

# Exploring the Accessibility of Education to Incarcerated Men in New York State Prisons

## Background

A study by the U.S. Department of Justice found that **83%** of individuals released from state prisons were **rearrested** within nine years (Alpher et al., 2018).

However, a comprehensive analysis by the RAND corporation found that **prison education reduces recidivism by 43%** (Davis et al., 2013). Despite this, the U.S. Justice Department found that **40% of men** incarcerated in state prisons **did not obtain either their high school diploma or GED** (Harlow et al., 2003).

## Methods

Interviews were conducted with **eleven men**. Each participant was asked about his **overall experiences** with educational programming, the process of **enrolling in classes**, how he perceived **his teachers**, factors that impacted **his motivation** to take classes, what **resources** were **available to disabled groups**, and whether he held a **position in the prison**. Interviews were typically **45 minutes to one hour** in length. Participants were ensured full confidentiality and anonymity.

## Aims

- 1) Identify consistent barriers that prevent incarcerated men from attaining or completing education
- 2) Determine how each barrier is preventing educational attainment
- 3) Illuminate preventable and fixable problems that encourage recidivism within the New York state prison system

## Results

There are **ten** distinct yet interconnected **barriers** to accessing education within prison:

<p><b>1) Correctional Officer Behavior</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COs are demeaning &amp; abusive</li> <li>• COs prevent individuals &amp; groups from taking classes</li> <li>• CO presence detracts from learning</li> </ul>	<p><b>2) Instructor Behavior</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers unjustly remove students from classes</li> <li>• Teachers are apathetic</li> <li>• Teachers ridicule illiterate &amp; disabled students</li> </ul>	<p><b>3) Transferring Facilitates &amp; Programs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals can be transferred without consent</li> <li>• Transferring facilitates destroys program progress</li> <li>• Individuals can be transferred from job programs without consent</li> </ul>	<p><b>4) Disability Accommodations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning impaired put into regular classes</li> <li>• No screening for disabilities after age 21</li> <li>• Lack of accommodations like hearing aids</li> </ul>	<p><b>5) Quality &amp; Availability of Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocational programs are outdated, not job-marketable</li> <li>• Individuals would have to file grievances to get materials such as pens and paper</li> </ul>
<p><b>6) Disciplinary Measures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must re-do therapeutic programs if they get a relevant charge</li> <li>• Policing worsens the learning environment</li> <li>• Being sent to SHU destroys progress</li> </ul>	<p><b>7) Variety and Selection of Programs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very inconsistent program variety across facilities</li> <li>• Programs are racially segregated; whites get better jobs</li> <li>• There aren't levels to classes, everyone is held to the slowest's pace</li> </ul>	<p><b>8) Scarcity of College-in-Prison</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common to get rejected</li> <li>• College only available at 25 facilities</li> <li>• Current programs rely on donations</li> </ul>	<p><b>9) Waiting Times</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically, program waiting lists last longer than a year</li> <li>• Have to write 3-4 letters to be considered for a program</li> <li>• No waiting list preference given</li> </ul>	<p><b>10) Student Motivation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of outside connection is depressing</li> <li>• Repeating programs is demotivating</li> <li>• Many don't consider education important</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

These ten barriers prevent many from **attaining their GED**, **overcoming their illiteracy**, or **amassing vocational skills**. The circumstance of incarceration itself does not create these barriers, but rather how DOCCS runs its facilities. Alleviating barriers to accessing education within New York state prisons would require **policy changes**, increased **accountability**, and **funding reallocation**. To learn more about this subject and my research, scan the QR code and read my research report.

