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**Follow-Up Study of Offenders  
Who Earned High School Equivalency Diplomas (GEDs)  
While Incarcerated in DOCS**



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**RESEARCH IN BRIEF**

**Follow-Up Study of Offenders Who Earned High School Equivalency Diplomas  
(GEDs) While Incarcerated in DOCS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of correctional education, in particular passing a General Educational Development (GED) examination or earning a high school equivalency diploma while incarcerated, on the recidivism rate.

**PRIOR DOCS RESEARCH:** The New York State Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) has conducted prior research regarding the effect of GED programs, and the studies consistently showed that the return to custody rate was relatively lower among those who earned a GED.

The latest research by NYS DOCS was conducted in 2001 based on 1996 releases. The study found that, overall, 37% of offenders who did not earn a GED at DOCS returned to custody within 3 years compared to 32% who earned a GED at DOCS. In addition, the study examined return rates by inmates' age. Among inmates under age 21 at release, 54% of those who did not earn a GED returned to DOCS, while only 40% of those who earned a GED returned within 3 years. The current study expanded the scope of the research by examining gender differences in the return rate by education groups.

**CURRENT STUDY:** Data for this study consist of all inmates who were released for the first time in 2005 from DOCS due to parole release, conditional release, or maximum expiration of sentence. There were 16,302 inmates in the study sample, of which 7 % were female. Recidivism in this study was measured by return to NYS DOCS' custody within 36 months after release. The sample of this study was categorized by the inmates' educational backgrounds: (1) those who received a GED while incarcerated, (2) those who were admitted and released without a degree, and (3) those who attained a high school diploma or its equivalent prior to admission. The possession of the diploma is verified by NYS DOCS.

**FINDINGS:** Of the 16,302 releases, 37% returned to NYS DOCS within 3 years of release (*see Table 1*). The return rate of those who earned a GED while incarcerated was 31%, while the rate of those who did not have a degree was 38% and the rate of those who had a verified degree at time of admission was 37%. The return rates for the previous study were quite comparable to those in the current study (*see Figure 1*).

Table 2 and Figure 2 illustrate the return rates separately for males and females. The results are strikingly different when examined by gender. Male offenders showed a generally higher return rate (37%) than female inmates (24%). Among DOCS degree earners, 32% of male offenders returned to DOCS, while only 15% of females returned.

For consistency with the report generated in 2001, Table 3 shows the return rate by education group among young offenders who were under 21 years old at release (*also see Figure 3*). The return rate for this group of young offenders (52%) was relatively higher than for the general population (37%). Similar to the earlier findings, however, young offenders who earned a GED at DOCS showed the lowest return rate (45%), while the return rate for pre-admission degree holders was 50%, and the rate was 54% for non-degree earners.

This study also reports the return rates of inmates under age 25 at release. The average return rate of this group was higher (44%) than the general population (37%). Table 4 and Figure 4 show the return rates across gender. Female offenders under age 25 show a significantly lower return rate (21%) than male offenders under age 25 (45%). Although there were only 31 females under age 25 who earned a degree while incarcerated, their return rate was only 13%, whereas the return rate was 39% for male offenders under age 25 with a DOCS degree. Among inmates under age 25 at release, those admitted with a degree returned at a higher rate (42%) than those who earned a GED at DOCS (37%), but at a lower rate than those with no degree (47%). This finding was consistent across gender.

**CONCLUSION:** The finding of this study is consistent with previous research on correctional education. Among inmates first released from NYS DOCS in 2005 due to parole releases, conditional releases, or maximum expirations of sentence, those who earned a GED while incarcerated returned to custody at a significantly lower rate than offenders who did not earn a GED or those who earned a degree before admission. This finding was consistent across gender and age.

Table 1. Return Rates of 2005 Releases by Education Group

	Returned to DOCS w/in 3 Years of Release				TOTAL
	No Return		Return to DOCS		
<b>Earned GED at DOCS</b>	<b>1,482</b>	<b>68.8%</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>2,154</b>
No Degree	5,241	62.0%	3,212	38.0%	8,450
Admitted With Degree	3,616	63.5%	2,082	36.5%	5,698
Total	10,339	63.4%	5,966	36.6%	16,302

Figure 1. Return Rate by Education Group by Year of Release

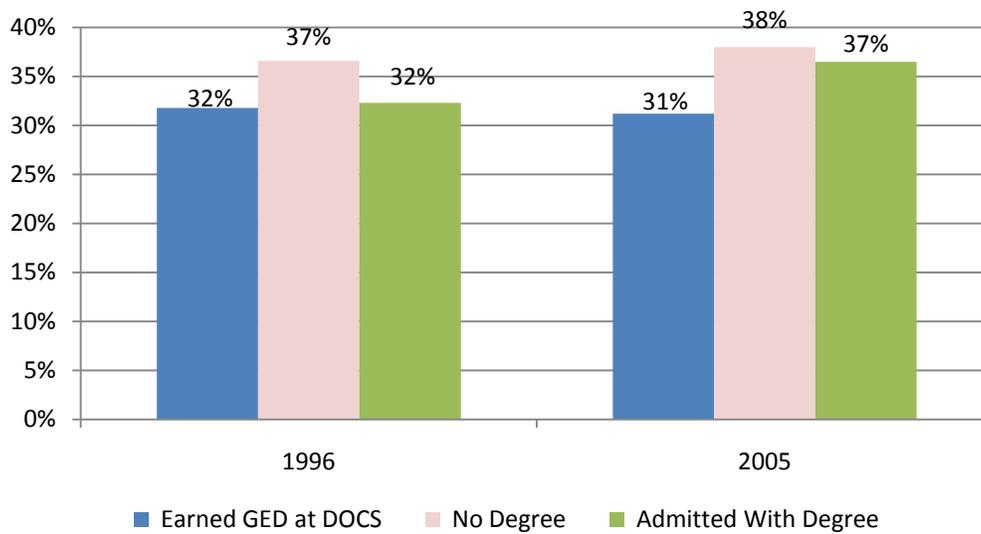


Table 2. Return Rates of 2005 Releases by Education Group and Gender

	Returned to DOCS w/in 3 Years of Release				TOTAL
	No Return		Return to DOCS		
<u>Male Offenders</u>					
<b>Earned GED at DOCS</b>	<b>1,404</b>	<b>68.1%</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>31.9%</b>	<b>2,062</b>
No Degree	4,782	61.2%	3,026	38.8%	7,808
Admitted With Degree	3,305	62.2%	2,007	37.8%	5,312
Total	9,491	62.5%	5,691	37.5%	15,182
<u>Female Offenders</u>					
<b>Earned GED at DOCS</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>84.8%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>92</b>
No Degree	459	71.5%	183	28.5%	642
Admitted With Degree	311	80.6%	75	19.4%	386
Total	848	75.7%	272	24.3%	1,120

Figure 2. Return Rate by Gender: 2005 Releases

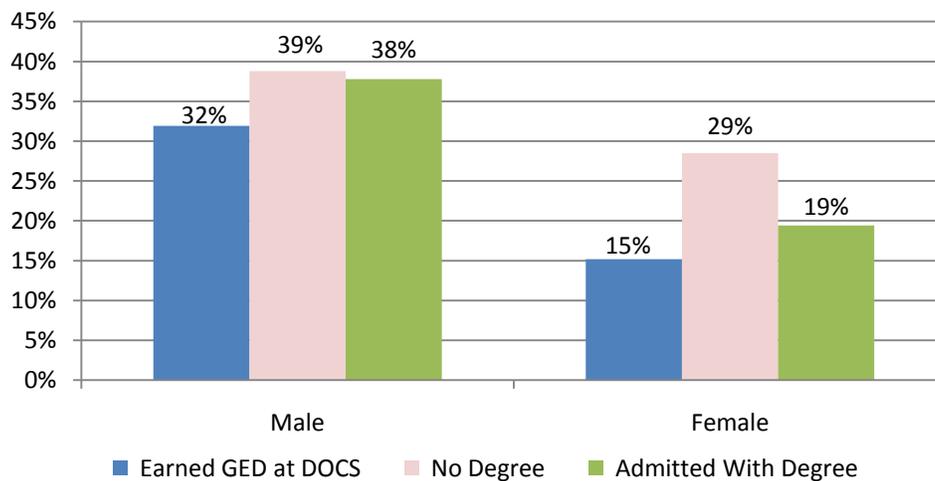
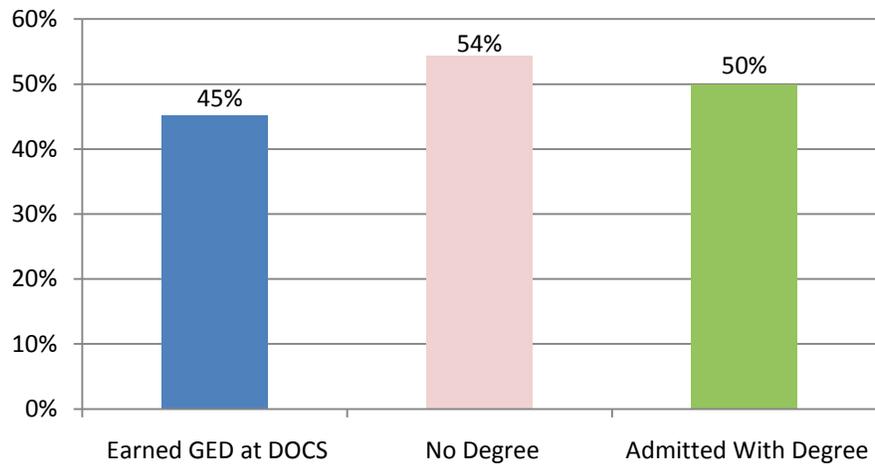


Table 3. Return Rates of 2005 Releases by Education Group  
Offenders Under Age 21 at Release

	Returned to DOCS w/in 3 Years of Release				TOTAL
	No Return		Return to DOCS		
<b>Earned GED at DOCS</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>54.8%</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>45.2%</b>	<b>166</b>
No Degree	323	45.6%	386	54.4%	709
Admitted With Degree	82	50.0%	82	50.0%	164
Total	496	47.7%	543	52.3%	1,039

Figure 3. Return Rate by Age Group:  
Offenders Under Age 21 at Release\*

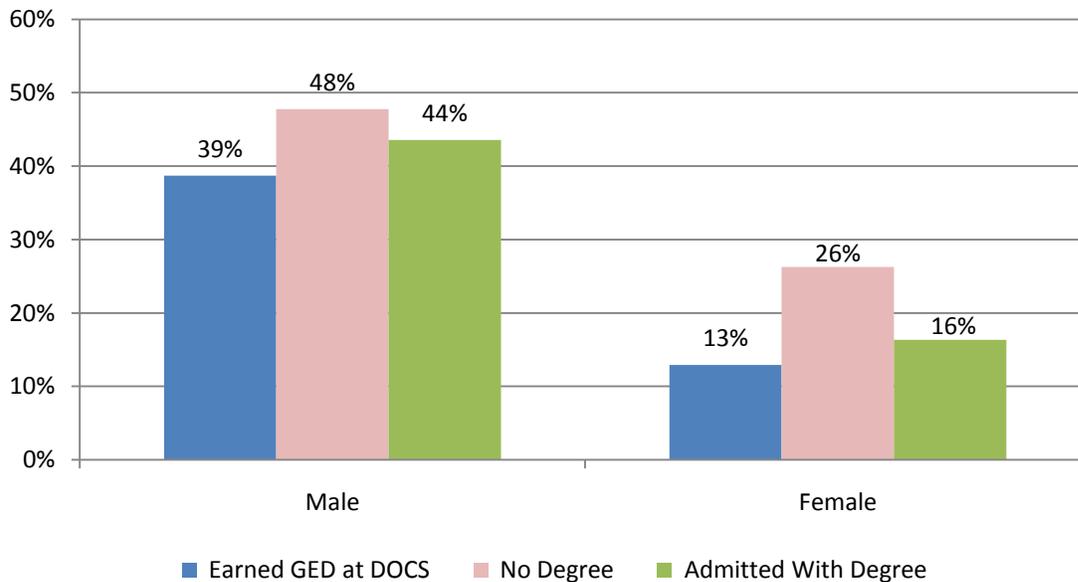


\*There were only 62 females under age 21, so the return rate was not examined across gender

Table 4. Return Rates of 2005 Releases by Education Group  
Offenders Under Age 25 at Release

	Returned to DOCS w/in 3 Years of Release				TOTAL
	No Return		Return to DOCS		
<u>Male Offenders</u>					
<b>Earned GED at DOCS</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>61.3%</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>38.7%</b>	<b>579</b>
No Degree	1,086	52.2%	993	47.8%	2,079
Admitted With Degree	430	56.4%	332	43.6%	762
Total	1,871	54.7%	1,549	45.3%	3,420
<u>Female Offenders</u>					
<b>Earned GED at DOCS</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>87.1%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>31</b>
No Degree	73	73.7%	26	26.3%	99
Admitted With Degree	41	83.7%	8	16.3%	49
Total	141	78.8%	38	21.2%	179
<u>Total Offenders</u>					
<b>Earned GED at DOCS</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>62.6%</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>37.4%</b>	<b>610</b>
No Degree	1,159	53.2%	1,019	46.8%	2,178
Admitted With Degree	471	58.1%	340	41.9%	811
Total	2,012	55.9%	1,587	44.1%	3,599

Figure 4. Return Rate by Age Group:  
Offenders Under Age 25 at Release



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September 2010