

When is it safe to hire someone with a criminal record?

May 27 2009

Carnegie Mellon University researchers have created a model for providing empirical evidence on when an ex-convict has been "clean" long enough to be considered "redeemed" for employment purposes.

The new study, which appears in the current issue of [Criminology](#), estimates that after five years of staying clean an individual with a criminal record is of no greater risk of committing another crime than other individuals of the same age. The research comes at a time when President Barack Obama's crime agenda includes breaking down employment barriers for people who have a prior criminal record, but who have stayed clean since their earlier offense.

"In the past, employers had no way of knowing when it might be safe to look past a criminal record," said Alfred Blumstein, co-author of the study and the J. Erik Jonsson University Professor of Urban Systems and Operations Research at Carnegie Mellon's H. John Heinz III College. "Hiring an ex-offender was a totally arbitrary decision. We believe our model can change that and help provide employers with data in making such decisions. Or it can be used by state criminal-record repositories in deciding when a prior arrest is too 'stale' to warrant distributing." Blumstein's co-author is Kiminori Nakamura, a Ph.D. student at the Heinz College.

The issue of employing ex-offenders has become more of a problem, as a vast majority of larger U.S. employers now perform criminal background checks, Blumstein said. He noted that advances in

information technology allow criminal records to be kept longer and to be distributed easily, and employers are concerned about liability risk if the former offender commits a new crime. Blumstein said this makes it difficult for a large number of people who have committed crimes when they were much younger, but have stayed clean since then.

The study, funded by The National Institute of Justice, used criminal-history records of more than 88,000 first-time offenders in New York in 1980. Most committed new crimes within the first few years after their initial arrest, but only a small minority had a new arrest after staying clean for at least five years. After determining whether the offenders had remained clean during the ensuing 25 years, the data on the 1980 offenders was compared against two comparison groups. The study determined that after about five years those in the offender group were at or below the risk of arrest as people in the general population who were the same age. A more demanding comparison is with people of the same age who had never been arrested. Those with a prior record had to stay clean longer, but their risk could be close enough even to that low-risk group.

Future studies will address other states and sampling years to assess the consistency of results. This effort is intended to develop standards for employers and record repositories to help reduce the handicaps imposed on those who had committed a crime when they were younger.

Source: Carnegie Mellon University ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: When is it safe to hire someone with a criminal record? (2009, May 27) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-05-safe-hire-criminal.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.