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UCSB STUDY SUGGESTS RISING PRISON POPULATION CAUSES INCREASE IN UNEMPLOYMENT AND REDUCTION OF MALE LABOR FORCE

While much research has attempted to show that unemployment influences crime rates, a study at the University of California, Santa Barbara indicates that high imprisonment rates in the United States and other Western countries are adversely affecting employment.

"Prison growth appears to have negative consequences on labor markets in the advanced Western democracies," said John R. Sutton, a professor of sociology at UCSB. "It is raising rates of unemployment and lowering male labor force participation."

Sutton, who examined imprisonment and employment data gathered between 1960 and 1990, presented his study, "Imprisonment and Labor Market Outcomes: Evidence From 15 Affluent Western Democracies," recently at the American Sociological Association annual meeting in Chicago.

Countries represented in the study are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany (including East Germany), the Netherlands and the United States.

Sutton said he found evidence that prison growth depresses labor markets in each of the 15 countries.

In each case, he said, people subjected to incarceration were found to have reduced chances for participation in the labor market for the rest of their lives. Family stability and educational attainment were also negatively affected. Groups most affected in each case were racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants.

Sutton said the study suggests that Western democracies need to rethink policies on crime and punishment because the societal costs of mass incarceration may be greater than the benefits.

"Countries that practice mass imprisonment, as in the U.S., pay a heavy price in terms of shattered families, deepening inequality, and lowered economic productivity, with no counterbalancing impact on crime rates," Sutton said. "These costs are likely to be particularly profound among groups that are already marginal to the labor market - minorities and immigrants - since they make up a disproportionate share of inmates in every country."

Copies of the study may be printed from Sutton's web site by contacting <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/sutton/>.

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