understanding how former participants perceive and evaluate their

experiences with employment programs in Canadian federal corrections may aid in identifying missing links between the programs' activities and the intended outcomes (e.g., less revocation of paroles, reduced recidivism), and to identify program's strengths and weaknesses that may only be perceived by those most affected by it.

Considering the identified issues experienced by male federal prisoners in Canada, the context of correctional programming, and the gaps identified in previous research related to employment programs for this population in Canada, this research is guided by the following research question: *In what ways do former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their reintegration into the labour market upon release?* The next chapter presents the theoretical framework used to pursue the research question, as well as the ontological and epistemological assumptions adopted in this study.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, ASSUMPTIONS, AND OBJECTIVES

This research is guided by the following research question: *In what ways do former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their reintegration into the labour market upon release?* In this chapter I present the theoretical framework chosen to address the research question. I discuss concepts surrounding the role of ‘work’ in one’s life, particularly the notion of ‘alienation’. I also discuss ontological and epistemological assumptions adopted when conducting this study, including that reality is socially constructed and can only be grasped by assessing actors’ own accounts of their experiences. Finally, I present the research objectives – to *understand* and *evaluate* – and the applied abductive research strategy.

2.1 ‘Alienation’, related concepts, and application in prison studies

To understand how former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their transition back into the labour market, some theoretical concepts relating to alienation were applied to frame and guide the data analysis and discussion. Work, as an object of social scientific studies, has been argued to be a source of alienation for individuals with the rise of industrialism, where workers ultimately began losing control over their own creativity as human beings (Baldry et al., 2007; Blauner, 1964; Sarros et al., 2002). Karl Marx’s (1818-1883) work suggested, in particular, that individuals working within the logic of capital (i.e., in a capitalist class society) became alienated both from the product of their work and the labour process. As a consequence, the meaning of work tended to be reduced to its monetary potential and provided little satisfaction or perceived value in itself. Marx lived and

developed his concepts in the context of the European industrial revolution of the 19th century, and devoted attention to a particular segment of the working class, the ‘doubly-free’ wage worker. This segment was comprised of those who were both free from their means of production and subsistence, and free to use their labour-power as a commodity, which is the case of wage workers in a factory (Baldry et al., 2007; Held & Giddens, 1982).

The concept of alienation in Marx’s writings point to the relationship between those who own the means of production (i.e., capitalists), such as factories and machines, and those who had been increasingly expropriated from their means of production (wage workers), who would comprise the majority of the population in a capitalist society. By losing control of the production, wage workers began to see labour tasks as ‘alien’ impositions by the employer, dissociating themselves from such tasks, from fellow workers, and from the product of their labour which would be sold in the market by the employer. Because Marx understood creativity and control over the environment to be intrinsic characteristics of human beings, this situation of performing repetitive and meaningless labour tasks by wage workers in capitalist societies dehumanized the individual (Held & Giddens, 1982).

When looking at the Canadian historical context, alienation from work also occurred. The emergence of industrial capitalism forced the creation of a new working class that was not accustomed to working in industrial settings, formed mainly by bankrupted small farmers and independent artisans that could not compete with the new technologies. The first signs of experienced alienation and discontent among Canadian workers were seen with the formation of trade unions (around 120 unions formed in Canada by the early 1870s) and strikes (there were more than 430 strikes in the 1880s), as well as individual acts of resistance such as sabotage or insubordination on a daily basis when performing work tasks. These forms of expression can be

understood as attempts to regain some level of control over the process of production (Rinehart, 2001).

In the context of alienation in Marx's writings, 'poverty' is conceptualized as the absence of property, both in terms of the necessary means of production (i.e., the tools needed for work) and of the necessary means of subsistence (e.g., the land). Poverty is then understood as the consequence of industrialism and of the capitalist mode of production, since individuals become alienated from labour and from their ability to meet their living needs. Marx states that the wage worker is a "virtual pauper", for once they lose their source of income they are unable to reproduce the conditions required for their subsistence, having to resort to charity or theft (Henninger, 2013, p. 284).

Since Marx's writings, various theoretical developments aimed at interpreting his work under the light of significant historical, socio, and economic changes. A group of academics, known as 'workerists', who dedicated efforts in reading and interpreting Marx's writings throughout the 1960s and 1970s, were particularly instrumental in adapting the theory to the new reality of workers. Elaborating on Marx's writings, these studies provided an accumulation of more detailed knowledge on the realities of factory workers, examining, for example, "the systems of communications employed by workers during their shift, the transmission of knowledge from older to younger workers, the gradual emergence of a culture of conflicts", among other situations that were not examined in Marx's writings (Bologna, 2013, p. 122).

The transformations in the modes of production starting in the late 1970s can be described in terms of three main processes: a) "companies [were] in search of more flexible forms of organization and [began] to outsource certain activities or purchase them on the market"; b) "faced with budget-restrictions, the public authorities [acted] in much the same

way”; and c) “changes in lifestyle and the development of new forms of mass-consumption [gave] rise to new personal services that either did not exist before or existed in a different form” (Bologna, 2013, 139-40). These processes were bolstered by the development of new information and communication technologies that enabled the proliferation of self-employed labour and a development of capitalism that was not particularly addressed in Marxist thought. However, compared to earlier stages of industrial capitalism, it has been argued that workers still had little control over their work processes, how long they worked and what they produced in the context of the “new economy” (Albo, 2010; Rinehart, 2001). This new paradigm emerged between the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, when the global economy was being transformed by major technological innovations, networked relationships between organizations, and flexible workplace practices (Albo, 2010). The concept of alienation has been used in various contexts in the literature since Marx’s writings (Sarros et al., 2002; Seeman, 1983). However, as Seeman noted, “[t]he thrust is that the themes that are classically brought together under the alienation rubric refer to the fundamental ways in which the individual is related to social structure” (p.172).

In the context of prison research, Thomas (1975) operationalized the concept of alienation and investigated its potential determinants as experienced by a sample of prisoners in the US. It was found that indicators related to individual pre-incarceration experiences (e.g., social background and past involvement with the criminal justice system) are closely related to levels of alienation, in detriment of predictors related to life in prison (e.g., level of exposure to prison life). Alienation is defined within the dimension of ‘powerlessness’, one of the four proposed by Seeman (1983). This dimension was argued to be appropriate to study the prison

population for it reflects “a general feeling of helplessness and subordination to power” typical experiences of life in prison (Thomas, 1975, p.489).

In the context of a women’s prison in South Africa, the concept of alienation was explored as the experience of bodily displacement from the self that is imposed upon prisoners during incarceration. Not only do prison rules and routine activities contribute to the normalization of certain behaviours, but the architecture of the prison space is also believed to enhance feelings of alienation and to change how prisoners use their bodies in that space. In this sense, alienation is argued to be the sense of loss of identity and of the power to act on one’s own life, which is often resisted by prisoners through acts of transgression or attitudes to reclaim their identities (Dirsuweit, 1999). More recently, a Brazilian study (Silva & Saraiva, 2016) found that women who experienced imprisonment used carceral labour as a form of escape from alienation or “estrangement from reality” (p.375). In such instances, prison work was used as a strategy to remove one’s self from the experience of being incarcerated and to minimize tensions associated with it.

Overall, the concept of alienation has been used in the prison literature to frame discussions pertaining to the experience of estrangement while incarcerated. While Marx developed his concept to examine the effects of macroeconomic structures (i.e., industrial capitalism) on a new class of wage workers, the proletariat, the concept has been useful to explain issues faced by varied social groups, including prisoners.

Despite the different fields of application (e.g., groups of individuals, areas of study, or level of analysis from micro to macro) the concept of alienation appears to be used consistently in terms of speaking to conditions of tension experienced by individuals that feel displaced or powerless. Such experiences of displacement or powerlessness are of note in the context of work

and the historical transformations of work, which have particularly affected the working class. Considering the barriers facing individuals who are transitioning from a life in prison to regaining control over their decisions and having an independent life, the concept of alienation can help make sense of participants' experiences regarding work in the community and in prison.

2.2 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

As is the case with any social science research, this study was developed under specific assumptions about the nature of reality and how such reality can be known. The nature of reality or social phenomena (ontology) does not exist as an independent entity and depends on interpretations from both the observer and social actors. In other words, social phenomena are socially *constructed* and reside in language and knowledge produced from immersion into the phenomenon in question (Benton & Craib, 2001; Blaikie, 2000). Thus, when considering the topic and the formulation of the research question – the attempt to grasp and understand how employment programs may affect how individuals make sense of the reintegration processes into the community, I approached it by focusing on how each individual who participated in employment programs makes sense of such process and how they decide to communicate it to the researcher at the moment of the interview.

The epistemological assumption, or how we assume that reality can be known, derives from a phenomenological approach to social research, which considers that individuals are able to abstract from their own experiences, to ascribe meaning to their actions and the world, and are in turn affected by such meanings (Layder, 1994; Palys & Atchison, 2008). This process is mediated by language, the “most important social tool in the construction of meaningful social action” (Delanty, 2005, p.59).

More specifically, this research embraces a constructivist (or social constructionist⁷) perspective, for which reality is constructed out of people's interactions and beliefs (Neuman, 2011; Roy, 2001). Accordingly, social scientific research produces a form of knowledge that is determined by the methodology used, which should be contextualized and should indicate some degree of reflexivity by the researcher (Delanty, 2005). I adopted a constructivist approach to look at how individuals make sense of their participation in employment programs and how it affected their lives following incarceration. In contrast to a realist approach, which could gather information on whether former program participants were able or not to find employment, or if they had been rearrested or not (among other indicators for reintegration into the community), this research produces knowledge by focusing on how individuals understand their experiences (what is real for them) and perceive the consequences they have in their lives. While I understand that the activity of academic knowledge production is also a social construct, my exploration and engagement with this issue (i.e., seeing science as a social construct) was limited to adopting a reflexive position during the research process. For example, I reflected upon the perceived condition of the encounters between the researcher and participants, as well as potential or perceived conflicts during the analytical process.

2.3 Social Construction

The notion of “social construction” suggests a specific set of lenses to investigate social problems. Further defining the concept of social construction will assist in contextualizing my

⁷ There are different definitions of “constructivism” or “constructionism”, depending on academic discipline. Before the developments of the concept in the social sciences, “constructivism” and “radical constructivism” were terms adopted in the psychology field, stressing that reality is based in individual processes of the brain or mind. Because of that, some scholars prefer to make a clear distinction using the term “social constructionism”, closer to Berger and Luckmann's (1967) notion of “social construction of reality” (Knoblauch & Wilke, 2016, p.62).

standpoint before specifying the research methods and procedures chosen to carry out the present research.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theory on the social construction of reality (SCR) (1967) is one of the classic approaches to constructivism in the social sciences. It is based on three main interrelated foundations or ideas regarding the linkages between 'individuals' and 'society'. The foundation is that individuals engaging in social activities create 'external features' (e.g., institutions, social arrangements) that emerge and are reestablished over time. The second point is that such 'external features' are objectified and perceived as independent realities through daily activities like the use of symbols, language, and rituals. Third, the objectified external features, or social products, are then internalized by individuals, who incorporate them into their consciousness through processes of socialization, through conversation, and through more general social activities (Layder, 1994). In this sense, the term 'construction' – in the 'social construction of reality' – can be understood as a social process, as the "production of social structures in the interaction of social actions by different actors" (Knoblauch & Wilke, 2016, 64).

In essence, Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that individuals create society and society creates individuals in a mutual chain of influence. As stated by Layder (1994), the main weakness of Berger and Luckmann's theory is the consideration that, because society is a human construct, then *society* and *individuals* must be the same. This is argued to limit our ability to examine how institutions operate to some extent independently from individuals. Also, the authors do not explicitly say that individuals are not exterior to their interactions and there is little exploration of the social practices in which individuals engage (p. 88-9).

This study's research question involves exploring how individuals make sense of social processes, more specifically, their participation in employment programs while incarcerated, and their perceptions of how such activities may have impacted their lives upon release from prison. The activities undertaken while participating in employment programs and in the community is expected to involve participants' relationships with other individuals (e.g., program colleagues, prison populations, supervisors, parole officers) in broader institutional contexts (e.g., the prison institution while participating in the program). Social constructivism, as defined by Berger and Luckmann (1967), provides a theoretical framework to explore how individuals make sense of their participation in a carceral employment program as impacting their current lives in the community, considering their past experiences and expectations regarding the labour market.

2.4 Research objectives and strategy

Social research can be aimed at *exploration, description, explanation, understanding, prediction, change, evaluation, or impact assessment* (Blaikie, 2000, p. 72). The objective of this thesis was to *understand* and, to some extent, to *evaluate*. In line with the ontological and epistemological assumptions that made up the foundation of the research framework, the 'research strategy' chosen to answer the research question approximates to what has been termed an *abductive* strategy. This approach was characterized by the exploration, through everyday language, of "the knowledge that social actors use in the production, reproduction and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation" (Blaikie, 2000, p. 100).

The chosen research strategy was considered useful in addressing the first research objective, which was *understanding* a particular phenomenon (Blaikie, 2000), more specifically the way that individuals make sense of their experiences as former participants of carceral

employment programs. It also helped to respond to the second research objective: to *evaluate* carceral employment programs based on former participants' accounts of the perceived impacts that such participation had on their lives upon release from prison. This was pursued in the context of 'evaluation research', defined as the "systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards, as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy" (Weiss, 1998, p. 4). For the purposes of this research, evaluation efforts focused on how participants perceive both the activities undertaken as part of the employment program as well as the perceived outcomes in terms of assisting their reintegration into society. Focusing on participants' experiences and perceptions provide a means for verifying: (i) whether the program's planned activities took place as intended, and (ii) how these activities are perceived as having contributed to intended outcomes or results. Therefore, participants' perceptions were compared to prescribed practices and with intended goals set for the program, documented in publicly available documents. In this sense, by achieving the first objective of *understanding* prisoners' experiences and further perceived impacts of the program assisted in reaching the objective of *evaluating* employment programs for federally incarcerated men.

The objectives of *evaluating* the program and *understanding* how participants make sense of their experiences were achieved using the same abductive strategy. To better comprehend the research strategy used, I provide a brief comparison with other research approaches. The abductive strategy differs in two main ways from *inductive* and *deductive* strategies. Both inductive and deductive research have similar ontological assumptions, viewing social reality as independent of observers or other social actors, i.e., the phenomenon can be observed and described similarly by different observers, in different contexts, and generalizations can be made

from it (Blaikie, 2000). These two strategies also have different epistemological assumptions. An inductive approach tends to focus on gathering/accumulating valid observations related to a given phenomenon and, from there, builds concepts, hypotheses and generalizing theories. By contrast, deductively-oriented research starts with a guiding theory and pre-defined concepts and hypotheses that are tested after data on the phenomenon under investigation is collected.

An abductive strategy, coming from an interpretive research perspective, begins the research process by aiming to understand the logic used by social actors to construct and reconstruct their own experiences. At this initial stage, the researcher builds ‘first-level constructs’, or a description of how individuals give meaning to their lives – everyday typifications. At this stage, the researcher gathers participant accounts in their naturally occurring language, using the concepts that they use to structure their experiences, and grasping their own motives and reasoning for how they make sense of their lives. These tasks can be achieved by social scientists if they encourage social actors to reflect on and rationalize circumstances that are seen as natural and taken-for-granted for them (Ong, 2012). For example, the researcher may note concepts or ideas that are frequently used by participants to explore their meanings with them.

The next step in the strategy involves the researcher creating social scientific accounts for the typifications initially made by the participants. Thus, an abductive research strategy supports the creation of ‘ideal types’ that are based on everyday typifications. This process of moving from ‘first-level constructs’ to ‘second-level constructs’ is the main feature of the abductive strategy and is what gives meaning to its name (Ong, 2012).

I discuss the limitations and barriers to the abductive strategy in relation to this research in the Discussion, Chapter 5. The following chapter details the research procedures taken to reach out to participants and the methods used to answer the research question.

2.5 Summary of Chapter

This chapter discussed the theoretical framework used to guide the study, including assumptions on the nature of social phenomena and how it can be known. In this respect, and from an epistemological standpoint, former federal prisoners' experiences with correctional employment programs are considered to be socially constructed. Understanding such experiences therefore requires the investigation of the participants' accounts of what these experiences meant to them.

This thesis also draws on the theoretical concept of alienation, specifically in regards to work and prison life. The concept of alienation as developed by Karl Marx provides a basis for understanding the struggles of workers since the rise of industrial capitalism. More recent accounts suggest this concept is still relevant to understand how individuals experience employment, although Marx's concept of the wage worker must be expanded to accommodate other classes of workers that make up significant proportions of Canadian workers, such as self-employed and contract workers. Applications of the concept in the context of prison labour suggest that it can assist in understanding challenges faced by individuals, such as maintaining their identities and sense of self when subjected to an environment that aims to normalize behaviours and minimize practices that differentiate one individual from another, as a form of control (Dirsuweit, 1999). The research objective is primarily to *understand* participant experiences with employment programs, but also, to some extent, to *evaluate* how the program

was able to reach its objectives for these particular individuals in terms their own perceptions. The abductive research strategy involved the creation of ‘everyday typifications’ (from participants own language) and then abstracting to ‘social scientific typifications’ (academic knowledge). The next chapter discusses specific methodological decisions for addressing the research question, including the research design and how data was produced and analysed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter revisits the research question and presents the research procedures for data collection and analysis. Details are presented regarding the planning process, participant recruitment, data production, and the analytic strategy used. References are made to specific research instruments used, which are available in the Appendices.

3.1 Research Question

The guiding question for this research was: *In what ways do former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their reintegration into the labour market upon release?* This question guided the examination of the experiences of men who were incarcerated and worked in federal prisons in Canada as a participant in a carceral employment programs. These individuals were mostly living in Correctional Residential Facilities (CRFs), or halfway houses, as part of their conditional release. Their experiences are discussed in terms of their process of reintegrating into the labour market upon release, which entails searching for, and participating in an employment position in the community. Challenges identified during this process were also discussed.

3.2 Research Procedures

3.2.1. Research Design

Considering the problem statement, research question, and the broader methodological and epistemological standpoints, I opted to use a non-experimental design. That means this research did not draw comparisons between individuals randomly assigned to ‘treatment’

(employment program participants) and ‘comparison’ (non-participants of the program) groups. The research question was addressed by examining individuals’ experiences with employment programs *after* their participation in the program had concluded (McDavid et al., 2013). This research design is similar to the approach used by Power and Nolan (2014) when exploring the experiences of former prisoners who succeeded in finding and retaining employment in the community. For the present research, however, I focused on exploring the varied experiences of former prisoners who participated in any form of carceral employment program, independent of the outcomes in terms of their reintegration into the labour market.

The research was conducted using qualitative methods for data collection and analysis, given that they would allow me to interact with participants in a dynamic way for eliciting and *understanding* their experiences and how they assign meaning to those experiences as former participants of a specific program. Qualitative analysis methods are compatible with a constructivist perspective and with an abductive research strategy. As argued, these higher level methodological decisions emphasize the focus on grasping participants’ naturally occurring language in order to capture how they make sense of their experiences. The following sub-sections present a description of how the data was produced and analyzed.

3.2.2. Sampling: identifying and recruiting participants

This section specifies who the target population was, the rationale for the number of participants and how they were selected, also providing details on the recruitment process. The target population from which participants were recruited comprises Anglophone⁸ adult male individuals, formerly incarcerated in a Canadian federal penitentiary, who participated in

⁸ Even though Canada is a bilingual country, only Anglophone participants were recruited considering the researcher is not fluent in French and did not have the means to include potential Francophone individuals.

employment/employability programs offered by CSC while in prison and who were released and living in the Ottawa region. They could have finished their sentences, or they could have been in the community under ‘day parole’, ‘full parole’, or under ‘statutory release’, for at least one month. These are three different types of release. In the case of being released under “day parole”, the individual can engage in community activities during the day and has to return to a halfway house in the evening. If released under full parole, the individual serves the rest of his sentence in the community. If released under statutory release, the individual would have served two thirds of their sentence (OAG, 2015).

In this research study, I aimed to understand men’s experiences with carceral employment programs. The male federal prison population is much larger in size compared to the female federal prison population in Canada, translating to a higher number of men being directly impacted by correctional policies. Employment programs are available for federally incarcerated women in Canada, however, these are argued to be increasingly ‘gender-neutral’ or to reflect the perceived needs of the male population (since the publication of the 2007 report “A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety”, prepared by the CSC Review Panel). Therefore, employment programs for women in federal corrections do not adequately respond to women’s (Montford, 2015). Women’s and men’s experiences, needs, and challenges within corrections tend to differ, which explains the different programming expected to be offered to these two groups (Griffiths et al., 2014). This merits the need for conducting a research study on women’s accounts of their experiences with correctional employment programs. Because of the limitations regarding the timeframe for completion and monetary funds available for this research, I decided to narrow the scope to the male population. The possibility of having both male and female participants in the sample was also discarded due to the fundamental differences in experiences

between the two correctional populations, and the different programming that they experience in corrections (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014).

The targeted population was, at the time of interviews, living in the Ottawa region (province of Ontario), area which houses the academic setting (University of Ottawa) where this research was conducted. The area has several organizations that offer housing, support and other programs to former prisoners, which helped facilitate recruitment. Also, the presence of these organizations indicates that many former prisoners would be – at least initially – readjusting to life in this community.

As I wanted to recruit individuals who participated in a carceral employment program, any release status was acceptable for participation – i.e., they could have finished their sentences, been in the community under “day parole”, “full parole”, or under “statutory release”. The reason for selecting individuals who were in the community for at least a month following release from prison was so they could have had some experience in the community before participating in the study. That would potentially allow them to assess and reflect upon their experience with employment programs as impacting their lives outside prison in different ways. I used purposive sampling, since I knew beforehand the individual characteristics (e.g., former federal prisoners, men, living in the community for at least one month, engaged in employment programs while incarcerated) that potential participants should have before inviting them to be interviewed (Weiss, 1998).

An optimal sample size of 15 participants was anticipated, given resource and time limitations and the goals of this multiple case study. The achieved sample size was expected to vary based on the response rate during the recruitment process, as well as on the content and depth of interviews (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The initial rationale was that in-depth semi-

structured interviews with approximately fifteen individuals would yield sufficient data to reach saturation, that is, a point where individuals' perceptions and experiences would cease to bring about new information or new perspectives on the experience with the program. Fourteen individuals demonstrated interest in participating and interviews were conducted with all of them. Considering the depth of most interviews, the sample was considered appropriate to yield enough understanding and to adequately answer the research question.

To recruit potential participants, I contacted organizations in the community that provide services in assisting former prisoners returning to the community. First, I reached out to John Howard Society (JHS) of Ottawa, which is one of the nineteen local offices of John Howard Society of Canada. It is a not-for-profit charitable organization that provides community services throughout the Ottawa area, assisting individuals “who are at risk of, or have come into, conflict with the law”⁹. Among other services, the JHS of Ottawa operates three Community Residential Facilities (CRF)¹⁰, as well as employment related assistance through the Hire Power Employment Services (John Howard Society of Ontario, 2016, p. 16). The second organization contacted was House of Hope, a not-for-profit community residential facility (CRF) that provides transitional housing to male former federal prisoners on conditional release returning to the Ottawa community.

Before reaching out to potential community partners, I submitted a research project description to the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (File Number: 11-15-11). Upon receiving a certificate of ethics approval ([Appendix 3](#)), I contacted all three CRF and Hire Power Employment Services operated by John Howard Society of Ottawa, as well as the CRF operated

⁹ This information is available at the John Howard Society of Ottawa website, under the section ‘Welcome’. Retrieved from: <http://johnhoward.on.ca/ottawa/>

¹⁰ These are mandated to facilitate the reintegration of former prisoners into the community. The three CRF in Ottawa operated by JHS are: Ste. Anne’s Residence, Kirkpatrick House, and Tom Lamothe Residence.

by House of Hope. The organizations demonstrated support and willingness to participate in the research process, which entailed assisting with recruitment and providing a space to conduct interviews.

The recruitment process entailed two forms of contact. First, participating CRFs' representatives printed copies of the participant recruitment poster ([Appendix 4](#)) developed by the researcher and posted them in common areas of the residences. This way, potential participants could read a description of the purpose of the research, assess if they were part of the target population, and have the contact information of the principal researcher, in case they wanted any clarification about the research or to demonstrate their interest to participate. Another form of contact involved case workers from the two CRFs approaching potential participants to make them aware of this research, asking if they would be interested in participate, and giving them a copy of the recruitment poster. While this second form of contact via case workers was not initially anticipated, it was discussed with the Research Ethics Board who accepted the practice and added this information on the research file as an approved practice. While this alternative recruitment practice could potentially cause a confidentiality issue for participants (i.e., the case worker who is in a position of authority over the participant would know that he is participating in the study), the Research Ethics Board considered that it took place as a request/preference expressed by the participant, who preferred to not contact the researcher directly to make arrangements for the interview.

Individuals interested in participating were directed to contact the main researcher by phone or email, or by using an intermediate at the CRF (e.g., the case worker) if they so preferred. Individuals selected to participate (in this case, all of them), received a more specific letter confirming their selection to take part in the research study ([Appendix 5](#)). Interviews were

scheduled directly with interested participants or through case workers from CRFs. The voluntary collaboration of case workers, functioning as intermediates between the researcher and participants, was fundamental for the success of the recruitment process.

Interviews were conducted after participants agreed with the terms for their participation, detailed in the research Consent Form ([Appendix 6](#)) developed by the researcher and approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board. Men who wanted to participate were given printed copies of the Consent Form before the day of the interview (through case workers). On the day of the interview, upon meeting with participants in an arranged room inside the CRF, the principal researcher first explained the terms of the Consent Form, clarified any questions they had, and collected their signature as an indication of their agreement with the terms of participation. The option to provide an audio-recorded verbal consent (rather than signature) was given to participants.

As specified in the Consent Form, participation in the study was strictly voluntary. Individuals offered their personal time to share experiences of the time they were federally incarcerated, as well as eventual employment experiences before and after incarceration. To minimize potential discomfort or distress, interviews were scheduled in times and locations that best suited them (inside the CRF or another location in the community). Also, when discussing the Consent Form with interviewees, it was made clear they were free to stop the interview at any time or to not answer a question if they did not want to. The Consent Form also included a list with community service providers in case they felt discomfort or the need for professional assistance (psychological or regarding employment) following the interview.

3.2.3. Data production

In line with the ontological and epistemological assumptions set out for this project, and with the research objectives and strategy detailed earlier in the chapter, data production involved semi-structured interviews. This technique is useful when the researcher wants to “understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories” (Patton, 1990, p. 24). Interviews were conducted in-person with former federal prisoners who participated in employment programs offered by the Correctional Service Canada while they were incarcerated. Participants were mostly men residing in Community Residential Facilities administrated by John Howard Society of Ottawa. One participant was in the community on full parole, living in a private residence.

The choice for conducting semi-structured interviews entailed the use of an interview guide, with a list of open-ended questions allowing the interviewee to choose whatever directions and words they prefer to transmit what they want to say (Patton, 1990:296). This technique gives flexibility for the researcher to ask for clarification on issues raised by the interviewee, or to further explore an unanticipated theme that might emerge during the interview. Participants were asked about their experiences and perceptions for particular events or ideas related to the employment program they participated in. They were also asked to reflect on potential effects that this participation may have had, or could have, on their reintegration process. In addition to open-ended questions, a few initial questions were directed at gathering demographic information, for example, asking the participant’s age, self-identified ethnicity, marital status, and level of education. A copy of the interview guide used during semi-structured interviews is available in [Appendix 7](#).

The product of the semi-structured interview is “language data”, or “interrelated words combined into sentences and sentences combined into discourses”, which are evidence of participant experiences (Hansen et al., 2005, p.138). To better grasp participant discourses and to increase the trustworthiness of our research, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, so the word-by-word textual data could be later analyzed. The following section describes the process for analyzing the data produced through semi-structured interviews.

3.2.4. Data analysis

To analyze the information produced through the interviews, I conducted a content analysis. Content analysis is performed when there is a need to systematically analyse written, verbal, or visual communication messages (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The content analysis was conducted with the support of the computer software NVivo, version 11.4, developed by QSR International.

Having in mind that the research was guided mostly by an abductive strategy, under an interpretive research perspective, content analysis best fit the research purposes. Initially, in order to gather what is called ‘first-level constructs’, I immersed myself in the textual data by carefully reading the transcripts. Then, I ‘open coded’ the data, taking notes of those common codes or themes that emerged while reading the word-by-word interview transcripts. Categories were created using participants’ natural occurring language in order to understand their logic for assigning meaning to personal experiences – their everyday typifications. The next step entailed the process of “abstraction” or creating social scientific typifications – broader categories – encompassing the initial typifications made by participants (Ong, 2012). These second-level constructs were based both on first-level constructs that were identified from the data and from existing academic literature produced on the matter, with the aim of linking both spheres.

The analytical process resulted in a list of fifty constructs that were used to codify the transcripts (see [Appendix 8](#)). Constructs were organized in a hierarchical manner, where seven were considered ‘parent’ constructs or nodes¹¹. These nodes are broader in scope, including: i) ‘individual background information’; ii) ‘employment history prior to incarceration’; iii) ‘employment in federal corrections’; iv) ‘experience with the criminal justice system’; v) ‘participation in other correctional programs’; vi) ‘life in the community’; and vii) ‘perceived impact of prison work’. For most of these parent nodes, nodes underneath them (second-level nodes) were created to capture themes specific to each parent node. Following the same logic, third-level nodes were created as required in order to capture more specific emerging themes. For example, under the parent node ‘employment in federal corrections’, a second-level node was created to capture ‘motivation for working in corrections’, which in turn housed third-level nodes. The results do not disclose information that could lead to the identification of participant identities and the names assigned to participants are pseudonyms.

3.3 Summary of Methodology

This chapter discussed methodological decisions taken in order to carry out this research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with former participants of federal correctional employment programs. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and further content analysed. Results are presented in the next chapter.

¹¹ The terms ‘constructs’ and ‘nodes’ can be used interchangeably in this section. ‘Node’ is a term used frequently in the context of the NVivo software, while ‘construct’ is the term used in the literature consulted to guide the data analysis approach.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Fourteen individuals participated in an interview, which lasted on average 52 minutes and happened during the months of February and March of 2016 in the city of Ottawa. Almost all interviews took place in a room made available at Community Residential Facilities (CRFs), also known as half-way houses, which housed participants. The exception was one interview conducted in a room in the Faculty of Social Sciences building, at the University of Ottawa campus. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 66 years, with an average of 44 years. Their level of schooling varied from Grade 5 to Bachelor's degree, and the majority (9 out of 14) achieved, at best, a high school degree. While all interviewees were identified with a masculine gender at the time of incarceration, one participant declared being transgender at the time of interview. This participant explained that the masculine identity was maintained while incarcerated for his safety. When questioned if they identified with any ethnicity, one participant self-identified as being Black or Afro-American, 7 self-identified as white, and 6 were Inuit. Most participants (11 out of 14) had never lived in the city of Ottawa before and were residing there because of the CRF (i.e., half-way house) assigned to them for completing their sentence in the community. Thirteen individuals were under day parole and one was on full parole.

Four themes emerged from the data to describe participants' experience with employment in the community and in carceral employment programs. These themes, presented in the following sub-sections, are: work-related aspirations in the community after prison; their employment experiences inside and outside prison; their perceptions of the carceral employment program they participated in; and the perceived influence that this experience might have had in their attempts to find jobs in the community. The names attributed to participants and to other individuals mentioned in interviews were not their actual names. Pseudonyms are used to protect

these individuals' identities. When quoting participants, when relevant I added the correspondent employment position they were referring to. It should be noted that some interviewees participated in more than one carceral employment position.

4.1 Work-related aspirations after incarceration period

Not all interviewees perceived employment in the community as a clear path, or as the path chosen by them to be followed upon completing their sentences. Reasons discussed by 4 of the 14 interviewees included a potential eligibility to receive financial support via government pensions, emotional or psychological issues posing challenges to job searching, as well as perceiving it as a short-term task or activity to be completed as requested by their parole officer. The remaining interviewees indicated having a clearer plan or strategy to maintain their employment or to find employment in an area they would be more satisfied with.

Two interviewees, Cara and David, were not focusing on finding employment due to their eligibility to receive some form of governmental pension. The monetary value to be received from these pensions was perceived as a substitute to a potential position in the labour market in the future. Before being incarcerated, in the 1970s, Cara worked in a technical position training new employees. Before that, Cara worked in a factory and in the mines, in the province of Ontario. At the moment of interview, she was working part-time in a grocery store to save money before starting to receive the financial support from a governmental pension, at which point she would stop working.

I'm in Old Age Pension, and Canada Pension Plan, but I get 2 or 3 irons in the fire – one downstairs in the grocery store, and working with *Laura* over [name of organization] to find part-time work. [I'm working now] just till I can get the Old-Age Pension. *Jane*, my PO, and the psychologist doctor *John* are trying to get me groomed for full parole in 8, 10 months. So I want a little extra money coming in to help save towards apartment, stuff like that.

Cara, 66 years

David, 48 years old, worked in the construction field for twelve years before being incarcerated. The job was informal; he described it as an “all under the table cash” position. While he was working a part-time job in Ottawa as encouraged by his parole officer, he was unsure whether he will look for employment once his sentence is finished. This is due to his eligibility to receive a disability financial support through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)¹², from the provincial government. David plans to move to a smaller city, but not the one he used to live before being incarcerated.

I’m involved in this, it’s called a “late re-group”, and it’s for part-time work. I am coming up to my warrant expiry in, like, 50 some days, and my parole officer (...) wants me to have some money banked. Cause I didn’t do nothing, didn’t save no money. So she’s just afraid that I might put myself in a position where I might be vulnerable to relapse, or having committing a crime, right? Not that I’m going to commit a crime.

Researcher: Do you plan to look for jobs after your expiry date?

I’m... actually, no, because I don’t know yet. I really don’t know, because I don’t know about the SP, right? (...) The ODSP. Ontario Disability Support. I got a full pension. But I can’t get while I’m on here. Because I’m being supported by CSC.

David, 48 years

As determined in the ODSP *Income Support Directive 2.6 Incarceration*, individuals living in Correctional Residential Facilities with funding from the CSC are not eligible to receive the ODSP financial support (Ontario MCSS, 2017).

Jason, an Inuit man serving day parole, found it difficult and stressful to search for better paid employment in the community because of the emotions and feelings that often emerged from his participation in a mandatory community program for healing and managing anger and violence. He worked occasionally in a given company, but the job was not perceived to be enough to fulfill his needs. Because it is challenging to search for a better job, Jason maintained

¹² The ODSP is a provincial program to provide income and employment support for those who qualify as having a financial need for living expenses or for having a disability (i.e., a mental or physical impairment that is expected to last more than one year and restricts the person’s ability to work and care for themselves). An ODSP financial support is paid monthly, and the amount should cover basic needs (e.g., food, clothing and personal items) and a shelter allowance (e.g., rent, utilities, home insurance) (Ontario MCSS, 2018).

that his current employment was a way to concur with the plan that his parole officer built for him.

I'm still working for them (...), and they [parole officer] keep telling me to get a better job... So I'm out there, and... But it feels like I don't wanna look around for another job cause, right after all this stressful situation from the [mental health] program I'm just taking it easy now... I'm just calming down... (...) I have no choice but to go around with them [parole officer] now. That's their plan, not mine. I just have to go around with them now. Cause the job that I was gonna go back to, I cannot go back there anymore [previous job in the community as a truck driver and heavy equipment operator]. And they have already hired and trained somebody else...

Jason, 46 years

Right before being incarcerated, over the period of four years, Jason maintained two jobs: one full-time as a truck driver, and one occasional job as a heavy equipment operator. Before that, Jason worked for approximately six years seasonally also as a heavy equipment operator. Before that, he worked occasionally in the construction field. All his pre-incarceration employment experience happened in the Territory of Nunavut.

Mark, 36 years old, was in the community serving day parole for approximately three years; he was focusing on improving his education, as required by his parole officer. He expected to conclude his education within a year, when he would be supported by his parole officer to start searching for employment. While he indicated his willingness to search for employment positions, he did not express having a clear idea of the type of job he could look for or that he would prefer doing. Employment possibilities were perceived as dependent on his parole officer's approval. Before incarceration, Mark worked in different positions, including in restaurants, gas stations, and as a telemarketer.

Right now they want me to focus on school. So I'm basically doing my school. I'm not sure what [job] yet, but I'm gonna find something (...). Once I'm able to work I'm gonna look at different avenues of what I can do, especially with the experience I've had working different jobs, and even what I've done while I was incarcerated. Like, different experiences I've had. So I want to look at all the options when I'm allowed to work. And go by my parole officers and see what they say, see if they approve it or not.

Mark, 36 years

Most interviewees understood employment as a natural progression for their lives in the community. The five interviewees who were not currently employed expressed having some form of parole condition impeding them to search for jobs in the community. Some were attending job readiness courses or treatment programs in the community, as required by their parole officers. These men expressed willingness to look for employment, to start their own business or to improve their skills to better enable them to enter the labour market once their parole conditions are satisfied.

I'm not employed, at all, right now. (...) They won't let me. The parole officer doesn't... You need to get permission before you can even look for work. And I've been out for 5 months and she hasn't given me permission yet. (...) I may be starting my own business. Just because I have savings, so I'd like to invest. What I'm thinking is invest out of savings, starting a business, or buying a business, or buying into a business. (...) I'm hoping that in the end I'll be able to start a job and find that interesting and be able to put the same type of commitment that I put in my old career.

Kevin, 49 years

No [I'm not working]. I just finished treatment program. It was a sixty-day treatment, and I just finished [it]. Now I'm trying to get into school. (...) I'm trying to get into culinary arts. Learning how to cook and learning how to bake... so I'm interested in that, cause since I've been in jail I've learned how to cook more stuff. (...) I knew how to cook before, but it made me learn more. Watching different cultures cook...

Gary, 38 years

They want me to do the job readiness, it's a course where you can pick up some skills, with job interviews or how to recognize unsafe work area... and how to communicate with your supervisor. Up here, when I'm up there, I see people in uniform... I see them as guards. (...) So that course is going to help me to open up more, and make me realize that in the society people are people. (...) At the end of the course they will be selecting who's going to be working with them. So whoever can pass the test will work in whatever jobsite they have. (...) My passion is dry wall. Cause it's heavy manual work. It's constantly moving back and forth, back and forth.

Leonard, 43 years

For those interviewees currently employed in the community, the majority (6 out of 9) also indicated an intention to sustain their employment position or to look for something that would bring more personal satisfaction, based on their previous experiences in the community or recent job experiences while incarcerated.

So I was doing volunteer work for this guy that I'm working for right now and also another guy that goes to my church, his brother does the same thing. So I kind of... I kind of surrounded myself with positive people, you know, and when I was doing the

volunteer work, the guy liked the work that I was doing. So when I got out I contacted him and he said: listen, you're welcome to come back. (...) So I kind of built a positive relationship with them and a... a good work ethic... and because I know what I'm doing, they like that. They never tell me: do this, do this... I know this needs to be done, I can go by myself and get the job done. So I guess they like what I do, right?

Alex, 31 years

I'm working right now, I'm hoping to save up my money. But I talk to, like... I might do trucking, cause it might be for a second career. But if they don't do that I'm gonna ask the lady – once I'm done, the school and upgrading my English – can I for the second career, can I do Culinary schooling? (...) It's a program. You call the City of Ottawa and they'll book you in and see they are available. Like, the trucking guy, *Matt*, he owns the company and does all the training.

Josh, 44 years

I'm working at a restaurant. And I'm actually doing dish pit and prep cook, and salad bar. (...) I'm actually trying to get into that trucking, so I'm just renewing my license now... and after two years of road experience I'm gonna get into that trucking industry (...) It's always been my dream. And I didn't know you need a special license and experience. I'm really interested in that. (...) I'm looking into that eighteen wheeler course. (...) And I probably can get support from [name of education program] for funding. If not, I'm gonna have to pay on my own, so...

Martin, 46 years

Overall, participants perceive employment as an important step in their return to life in the community. The exception was mainly for those planning to retire, for which employment was a short-term financial aid proposed and encouraged by their parole officers. For those envisioning longer-term employment, it was still challenging to plan their careers, considering current emotional issues, immediate needs to be addressed such as those related to education and mental health, as well as readapting to having an independent life. Others expressed excitement for either returning to old employment plans that were interrupted by incarceration, or for potentially starting a new career. Despite their challenges or desires to re-enter the labour market upon release from federal prison, many men were restricted in the short-term by parole conditions in terms of the jobs positions they can apply for, or if they are allowed to search for employment.

In the next section I discuss the fields of employment occupied by participants during and after their incarceration, as well as their employment aspirations for the near future.

4.2 Employment experiences inside and outside prison

All participants worked in institutional jobs while inside federal prison. These occupations included, for example, preparing or handing out meals, cleaning various areas in the institution, removing the garbage, doing the laundry, working in the prison library or chapel, among other daily occupations necessary for the institution to function. Seven participants (out of 14), in addition to institutional jobs, also worked in CORCAN shops. Examples of CORCAN shops include metal/welding shops, carpentry shops, leather shops, or paint shops, depending on what was available in the federal prison in which they were housed. Some participants received incentive pay for working for CORCAN, since their experiences occurred before the federal government eliminated, in 2013, the hourly pay¹³ given to CORCAN workers. Three participants worked in CORCAN prior to the pay cut, three participants worked in CORCAN after the pay reduction, and one participant worked during both time-periods, experiencing different moments of the program. Two participants, Adrian and Cara, discussed their experiences with this transition in CORCAN practice.

The only job that used to give incentive pay was CORCAN. They did it based on production, like, I remember my first CORCAN check for two-weeks was 400 and some dollars. I was working overtime. But then a big stink happened... a guard complaint to the newspaper and stuff. He said something like, oh, now they are making more money than we do. They just shut that right off. No more incentive, and now people that work for CORCAN... and you do some hard work in there, and it's all day. It's like having a real job on the street, working in a factory and all that. But now the maximum that you can make is like forty dollars every two weeks.

Adrian, 39 years, CORCAN job (welding)

When you take the money away, you're dealing with a population that doesn't trust or doesn't really want to be part of that labour force except for the money. And then you take away that bone, dark bone, and then a lot of people just say "to the hell with that" and don't get involved, then they lose that chance of picking up the gist of a trade that they can use up on the street. Like, even the small jobs... there's the welding, the

¹³ The current daily rate paid to prisoners who work in federal prisons range from \$5.25 per day (level D) to \$6.90 per day (level A) depending on performance (CSC, 2016). Before payment cuts, CSC had additional incentive pays for workers who could receive an extra \$13.80 a day or a maximum of \$138.00 bi-weekly. This meant that before, prisoners could earn up to \$207.00 bi-weekly, including base pay, overtime, and incentives (CSC, 2008) – which is almost three times the amount earned after the payment cuts.

carpentry, stuff like that. If a person apply himself you could learn a bit. But CORCAN was the best because it had two things: it had the learning aspect, and it had the money aspect, so...

Cara, 66 years, CORCAN job (carpentry)

Participants engaged, for the most part, in multiple work experiences throughout their incarceration period. Once in the community, they may attain employment in a given field depending on factors such as their work experiences before incarceration, employment experiences while incarcerated, and varied parole constraints or opportunities they experience when exiting the carceral system. Among the nine participants that were employed in the community at the time of interviews, four found jobs through partnerships in the community that aim to help those with significant barriers to find employment. In the city of Ottawa, a not for profit organization provides training and allows former prisoners to attain employment in the fields of asbestos abatement, moving and cleaning, and bed bug removal. Two participants were working in the community with asbestos abatement, and two others were working with moving and cleaning.

I do part-time at the Residence for cleaning through the [*not for profit company*] for four hours, from eight o'clock till noon. Four days a week. (...) And hopefully, it might turn into full-time by the end of the year.

Researcher: Was it an application that you had to fill in, or somebody referred you?
No... I worked for [*this not for profit company*] before. I did the asbestos work. You know, removing asbestos and mold. And so I've done that various types of work, but then I also worked with the... you know, not every day, but once in a while I worked for [*same not for profit company*] moving, picking up garbage in the facilities, and the bed bug they have there too. And so they noticed I am good at cleaning, and I've been there for a while, so they know me. So they offered me this job, so...

Peter, 51 years

The remaining five employed participants found jobs in other regular positions opened to any member of the community to work with carpentry/construction, car cleaning/detailing, cooking assistant, snow shoveling, and helping at a grocery store. For example, Alex, 31 years, used his connections in the community from previous positive experiences doing volunteer work in order to obtain employment upon his release.

4.2.1 Current employment in the community matches area worked in prison

Some participants (4 out of 9 who were employed at the time of interviews) had jobs in areas or occupations similar to those they had when they worked in prison. These four participants shared the experience of having worked in both institutional and CORCAN jobs, but only one of them, Alex, was working in an area related to his CORCAN experience at the time of interview (i.e., construction/carpentry). He was satisfied with his current occupation. The remaining three participants were working in areas related to their experiences in institutional jobs (i.e., cleaner, cooking/kitchen assistant, and maintenance/cleaner), but these jobs were not their first choice in terms of what they would like to be doing for work.

I just do house renovations, I do hardwood flooring, painting, dry wall, insulation, a little bit of electrical... (...) So basically I worked for CORCAN for nine months... for my apprenticeship. (...) I was just trying to do something positive to help my time go by quick, and at the end of the day I like doing carpentry, so... the construction field is what I'm attracted to, right? I'd say: it's good because it gave me the opportunity to get an apprenticeship and get hours towards an apprenticeship. So I think I've got seven hundred and ninety hours towards my apprenticeship... and that was good because now I have like my papers and stuff like that, and I can continue with that.

Alex, 31 years

I had a job there [at CORCAN] as a... what was it called, a spot welder. I was basically at a table machine and I would have to spot weld certain things that come through in the assembly line. And I loved it there, because like I said, I could earn some money and, you know, I would work overtime sometimes, like, work till like eight at night. (...) [Now] I do asbestos abatement for a company called [name of non-profit organization]. This is my fourth month now. I do [like this job]. But it's a lot of the same thing, and I like... I prefer jobs that offer me a challenge. I guess since I'm a registered welder federal apprentice and that offers more specially when you get into custom jobs, so... you have to use your brain a bit more, you have to solve some big problems... but it's just because of this situation, almost most of the companies that offer training agreements are in parts of [the city] that I don't have bus access.

Adrian, 39 years

I'm working for *Clark* at a restaurant. And I'm actually doing dish pit, prep cook, and salad bar. (...) It's okay, I like it.

Researcher: Is it something you see yourself doing in the future?

No. I'm actually trying to get into that trucking, so I'm just renewing my license now... and after two years of road experience I'm gonna get into that trucking industry, so...

Martin, 46 years

None of the currently employed participants were working in an area/field closely related to their work experiences prior to incarceration, even though some considered returning to an older occupation undertaken before their incarceration experience.

4.2.2 Current employment aspiration matches area worked in prison

Ten out of 14 participants expressed having specific employment aspirations for their lives in the community. When questioned about the type of occupation they would like to see themselves involved with in the near future, six participants mentioned wanting to work in a field that is closely related to that they held while in a federal institution. Two participants were already working in their chosen field and aspired to continue (i.e., carpentry and cleaning services). Of the remaining four, two participants would like to receive further training in culinary arts in order to resume working in this field, one was searching for work in welding to build on his CORCAN experience, and one would like to resume working with dry wall¹⁴.

They called me down to the kitchen and asked me if I would like to work... just to hand off the food to the people. I said: sure. That was good, yeah. (...) I was only on the line for about a week, and they come to me (...) and say: oh *Josh*, do you wanna be cook? Sure! So I was a cook and I just enjoyed it, I love cooking. (...) Right now I've only got basically seasonal work with the asbestos. (...) Next week or the week after I'll be full time. (...) But, like, I might do trucking, cause it might be for a second career. But if they don't do that I'm gonna ask the lady, once I'm done the school and upgrading my English, [I will ask] can I go for the second career, can I do Culinary schooling? And well, you guys pay for it. The second career the government will pay for it. (...) It's a program. You call the City (...) and they'll book you in and see if they are available.

Josh, 44 years

I do asbestos abatement for a company (...). While there is time waiting, I went to get certified in asbestos since the opportunity presented itself (...). I'm a registered welder federal apprentice (...). I completed [to learn welding] in prison, but when I went to high school when I was a kid, I remember there was a metal shop. And then the teacher taught us welding for a part of the year. And I just... I love it, and I always thought about it. Even when I, like when things went bad in my childhood and I started getting in trouble I always sort of remembered that. I always sort of wished, you know, I always wished that I would've finished school, but I didn't. So, when I came to this sentence

¹⁴ This participant learned to work with drywall while working for CORCAN in the community while under pay parole, differently from all other participants who only experienced CORCAN inside corrections.

and I decided to turn my life around, I decided to go finish high school and everything, and then I was trying to find any way possible to try to get in to it [welding], so... (...) but it's just because of this situation. Almost most of the companies that offer training agreement are in parts of Ottawa that I don't have bus access.

Adrian, 39 years

While six participants aspired to work in a field related to what they worked in while inside federal corrections, 4 participants had plans to follow a different path. Some wanted to return to the employment field they had prior to incarceration, one would like to continue working on a new opportunity that presented itself after returning to the community, and one participant planned to invest or buy into a business since he may no longer be allowed to return to his previous occupation as a public servant.

If I'm able to have my conditions changed to use the internet, that opens up a lot of things. If not, we'll see. I'm putting a lot of hope. (...) One of my thinking is invest out of savings, starting a business, or buying into a business. Because (...) just about every company now asks if you have a criminal record, and they don't have to hire you if you have a criminal record... and because you're searchable on Google, they put your name on and they go: oh, we don't want this guy. (...) because I had a new crime after I got out, like I said, I'll never be able, I won't be able to work for the government again.

Kevin, 49 years

I worked in some few places back home. Water truck helping and sewage lagoon helping. It's a small community, cause they have to drive, delivery water or take out the sewage. (...) And in summertime on construction, labour work. (...)

Researcher: And what types of job are you looking for?

Construction or garbage truck helping.

Earl, 22 years

When focusing on the occupational fields participants engaged with before, during, and after returning to the community, some patterns arose. No participant was currently working in the same field as they did prior to their imprisonment. Only one participant, *Earl*, wanted to look for a job in a similar occupation he had prior to incarceration. While two participants would have liked to go back to their former jobs, contextual barriers led them to either plan for or accept an alternative occupation (Kevin, who may not be able to work in the federal government again, and Jason who cannot return to his former position as heavy equipment operator and is experiencing

mental health issues). Existing partnerships in the community allowed some participants to attain an employment position in the community. However, such opportunities are mostly perceived as temporary solutions until participants are able to be hired or attain a position that would bring them greater satisfaction.

4.3 Participants' perceptions of carceral employment program

This sub-section presents participants' overall perception of their experience with carceral employment programs, including their motivations for engaging in work activities, the process taken for attaining the job, the work environment in terms of relationships and challenges, their views on what the goal of employment programs are, and the impacts of such programs on the individual while incarcerated.

4.3.1 Motivation for working in prison

Participants reflected upon what aspects drove them to work while incarcerated. Motives mentioned by 13 participants for working in prison were grouped in four main categories: the monetary compensation; acquiring work experience; killing time; and enjoying to perform a particular work activity. Differently, one participant (*Jason*) indicated he was not motivated to work, but still felt he was required to carry on with the employment duties assigned to him. In fact, another participant described how federal prisoners are expected to work and how it can impact decisions regarding their release to the community.

Well, I mean... they want you to work, right? It shows initiative. And it's good on your file, right? Saying you're participating and you're showing that you can do this, can do that, right? That you're most likely to succeed in society... you know... by finding work, and doing the job, and no complaints, and stuff like that, right? I just did it because I wanted to keep myself busy, I didn't like sleeping in my cell all the time and doing nothing, right?

Peter, 51 years, Institutional job and CORCAN (furniture)

They just gave me that job as a laundry worker in [prison]. (...) I was doing my time, and I didn't do any program in there, so I just took the job that they offered me. Which I had no choice but to take it.

Researcher: Why do you think you had no choice?

Jason: Cause if you do not take that job, then you're out of luck if you're not working. That's what they told me, so... I had no choice but to take it.

Jason, 46 years, Institutional job

Among the remaining 13 individuals who found motivation to work while in prison, the great majority (11) indicated that an important factor for working was that it helped them to "kill time" or to keep them busy. The only two participants who did not mention this motive indicated being driven for the monetary compensation from working in prison.

I'd say the income, like, the money... cause you get so much every two weeks, right? It puts money in your canteen and you always want stuff, like cleaning stuff. Like, for my hygiene. Laundry detergent, shampoo, and stuff like that. (...) You have to buy it, everything. [Also] some baking supplies, like, they sell baking supplies, so... I buy flour, I buy butter, I buy baking powder, and stuff like that... so I use it to buy stuff and make baked goods and... yeah...

Gary, 38 years, Institutional job

Most people, people talk about how long and boring the days are, and that's like... my goal when I went into prison was to make my days go by as quickly as possible, and that's what I did with my library job and I had all sorts of other activities. (...) While in the [institutional job] you're working 35, 45 hours a week, you're working a lot. Really full-time, but that's because you want to be there. So you're working a lot of hours, but those hours fly by, because you're having fun and doing interesting things.

Kevin, 49 years, Institutional job

I want something to kept you busy, time flew by when you were working... when you weren't working the time just dragged on and it seems slower when you weren't doing anything.

Mark, 36 years, Institutional job

Most motivation was to get out of the room, like, get out of the cell, because I would benefit from working in certain area, like, pick up job trades, and if I didn't work I would be locked up in my cell for the whole day till about five o'clock in the evening, so... If you're not working, from ten o'clock till five in the afternoon, like, in the evening... you go out for breakfast and you're locked up, at twelve o'clock they open again to go for lunch, but they lock you up at one, so... there's times where you're waiting to come out of the room.

Leonard, 43 years, Institutional job and CORCAN

Most participants (9 out of 13) indicated multiple reasons for wanting to work while incarcerated. For example, all participants who perceived carceral work as a way to "kill time",

also mentioned other reasons, such as being a form to gain work experience (mentioned by 6 individuals) or because they enjoyed performing their particular work activity (5 individuals).

And some guys don't like to work. I just wanted to keep busy. And because of my association with the chapel, it worked out really nice, you know, because I could go and clean, I love to clean, and make things nice and... of course the (...) garden was wonderful. Just because I could sit in there anytime I wanted and weed the garden's new plants. Yeah, free access when no one else was in there... so that was wonderful. (...) He was very impressed with how I kept it all. But, yeah, that was a very nice benefit... Was being able to spend time just working in the garden, working with my hands.

Louis, 55 years, Institutional job

When I first went there [CORCAN shop], guys were like: guy, don't go there! Slavery, because they expect you to do so much for free. But I wasn't looking at it from that aspect. I was just trying to do something positive to help my time go by quick... and at the end of the day, I like doing carpentry, so... the construction field is what I'm attracted to, right? But anyways, I stuck through it for the first nine months and (...) I'd say it's good because it gave me the opportunity to get an apprenticeship and get hours towards an apprenticeship.

Alex, 31 years, CORCAN

4.3.2 Process to attain prison work

The main avenue for a prisoner to attain employment in federal corrections consists of filling out a job application and depositing it in the appropriate location or handing it to a responsible staff member. One could fill out a 'general' job application open to any position available, or apply to a specific job that had been made public via posters placed inside the prison. Some participants also indicated that they had approached prison staff to inquire about the possibility of working in a specific position.

When I went to the range there was already guys that had the jobs and basically like, you have to put in the application, saying: I'd like to apply for the cleaning job or the range rep... (...) So I would just put out a form, put in the box, and then when I see... when I was going to the yard or something, you go past like the guards' desks, whatever, I just say like: listen, I'm trying to get the job for 'whatever'. You know what I mean? Yeah, yeah exactly... and be like: you know, I was a cleaner at the last two jails.

Alex, 31 years, Institutional job

[I would apply to] specific job locations. Like, if I were to apply for a cleaning job, and I didn't put a specific area, they would look at it but they would just shred it. I need to specify that I want to be a cleaner at the school, or I want to be a cleaner at the health care, or cleaner of the whole unit... I see it in job posters. (...) I applied for the job when someone said that they were hiring at CORCAN metal shop.

Leonard, 43 years, CORCAN job

So as I went to the normal religious services, I spoke to the chaplain and asked him that if he ever has a position opened up... And after about three or four weeks he asked me if I would come and work for him.

Louis, 55 years, Institutional job

Participants also mentioned being recommended by friends and colleagues in prison and were approached by correctional staff inquiring if they would like to work in a particular position. If they accepted the offer, they were still required to fill out a job application to formalize the hiring process.

For the [job], a buddy of mine had the job and he quit, and he gave me. He went to the keeper and he said that he was having whatever issues, you know? He was quitting the job, he didn't want it no more. And he said, "my buddy here needs a job", so he gave me the bag, and I did the job for 3 months.

David, 48 years, Institutional job

There's application forms and you put in an application form for whatever job you're interested in. Normally the easiest jobs to get, when you get to the institution, is either in the kitchen, either cooking the food, or doing the dishes, or serving... and CORCAN, where they make furniture. Those are the easy jobs to get into. Other jobs are more difficult (...) well, the library. Those types of jobs normally are for people that have been there longer, or who know people, or they've proven themselves. (...) But in the end I chose the kitchen as the job, then I got the program, then I was offered the job in the library. And the library job was because I knew someone who worked there and he recommended me to the librarian who was CSC staff, and so I got the job in the library.

Kevin, 49 years, Institutional job

They called me down to the kitchen and asked me if I would like to work... (...) I was only on the line [serving food] for about a week, and they come to me (...) and say: oh Josh, do you wanna be cook? Sure! So I was a cook and I just enjoyed it, I love cooking.

Josh, 44 years, Institutional job

[For the work in the health care area, as a cleaner] the job was referred to me. Employment in the institution, they say, 'we randomly pick up your name... we want to ask you if you want to work in health care. And here's the application if you're interested'. So they gave me one... it was a trustworthy job, so there'll be trust.

Leonard, 43 years, Institutional job (cleaner)

One participant worked through 'work release' in a community establishment. A friend mentioned this possibility to him, so he filled out an application and explained his desire to work outside the correctional facility to prison staff. Once he received the approval from prison, the participant went to a job interview in the community before being accepted a few weeks later.

I think I was at CORCAN for like eight months, and then (...) one of the guys was working at [name of restaurant]. And I told them that I wanted to get a job there, and

whatnot... So what I did was I got an application. It wasn't for [name of restaurant], it was just a typical job application, to whatever job you're applying for... so I wrote down: 'I'd like to apply for [name of restaurant], I have previous work experience (...)' So I put it in the box and then they call me up in the front desk. (...) oh, you have an interview for [name of restaurant]. I said: Really? They said: really. So... I made like a resume and stuff like that, and just put my work experience and stuff like that, a cover letter, you know, just trying to be a little professional. So I had an interview with the manager of [name of restaurant], and two guards they obviously watch over to see.

Alex, 31 years, Work release

4.3.3 Prison work environment

Participants reflected on various aspects of their carceral work experience. In particular, when prompted to consider the prison work environment in comparison to a community job, individuals brought up issues such as their relationship with co-workers and supervisors and challenges inherent to the prison work environment. When asked about their relationships with co-workers and/or supervisors during their prison work experience, participants responded by focusing on different issues, sometimes intertwined. One of the aspects they mentioned focused instead on solely performing the work required of them. In fact, some participants indicated that interactions with supervisors would be expected predominantly if one were to be reprimanded for not performing well in a given task.

I kinda had a boss, but, you know what I mean? I was never pulled to the side, I was never reprimanded, or questioned, nothing like that (...) it's just not worth being put on the radar, getting red flagged, it's bad enough where I am, (...) I'm there because I made a mistake out here. When I go to jail or prison I don't go there and... I stay clean, I stay away from all the bad apples, I don't want them... I don't want the institu... I don't want the guards or anybody, you know, give me any shit for something.

David, 48 years, Institutional job

I've had problems with them before, you know what I mean? But... it's prison. What do you expect? I don't expect nothing from them. I just go, show up, do my work and then I leave. But, at the end of the day, like I say you keep a mutual respect with them, like, it's not their fault I'm here, you know what I mean? It's my fault. So, at the end of the day I just go there, do my work, I leave... The supervisor he's alright guy, he's just been dealing with shithead his whole life... So everyone that comes around is a shithead. This is the mentality that they're already ingrained with, you know what I'm saying? I'm no better than the next guy. They don't know who I am, I'm just a number to them.

Alex, 31 years, CORCAN job

Some participants who worked in institutional jobs indicated they did not have a close relationship with their job supervisors, either because they did not recognize having had a supervisor for their prison work, or because they did not interact with them frequently enough. CORCAN participants tended to describe some form of relationship or more interactions with job supervisors, whom could be reached for clarification on job related issues.

Researcher: Did you have a supervisor?

No, there was a front desk that we got to go to in order to get the key for the laundry room.

Jason, 46 years, Institutional job

We had supervisors... but they didn't treat us like supervisors, cause they weren't correctional guards, they were kitchen staff. (...) They were in kitchen uniforms.

Mark, 36 years, Institutional job

The supervisor was always there. Not behind me, but he'd be like... there was a window and he'd be looking at everybody to make sure everybody's working. He was away from me, I didn't mind. But if I had questions that I needed to answer, I would go ask the supervisor.

Leonard, 43 years, CORCAN job

Another aspect brought up by participants was that their work relationships were perceived as similar to what one would expect to have in the community, with both positive and challenging experiences with supervisors and co-workers. While all participants who mentioned this had worked in CORCAN jobs, it is not clear whether those working in institutional jobs had a similar view or not – as this issue was not raised by them. However, as previously discussed, participants did indicate that interactions with supervisors were more common in CORCAN jobs, compared to institutional positions (e.g., cleaning services, maintenance, working in the kitchen). In this sense, the more frequent interaction with a work supervisor in CORCAN jobs supported the perception that working in CORCAN shops was, to some extent, similar to being employed in the community.

It's like any other [relationship]. In the jail, there's guys you are working with you don't get along with, you don't like (...) and they don't like you. But you're there for a reason, of production, so you leave your differences at the door, and if you can't do that then I feel that you both shouldn't be in a place that you're costing another people

money, because of your personal feelings for each other. Some of [the supervisors] I love, some of them I hated. It's just normal. Just like in the streets.

Cara, 66 years, CORCAN job

Yeah, I got along with everybody. I mean, I'm not a hard person, right, I won't complaint a lot. I got along with a lot of people, so... never got into any fights inside. There were two [supervisors] actually, in that department. I guess was would be an assistant, and the other one would be more in charge. (...) They were good guys, I mean, they were reasonable, you know? One was a bit more anxious than the other. Skittish, like, get this done now, you know. With that type of guy you tend to make more mistakes... (...) They didn't push it too hard or enforce anything, right? They were just like regular people, like a regular job. I mean, they had certain things they have to be aware of, right? If someone screws up they have to report it, something like that. (...) They were from the outside, yeah. So this is a regular warehouse type of job... to them, right? But it's within the institution.

Peter, 51 years, CORCAN job

You get some guys that they shouldn't be in a position of authority. They like to abuse it, and... but on the other hand there's also some people that really reached out to help and really cared. Like, when I was in the welding shop, (...) it's great, great people at work there, and... really took the time to really teach you everything you wanted to know.

Adrian, 39 years, CORCAN job

One of the participants emphasized that while relationships with co-workers were not always satisfactory, it was clear they shared the appreciation for being engaged in that particular job (i.e., library work). While their job supervisor was not perceived as dedicated to the job, workers genuinely cared about it and enjoyed their job, sometimes working more than what was requested of them in order to provide additional library services for others and for themselves.

Well, it was good for the most part...there were times it was tense, cause you're working with different types of people. (...) [The supervisor] didn't do a lot of supervising. He was pretty laid back (...). We did ourselves, cause everyone who worked in the library really wanted to be in the library. So we all wanted to make it better. And we wanted to make it better for inmates. So for example, days that we could take off, we petitioned, we went to the librarian and said: 'we want to add extra hours, we want to be opened extra hours'.

Kevin, 49 years, Institutional job

An issue discussed by some participants was that the prison work environment carries inherent challenges. Some of the challenges included a low level of expectation from a supervisor in terms of work performance; the potential for prison-related emergencies to disrupt the work

routine; and a complex relationship between co-workers outside the work environment that could influence their jobs in prison.

The supervisor he's [an] alright guy, he's just been dealing with shithead his whole life... So everyone that comes around is a shithead. This is the mentality that they're already ingrained with, you know what I'm saying? I'm no better than the next guy. They don't know who I am, I'm just a number to them. (...)

Alex, 31 years, CORCAN job

Some of the challenges were I still have to work amongst the correctional staff. Like when there were problems going on, I have to go back to my place... I couldn't stay at work, you know, when there's problems going on in the institution. (...) If there was a fight somewhere, they might close off everything, and so I would have to leave my work and go back, and they'd lock everybody down for hours or for days and days.

Louis, 55 years, Institutional job

Some people that would come down, the chaplain might say: 'you can't hang out here you have to leave the garden, you can't be around here'. They would get upset and... but I didn't want to be the one to have to tell them: 'sorry, you can't be here'. Because that makes me look like I'm hired, bossing them. And so it made it very difficult sometimes, when I had to turn and look the other way when things were happening. People would come in and use the bathroom at the chapel and steal the toilet papers, steal towels and things like that. Even though I saw it, I can't report them. Because inmate to inmate, we're not allowed... you should never tell on someone, right? So it made it very difficult for me to see that people were ripping off the chapel and I couldn't do anything about it.

Louis, 55 years, Institutional job

4.3.4 Perceived goal of carceral employment program

Some participants reflected on what they perceived to be correctional institutions' goals when implementing employment programs. The main aspects brought up included that programs are a way to maintain the provision of basic services for a low cost in the institution, and also that programs are a mechanism to assist prisoners in learning tools that could be applied in the labour market, contributing to their rehabilitation process. Some of the answers combined more than one potential goals, raising also some benefits of work programs to the individual that participates in it.

To keep us active, to keep us busy, because... we gotta keep our areas clean, right? They don't clean nothing for us. We keep our living areas clean, you know? We need to clean the supplies area, they will not go to the supplies or nothing, you know what I mean? If you're going to some institutions and ask the guards, they would rather to see us all locked up in our cells and left there, just to do our time, they'd rather just leave

our meals in the door. So, if that was the case, you would never have to have clean supplies.

David, 48 years, Institutional job

If I think like an inmate, and is us against you, or us against the system, then it's just a way to get stuff done at a cheap rate. But realistically... if you get a good instructor and you feel human, and you're treated as a human, not a child, some sort of animal, and you can learn something for the future and that sort of stuff, then I think it's a good situation.

Cara, 66 years, CORCAN job

A lot of the guys when they come in, they either have a lack of skills or, you know, attention problems, something like that... So, getting the job, specially at CORCAN, where you can learn new skills, right, and hopefully use them again once you're released. So now you have skills, and now you can use these skills out into the community.

Peter, 51 years, CORCAN and Institutional job

4.3.5 Perceived impacts of prison work on the individual

Some participants discussed the impacts that working during incarceration can have on prisoners. When referring back to their experiences in CORCAN shops, working was brought up as an opportunity for the individual to realize his or her own potential, which could have been a person's first time learning a trade. In the same context, one participant stressed that the work experience positively changed the dynamic between those engaged in learning the trade.

What happened when I took this apprenticeship, (...) the very first thing I noticed is the whole conversation changed between us there... and there wasn't one person talking about criminal activity in there anymore. It was always the excitement and the pride over learning something that we knew could get us somewhere outside. Like, we felt like we could actually do something with our life and that the talk between us became: oh, I'm gonna go here to finish my schooling for... or I'm going to apply to this place for a job... That's what all the conversations became. So I just wish they would realize that. Realize how it can change people, and give them something to really go for. If they would do that, they would be solving a big problem. (...) We all had a common passion and we were all fulfilling it in our own way... and so that's what the focus became. It started to be like a support system for each them, in how we would go forward with this.

Adrian, 39 years, CORCAN

For me, I already knew what I wanted to do, and I know who I am (...). For other individuals I'm sure that it does help them. You know what I mean, to realize: 'okay, I have potential'. Because a lot of guys never worked a job in their life. Some guys were selling dope or whatever, whatever crime they do... So when they come in to start working they actually get a sense of real life, you know what I mean, working nine to five. It does help individuals, I know that for a fact.

Alex, 31 years, CORCAN and Institutional job

When discussing both CORCAN and institutional jobs, participants mentioned how it helped “time go quicker” and feeling somehow helpful and productive.

Well, it helps you out to make you not feel so down on yourself. Makes the time go quicker. Because if you sit there and do nothing, like some guys do... they do that. The time goes slow. (...) [For] me, it's work. If I'm working on something or concentrating on doing something, time goes fast.

Josh, 44 years, Institutional job

I think it does help your self-esteem, especially if the jobs, you know, like I said, the library jobs... which is one of the better jobs, you know, you feel good about yourself, and you know you're helping other inmates, (...) and lot of it is because you are so busy you're making time fly. But yeah, you're feeling good about yourself because you're doing something positive. You're not just sitting around watching television all day, which is what I've been doing since I got out. That's why I'm one of those people where my incarceration was much more positive experience for me than parole has been.

Kevin, 49 years, Institutional job

Participants engaged in employment programs in federal corrections mostly for the need to occupy their days with activities perceived as useful or productive. Other motives mentioned for working include the opportunity to gain experience in a given trade and because the job activities were a source of pleasure for them. To attain a work position in prison, individuals could be proactive in searching for job postings and asking colleagues or prison staff for a specific position, or they could get it through recommendations made by friends or job offers made by prison staff. Overall, participants applied by filling out an application, but when applying for a job outside the perimeters of prison (i.e., work release) it was also necessary to do a job interview and curriculum vitae preparation.

The work environment in prison was described in terms of the relationships with co-workers and/or supervisors, and in terms of the challenges inherent to being an activity carried out inside a correctional facility. Some participants who worked in CORCAN shops noted that these work relationships were similar to what you would have in the community. Most of those working institutional jobs indicated a lack of a supervisory role outside of what guards or staff

would provide to any other prisoner. Challenges identified in the work environment relate mostly to it being dependent on the institution's stability, considering its different security and social settings compared to a work environment outside the correctional institution.

Upon mentioning that employment programs' goals were perceived as to maintain low costs for the prison maintenance and also to increase prisoners' chances of acquiring employability skills, participants stressed that work programs had some effects on individuals' experiences while incarcerated. These effects included the opportunity to realize their own potential as workers, to improve the relationship between co-workers in terms of seeing themselves as part of a work community, and to aid prisoners in feeling productive.

4.4 Perceived influence of participation in employment program on finding jobs in the community

Participants shared their perceptions on whether their work experiences during incarceration were helpful, or not, for finding employment in the community. Overall, nine participants did not consider that their job experiences in prison helped them to find jobs in the community, and five participants did see some effect in this regard.

Among the five interviewees who perceived that their prison jobs were, or could be, helpful for attaining employment in the community, three mentioned the impact as coming from their CORCAN experiences. Specifically, they considered it beneficial to have acquired certifications for using a forklift and to have had a welding apprenticeship, which allowed them to use the worked hours in CORCAN towards the process for becoming a registered welder.

And that's where I got my forklift license... and that's how I got my job at the [warehouse] I told you about. Cause I got my forklift certification from inside, and I was able to use it out here. (...) I mean, I've done construction before in my younger years, so I have a bit of experience there already (...) I've always found work... but yeah, the forklift though, right? Without me getting that certificate, I would have had to

find a way to get it out here in the community, which costs a lot more money, right? Inside it's free.

Peter, 51 years, CORCAN job

I am still registered with the Ministry as an apprentice. And I have my record book, with the skill sets that I do possess at the moment, so... Once I find a company that can enter into a training agreement with me and the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities again, to hire me and train me as an apprentice until I finish, then that's where all of that will come valuable.

Adrian, 39 years, CORCAN job

Two participants considered that their experiences working institutional jobs, specifically in the kitchen, have the potential to become valuable once they are allowed to search for jobs in the community. At the moment of interview, they were required by their Parole Officers to focus on improving their education.

So I want to look at all the options when I'm allowed to work. And go by my parole officers and see what they say, see if they approve it or not. (...) Like, for instance, if you haven't had experience cooking or working in the kitchen atmosphere, it gives you the experience on how to run certain machines, how to use the steam kettle, and that. (...) In the kitchen, everybody have to get along with everybody. Like, specially communication wise, we have to communicate with each other to know, okay, I'm doing this and you're doing that, so and so are doing that... or to communicate what time something should be done... to get started. [If I apply for a kitchen job, I would add this experience in my resume, but] I wouldn't tell them the institution. I'd just tell them CORCAN.

Mark, 36 years, Institutional job

Nine participants did not see their work in prison as influencing their attempts in finding work in the community. Reasons mentioned included having plans to work in an area other than the one worked while in prison (4 participants); the stigma over having a criminal record, which is not compensated by the prison work experience (2 participants); planning to retire in the near future, so temporary employment positions would suffice (2 participants); and not having had a good experience working due to significant mental health challenges during incarceration and in the present (1 participant).

For those who mentioned having plans to work in a field unrelated to their prison work, their prison jobs would not be seen as advantageous during job interviews or in their résumés.

For two of them (Kevin and Louis), this happened because their institutional jobs in prison were not considered a source of professional experience, but mostly as a way to spend their incarceration in a more enjoyable or less tedious manner.

You know, right now, I have an internet connection condition, I can't use the internet, which is very difficult for any job. And in hindsight, when they told me, when I first got to that board, that maybe I should take a job at the [CORCAN] warehouse, although I was against it at first, in hindsight, perhaps I should've done that, because that would've given me experience working in a warehouse, I would've taken health and safety courses, I would've learned how to drive a forklift... those types of things that would probably help me more easily find a job that I could get right now... (...) CORCAN, perhaps, I should've done it. But I probably wouldn't have done it because I was offered the job in the library, as I said, the library was a very social job, very interesting job. (...) The library work, it was fun, but because I probably won't be working in a library... it's not... (...) it's not gonna be direct help. It was more to help me spend my time while I was there... to make my time easier, more enjoyable.

Kevin, 49 years, Institutional job

Other two participants (Earl and Martin) mentioned that while they had worked in CORCAN shops, they did not get certifications from it and did not want to pursue those careers in the community. Earl worked in a leather shop, and while he was told he would receive a certificate for that, he never did. Earl now plans to find work in the construction field, in which he worked prior to incarceration. As for Martin, while he had some experience in a CORCAN metal shop, he did not complete a sufficient number of work hours to undergo a test and become a certified welder. He was also not willing to continue on the path to become a certified welder in the community, preferring to focus on a different career – the trucking business.

I was gonna get a certificate for the leather shop, for the [type of machine], but he [a staff from the CORCAN leather shop] never sent it to my PO in my other institution... (...) *Researcher: Which one do you think will be the most important? The experiences that you had inside the institutions, or the experience you had before when you were younger?*

Probably before. I like to do construction.

Earl, 22 years, Institutional and CORCAN jobs

I didn't have quite enough hours to go for the journeyman on welding. So I didn't have enough time to go for my test. (...) We need so many hours, and the supervisor or some people they give us something to test on welding and they test it. And see how our skills are. And then when we pass we become welders. (...) I wanted to, but there was no time, no time. I was sent home. My time was served. (...) And continue to is really not

my goal, like... not my dream, but it was a good experience. (...) I'm not really considering it right now, because I don't have that certificate. (...) I'm actually trying to get into that trucking, so I'm just renewing my license now... and after two years of road experience I'm gonna get into that trucking industry so...

Martin, 46 years, Institutional and CORCAN jobs

Two participants (Leonard and Josh) found that their work experience in prison would not be as useful for attaining jobs in the community because of the known stigma of hiring someone with a criminal record. Leonard had less experience with the labour market and could be considered less employable than Josh who had more stable employment positions in the community prior to incarceration. However, both emphasized the importance of a not for profit organization acting in Ottawa to help them in terms of attaining jobs in the community post-incarceration.

Taking the program, working with the CORCAN, taking the school, and working in the kitchen, you know, things that benefit me... I received my [high school] diploma from the penitentiary two years ago. And, you know, it was uplifting. For me it felt good to have that piece of paper. (...) If I were to go and apply for a job by myself? No way they would hire me. Cause I have a criminal record. But [this not for profit organization] have ways with dealing with the companies. Cause [the organization] puts trust in me to go work in a job site, right? Cause most jobsites won't hire people with a criminal record cause they assume that we're going to take their power tools, right? Cause it happened in the past, so... they wanna make sure that all their tools are available for them to use, so... (...) [this not for profit organization] will help find a secure job. And when I went [there] I told them any part time job available throughout the week, I'll take it. Asbestos or general labour.

Leonard, 43 years, Institutional and CORCAN jobs

Well, I had jobs when I was out before. Like I said, I did construction, I've done high-tech and all that... so jobs weren't that hard to find if I wanted I just go to a construction site and get a job... but when I got out I said: crap, now they're gonna look at my criminal record, and all that, so I went to [the not for profit organization]. They said, 'why don't you take the asbestos course?' So I took that. It was a 2 days' course, now it's a three days cause they added a little bit more to it. From that course that you take there, you need to write the test to get that certificate you gotta go to Algonquin College. Cause that's where they do it. (...) And then they see... because my boss also contracts us to the bigger asbestos companies, (...) They're very good. They have no [trouble] with people, cause they know *Mark* works with people who've been incarcerated, they don't care.

Josh, 44 years, Institutional job (kitchen)

In addition to the reasons mentioned above by participants, two of them (David and Cara) found that their experiences did not impact the process for finding jobs in the community mostly

because they are not planning on pursuing a specific profession related to their prison work. Rather, they are working temporary jobs to fulfil parole conditions as well as to be better prepared monetarily, in support of their plans for retirement. David is eligible to receive a full pension under a provincial program for individuals with disabilities. He mentioned being uncertain of his plans for finding other jobs after reaching his statutory release from the Correctional Service Canada. While he mentioned the work experience in the institution on his résumé, he did not perceive any influence of it assisting him to finding work.

Researcher: Do you plan to look for jobs after your expiry date?

I'm... actually, no, because I don't know yet. I really don't know, because I don't know about the SP, right? (...) The ODSP. Ontario Disability Support. I got a full pension. But I can't get while I'm on here. Because I'm being supported by CSC. (...) I did [put my experience in my resume]. (...) I handed out a couple applications, but no one's ever had a question, nothing about it. They never asked anything different.

David, 48 years

Cara was in a similar situation in terms of taking temporary jobs and planning to retire, but was eligible to receive a pension from the federal government under the Old Age Security program. While still on parole in the community, she worked part-time jobs unrelated to past positions she worked while in prison.

Well, I worked in the kitchen, I got enough hours that when I came out I grabbed chefs' papers through the 'Mission'. I worked through the 'Mission' and I got my papers there. (...) I went in with 27 (years), going out at 67. (...) There's some people that have gone [to the community and found related jobs] but they weren't lifers, because usually we don't get out quick enough. (...) I'm in Old Age Pension, and Canada Pension Plan, but I get 2 or 3 irons in the fire – one downstairs in the grocery store and working with *Laura* over [the not for profit organization] to find part-time work. (...) I want a little extra money coming in to help save towards an apartment, stuff like that.

Cara, 66 years

Overall, participation in carceral employment programs was not perceived as having a strong influence on finding jobs in the community for these participants. While some individuals emphasized that CORCAN shops may provide prisoners with good skills and learning opportunities, this impact may depend on some aspects, such as matching the CORCAN area of

production with the individual's aspirations and being able to provide participants with useful indications of their experience (e.g., trade certifications). One participant did find a job due to his certification for using a forklift attained while incarcerated – even though he is currently working with cleaning services, an area related to another institutional job he had. Matching the CORCAN shop with the individual's aspirations increases the chances that participants will want to build on the experiences attained through the program when planning their careers in the community. Two participants were not planning to work in the same fields in which they worked in CORCAN shops. On the other hand, two individuals planned to use the hours worked in a CORCAN metal shop to become registered welders in Ontario, but they still had to find a certified employee that is able to support their welder apprenticeship.

When it comes to participants' experiences with institutional jobs, certificates and training were not commonly mentioned. The exception was for Cara, who was able to leverage the hours worked in the kitchen to get a certificate in the community in a related area. Nevertheless, she was not currently using it when searching for temporary jobs. Two other participants also planned to build on their experiences with kitchen work and to engage in culinary studies in the community. They both saw that their prison work experience could be an advantage to them when looking for related work in the future.

It is of note that some participants emphasized the role of partnerships in the community for providing jobs to individuals with criminal records. In some cases, this avenue for finding work was perceived as essential, at least in the short and medium term following their return to the community.

4.5 Summary of Results

The themes presented demonstrate particular aspects of former prisoners' employment experiences. These themes were developed in relation to the research question: *In what ways do former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their reintegration into the labour market upon release?* The first theme discussed some issues faced by participants when first considering returning to the labour market after incarceration. While most participants planned to find employment upon release, there were challenges or barriers to doing so. Parole conditions may have required that they do not search for employment immediately, recommending they first attend educational, job readiness or mental health programs in the community. In some cases, individuals were frustrated for not knowing when parole officers would allow them to search for work. Besides parole conditions, individual issues, such as mental health, can impose barriers to an individual's reintegration into the community via employment. Also, their financial situation upon release can limit the jobs they can attain, for example, the position must be within an area served by public transportation.

The second theme presented a picture of the types of carceral employment programs in which participants engaged while in federal corrections. All participants worked institutional jobs and 7 (half) also worked in CORCAN shops. Among the nine participants who found employment in the community, 5 did so on their own, and 4 found work through the support of a non-profit organization that provides training and employment to individuals with significant barriers, such as having a criminal record. This theme also described some patterns in terms of the field of work performed inside prison as matching or not the current job in the community or the individual's job aspiration (i.e., what he would like to be doing for work in the future).

The third theme presented participants' experiences with carceral employment programs around five main issues. The first issue discussed their main motivations for working during incarceration, which was mostly for "killing time" or to feel they were doing something productive while incarcerated, followed by the chance to get work experience and because the work was perceived as a source of enjoyment. A second issue was the process for attaining the prison job; some participants were proactive in searching and applying for the job, while others earned the position from a friend's or a staff member's recommendation. A third issue discussed was their perception of the work environment, indicating that in CORCAN shops participants had more interactions with work supervisors compared to those working institutional jobs. Greater contact with work supervisors might have had an effect on CORCAN participants in terms of viewing their work as somewhat similar to what they would have in the community. Participants also discussed some challenges inherent to the prison work environment, including the low level of expectation by a supervisor in terms of their performance, and the challenging relationship with co-workers having different levels of authority, which could impact their relationship outside work-hours in prison. A fourth issue was the perceived goal of carceral employment programs, being that of increasing participants' employability as well as to maintain the provision of basic services to prisoners with reduced costs. Finally, the fifth issue related to this theme was the effect of prison work on participants' lives. Participants noted that work activities in prison allowed them to realize their potential as workers, to engage in more positive relationships with co-workers, and to help them feel proud for being productive while incarcerated.

The fourth theme presented how participants saw their experiences working in prison as affecting their attempts to find employment in the community. Most participants (9 out of 14) did

not think their experience helped or could help to find them work. Reasons included planning to work in a different occupational field, the impact of having a criminal record, and planning to retire in the near future. The remaining participants perceived their experiences working in prison as having helped or having the potential to be useful in their reintegration into the labour market. These participants planned to keep working in a similar field as the one they worked in while incarcerated.

In the next chapter, I discuss these findings in light of the existing literature and what carceral employment programs in Canadian federal corrections are intended to achieve.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to *understand* how individuals make sense of their participation in carceral employability programs and how this was seen to affect their reintegration into the community. It also aimed, to some extent, to *evaluate* employment programs based on former participants' accounts of the effects the program might have on their lives in the community.

Considering the many challenges that most former prisoners face when returning to the community, finding and retaining employment can be an important event to alleviate some of the pressures of this transition (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013). Not only does work provide the monetary means to meet basic needs, it can also provide a sense of belonging in an occupational setting (Fenton et al., 1984; Western, 2007), particularly if engaging in work that is perceived as meaningful. Canadian federal prisons implement employment and employability programs to which prisoners can apply. Participation takes the form of engagement in work activities (e.g., prison maintenance or CORCAN shops) and/or vocational and skills training activities. The argument in support of implementing carceral employment programs is that it can benefit participants by providing transferable skills and work experience, thus enhancing their job readiness upon release into the community (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a).

This chapter discusses the four main themes that emerged when aiming to *understand* how former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in terms of their reintegration into the labour market upon release. These themes include: work-related aspirations in the community after prison; employment experiences inside and outside prison; perceptions of the carceral employment program they participated in; and the perceived influence that this experience might have in their attempts to find work in the community. I discuss the main findings and limitations of the objective of *evaluating* the employment

programs based on the perceived effects by participants. In the final section, I discuss the challenges and limitations of this research.

5.1 Work-related aspirations in the community after prison

The first theme examines the aspirations and challenges participants faced when considering the return to the labour market upon release. It provides context on how participants related to the notion of potentially searching for employment after having spent a period of time in a federal prison. The theme also contributed to a better understanding of conditions faced by participants, including current and potential relationships with institutions and services in the community.

Results showed that while most participants were planning to find employment upon release from prison, many had immediate barriers that prevented them from doing so. One example were parole conditions, which could include the restriction of employment search. Five out of fourteen former federal prisoners interviewed could not search for jobs before satisfying other parole requirements, such as community programs on job readiness, education, mental health healing, or other treatment-based programs. Parole officers had the power to determine whether the individual was ready or not to start searching for employment. Such uncertainty and the realization that the decision lay with the parole officer was a source of concern and stress for some participants. This finding, interpreted via the concept of alienation, suggests that some participants experienced alienation in terms a perceived loss of control over their own abilities as members of society to use their ‘labour-power’ as a commodity. In this case, the immediate cause of alienation was the parole conditions that prohibited the individual to engage in work.

Research has shown that incarcerated individuals have historically often been part of a marginalized group coming from a poor neighborhood, with limited educational background and scarce economic resources. The Canadian federal government recognized this incarceration pattern nearly 80 years ago. More specifically, the 1938 Archambault Royal Commission of Inquiry recommended that prisons take on a *rehabilitative* role through the provision of vocational and educational training to prisoners (Griffiths & Murdoch, 2014). This illustrated an incipient change of perspectives on what correctional goals should be, starting to abandon, at least formally, the punitive function of prisons (Ricciardelli et al., 2014). The new perspective was based on the idea that the provision of adequate programming in prisons would remediate deficiencies identified in the prison population. While this approach, known as the ‘medical model of corrections’, focused on treating the individual, another shift would later prioritize assessing and meeting the needs of marginalized *groups*, not just individuals – linking correctional problems to social problems.

This movement, along with the new managerialism in corrections, would eventually shape the form and type of programs delivered to those serving the remainder of their correctional sentences in the community. Aiming to better manage individuals in the community and to reduce the chances of recidivism, the Parole Board of Canada approves conditional releases (e.g., day parole, full parole) if they understand it will contribute “to the protection of society by facilitating the reintegration of the offender into society as a law-abiding citizen” (CCRA, 1992, Part II, 102 b). Requirements for release may include participation in community programs, which can be modified as deemed appropriate (CCRA, 1992, Part II, 133 (6)).

Conditional release can bring benefits to individuals and to the overall community. Research has recognized that gradual release from incarceration can lead to better chances of

reintegration than abrupt unsupervised release (Waller, 1974). It is also known that parole conditions may promote the use of institutional and community services that provide support in addressing challenges (e.g. limited education, mental health issues, limited employment experience) faced by many former prisoners (Valera et al., 2017). However, in the present study, some individuals appeared to have experienced additional challenges in their transition to the community, with more restrictive terms and conditions set by their parole officers. This included a restriction on their ability to search for jobs. It also meant having restrictions on accessing the internet, using computers, or being near specific locations. Such restrictions faced by many parolees have been argued to function as “invisible punishments”, which may hinder individuals’ attempts to successfully transition from prison (Petersilia, 2003, p.112). While this research did not collect data on the legal reason for participants’ imprisonment, a few men chose to disclose this information when relating their experiences; for example, some were convicted for sex offences, which led to additional restrictions imposed by their parole officers.

As one individual who worked in a prison library explained, he was not aware of the exact conditions of his parole when he applied. He believed parole would mean a step further in terms of having more freedom compared to his incarceration experience, but that was not what he experienced. He could not apply for jobs and could not be outside his room for more than two hours a day, while in prison he could practice physical exercise at the gym and could work to feel productive. This individual emphasized that he would rather have continued serving his sentence inside rather than being under the parole conditions.

This finding is supported by research indicating that men convicted for sex offences face additional barriers when returning to the community (Evans & Porter, 2015; Gunnison &

Helfgott, 2013; Rydberg, 2018; Yoder & Farkas, 2017), which creates potential negative consequences in their attempts to transition to the community (Rydberg, 2018).

Another finding related to participants' work-related aspirations upon returning to the community indicated that while most former prisoners were planning to maintain or to obtain employment in the near future, a few individuals on parole were not planning to keep their jobs for an extended period of time. Rather, some were working only because parole conditions required them to do so and were planning to retire due to age or disabilities upon completing their sentences. Also, one person did not want to consider returning to the labour market as he was experiencing debilitating mental health challenges. These cases point to a simple but important fact that prisoner reentry does not always require participation in the labour market. This could be particularly true for individuals serving long sentences (i.e., 'lifers') and those experiencing mental health challenges (Petersilia, 2003). Even though a few participants had plans other than returning to employment (e.g., retirement, deal with mental health struggles) they were still required to look for and find jobs in the community by their parole officers. For some of them, their relationship with employment could be interpreted as one that created a feeling of 'powerlessness' or of "helplessness and subordination to power", acting as an extension of this form of alienation experienced while incarcerated (Seeman, 1983; Thomas, 1975, p.489).

5.2 Employment experiences inside and outside prison

The second theme reflected participants' experiences with employment while incarcerated and in the community. More specifically, the theme focused on the occupational spheres with which individuals were engaged throughout their lives, the types of jobs they

aspired to attain in the near future, and the mechanisms used for finding employment upon release from prison. It provided context on how participants related to employment, their plans for engaging in work that is meaningful to them, and it identified processes for navigating their transition to the community.

In 2012 around 50% of the federal prison population in Canada was assigned to work in institutional jobs, while a lower proportion, 12%, was assigned to work in CORCAN shops (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a). Similarly, fewer participants had experience with CORCAN work programs, such as welding, carpentry, or paint shops, although all of them participated in institutional employment programs at some point, such as working in the kitchen, performing cleaning duties, maintenance, working in the library or in the chapel of a correctional institution.

Findings indicated that participants, for the most part, were not working or aspiring to work in the same occupational position held prior to incarceration. Only 3 out of 14 participants wanted to engage in the same or a similar position held prior to imprisonment. Two of them held stable job positions in the community, one as a public servant and the other as a truck driver and heavy equipment operator. Despite their desire to return to their previous job positions, the nature of their offences or the fact that the particular position had been offered to another person, made this return an unviable option. While this situation is uncommon among the prison and parolee populations who mostly experience an unstable job history (Correctional Service Canada, 2010; O'Grady & Lafleur, 2016; Waller, 1974), it is of note that individuals who have held stable and satisfying job positions in the community prior to incarceration might have different needs upon release. These individuals will be able to contribute to the community in different capacities, with different levels of work-readiness. Organizations in the community

should be able to accommodate individuals with diverse backgrounds through partnerships that create a range of placement options for those with a criminal record and incarceration experiences (O’Grady & Lafleur, 2016). Individuals that already carry a sense of belonging in a particular occupational sphere might face singular challenges if required to reconstruct their lives in a different work environment for which they have not prepared themselves with training or work experience. In this sense, they might experience alienation since the work field to which they were attached is now outside their reach. Indeed, they might experience alienation in terms of ‘powerlessness’ (Seeman, 1983) and feelings of lacking control when struggling to find employment with a criminal record.

When comparing the type of work experienced in prison with the job position attained in the community upon release, 4 out of 9 participants were working in the same field as the one experienced in prison. Two of them were satisfied with the field of work initiated while in prison and planned to retain their current work. Participants’ employment *aspirations* were also compared to their work in prison. Among those who expressed having job aspirations for the near future, including if they wanted to remain in the same field as their current jobs, 6 out of 10 participants were planning to work in the same area in which they worked while in prison. This finding indicates that some participants were engaged in carceral employment programs that were, to some extent, meaningful or helpful to them, since the same occupational field was considered as a potential future career in the community. It also means that ‘transitional employment’, or job positions that are made available to individuals with significant barriers to employment, are not sufficiently meaningful (Waller, 1974; Western, 2007) or do not match their aspirations. Having a ‘match’ between prison work and participants’ aspirations could function as a trigger for positive employment experiences in the community, building on the experience

gained with carceral employment programs and supporting the chances that the individual is motivated and satisfied during the transition to the community.

The processes for finding employment in the community after returning from incarceration included independent searches as well as resorting to partnerships with local organizations that support former prisoners. While all participants that were allowed or encouraged to look for jobs by parole officers were in fact employed, for many of them the job positions were not ones they would like to retain. This situation suggests that there is a limited option of jobs available for former prisoners while they are on parole. Participants might be working solely for the monetary compensation and to satisfy parole conditions, not experiencing it as a meaningful activity to them. The conception of alienation as the lack of control ('powerlessness') for engaging in meaningful work activities was also experienced by participants. While they could fulfill the first expectation set for them by parole officers in terms of being productive members of society, many do not necessarily feel as though they have accomplished much. In this sense, there appears to be a missed opportunity to expand partnerships in the community for providing more varied employment options and to meet their diverse job aspirations. This could create greater chances of job satisfaction that would, in turn, reduce feelings of alienation and challenges in coping with the transition period.

5.3 Perceptions on carceral employment program

A separate theme reflected participants' perceptions of their overall experience with prison work. More specifically, this theme identified aspects such as the motivations and processes for engaging in work while in prison, challenges and work-relationships with supervisors and colleagues, the perceived goal of employment programs in prisons, and the

perceived effects of participating in the program. Part of the research objective was to *evaluate* the impacts of the program based on participants' reconstruction of their experiences. Publicly available information on the goals or objectives of employment and employability programs offered in Canadian federal corrections were compared to participant accounts of the program.

As indicated on Figure 1 and on [Annex 7](#), 'Logic Model: Employment and Employability Program', the program expects that individuals employment needs are identified during intake assessment. This assessment should then guide referrals to employment programs in prison and part of the individual's correctional plan. This process is in line with a recently released policy on carceral employment programs in Canada, the Commissioner's Directive (CD) number 735, 'Employment and Employability Program', effective May 15th, 2017. Sections 21 to 25 of the CD-735 indicate the requirements for assessing employment needs and to build a plan to address them (Correctional Service Canada, 2017).

Individuals typically completed an application form to apply for a job in prison, although some were informally recommended by fellow prisoners or appointed by correctional staff before formalizing the application process for a job position. Only one participant mentioned having discussed his employment needs with a correctional parole officer during an individual assessment early in his incarceration. Figure 1 below displays how federal prisoners are assigned to employment or employability program in Canada.

Figure 1. Process for assigning prisoners to employment or employability programs in Canadian federal corrections



Source: Correctional Service Canada. (2013). Audit of Employment and Employability Programs for Offenders. Internal Audit Sector, 378-1-280.

Most participants, however, did not perceive prison work experiences to be part of their correctional plans and did not discuss this with their correctional parole officers. While such assessments may have occurred and participants did not remember, it still indicates that there may be an opportunity to make prisoners more aware of how decisions are taken regarding their applications for prison work, as well as how work relates to their correctional plan. In support of this finding, an internal evaluation conducted by CSC in 2008 found that the assignment of employment positions to prisoners was not only based on their needs, but also on the lack of work opportunities and competing priorities, such as required attendance in other correctional programs (e.g., mental health treatment, schooling) (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

Other aspects brought up by participants were related to the prison work environment, in particular the relationships with work supervisors and colleagues. This speaks to the extent to which carceral employment programs emphasize the development of generic employability skills (e.g. problem solving, communication, team work) through work experience in CORCAN shops or institutional jobs. During the 1990s, the CSC started to change its delivery of employment programs by adding activities that could also aid in providing employability skills to prisoners

(Gillis & Muirhead, 2004). Indeed, one of the main goals of the Employment and Employability Program (EEP) is to provide skills and abilities to prisoners so they are able to obtain and retain employment in the community (Correctional Service Canada, 2008).

CORCAN expects that work supervisors act as professional role models to employees in CORCAN shops (Correctional Service Canada, 2013b), and CSC's internal research shows that the unique characteristics of a given CORCAN shop, including the emphasis on team work, can have a positive impact in terms of building work competencies and behaviours (Getkate, 1993). Findings from the present study showed that, for most of those who engaged in institutional work, supervision was perceived as nearly nonexistent. Participants met with work supervisors before the job began in order to understand the tasks to be carried out and to sign a contract. This is in accordance with section 30 of the Commissioner Directive on the Employment and Employability Program (CD-735), from 2017, regarding the "inmate employment orientation" (Correctional Service Canada, 2017), which does not provide details on potential day-to-day interactions between workers and supervisors. Therefore, participants who held institutional jobs did not benefit from having role-models or from developing a healthy relationship with their work supervisors. On the other hand, participants who engaged in CORCAN shops recognized a more frequent presence of work supervisors in the work environment, but also mentioned that the quality of the relationship depended on the personality, style and willingness of the supervisor to teach them.

Participants were also asked to reflect on what they believed the goal of carceral employment programs were, based on their experiences while incarcerated. The goal of the EEP is to "enhance the job readiness of every offender" by developing employability skills that could improve prisoners' capacity to find and retain employment in the community (Correctional

Service Canada, 2013a, p.14). The program's logic model ([Appendix 1](#)) also indicates that, as a long-term outcome, the EEP aims to "lower the costs of incarceration", which would be achieved if the institution becomes self-sufficient. Participants' exhibited a similar perception of what the program's goals were, considering both the development of skills for prisoners and the monetary benefit created for the institution, since prison management would not need to pay equal or more than minimum wage in contracts in the community for the maintenance of its basic services.

This perception of the goal of employment programs as twofold, including that it serves as a lucrative strategy for the correctional institution, indicates that participants recognize the value of their work performed while incarcerated, and potentially feel as though they are not being adequately recognized or compensated for their work. Using the concept of alienation suggests that prisoners who worked in CORCAN shops while incarcerated feel estranged from the product of their work. Participants know the value of their work (they acknowledge the profits their work bring to CORCAN) and they realize they are not being fairly compensated for it, since they are immersed in the carceral context, and not in the free market.

While results were similar for both CORCAN and institutional work participants with regards to the perceived goals of employment programs, this finding could have been influenced by the fact that, in 2013, the federal government eliminated the hourly pay given to CORCAN workers. Most participants were incarcerated during that period and experienced the changes or had colleagues who were experiencing the cut in incentive pay. This experience could have enhanced their perceptions that federal prisons were financially benefiting from their work without properly compensating them for it.

Participants also discussed how employment programs affected them in positive ways while incarcerated. Benefits mentioned included the feeling of being productive, the realization

of their potential as effective workers, and a sense of belonging in a given occupation. This finding is in line with research and an internal evaluation on the EEP conducted by CSC in 2008, with similar aspects brought up by prisoners regarding the benefits felt while participating in employment programs (Correctional Service Canada, 2008; Richmond, 2014). The finding also relates to the notion that participation in employment can be a source of belonging and satisfaction (Fenton et al., 1984; Klein, 2008; Western, 2007).

5.4 Perceived impacts of program participation on job attainment in the community

Different issues emerged when participants reflected on whether their experiences working in prison could have played a role in finding work in the community. Most participants believed that their experiences were not useful in helping them attain a job. Reasons included planning to work in a different occupation, to retire, the stigma over former prisoners overriding any benefits from having worked in prison, wanting to return to a previous profession, or because of significant mental health issues. Indeed, research shows that the stigma faced by former prisoners becomes visible particularly when trying to find a job in the community (Gunnison & Helfgot, 2013; Hunter & Boyce, 2009; Western, 2007). Research has also shown the high prevalence of mental health issues within the Canadian federal correctional population (Petersilia, 2003; Ricciardelli et al., 2014). Regarding their explanation that the experience would not be helpful because they planned to work in a field different from the one worked in prison, there are two potential underlying issues that could explain this.

The first potential explanation would be that participation in employment programs, for these participants, solely entailed the performance of work activities, with no particular focus on developing employability skills (i.e., soft skills) or undergoing vocational training. Otherwise,

participants would have perceived the program as also providing useful transferable skills for the process of finding and attaining a job. While working in prison may have been a valuable coping mechanism while incarcerated (Silva & Saraiva, 2016), participation in the program may not assist with reintegration into the labour market upon release.

The second potential underlying issue is that work opportunities in prison were not sufficiently meaningful or were not seen as valuable careers in the labour market, thus informing the choice to follow a different employment path in the community. The finding reflects CSC's internal evaluation of the EEP (2008), which found that the program needed to expand and include more meaningful work opportunities for prisoners (Correctional Service Canada, 2008). Additionally, assignment to work programs may not have occurred in a way that ensured that employment needs and aspirations of prisoners were being considered.

Still, some participants considered their experiences with carceral employment programs to be helpful in finding employment in the community. It is of note that these individuals received some form of vocational certificate from the carceral employment program or participated in an apprenticeship program, where they could use the hours worked in CORCAN shops as part of the work practice necessary to become certified in a given trade. In addition, a few individuals perceived the experience of working in prison valuable to finding work in the community specifically because the prison job placement was meaningful to them, and they aspired to expand their education and find employment in that same field.

5.5 Considerations and limitations on the objective to evaluate carceral employment programs

Researchers and evaluators have long attempted to identify the relationship, if any, between participation in carceral employment programs and employment outcomes and

recidivism upon release to the community (Petersilia, 2003; Sabol, 2007; Waller, 1974; Wilson et al., 2000). Even when studies find a relationship between program participation and reduced recidivism, it is not explained by the mechanisms through which such relationships are believed to occur (Wilson et al., 2000). Despite the benefits for individuals in terms of alleviating the isolation of life in prison, the ultimate goal of such programs is to assist former prisoners in attaining and maintaining jobs in the community, as employment is found to be an important factor for transitioning back to the community (Petersilia, 2003). Different from trying to establish a causal relationship or to demonstrate how a program contributed to the achievement of the program's overall outcome, this study aimed to *understand* how participants made sense of their participation in employment programs as affecting their lives in the community. In line with the research question and methodological decisions, I also aimed, to a limited extent, to *evaluate* if and how the program was able to reach its goals based on the perceptions of those most directly impacted by the program, prisoners engaging in carceral employment programs.

As discussed, the EEP's main objectives are the successful reintegration of prisoners by enhancing their job readiness, as well as to lower the costs of incarceration – as identified in the program's logic model ([Appendix 7](#)). Participant perceptions of the program goals matched broader (long-term) outcomes presented in documentation on the program's profile. In this sense, there is a shared understanding of the broader reasons for implementing carceral employment programs.

Participants did not recognize, however, some of the links between employment program participation and other events during the incarceration period. For example, there were no clear links made between prison work and the employment needs assessments that are supposed to be conducted early in their sentences and guide the assignment of employment positions or

vocational training. Even in the event that these steps for assigning employment for prisoners are being followed, from the perspective of the users of the program (the prisoners) it would be beneficial to be able to make that connection and understand why and how your participation in prison work is supposed to assist you in bridging into the labour market upon release. That awareness of how the program is supposed to be of assistance would also serve as a tool for ensuring the program provider is made accountable.

Considering that most participants were not aware of why they were assigned to a particular prison job or of how this decision was made, there appears to be a lack of information provided to prisoners particularly regarding how the program is supposed to benefit them. This situation could result in work activities that are ineffective in terms of leading to one of the carceral employment program's ultimate goals of contributing to the successful reintegration of prisoners by enhancing their job readiness. As discussed, some participants did not perceive their experiences with the program as having assisted them in finding jobs in the community.

However, to fully evaluate participant experiences with employment programs, it would be necessary to collect more detailed information on their work and training activities and to gather feedback from program stakeholders and from those working the frontlines with program participants. In addition, an evaluation of the program should take into account that carceral employment programs can vary significantly across institutions in how they are implemented and the types of activities offered, as suggested by previous internal research conducted by CSC (Correctional Service Canada, 2008) and feedback from participants in this study. Therefore, our secondary objective to evaluate how the program has impacted the participants upon release is limited due to the inability to triangulate data.

5.6 Limitations in the application of abduction as a research strategy

I chose to use an abductive research strategy. Coming from an interpretive research perspective, in which social reality is dependent on those producing and interpreting it, its main feature is the focus on everyday language to explore “the knowledge that social actors use in the production, reproduction and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation” (Blaikie, 2000, p. 100).

One of the challenges of using semi-structured interviews to examine how participants construct their own experiences, was the social distance between participants and the researcher. It is recognized that social distance between interviewer and interviewee can impact significantly how the information is conveyed (Miller, 2012). Participants recognized that I have a higher educational achievement than they did in most cases, since it was made clear to them that the interviews were part of the data collection for completing a thesis in a Master of Arts program in Criminology at the University of Ottawa. I am also a woman, which could have impacted the interview based on individuals’ background in understanding women in society in relation to men. On the other hand, the fact that my first language is not English or French and I have not lived in Canada for most of my life, it was clear that they were interacting with someone that also faced some challenges – including in terms of verbal communication and for lacking knowledge of local issues that, for them, were learned naturally throughout their lives. This situation, learned by interviewees in the moment of interview, is believed to have balanced, to some extent, a perceived power differential between the two social actors at the beginning of interviews. One mitigation strategy used to address the social distance between interviewer and interviewee was to make clear, prior to and during the interview, that the purpose was to understand *their* perspectives and experiences, without judgement on their actions or thoughts,

instead treating them with respect and sympathy when they shared their thoughts on the difficult situations they experienced.

During the analytical process, an abductive strategy entails identifying ‘first-level constructs’, or concepts and words used in participants’ naturally occurring language that explain how they make sense of their lives. As a second step, the researcher creates ‘social scientific typifications’ based on first-level constructs (Ong, 2012). The literature review informed most of the topics discussed during interviews, although a few new themes emerged, such as mental health experiences and motivations for working in prison. In this sense, the research strategy was adapted in that some social scientific typifications were discussed with participants, who in turn challenged or informed my interpretations, approximating also to a deductive strategy. Overall, the research strategy was perceived to be successful in terms of generating knowledge that is primarily grounded on participants’ accounts of their experiences.

CONCLUSION

This research produced knowledge on how former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employment programs in Canadian federal prisons as affecting their transition back into community, more specifically when returning to the labour market. For varied reasons, many participants did not find that participation assisted them in transitioning to employment. However, such reasons were not always dependent on their experiences with the carceral work programs per se, but rather due to external issues such as planning to retire, to receive a government pension due to disabilities, mental health experienced during and after incarceration, or the perception that the stigma for being a former prisoner overrides any potential benefit coming from the program. Potentially indicating some shortcomings in how carceral employment programs were implemented, others mentioned that the program was not helpful because they planned to work in a different occupation than that of the prison work in which they participated. On the other hand, participation in carceral employment programs were seen as beneficial in their reintegration into the labour market by some former prisoners who were able to receive provincially recognized trade certificates, to use worked hours towards an apprenticeship, or who engaged in prison work experiences that matched their employment aspirations for future engagement in the community.

A notable finding on the perceived effects of carceral employment programs was not directly related to the guiding research question, and confirms prior research on prisoners' perception of carceral employment programs. Indeed, the effects of work activities on the individual while incarcerated were perceived in positive terms by 13 out of 14 participants. Working in prison helped participants to cope with prison idleness, to feel productive and part of society, and to make 'time go by'. In some cases, particularly when CORCAN still paid

incentive fees based on production (before 2013), individuals also felt valued for being able to contribute financially to family members in the community. In this sense, irrespective of how well the program was aiding in increasing individuals' employability upon release, it was appropriated by participants as a coping mechanism and as a tool for maintaining their status of 'contributing members of society'. This is significant given the acknowledged value that work can have for individuals, particularly in fostering a sense of belonging (Fenton et al., 1984; Western, 2007) and in coping with tensions that are inherent to incarceration (Silva & Saraiva, 2016).

Looking Forward

Findings from this study opened up possibilities for future research. The concept of alienation used to interpret the data collected shed light on another aspect that could be problematized and used to frame research on carceral work programs: that is the notion of prison work as a form of unfree labour. While the concept of alienation can assist in understanding some of the particular issues experienced by individuals working while incarcerated (e.g., using work as a form to escape from the prisoner identity), it is limited in terms of not directly problematizing the tension between two dynamic aspects of prison work. First, the definition of 'convict' entails that the individual lacks the right to freedom and that the state will shape the labour relations that one engages with in prison. Second, prison work is also an extension of the broader commodification of labour, and working prisoners are part of the global working classes. More specifically, working prisoners experience a "coerced commodification of [their] labour power" that is controlled by penal authorities (De Vito & Lichtenstein, 2013, p. 289). Therefore, using the notion of unfree labour to frame studies on prison work will allow to connect working

prisoners to other working groups that are part of a fluid network of free and unfree labour in modern societies.

When considering the target population for this study, there is an opportunity for future research to focus on those with a lengthier experience in the community, and to look more closely to the experiences of different social groups. Many participants were still on parole and under conditions that did not allow them to actively search for employment. It would be relevant to explore the perceptions of those who are not under parole supervision to verify how they view their experiences with carceral employment programs as potentially having impacted their transition to life free from the constant surveillance of the state. In addition, comparative studies focusing on how carceral employment programs function for specific groups of prisoners in Canadian federal prisons would allow to better assess their perceived effects on the various groups who are supposed to benefit from them. For example, it would be relevant to research how women perceive employment programs in prison as impacting their lives in the community, since carceral programs in prisons for women should be designed and implemented to address different challenges (Griffiths et al., 2014; Montford, 2015). Considering the particular needs of Indigenous prisoners, who have been disproportionately represented in federal corrections (Sapers, 2012), it is also necessary to explore how carceral employment programs are addressing their needs.

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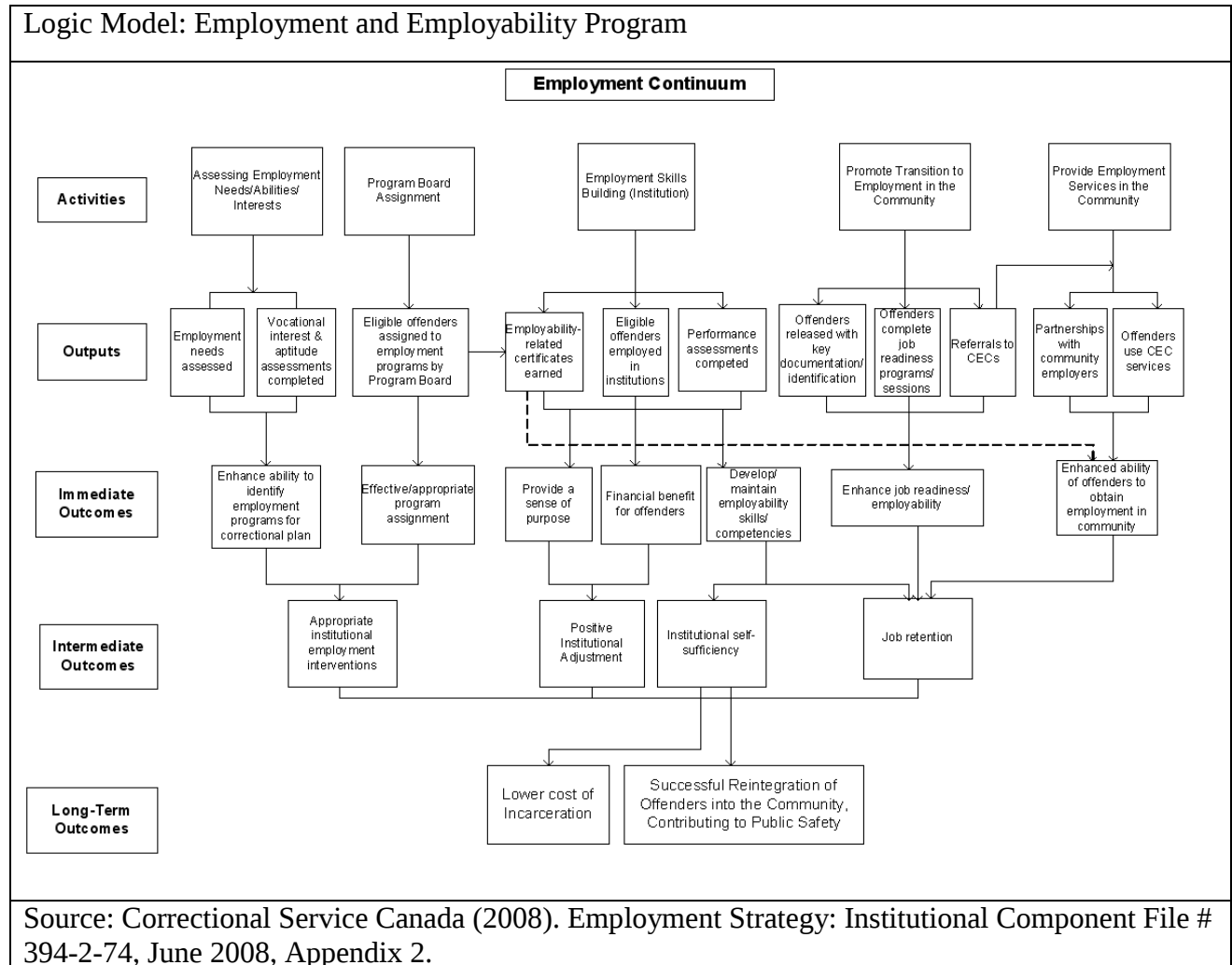
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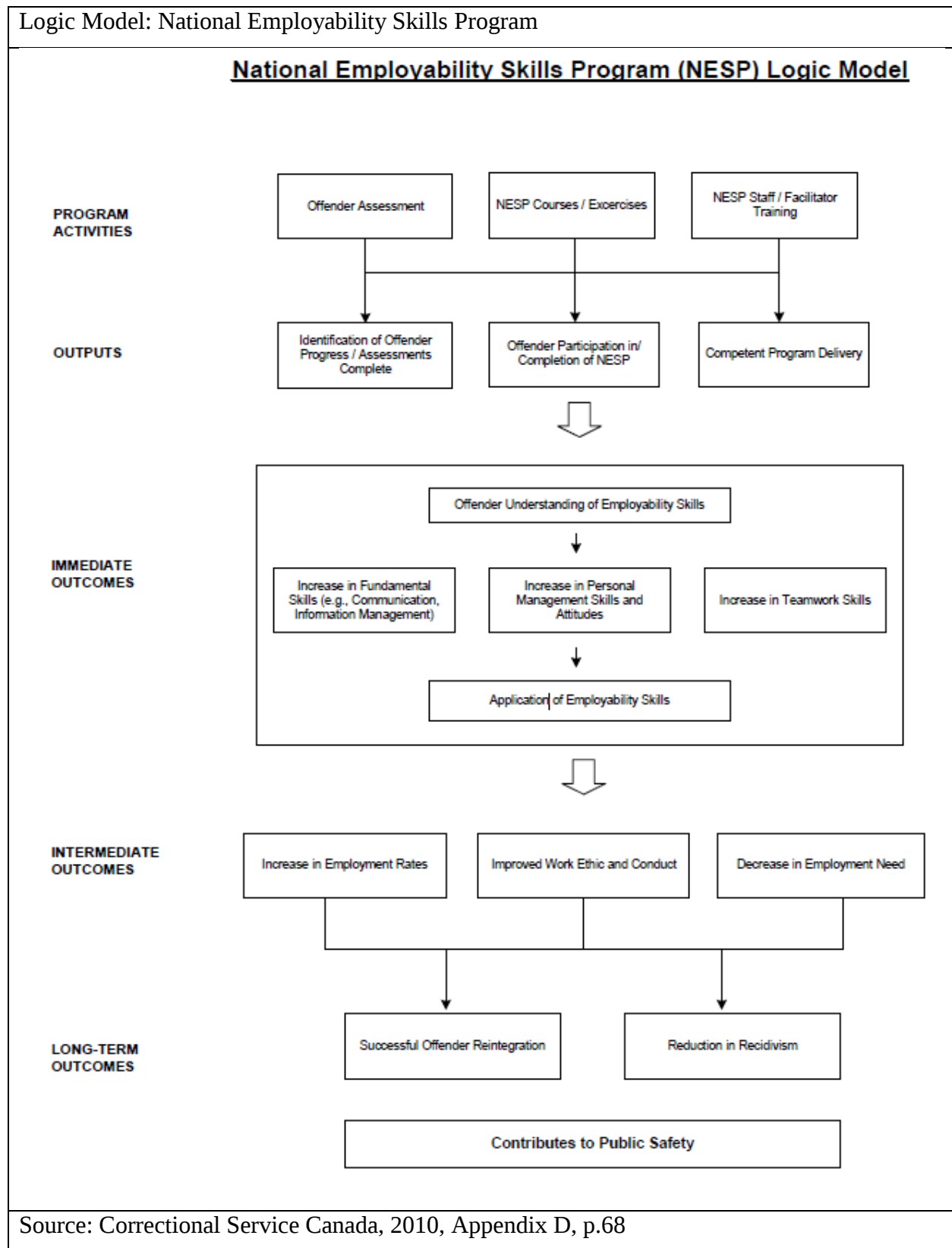
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Logic Model for the Employment and Employability Program



Appendix 2: Logic Model for the National Employability Skills Program

Logic Model: National Employability Skills Program



Source: Correctional Service Canada, 2010, Appendix D, p.68

Appendix 3: Certificate of Ethics Approval

Page 1 of 2

File Number: 11-15-11

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 12/14/2015



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice **Social Sciences and Humanities REB**

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Ronald-Francis	Melchers	Social Sciences / Criminology	Supervisor
Aline	Nogueira Menezes	Social Sciences / Criminology	Student Researcher

File Number: 11-15-11

Type of Project: Master's Thesis

Title: Employment programs for male federal prisoners in Canada: A case study on the perceptions of former participants living in the Ottawa region

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
12/14/2015	12/13/2016	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:
N/A

File Number: 11-15-11

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 12/14/2015



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Riana Marcotte
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Appendix 4: Recruitment letter



Research Study:

Employment Programs for Male Federal Prisoners in
Canada: A case study on the perceptions of former
participants living in the Ottawa region

Hello,

A graduate student at the University of Ottawa, Aline Mourão, intends to complete a research project on the views of previously incarcerated individuals who participated in employment programs (e.g. CORCAN, institutional work, job training) offered inside corrections by CSC (Correctional Service Canada). The study aims to explore the experiences individuals had with the program and also their experiences in the community regarding employment. This will be done through a one-time face-to-face interview with selected participants, which will be audio-recorded. Interviews will be conducted in English only. Your anonymity and confidentiality is guaranteed, so nothing you share can be associated or linked to you. Recorded interviews will be kept in an USB key that will be encrypted, limiting accessibility to it. This USB key and other research materials will be stored in a locker only accessible by the principle researcher and supervisor, located in the Faculty of Social Science Building at University of Ottawa.

Those who have participated in any type of employment program while incarcerated at a Canadian federal prison, and that are now in the community for at least 1 month, are being invited to indicate their willingness to participate in this research project. Please, contact the principal researcher if you are willing to participate, so you can receive more information about the research project and about the recruitment process.

It is possible not all interested individuals will be able to participate in this study. This would be the case if we have a large number of interested participants, or if the person does not fit the characteristics required for this study (as described above). In the event we have a large number of individuals interested in participating and who have the characteristics the study is looking for, we will randomly select an appropriate number of participants. A random selection will be done by assigning a number to each interested participant, sorting these numbers out, and selecting by chance the appropriate amount of participants for the study. We will then match the selected numbers to the participants they represent, so we can contact them and let them know about the next steps of the research. For those individuals not selected, we will contact them to advise about the selection process results, explaining why they will not be able to participate. This process will guarantee that no preference is given when selecting who will participate in this study.

The principle researcher can be contacted directly at:

Aline Mourão
Master's Student
Department of Criminology
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]



uOttawa

Employment Programs for Male Federal Prisoners in Canada:

A case study on the perceptions of former participants living in the Ottawa region

Hello,

I am writing to inform you about a research study on the perceptions of former federally incarcerated individuals who participated in employment programs offered inside corrections by CSC (Correctional Service Canada). This study is being conducted by Aline Mourão, a Master's student of the Department of Criminology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. Ronald-Frans Melchers. You have been selected to participate in this research project because you participated in one of CSC's employment programs, either through CORCAN, institutional work, or by completing certified vocational trainings.

The purpose of this research project is to explore how former federally sentenced prisoners in Canada – now living in the Ottawa region – make sense of their experiences as participants of employment and employability programs offered inside federal corrections.

You are invited to participate by attending to an individual interview with the principal researcher, which will take place inside the premises of the participant organization where you first received the research recruitment invitation. Interviews will last roughly an hour, will be audio-recorded, and you will be asked questions about your views and perceptions of your participation in the employment program you engaged in, as well as your employment experience in the community. As previously discussed, interviews' recorded audios will be kept safe in a USB key that will be encrypted, limiting accessibility to it. This USB key and other research materials will be stored in a locker only accessible by the principle researcher and supervisor, located in the Faculty of Social Science Building at University of Ottawa.

Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. Therefore, you can choose to withdraw from this study at any time, even after agreeing to participate. You are also free to not respond any questions you are asked during the interview. All information that you provide will remain anonymous and confidential, so no one other than the principal researcher and the research supervisor can link the interview content to you. This research is being conducted separately from the organization where you were recruited from. Your choice to participate or not will not have any impact in your access and participation in the programs offered by such organization.

Please note that by agreeing to participate in an interview you will be offering your personal time, and such time cannot be compensated. Your participation in this study will

contribute to expand the knowledge on how employment programs delivered in federal corrections impact the lives of former participants once they are in the community, taking the standpoint of those most affected by it: former participants. The results may be used to suggest improvements needed for the programs or to point other directions in assisting those who were incarcerated in a federal prison. On a more personal note, taking part in interviews for this study may benefit participants in the sense they will be able share their perceptions and experiences in a safe environment, and in a constructive way. Therefore, your opinion is extremely valuable and is the core of this research study. Hopefully, it can lead to positive social change.

More information will be provided to you upon your agreement to participate in the research project. At that time, you will be sent a detailed informed consent form specifying what you can expect during your involvement in the research project. If at any time you have a question or concern about your participation or the research project, you may contact the principle researcher, Aline Mourão, or the researcher supervisor by e-mail or phone.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you. Please contact me, the principle researcher, by e-mail or phone, to let me know if I can count on you as a participant.

Principle Researcher:

Aline Mourão

Master's Student

Department of Criminology

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Ottawa

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor:

Ronald-Frans Melchers

Associate Professor

Department of Criminology

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Ottawa

120 University (office 14037)

Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Appendix 6: Participants Consent Form

Consent Form

Employment Programs for Male Federal Prisoners in Canada: A case study on the perceptions of former participants living in the Ottawa region

Principle Researcher:

Aline Mourão
Master's Student
Department of Criminology
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor:

Ronald-Frans Melchers
Associate Professor
Department of Criminology
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
120 University (office 14037)
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5
Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Invitation to Participate

I, _____, am invited to participate in the abovementioned graduate research study conducted by Aline Mourão of the Department of Criminology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Ronald-Frans Melchers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project is to explore how former federally sentenced prisoners in Canada – who are returning to the Ottawa region – make sense of their experiences as participants of employment and employability programs offered inside federal corrections.

Participation

My participation will involve a one-time interview that will last roughly an hour. I will be asked various questions regarding my employment history, and my perception of the employment

program I took part while incarcerated. I understand that interviews will take place in a room inside the participating organization which I am familiar with. I may suggest the days and times that are convenient for me, so I can participate in an interview. The principal researcher will then arrange for a date and time to complete the interview. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for use by the principle researcher only. I understand that the principal researcher may re-contact me after the interview if more information or clarification is ever needed.

Risks

My participation in this study entails that I share some personal events, and my perceptions and views about a program I took part in the past, and this could cause me to feel some discomfort. I may experience some other minor inconveniences relating to the need to arrange my schedule in order to travel to and participate in an interview. I understand that I am offering my personal time, and that I will not be compensated for my participation.

I acknowledge that the principal researcher will make every effort to minimize these risks. The principal researcher will attempt to arrange a suitable day and time for me, so the interview do not conflict with my schedule. I have been assured by the researcher that the purpose of the research project and interview is to explore my own views and opinions, regardless of what other individuals may believe. I have also been informed that I may decline to answer any question, I can stop the interview at any time for any reason, and also withdraw from the research even after the interview has taken place.

The following resources have been recommended to me in case I feel I need some support to cope with potential discomforts I may experience:

Community Information Centre of Ottawa

Directory of Ottawa Community Services AKA Blue Book

Online list and search tool for community, social, government and health services in the City of Ottawa among other nearby areas in Ontario.

Website: <http://www.cominfo-ottawa.org/directories.html>

John Howard Society of Ottawa

Community Employment Resource Centre (CERC) - John Howard Society of Ottawa

Contact: Kristy Gress

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Hire Power Employment Services - John Howard Society of Ottawa

Contacts:

Email: [REDACTED]

Deborah Bellware

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Neally Thompson

Phone: [REDACTED]

Crisis Intervention - John Howard Society of Ottawa

Contacts:

Rob Noyes - Crisis Worker

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Emily Knights - Crisis Worker

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

City of Ottawa website

Tips regarding interview skills, workshops, writing a résumé:

Website: <http://ottawa.ca/en/residents/social-services/job-search-skills>

Benefits

My participation in this study will help contribute to expand the knowledge on how employment programs delivered in federal corrections impact the lives of former participants once they are in the community, taking the standpoint of those most affected by it: former participants. The results may be used to suggest improvements needed for the programs or to point other directions in assisting those who were incarcerated in a federal prison. On a more personal note, taking part in interviews for this study may benefit participants since they will share their perceptions and experiences in a safe environment, and in a constructive way. Therefore, my opinion is extremely valuable and is the core of this research study. Hopefully, it can lead to positive social change.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

I was informed by the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. Interviews will be assigned with a code that corresponds to a particular participant, which will only be known to the principal researcher and the research supervisor. Anonymity will be protected and guaranteed by using pseudonyms (fake names) assigned to each participant, and by not revealing the names of correctional facilities where participants were. This way, if a quote is used in the final research report, there will be no way to link the quote to a particular research participant.

Conservation of Data

The data collected during my involvement in the research project will be kept in a secure manner. This data will include a consent form, an audio recording and transcript of a semi-structured interview, as well as any additional notes taken by the principal researcher during data analysis. The only individuals who will have access to any data collected throughout the research project are the principal researcher and the research supervisor. During the course of the research

project, all hard paper and audio sources of data will be kept in a locked cabinet inside a secured room only designated for graduate students. Only the principal participant will have access to the locked cabinet in this room. Electronic data gathered during the research project will be stored on an encrypted USB key, also securely locked away. All data will be conserved for 5 years after completion of the research project, at which time all stored hard copies of information will be physically destroyed. All research data that has been conserved electronically on the encrypted USB key will be securely deleted.

Voluntary Participation

I am voluntarily participating in this research project, so if I decide to withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any questions, I will not suffer any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed. All hard copies of information related to my involvement in the research project will be physically destroyed, as well as all electronic data will be securely deleted.

Review of Transcript

The principal researcher has informed me that if any information I provided during the interview will be quoted in the final report, I will be informed of this and given the opportunity to review my transcript. If I decide to review my transcript before it is used in quotes in the final report, I may request to meet with the principal researcher or to ask to receive it via e-mail. I have been informed that no security measures will be taken to encrypt the e-mail or to have it password protected

Acceptance

I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Aline Mourão of the Department of Criminology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Ronald-Frans Melchers.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Telephone: (613) 562-5387
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 7: Interview guide

Interview Guide/ Schedule

Information for the interviewer:

Research project title: Employment Programs for Male Federal Prisoners in Canada: A case study on the perceptions of former participants living in the Ottawa region

Research Question: In what ways do former prisoners make sense of their participation in carceral employability programs as affecting their reintegration into the community upon release?

Before the interview

Interviewer (I): Good morning/afternoon Mr. (*name of participant*). My name is Aline. How are you doing?

I: I want to thank you again for participating in this study. As you know, this research is part of my Masters in Criminology program, and I want to focus on former participants' views over employment programs delivered in federal prisons. So, thank you again for agreeing to meet me.

Go over the Consent Form with the participant, explaining the research objectives, the types of questions he can expect, and making clear his participation is completely voluntary.

I: I just want to make it clear once more that your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to leave, you are free to go without any problems. You are also free to not answer any question you don't want to. Also, everything you say during this interview is confidential and anonymous. So in the research results we may use what you said, however we will not use your real name or any detail that could be used to identify you. During the interview, please ask me questions at any time if I am not making myself clear.

“Breaking the Ice” and Sociodemographic characteristics (Warm up questions and gathering basic socio-demographic information)

I: So, just to start, could you tell me a bit about yourself? Your age, where you are from...

PROBE: (*If not from Ottawa*) Why are you living here?

I: Do you identify yourself with any ethnicity?

PROMPT: Indigenous, Caucasian, Afro-American, Asian...

I: Do you have a fixed residence here?

I: About family, are you single, in a relationship, married... ?

I: What is your level of education?

I: So, you come here at (*name of Organization*) for what type of support/ service? (education, job training, counselling, any other purpose)

Employment history

(This section will help the researcher to have a background on the participant's relationship with employment. It is also intended to make the participant reflect on his experience with employment, as a warm up before talking about their participation in a carceral employment program)

Introduction: I would like to know what your experience with employment is.

I: Are you formally employed right now?

PROBE: (*If yes*):

- Is it a full-time, part-time, occasional employment?
- For how long? What are you working with?

PROBE: (*If no*) Are you looking for jobs? For how long have you been looking for?

I: What about before incarceration? Could you tell me if you worked before?

PROBE: (*If yes*):

- What did you work with, for how long?
- Did you like working in those areas? Which did you prefer? Why?

(Relationship with others and superior, type of work being done, closeness to home...)

PROBE: (*If no*):

- Why is that? (How did you try to find a job? Did you seek for assistance? For how long were you trying to find employment?)

Employment Program in Prison

(Initial questions will help them remember their experience with the program. That will give them support to answer the following questions)

Introduction: Now I would like to ask you about your experience participating in an employment program while in prison. You are not being, in any way, tested on your knowledge on the program. We want to know how you experienced it.

I: What's the name of the facility you were when you participated in the employment program?

PROBE: (*If more than one prison*) How was it to start in a new work program in this second facility? Most will have been through several institutions

I. Intake to program:

I: How did you get assigned/admitted to a work/ employment program while incarcerated?

PROBE: if admitted to employment programs in more than one institution, please explain how the process of admission was, and if there were differences across institutions.

I: How far were you in your sentence the first time you were assigned/ admitted?

PROBE (if took program in more than one institution): Until what point in your period of incarceration did you participated in an employment program?
Most will have had several programs over a long course of time

I: What type(s) of employment program(s) were you assigned to (work in the institution, work in a CORCAN shop, vocational training)?

PROBE (if more than one type of program):

Which was the most significant/ important to you? Could you explain why?

II. Activities:

Interviewer : *Based on the employment program that you participated (or the one that was most significant to you...):*

I: Could you tell me what was this activity like in a daily basis? What would you normally have to do when participating in the program?

PROBE: What was the frequency of the activity?

PROBE: What was the particular type of job required/ training undertaken?

I: Did you have a work supervisor in the program?

I: How/ what was your relationship like with them

PROMPT: *was he like a mentor to you? Was he just vigilant over your work, treating you like a prisoner?*

I: Does it resemble what you expect to find as a job supervisor in the community?

PROBE: Why? Can you think of an example?

I: What was your relationship like with other participants of the program (physically, talking, friendship)?

I: How was it compared to your relationship with other prisoners?

III. Immediate Outputs & Program Outcomes:

(*Normally for CORCAN and job training participants*)

I: Were you able to complete the program?

PROBE: (*If no*) Why not?

(For job training participants)

I: Did you receive a certificate for your job training?

I: Do you believe it helped (may help) you to find employment?

PROBE: *(If yes)* How?

PROBE: *(If no)* Why not?

(For those who worked):

I: Did you receive any certificate about your work experience, or a letter of recommendation from your program supervisor that could help you getting a job in the community?

PROBE: *(If yes)* How does (did) it work?

(Measuring if they perceive that they really learned something transferable to the labour market)

I: Aside from certificates and letters of recommendation, How do you think your participation in the program affects (affected) your attempts to find a job in the community?

PROMPT: *Matching current market needs, technical knowledge acquired, helpful experience, behaviour in a work environment, dealing with co-workers, time management.*

(Measuring if they perceive that the program brought them benefits other than those related to reintegration into the labour market)

I: Do you feel the program helped you in any other way that may not be related to help finding a job?

PROMPT: building an **identity** other than “offender”, “inmate”; feeling productive, pride of yourself; planning your next steps; helped being released; earning money for family/ yourself; etc.

I: Overall, according to your experience in an employment program while in prison, what do you consider to be the **program’s goals/ objectives**?

Finishing up the interview

I: Is there anything else you wanted to talk about related to your experience with the employment program that we have not discussed?

I: Thank you very much for your participation in this research project. If you need any information about this study, or if you decide that this interview with you should not be used in the study, please contact me and I will assist you the best I can.

Appendix 8: List of codified nodes during the analytical process

Hierarchy of nodes with number of interviews for each and total number of instances that each node was codified

Nodes	Number of interviews codified	Total number of instances codified
I. Individual background information	14	86
1. Self-identified ethnicity	13	13
2. Family Situation	14	23
3. Level of Education	13	17
4. Mental Health issues (1st level construct)	3	5
5. Original Location	13	18
6. Why is in Ottawa	10	10
II. Employment History (prior to incarceration)	14	23
III. Employment in federal corrections	14	471
1. Autonomy in prison work (1 st level construct)	3	9
2. Certificate-Recommendation - Prison work experience	12	23
3. Employment training in federal corrections	11	17
4. CORCAN employment	13	60
a. 'outside' perception of CORCAN	3	3
b. CORCAN wages (1st level construct)	9	15
5. Details of prison work acquired	14	111
a. Daily work activities	12	29
b. Duration of prison employment	10	22
c. Employment in the Correctional Plan	9	11
d. Process to get carceral employment	13	49
e. Time to get prison job	9	13
6. Goal of work program	8	12
7. Institutional Employment	14	37
8. Institutional vs. CORCAN	7	12

Nodes	Number of interviews codified	Total number of instances codified
9. Jobs off property - Temporary Absence employment	2	7
10. Motivation for working in corrections	14	80
a. I really enjoyed it (1st level construct)	5	7
b. Income	7	12
c. keeping myself busy (1st level construct)	12	20
d. To get experience	4	4
11. Preference between prison jobs	7	10
12. Recreating outside work environment	14	47
a. Co-workers - relationship	8	11
b. Supervisors - relationship	13	23
IV. Experience with the CJS	14	59
V. Participation in other correctional programs	10	33
1. Education in federal correction	6	10
VI. Life in the community	15	235
1. Availability of community support	9	27
2. Challenges to Find Employment	11	21
3. Community mandatory programs	6	6
4. Employment Status	15	34
5. Job-related plans	14	42
6. Life at the Halfway House	7	14
7. Relationship with Government support programs	5	6
8. Status of Release	11	21
VII. Perceived Impact of Prison work	10	18
1. Impact on identity in prison	8	11
2. Impact on the Parole Board	3	3
3. Impact to Find Job in the Community	13	28