



Career Development and Criminal Justice: Foundations for a New Integration to Promote Peace and Justice

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Abstract

The promotion of peace and justice is an important responsibility of governments, and it represents one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015). To date there has been little consideration of how career development services might contribute to this domain at a societal level. Rather the focus has been on career guidance and vocational rehabilitation interventions for offenders that are local and small scale. This article proposes five foundations on which to build a wider integration of career development with efforts to promote peace and justice. These are: (i) a conceptual foundation; (ii) an empirical foundation; (iii) a moral foundation; (iv) a security foundation; and (v) a public policy foundation.

Keywords: Career development; Peace; Criminal Justice; Work with offenders; Social justice.

Introduction

The established view of the intersection between career development and criminal justice has been to treat offenders as a population with special needs, in much the same way as refugees, disabled people, or other minority groups have distinctive needs and require additional support. This article will argue that this intersection has a wider significance that merits attention.

Robertson (2020) argued that career development services can potentially contribute to a wide range of socially desirable outcomes, and not all of these outcomes are captured in the extant public policy literature. The United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goals could be used to develop a systematic framework of

the policy goals that career development can potentially contribute to. Collapsing the framework down to six categories, Robertson argued that career development can contribute to public policy related to (i) labour markets and decent work; (ii) education; (iii) social equity; (iv) environment; (v) health and well-being; (vi) and peace and justice. This article explores the final category.

Crime places a substantial burden on individuals and societies. The economic burden includes costs of services such as policing; courts, judicial and legal processes; prison and probation services. These are in addition to the costs of insurance and security borne by individuals and institutions. Those in custody, or with

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employment prospects impaired by their criminal record, are less likely to contribute productively to the economy. The net costs to society of crime are therefore enormous, and any activity which reduces them, even marginally, is highly desirable. Although much harder to quantify, any consideration of the economic impacts of crime must be secondary to the psycho-social harms it causes, which have an immeasurable negative impact on individuals and societies.

The consideration of the interface between career development and criminal justice need not be limited to individual level interventions to support those categorised as offenders. The issue can be considered at a societal as well as an individual level of analysis. Also, the role of career development need not be limited to the vocational rehabilitation of offenders. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the notion of rehabilitation is limiting, as it casts the offender in a passive role as a receiver of a short-term service to improve them. Desistance from crime is a process (Anderson, 2021) in which the offender is actively interacting with their environment over an extended time period, and rehabilitation programmes may play only a small part. Secondly, a wider perspective would suggest a preventive function may be just as important, and perhaps more important than desistance.

Our understanding of these issues is at a very early stage of development. This article seeks to lay the foundations for building a deeper understanding of the relations between career development and criminal justice. Five foundations are proposed here: (i) a conceptual foundation; (ii) an empirical foundation; (iii) a moral foundation; (iv) a security foundation; and (v) a public policy foundation. These five foundations provide the structure to the article, which concludes with a discussion of how the field of career development might build upon them in its engagement with theory, research, practice, and policy.

A Conceptual Foundation

Career development is a conceptually rich field, so a range of theoretical perspectives are available to inform crime reduction policy and practice. The focus here is not on the causes of criminal behaviour, but entirely on theory that either explains desistance or suggests ways to encourage it. The following discussion provides a sense of the range of available approaches, and also draws heavily on a critical overview of criminological theories of desistance (Weaver, 2016).

1. Crime as a career or occupation: Criminal activity can be seen as a 'quasi-job'. The study of deviant careers was pioneered by the Everett C. Hughes and associates at the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1930s (Barley, 1989). Seeing crime as a career or occupation allows the application of the career development approaches to understanding the lived experience of participants. It also allows for a consideration of the possibility that participation in legal work displaces criminal behaviour by using up time and energy. 'The Devil finds work for idle hands to do' is a belief with broad appeal. Periodic moral panics about youth unemployment seem to build on this understanding, and it represents one of the key drivers for government policy interventions to provide guidance to access education and training where work is unavailable to school leavers. This kind of logic has some validity, but it is also problematic, because deviant behaviour is often associated with 'out of working hours' time frames, and informal social spaces.
2. Crime as rational economic activity: Crime may represent an alternative source of income when legal methods are frustrated or comparatively less well rewarded. Again, there will be some truth in this, but it is problematic. There are types of crime that require access to an entry level of income (e.g. motoring and drug use offences) or access to a

- workplace (e.g. financial fraud, theft from the employer) so participation is more viable for those in work. Not all crime relates to property or financial rewards. There are also shades of grey: informal employment may involve varying degrees of illegality by worker and employer. Economic behaviour is assumed to be rational, so this perspective is linked to rational choice theories in which desistance is preceded by weighing up the pros and cons of engaging in crime.
3. 'Ageing out of crime': Lifespan developmental theories are important in career development but there seem to be little application of them to work with offenders. In the criminological literature on desistance, however they feature prominently (e.g. Sampson & Laub, 1997). There are 'age-crime' curve explanations which draw attention to the fact that engagement in criminal activity is more likely during adolescence or young adulthood. There are also 'maturational reform' theories which implicitly or explicitly attribute desistance to biological change with ageing.
 4. Social learning and social cognitive theories: Social cognitive theories of career development are applied to work with offenders by Allen Bradley (2015), Chen & Shields (2020), and Johnson (2013). These focus on the use of sources of self-efficacy information to build agency, pro-active behaviour, and goal setting. Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) theory was also used by Chen & Shields (2020), highlighting the identification of negative career thoughts and learning approaches to career decision making. In contrast, criminological theories based around social learning seem to focus on shifts in peer group association and role learning.
 5. Narrative approaches: Adopting a perspective aligned with social constructivism, Ward & Marshall (2007) describe the 'Good lives model'. In this career development programme, offenders reflect on identity and values, examine past narratives which may be difficult, and construct alternative pro-social narrative projected into future.
 6. Informal social control theories: These are criminological theories that look to social institutions such as marriage, family, education, and employment, as sources of influence that tend to shape and constrain behaviour towards desistance (e.g. Laub & Sampson, 2003).
 7. Interactionist Approaches: These criminological approaches seek to understand how individual change interacts with changes in social participation and roles in desistance (e.g. Weaver, 2015).
 8. Situational theories: These criminological approaches emphasise geographical explanations – how place and space shape behaviour. There are perhaps echoes of Robert's 'opportunity structure' theory (Roberts, 2009), where in addition to family and institutional influences, local labour markets constrain and shape careers.
 9. Other approaches: Contemporary career theory is very diverse, and many alternative approaches could be drawn on. For example, Bennett & Amundson (2016) apply chaos theory, happenstance, and Amundson's hope-based interventions to work with offenders. This involves creating an image of possible future self.
- A notable absence from conceptual accounts of career development work with offenders is trait and factor theory, historically the most influential perspective in the field. To an extent this is understandable as differentialist psychologies might potentially be discriminatory if used in their very earliest manifestations where notions of a 'criminal type' existed. There are echoes of this in modern conceptions of 'dark triad' personalities - Machiavellianism,

narcissism, and psychopathy- in the workplace (Cohen, 2016), but these offer little insight into effective approaches for rehabilitation, and do not imply law breaking. More importantly, trait and factor approaches might suggest using systematic assessment to identify untapped educational or vocational potential that prior attainments do not indicate. Building on strengths requires identifying those strengths in the first instance. Whilst work with offenders can be informed by mainstream career theory, it is worth noting that conversely mainstream careers practice can be informed by work with offenders. Alec Rodger (1952) introduced a simple structured assessment interview for use in vocational guidance, which was developed working with young offenders in prison in the 1930s. Known as the 'Seven Point Plan' this subsequently became the standard vocational guidance interview model in the UK in the mid-20th Century.

There seem to be some recurring themes in thinking about desistance, which cut across theories. Some of the considerations that seem to be important are outlined below.

Firstly, peer groups are important in desistance. Any change in their make-up may affect social identity relations and, as a result, the chances of desistance. Engagement in employment or education can bring about shifts on peer group affiliation. But so can marriage or other changes. Secondly, identity is important, and for a shift to desistance to be enduring a change in personal identity may be required. Peer groups and identities are interlinked and theories offer different types of explanation as to how they may come to change. Thirdly, turning points are important. Changes might be brought about by joining an educational programme, or by marriage (Giordano et al., 2002; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). Education can act as a meaningful turning point in a person's desistance journey (Sampson and Laub, 1993).

In summary there is some commonality and some divergence between career theory and criminological theory in relation to understanding desistance. Criminological theory does not seem to engage with why people might not engage in crime in the first place, but arguably this is the role of mainstream career development theory.

An Empirical Foundation

This section provides a brief overview of the available research evidence linking access to work and learning with crime reduction. It draws on a review of both the career development and the criminology/rehabilitation literatures. Table 1 lists relevant literature reviews briefly summarising their findings. Table 2 similarly lists and summarises meta-analyses; these offer some statistical rigour, but a narrower focus.

The evidence base is weak in terms of both quantity and quality. Most studies have methodological limitations, and the experimental design of studies tends to be weak (Greenwood, 2008). Selection bias is a key concern: those more likely to succeed may be over-represented in vocational programmes. Where vocational programmes fail to succeed this may reflect weaknesses in design, an unsympathetic institutional context, or a failure to provide adequate post-release support. Studies tend to focus on rehabilitation rather than understanding desistance from crime as a more holistic process. Change is likely to take place over long time scales and longitudinal studies are rare.

The great majority of studies come from the USA, and the available literature reviews and meta-analyses rely almost entirely on American evidence. The USA is atypical in that it incarcerates an unusually high proportion of its citizens: 629 per million, according to the Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (ICPR, 2021). It has a diversity of prison regimes across the states, and there are issues around the ethnicity of the prison population, which are

discussed later. Generalising from these studies requires caution.

Studies from the Global South are rare, but there are some interesting exceptions from Sub-Saharan Africa which indicate a growing awareness of the unmet career development needs of offenders. These include Itai & Gilliet (2015), who examined rehabilitation in prisons in Zimbabwe. Although provision had improved and international standards were

considered, they found a lack of consistency in rehabilitation programmes. They highlighted an unmet need for career guidance for inmates. Makhurane (2020), similarly reported a lack of adequate career guidance in correctional schools in South Africa. Also in South Africa, Du Preez & Luyt (2004) point to the lack of alignment between prisoner’s interests in technology and the vocational education and training for traditional trades in adult prisons.

Table 1: Literature Reviews

Literature reviews	
Bouffard et al 2000	Systematic review of evaluation literature, in the period 1985-2000. Meeting the criteria were 13 vocational education programmes; five correctional industry programmes; and seven community employment programmes. Ranked the methodology and assessed quality of evidence using the ‘Maryland Scale for Scientific Rigor’. Concluded there was evidence that all three types of intervention can work, but that the quality of the scientific evidence was poor.
Harrison & Schehr (2004)	Identifies nine studies providing evidence that vocational guidance reduces recidivism. Counter examples are identified but reported as having weaker methodologies. Packages of support, combining vocational guidance, with other kinds of employment-related support, financial support and post-release services, seems to be most effective.
Newton et al, 2018	Systematic review of evaluation literature, in the period 1975-2009. Meeting the inclusion criteria were seven programmes for volunteer adult participants in community-based or prison-based interventions that included a job placement, job training, or a vocational education/training component. All the studies were from the USA. Found there was insufficient data to draw firm conclusions about effectiveness in terms of employment success and reducing recidivism. Some evidence that programmes are most effective soon after release from prison, for high-risk and older offenders, and for those with substance use problems. Interventions were unlikely to be effective when offered in isolation from other support.
Vernick & Reardon (2001)	Identified 16 articles describing interventions in correctional settings with a career development or vocational rehabilitation component. Argue that these programmes have short-term benefits within the prison, such as attitude change, as well as longer term rehabilitative benefits.
Visher et al. 2005	Systematic review of eight studies in the period 1971-1994 using the Campbell Collaboration methodology. The studies included used diverse interventions including a job-placement component or a job-training component, although other support components may have been included. No statistically significant effect on the likelihood of re-arrest among ex-offenders was found.

Table 2: Meta Analyses

Meta analyses	
Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles (2013)	Evaluated evidence on ‘correctional education programmes’ in the USA that included an academic and/or vocational curriculum with a structured instructional component. Studies included were published in the period 1980-2011. Evidence from 50 studies (71 effect sizes) showed that inmates who participated in correctional education programmes had a reduced rate of recidivism 13% improvement on those who did not participate. In relation to employment outcomes, 18 studies included (22 effect sizes) were of a lower quality but suggested that the odds of obtaining employment post-release among inmates who participated in correctional education (both vocation and academic) were better than those who did not participate. Concluded that correctional education is cost effective in reducing recidivism.
Ellison, Szifris, Horan, & Fox (2017).	18 papers met the criteria for inclusion. All bar one of the studies included were from the USA, and authors comment on the paucity of UK evidence. Found that participation in prison education (including academic, vocational and basic skills education) reduced likelihood of re-offending by one third. Meta-analysis on five employment studies found a 24 % increase in likelihood of gaining employment if the prisoner engages in prison education.
Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie (2000).	Looked at 33 comparison group evaluations of educational, vocational, or work programmes for people in prison or probation, in the period 1975 – 1997. Most of the studies were judged to be of poor quality, and selection bias may have been more important than programme effects. Participants had a higher employment rate and lower rate of recidivism than non-participants, with educational programmes apparently performing better than work programmes. There was heterogeneity in effects across studies suggests that some types of programme were effective and others not.

Ultimately, the attribution of causality is difficult. It is impossible to disentangle career education and guidance from other kinds of education, training, and employment interventions in this literature. Terminology is not used consistently, and interventions are often bundles of activities. Studies focusing exclusively on career education or career guidance are rare. Given the enormous potential benefits to society of crime reduction, the inadequacy of the evidence base is striking. What can be said is this:

- Success in finding employment is widely believed to be associated with reductions in recidivism. Although there is mixed evidence from literature reviews and meta-analyses, there seems on balance to be some empirical support for this.
- Access to education, training, and employment support tend to improve employment outcomes (e.g. Callan & Gardner, 2005; Gordon & Weldon, 2003).
- Supportive interventions, irrespective of their nature, tend to reduce recidivism, and may be best used in combination (e.g. Duwe & Clark, 2017).
- The effects of career guidance interventions with offenders cannot be disentangled from their context. Nonetheless there are encouraging studies, for example Allen & Bradley (2015) explored the effect of a 12 week career counselling programme on a small group of adolescent prisoners. The intervention produced significantly improved levels of career maturity and self-efficacy for the treatment group, compared with a control group who received CBT.
- There is no evidence base on the preventive effects of career development interventions. This gap in knowledge is critical.

In summarising the evidence base, it is worth noting that studies frequently note

gender differences or differences in patterns in relation to the nature of offences, but this is beyond the scope of this discussion.

A Moral Foundation: A Social Justice Perspective

In a survey of employers and other stakeholders, Graffam, Shinkfield, & Hardcastle (2008) found that people with a criminal background were rated as being less likely than other disadvantaged groups to obtain and maintain employment (except those with intellectual or psychiatric disability). Barriers to employment for ex-offenders are considerable. The following overview of barriers draws on a number of sources, notably Bennett & Amundson (2016), Callan & Gardner (2005), and Chen & Shields (2022).

1. *Personal histories:* Offenders tend to have a less successfully educational record prior to their engagement with the criminal justice system, and may lack the general educational qualifications that employers expect. Similarly gaps in employment history are likely.
2. *Vocational education and training in prison:* Access is limited and participation can be disrupted when there are staff shortages, security issues, or at the point of release. Prison training and work experience may be of poor quality and mismatched with employment opportunities (Piacentini et al, 2018; Ofsted, 2020).
3. *Lack of basic skills:* Literacy and numeracy may be poor. Lack of self-care, autonomous self-management or independent living skills may be an issue, and prison is a uniquely unsuitable environment for acquiring these skills.
4. *Job search and disclosure challenges:* Lack of skills and experience in job seeking is a common issue. Laws around

- disclosure of offences may apply. Offenders may have pragmatic concerns that disclosure will lead to failure in job search. The rules can be complicated. In the UK, whilst offences can be become 'spent' after a period of time, but there are many exceptions. Spent offences do not need to be declared - in effect it becomes legal to lie about a criminal record - but there are no restrictions on employers asking about criminal record (Henley, 2018). In the USA, the 'Ban the Box' campaign seeks to promote offender employment by advocating legal change to prevent employers asking the question (Henry & Jacobs, 2007).
5. *Job eligibility restrictions:* Registration or licencing for some occupations may be closed to those with a criminal record.
 6. *Negative career attitudes* (low self-esteem/self-efficacy/positive outcome expectancy) lack of motivation to search for and obtain legal careers.
 7. *Employer attitudes:* Employers may be less willing to hire offenders than other disadvantaged groups (Graffam, Shinkfield, & Hardcastle, 2008). Stigma represents a barrier to desistance (Anderson, 2019). Employers may have concerns about risk, particularly where the nature of the offence is relevant to the nature of the work. There may be particular concerns about offences involving violence, drugs, property theft, sexual offences, and terrorism (Atherton, 2020; Lukies et al, 2011). Discrimination by employers interacts with ethnicity and other barriers, e.g., health.
 8. *The nature of work:* The type of jobs available may be poorly matched to aspirations, training and experience. The rise of the service economy tends to offer 'feminised' work which sits uneasily with working class masculine ideals (Maguire 2021). Poorly paid, low status, and insecure or precarious work is most accessible. Offenders are effectively pushed towards the least attractive jobs in society. This may result in pressure to move towards the informal economy or illegal activity that provides access to peer relations, a sense of agency, and a higher income.
 9. *Multiple personal issues:* Offending behaviour is strongly associated with mental health conditions, homelessness, substance abuse issues.
 10. *Financial issues:* Poverty may make the cost of travel to work, acquiring a driving licence, or a car prohibitive. A criminal record may affect eligibility for credit including student loans. Transitional funds provided on release from prison tend to be inadequate.
- Crucially those who are engaged with the criminal justice system are predominantly from the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in society. Deviant behaviour is strongly associated with structural inequality. Discrimination against offenders in the employment domain interacts with other characteristics, notably race and ethnicity. The processes by which a society allocates adult life roles to individuals are a crucial consideration, and how career development interventions play a role in these processes is unavoidably political (Watts, 1996a). Drawing on examples from 20th century oppressive regimes, Watts (1996b) illustrates how nations can implement systems that represent a grossly unfair and exploitative allocation of individual to labour roles.
- These concerns are not confined to history. The UN Sustainable Development Goal 16, which relates to Peace and Justice, is concerned with fair, transparent and accessible justice systems. It remains clear that even when laws are ostensibly

fair, that some communities within a society are substantially more likely to be engaged in the criminal justice system to the detriment of their employment and education.

This is dramatically illustrated by the racial disparity in the USA, where African Americans and Hispanic people are much more likely than White people to be engaged in the criminal justice system. The use of prisoner labour by private prison operators in the USA falls below international standards for labour protection (Kang, 2009). Work may be used for restorative purposes, or as a means of control, but it may also involve profit from cheap labour. Employing predominantly African American inmates at less than the minimum wage is uncomfortably reminiscent of slavery (DelSesto, 2021). Prison work may represent forced labour, and this is not a uniquely American issue. The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2017) estimates that 4 million people globally are in state imposed forced labour, of whom 563,000 people are in prison or similar forms of detention. In East and South-East Asia, for example, some states are resorting to compulsory labour to respond to rising levels of drug crime, and this is often imposed without due legal process.

Concerns about ethnicity, poverty, social justice, and access to career opportunity are not confined to developing and emerging economies, but apply also in economically prosperous societies with well-developed criminal justice systems.

A Security Foundation: Unstable Societies and Post-conflict Reconciliation

Nations vary in how politically stable they are. Societies can move from relative stability into instability. This is dramatically illustrated by the 'Arab Spring', a period in the early 2010s during which in which a number of nations across the Middle East experienced revolutions, or civil unrest. Whilst career development may not seem immediately relevant, barriers in access to

career opportunity may be one of the 'causes of the causes' of unrest, and career development services may have a role to play in the transition from instability to stability.

Youth unemployment is a major global issue (ILO, 2018). This seems to be associated with civil unrest and political instability, for example in North Africa, where unemployment has been very high. There is some debate about the importance of unemployment and poverty as causal factors in civil unrest (Couttenier & Soubeyran, 2015). It seems likely that economic factors interact with other geographic, demographic, environmental, political, cultural, ethnic, nationalist, or religious factors. Unequal life chances can be a divisive issue. Steps toward progress in achieving democracy, human rights, and social protection has often involved action that breaks the law and disrupts the peace, and this action may become legitimised in historical retrospect, particularly if successful.

Social justice in employment is linked to peace (Pouyard & Guichard, 2018). The impact of policies relating to economics, inequality, youth, and education are inter-related and impact on peace and democracy (Sen, 2007). Career development services operate at the intersection of these policies. They work to promote access to decent work and to educational opportunity. At a societal level this will tend to improve social harmony between sub-groups in society.

The position of armed forces, police, and security services is also relevant. The extent to which these organisations offer attractive careers to all elements of a society may influence their public legitimacy. In the UK, for example, the extent where police forces have failed to reflect the makeup of their local community has been a causal factor in civil unrest. The American Public Health Association (2018) identified violence by law enforcement agencies as an issue of public health concern with both direct and indirect negative effects on health outcomes, a

burden borne disproportionately by minority ethnic populations. Also, conscription into military service exists in some nations, representing a significant career event. Conscripts can be exploited, and for this reason the ILO (2017) identifies the abuse of conscription as a category of forced labour imposed by the state affecting an estimated 591,000 people worldwide.

Career development services may have a positive role to play in post-conflict reconciliation. Working together with other agencies, they may contribute to skills development in economic reconstruction, and to reducing tensions through fair sharing of opportunities and life chances. It seems unlikely that they can have a positive impact working in isolation. Their effectiveness derives at least in part from their location in relation to other social, educational, and employment institutions. To the extent that they share objectives, agencies may work together to promote social justice. Educational institutions are not necessarily a positive influence on fairness in society (Smith & Vaux, 2003), but they may be part of the solution: there are positive examples to be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Emkic, 2018), and in Northern Ireland (Smith, 2010).

A Governmental Foundation: The Role of Public Policy

Key international bodies agree that governments should invest in career development services (CEDEFOP, 2021). In the first decade of the 21st century a consensus emerged in the literature that career development was seen by governments as relevant to public policy goals relating to the labour market, the functioning of the education system, and the promotion of social equity (e.g. Watts, 2008). Nonetheless, career development remains marginal to policymaking in many nations (McCarthy & Borbély-Pecze, 2020) for a variety of reasons, including its tendency to cut across the responsibilities of employment and education ministries. Drawing on the United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goals for

inspiration, Robertson (2020) suggested that in addition to labour market, education, and social equity goals, career development work could also make a wider contribution to society, by serving additional public policy goals in relation to the environment, health and well-being, and peace and justice.

The latter is our focus here, and this proposal is not unproblematic for two reasons. Firstly, there is lack of precedent. Crime reduction has not previously been considered as a high-level purpose for career development services, and conversely career education and guidance have not featured in criminal justice policymaking. Secondly, criminal justice is served by separate government ministries and institutional structures. If it is challenging to cut across employment and education, then it is more challenging still to reach into additional policymaking domains. Nonetheless, the value of crime reduction to society is very high, so this possibility should be explored.

Public policy for career development rarely if ever explicitly addresses work with potential or actual offenders. Similarly criminal justice policy does not address career development. Writing in the USA, Vernick & Reardon (2001, p 286) state:

There is little written history of career programming for the offender population. Isolated programs targeting the career development needs of incarcerated persons exist in selected prison settings, but there does not appear to be a general commitment to this sort of programming. There appears to be no evidence in the literature of a policy targeting the career needs of this population, although policies may exist that have never been implemented.

In the absence of strategic national vision for the intersection between career development and criminal justice, the tendency has been for provision to be

patchy, local and/or short term in nature. Initiatives have been set up for specific prisons, or local community settings, but they do not necessarily endure even if successful.

At a population level, crime can be understood in ways analogous to public health. There have been attempts to understand policing through this lens (e.g. Bartkowiak-Théron et al, 2021). This perspective is not limited to crime categories, such as violence and use of drugs, which involve direct detriments to health. Some of the most effective public health interventions are not remedial or medical in nature, but relate to food supply, sewage systems, housing, education, and employment. Similarly, effective crime prevention may require interventions in domains other than policing, courts, and prison systems. Interventions that have very modest impacts may, at a population level, be valuable. Public health perspectives can also be brought to bear on the work of career development services (Robertson, 2013). Career development services may be well placed to make a contribution through action in the education and employment domains.

Conclusion

Work with offenders has been seen as niche aspect of career development professional practice. Its wider implications have not been realised by the profession. An expanded role for career development services has the potential to make a socially and economically valuable contribution to public policy goals around criminal justice. This may be achieved, not just by supporting desistance from crime, but also by contributing to prevention, and promoting fair access to life chances in a way that may help to reduce gross inequalities, and tensions between social groups.

This proposition can only be credible if there is a concerted research effort to generate evidence for the contribution of career development activity to prevention and desistance. This needs to be underpinned by clear theoretical conceptions, and a strong sense of the social justice implications of any approach to practice. Notwithstanding some positive indicators, the current state of the evidence base is weak. This must be addressed if a persuasive case is to be made to policymakers.

About the author

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