

(a) Who are the women in the college program? (b) What is the impact of the college experience on inmate students and their children? (c) What is the impact of the college experience on the prison environment? (d) What is the impact of the college experience beyond college on recidivism? and (e) What is the cost of such a program to taxpayers? The researchers used a triangulated methodology employing quantitative analysis of recidivism rates and costs of the program along with in-depth interviews with the participants; focus groups with inmates, faculty, children, and college presidents; and surveys of faculty who taught in the program. Although not using a randomized experimental design, Torre and Fine, along with their coinvestigators, tracked participants in the college program after release and found that women who had not participated in the program were four times more likely to be returned to custody than women who had participated.

The narratives from the interviews with college inmates also illuminated the positive benefits of the education. One inmate college student said,

Because when you take somebody that feels that they're not gonna amount to anything, and you put them in an environment, like, when you're in college it takes you away from the prison . . . it's like you're opening your mind to a whole different experience. (Torre & Fine, 2005, p. 582)

The positive impact of college on the inmates was also transferred to their children. The cost-benefit analysis of the program indicated that the savings based on decreased recidivism rates for those who attended the college far outweighed the initial cost of the program itself. In sum, with just a small grant from a private foundation, the PAR team brought together universities, prisoners, churches, community organizations, and prison administrators to resurrect a college at BHCF. The authors concluded, "Key elements of this program include broad-based community involvement, strong prisoner participation in design and governance, and the support of the prison administration" (p. 591). A full report of this research can be found at <http://arj.sagepub.com/content/4/3/253.abstract>. As you can see, PAR has the potential to be life changing for all those involved.

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