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Ananova:

Criminal record disclosure 'will bring more re-offending'

Ex-offenders trying to "go straight" will be forced back into crime by new legislation which grants employers the right to ask jobseekers for evidence of criminal convictions, according to a new report.

The report funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation warned there would be "considerable pressure" on job applicants to reveal their criminal past, even though the law will not force them to comply.

Seven out of 10 employers surveyed said they would ask job hopefuls to allow them to access their criminal record under measures in the 1997 Police Act which are due to come into force in autumn 2002.

"Ex-offenders already face considerable difficulties finding work, even though a steady job can play an important part in making it less likely they will commit further crime," said co-author Del Roy Fletcher.

"Our research suggests that the introduction of basic disclosures will heighten the level of discrimination against offenders, with serious potential consequences for levels of re-offending."

Home Office figures show that one in three men has at least one criminal conviction - excluding motoring offences - by the age of 30.

But researchers at Sheffield Hallam University and ex-offenders' charity Nacro analysed 22,000 job applications and found that fewer than 1% had revealed a conviction.

They conclude that most offenders are "hidden" in the labour market and the report adds: "When fully implemented the Act will give all employers access to the criminal records of job applicants.

"Although the legislation does not enforce the disclosure of criminal records, the pressure on job applicants to produce basic disclosures may be considerable.

"Consequently, many fear that this will facilitate unrestricted vetting and discrimination."

Story filed: 00:13 Wednesday 3rd October 2001

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