

# Perceptions of Employers towards Hiring Ex-Offenders with Online Degrees

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## Abstract

This study explored the attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of human resources hiring managers towards employing non-violent ex-offenders who have obtained higher education. The study aimed to examine the possibility of hiring non-violent ex-offenders and the variable (method of obtaining higher education) that may affect HR hiring managers' decision to hire these individuals.

## Introduction

In today's world of economic uncertainty and misplaced workers, statistics indicate that the number of individuals seeking employment has seen a tremendous increase. Reports of crime and suicides have been identified as direct effects of the current economic state [1]. The urgency of finding employment presents itself vital.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics recently put the number of unemployed at 14 million, leaving 3.2 million jobs vacant [2]. Within the unemployed population, there exists a subgroup of people who are often overlooked and not considered for gainful employment, principally after being labeled ex-offenders [3]. Even though many ex-offenders have demonstrated that, if given the opportunity, they would remain gainfully employed [4], it has become apparent that HR hiring managers are apprehensive when being tasked with the decision of whether to hire or not hire ex-offenders. Because unemployment has not affected all industries equally, some companies are inundated with as many as 70 applications per advertised position, whereas other companies are resorting to re-advertising positions after yielding less than adequate responses to their job postings [5], prompting the need for this potential pool of employees to be considered.

When faced with these hurdles, some ex-offenders have chosen to pursue postsecondary education in hopes that a college degree would serve as a catalyst for improving their opportunities of obtaining gainful employment, thus potentially reducing the chances of recidivism [6]. Additionally, the racial disparities related to employment play a significant role in the in the lack of job opportunities available to ex-offenders. According to a study conducted by Pager, Bonikowski, and Western [7], it is easier for a European American

person with a felony conviction to get a job than it is for an African-American person with no criminal infractions in their histories.

In efforts to remedy this unemployment epidemic, the federal government has suggested employing ex-offenders for those hard-to-fill job positions [8]. An article by Devaney [5] indicated that the federal government thinks that ex-offenders are an underused resource and companies should consider hiring them because they work harder and are more productive than traditional employees, and they are willing to take jobs no one else wants. However, hiring ex-offenders will help the economy and alleviate the need for government support through public assistance and shelter programs.

### **Background of the Study**

Unemployment has reached staggering numbers since the economic collapse in 2008. Furthermore, among the unemployed population lies an often unaccounted for demographic: the non-violent ex-offender. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics [9], 70% of prisoners are returning home to their communities, and the possibility of these individuals re-offending becomes significant if they are unsuccessful at finding employment. If ex-offenders are to remain free, it is mandatory that they become gainfully employed; finding employment has become a daunting task [10, 11].

The challenge for some ex-offenders is locating employers that are willing to employ them [12]. According to research, studies have indicated that the ex-offenders' race, crime, and method of obtaining higher education could ultimately influence HR hiring managers' attitudes.

Thompson and Cummings [13] conducted a study investigating the perceptions of human resources professionals and their company polices pertaining to employment of college graduates that obtained their degrees online versus in a traditional setting. As a result of funding cutbacks in prisons, many ex-offenders have opted to earn college degrees online or in a traditional manner, in hopes of creating an opportunity for themselves that would otherwise be impossible. Results of the study also illustrated that employers would rather hire a person who obtained their degree from a traditional school versus a school that offers 80% of their degree content online; however, company policy requires applicants with online degrees to be treated with the same consideration as an individual with a degree from a traditional college or university. Furthermore, employers are concerned about the loss of people skills or social contact, especially when considering hiring non-violent ex-offenders, which are a necessity when entering the workforce, and which are associated with online degree programs.

While these studies were all comprehensive in their overviews, the implications of these studies are that they lack deep insight into the attitudes of HR hiring managers when considering employing a non-violent ex-offender who has obtained a college degree. This gap in the research presents an opportunity for this study.

## **Statement of the Problem**

According to recent research, companies across a variety of industries have been finding it somewhat difficult to fill job vacancies. In some instances, many ex-offenders have obtained the proper educational credentials required to conduct the necessary job duties in these fields [14]. However, it appears that due to their criminal background history, the odds of being hired for these positions are minimized. Reformed ex-offenders have a difficult time finding employment because of background checks. Even if ex-offenders have demonstrated behavior contrary to their former infraction or infractions by earning a college degree, they may face the challenge of overcoming a criminal history that may categorize them as high-risk to HR departments [7]. Due to this often-insurmountable obstacle, many ex-offenders, especially those who are required to meet certain financial obligations to remain free, may resort to illegal exploits and become repeat offenders, a choice that is reflected in this country's high rate of recidivism [15]. The decision to do so has far-reaching repercussions that negatively impact the country as a whole.

In current literature, there has been research conducted in the realm of discovering the likelihood of recidivism for ex-offenders reentering society, but there is little to no research on the attitudes of HR hiring managers towards ex-offenders who have obtained higher education and their willingness to hire or not hire these individuals for hard-to-fill positions. The lack of research in this area presents exploration opportunities in this subject, specifically the psychological, social, and economic ramifications of ex-offender unemployment.

## **Review of Literature**

Unemployment and the lack of jobs have become a reoccurring topic of discussion on various news segments, in newspaper articles, internet chat rooms, blogs, and social websites. Efforts to construct a systematic resolution have been unsuccessful. Many industries have noted that there are jobs available; however, employers have indicated that the number of qualified applicants is limited, or in some cases, nonexistent [5]. In efforts to resolve this issue, employing ex-offenders who have acquired the proper skills and education has been suggested [7]. Research examining the possibility of hiring ex-offenders has yielded unpromising results overall; however, in recent years, there has been some indication of a change in attitude [15]. This change is the catalyst for further research regarding employment possibilities for non-violent ex-offenders who have obtained higher education. The following section examines the seminal bodies of work and their methodologies, along with how they relate to this study.

## **Hiring Graduates with Online Degrees**

Due to all of the controversy surrounding the credibility of online degrees, Thompson and Cummings [13] conducted a study investigating the perceptions of human resources professionals and their company polices pertaining to employment of college graduates who obtained their degrees online versus in a traditional setting. As a result of funding cutbacks in prisons, many ex-offenders have opted to earn college degrees online or in a traditional

manner in hopes of creating an opportunity for themselves that would otherwise be impossible.

According to L. D. Thompson [16], distance education serves the needs of both the traditional student, the adult learner age 35 or older, and the ex-offender who has a full-time job, family, or is limited by time or probation and parole constraints. In this quantitative study, L. D. Thompson used a methodology based on Don A. Dillman's tailored design method, which describes a set of procedures developed to produce high quality information, high response rates and to reduce error in self-administered surveys. The researcher utilized a survey instrument that reflected the organizations' current hiring practices on a 6-point Likert scale. Out of 824 eligible participants, 93 replied to the survey, which is about an 11.3% response rate. Conversely, two participants refused to consent, and four surveys were rendered useless because they were largely incomplete. A one-way analysis of variance was used on the 87 eligible surveys. Findings of the study indicated that, if given a choice, employers would rather hire a person who obtained their degree from a traditional school versus a school that offers 80% of their degree content online; however, company policy requires applicants with online degrees to be treated with the same consideration as an individual with a degree from a traditional college or university. Furthermore, employers are concerned about the loss of people skills or social contact, which are a necessity when entering the workforce and which are associated with online degree programs. Employers have also expressed the same lack of contact concerns when considering hiring ex-offenders.

The limitations in Thompson's study were that participating HR professionals were only allowed to consider applicants who had obtained bachelor's or master's degrees. Secondly, the low response rate made it impossible to generalize to the entire HR population. Lastly, it was assumed that the HR professionals adhered to the request of answering all survey questions based on company culture and not personal feelings. In closing, the researcher suggested that further studies be conducted to investigate perceptions of ex-offenders who have earned online degrees and the extent to which they feel that their degree prepared them for the workforce [16].

### **Prison-Based Education**

The term "prison education" can describe a variety of programs. It commonly refers to a type of academic training or vocational instruction that is offered to inmates while incarcerated [6]. This form of education is devised to assist in preparing offenders for reentry into society upon release. Generally offered inside prisons, this type of education can also be offered via colleges, universities, and online with special provisions considered. In 1953, the University of Southern Illinois was the first institution to implement a prison-based education program for inmates wanting to obtain higher education through the penal system [17]. Despite slow acceptance of the program, by 1965, prison-based postsecondary education began to appear all over the country. In that same year, Congress enacted Title IV of the Higher Education Act, designed for offenders who fell into certain categories, making them eligible for postsecondary-level studies [18].

The debate over the validity and necessity of prison-based educational programs has been an argument that has solicited both optimistic and pessimistic responses. Considered societal outcasts, prisoners and ex-offenders are the topic of many political discussions, with the opposing side taking a stance against opportunities for advancement by stating that the judicial system is too lenient on criminals and that they are allotted too many luxuries in the prison system. Perhaps most notable are the 1994 laws passed by President Bill Clinton that barred offenders from receiving Pell grants for postsecondary education programs in prisons. In 1998, amendments to the Higher Education Act came in the form of the Aid Elimination Provision, which prevented prospective students with drug charges from being eligible to receive federal aid for college. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid application includes a question about whether applicants have ever been convicted of a drug crime, which subsequently renders them ineligible [19].

However, theorists have often argued that prison education encourages positive communal attitudes and injects a temperament that is contrary to the negative social norms of the life of an individual who has been incarcerated [20].

Further research suggests that the recidivism rate is reduced to 25% or less for ex-offenders or parolees who have earned an associate degree or higher, versus 85% for ex-offenders or parolees who have not or will not earn degrees. According to research conducted by various parole officers, a major contributor to recidivism is the undeniable evidence of unemployment that plagues ex-offenders upon being paroled [19]. However, similar studies show that 85% or more of ex-offenders who do find steady employment upon being released credit this accomplishment to having obtained a college education. The importance of a college degree or some postsecondary course credits at a minimum are essential for an ex-offender desiring to obtain employment beyond manual labor that pays minimum wage.

A recent qualitative study indicated that fewer African-American men were likely to seek higher education due to the incarceration rate of the population. The study was performed to discover the interests, perceptions, and attitudes of African-American men who had been incarcerated towards obtaining higher education. The study used a quantitative and qualitative mixed methodology in which participants were asked to complete a verification form and a consent to participate in study form prior to engaging in the study [21].

Thirty-two participants from a 238-resident homeless shelter located in downtown Birmingham, Alabama, were selected using a random survey. To be eligible for the study, participants had to have been incarcerated for at least one felony, be between the ages of 21 and 32, have completed high school diploma requirements or obtained a general equivalency diploma, and had not gone to a college or had gone to but never completed a program.

Participants in the study were instructed to view a film that starred Charles S. Dutton, a formerly incarcerated ex-offender who, after being released, sought out higher education and became a successful actor. Next, participants were given a perception, expectations, emotions, and knowledge (PEEK) survey that consisted of close-ended questions that ranked responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “extremely likely” to “not likely at all.” The PEEK survey was the quantitative portion of the study. Lima also conducted interviews with

each participant, which served as the qualitative segment. Each participant responded to a total of 14 interview questions that focused on positive and negative connotations or perspectives about obtaining higher education upon being released from prison. The purpose of the interview questions was to determine if a participant would be considered as a practical resident with buoyant thought development or an inadequate citizen with a distrustful thought process upon release from incarceration [21].

Lima's study yielded results indicating that the overall response to the PEEK survey and interview questions was overwhelmingly positive and that most participants felt that pursuing higher education could make a positive difference in their livelihoods. Upon further investigation, the results revealed that participants noted that their lives were much more productive prior to their incarceration period. Of the 32 participants, the PEEK survey exemplified that they had a somewhat promising view about going to college and that there would be a high likelihood of achievement for the majority of the participants tentatively seeking a prosperous postsecondary institutional student career. Regarding cynical positions, a total of less than 5% did not feel the need for postsecondary education after incarceration. In summary, the study concluded with the assessment that there needs to be additional services put in place for ex-offenders who have recently been released from prison in efforts to help them achieve employment and support.

Opportunities are limited for any persons in today's society that do not have some form of college education. For ex-offenders, obtaining higher education in efforts to advance is a vital factor to be taken in consideration, especially as an ex-offender being considered for a job by an HR manager.

### **Human Capital Theory**

The foundation of the theory suggests that education or training raises the efficiency of workers by providing beneficial, purposeful, and resourceful skill sets, therefore increasing employee-earning potential. The theory hypothesizes that monetary disbursement towards education is exorbitant and ought to be regarded as a financial venture, pursuant to increasing individual revenues. Lastly, the human capital methodology is often utilized to explicate occupational wage disparities [22].

However, when applying the human capital theory to the plight of most nonviolent ex-offenders, this theory has some variation. Despite an overwhelming need for qualified personnel in the fields of accounting, sales, and engineering, the amount of educational accomplishments appears to have no bearing. For this reason, this study considered the attitudes of HR hiring managers when presented with this scenario.

### **Label Theory**

Despite the many theories that exist, one particular theory remains apparent in some of the HR hiring managers' decision-making processes regarding hiring ex-offenders. Developed by sociologist Howard S. Becker and derived from the study of phenomenology, the label theory professes that the labels given to people manipulate their mannerisms, predominantly

the relevancy of being labeled a felon, ex-offender, or criminal. It also states that deviance is not intrinsic to an act but alternatively focuses on the predisposition of the mainstream negatively labeling this minority group as abnormal [23].

Subsequently, the theory suggests that being labeled encourages defiant or adverse behavior (i.e., an individual bearing a label has no other logical alternative but to do the accepted thing or become the connotation of that finding [24, 25].

When evaluating the thought process of an ex-offender, the label theory is considered applicable. For example, if individuals believe they are smart, then they behave in a way that they believe one who is smart would behave, which could result in being labeled a scholar. However, if individuals believe that they are a failure, then more times than not, they will conduct themselves as a failure by committing acts that are contrary to prosperity, which could lead to being labeled a failure.

### **Online vs. Traditional Degree Programs**

To be considered as qualified talent, applicants seeking employment in certain industries have discovered the importance of higher education. By obtaining education, applicants are able to acquire skill sets desired by talent-seeking organizations. In today's fast-paced world, technology has afforded individuals desiring higher education an opportunity that was once restricted to brick and mortar schools. Traditional school settings had been the normal paradigm for people aspiring to obtain a higher education until the introduction of the Internet in the early 1990s [26]. The Internet has permitted universities to reach beyond geographical boundaries, placing the decision of whether to obtain higher education at the fingertips of consumers. Among these potential clients are nonviolent ex-offenders who have made the decision to return to school to obtain higher education.

However, in recent years, the increase in the number of universities offering instruction solely online has created some controversy. The validation and rigor of these types of educational programs has been the center of discussion for many critics [27]. In addition to what some deem questionable, the delivery of online content has formulated some debatable questions that investigate which degree is best perceived by HR hiring managers.

In a study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, one key finding was that 34% of HR departments stated that job seekers who acquired their degrees online were as favorable as individuals that obtained their degrees in a traditional setting. The study went on to reveal that 55% of HR departments stated that it would not make a difference if an individual acquired the degree online or traditionally; however, the amount of job experience would be a determining factor. Also, the study indicated that 43% of HR departments felt that online degrees were suitable for entry-level positions only, whereas only 15% felt that online degrees were suitable for executive positions. Overall, 79% of HR departments indicated that they had hired applicants possessing online degrees in the past 12 months.

## **Summary**

Overwhelming evidence indicates an existing apprehensive attitude of HR managers toward hiring ex-offenders. The potential liabilities and risks combined with the stigma associated with the label “ex-offender” often deter hiring managers from granting a person with a known criminal record a chance of redemption. Lack of trust by employers makes ex-offenders appear unemployable and destined for failure. However, the enactment of programs by institutions and various outreach organizations have illustrated some hope for ex-offenders who have completed some type of intervention process, educational accomplishment, or acquired skill training. Job placement for these people also presents positive opportunities, thus decreasing the chances of recidivism. Despite the presence of a constricted labor market, the chances of an ex-offender who has acquired any type of higher education increases the possibility of being hired by 39% versus an individual who has no formal educational training.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative exploratory study evaluated the attitudes of HR managers towards hiring nonviolent ex-offenders possessing higher education. Secondly, this study examined the factors that promote or mitigate HR hiring managers’ decisions to employ nonviolent ex-offenders possessing higher education.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information via Go-To- Meeting Web meeting software. All data were recorded using notes taken by the researcher and through the audio-video capabilities of the Go-To Meeting software. Upon completion of gathering data, the researcher analyzed the qualitative data and reported findings. Despite the precise scrutiny of qualitative research, this research method was considered appropriate for this study.

## **Population and Sample**

The geographical location of the study participants was a large metropolitan city in Georgia. The targeted area has a residential population of approximately 200,549 people [26]. The participants were HR hiring managers of the metropolitan area.

Purposive sampling is used to select participants for their unique characteristics, attitudes, or perceptions as it relates to theoretical categories [27]. The sampling procedure for this study was conducted as follows:

- Contacted The Society for Human Resources Management local chapter president or designated member representative
- Requested the contact information for all members within the local chapter (email, phone number, and addresses)
- Sent an e-mail asking members for initial phone call or contact

## **Selection Process**

- Potential participants that responded to recruitment efforts were screened to ensure that they fit the inclusion criteria.
- 10 HR hiring managers were selected to participate in the study.
- An additional list of HR hiring managers meeting the inclusion criteria was kept by the researcher, in the event that a participant from the primary selection was unavailable.

## **Sample Size Justification**

The sample size for this study was 10 participants. Creswell [28] state that saturation of codes and themes may be reached with as few as five study participants. In similar research, Morse [29] suggested that another key principle to consider when determining a sample size for a qualitative study is that the larger the scope of the research question, the longer it will take to reach saturation. Also, if quality of data is on point and is experimental, then fewer participants will be necessary to achieve saturation.

Based on research, the sample size of 10 participants consisted of the following:

- 2 HR hiring managers for a small business
- 3 HR hiring managers for a medium size business
- 3 HR hiring managers for a large corporation
- 2 HR hiring managers for a non-profit corporation. The study excluded anyone who was not.
- 1 HR hiring manager or did not hold the responsibility of hiring and/or influencing the decision of hiring individuals.

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher implemented the following procedures for data analysis:

- All data collected during the participants' interviews were gathered and sorted by information type or categories, and transcribed professionally.
- The researcher reviewed the data and identified reoccurring themes, perspectives, and experiences.
- The researcher used the NVivo software for coding the data and identification of similar responses from participants.

As themes in participants' responses materialize, the researcher triangulated data associated with attitudes of HR hiring managers' towards non-violent ex-offenders that have obtained higher education. After the data had been coded and themes had been defined, corresponding consistencies were united, and outcomes were assessed through a thematic analysis. A written rationalization was used to elucidate the findings. The analysis illustrated the perceptions and attitudes of HR hiring manager, and either sufficed any current questioning of phenomena or dictated the need for further examination.

## **Findings**

### ***Ex-Offender with a High Educational Achievement Status***

When participants were asked how they felt about hiring non-violent ex-offenders who had obtained a higher education or post-secondary education, the results were as follows: Participant 002 stated, It would show him that this individual was a hard work and was trying to move away from their past. That is the type of employee that he looks for. Participant 004 stated that if the applicant has obtained a degree, then she thinks that is great. She would definitely look at that individual as a potential employee. It just depends on the job position.

Participant 003 said, he thinks that person is on the right track when s/he has achieved an education. He also thinks that is an equalizer, and the individual could be a real role model to society: "They would be considered an asset." However, in contrast, participant 005 stated that some jobs require a certain type of personality type. Therefore, the fact that someone has a college degree does not mean that they are they right person for the job. Participant 007 agreed with participant 005 and added if it were a crime such as forgery, she would base her decision on how many years ago the crime was committed. Even with a post-secondary degree, she would still be cautious, because her organization deals with a multitude of cash transactions. A college degree does not guarantee that the individual can be trusted, especially in her industry.

Lastly, participant 006 stated that if the ex-offender has some type of education and some type of offense on their background, she needs to research the background to find out exactly what happened. Then she would determine if the candidate is a right fit for the job. She would like to hire them in efforts to try them out. Every company has a probationary period and if they did get a degree in prison, that would be fine, however it would weigh more heavily if the pursued their education on-ground or online once released from prison. This would illustrate that they obtained their degree of their own free will and not because an officer made them go to class. On another note, "It doesn't matter to her if the ex-offender got their degree off the back of a cereal box, as long as it came from an accredited college or university" (see Table 1).

Table 1. HR Hiring managers' perspectives towards employing ex-offenders possessing a higher educational status

<b>Educational Status</b>	<b>HR Hiring Managers' Perspectives</b>
No higher education required. Would hire based on skill and other circumstances	3
Must have a higher education	0
Makes no difference if non-violent ex-offender has higher education	3

**Method of Obtaining Education and Influence on HR Hiring Decisions.** The next question asked participants to explain if the method by which a non-violent ex-offender obtained higher education influenced their decision to hire them and if they preferred degrees obtained traditionally, online, or if a degree obtained in prison is suitable. The results are as follows: Participant 002 stated that any degree from a reputable, accredited college or university would be alright with him and he would be more apt to give this individual a chance. Participant 005 stated that it really did not make a difference how the non-violent ex-offender obtained the degree. It depended on what he was looking for in a potential applicant. Participant 004 stated that she did not think that it mattered. If a non-violent ex-offender obtained a degree while in prison or whether it is online or on-ground, she would accept them all. It showed progression and that the individual was trying. Likewise, participant 003 also stated that it did not matter to him, because a degree is a degree as long as it came from an accredited school. Last of all, participants 006 and 007 stated that they had no preference (Table 2).

Table 2. HR hiring managers' preferred method of education obtainment

	<b>HR higher education hiring decision</b>
On-ground(traditional)	0
Online	0
In prison	0
No preference, as long as it is accredited	6

**Results Pertaining to Method of Obtaining Higher Education Influence on HR Hiring Decisions.** The next question asked participants to explain if the method in which a non-violent ex-offender obtained higher education influenced their decision to hire them and if they preferred degrees obtained traditionally, online, or if a degree obtained in prison is

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Table 3. HR hiring managers' preferred method of education obtainment

<b>Type of Education</b>	<b>HR Preferred Method of Payment</b>
On-Ground(Traditionally	0
Online	0
In Prison	0
No Preference, as long as it is accredited	6

***Degrees Most Valuable to HR Hiring Managers***

Participants were asked to explain which degree they deemed more valuable. The researcher then gave them the options of a vocational degree, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree and higher. The results are as follows: Participant 004 stated that a vocational degree is sufficient at the bare minimum. For most jobs in her organization, that is all that is needed. If a non-violent ex-offender decides to pursue a higher degree such as a bachelor's degree, then that makes it even better. Participant 007 stated that a bachelor's degree or higher is preferred, because it illustrates stability and maturity. According to participant 007, during the time period of obtaining the four-year degree, the individual has the opportunity to grow. Also, the maturity level of an individual who has a two-year vocational or associate's degree is not as fully developed as the individual possessing the four-year degree.

Participants 002 and 005 both stated they liked them all, and it really did not matter. However, they did prefer a bachelor's degree because it illustrated the individual's desire to learn more. Participants 008 and 003 both stated that it depended on the job or position and that a vocational degree is suitable for hands-on jobs. Participant 003 went on to further explain that "A vocational degree is much needed and in demand now; "automotive techs and HVAC techs are in demand now, so, a bachelor's degree wouldn't be a necessity"; "however, a bachelor's degree or higher, requires a little more commitment"; "so the higher you go on the degree totem pole, the more attractive non-violent ex-offender looks to a potential employer" (Table 4).

Table 4. Degrees preferred by HR hiring managers

Type of Degree	HR Preferred Degrees
Vocational	1
Associate's	0
Bachelor's or higher	1
No preference	2
Depends on job	2

## Conclusion

Regarding the influence of a non-violent ex-offender that has a higher level of educational attainment on HR managers' hiring decisions, 40% of the participants indicated that possessing a two year, four-year, or higher degree would definitely have an influence on their decision to hire them or not. The participants further stated that "A non-violent ex-offender that possesses a degree increases their chances of being hired within their organization," and "It shows that individual's progression and ability to overcome obstacles." 30% of the participants indicated that having a higher level of education would have no influence on their hiring decision. One participant further explained by saying that to him, that individual would just be a criminal with a college degree, and he still would not hire that person. He also felt that no matter the circumstances are, a non-violent ex-offender cannot be trusted. 20% of the participants indicated that having a higher education may influence their hiring decision, but there were no guarantees. Their decision would depend on the crime and the job applied for.

Regarding the method by which non-violent ex-offenders obtain their education and its influence on a HR hiring manager's decision to hire them, 70% of the respondents indicated that it did not matter, as long as the ex-offender attended an accredited school. 20% of the participants indicated that they preferred degrees that were obtained from a traditional campus that offered an online component. One participant pointed out that he did not value degrees obtained in prison, because of the restrictions and the ex-offender's inability to interact with people on the outside. This lack of interaction may transcend into the ex-offender's prospective work life. 10% of the respondents indicated that they preferred degrees that were obtained in a traditional manner only.

Regarding the type of degree deemed most valuable by HR hiring managers, 40% of the participants indicated that they had no preference of degree when considering hiring a non-violent ex-offender. 20% of the participants pointed out that their preference of degree depended on the job opportunity offered. Another 20% of the participants indicated that they were satisfied with a vocational degree. The last 20% of participants indicated that the bachelor's degree or higher was their degree of choice.

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