

# An Evaluation of Kansas Correctional Industries/ Private Industries (KCI/PI) Programs

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## Introduction

This research brief descriptively explores the relationship between the completion of Kansas Correctional Industries/Private Industries (KCI/PI) and recidivism, while integrating both risk—as measured by the LSI-R—and employment as mediating factors.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the underlying theory is that the successful completion of correctional education programming, such as KCI/PI, increases human capital which increases the likelihood of post-release employment. This idea is evident in the KDOC description of the KCI/PI program—KCI/PI completers develop marketable job skills and a work ethic that will help prepare them to return to their communities.<sup>1</sup> In addition to increasing the likelihood of employment, KCI/PI completion should arguably lead to sustained employment over time with earnings above the poverty threshold. This subsequently reduces the likelihood of recidivism; therefore, the relationship between correctional education programming and recidivism is largely indirect. In other words, through enhanced employment, the completion of KCI/PI reduces the likelihood of recidivism. Risk is added as an additional factor to determine if the strength of the indirect relationship between the completion of KCI/PI programs and recidivism varies for individuals within the different risk categories.

*Figure 1: Framework*



It should be noted that the emphasis in this research brief is on the completion, and not just participation of KCI/PI programs. The same issues that may prevent a correctional education program participant from successful completion, such as disciplinary issues, would be related to less than desirable post-release outcomes. Also, non-completers are less likely to have accrued the same relative gains in their skills, disposition, and knowledge which may place prevent increases in human capital.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.doc.ks.gov/facilities/hcf/programs/private-industry>

## Methods

### Relevant Definitions:

*Kansas Correctional Industries/ Private Industries completers:* those participating in KCI/PI programs listed as either private industry or employment and successfully completing a full six months. The time horizon for the KCI/PI completion to have occurred was within five years of the release associated with the release cohort.

*Comparison group members:* those released within the same timeframe as the KCI/PI completers who had not completed any of the following correctional education programming: vocational training; work release; or GED. This was done so that the same comparison group could potentially be used to evaluate the other correctional education programs beyond KCI/PI.

*Recidivism:* any Kansas Department of Correctional Education (KDOC) readmission within two years of release for both new crime commitments and parole violations. Because three full fiscal year release cohorts (2014, 2015, and 2016) and part of another (individuals released during the first two quarters of fiscal year 2017) were used in the analysis with the last year being 2017, the two-year measurement allowed a parallel amount of potential survival time for each study group member regardless of their year and quarter of release.

Individuals could be included in multiple release cohorts and may have participated in multiple correctional education programs, based on the timing of their participation and their pattern of release and potential recommitment. If someone were released multiple times in the same fiscal year, the first release was used, which would reflect a recommitment.

*Consistent and Quality Employment:* having earnings in either three out of the first four full quarters (discounting the quarter of release) or two out of the first four full quarters following release in addition to the quarter of release. The total wages in each quarter were required to be equal to or greater than \$3190 or the mean quarterly poverty threshold in Kansas during the post-release timeframe of the study (CY 2014-CY 2019).

*Risk:* The study group members were categorized as: low, moderate, or high risk based on the LSIR score from the administration closest to the admission date for the relevant prison spell:

- LSIR score of 18 or lower (low risk)
- LSIR score of 19-31 (moderate risk)
- LSIR score of 32+ (high risk)

*Success:* not recidivating within the two-year post-release tracking period.

### Delimitations

Each study group member was required to have a Kansas-specific post-release record of employment or recommitment to better ensure that the post-release outcomes of study-group members were able to be tracked and measured within Kansas. This approach was used by

Lichtenberger, et al (2009) in a similar study of vocational training completers within the state of Virginia.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted this approach tends to result in higher rates of recidivism and employment, so comparisons to other studies/evaluations with different operational approaches should be avoided.

Study group members were also required to have at least one LSI-R administration during their most recent incarceration spell prior to release. Anyone listed as being released from KDOC authority by sake of passing away was removed from the analysis.

### KCI/PI Results

The first set of descriptive analysis involves completers of KCI/PI compared to individuals released in the same timeframe with the same risk-level. Because the number of released KCI/PI completers was somewhat small and the number of low-risk KCI/PI completers was even smaller, that subgroup was excluded from the analysis. Low-risk KCI/PI completers were comparatively successful, and their inclusion would have increased the overall KCI/PI group's rates of success and decreased the overall rates of recidivism; however, presenting the information would have violated traditional information suppression rules that protect the identity of individuals through the publishing of results of research and evaluations.

### Risk Distribution

In examining the risk distribution of the KCI/PI completers and the comparison group members (after excluding the low-risk offenders), the proportion in the moderate- and high-risk categories were similar. For both groups, slightly more than one half were moderate-risk and slightly less than one-half were high-risk.

Table 1: Group Composition by Risk-Level

	KCI/PI Completers	Comparison Group
N	121	9,578
Moderate	52.9%	51.7%
High	47.1%	48.3%

### Post-Release Employment

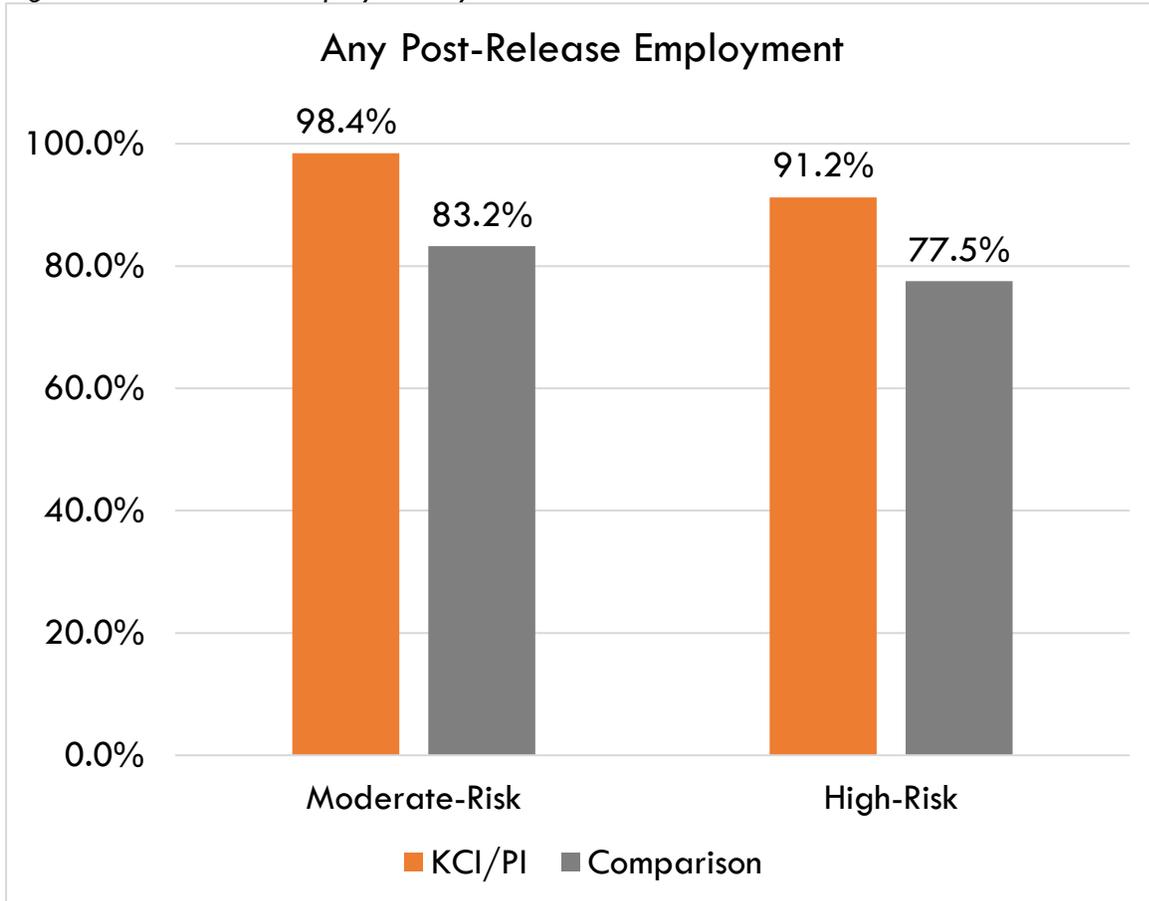
The overwhelming majority of KCI/PI completers, regardless of risk-level, had gained some sort of employment in Kansas for at least one quarter after release and the group maintained a noticeable relative advantage over their comparison group counterparts. As shown in Figure 2,

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<sup>2</sup> Lichtenberger, E., O'Reilly, P., Miyazaki, Y., and Kamulladeen, R. (2009) *Direct and indirect impacts of career and technical education on post-release outcomes*. Richmond, VA: Department of Correctional Education.

nearly all the moderate-risk KCI/PI completers had gained employment in Kansas, which was 15 percentage points higher than the rate for moderate-risk comparison group members. More than nine out of every ten high risk KCI/PI completers had some sort of employment in Kansas after release. This was about thirteen percentage points greater than their high-risk comparison group members.

Figure 2: Post-Release Employment by Risk-Level



## Consistent and Quality Employment

When sustained employment with earnings over the poverty threshold was examined, the positive differences between KCI/PI completers and their comparison group counterparts were more robust, relative to examining any record of employment in Kansas. Nearly one-half (48.4%) of moderate-risk KCI/PI completers had consistent and quality employment the year following their release, relative to 18.1% of comparison groups members. Even high-risk KCI/PI completers maintained a comparatively high degree of success in the Kansas workforce specific to other high-risk offenders released during the same timeframe. In fact, high-risk KCI/PI completers maintained substantially higher rates of consistent and quality employment relative to moderate-risk comparison group members (43.9% to 18.1%).

**Table 2: Consistent and Quality Employment by Risk Level**

	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Overall</b>
KCI/PI	48.4%	43.9%	46.3%
Comparison	18.1%	10.8%	14.6%
Diff.	30.3%	33.0%	31.7%

## Success

Success was measured as not recidivating within a two-year time horizon following release. As shown in the Table 3, moderate-risk KCI/PI completers experienced a high degree of post-release success (87.5%), demonstrating that substantial numbers were able to translate their relative advantage in the workforce, to overall success. The moderate-risk KCI/PI completers maintained a 27.7 percentage point advantage relative to their comparison group members. Although high risk KCI/PI completers maintained a ten-percentage point advantage over their comparison group counterparts, the difference was not as robust as it was for moderate-risk KCI/PI completions. Nonetheless, high-risk KCI/PI completers had roughly the same rate of success as moderate-risk comparison group members (61.4% to 59.8%).

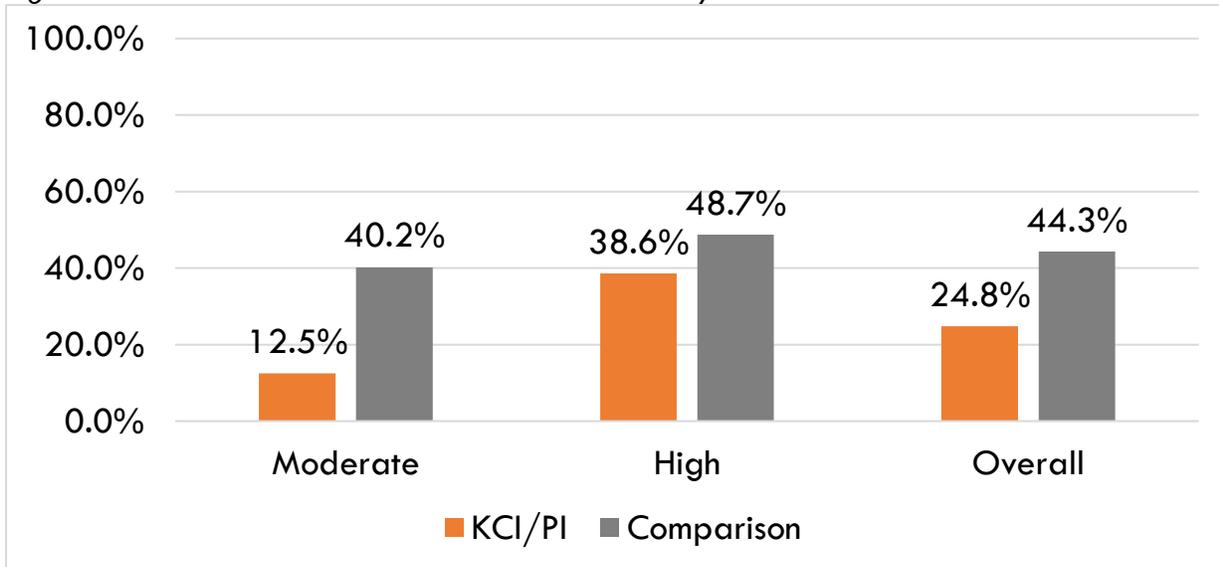
**Table 3: Success by Risk Level**

	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Overall</b>
KCI/PI	87.5%	61.4%	75.2%
Comparison	59.8%	51.3%	55.7%
Diff.	27.7%	10.1%	19.5%

## Recidivism

The corollary of success, or recidivism was measured by examining KDOC-specific recommitment within two years of the given release. As illustrated in Figure 3, the relative advantage of KCI/PI completers in reference to the comparison group members was evident across the two different risk categories, as one would expect based on the results specific to success. Similarly, the positive treatment effect descriptively associated with KCI/PI completion was greater among moderate-risk offenders.

Figure 3: Recidivism Rates within Two Years of Release by Risk Level



## Success and Recidivism as a Function of Consistent and Quality Employment

When success is viewed as a function of consistent and quality employment, the ways in which the participation and subsequent completion of KCI/PI programs becomes evident particularly for moderate-risk individuals. For example, 100% of the moderate-risk KCI/PI completers who obtained consistent and quality employment were successful or had not recidivated within two years of release. In contrast, three quarters of the moderate-risk KCI/PI completers who were not employed or inconsistently employed were successful. This was still a fairly high rate of success, but it did not approximate the 100% success rate of their within treatment group peers with similar employment measures.

Among the high-risk KCI/PI group, four out of every five were successful. This rate of success was somewhat higher (80.0%) than the rate of success for moderate risk KCI/PI completers with no or inconsistent employment (75.8%). For high risk KCI/PI completers without consistent and quality employment, more than half recidivated (53.1%).

What should be emphasized is the difference in the percentage of both moderate- and high-risk KCI/PI completers obtaining consistent and quality employment the first year of release both overall, and relative to their respective same-risk comparison groups. Both KCI/PI groups

maintained at least a 30-percentage point advantage over their respective comparison group. Consistent and quality employment served as the trigger for success at the two-year mark for all groups.

The benefits of consistent and quality employment were also evident among the comparison group members across both the moderate- and high-risk categories (See the bottom half of Table 4). Although significantly smaller proportions of comparison group members attained consistent and quality employment, the success rates among those who did were high. In fact, high-risk comparison group members with consistent and quality employment (86.6%) had modestly higher rates of success relative to high-risk KCI/PI completers (80.0%). Among those not obtaining consistent and quality employment, the rates of recidivism were the same among the high-risk groups (KCI/PI was 53.1% and the High-Risk Comparison group was 53.0%). Moderate-risk KCI/PI completers without consistent employment had a fairly large advantage relative to moderate-risk comparison group members. Three-quarters of moderate-risk KCI/PI completers without consistent employment were successful, while slightly more than half of comparison groups members met that same distinction.

Table 4: Consistent and Quality Employment and Post-Release Success by Risk-Level

KCI/PI Completers (N=121)							
Moderate Risk 52.9%				High Risk 47.1%			
Consistent and Quality Employment 48.4%		No or Inconsistent Employment 51.6%		Consistent and Quality Employment 43.9%		No or Inconsistent Employment 56.1%	
Success	Recidivated	Success	Recidivated	Success	Recidivated	Success	Recidivated
100.0%	0.0%	75.8%	24.2%	80.0%	20.0%	46.9%	53.1%
Comparison Group (N=9,578)							
Moderate Risk 51.7%				High Risk 48.3%			
Consistent and Quality Employment 18.1%		No or Inconsistent Employment 81.9%		Consistent and Quality Employment 10.8%		No or Inconsistent Employment 89.2%	
Success	Recidivated	Success	Recidivated	Success	Recidivated	Success	Recidivated
89.1%	10.9%	53.3%	46.7%	86.6%	13.4%	47.0%	53.0%

## Key Takeaways

While it is difficult to disentangle maintaining steady work and not recidivating in the context of how consistent and quality employment was measured, the time horizon used to measure recidivism was at least two times as long. Logic would dictate that maintaining consistent and quality employment for the better part of the first year following release is only possible if someone does not recidivate. However, the employment/earnings measure stopped at the end of the first year, allowing a time horizon of at least an additional year in which the employment/earnings measure was free from this entanglement.

KCI/PI completers did extremely well in terms of consistent and quality employment and had much higher rates relative to their same-risk comparison groups, in addition to other workforce-related correctional education completers that were not highlighted in the current brief, namely vocational and work release program completers. In fact, as shown in Table 5, the moderate-risk KCI/PI completers had rates of consistent and quality employment that paralleled low-risk completers from the other correctional education program areas.

**Table 5: Consistent and Quality Employment by Risk Level and Correctional Ed. Program**

	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>
KCI/PI	N/A	48.4%	43.9%
Vocational	48.2%	26.7%	17.0%
Work Release	47.0%	37.7%	25.8%

When examining the interaction of employment and success, remarkably, all the moderate-risk KCI/PI completers who had gained consistent and quality employment were successful two years after release (i.e., had not recidivated). Once again, nearly half of this group had consistent and quality employment as measured in the evaluation.

These results demonstrate the undoubtedly positive benefits of obtaining consistent and quality employment even among those not participating in correctional education programming and high-risk individuals. This holds true although the quarterly earnings threshold was somewhat modest and arguably within reach for formerly incarcerated individuals with marketable skills. The threshold was \$3,190 in each quarter, which would equate to roughly \$245 a week and slightly more than \$6.00 an hour assuming a 40-hour workweek. In other words, the switch that turns on post-release success may not be attainable for all, but for those who have increased their human capital by obtaining marketable skills, such as those in the KCI/PI program, their prospects should be high.

It follows logic that completers of correctional education programs that provide work experience and opportunities that arguably parallel real world employment opportunities would have a relative advantage specific to obtaining consistent and quality employment the first year following one's release. Correctional education programming has an associated cost and by default opportunities to participate in such programs are limited (i.e., the programs cannot be offered to everyone). To better maximize the positive treatment effect and reduce risk, post-release job placement should continue to be emphasized and/or coupled with workforce related correctional education to maximize the potential benefits of such programs, particularly for high-risk participants.

### **Further Investigation**

Although 'treatment' group members, or KCI/PI completers, were compared to individuals released during the same timeframe and within the same risk level, it could be beneficial to use a more sophisticated approach in establishing comparison groups. Matching treatment and comparison group members on key characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, crime type, sentence length, more nuanced or smaller risk-level ranges, age at release, etc.) could help better isolate the potential impact of completing KCI/PI programs. Although the descriptive approach that was used in the current evaluation is sufficient, a matching approach would better pinpoint the extent to which the positive treatment effect could be related to other factors, or factors that are not measurable.

As Second Chance Pell grants have been implemented in Kansas and with the recent repeal of the longstanding restriction on the eligibility of incarcerated individuals for regular Pell grants, it would be beneficial to determine how college course completion patterns are related to post-release success and risk reduction. This can be accomplished using some of the same information from the current evaluation. This would help determine how postsecondary education may help reduce recidivism, but also create a framework for future studies, as participation in prison-based college programs in Kansas will likely increase in the near-term future.