

12-2017

# The Relationship Between Inmate Education and Disciplinary Infractions in Prison

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**The Relationship Between Inmate Education and Disciplinary Infractions in Prison**

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree

Masters of Science

in Criminal Justice

December 2017

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### **Abstract**

This study presents data concerning discipline problems of 201 inmates who have earned their GED (General Equivalency Diploma) while incarcerated in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Sandstone, Minnesota. The study looks at the number of discipline incident reports for each inmate before receiving their GED versus incident reports they receive after earning the diploma. Previous research has suggested that correctional education has a positive effect on recidivism rates of offenders, but this researcher wanted to look at the impact of education while the inmate is still incarcerated. The study takes into account how many months the individual was incarcerated before and after earning the GED, not just the total number of incident reports the inmate received during the entire time of incarceration. The findings indicate that those inmates who have earned a GED while incarcerated have a lower rate of discipline problems after they receive their diploma compared to before. The average rate incident reports before receiving the GED was one report every 11.19 months. The average rate for incident reports after receiving the GED was one report every 19.2 months.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

This researcher has spent the last 10 years as a General Education Diploma (GED) teacher in the Federal Correctional Institution in Sandstone, Minnesota. This low-security level institution is located in North Central Minnesota, approximately 75 miles north of Minneapolis. The offenders are all male. The majority of the offender population (approximately 53%) is made up of drug offenders. The remaining population is split between sex offenses (22%), Weapons and Arson (13%) and the remaining 12% includes crimes such as fraud, robbery, burglary, homicide, and kidnapping.

This researcher has had hundreds of convicted felons come and go through her classrooms, working toward earning their GED. Throughout this time, she has seen students of every age, race, education level, and motivation level. She has had the wonderful 21-year-old student who had come within three months of graduating from high school only to find himself with a pregnant girlfriend that needed supporting, so he dropped out of school, only to end up in prison. She has had the 60-year-old lifelong criminal who had never paid attention in class and had the attitude of “I’ve made it this far in life without my GED, why on earth do I need it now? I’m ready to retire!” She has had everything in between, from the student that comes in on his own time outside of class to work with a tutor, to the student that can’t be forced to work even during the mandatory class time.

The student who cannot be bothered to work for his education is often times also the one that causes problems in other areas of his life in prison. They receive written incident reports for not attending classes, for refusing to do homework, and for being insubordinate to the staff. However, the latter students seemed to be the exception, not the rule. The purpose of this

research is to ask: Does the frequency of in custody problem inmate behavior change after inmates complete their GED in the institution?

### **Students in the Federal Bureau of Prisons**

In 1980, the percentage of African American high school dropouts who were imprisoned in federal and state institutions was at about 10%. By 2008, that number had grown to a staggering 37% (Western & Pettit 2010). A major study published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that in 1997, 41% of offenders in Federal and State United States prisons did not have a high school diploma or G.E.D., while only 18% of the general population did not have a high school diploma or G.E.D. (Harlow, 2003). Only 11% of offenders attended some post-secondary educational institution while 48% of the general population had. The highest level of education for 25% of offenders is passing the G.E.D. exam, while this is true for only 4% of the general population (Harlow, 2003).

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) reported in 2012 that approximately 218,000 inmates were under their supervision, 94% being male. These offenders are far less educated, on average, than law-abiding citizens. The incarceration rate for men not completing high school has grown significantly over the past 30 years. Some estimates show that over half of all African American males who drop out of high school are incarcerated at some point in their lives (Coley & Barton 2006).

### **Education in the Federal Bureau of Prisons**

The Federal Bureau of Prisons Education Department focuses on providing inmates with the attitudes, knowledge, skills and credentials needed to function as contributing adults, both while incarcerated and when released back into the community. The two primary goals for the

education program are to ensure that every inmate who has the capability and leaves the system possesses a high school diploma or equivalency, and has the skills needed to obtain employment when released from custody. Inmates are encouraged to prepare for the Test of General Education Development (GED) which leads to a high school equivalency diploma.

The Education Department provides a range of academic education programs for inmates who do not possess a high school diploma, through day and evening classes. Programs provided by the department include: Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in both English and Spanish languages, which focus on reading, writing, and math for inmates who function below the fifth grade level; Pre-GED classes in English and Spanish, which focus on reading, writing, and math for inmates who function between the fifth and ninth grade levels; GED classes in English and Spanish that prepare inmates who function at or above the ninth grade level for the GED examination; and Bilingual programs which provide ABE and GED instruction in Spanish as well as English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) for inmates with limited English proficiency. Initial program placement is based on the standardized achievement tests administered during the reception/ classification process. Subsequent tests are administered approximately every three months to inmates participating in academic programs to measure progress and determine eligibility for placement in more advanced level classes. The official screening test, similar in both form and content to the GED, is usually administered to determine inmate readiness for the actual GED test. The screening procedure enhances the individual's chance of passing the GED by providing a realistic testing experience and serves as a predictor of success that in turn maximizes the Department's resources (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2012).

## **History of the General Education Diploma**

The GED test has been an important part of the education of the United States for over 70 years. During World War II, men were being pulled from high school classrooms to serve their country. Upon returning to their homes after serving four to six years in the military, it was not practical for them to return to a typical high school classroom setting. The American Council on Education was commissioned to measure high school instructional outcomes for these military personnel so that they would have a chance to enter college or qualify for the jobs requiring a High School diploma that they deserved after returning home. The GED test was put into practice in 1942 with the main objective focused on the education of these soldiers.

In 1947 New York became the first state to make GED tests available to non-veteran adults. With the increase of post-World War II immigrants coming to the United States, there was a high need for access to American education for these individuals so that they could help fill the positions left behind by the soldiers. The test was expanded to include these individuals so that they could work towards the lives they dreamed of when they came to the United States.

The first GED design reflected the industrial era, when a high school diploma was sufficient for most jobs. The American Council on Education was commissioned in 1942 to measure high school instructional outcomes. More than 40% of test-takers were taking it for employment reasons alone. Only 37% of test-takers indicated their plans were for further study in college. At this time in America, most people could live quite comfortably on the income from a job only requiring a high school diploma or GED.

By 1974, all 50 states were issuing GED credentials. In 1978, the GED test was changed to lean more towards application of conceptual knowledge and evaluation of presented

information instead of just recall of facts. They introduced real-life contexts and reading materials such as schedules and newspaper articles that were relevant to adults. The trend was leaning more towards continuing education and not just getting basic employment.

By 1988, there had been a further shift from an industrial to information society with changes in technology and global awareness. The GED test then added essay writing, and increased emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills. At this point, more than 65 percent of testers were indicating higher education plans as a reason for taking the GED. Changes in the 2002 version concentrated on updating the information even more to meet a changing world.

In 2014, the GED test was technology based and students began taking the GED test on computers rather than with the pencil and paper tests of the past. Today, the GED test is much more college-oriented, and provides not only same-day scoring, but also a report of career and college-readiness expectations. According to the GED Testing Service, “The GED Tests provide adults who did not complete a formal high school program the opportunity to certify their attainment of high school-level academic knowledge and skills” (American Council on Education [ACE], 2011). The GED is “field tested and normed on graduating high school seniors” and the GED Testing Service claims that only about 60% of graduation high school seniors would be able to pass the GED upon first attempt (ACE, 2011).

The 2002 test, which the participants of this study passed, consists of five parts: mathematics, science, social studies, language arts (writing) and language arts (reading). The entire test takes over seven hours to complete. Each of the five sections of the GED is scored on a scale of 200 to 800. In order to pass the test, one must receive a score of 410 or higher on each

section, and must earn a minimum overall score of 2250 (ACE, 2011). The GED differs from a high school education in that it doesn't technically require any amount of class time, rather, the test is meant to show that one has high school-level knowledge already.

### **GED in Correctional Settings**

A focus on moving the GED into the Federal correctional setting came in 1982. The first mandatory literacy standard for federal inmates was put in place at that time with a goal of having every inmate literate at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. In 1982, for the first time, a GED was required for inmates to earn a pay grade higher than Grade 4. For inmate workers, there are four pay grades for the jobs that they hold while incarcerated. They pay grades range from 1-4, one being the higher pay and four being the lower. For example, a Grade 4 is maintenance crew, cleaning, grounds keeping, etc. This level earns 12 cents an hour. Grade 3 workers earn 17 cents an hour. Grade 2 workers earn 29 cents an hour and Grade 1 earn 40 cents or higher. The prison system was trying to use money as a motivator for inmates to attend school since they could not earn more than 12 cents an hour without their GED. Most incarcerated individuals had never felt a motivation to earn an education; it was not something that was important before they came to prison. The majority of the federal prison population comes from recurring cycles of poverty and low literacy levels.

In 1991, the Federal inmate literacy achievement standard was raised from Grade 8 to Grade 12 and GED programs were in place across the entire BOP.

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (VCCLA) made the GED mandatory in the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

A prisoner who is serving a term of imprisonment of more than one year for a crime of violence, other than a term of imprisonment for the duration of the prisoner's life, may receive credit toward the service of the prisoner's sentence, beyond the time served, of up to 54 days at the end of each year of the prisoner's term of imprisonment, beginning at the end of the first year of the term, subject to determination by the Bureau of Prisons that, during that year, the prisoner has displayed exemplary compliance with such institutional disciplinary regulations. (VCCLA, 1994)

If an inmate was incarcerated without his or her high school diploma or GED, this good time would not be vested if the inmate was not making satisfactory progress towards or had not earned his GED. The inmate would at that point only have received 42 days of credit towards his sentence. The VCCLA statute says that good time is counted at the end of each year that the prisoner is incarcerated, beginning at the end of the person's first year in prison (VCCLA, 1994). The BOP gives itself 15 days from the last day of each year of the sentence to calculate good time. The last day of this 15-day period is called the "vested date." After this vested date, unless the inmate has disciplinary issues, those 42 or 54 days are theirs to keep and cannot be taken away.

Correctional education is most often underfunded, and the ratio of staff in the Bureau of Prison education departments to number of incarcerated individuals has declined since the prisons have been in the grip of the incarceration boom that has been taking place since 1980 (Crayton & Nuesteter 2008; Klein, Tolbert, Bugarin, Ctaldi, & Tauschek, 2004; Stephan, 1999). The number of inmates testing for the GED in the BOP has doubled between 2002 to 2010. The staffing levels of the prison education departments have for the most part stayed the same or

decreased. This creates an educational atmosphere where education may be viewed by the inmates as not valuable and this contributes to the way in which the incarcerated individuals view their education once in prison.

The Federal Correctional Institution Sandstone currently has two GED teachers for 55 students. There are students taking classes ranging from basic reading classes up to Algebra and Advanced Geometry and every level in between. Due to the fact that each student comes into class with a different level of education, it is impossible to put a group in a large classroom with a teacher standing in front of the teaching them all the same lessons. Thus, each student has an individual lesson plan kept up by the assigned teacher. When there are only two teachers for 55 students, this becomes an amazing amount of paperwork.

The change to the 2014 computerized test makes the correctional teaching system more difficult. Typing and computer usage will need to be subjects in and of themselves. The average offender may have no experience with keyboarding or computers, and even if they have spent some time using technology, their typing skills are more often than not lacking. With several essay sections to the new GED test, this could become an issue once the new computerized GED tests enter the prison systems. As of October 2014, the Bureau of Prisons had not made the transfer to the computerized version of the GED and had received a waiver to continue to use the 2002 paper and pencil version. This resulted in urgency in the prison classrooms to push as many inmates through the current paper and pencil test before the 2014 computerized test came into effect.

Approximately 10% of all United States GED testing occurs in correctional facilities. The other 90% of testing occurs in public schools, Adult Continuing Education classrooms, Job

Corps locations, and other educational settings. The number of GED test takers in prison is growing greatly. In the year 2011m there were approximately 10,500 inmates in federal prisons who took at least part of the GED test. Of those, 9,510 individuals completed the test with 69.9% passing, or 6,643 inmates earning their GED (ACE, 2011).

### **A Wide View of Discipline Problems in Prison**

In the Federal BOP, there are 91 different prohibited acts. These acts are separated into four different levels of severity. These levels are 100 series, 200 series, 300 series, and 400 series. The 100 level are the most serious actions, ranging from murder, serious assault, escape, fire, riots, drugs, and sexual assault among others. The 200 series consist of acts such as fighting, threatening with bodily harm, extorting, sexual acts, group demonstration, bribing a staff member, destroying property having a value in excess of \$100, stalking, possessing stolen property, tattooing or self-mutilation, among others. The 300 level are lesser acts such as possession of anything not authorized, refusing work or programming, lying to staff, being in an unauthorized area, failing to stand count, gambling, smoking, cheating on a GED test, abusing mail or telephone privileges, etc. The 400 series incidents are the lowest level and can include using obscene language, misconduct with a visitor, unauthorized physical contact, and conduct which may disrupt or interfere with the security and the orderly running of the institution.

### **Drug Use in Prison**

Illegal drug use inside prison walls is a major discipline and safety issue prisons face every day. Federal prisons haven't been spared from the drug blight. A 2003 report by the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General said the Bureau of Prisons was falling short in efforts to address "a continuing problem with inmate drug use and drug smuggling in almost

every institution” (Crary, 2010). Since then, the Bureau of Prisons has expanded use of ion spectrometry devices, which detect trace amounts of drugs on visitors and the items they may be bringing into the inmates, and has begun searches of staff members—who are required to walk through a metal detector and have their property X-rayed before entering prisons’ secure areas. Illegal drug use by inmates persists despite extensive countermeasures, with positive federal inmate test rates hovering between 2.9 and 3.8 % since 2001 (Crary 2010).

### **The Official Picture of Prison Violence**

A review of the official data on the extent of the prison violence problem (murder, rape, assault) suggests that the most serious forms of violence are rare in federal and state prisons and that the rate of violence in federal and state prisons since 2000 is slightly declining, despite the doubling of the United States prison population in the last decade. However, an examination of these same official data focusing on the *number* (rather than the rate) of violent victimizations suggests that an examination of changes in *rates* of violence only tells part of the official story. For example, examination of data from the 2000 *Census of State and Federal Correctional Facilities* revealed that “the number of assaults, including both physical and sexual assaults, was 32% higher [in 2000] than in a similar period preceding the 1995 census” (Stephan & Karberg, 2003: VI). In 2000, there were 34,000 inmates on inmate assaults reported in federal and state prisons. This increase in the volume of assaults has implications not only for traditional prison control strategies (i.e., the need to identify and discipline offenders using segregation and transfer, and to protect victims using protective custody) but also for the community control of a growing number of discharged offenders, who experience violence directly (as offenders and/or victims) in prison, after release from prison. (Byrne, 2013)

## Definitions of Key Terms

**BOP.** Federal Bureau of Prisons

**G.E.D.** The acronym stands for “General Education Development.” For the purpose of this paper, however, G.E.D. refers to the informal definition, which is the high school equivalency degree, more specifically, the high school equivalency degree that is earned in prison.

**Grade Equivalent.** A score from an academic test indicating the grade at which an offender functions academically.

**Incident Report-** Report written when an inmate carries out a prohibited act while incarcerated. Commonly referred to as a “shot.”

**Inmate.** See “Offender,”

**Offender.** An individual who has been sentenced to time in prison.

**Prisoner.** See “Offender,”

**Prohibited Act.** Actions that are not allowed in the Federal Prison System. There are 4 levels of violation severity in Sandstone (100 Level through 400 level)

**Recidivism.** The most comprehensive definition of recidivism is offered by Langan and Levin (2002): “re-arrest, reconviction, resentence to prison, and return to prison with or without a new sentence.”

**Shot.** Report written when an inmate carries out a prohibited act while incarcerated. See “Incident Report”.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Recidivism and Inmate Education

Research in the field of corrections shows that earning a GED while incarcerated significantly reduces recidivism. A 1986 study by the New York State Department of Correctional Services found that the return rate of a sample of offenders who earned a GED while incarcerated was substantially lower (17.1%) than the Department's overall return-to-custody rate (26.3%) (Macdonald & Bala, 1986).

In July 1989, the Department produced a report that improved upon the 1986 study by expanding the scope and the sample size of the study and included results from a more comparable control group (New York State Department of Correctional Services [NYSDOCS], 1989). The 1986 study included only 14 facilities, while the 1989 study included all facilities. The 1986 study tracked a sample of 205 offenders while the 1989 study tracked 4,226 offenders. Finally, the 1986 study compared the return-to-custody rate of the sample of offenders who earned a GED while incarcerated to the overall Department return-to-custody rate. In contrast, the 1989 study compared the return rate of offenders who earned a GED while incarcerated to the return rate of offenders who were admitted to Department of Corrections without a high school degree and who did not earn a GED while in DOCS. Offenders who earned a GED while incarcerated returned at a lower rate (34.0%) than those offenders who did not (39.1%) (NYSDOCS, 1989). However, only 10-28% of offenders who enter prison in New York State without a high school diploma or GED go on to earn a GED while incarcerated (Harlow, 2003; Tyler & Kling, 2006).

Several recent studies have shown that inmates who participate in an education program (e.g. literacy, ABE, GED, college) while incarcerated are less likely to return to prison after their release than offenders who do not participate in an education program (Boe, 1998; Burke & Vivian, 2001; Harer, 1995a; Haulard, 2001; Porporino & Robinson, 1992; Ryan, 1991). A five-year follow-up study conducted by the Arizona Department of Adult Probation concluded that probationers who received literacy training had a significantly lower re-arrest rate (35%) than the control group (46%), and those who received GED education had a re-arrest rate of 24%, compared to the control group's rate of 46% (Siegel, 1997). "Inmates with at least two years of college education have a 10% re-arrest rate, compared to a national re-arrest rate of approximately 60%" (Marks, 1997, ¶ 14).

"According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, there is an inverse relationship between recidivism rates and education. The more education received, the less likely an individual is to be re-arrested or re-imprisoned" (Harer, 1995b, p. 98). Porporino and Robinson (1992) found that offenders in the Canadian federal correctional system who completed the Adult Basic Education program were less likely to return to prison after release than both those who participated in but did not complete the program and those who dropped out of the program. Only 30.1% of the ABE completers had readmissions during the follow-up period compared to 35.5% of those who were released before completing, and 41.6% of the offenders who had withdrawn from ABE (Porporino & Robinson, 1992).

Nuttall (2003) authored the adult correctional education study "The Effect of Earning a GED on Recidivism Rates," which includes data on three groups of inmates in the New York State Department of Correctional Services. The study tracked inmates who earned a GED

diploma while incarcerated, inmates who already had a high school diploma or GED test credential, and inmates who did not earn a GED while incarcerated. Inmates who earned their GED diploma were significantly less likely to return to custody within three years. Offenders under the age of 21 who earned their GED diploma were 14% less likely to return to prison within three years, while prisoners over 21 were 5% less likely to return to prison after earning a GED diploma. Education in prison systems is an effective way to lower recidivism.

Researchers have examined the effect of education and employment on various adaptations and have found evidence for consideration. For example, Wright (1989) found that, independent of race, prisoners who did not go beyond high school education had fewer physical problems such as violence caused by another inmate, and had more disruptive infractions in prison. Similarly, Finn (1995) reported that urban background and economic deprivation were positively related to disciplinary infractions in prison, whereas race and prior imprisonment were not. Pre-prison education level has been shown to be negatively related to depression, anxiety, and discipline in prison, whereas factors such as age and prior imprisonment have not (Porporino & Zamble, 1984).

Researchers with the RAND corporation found that inmates who participate in correctional education programs have 43% lower odds of returning to prison than those who do not. The estimate is based on studies that carefully account for motivation and other differences between correctional education recipients and non-recipients. Employment after release was 13% higher among prisoners who participated in either academic or vocational education programs than those who did not. Those who participated in vocational training were 28% more likely to be employed after release from prison than who did not receive such training. The findings also

suggest that prison education programs are cost effective. The direct costs of providing education are estimated to be from \$1,400 to \$1,744 per inmate, with re-incarceration costs being \$8,700 to \$9,700 less for each inmate who received correctional education as compared to those who did not. (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013)

## **Chapter III: Study Information**

### **Inmate Education and In-Custody Violations**

There have been many studies concerning recidivism and behavior once released and educated in prison, but one thing that has not been studied at length is how education may affect behavior while still incarcerated.

The purpose of this study was to compare the number of misconduct incidents committed among inmates with varying levels of educational attainment. This information gathered is important in the correctional field because behavior of inmates is crucial to the orderly running of an institution.

When behavior of individuals is not kept in check, problems can snowball out of control in very little time. Simple card playing unwatched can turn into gambling over sporting events. This gambling can escalate to large amounts of money being owed within the walls of the prisons, and this debt often times ends up being paid by family and friends outside in the community through illegal monetary transactions. If the outside source does not pay, violence often escalates inside the walls between the parties involved, as fighting is used to make sure the payment is made.

Once an inmate achieves his GED, this research theorized that his behavior should make a turn for the better. This is in part due to the fact that many opportunities are opened for the student once he has his high school equivalency. These opportunities include better paying work assignments, entering college correspondence courses to work towards a degree, vocational programming while still incarcerated, and apprenticeships through outside colleges.

Maybe even more important than the future programming the inmate can participate in, there is a noticeable change in the attitudes of inmates after they have earned their GED. For many of these students, earning this certificate may be the only legitimate thing they have ever accomplished in their lives. They have grown up in a society where they are more often than not told they are losers, useless, and won't ever amount to anything. Once they accomplish this major goal in their lives their entire demeanor often changes.

The purpose of this study was to analyze research pertaining to the relationship that completing a GED while incarcerated has with the discipline issues while incarcerated. Ideally, a study of the effects of prison education programs on inmates' behavior would involve needs assessment of inmates entering prison; random allocation of inmates to programs that are matched to each inmate's needs; collection of detailed information on the inmates' performance from teachers' ratings and educational test scores; collection of detailed information on other aspects of the inmates' prison experience based on prison records and interviews with the inmates, etc. A study such as this would be extremely time consuming and expensive and findings would be unavailable for many years because of the nature of the data collection. This pilot study was directed by the need for more timely information.

## **Chapter IV: Methodology**

### **Data Retrieval**

This research used the population of the Federal Correctional Institution in Sandstone, Minnesota as of April 27, 2013. The demographic for this study started with 1285 total inmates that resided at FCI Sandstone on the above date. This number was narrowed down to the 201 inmates having earned their GED while incarcerated. This is 15.6% of the total population of FCI Sandstone on the date of data retrieval.

The study data were compiled using archived files of educational and disciplinary infraction information drawn from SENTRY, the Bureau of Prisons' inmate information management system. Data were provided in a format that does not allow for identifying individual inmates. Each of the 1285 inmates was assigned a random number by the computer generating the data. The institution examined was the Federal Correctional Institution in Sandstone Minnesota. Information was gathered about those inmates that have completed their GED while incarcerated with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, along with those who entered the BOP with their GED, high school diploma, or some college. Information was collected about how many times during the inmate's Federal incarceration formal discipline was necessary.

These data also include the dates that the inmate entered the Federal Bureau of Prisons system, the date that the inmate earned his GED if earned while incarcerated, length of incarceration before earning that GED, and length of incarceration after earning GED. Also, the data contain the number and level of incident reports received by each inmate before and after the GED was earned was used.

Of the 1285 inmates at FCI Sandstone on the date that the data was compiled, 201 had earned their GED while incarcerated. For the purpose of this study, only data on these 201 inmates was included.

### **Outcomes**

The number of incident reports these 201 inmates received before earning the GED totaled 323. The number of incident reports these 201 inmates received after earning the GED totaled 403. These data alone do not support the hypothesis that earning a GED will lower the number of disciplinary actions while incarcerated. Further data sets were compiled to include the length of incarceration in monthly increments before earning the GED and after. The hypothesis is that the average rate of incident reports received after earning a GED will be smaller than the average rate received before earning the GED.

When taking a look at this sample of inmates, 31 (15%) had no incident reports at all, either before or after receiving their GED. Of the remaining 170, 44 (25%) did receive incident reports before receiving their GED but had received none after. A total of 66 of the 170 had a lower number of incident reports after receiving the GED, 14 had the same number before and after, and 90 received more incident reports after receiving their GED.

These numbers can be misleading due to the time of incarceration prior to and after the GED was earned. Due to the fact that the GED program is required by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, most inmates that enter the system are enrolled in GED class within their first 120 days. It takes the average inmate 24-36 months to complete their GED in prison. Some may complete it in as little as 2-3 months. If the inmate has a 20-year sentence and completes his GED in the

first two years, the time after receiving the GED is significantly longer than the time before, giving them much more time to receive an incident report.

Some specific examples of this data can be seen with looking at some random individual inmates. The inmate assigned the number 241 was incarcerated 22 months before earning his GED and received one incident report. He was incarcerated for 151 months after receiving his GED and received three incident reports. This is a rate of 1 every 50 months after versus 1 every 22 months before. The rate of misconduct is lower after GED completion. The following chart gives more examples of the same.

Inmate	Months Before GED	Incident Reports	Rate	Months After GED	Incident Reports	Rate
#254	9	1	1/9	99	5	1/20
#736	42	4	1/10	29	1	1/29
#828	37	6	1/6	54	0	0/54
#915	60	22	1/2.7	43	4	1/10.75

While the above examples are not always the case, the majority of situations follow this pattern. Taking a look at the entire sample of inmates and the incident reports before and after earning their GED, the rate of incident reports before receiving the GED was one report every 11.19 months (323 reports in 6314 months served). The rate for reports after receiving the GED was one report every 19.2 months (403 reports in 7741 months served).

Continuing this research, a paired t-test was run on the data concerning number of incident reports among the 201 FCI Sandstone inmates before earning the GED and incident reports after the GED was earned. There was a significant difference in the scores for incident reports received before passing the GED ( $M = .0717$ ,  $SD = .11288$ ) and incident reports received after passing the GED ( $M = .0449$ ,  $SD = .06486$ ) conditions;  $t(200) = -3.033$ ,  $p = .003$ . These

results suggest that passing the GED really does have an effect on the incident reports earned by an inmate. Specifically, the results suggest that once the inmate has passed his GED, he will receive fewer incident reports per month than he did before passing the GED.

Although these numbers are promising, we must admit that there is more research to do. This research had its limitations. This study was done in a small mid-western location with a population of low level offenders. The results may look different in a high lever institution in an inner city. Further research could also be done on the entire population instead of just the GED earners to see if the change in number of incident reports may be due, in part, to the fact that they inmate has been in prison longer and is settling into his surroundings.

## **Discussion**

The hypothesis that the percentage of disciplinary infractions for an individual received after earning his GED would be less than the percentage received before earning his GED is supported. There were almost a third fewer incident reports written to an individual after he receives his GED than in the time period before. This is important in the Federal Bureau of Prisons due to the fact that there is a huge emphasis on reentry at this point in time and education is a very large part of the reentry process. If more emphasis is put on education while incarcerated, not only will it help with the daily running of the correctional institution, it will also help in the life of the inmate long after the individual is released.

While the inmate is still incarcerated, education can open many doors that were previously closed to him. There are many programs that are only available once the inmate has his GED: Vocational Technical Programs ranging from Culinary Arts to Welding and Building Trades are available at most Federal Prisons. College classes are accessible through distance

learning with the help of proctors within the prisons. Apprenticeships can be completed in the bakery, housekeeping bookkeeping, dental assistant and barber programs to name just a few. All of these opportunities would not be available to these inmates without first earning their GED.

It has been proven through studies time and time again that individuals who have their GED are less likely to recidivate and go back to prison, but there are multiple other factors that are of great importance also. The fact that the individual can go to his children who may be on the verge of following down the same path of their father, and say that he got his education while encouraging them to stay in school, can help to break the cycle of incarceration our country seems to be in. When these men speak from experience, the words are much less likely to fall on deaf ears of the children. The inmates are also able to communicate with their children at their level. Once they have finished their high school equivalency, they are able to talk to the children about school subjects and have the knowledge to speak intelligently.

The fact that these men are much more prepared to get a job once they have their education is an invaluable result of earning their GED. The job market is growing every day, especially for the entry level jobs the inmates normally seek. This researcher does job searches weekly for inmates returning to society. The number of jobs available requiring a GED or high school diploma greatly outnumbers those requiring a lower level of education. Many times, restaurants even require the GED for dishwashers and bus people, jobs that in the past would never have had the education requirement.

Overall, there is no drawback to earning the GED, in or out of prison. The benefits of an incarcerated individual accomplishing this major goal are even greater than those of a person who is not in prison. This study shows that that GED can lead to better behavior while still

incarcerated, which in the long run can lead to greater success in every part of their lives once they are released.

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## Appendix

### Paired Sample Statistics

Pair 1 T-Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Disciplinary Infraction before GED	.0717	201	.11288	.00796
Disciplinary Infractions after GED	.0449	201	.06486	.00458

### Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlations	Significance
Disciplinary Infractions before and after GED	201	.080	.261

### Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences				
	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Pair 1 Disciplinary Infractions after GED- Disciplinary Infractions before GED	-.02688	.12563	.00866	Lower	Upper
				-.04435	-.00940

### Paired Samples Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	-3.033	200	.003