Willingness of employers to employ ex-convicts among selected SMEs in the western region of Ghana

Emmanuel Agyapong Wiafe

Abstract: Punitive measure against anyone is for correctional purpose and making individuals become better citizens. In this regard, incarceration is supposed to lead to the rehabilitation of individuals to make them socially fit. However, ex-convicts face challenges in society including employment. Therefore, this study explores the willingness of an employer to employ an ex-convict. To achieve the objectives, a survey research design was adopted, and the responses obtained from a sample of 283 SME owners in the Western Region of Ghana. The findings show a high level of un-willingness of SME business to employing ex-convict. Again, employers and owners of SMEs have a negative inclination toward hiring ex-convicts. However, individuals with high levels of education and skills were found to have a better chance of being gainfully employed. To help the situation, education, training, tax reliefs and development of legal framework toward employing ex-convict would help deal with this situation.

Subjects: Social Sciences; Sociology & Social Policy; Criminology and Criminal Justice

Keywords: Ex-convict; employment; willing to employ; the attitude of employers; employability

1. Introduction
The transformation and rehabilitation by prisons' success depend on the reintegration of ex-convicts into society. This implies incarceration must provide incentives and improves an individual’s willingness to live law-abiding and self-supported life. (The United Nation Office of Drugs and Crime, 2012). Concerning the prison’s function to mitigate crime, most prisoners incarcerated...
undergo rehabilitation programmes. Such rehabilitation efforts are aimed at equipping them with the necessary skills to empower them socio-economically to become better citizens upon discharge from prisons (Abotchie, 2008). By this, many prisoners have had the opportunity to perfect already learned skill through on-the-job training. This offers them work experience and enhanced skills needed for potential employment (Collins et al., 2009). In this respect, the prison is not only seen as an isolated institution designated for withholding criminals but also as a facility for reforming and equipping them for employability prospects.

To achieve this, educational, vocational and counselling programmes among others constitute the noble rehabilitation programmes ran by the prisons to assist prisoners to quit a life of crime (Hagan, 2013). Ghana as a country has towed such line of giving prison inmates the needed skills and education (Ghana Prison, 2014) in the form of vocational training and basic education. These efforts by the prison service are specifically geared towards reducing unemployment and to make prisoners better fit for society upon their release.

The efforts by advance and developing economies have failed to yield the needed results as statistics show that recidivism is between 40% and 70% (Skoler, 1971). The rate of released prisoners committing new crimes is estimated to be between 40% and 70%. Couloute and Kopf (2018) estimate unemployment among formerly incarcerated people to be over 27% in the USA. According to the Guardian, only 26.5% of ex-convicts can secure jobs in the UK. This situation may be worse in developing countries where prison sentences that may lead to a severe form of prejudices. However, little or no work is done on the employment status of ex-convicts and employers’ willingness to employ former offenders.

Studies have linked high recidivism to unemployment and willingness to employ ex-convicts (Nally et al., 2014). Laub and Sampson (2003) and Kivivuori and Linderborg (2010) suggest that employment reduces an individual’s risk for re-offending. Thus, employment for ex-convicts engenders a better lifestyle and increase the cost of crimes. Yet lack of employable and sustainable skills renders a lot of people predisposed to the act of crime (Gainsborough & Mauer, 2004 as cited in Boateng, 2017). Furthermore, rehabilitation and reformation are argued to be unsuccessful due to a lack of a decent job for ex-convicts among other factors (Osayi, 2013). The factors that play out in putting out ex-convict as less competitive candidates for job vacancy fuels employer’s unwillingness to hire ex-convicts (Addo, 2014; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Manza et al., 2004; Taxman, 2004; Travis et al., 2001).

The issue of unemployment among ex-convicts and its adverse effect on society is a universal problem. Regardless, the public’s attitudes towards ex-convicts have been apathetic and negative (Todd, 2004). Also, a report from a seminar, United Nation Asia and Far East Institute (2011) revealed that reintegration of ex-convicts into the Caribbean society is impossible due to people’s perception towards ex-convicts. Since attitude toward ex-convict could affect the effort by government and Prisons service, it is expedient to find out the willingness of employers towards ex-cons.

Many of the studies conducted focus on advance economies and predominantly in the United States of America with little focus on developing economies like Ghana. However, the dynamics of the Ghanaian economy and the structures of the prison system differ markedly from that of the advance economies. Hence, this may make the finding of such studies practically applicable to the case of Ghana and its Western Region. Works that focus on ex-offenders in Ghana pay much attention to recidivism with little attention to employment ex-convict (Addo, 2014; Kunateh, 2008). However, identifying the willingness of employers to hire ex-convict in a developing economy is important in several ways. It will first help address the employment of ex-convict and reduce crime rates as gainful employment reduces the rate of recidivism (Hoztller, 2002). Secondly, this will shape the policy direction of Ghana Prison Service and Ghana Government on incarceration, societal reintegration, and employment policies in the Country. It must be noted that ex-convicts comprise a fraction of potential human resource the nation can utilize. Moreover, most of the ex-convicts are youth who possess pre-requisite skills for sustainable
livelihood for development (Kunateh, 2008). However, an unsuccessful quest to fit in the labour market could render them less useful in building the Ghanaian economy. It is with these pieces of evidence this paper seeks to assess employers’ willingness to employ ex-convicts in the western region of Ghana.

The remaining paper presents the literature review, the methodology, the result and discussion and the conclusions and policy implications of the study.

2. Literature review

The dynamic nature of modern societies makes crime inevitable. Therefore, crime combat has been a priority of governments and security agencies. To reduce crime, rehabilitation and empowering prisoners to be a social asset for development is argued to be the sure way. As early as the 1920s, Lombroso argued that imprisonment could be an improper form of punishment for crime. To this end, the prison service is known to be an institution for the rehabilitation of convicts. To do this, several programmes are being implemented. In Ghana, vocation training is done to equip inmates with the requisite skills for societal transition and reintegration into economic life. As pointed out by Reid (1985), Individual situations should be prima in the consideration sentencing of criminals. Reid proposed a sentence that is tailored to suit an offender’s rehabilitation. To this end, he propounded what is called an “interdeterminate” sentence. The kind of sentencing and release for offender depends on the satisfactory review of rehabilitation officers.

Despite this, Dissel (2008) points the challenges that face African countries to the objective of rehabilitating prisoners of which Ghana prisons are not an exception. These problems hinder their efforts to achieve this objective. Issues such as overcrowding and inadequate facilities in the prisons affect the delivery of the prison service mandate. Again, the type and conditions of discipline and sentences offered forced hard labour and access to medicare were considered inappropriate. According to Dissel (2008), this may lead to mental and physical health conditions that could negatively affect convicts. Thus, the conducive environment for rehabilitation is negatively affected by such issues pointed out. These are coupled with issues of staff inadequacies of the prison service.

Reports have pointed out the failure of reform and rehabilitation programmes established by prisons. These programmes for convicts have not yielded much both in advance and developing countries alike. Yankeegroup, (1990) survey in the United States of America on employment is revealing. It indicates out of 100 job opportunities related to prison work experience, 90 responded that prison work was not particularly helpful, 15% said the prison experience had not been useful for learning new skills, but valuable for maintaining skills acquired before imprisonment. On the other hand, 41% said they were helped in prison by the acquisition of job knowledge and employable skills that was a new experience to them, 16% emphasized that the physical condition from heavy work in prisons prepared them for heavy labour jobs they did during post-release. The remaining 9% appreciated the prison was found to be satisfied with their social status and their jobs after incarceration. Nonetheless, the study conducted by Shinkfield and Lavelle (2014), reveals that reoffending reduces when ex-convicts participate in an employment assistance programme. The study employed 1200 convicts, 600 program participants and 600 non-participants. Thus, making employment accessible to ex-convicts makes it less likely for them to re-offend and get re-incarcerated (Freeman, 2003). This implies that individuals who can obtain some level of employment after incarceration will find crime and reoffending costlier. Hence, the utility of committing crime reduces to lower rates.

It must be noted that ex-convicts encounter difficulties in the job market resulting from their inexperience, poor qualification, low self-esteem, basic skills (Visher & Travis, 2003). Even those who have skills, vacancy-skill mismatch and the absence of conducive job environment turn to mitigate against their employability. These in addition to a hostile attitude in the society make it difficult for ex-convicts to be effectively re-socialized and re-integrated into society. (Appiah-Hene, 1989).
Re-offending is always attributed to the hostile attitude of societies in which ex-convicts find themselves (Angell et al., 2014). Evans (2007) earlier had asserted that ex-convicts experience of hostile attitudes experienced leads to many challenges and issues that impact the welfare of ex-convicts. Evan (2006) points to unbearable discouragement, lasting exclusion from economic and social participation, return to drug addiction, homelessness and at the end of the prison as emanating negative attitude faced by ex-prisoners. It is a consensus that employment offers a way through which community accepts ex-convict and reduces their risk of recidivism. However, according to Angell et al., (2014) ex-prisoners are likely to face a challenge with finding jobs and in some cases obtaining financial benefits. Thus, employment becomes one of the hindrances for ex-convicts. In cases, ex-convicts are found to engage in low wage paying jobs even in cases that they possess the requisite skills needed for the job. (Tillyear & Vose). In effect, ex-cons face hostile attitude when it comes to having employment or engaging in gainful economic activity which is not crime-related. Thus, little social support faced by ex-convicts becomes a major problem (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011).

Aside from the negative attitude towards ex-convicts, stigmatization becomes another hurdle they have to overcome in their daily lives. Ex-convicts live with the mark of a convict for almost forever after they have served their incarceration. Link and Phelan (2001) indicate that ex-convicts are stereotyped, labelled, discriminated against and lose social status. Thus, they keep facing invisible punishment which has the potential of slowing their successful integration in society (Link, 2001). Stigma poses a negative effect on ex-convicts as it lowers self-esteem (Le Bel, 2012), weak social unity (Corrigan & Watson, 2002) or it could prevent further crime (Kobayashi et al., 2001). The implication of such negative labelling and stigmatization is the avoidance behaviour put up by ex-convicts.

Among employers, it is evident by the work of Harris and Keller (2005) which suggest prejudice against ex-convicts. Such prejudices result in discrimination against ex-convicts when there is a vacancy position. Eventually, ex-convicts may become discouraged in their attempt to find a job. In an event of such happening, they may feel reluced or even drop out of the labour force. The way to ameliorate such negative consequences of incarceration is through education. Education is seen as the best mean of changing public perception of punity. It tends to be one of the means of solving negative attitude towards ex-convicts. Owens (2009) affirms the positive effect on attitude toward ex-convicts.

As once considers the willingness of employers to employ ex-convicts, one must also think about their employability. Addo (2014) asserts that the prisons as an institution offer employable skills in most vocational courses such as masonry, basketry among others to provide sustainable livelihood and employment prospects for prisoners after their incarceration. The employability of ex-convicts may impact positively in successful reintegration. Employers, on the contrary, are not in agreement with it. The possession of professional skills and high academic credentials stands a high probability of being gainfully employed. This is because of the high level of employability. However, Boateng (2017) argue that having employable skill is not relevant if one is convicted of a crime. In this respect, the chances of getting a job are independent of the academic qualification of the offender. The report by Work Link (2019) also shares the same sentiments. The common trend is reluctance of employers employing ex-convicts irrespective of their expertise. Nevertheless, cumulative years of experience may prove to be beneficial to an ex-convict in the job market.

There are other strands of literature which support the effect of the degree of crime on the willingness and employability of ex-convicts. Though it is generally accepted that the rate of employment among ex-convicts is low in the United States. This was found to be severe among groups who are convicted of worse crimes as classified per their records. For such, they are viewed as persons with high-risk level and potential threats of re-offending at workplaces. This may lead to an outright rejection of their application for jobs. Gehring (2000) explains crime as one of the most unaccepted incidents that all societies detest. Indefinite terms, the degree of the crime
determines the duration of the sentence an offender must serve. Greenfield & Snell (1999) state, crime differs, as some are put into the category of violent crime and non-violent crime. Crimes regarded as violent include robbery, murder, and physical assault whilst contempt of court is regarded as a non-violent crime.

According to Hirschfield and Piquero (2010), the degree of crime is a major determining factor of perceived dangerousness. The consideration is that public perception and attitude towards the acceptance of ex-convicts is highly dependent on the degree of the crime on which the ex-convicts were incarcerated. The public is far less welcoming of convicts who were convicted of violent crimes into their communities than ex-convicts who were convicted of a non-violent crime (Immerwahr & Johnson., 2002). A significant consideration of the offences committed by ex-convicts and opportunity employability gives a clear indication that the ex-convict’s degree of crime is a determining factor whether his or her services would be hired by the employer. Public intentionally alienates ex-convicts perceived to be dangerous based on the severity of the crime committed.

The review of the literature points to the link between employment and re-offending and emphasizes the challenges ex-convicts face in broader societies. However, the majority of the studies are centred on the USA and other advanced economies at the neglect of developing economies. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the willingness to employ ex-convicts from a developing country perspective. This study also examines the issues at stake from the perspective of SMEs – which employs largest proportion of the active labour force. Again, there is not much research done on the ex-convicts’ labour market issues. Two questions arise out of the review. These are 1) what is the willingness of employers is to employ ex-convict and 2) what could be done to improve employers of SMEs inclination towards employing ex-convicts. The objectives set for the study require such a design.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study design
A study employs a survey research design. The survey design allows for the use of quantitative procedures to examine opinions, behaviour, and characteristics of a population under study. Given the objective of the study, the survey research design. It believes that the willingness and attitude of employers fall within the scope of behavioural analysis hence the choice of the design. On another foot, survey design is used when the objectives for the study are to identify, describe trend and behavioural changes of individuals.

3.2. Sample and sampling technique
The target population of the study was business owners and HR persons of Small and Medium Scale (SMEs) in the Western Region of Ghana. The study used a total of 300 participants for the study. This sample was selected based on the registration by the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan assembly was obtained. Once the list was obtained, it was realised that most of the businesses in the western region were found with-in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. Hence, the sample used for the study was selected from firms and businesses within and around Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis and nearby firms. Sekondi-Takoradi happens to be the regional capital of the Western Region, with an influx of new and emerging companies due to the oil find. This has contributed to the increased number of employers in the metropolis.

In the selection of the SMEs, a list of registered businesses was obtained from the Office of the Registrar General/BAC in the Metropolis. The existing list suggests that which had registered about 2250 SMEs as of 2016. Given the estimated population, a sample size of 300 was selected base on Israel (1992) tables for sample selection. Three hundred (300) SMEs which employed between 1 and 30 workers (Amankwaa et al., 2016) were selected.
The distribution of the selected sample indicates that out of a total of 300 questionnaires were administered to employers with a response of 94.33%. Of this, 47.2% were males and 52.6% females. Out of the respondents, 13.7% were CEOs, 12.6 were HR Managers, then 50.5 were owners and 4.2 were different categories. The educational background of employers (respondents) showed that 9.5% did not qualify 22.1 were JHS certificates holders, 32.6 SHS, 18.9 degree holders and 13.7 Master’s holders. Out of respondents/employers, 49.5% operate a micro business, 36.8% small scale and 13.7% medium scale size of business.

3.3. Data type, instrument and administration
Primary data were sought for the study. The choice of primary source data was due to the lack of existing secondary data source. The questionnaire was the main instrument for collecting primary data. The questionnaire was adapted from Young (2011). The questionnaire was divided into three main parts. The first section biographic of the participants. The second section of the questionnaire focused on the inclination of the SMEs owners and employer towards employing ex-convicts. There was a mixture of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions (See Appendix A1 for a copy of the questionnaire). The questionnaires were self-administered. A questionnaire was used because it provides the ability to reach targeted respondents within a short period at a relatively low cost. Most of the questions were close-ended, this made coding much easier.

The questionnaires were self-administered. Once contact with a selected participant, the questionnaires were delivered to the participant and allowed a space of 1 week for the research participant to fill the questionnaire for retrieval by the researcher. The time of 1 week was allowed in other not for the participant to feel pressured to fill the questionnaire. It was assumed that this will help prevent wrong responses that may affect the findings of the research. In some cases, the questionnaires were filled by the respondent and delivered to the administrator upon the visit of the researcher. In those instances, the questionnaire was filled in less than 20 minutes. Though 300 participants were selected for the study, 283 of questionnaires were returned filled and completed.

The reliability of the instrument used was examined using the Cronbach’s Alpha for reliability test. The test score of 72% indicated that the instrument for collecting data was reliable. This indicates that there is high internal consistency.

4. Ethical consideration
To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, and other considerations for this study, the protection of human subjects concerning participant confidentiality and respect for respondents shall be adhered to and devoid of judgmental gestures towards responses. Respondents’ consent was sort, and their responses were treated with the utmost confidentiality. In the case of anonymity of respondents, participants of the study were identified with serial numbers which are not traceable to any individual.

5. Data analysis
The study uses descriptive and inferential statistics in the analysis of the study. To examine attitude towards employing ex-convicts, bar chart and descriptive and the chi-square test of dependence were used. The Chi-square test of dependence is used to determine whether there exists a significant relationship between two categorical variables. There is a comparison of categories between the two variables such that the frequency of each category for one nominal variable is compared across the categories of the second nominal variable.

6. Limitations
The study is limited to the western regional capital of Ghana and surrounding towns and focused mainly on SMEs businesses. The study only examines the crime characteristics and how it relates to employers willing to accept ex-convicts as employees. It is acknowledged that there are various dimensions of factor that affect the willingness of SMEs owners and employers to employ ex-convicts as well as ex-offenders’ characteristics that may lead to unemployability. However, this issue does not affect the current results of the study.
7. Results and discussions

7.1. Employers' willingness to employ ex-convicts
Data revealed that 82% of employers have never employed ex-convict while 17.9% have employed ex-convict. This indicated that the employment rate of ex-convict by employers of Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis is relatively low.

![Willingness to Employ Ex-Convicts](image)

8. Source: survey data (2019)
On the other hand, 34.7% of employers are willing to employ ex-convicts based on conditions like the level of education, nature of offence and age of ex-convict whereas 60.0% are not willing to employ ex-convict at all. This result points to a huge problem in the handling of ex-convict, their management and re-integration into society (Visher & Travis, 2003). The lack of willingness on the part of employers to employ ex-convicts may pose a problem to society and ex-convicts in general. The reasons for employers’ unwillingness may be due to stereotyping and stigma that is associated with being incarcerated in the community. With that said, the problem is also an economic one. As noted earlier, areas with low levels of employment opportunities may see individuals with criminal background having difficulty being gainfully employed. Again, as employers would want to reduce risk, they find it more prudent to side-line applicant who may be a more adverse effect on the company. Thus, if employers find a potential employee riskier, they may turn such a prospect down. However, on the demand side, Holzer, Raphael and Stoll (2003) argue that job readiness may influence an employer from no employing an ex-offender. He argues that ex-offenders may not look ready to be employed. This may be the case of many firms’ owners and employers who were participants of the study. Hence, having a high level of unwillingness to employ ex-convicts in their organization or business. Hagan (2013) reveals that the employment of individuals with prison history may be a problem. This is in line with already existing studies in this area of research. For example, Work Link Report in 2012 found that conviction of crime limits an individual’s chances of gainful employment. People with a criminal past are less likely to obtain employment.

9. Attitude towards employing ex-convicts
According to Albright and Denq (1996), employers’ attitude is a major stepping stone for advancing ex-offender employment effort. In line with this, the attitude of employers towards employing ex-convicts was examined based on the type of offence in which the individual was convicted of is likely to affect the employment or re-employment of the ex-convict. The result is presented in Table 1.

Ex-convicts encounter a lot of hindrances in the job market due to inexperience, poor qualification, lack of required skills and inadequacies in environments (Travis & Visher, 2005). This in
Table 1. Attitude towards employing ex-convicts\(n = 283\)

| STATEMENT | STRONGLY DISAGREE | DISAGREE | NEITHER DISAGREE NOR AGREE | AGREE | STRONGLY AGREE | N | Chi-square (P-value) |
|-----------|-------------------|---------|-----------------------------|-------|----------------|---|---------------------|
| I am inclined to hire a convict | 26.3 | 32.6 | 15.8 | 17.9 | 3.2 | | |
| I am inclined to hire an ex-convict with formal education, a vocational trade or on-the-job training while incarcerated | | | | | | | |
| Willingness to employ | Yes | 9.09 | 27.27 | 12.12 | 42.42 | 9.09 | 105 | 33.5462 |
| No | 21.05 | 43.86 | 24.56 | 7.02 | 3.51 | 179 | (0.000) |
| I will employ an ex-convict with completed university or college before incarceration. | | | | | | | |
| Willingness to employ | Yes | 21.21 | 21.21 | 12.12 | 39.39 | 6.06 | 105 | 28.977 |
| No | 28.07 | 36.84 | 12.05 | 10.53 | 3.51 | 179 | (0.000) |
| I will employ an ex-convict eligible for the Work Opportunity | | | | | | | |
| Willingness to employ | Yes | 9.09 | 30.30 | 30.30 | 24.24 | 6.06 | 105 | 20.888 |
| No | 28.57 | 30.36 | 21.43 | 12.50 | 7.15 | 179 | (0.022) |
| I will employ someone under bond | | | | | | | |
| Willingness to employ | Yes | 18.18 | 27.27 | 15.15 | 33.33 | 6.06 | 105 | 8.9299 |
| No | 27.27 | 36.36 | 20.00 | 10.91 | 5.45 | 179 | (0.348) |
| I am inclined to hire an ex-convict guilty of a Drunk driving | | | | | | | |
| Willingness to employ | Yes | 42.42 | 18.18 | 18.18 | 18.18 | 3.03 | 105 | 6.1203 |
| No | 32.73 | 32.73 | 18.18 | 10.91 | 5.45 | 179 | (0.805) |
| I am inclined to hire someone found guilty of a drug crime | | | | | | | |
| Willingness to employ | Yes | 31.25 | 34.38 | 25.00 | 6.25 | 3.13 | 105 | 4.436 |
| No | 39.29 | 28.57 | 16.07 | 12.50 | 3.57 | 179 | (0.816) |
| | | | | | | | |
(Continued)
Table 1. (Continued)

| STATEMENT | STRONGLY DISAGREE % | DISAGREE % | NEITHER DISAGREE NOR AGREE % | AGREE % | STRONGLY AGREE % | N  | Chi-square (P-value) |
|-----------|---------------------|------------|-----------------------------|--------|-------------------|----|---------------------|
| Willingness to employ | Yes | 21.21 | 21.21 | 12.12 | 39.39 | 6.06 | 105 |
|                  | No  | 28.07 | 36.84 | 21.05 | 10.53 | 3.51 | 179 |
| I hire a felon convicted of theft | Yes | 28.13 | 25.00 | 25.00 | 21.88 | | 105 | 29.892 (0.000) |
|                  | No  | 41.07 | 32.14 | 16.07 | 5.36  | 5.36 | 179 | |
| I will hire a person convicted of burglary | Yes | 31.25 | 40.63 | 15.63 | 9.38  | 3.13 | 105 | 4.357 (0.024) |
|                  | No  | 48.21 | 30.36 | 12.50 | 7.14  | 1.79 | 179 | |
| I will hire a person convicted of assault | Yes | 22.64 | 46.23 | 20.75 | 10.38 | | 105 | 40.564 (0.000) |
|                  | No  | 44.57 | 38.86 | 9.14  | 6.29  | 1.14 | 179 | |
| I will hire a person convicted of arson | Yes | 18.87 | 36.79 | 15.09 | 25.47 | 3.77 | 106 | 45.293 (0.000) |
|                  | No  | 42.86 | 34.86 | 15.43 | 6.86  | | 179 | |
| I will hire a person convicted of robbery | Yes | 35.85 | 38.68 | 16.98 | 8.49  | | 106 | 26.488 (0.008) |
|                  | No  | 51.43 | 25.14 | 13.71 | 9.71  | | 179 | |
| I will hire a person convicted of manslaughter | Yes | 41.51 | 30.19 | 14.15 | 14.15 | | 106 | 20.179 (0.010) |
|                  | No  | 59.43 | 24.00 | 8.57  | 5.71  | 2.29 | 179 | |
| I will hire a person convicted of child abuse | Yes | | | | | | | |
|                  | No  | | | | | | | (Continued) |
| Statement | Yes | No | Chi-square (P-value) |
|-----------|-----|----|---------------------|
| I will hire a person convicted of sexual assault | 26.42 | 24.53 | 31.995 (0.000) |
| I will hire a person convicted of a sexual offence against a child | 50.94 | 26.42 | 47.296 (0.000) |
| I will hire a person convicted of murder | 33.96 | 18.87 | 47.296 (0.000) |
| I will hire a person convicted of a crime not related to the job | 35.85 | 26.42 | 25.724 (0.000) |
| I am inclined to hire a person with skills | 20.75 | 26.42 | 38.478 (0.000) |

Source: Survey Data (2019). NB: The sample reduced to 283 due to missing responses.
addition to a hostile attitude in the society makes it difficult for the ex-convict to be re-socialized and reintegrated into society (Appiah-Hene, 1989). Becky Beane in her article ‘from prison to payroll’, ex-convict challenge to find a job stated that “Nationwide as many as 60% ex-convicts are unemployed years after their released from prison”. Tilyear and Vose, (2011) stated the community setting to which an ex-convict returns is crucial to developing an explanation for unemployment and recidivism.

Of the total respondents, 26.3% strongly disagree, 32.6% disagree, 15.8% neither disagree nor agree, 17.9% agree, 3.2% strongly agree are inclined to hire a felon. This shows that employers are generally averse toward employing ex-convicts. To examine the dynamics of willingness to employ, the study examined the dependence between willingness to employ ex-convicts and inclinations based on education, type of crime and some level of institutional monitoring using a chi-square test for independence.

The results in suggest that there exists a significant relationship between formal level of education or on-the-job training and the willingness of an employer to recruit and ex-convict. It was statistically significant at less than 1%. The distribution shows that 42.42% of all the respondent who is willing to employ ex-convicts agree to employ an individual who had education, vocational trade or on-the-job training while incarcerated. On the contrary, about 65% of employers who were not willing to employ ex-convicts either strongly disagree or disagree with employing someone with education while incarcerated. A similar pattern was observed when the incarcerated person received a university or college degree before being incarcerated. The results on education give a clue on the importance of education whether received during or before incarceration. In both respects, the chances of being employed increase significantly. Education is one of the factors that makes the difference in how ex-convicts are regarded and the attitude and inclination one forms towards them. Owens (2009) indicates that education can reduce negativity which is associated with ex-convicts. This hereby indicates that the level of education of the ex-convicts influences the willingness of employers in employing them. By this, it is established that education leads to an increase in the probability of ex-convict employability.

By these findings, level of education, vocational training and on-the-job training influenced positively the attitude of employers towards employing ex-convict. Though the percentages are low, compared to other factors listed, education gives a glimpse of hope for ex-convicts. Training and education may give a positive view of an ex-convict and enhances the level of employability. This buttresses the position stated in a paper presented by the director-general Ghana Prison Service at 10th UN Congress on the prevention of crime and treatment of offenders in Austria 10th of 17 April 2000 that the service relies exclusively on prison officers for trade instruction program and supervision of industries. Furthermore, the data gathered reaffirmed Colvins (1997) explanation that vocational and educational rehabilitation is crucial in turning the fortune around in the rehabilitation process. These methods and techniques help convict after a predetermined programme to re-enter the society as a productive member hence influence employer attitude towards employing ex-convict.

Education and vocational training improve the credentials of applicants for a vacant position. That is improving the eligibility for work. The study revealed that employers are willing to recruit ex-convicts for jobs if they are qualified or eligible for work. The results show that 33% agreed that they will employ an individual who is eligible for work among employers who are willing to employ ex-convicts. Among un-willing employers, 9.09% and 3.64%, respectively, agreed and strongly agreed to employ workers who are eligible but are ex-convicts. Thus, among employers who are not willing to employ ex-convict, incarceration reduces the probability of gaining employment by over 60%. Implyed, an individual with strong labour market characteristics may improve earning opportunities. This is the case of ex-offenders who are even enhanced. Ex-convicts who therefore meet the selection criteria are likely to gain employment.
The relationship between the type of crime and employers' willingness to employ ex-convicts were significant across all the listed crimes except for burglary which was found to be insignificant. The results in show remarkably interesting results. The results reveal that the willingness of employers declines in employing ex-convicts when the offenders are involved in child abuse and sexual offences against children. About 77% of the employers willing to employ ex-convicts are less likely to employ an ex-convict with sexual offences against children. Similarly, 71% of the employers who are willing to employ ex-convict strongly disagree/disagree with employing offenders convicted of child abuse. Among both willing and unwilling employers to recruit ex-convicts, 52.83% and 70.86% strongly agree/disagreed, respectively, to hiring a person convicted of charges of murder. This compared with 16.98% and 17.14%, respectively, for willing and unwilling employers who agreed/strongly agreed to employ a convicted murderer. Interestingly, manslaughter happens to have a higher level of less inclination by employers towards employing ex-convicts.

As a result, data gathered indicate a general trend of the attitude of employers towards employing ex-convicts, that employers' attitude towards employing ex-convicts is generally poor irrespective of the nature of the crime upon which the ex-convict was incarcerated. That notwithstanding, it is observed that inclination towards employing an individual with some levels of skills is higher among SMEs in the study area. The results confirm existing narratives that employers are more likely to employ convicted criminal who was engaged in drug offences, burglary and theft as compared with sexual offences (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013)

10. Policies to sway willingness to employ ex-convicts
The results in Table 2 show the factors that may influence the decision of SMEs to employ ex-convicts or ex-offenders in their business. Respondents were of the view that the current employment laws be reviewed in such a way to pave ways and employment avenues for ex-cons and offenders after they have served their sentence. The number of employers who agree/strongly agree to this was about 42% of all respondents. Another 38.9% agreed that having a tax incentive for SMEs that employs ex-cons would improve an employer's willingness to employ ex-offenders.

Education seems to play a higher role in improving the willingness of SMEs in employing ex-convicts. Responses show that majority of SMEs agreed that education of employers is a key component in changing the attitude of employers and improving the willingness of employers. Similarly, the educational qualification of an ex-convict is among the factors that could improve employers’ willingness to hire an individual who is an ex-offender.

| STATEMENT | STRONGLY DISAGREE % | DISAGREE % | NEITHER DISAGREE NOR AGREE % | AGREE % | STRONGLY AGREE % |
|-----------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------------|---------|------------------|
| 1. There should be a review of the employment law | 21.1 | 17.9 | 17.9 | 26.3 | 15.8 |
| 2. There should be a tax incentive for employers who employ ex-convicts | 13.7 | 18.9 | 27.4 | 16.8 | 22.1 |
| 3. The tax incentive will influence the decision of me hiring an ex-convict | 14.7 | 17.9 | 28.4 | 20.0 | 17.9 |
| 4. Educating employers on needs to employ ex—convict | 10.5 | 18.9 | 21.1 | 28.4 | 21.1 |
| 5. Employers are willing to hire ex-convicts with the necessary qualification and job requirement. | 11.6 | 27.4 | 23.2 | 27.4 | 10.5 |

Source: Survey Data (2019).
In a nutshell, education is one of the factors that makes the difference on how ex-convicts are regarded and the attitude one forms towards them as indicated by Owens (2009) that education has the ability to reduce negativity which is associated to ex-convicts. Hence, the education of ex-convicts increases the willingness of employers in employing them. Thus, the higher the level of education, the greater the chance of gaining employment and the lower the level of education, the lower the chances of gaining employment.

11. Conclusion and policy implications
The study aimed at examining the attitude and the willingness of employers to employ ex-convicts among SMEs in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metro. The study used an exploratory design for the study. The results indicate that individual business owners identified have a very negative attitude towards employing ex-convicts. This paper reveals the following findings. About 82% of employers have never employed ex-convict whilst 17.9% have employed ex-convict. This indicates that the employment rate of ex-convict by employers of Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis is relatively low. On the other hand, 34.7% of employers are willing to employ ex-convicts based on reasons such as level of education, nature of offence and age of ex-convict whilst 60.0% are not willing to employ ex-convict. Unwillingness to employ ex-convicts is based on factors such as personal experience, public perception of an ex-convict (stigmatization) and bad publicity to the organization. Only a few of the participants of the study indicated their willingness to employ ex-convicts in the metropolis. This by implication and given the high level of unemployment’s, ex-convicts are found to be at risk of getting a sustainable source of employment. This paper concludes that employers are not willing to employ ex-convicts.

With the above findings, general attitude and people’s perception play a major role in influencing the willingness and unwillingness in employing ex-convicts. Furthermore, incarceration leaves strong stigma taints the credibility of leading to a characterisation that is socially unappealing (Link & Phelan, 2001). For many ex-convicts, the mark of being an ex-convict last long after they have served their incarceration. Ex-convicts face the dilemma of being stigmatized from walking away from employment opportunities. However, educational level plays a major role in the employability of ex-convicts. Thus, persons who have acquired some form of vocational, college training or some skills stand a high chance of having employment. To influence the attitude of employers on ex-convict, it can be concluded that educating ex-convicts and giving tax incentives would improve their acceptance of ex-convict and may reduce recidivism of ex-convicts.

The conclusions and the recommendations for the study could be applied to other developing nations in the sub-Saharan African region. The general nature of the market in the SSAs is basically and largely informal and this cut-across most sub-Saharan markets. SMEs predominantly the manufacturing, Agric and the service industries in SSAs like Ghana and mostly clustered in capital cities. That implies the conditions in the Western Regional capital mirrors majority of African cities. Nevertheless, generalisation must be used in context as not all the case may be present due to some country-specific heterogeneities.

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Appendix A1

Questionnaire

Questionnaire on the willingness of employers in hiring Ex-convicts. This questionnaire is aimed at obtaining information on the willingness of employers in hiring Ex-convicts.

The information gathered is solely for academic purpose and will be treated with confidentiality.

SECTION A—PERSONAL INFORMATION

Please tick (x) against the appropriate answer.

(1) Age: ........

(2) Gender: Male [ ] Female [ ]

(3) Position Held: CEO [ ]

General Manager [ ]

H R Manager Officer [ ]

Others please specify _______________

(4) Years spent in present position: 1–5 years [ ] 6–9 years [ ] 10–15 years [ ] Above 15 years [ ]

Section B: Willingness to employ ex-convict

(5) Have ever employed an ex-convict before? Yes [ ] No [ ]

(6) Are you willing to employ an ex-convict? Yes [ ] No [ ]

(7) Provide the reason(s) for your answer in question 6: __________________________

(8) The question in the table below seek to evaluate the inclination (attitude) of employers in employing ex-convicts. They are a series of statements. 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strogly Agree

| Position Held | Male | Female |
|---------------|------|--------|
| CEO           | [ ]  | [ ]    |
| General Manager | [ ]  | [ ]    |
| H R Manager Officer | [ ]  | [ ]    |
| Others please specify | [ ]  | [ ]    |

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| STATEMENT                                                                 | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| (i) I am inclined to hire a felon                                        |     |     |     |     |     |
| (ii) I am inclined to hire a felon that has completed college,           |     |     |     |     |     |
| a vocational trade or on-the-job training while incarcerated.             |     |     |     |     |     |
| (iii) I am inclined to hire a felon that has completed college,          |     |     |     |     |     |
| a vocational trade or on-the-job training before incarceration.           |     |     |     |     |     |
| (iv) I am inclined to hire a felon enrolled in a reentry program.        |     |     |     |     |     |
| (v) I am inclined to hire a felon eligible for the Work Opportunity      |     |     |     |     |     |
| Tax Credit.                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| (vi) I am inclined to hire a felon that is federally bonded.             |     |     |     |     |     |
| (vii) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of a DWI                    |     |     |     |     |     |
| (viii) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of a drug crime            |     |     |     |     |     |
| (ix) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of a forgery crime          |     |     |     |     |     |
| (x) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of theft                     |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xi) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of burglary                  |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xii) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted to assault                  |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xiii) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of arson                   |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xiv) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of robbery                  |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xv) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of manslaughter             |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xvi) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of injury to a child        |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xvii) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of sexual assault         |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xviii) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of sexual offence         |     |     |     |     |     |
| against a child                                                          |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xix) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of murder                   |     |     |     |     |     |
| (xx) I am inclined to hire a felon on a probationary supervision          |     |     |     |     |     |

(Continued)
The following statements are means for improving the willingness of employer to employ ex-convicts. Tick appropriately whether you disagree, agree or neutral. 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

| STATEMENT | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|
| (xxi) I am inclined to hire a felon convicted of a crime not related to the job |   |   |   |   |   |
| (xxii) I am inclined to hire a felon with adequate job skills |   |   |   |   |   |

(9) The following statements are means for improving the willingness of employer to employ ex-convicts. Tick appropriately whether you disagree, agree or neutral. 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

| STATEMENT | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. There should be a review of the employment law |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. There should be tax incentive for employers who employ ex-convicts |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Tax incentive will influence the decision of me hiring an ex—convict |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Employers should be educated on the need to employ ex—convict |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Employers are willing to hire ex-convicts with the necessary qualification and job requirement. |   |   |   |   |   |

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