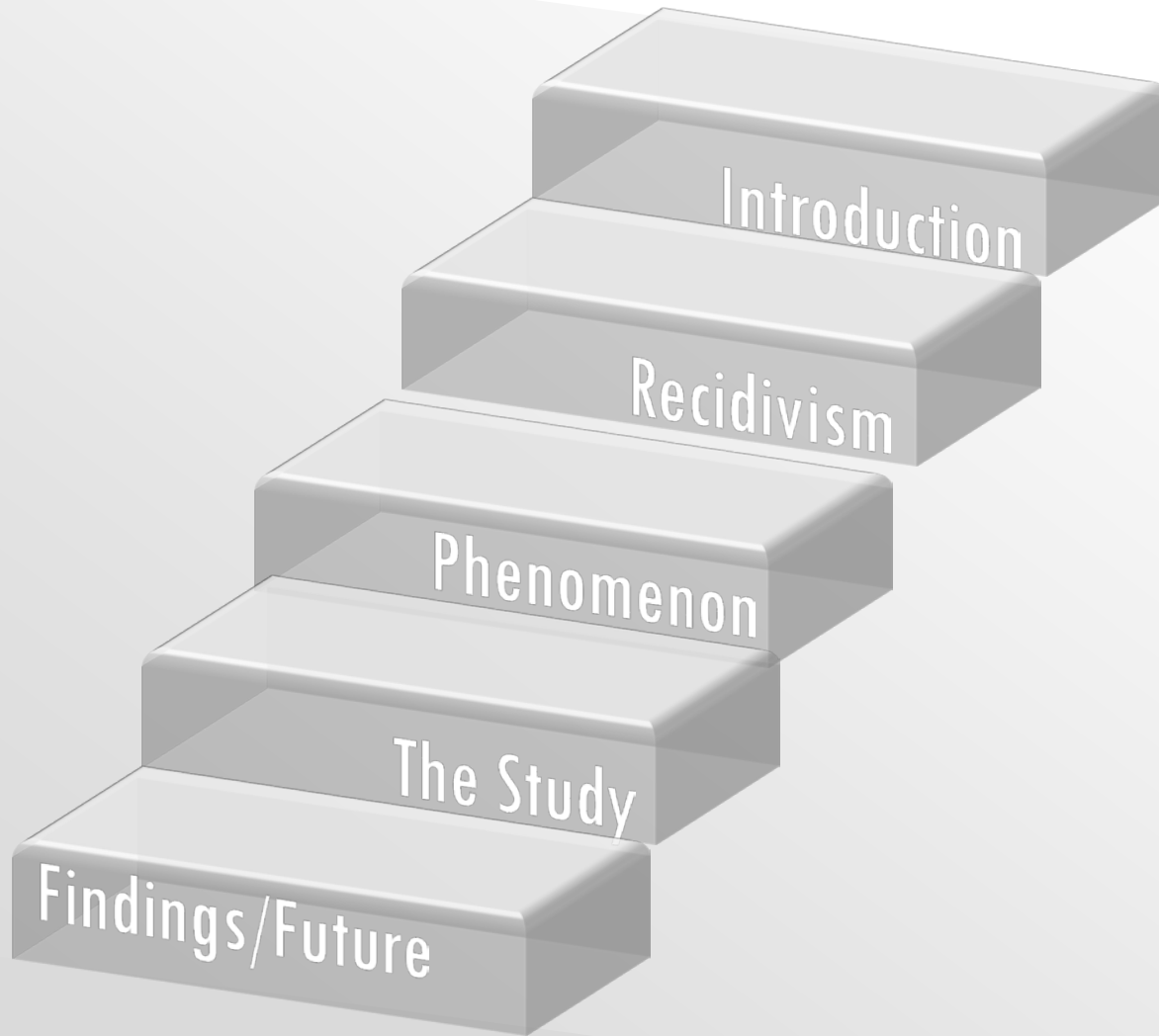


*A Holistic Approach to Reducing the High
Rate of Recidivism for Ex-Offenders*



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INTRODUCTION: RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Over a million individuals are incarcerated in state and federal prisons, and at least half of these prisoners have the potential to reenter society yearly, all facing a disadvantage from factors such as substance abuse and lack of employment or housing.

- By the end of 2013, the state of Florida's incarceration rate reached approximately 125,000 inmates.
- The number of prison inmates in the United States rose 19.8% between 2004 and 2008.
- The United States had the highest per capita prison population in the world, with at least 701 per 100,000 of the national population in prison. By contrast, the United Kingdom had the highest per capita prison population among the European Union countries with approximately 141 per 100,000 of the population.
- The cost to taxpayers to build prisons was \$2.14 billion, with \$613 million in annual operational costs. These large expenditures, added to the high rates of criminal recidivism (i.e. 50% in many jurisdictions) led to the need for "consider structural or service-related interventions that can be utilized to reduce reoffending rates"

Understanding the Problem

Recidivism is at a 67% rate. Offenders are being released from federal and state facilities into the urban Southeastern Florida county in droves, and “what works” isn’t working. This forces the need for stakeholders to find a more effective way to aid the thousands of released prisoners into the society who have little or no resources - leading them back to increase in crime; and creating safety issues for the community, including a consistent high rate of recidivism (Quick Facts, 2015).

Contributing Factors to the recidivism problem

- ❑ In 1999 there was an explosion of interest in the recidivism topic, perhaps as a result of the four-fold increase in prisoners that started in the 1970s and grew until 95% of the 2.3 million incarcerated Americans became eligible for release into community life within a few years after 2008 (Eroy, 2009).
- ❑ Approximately 32.8% of the 40,000 inmates leaving Florida's prisons yearly could recidivate, at a cost of \$20,000 per inmate per year (McNeil & Barber, 2009a).
- ❑ Of the 100,884 inmates in Florida prisons during fiscal year 2012-2013, approximately 115,000 offenders were on active probation (Crews, 2013).
- ❑ The Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) incarceration rates from July 1, 2011, through June 30, 2012, were estimated at 32,279 inmates, the release rate was 34,463 inmates, and the community supervision rate was 90,880 (Quick Facts, 2015).
- ❑ In 2014 the estimated incarceration rate was 100,873 inmates across 56 state prisons in the Florida corrections system and 142,159 felons on probation.

The lack of employment, housing, and provision for mental and physical health care in a difficult unstable economy by released prisoners becomes a public safety issue.

PHENOMENON OF INTEREST

The multiplicity of issues that trigger recidivism as offenders return to communities--with attention to rejection, socioeconomic status, routes into employment, and social ties--reinforces the need to understand the specific needs of prisoners and the system in order to determine risk factors on recidivism, while controlling for type of criminality.

Intentional Behavior: Statistics from the Bureau of Justice, Hughes and Wilson (2002) argued for inclusion of incorporating risk-reduction assessments in the process as a means reducing recidivism. Furthermore, it was argued that along with effective risk reduction assessments, community services for ex-offenders should provide access to complete evidence-based programs and tools to help ex-offenders live productive lives as law-abiding citizens.



Stages of Change Needed: TTM Value

Transtheoretical model of change (stages of change model) refers to a model of intentional behavioral change. The stages of change model blends key constructs from other theories into a complete theory of change diversified to include behaviors; populations; prevention; policy-making, and treatment settings.

- ❑ To help policy makers pursue better alternatives, Bourgon et al. (2010) examined the impact of the prevalence of “nothing works” , and concluded that policy-makers replaced rehabilitation as an objective toward correction and deterrence with punishment as a goal to reduce recidivism - mid-1970s and 1990s philosophy.
- ❑ Bourgon et al.'s (2010) asserted that the important outcome of “nothing works” empowered advocates of the rehabilitation ideal to continue their pursuit in finding “what works” - latter 20th century to present - philosophy emphasizes criminality is structured, and nothing works in corrections.

The theoretical framework incorporated holism theory to find answers to the major issues related to recidivism:

- (a) the factors in an individual's life that triggered a return to criminal activity, and
- (b) the types of support, resources, and services that ex-offenders needed to help them transition back into community life as productive citizens.

STUDY DESIGN

"Recidivism has a serious effect on the economy" (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Barrett, & Flaska, 2004, p. 23). The purpose of this phenomenology qualitative study was to:

- a) probe the overall effectiveness of intervention programs that incorporate support, resources, and behavioral and or social programs needed to assist ex-offenders and reduce the high level of recidivism in the target county.
- a) show the normality existing for prisoners' life on the outside.
- b) discovered a more comprehensive insight into and appreciation of the obstacles that hindered their rehabilitation.

Three key points involved in recidivism rate calculations:

(a) starting points, (b) follow up, and (c) recidivism events (Chamayou, 2012).

- The study included focus groups for interviews: one of service providers, and one of ex-offenders who have little or no financial resources of their own, are unable to meet basic needs, but are expected to conform to societal norms after being released from prison.
- review service providers offering rehabilitative treatment programs consideration of how institutionalization, societal implication, and accountability and responsibility affect recidivism.
- review the use of programs like the Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation which shifted the attitudes of scholars from "nothing works" to the more confident systematically developed need for treatment and strategies aimed at reliably reducing recidivism.
- explored current theory, practice, and recidivism-program interventions and outlined new ideas in reducing recidivism.
- Explored whether funded programs served as a foundation for making better citizens of ex-offenders, with a resultant lowering of the recidivism and imprisonment rate

THE STUDY:

The theoretical framework incorporated holism theory to find answers to three research questions; and a solution to reducing the high level of recidivism as related to these questions.

Interviews: purposeful qualitative sampling was used to select people and sites that was best able to provide an understanding of the phenomenon - sample size should be small for in-depth perspective (Creswell (2008)).

The first group of participants were four service provider organizations that assist ex-offenders in the county - a criterion in the selection of service provider organizations included government and private service provider organizations. The selected organizations represent the five primary types of assistance: (a) homelessness, (b) basic needs, (c) job placement, (d) education and training, and (e) specific needs.

The second group of participants was 12 ex-offenders who had been released from prison between 2011 and 2014 who were clients of the participating service providers selected to participate in the study.

The rationale for using 2011 to 2014 as a requirement for participant selection in the study was based on statistics by the BJS that showed that 67% of 404,638 prisoners in 30 states recidivated within a 3 year period after release from prison in 2005 (National Institute of Justice, 2014).

Data Collection Instruments

- a) face-to-face interaction and recorded - gathered from the participants through a semi-structured interview using a set of relevant probing questions in a focus group setting.
- b) the two data collection instruments for the focus groups were based on the interview instrument used in the Urban Institute's Voice of Experience: Focus Group Findings on Prisoner Reentry in the State of Rhode Island (La Vigne et al., 2004) - Permission was given by the Urban Institute to make minor adjustments to this instrument and use it in this study

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The theoretical framework incorporated holism theory to find answers to three research questions. Finding a solution to reducing the high level of recidivism is related to these questions.

Research Questions:

1. What types of support, resources, and services do ex-offenders need to help them transition back into community life and not return to criminal activity?
2. What factors in an individual's life trigger a return to criminal activity?
3. How can profit and nonprofit organizations in a large urban county join forces to: (a) streamline the confusing process of finding agencies that provide assistance to ex-offenders, (b) improve the tracking system to follow up on services rendered to ex-offenders, and (c) incorporate into recidivism reduction programs the types of support, resources, and services tailored to ex-offenders' individual needs so that a more holistic approach is taken into the prevention of recidivism.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FINDINGS

Research Question 1: The most commonly shared support, resources, and services identified by community service providers and ex-offenders that were needed by ex-offenders to not return to criminal activity were jobs, housing, and acceptance of an ex-offenders' history.

Pre-release planning:

Both ex-offenders and service providers alike agreed that offenders are not being properly prepared for reentry, job placement, finding community resources, and adjusting to an unfamiliar community.

(Protocol Questions 1, 59, 75, 76, 77, 79 and 80.)

Research Question 2: All participants agreed that factors that trigger a return to criminal activity that were identified by all ex-offenders in the focus group were (a) lack of jobs, (b) lack of housing, (c) non-acceptance by individuals in the community, (d) non-acceptance by family members, (e) barriers caused by their criminal background, and lack of social services and collaborative providers pre and post-release.

(Protocol Questions 7, 12, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 35, 72, 74, 81, 82, 83, and 84.)

Research Question 3: Service provider focus group participants did not clearly identify ways to streamline the process of finding agencies; but stated it was important to do so. Service provider participants identified limited resources and funding as obstacles in the development of a database listing all service provider agencies and their services.

Ex-offender focus group participants believed that profit and non-profit service provider organizations must work together to streamline the confusing process of finding information about service provider organizations - and referenced the need for one main hub and/or database for all service provider information, regardless of size.

(Protocol Questions 15, 22, 23, 29, 30, 37, 38, 52, 76, 78, and 79.)

FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations:

- Time constraints: Not having equal representation of participants based on the amount of time ex-offenders had been in recidivism programs or how long they had been released from prison prior to participating in the study could impact the results of the study.
- Small number of respondents
- The small number of women participants relative to male participants

Recommendations:

- Because none of the 12 ex-offenders or 4 service providers were aware of the process of how community service providers worked strategically with correctional facilities to meet their needs before release, more research is needed to facilitate how best to integrate this pre-release process as part of an inclusive evidenced-based program, that has meaningful curriculum, appropriate physical, mental, and drug treatment, education opportunities, and vocational skill training.
- Develop an instrument to aid funded service providers offer ex-offenders a diversity of service styles and approaches either as part of true collaboration or expansion of their services in (a) housing, (b) employment opportunities, (c) appropriate training, (d) personal development, (e) identification cards, and (f) family and individual counseling.
- Expand study to one year
- Include more subjects