After the Exoneration: Effects of Wrongful Convictions on Career Prospects

Dr. Eric Jones and Bretton Hoekwater

To date, over 320 people have been exonerated through DNA evidence after serving time in prison for a crime they did not commit.\(^1\) Over a thousand more have been exonerated through other means.\(^2\) Currently, much of the research about wrongful convictions deals with how a person may be wrongfully convicted, such as mistaken eyewitness identification, a false confession, or other factors.\(^3\) Very little research has investigated the challenges after exoneration.\(^4\) This summer, our research sought to investigate how a wrongful conviction affects exonerees after they are released, specifically in pursuing a job.

For this study, we created an online survey using Qualtrics, a survey creation software. After, we used a snowball sampling technique to distribute it. In other words, participants were emailed a link to the survey and asked to email that link to others. Within the survey, participants were given a description of an entry-level position, the requirements and qualities that would be necessary for that position, and one job application. Following, participants were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of the applicant as well as demographic questions. Currently, we are still collecting data to evaluate our hypotheses.

Through this summer’s research, I became an expert in using Qualtrics and created the survey that was used for our study. I also gained the experience of using scientific articles to build an argument for why this research was important. This was done in the form of a manuscript. Furthermore, I learned about collecting data and analyzing it in SPSS, a statistical software. For example, I learned the process of coding essay questions for their content as well as how to run a variety of statistical tests. Additionally, this experience was incredibly beneficial for me as it taught me about challenges faced in conducting a research project. For instance, I learned of the challenges faced in balancing different types of validity in the research design as well as those encountered in obtaining a non-student sample. Because of this summer’s research, I now have a solid foundation from which I can pull as I continue in my Calvin and graduate school education.

\(^2\) Retrieved from [http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/about.aspx](http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/about.aspx).