

Employment and Recidivism: An Analysis of a Faith-based Reentry Program

By Emily Friedman, Caitlin J. Steckley, and Rachel Simmons with mentorship by Dr. Michael Hallett

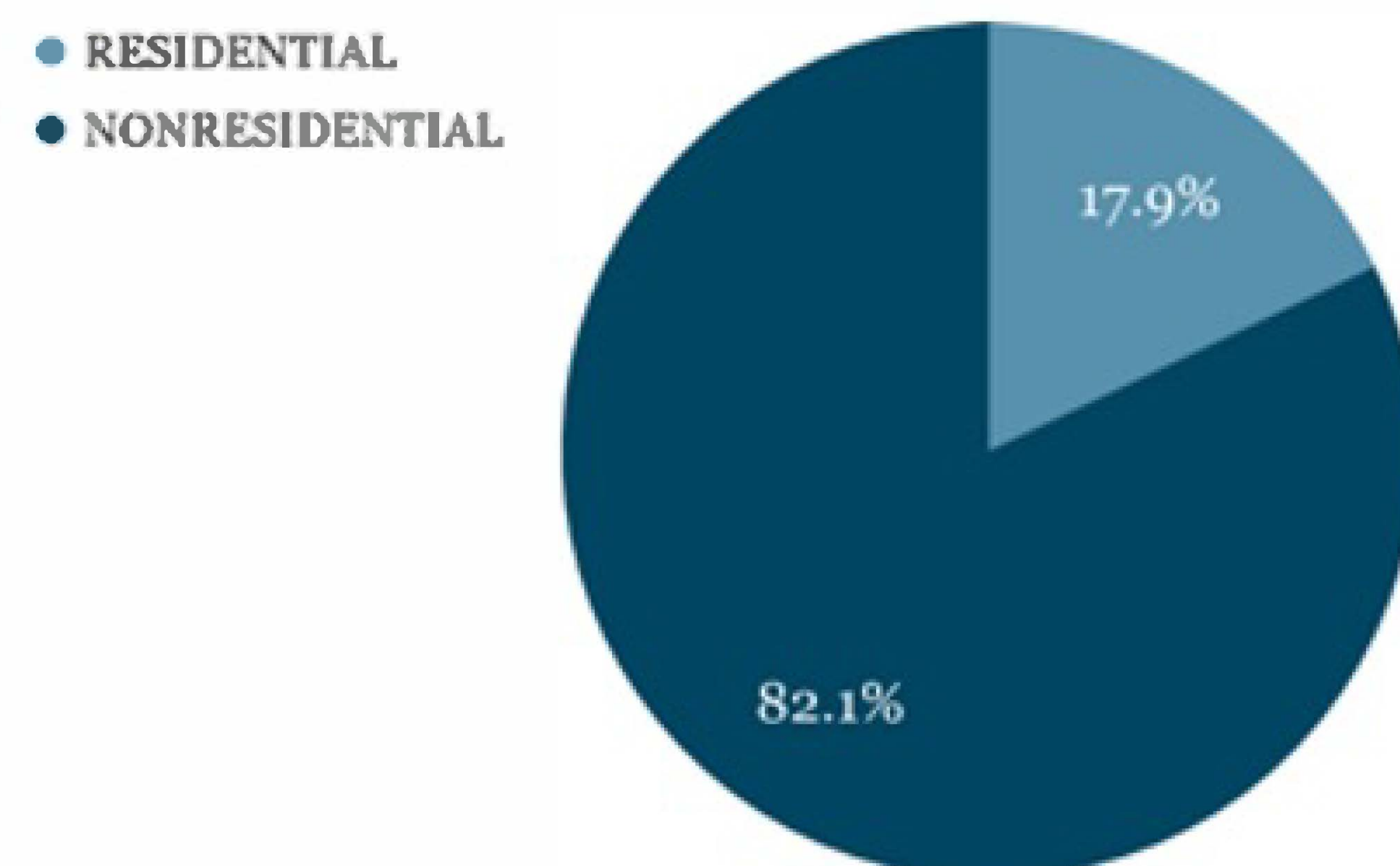
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the success of a faith-based prisoner reentry program in the Jacksonville, FL area. We wanted to analyze how, according to successful desisters, the program helped individuals sustain a crime-free life. We hypothesized that clients securing employment would be statistically different than those who did not on the variable of rearrest. Using a chi-square test for independence, the data affirmed our hypothesis.

PRISONERS OF CHRIST

Prisoners of Christ (POC) is a non-profit reentry program in Jacksonville, FL founded on the idea that every person deserves a second chance. The faith-based organization is run largely by volunteer ex-offenders. POC has two programs: housing and employment assistance. POC also offers limited assistance with health care, food subsidies, and transportation.

PARTICIPATION % OF PROGRAMS



POC is atypical in assisting sex offenders and others who are deemed “high risk.” While POC is a Christian-based organization, religious belief is not a condition of acceptance.

METHODS

QUANTITATIVE

POC provided a database of clients enrolled between 2015 and 2019. We removed individuals with duplicated or missing data for a final sample size of 546. To assess recidivism, we checked for rearrest through FLDOC and Duval County Jail databases. Recidivism was calculated by rearrest (not necessarily reconviction) on any offense, including probation violations. Successful employment and all other personal information was documented by POC itself. Recidivism was aggregated by rearrest and employment status. We then ran a Chi-Square test

of independence to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between groups based on arrest and employment.

QUALITATIVE

We conducted 14 interviews with POC clients considered “successful desisters” due to no rearrest within five years. These interviews were approximately 60-105 minutes long and were semi-structured. Questions were constructed around criminal history, religiosity, and effectiveness of POC. Interviews were recorded with the participant’s consent and were transcribed in a secure database. Themes were analyzed individually by researchers first and then compared among the group to ensure inter-coder reliability.

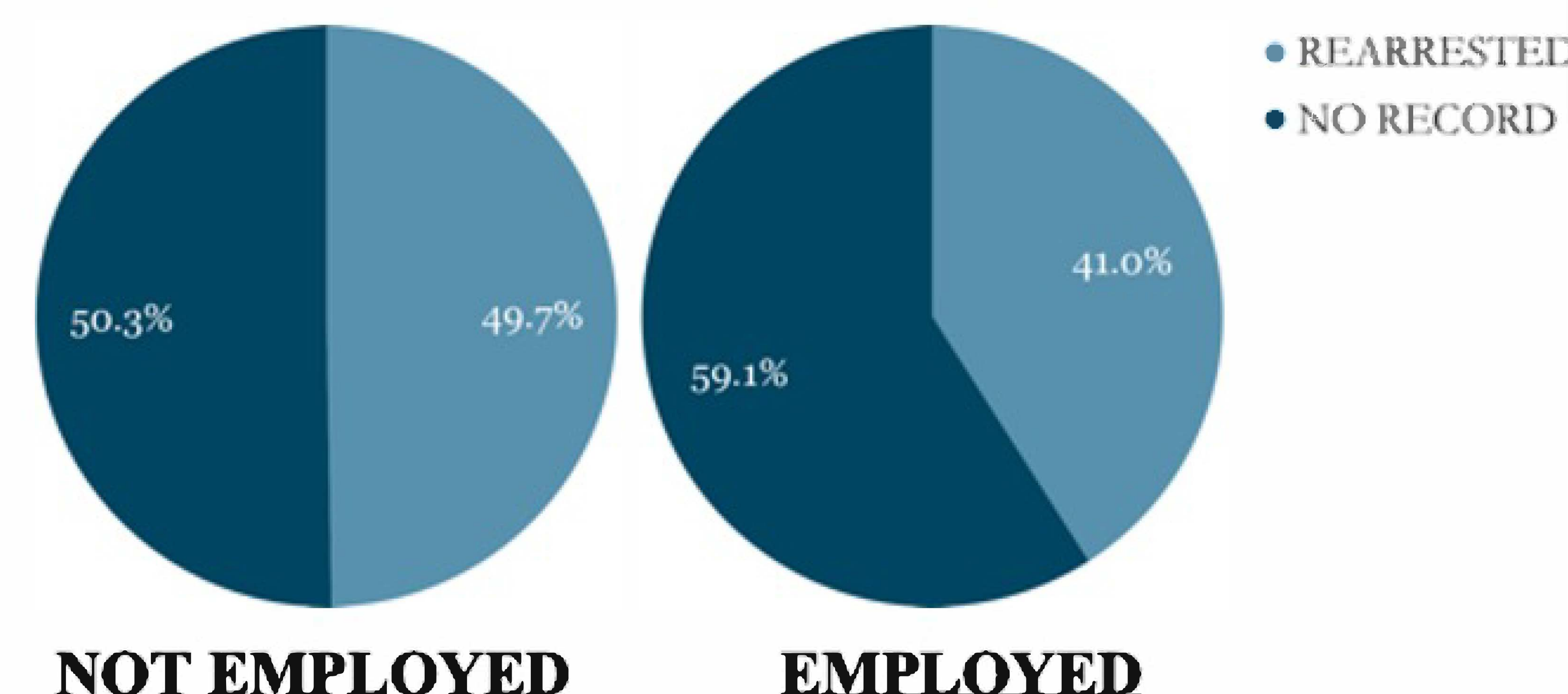
“So POC helped me learn to live on the streets. This is my first time, since I was 14 living successfully on the streets without crime or drugs in my life.”

RESULTS

QUANTITATIVE

Employed clients achieved a lower rearrest rate than non-employed individuals (see pie charts below). Our Chi-Square test showed a statistically significant difference between the employed group and unemployed group on the variable of rearrest. There is slightly less than a 5% probability that these results are based on chance. Alternatively put, there is a 95% probability that the observed difference between employed vs unemployed clients on rearrest is not based on chance (see figure 1.1 and 1.3).

RECIDIVISM RATES FOR EMPLOYED VS NON-EMPLOYED



1.1 Observed

	Arrested	Not Arrested	Grand Total
Employed	147	212	359
Unemployed	93	94	187
Grand Total	240	306	546

1.3 Values of Chi Square Test

Pearson's Chi Square Value:	3.852418465
Degrees of Freedom (df):	1
p-value:	0.049674315

QUALITATIVE

In interviews, desisters spoke with pride on the importance of the financial stability they gained for the first time in their life due to POC. Desisters commonly referenced their improved credit score, ability to purchase a car, and afford to live alone. Learning “live like an adult” and similar sentiments were shared during interviews. The importance of faith and religion were also common themes shared by interviewees.

DISCUSSION

Our qualitative and quantitative results point towards financial security as being a possible buffer against reoffending. The economic stability desisters gained from employment and other program benefits shows a significant difference on their likelihood of rearrest. This is also emphasized through anecdotal stories told by those we interviewed who have not been re-arrested since release. This emphasizes the importance of continuing to grow the reentry sector. However, it’s important to note that while employment and rearrest did have a statistically significant correlation, there may be other factors that impact these results, such as the ability to make a living wage, etc.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations of this study include the inability to do a broader check for recidivism. Additionally, this study was cross-sectional not longitudinal, offering only a limited snapshot of ex-offender behavior.

