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## REDUCING RECIDIVISM: PEOPLE ON PAROLE AND PROBATION

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REDUCING RECIDIVISM  
PEOPLE ON PAROLE AND PROBATION

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Noe George Gutierrez

July 2020

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## ABSTRACT

Continuing criminal justice approaches have led to persistent recidivism among parolees and probationers. This study investigates the observed influence recidivism has on individuals on parole and probation. This research project aimed to shed more light on the attitudes of parolees and probationers and to provide more insight into recidivism and its contributing factors. Focus groups were held to provide the data for this research. Also a survey was distributed to 13 male and 4 female parolees and probationers over the age of 18 who were previously or currently on probation and/or parole. The emphasis was on participant perception and not on professional reports because of underreporting and lack of attention to their opinions. Incarceration was found to negatively affect perceived reintegration. The attitudes and feelings of parolees/probationers were deemed minimally important when deciding to return a parolee/probationer to prison/jail. Opportunities for support and treatment continue to be limited and seldom achieved. Implications include a desire for rehabilitation and the intention for parolees to avoid recidivist behaviors. Based on data from the survey administered, parolees and probationers do not feel they should be returned to prison or jail for a relapse to drug or alcohol use. Rather, they feel that more help is needed in order to remain out-of-custody. They report an improvement in their quality of life when active in services. Social workers are an integral part in helping to promote the continued advocacy of parolees and probationers and providing them support in accessing available resources. The central finding of

this study was that recidivism can be reduced without punitive measures. In substantiating this claim, the research critically comments on the hope and determination that parolees and probationers possess.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research has been a passion of mine because of my years of working with this special population. I am mindful of the plight probationers and parolees endure while attempting to obtain or maintain recovery from substance abuse and mental illness. I am also aware of their journey to seek redemption for their criminal transgressions. First and foremost, I want to thank those persons who agreed to participate in this study. I have learned over the years that these human beings are special because they have been through a lot and have hit some very low points in their lives. My hope is that with this research we can continue to treat them as individuals and not statistics. The one social worker who has influenced me the most has been Christina Bartlett, Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She has provided me the example that I will follow for the rest of my career. She has demonstrated to me how to provide empathy to consumers and create hope for them when there is none. Tina, you are my forever mentor. I would like to thank the entire California State University San Bernardino School of Social Work faculty and support staff. I would like to especially express my gratitude to Rachel Allinson, L.C.S.W. who believed in me and my journey to rid myself of procrastination. You were the motivating factor in my success. I would like to thank staff at Eisenhower Medical Center, Pitzer College and the Office of Congressman Raul Ruiz, M.D. for providing me the learning environments to better hone my social work skills. Finally, I would like to thank all those Riverside University Health System Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Prevention

and Treatment Programs staff who I have had the blessing and honor to work alongside for the past 28 years. You have challenged me and provided the leadership necessary for someone like me to pursue higher education, provide high quality services, and participate in building my community.

## DEDICATION

I would not have had the ability to complete this without the love and support of my girlfriend Emily Kanoski Coy. Emily, you have been by my side in this educational journey the last two years and I love you for it. You never complained and were unconditional in sharing your love and sensitivity. To my children, Ruben Joseph Gutierrez and Sofia Grace Gutierrez, you two have been the biggest inspirations and blessings in my life. Although you may not have always understood what dad was doing, you remained respectful and patient. Ruben, you came into my life when you were two years old and I knew then that I would be your dad forever. It has been an honor to be your parent since that first time we played on that McDonald's play ground. You are relentless in everything you do and you motivate me to push myself. Sofia, I met you at six months old. You provide me so many opportunities to be happy and proud of you. You have the biggest heart I know and your love inspires me. To Ayden Alexander Coy, you have etched a place in my heart that moves me. Your personality has been a bright spot for me when I've been overstressed. You three are my biggest inspirations to reach for the stars. My only hope is that you go above and beyond what I have been capable of. To my mom, Mary Ellen Gutierrez, Registered Nurse, thank you for showing me early on what it meant to help others. You are a real-life super hero. My late father, Steven George Gutierrez, for showing me that we must show our fellow humans compassion and help others when we can. You're in my heart daily and forever Dad. My sister Valerie Gutierrez for

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I feel proud of the work i put into this project. I am dedicated to helping others, so to be able to concentrate my efforts and arrange it in such a professional manner is rewarding. During my quest I have had to sacrifice time away from my friends and family and I would like to thank them all for any sacrifices they made in supporting me.

If you do choose to include it, it is to have no page number listed, and is also not to be counted in the pagination of the document. That means the preceding acknowledgements page is to be, for example, page iv, the dedication page is to have no page number, and the page following the dedication is to be page v. Additionally, the dedication page is not to appear in the table of contents.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ASSESSMENT

#### Introduction

Chapter One explains recidivism and its causes. It analyzes and asks the question; how do we reduce recidivism? It covers the different reasons why criminal offenders are returned to prison or jail and their perspectives and experiences. Chapter One describes the Post-Positivist paradigm used to complete this study. It explains the fundamental components of the approach and why this method was chosen. Also included is a literature review that details current knowledge including substantive findings about recidivism. Lastly, this chapter shares the potential contributions of this study to the micro and macro social work practices.

#### Research Focus

The research focal point of this study is to look at the personal experiences of criminal offenders as they cope with the possibility of returning to jail or prison. Criminal offenders who lapse into old behaviors are likely to return to prison or jail. The research focus was to learn more about why this occurs and provide insight into the criminal offender experience concerning recidivism.

The study recognized patterns of non-involvement from offenders in determining alternatives to incarceration. The questions posed related to

recidivism and its causes. Why do so many parolees and probationers recidivate in and out of prisons and jails? According to the Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice (2005), “recidivism is one of the most fundamental concepts in criminal justice”. The idea refers to an individual’s return to criminal behavior in the course of a three-year period after an individual’s release from incarceration. It usually occurs after the individual suffers negative consequences or receives a form of stipulation due to a prior crime. Recidivism is determined by criminal acts that come from being re-arrested, re-convicted or returned to incarceration with or without a new sentence.

With the data provided by participants, the researcher developed a theory about recidivism. This theoretical concept was refined so that it could be utilized as a stepping-stone to future studies, contribute to the social work profession and be used by various criminal justice agencies to decrease recidivism. In context, little has changed in the last twenty years when discussing recidivism. Within three years of release one-third of offenders return to prison. Future research should consider regions of the United States and the disparity in cultures and populations so that treatment can be distinctive. Furthermore, the stigma attached to those who commit crimes is difficult to overcome, even for the most empathic. De-stigmatizing substance abusers as career criminals is important. The perception of the general population must be studied consistently to ensure that substance dependence

is viewed as a disease and that mental health professionals are in communication with each other. Legitimizing substance abuse treatment is also an area that can be studied to further fund evidence-based treatment programs.

There is much credence to the belief that individualized treatment plans are a necessity if we are to reduce recidivism. Also, mandating treatment and ancillary services through the criminal justice system can improve accountability and outcomes. Predominantly, there exists a significant amount of evidence that those who are engaged in mandated treatment do equally well or better than those who voluntarily participate in treatment, but it remains essential to discover what approaches of treatment are the most practical in diminishing the impact of recidivism (Huebner & Cobbina, 2007). Blanket treatment programs cannot serve clientele who need specialized services. In a study about male batterers, (Hansen & Wallace-Capretta, 2004) it was determined that the men who were prone to violent recidivism had a tendency to be young, unmarried, and with a history of criminal behavior. Their lifestyles were unstable, resulting in frequent moves, poor accommodations, unstable employment, substance abuse, and little commitment to a positive social attitude.

It is imperative that there be a standard of care in the United States. A large number of prisoners face a multitude of barriers and necessitate a spectrum of services to help plan for their release and to support them once

they are released. Thus, qualified and effective programs must provide access to all of the appropriate services both while in-custody and upon release from custody (McKean, L., Ransford, C. 2004). Addressing all facets of a client's needs will improve the quality of life for that individual as well as minimize the possibility of a return to prison or jail. Because of political limitations, treatment must frequently be accessed through county, state and federal funds. Equal access to treatment and rehabilitation services should be offered. Also, the proposition that a culturally relevant perspective be taken in addressing recidivism is an equally important aspect. There must be a comprehensive overhaul of our prison and parole system for the trend of recidivism to decrease. Further research in the area of recidivism should also include the separation between federal and state guidelines.

The formation of a literature review assisted the researcher's modus operandi to this study. By analyzing previously researched information on the causes of recidivism and the lack of research available using the perspective of the offender, the researcher improved the level of awareness about recidivism and offenders viewpoints. The material studied allowed the researcher to develop a conceptualization and framework of understanding to help to develop the focus group structure and types of questions.

#### Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

In using the Post-Positivist paradigm, according to Morris (2006) we begin with a problem focus and a more complete understanding of that problem focus evolves during the study. Furthermore, the study was dedicated to accumulating qualitative data in a practical environment since we assume that this is the only way to capture the complexity of human experience.

The study was administered from a Post-Positivist perspective. Post positivist methods pay attention to individuality in order to make sure that the situations and samples studied are representative. There is an objective reality but adherence to the strict methodological prescriptions of the positivist paradigm results in data gathering, analysis and findings that cannot always capture the complexity and richness of the human experience (Cooper, 1997). Some assumptions of post-positivism include that individuals and researcher involved in the study remain personal, affected by bias and changeable. Post-positivism also demands an "impersonal stance" of the researcher (Cooper, 1997). Cooper (1997) also suggests post-positivist paradigms assume that knowledge is provisional, not certain or absolute, and that knowledge is socially constructed. Those who take a post-positivist approach dismiss the notion that any human can view the world in its actuality. There is a bias that is inescapable in each of us and every experience is affected. Our greatest hope in achieving objectivity is to determine a picture across different imperfect theories.

According to Gephart (2004) qualitative research, “emphasizes quality of entities- the processes and the meanings that occur naturally”. In this study the researcher delved into the experiences of criminal offenders by asking questions related to their multiple incarcerations. The researcher interpreted the data and responses of the subjects and a theory was generated based on their truth.

### Literature Review

This portion of the study discusses previous research about recidivism and its causes. Morris (2006) stated, “Our hypotheses about causal or correlational relationships rely on assumptions based on established knowledge in the academic literature about regularities and mechanisms in human interaction. The scholarly literature is the primary source of literature for any research project”. For this study, the researcher reviewed previous literature to obtain a more objective perspective on the topic of recidivism and its causes.

The literature review discusses the prevalent issues regarding recidivism and how there is a lack of participation from the offender. Employment is considered as a deterrent to recidivism and a high probability of not re-offending should the offender have steady employment. A pursuit of education is also an indicator of reduced recidivism. Finally, involvement in

substance abuse treatment prior to release and while released is a significant factor in lessening recidivist behaviors.

There is a common thread throughout previous literature that recidivism continues to be a disputed point that requires a multi-pronged approach that includes several methods of treatment and support. Many studies have found that providing services and involving a rehabilitative and non-punitive approach can produce more positive outcomes and decrease recidivism. The literature also concludes that the viewpoint of the offender is not common in deciding a potential return to prison or jail.

#### Exclusion of Offenders with Substance Related Pasts

In general, many studies have explored the reasons for recidivism and provided solutions without the input of offenders, especially those offenders with substance abuse histories. Separate U.S. Department of Justice reports that provided data regarding recidivism were used. The *Drug Use and Dependence* (Mumola, Karberg 2006) report states that 50% of federal inmates reported drug use in the month before their offense. Also, 53% of state and 45% of federal prisoners met the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual - IV (Mumola, Karberg 2006) criteria for drug dependence or abuse. Half of drug dependent or abusing inmates in state prisons reported three or more prior sentences. Researchers have collected considerable proof that implies that offenders disproportionately use drugs and that drug use contributes to recidivism. A national study of inmates in federal and state institutions in 1997

revealed that 83% of all state inmates reported ever using drugs, 57% had used drugs in the month prior to the offense, and 52% were using drugs at the time of the transgression (Huebner, Varano, Bynum, 2007). These studies delineate that substance abuse and dependence is in direct correlation with recidivism.

The existing literature emphasizes the improved outcomes when certain interventions are utilized to assist offenders in preventing recidivism. Unfortunately, little research incorporates the viewpoints of offenders in how those interventions are applied and when. This study emphasizes the potential for lower recidivism rates when offenders are heavily involved in their own care and support. According to the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Bureau of Justice Statistics (Hughes, Wilson 2004), recidivism is measured by criminal acts that resulted in the re-arrest, re-conviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three year period following the prisoner's release.

### Employment

Many offenders who are released and are not provided immediate support quickly recommit an offense upon release. In the *Scarlet Letters and Recidivism* (Kurlychek, Brame, Bushway 2006) study, it was determined that a person who has committed a crime in the past has a higher probability that he/she will commit a crime in the future. This risk is higher immediately after arrest or release from custody. This study asked the question: How do we

determine when a criminal history record is relevant to employment decisions? The likelihood of re-offending decreases rapidly once a certain time period has passed after release from custody. Therefore, the risk to hire someone with a criminal history is small despite the reluctance of employers to do so. Once this stigma is lifted, according to the research, employment opportunities will be increased for those with prior records. The findings of this project relay the importance of employment in the rehabilitation of criminal offenders. This facet of life is necessary for the offender to find value in his/her freedom.

### Education

When the pursuit for further education is encouraged, the rates of recidivism are significantly decreased. In *Current Strategies for Reducing Recidivism* (McKean, Ransford 2004) treatment, education, and employment are the three main components of the study. These, when applied to subjects, are directly related to reductions in recidivism. Substance abuse treatment programs have shown that involvement in a program reduces criminal behaviors and improves the length of time without a new offense. The study also relays that treatment programs are cost effective. Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), a treatment which addresses crime by increasing participants' reasoning abilities so they become less self-centered and more concerned for the well being of others, is currently used in 30 states and has reported reductions in recidivism rates of 25 to 60 percent. The effects of this treatment are reported to last up to ten years and also to translate into improvements in

disciplinary issues, with incidence rates for misconduct in prison, on parole, or on probation reduced by 28 to 50 percent, as well as enhanced employment. For every \$1 the program spends \$11.48 is saved (McKean, Ransford 2004). Money saved on crimes that are not committed while offenders are in treatment is substantial according to the above research.

### Substance Abuse Treatment

When offenders are offered substance abuse treatment both during and immediately after release, recidivism rates are decreased. The *Effectiveness of Early Parole to Substance Abuse Treatment Facilities on 24-Month Criminal Recidivism* (Zanis, 2003) study involved 569 offenders with a history of substance abuse or dependency. Only 22% of those paroled to a substance abuse treatment facility were convicted of a new crime versus 34% of those who were released on standard parole without treatment. This difference is statistically significant and further proves the importance of treatment for those in need. According to the report, the rate of recidivism in the U.S. is about two-thirds, which translates to two-thirds of inmates released will return to prison within three years. In comparison, the *Profile of Non-violent Offenders Exiting State Prisons* (Durose & Mumola 2004) study determined that within 3 years of their release from prison, about 7 of 10 non-violent subjects were re-arrested for a new crime, nearly half were re-convicted, and more than a quarter were returned to prison.

In general, the data reviewed has reinforced that recidivism in the U.S. is a high cost to society. The financial burden of arrests, prosecutions, and incarcerating re-offenders is exponentially more costly than rehabilitation. In addition, the sociological cost to communities, families and offenders themselves cannot be understated. Criminal offenders who lapse into old behaviors likely return to prison or jail. The research focus was to learn more about why this occurs and provide insight into the criminal offender experience concerning recidivism.

### Theoretical Orientation

#### Anomie Theory

The Anomie theory was used in this study. The theory implies that the more unequal the opportunities, the higher the strain and, in consequence, the level of criminal offending, (Savolainen, 2000). The researcher found that the subjects of the study believed that their non-involvement in determining opportunities has led to higher levels of recidivism. Additionally, the criminal behavior is caused by the disintegration of norms as it leads to a breach of the accepted standards and the continuation of criminal activity. These responses are due to the arrangement of parolees and probationers in certain types of structures and social organization that do not provide them with the appropriate opportunities to seek the individual ambitions within our communities (Rez, 2014). This was a recurring contention of the subjects

studied. When offenders were returned to their previous environments and social settings, they were expected to do something different with the same resources and stomping grounds.

### Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was also used in this study. It provides a systematic way to generate theories that illuminate human behavior (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). Grounded theory materializes from and is found in the data of the study, which makes it a theory that is more likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action (Straus & Corbin, 1998). The Grounded theory is suitable for focus group data collection and analysis according to Hernandez (2011). According to Kitzinger (1995), focus groups enable participants to respond to ideas shared by other members of the group and might encourage participation where participants are reluctant to be interviewed on their own. It was important that the focus group was facilitated in the community in which the subjects were residents.

### Contribution of Study to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

With the data provided by participants, the researcher developed a theory about recidivism. This theoretical concept was refined so that it could be utilized as a stepping-stone to future studies, contribute to the social work profession and be used by various criminal justice agencies as a learning tool.

## Summary

Chapter One covered the assessment of the study through the Post-Positivist paradigm. It explained the reasoning behind its use and how the researcher used the approach to inquire about recidivism reduction.

The chapter also included a literature review that examined research about recidivism and its causes. The Anomie and Grounded theories were included to further substantiate the research and data. Finally, the chapter shared potential contributions to micro and macro social work practice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ENGAGEMENT

#### Introduction

Chapter Two details the engagement phase of this research study. It delineates the engagement gatekeepers and focus group attendees by the researcher. Chapter Two explains the steps the researcher took in preparing to obtain all data. In addition, the chapter provides a dialogue on diversity, ethical, and political issues that were pertinent.

#### Research Site

The study was facilitated in a region of Southern California that serves criminal offenders who are on parole and/or probation. The area being served covers approximately 303.9 square miles with a population of 188,789 (Census Reporter, 2017). Specifically, the researcher studied criminal offenders assigned to local agencies offering probation and rehabilitation services. These services included daily, weekly and monthly community supervision, on-site and observed drug testing, assessment and referral to numerous community services and family support. The study's participants were individuals on parole and/or probation who were 18 years and older. Each participant had a history of incarcerations in jails and prisons. Some of the convictions included robbery, aggravated assaults, residential and

commercial burglary, larceny/theft, and vehicle theft, possession of a controlled substance and under the influence of a controlled substance. According to the most recent data available from June 2018, there were 22,508 total individuals on Adult Supervised Probation population in the county served (Chief Probation Officers of California Annual Data Survey, 2018).

The study site is a primary treatment center for people on parole and probation who are seeking counseling for substance abuse issues. With their successful participation, participants are able to remain compliant with their terms and conditions of parole or probation. In turn they reduce their chance of returning to jail or prison and ultimately completing their term.

#### Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

In engaging potential participants, the researcher communicated with probation officers and parole agents in the area to request that they share about the study and its purposes to their respective clients. In preparation for the study, the researcher provided printed materials and electronic communications with both probation departments and parole offices in the area.

The issue in question is the problem of recidivism. The research site included a geographical area that extends approximately 45 miles. In securing a more neutral site for criminal offenders, the researcher spoke with a

University Health System Behavioral Health administrator to ensure the appropriateness of using the facility and to avoid the parole or probation office as that may have been a potential deterrent for participants to participate and/or limit their self-disclosure. The administrator and researcher further discussed the potential for the outcomes of the study to be beneficial to future social workers and behavioral health specialists who work with criminal offenders. The administrator provided the researcher with a letter allowing the use of the facility for focus groups. The researcher consulted with key players about the study including parole agents, probation officers and program supervisors for both the state parole and local County Probation Department. As gatekeepers, these individuals were able to communicate to potential study participants and supported the researcher's purpose to determine data that supported how to reduce recidivism.

#### Self-Preparation

In preparation for preparing for the participants, the researcher considered the topic of trust. Traditionally, people on parole and probation lack the trust of others who are in a position of authority, such as a parole agents or probation officers. Understanding that offenders have a history of not trusting law enforcement and criminal justice representatives, the researcher was careful in explaining the nature of the study, that their names would not be used and that their respective probation officers and parole agents would not be notified of their participation and be given the information they may provide.

Research has shown the negative effects that perceived unfairness in penalties can have on how offenders view the criminal justice system. Piquero, Gomez-Smith, and Langton (2004) found that punishments that were perceived as unfair, particularly for those with low self-control, were likely to have the unintended consequence of creating anger in the offender.

### Diversity Issues

Some of the diversity issues that arose from the focus groups were directly affiliated with gender and race. The researcher was a Hispanic male who had a 20-year history of working with criminal offenders. The researcher did his best to remain unbiased and as objective as possible in how he addressed participants and not appear too comfortable. He was asked about his employment and investment in the research. He reminded the group that he was working in the capacity of a student researcher and was not an employee of the facility nor was he a representative of state parole or County Probation Department. The researcher preconceived this type of issue and it was expected that participants would question motives of researcher and how the information would be used. Participants appeared satisfied with the explanation and their willingness to share and feedback were indicators of this.

### Ethical Issues

In addressing the ethical issues of the study, the researcher became aware of several concerns. Confidentiality was of the utmost importance as participants, because of their distrust of the criminal justice system, could have potentially held back information because of the fear that authorities may have access to their participation. The researcher reminded the participants several times throughout the process that their information would remain confidential and their names would not be used. This was also delineated on the informed consent form. The focus group guide was helpful in instructing the researcher and participant stay on task. The participants were advised that the researcher would protect their data and that it would be disposed of accordingly. All data was locked in a cabinet and locked again in an office. The only individual who had access to the cabinet lock was the researcher. Once all data was obtained it was disposed of. Only issues that were potentially affiliated with reducing recidivism was discussed.

The researcher did not recognize any of the participants in the study and no participant voiced any concerns of familiarity with the researcher.

### Political Issues

A political issue that was focused on was how the study may impact the agencies involved and the facility that was utilized. Because the topic was recidivism it could have been assumed by participants that their participation or lack of participation may affect their parole and/or probation status. Also,

the perceived position of power the researcher may have affected the level of sharing by certain participants. The lack of trust of the researcher also came into play. The researcher shared that the results of the study would be shared with criminal justice agencies and those organizations that have a vested interest in decreasing recidivism. Initially, the fact that their data would be shared alerted the participants to question the motive of researcher. After participants realized that it was anonymous and in strict confidence, they were more comfortable sharing and were more open and honest. Participants were reminded that only through their input would things change in helping criminal offenders avoid a return to incarceration and that they could and should be a significant part of that change.

### The Role of Technology in Engagement

In engaging participants prior to the study, a Facebook event page was created to disseminate information to the general public through social media. The public page included address for the focus group and contact information for the researcher. This page was strictly to provide contact information for the focus group and how the researcher could be contacted. The researcher also provided an email address where potential participants could contact the researcher should they have any general questions. The researcher employed a graphic artist to develop a flyer to share and post at sites where people on parole and probation regularly visit, i.e. parole office, probation offices, drop-in

centers, substance abuse centers and mutual aid/community support group meetings. The researcher sent emails to key players (parole agents, probation officers) who have steady communication with those on active parole and/or probation. The email contained the flyer as an attachment.

### Summary

Chapter Two outlined the engagement approaches of the researcher relevant to the gatekeeper, research site and focus group participants. This chapter included what procedures the researcher used to prepare to adequately collect data. Diversity, ethical, political and the role of technology were illustrated in this chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### Introduction

In this chapter the selection of study participants is explained. Typical case sampling was used in order to help those unfamiliar with the study's topic. Furthermore, Chapter 3 supports the methods of data gathering used while sharing focus group questions presented to participants. The stages of data collection are presented to demonstrate the reflective and interrogative processes the researcher encountered. Lastly, the manner in which data was obtained in the study was discussed.

#### Study Participants

The population pool from which the researcher selected the appropriate study participants from included all adult individuals in a community within a 30 mile radius. The random selection of participants sought involved adult individuals on probation or on parole. The participants selected best informed the research question and improved the understanding of the phenomenon of recidivism. The purpose of identifying this population was to provide information on the number and type of study participants and to decipher whom the study findings apply to and to help clarify the generalizability of results as well as any potential limitations.

## Selection of Participants

A total of 17 participants ages 25 to 47 years old were interviewed using random sampling. Participants engaged voluntarily and provided informed consent. There were 13 males and 4 females present. Participants were actively on probation or parole and were previously convicted of misdemeanor and/or felony sentences which resulted in prison and jail sentences, thus the studies' findings will apply to those adults who have prior jail and prison sentences.

In regard to race/ethnicity, 5 participants identified as Hispanic, 9 as Caucasian/White and 3 as African-American/Black.

The participants sought after for this study were any adult male or female probationer or parolee aged 18 and up. Participants were selected through purposive sampling techniques. The purposive sampling technique, according to Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim (2016), is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience.

The underlying principle that is common to all these strategies is selecting information-rich cases, that is, cases that are selected purposefully to fit the study (Coyne, 1997). Maximum variation sampling is a

heterogeneous sampling is a purposive sampling technique used to capture a wide range of perspectives relating to the thing that you are interested in studying; that is, maximum variation sampling is a search for variation in perspectives, ranging from those conditions that are view to be typical through to those that are more extreme in nature.

Using a maximum variation sampling allows the researcher to identify the diversity of experiences with a social phenomenon and gives in-depth descriptions of unique cases as well as any important shared patterns that are common to diverse cases, (Morris, 2006). The application of this strategy on participants is appropriate as it involves various ethnic and age groups with a multitude of diverse characteristics including the involvement of Hispanic, Caucasian/White and African-American/Black participants.

The majority of the 17 participants were male. Some live with their families and some were residing in sober living environments or rehabilitation centers.

Participants were also selected using self-selection sampling, where research subjects volunteer to take part in the research on their own accord. They were not approached by the researcher directly.

The researcher publicized the study at local probation and parole offices as well as multiple substance use treatment providers. The researcher consulted with numerous probation officers and parole agents notifying them of the research project and requesting the dissemination of contact information

to potential participants. Each participant signed informed consent forms provided by the researcher at the beginning of the session.

### Data Gathering

The researcher scheduled two focus groups on separate days and times. There were no participants in the first scheduled group and 17 participants showed for the second group, which lasted 90 minutes. The researcher only deviated once from the list of predetermined questions after a participant shared, “Last time I was mandated to finish the program and I didn’t finish the program I only went half-way through and I started using again. A lot of us go back because, point blank, the party life and not take responsibility and do what we have to do”. The researcher believed this was an opportunity to ask the group a follow-up question to the main question, “What was it like for you when you went to prison?”

The researcher asked a number of questions in the focus group format. The researcher did not inquire about specific crimes and did his best to alleviate any concerns by participants that their participation would not be used against them and that no member of the criminal justice community will have access to the information they provide. Focus group questions revolved around recidivism, challenges in accessing services, reintegration, mental health and participants’ perceptions on their experiences. Each member of

focus group was participative and responded to facilitator questions as well as reciprocated to peer responses.

The researcher approached the selection of participants with the intent to collect analytical statements from parolees and probationers and their experiences. A qualitative method was used to obtain data and analyze the information accordingly.

Focus group questionnaires were the data gathering method. Focus group questionnaires were developed that focused on the topic of recidivism and related factors. A consent was signed by each participant explaining the purpose of the study and its confidentiality. All questions were printed for participants and were read by researcher. The researcher was also the notetaker, documenting process notes of the meeting and recording the entire group discussion with the participants' permission. The recording was played back and each participant response was recorded verbatim.

The questions were created prior to scheduled focus groups and are attached at the end of this study (See Appendix). The questions were geared towards capturing the parolee and probationer perspective related to their own experiences while on probation and parole. Some topics included; prison experience, challenges of reintegration and behavioral health services efficacy. Open ended, follow-up, probing and prompting questions were used. An example of an open-ended question was, "What was it like for you when you went to prison?" Open ended questions allowed for the participant to

express their thoughts and feelings and kept the conversation going. An example of a follow-up question was, “So do you think it’s justified to return to prison because of a relapse to substances?” The follow-up question inquires about the main question and provides further details. Each inquiry was grouped and labeled into categories using open coding and axial coding. See appendix for complete list of questions.

### Phases of Data Collection

The structure of the focus group included engagement, development of focus, maintaining focus and termination. Engagement included the facilitation of a written informed consent. This consent was read to all participants and researcher made certain that any questions were answered prior to beginning focus group. Each participant signed their respective forms. The informed consent form stated that all information provided by participants will remain confidential and that their name will not be used to identify their responses to questions. The informed consent also communicated to the participant that no harm will come to them for participating. The researcher also provided each participant a Focus Group Interview Guide which delineates the timeline of the focus group and what was asked of participants (See Appendix). The form was read to the group. It included the topics; Purpose, Informed Consent, Introduction, Welcome, Explanation of the process and procedure, about the focus group, Logistics, Ground Rules and questions.

## Data Recording

All data, note pads, and informed consent forms were gathered in the study was sealed after receipt and no names were used. After the data was collected it was stored in a locked cabinet at the site of the study where only the researcher had access to the key. Subjects were reminded periodically of the confidential and voluntary nature of the study and were asked to not discuss the study with any future potential participant. All paper data was destroyed once it was collected in aggregate form and stored on a password sensitive file that only the researcher had access to. The entire focus group was recorded using a digital recorder. Once the data was transcribed, the recording was deleted.

All precautions were taken to protect the identity of all participants involved. The researcher took notes and kept a journal of interpretations of participant responses. In addition, the entire focus group audio was recorded in order for researcher to review data.

## Data Analysis Procedures

Each inquiry was grouped and labeled into categories using open coding and axial coding. The narrative of the group interview is broken down into themes or categories. Axial coding proposes relationships between themes or categories. The third stage, selective coding, is when we develop a theoretical statement. We identify the conditions of the relationships between

categories and themes and we include them in a comprehensive statement (Morris, 2006).

The researcher used Post-Positivist qualitative data analysis for this study. The researcher developed a vocabulary of codes and themes that enabled him to interpret the meaning of the codes and themes in order to uncover and methodically analyze phenomena from the data of the study. The researcher used open coding identifying words and portions of responses that were presented during the focus group and he analyzed them into greater detail. Then the researcher used these open codes to categorize concepts into themes and to demonstrate the range of these concepts. Thereafter the researcher developed connections between these codes and linked them in a process called axial coding. During the axial coding the researcher developed statements about the commonalities in the words. Finally the researcher used selective coding, to integrate and refine the categories and their concepts, to build a theory about recidivism and the experience of probationers and parolees (Morris, 2006). The researcher used the outcomes to weigh and evaluate their importance and to utilize visuals to show the relationships between them.

### Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the method in which participants were selected using typical case sampling. The data gathering portion explained the use of

focus groups as a means of obtaining input from participants. The phases of data collection outlined the course of action of the researcher during implementation of the focus group. The methods used in recording the data were digital, note taking and a journal. Finally, Chapter 3 explained the data analysis section of this study. The researcher used the data from the focus groups to establish codes followed by the development of themes that built the theory of recidivism through the probationer and parolee perspective.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVALUATION

#### Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the researcher's use of open, axial and selective coding to analyze the study's data and explain its reports and interpretations. Using the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet the researcher interpreted the feedback provided by participants. The researcher identified general themes that were formed into a theory of how we can reduce the rate of recidivism of criminal offenders by incorporating their viewpoints.

#### Data Analysis

The study was analyzed using the Post-Positivist qualitative data analysis approach. Data gathered from focus groups was examined by the researcher to find themes and areas of interest for further investigation that may be pertinent to social work practice.

Using open coding as an initial process, the researcher was able to develop the practice of analyzing data with a frame of mind that was open to all potential interpretations, (Morris, 2014). This analysis was used to describe the personal perceptions of criminal offenders about recidivism, its causes and what they experienced in and out of jail and prison.

In connecting the developing categories, the procedure of axial coding was used to link the emergent categories and make statements about the relationships between categories and their dimensions.

The use of selective coding enabled the researcher to process, integrate and refine the categories and their dimensions to develop a theory. The researcher described the findings, used diagrams and examined the patterns using the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. They were also used to identify the core categories. To clarify the theory, the researcher determined properties of the core categories, eliminated categories that included insufficient data, validated emerging theories and constructed explanations and variations, (Morris, 2014).

#### Open Codes

According to Morris (2014), open coding is the process of identifying the social phenomenon's concepts, categories of concepts, properties of concepts and dimensions of properties.

The primary themes that came to light in this study included difficulties with reintegration, being treated unfairly during sentencing, problematic issues in prison, out-of-custody programs and structure needed. Open codes that were determined within these themes were lack of readiness, being labeled/stigma, lack of resources/opportunities, difficulty coping with others, lack of employment opportunities, anxiety, need for structure, being sentenced as violent, being railroaded/wrongly accused, gang enhancement, strikes, public defenders, racism, abuse, rape, silence, lack of rehabilitation, drugs, lack of

education/employment opportunities, availability of sober living environments, lower standards, lack of understanding, lack of boundaries, pride and ego, transition, separation and programming.

### Difficulties with Reintegration

Many respondents shared that they had difficulties with adjusting back into their communities. This theme included the open codes lack of readiness, being labeled/stigma, lack of resources/opportunities, difficulty coping with others, lack of employment opportunities, institutionalization and need for structure.

#### Lack of Readiness

The lack of preparation of offenders prior to incarceration ranges from having no knowledge to understanding what to expect. Some of the participants shared that they were not adjusted to enter incarceration. Participant #7 shared, “You’re stuck in a predicament that you can’t get out of You’re forced to do this time and it’s kind of hard, it’s very hard and not easy to do anything about it really.” (page 1).

#### Being Labeled/Stigma

Many offenders who return to their communities are characterized as such. It can be difficult to purge the stigma of “criminal offender”. Participant #7 shared, “It was hard when I came back into the community. I felt like a monster. I felt like I didn’t belong there no more. I felt different. I felt isolated you know and

uh...some of us keep going in and out because we really feel like we don't have a purpose".

#### Lack of Resources/Opportunities

There was a recurrent thought throughout the study that criminal offenders are not afforded ample community resources or opportunities once released from custody. Participant #1 shared, "They're taking everything out of it to where you're doing life in a pair of flip-flops and an orange jumpsuit. And Participant #11 stated, "The jobs that were offered to me were just like through temp agencies, working warehousing, alone in containers".

#### Difficulty Coping With Others

This code refers to the inability of offenders to cope with others during the reintegration process. Participant #11 shared, "It was hard for me to cope with people who have no structure in their life because I came from where there's nothing but structure, respect and all that other stuff but it was just hard for me to surround myself with society 'cause society nowadays is watered down in other words."

#### Lack of Employment Opportunities

The lack of employment opportunities is a regular occurrence for offenders with felonious backgrounds. Participant #11 stated, "The jobs that were offered to me were just like through temp agencies, working warehousing, alone in containers." While participant #14 compared the difference between illegal sources of income versus legitimate employment, "Making money, like minimum

wage make nothin'. Make 300-400 dollars in a couple of hours rather than work for three hours and bust my ass and only make \$30?" Another example of data that supports this code is participant #5's response, "I think they need to integrate vocational training and maybe job placement or career placement because it makes it hard to find work when you're on parole."

### Anxiety

"Anxiety" refers to the dread participants felt after being released from custody. This code was chosen because the researcher determined a pattern among participants. Participant #3 shared, "I used to get anxiety attacks, when I first came out of prison I didn't leave the house for two months. I was in the house. I felt like I was still locked up. It messed my head up." And participant #7 stated, "Some people come out, it gave me anxieties in crowds, and isolate myself."

### Need For Structure

"Need for Structure" refers to the perceived needs of offenders after release. Participant #12 stated, "I have to have that structure. So my reintegration, it has to include almost the exact same things that I got going on the inside. I do well under supervision. I do well with structure. I have to have it. It's unfortunate. It's where the institutionalization comes in. I have to have it or it doesn't work. That's the only way that I'm being able to get as far as where I'm at." Participant #10 talked about his past recidivism, "I've been in and out for 19 years so I need to follow that structure." Participant #15 concurred, "Talking

about the programming thing when we come out, there's no program and structure for us."

### Being Treated Unfairly During Sentencing

Participants expressed they were treated inequitably prior to entering prison or jail. This theme included the codes "being sentenced as violent", "being railroaded/wrongly accused", "gang enhancement" and "strikes and public defenders".

#### Being Sentenced as Violent

"Being sentenced as violent" refers to the instances where offenders were convicted with the label of "violent offender". Participant #6 shared, "Quit stressing the damn violent shit. And then they just wreck your whole life and you're done, you can't do anything." Participant #11 shared another example of this code, "I just feel like, they need to change this three strike law man. Whether it's violent or serious or whatever the case might be. 'Cause for one, you got these innocent state of minds that haven't really been shown these ways in prison and then you send them to prison and then you create this monster. You create this mental monster that, in prison your emotions don't exist."

#### Being Railroaded/Wrongly Accused

"Being Railroaded/Wrongly Accused" refers to the belief that offenders are not humanized and that they are just numbers in the criminal justice system. Participant #17 explained this code, "I don't know how many times that I plead

guilty to a charge that I was dope sick and wanted to get out of jail. I think Riverside County has one of the largest conviction rates because of that.” In addition, participant #12 supports this code when he stated, “They're signing away their lives or they're for a gang enhancement just to get out they have no idea what they signed. That's one of the worst things I've ever seen, is that. I just got it struck six times.” Participant #5 supported the code further with his experience, “Even if I didn't do it, I'm gonna take the three years with half because I don't want to go for eight years. I got pushed into, they scared the shit out of me and I'd rather do a year and a half rather than 8 years, two strikes, 85%. The odds of me beating that case aren't good because I'm already considered a criminal. The priors, they're not even supposed to bring up the priors but they do.”

### Gang Enhancement

“Gang Enhancement” refers to the mandatory prison sentence attached to any felony committed for the benefit of a gang. The researcher chose this code because response from participant #12 identified a direct correlation to recidivism. Participant shared, “Some of the laws need to be changed, the gang enhancement statute in the first place right there, that one right there, there's needs to be a whole revision of that whole thing, people getting 5, 10, 15 life getting added to their sentences just because their last name, is because of their parents. That's ridiculous. That gets people stuck in there. Because they don't know what these rules are and they don't know how to fight back against it and

they're signing away their lives or they're for a gang enhancement just to get out they have no idea what they signed. That's one of the worst things I've ever seen, is that. Participant #12 continued, "Violence, strikes, gang points, validation, what your 'C' file is full of, so there needs to be, the bar needs to be set probably a little bit lower, to be honest with you, to help people that are the real recidivists that need the help to stop doing it because it's not to downplay what's it doing for people that are the low levels."

### Strikes

"Strikes" refers to the "three strikes law" which introduced mandatory 25 years to life sentences if the defendant was convicted of any felony with two or more prior strikes. Participant #7 shared, "I got two strikes man and nobody got assaulted with deadly weapons. Nobody got a GBI (Great Bodily Injury)." And participant #11 shared, "When I came home I told myself, I came home to this shit? You know what I mean? But I remind myself I got two strikes and I got a son, you know what I mean? This is it, now or never."

### Public Defenders

Public defenders are sometimes not seen as an advocate by offenders. This code was chosen because the researcher identified from two subjects that public defenders can sometimes not represent their client's best interests. Participant #2 shared, "They gave me a strike and for me that was bullshit why they gave me a strike. For me I told the lady I wanted to go to the mercy of the court and she said that I could go back after that and it didn't happen like that I

was still fuckin' right there." Participant #7 reiterated, "They need to look at the public defenders too. Some of them aren't really on your side. Some set you up for failure. I had one tell me, that's supposed to work for me, we got you. OK, you're gonna sign for three years with half and they come back talking about I accepted three years, oh no, you're gonna do four, accept the four. They're just doing it for the conviction rate. They don't care about the human, the person."

### Problematic Issues in Prison and Jail

Concerns for offenders in prison and jail include issues like racism, abuse, rape, silence, lack of rehabilitation and drugs.

#### Racism

The code "Racism" refers to the involuntary segregation offenders must participate in to remain safe while in jail or prison. Participant #10 shared, "The challenge I faced was racism. I'm not really a racist individual but being in that type of hostile environment you pretty much have to stick with your own and there's certain rules, there's guidelines that you have to follow. I would seclude myself from them people, I mean I have good black friends I grew up with of course due to me being in that environment I stayed away from 'em. Because it wasn't like that, I could say Hi, what's up, how you doin'? I couldn't eat with you, I couldn't drink with you, I couldn't smoke with you, I couldn't play cards with you, I couldn't do nothing with you. If it went off and you were my boy I would have to beat you. That's how it was." Participant #2 also had to choose, "So I got there

and met my people and had the support of my people and to know that it's gonna be OK as long as we stay together you know. If something happens, then I have to fight. If I don't fight, there's gonna be problems. I'd rather fight for my people then let my people put hands on me. So that was that."

### Abuse

"Abuse" refers to the trauma experienced by offenders while in custody. Participant #7 shared, "Dealing with that alone, you never know, I've seen cops beat people, I didn't think I'd have flashlight therapy, I got the scar right her."

### Rape

"Rape" refers to female participant #12's response. She stated, "For the women, OK, you got COs in there that are paying off other chicks so they can go and get that chick. There's a lot of rape in women's prison done by COs, a lot. There's a lot of rape going on by other inmates."

### Silence

"Silence" refers to the fear offenders have in speaking up about the trauma they endure while in prison. Participant #12 "You got a lot of women who are scared and don't want to say nothing 'cause they're looking like they're not gonna get home to their kids. You know what I mean? So a lot of women will, OK, let stuff happen. You know what I mean? They come way outside of their character or hyped and just do whatever they're told or whatever they want to. The stuff keeps going on and on and on and it doesn't change until somebody

gets some balls and says something. You know what I mean? But that is one of the biggest challenges.”

### Lack of Rehabilitation

The “Lack of Rehabilitation” has to do with what offenders perceive as a lack of rehabilitation in prisons and jails. Participant #6 shared, “At one time, the state of California had 33 institutions now they just put the stress onto county jails with realignment. I just got out from doing three and a half years in county jail and went straight to AB 109. I think they need to stop making this an industry and really put rehabilitation like they say they have.”

### Drugs

“Drugs” refers to the availability of illegal substances in prisons and jails and its correlation with recidivism. Participant #7 shared, “I felt isolated you know and uh...some of us keep going in and out because we really feel like we don’t have a purpose or we feel like it’s easier to break the law and try to survive and get what we want out of life just by breaking the law where it’s easier to sell drugs to make money or it depends on what aspect of life you’re coming from and what you’re doing, as for me, I sold drugs, I kept getting in trouble and that affected my whole surroundings, it affected everything.” Participant #14 shared, “The only thing I can say about SAP is the availability of drugs. But I see that problem, the drugs being available on the yard all day, as soon as you get out.”

## Out-of-Custody Programs

“Out-of-Custody Programs” are structured programs available or offered to offenders when they are released from prison or jail. Codes included lack of education/employment opportunities, availability of sober living environments and lower standards.

#### Lack of Education/Employment Opportunities

“Lack of Education/Employment Opportunities” refers to the absence of resources for offenders after they are released. Participant #17 shared, “I say your last three months of being released they should put you in a program like that, like a halfway house or something like that and to let you integrate, get back into the society and progress into it.”

#### Availability of Sober Living Environments

“Availability of Sober Living Environments” refers to offenders being able to have access to sober living homes after incarceration. Participant #17 shared, “I say your last three months of being released they should put you in a program like that, like a halfway house or something like that and to let you integrate, get back into the society and slowly progress into it.” Participant #8 shared, “They should have more halfway homes for people like us because we definitely feel left out. I don’t have a family, know what I mean?”

#### Lower Standards

“Lower Standards” refers to the desire for recidivist offenders to have more appropriate guidelines so that they qualify for programming and resources. Participant #12 shared, “Violence, strikes, gang points, validation, what your ‘C’

file is full of, so there needs to be, the bar needs to be set probably a little bit lower, to be honest with you, to help people that are the real recidivists that need the help to stop doing it because it's not to downplay what's it doing for people that are the low levels".

### Structure Needed

Many criminal offenders acknowledge that because of the framework within prison and jail there is a need for structure outside of institutions that is not necessarily available. The codes discussed were lack of boundaries, pride and ego, transition, separation and programming.

#### Lack of Boundaries

"Lack of Boundaries" refers to the absence of limitations once an offender is release from incarceration. Participant #11 shared, "I got to go to school, but this experience, the whole mental state of mind part, it was a little frustrating 'cause now I was like, state of mind to where I have boundaries."

#### Pride and Ego

"Pride and Ego" refers to the need for offenders to act and feel superior in order to survive a prison or jail stay. Those same types of behaviors outside of the institution can be detrimental in avoiding recidivism. Participant #11 shared, "If I get into an argument walking down the street with my family and you disrespect me in front of my family and I act on it that might be my last, that might be it so I got to figure out how to put my pride aside and get rid of this ego I have,

I established being in prison, it's hard, every day is hard. My tongue fell off a long time ago."

### Transition

"Transition" refers to the period just before release and the progression of the offender back into the community. Participant #12 shared, "So my reintegration, it has to include almost the exact same things that I got going on the inside. I have to have that. I do well under supervision. I do well with structure. I have to have it. It's unfortunate. It's where the institutionalization comes in. I have to have it or it doesn't work. That's the only way that I'm being able to get as far as where I'm at." Participant #17 shared, "I say your last three months of being released they should put you in a program like that, like a halfway house or something like that and to let you integrate, get back into the society and slowly progress into it."

### Separation

"Separation" refers to the possibility of some offenders returning to a new environment. Participant #10 shared, "I had to go to a whole new area and go to a program because if I were to go back to where I continued and was busted at it was a return to the cycle. I had to separate myself from the people, places and play things."

### Programming

"Programming" refers to what offenders identify as resources in the community. These programs assist the offender in following some order after

being released. Participant #15 shared, “I’m turning in 61 hours a week and I love it because it’s a program ya know. That’s the only reason I’m doing good, ‘cause I’m running a program. So I’m kind of scared, this is over in like four months, what’s gonna happen?”

### Negative Effects of Incarceration

There were many adverse consequences identified by participants throughout the study. This theme is meaningful because most offenders expressed some sort of negative consequence attached to their incarceration. Whether it was something they experienced or their family. “It was devastating...you’re stuck in a predicament you can’t get out of.” (Interviewee #7, page 1) Included in this theme are the codes; devastation and fear.

#### Devastation

One term stated by Interviewees #7 and #15 was “devastating”. Referring to what it feels like to be sent to prison and the impact on the individual serving the term as well as the family who is left to cope with the loss of their family member.

#### Fear

Interviewees #7 and #15 also agreed that fear was a feeling experienced prior to incarceration.

### Re-entry Into the Community

Once their term is complete, the offender is expected to return to their respective community and reintegrate. This theme includes the codes; don't belong, violations, lack of recovery,

### Don't Belong

Interviewee #7 felt like "a monster" after returning to his neighborhood. "I felt like I didn't belong there no more. I felt different. I felt isolated. We really feel like we don't have a purpose."

### Violations

"I violated 21 times". #7

## Positive Attributes of Parole and Probation

Despite the problematic issues discussed in this study, there were beneficial supports acknowledged by participants. These include; parole agent, structure and recovery programs.

### Parole and Probation

This code was chosen because Interviewee #13 stated about his parole agent, "I wanted help so I got sick and tired of it so I decided to tell my P.O. He's always been there for me", referring to the substance abuse treatment that was offered to participant. In addition, Interviewee #12 referred to being on probation, "...it's helping me better than parole...keeping me accountable immensely, a lot more than parole did".

## Data Interpretation

Some common unfavorable and negative feelings associated with incarceration that were discovered included feelings of fear, depression, devastation, being stuck and not being able to fulfill family roles and duties. Frequent feelings associated with returning to their communities after incarceration included feelings of inadequacy, a sense of not belonging, being different and isolated.

## Implications of Findings for Micro and/or Macro Practice

This research is important to the social work and criminal justice field so that a more comprehensive view of recidivism can be pursued. There are few studies that seek the opinions of criminal offenders in order to review legislature to reduce recidivism. It is hoped that data from this research will introduce the viewpoints of criminal offenders to help determine innovative approaches to reducing recidivism and re-dedicating the criminal justice system to habilitative and rehabilitative approaches. The criminal justice system has, for too long, dominated its approach with a focus on punishment and restitution. The social work profession has had limited impact on shaping criminal justice policies and assuming leadership roles in coordinating psychosocial service delivery throughout the nation's criminal justice system, (Wilson, 2010). This study will validate the need for the social work perspective to take the forefront in providing

treatment to criminal offenders which, in turn, will reduce recidivism that can have a direct correlation with reducing crime.

This project is advocated by the move towards an equitable approach :

The ethical challenge to social workers is to weigh the needs of the justice system against those of the offender. The social worker should take on the challenge by participating in legislative action to mold social policy to create a balance between the justice system and the offender. Thus, the social worker can help the justice system provide more effective services to the offender, their families, and their communities as professionals by participating in the process of public policy development. (Roberts & Springer, 2007, p. 46)

This paper will open the door for other research to create a more balanced approach and further support that the restoration of criminal offenders to law abiding citizens should be of primary concern once they are released from an institution. It is particularly important to understand the long-term outcomes of this population because nearly all offenders sentenced to prison will be released, most within three years of entry. Failure to consider the needs of offenders returning to the community and not taking their contribution into consideration may undermine the ultimate effectiveness of deterrence and incapacitation-based justice policy (Huebner, B., Varano, S. & Bynum, T. 2007). The importance of this subject within the fields of social work criminal justice is equal to the conviction of criminal offenders.

An estimated 95% of non-violent offenders released had an arrest history preceding the arrest which resulted in their imprisonment (Durose & Mumola 2004). This statistic represents the lack of attention paid to early offenders and juvenile offenders who may have not had the appropriate intervention at the most opportune time. This avenue of research may have a lasting impact on how recidivism is analyzed. As Huebner, Varano & Bynum (2007) discuss, offenders are often deserted from their families at the time of their release and unable to secure employment opportunities, which further increases the incentive to escape traditional society and find solace and affirmation in deviant subcultures.

Further research should place emphasis on criminal offender attitudes and the use of focus groups. Recidivism should also be viewed from the offender's perspective so that recidivism can be reduced and there can be an increase in opportunities for offenders to be productive and remain in the community. Innovative programs that can be implemented while the offender is not in violation that also enhance good standing on parole and probation are other areas that are underrepresented. Further investigation can develop or attract some possible implications for policy and practice within the United States and abroad.

## Summary

Chapter Four addressed the methods in which the data was evaluated and interpreted. The study contemplated that recidivism can be decreased using

the insights and input of criminal offenders. The researcher used the data collected from the focus group to establish codes which were developed into themes and finally refined into the theory of reducing recidivism with the input of the offender. The chapter described how the study was analyzed. How the researcher analyzed data was explained. Finally, implications for social work and criminal justice were discussed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

#### Introduction

Chapter five considers the termination and follow up process that was followed. It discusses, the process of disengagement from the study site and study participants and plans to disseminate the study finding to appropriate audiences.

#### Termination of Study

Participants were notified at the beginning of the focus group that the length of the group would be no more than two hours.

It was explained to participants that the study was designed to investigate the high rate of recidivism in the studied community. In this study we hypothesized that high recidivism rates are profoundly correlated with the lack of involvement and perspective of parolees and probationers in their reintegration; the focus group was designed with the goal of obtaining useful information in order to examine that hypothesis.

At the close of the session the researcher shared with participants his appreciation for their cooperation and provided a debriefing to the group that included reflecting on the focus group session, identifying strong points and

challenges and discussed opportunities for improvement should the study be followed up with.

It was shared with participants if they have any inquiries about the study or would like to obtain a copy of the group results, they are free to contact the researcher. Each participant was provided the phone numbers and email addresses of researcher and study site. It was important to provide contact information so that participants could access outcomes of the study and realize the importance of their participation for future considerations.

#### Communication of Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

An explanation of whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subject's rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related issue or injury to the subject, including the names of specific offices or persons and the telephone numbers/addresses to contact for answers to questions about the research subject's rights and the research study itself.

Distribution of the study's findings will include identifying the appropriate audience for the research findings and communicating the results to key players involved in the preparation of this study. The researcher will seek a theoretically informed approach for dissemination of the research. The audience includes parole and probation administration as well as Parole Agents and Deputy Probation Officers who have direct contact with the studied population. Other

interested parties can include Correctional Officers and Counselors who work with the population while they are in custody. Local parole and probation staff have weekly and monthly meetings where the researcher can present his findings and interact with staff for their respective offices. The Parole Agents Association of California provides a bi-monthly newsletter to all parole agents where the researcher can publish outcomes of the study. The county probation department prints a monthly newsletter that can also publish the results. Both parole and probation agencies have a website that can additionally share a link to the data.

#### Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

Participants were provided contact information for the researcher so that they could choose to remain in communication with him in order to access the qualitative research findings, continue potential participant involvement and provide credibility to the study by relaying outcomes of the study in a confidential manner.

#### Dissemination Plan

In developing the dissemination plan, the researcher considered the need to evaluate the success and outcome of the study versus the process of the research. The outcomes will be shared through presentations at local probation and parole offices as well as other key locations. Both printed and digital

resources outlining the study will be provided to interested parties. First, the outcomes will be provided via online link once data is accumulated, approximately 90 days after the study is complete.

The researcher will seek decision makers in reducing recidivism and speak with them in face-to-face meetings to discuss the study and its subject. Target audiences such as parolees and probationers will be concentrated on to take into account their attitudes and habits.

Specific audiences who can benefit from this information include all parole and probation employees along with prison and jail employees who provide face-to-face services to parolees and probationers. Service providers will find interest in the outcomes and benefit from the data by utilizing participants' responses and the study's overall evidence. Finally, the families of parolees and probationers may have the utmost interest in the outcome of the research as they are the immediate psychosocial support for participants once they are released from prison and jail.

## Summary

Chapter 5 discussed the termination and follow up between the researcher and participants. The communication of findings, termination and follow up between the researcher and participants was explained. The process in which the data of outcomes will be relayed and potential ongoing relationship between

participants and researcher was reviewed. Lastly, the dissemination plan was shared.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT



California State University, San Bernardino  
 Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
 APPROVED 3/11/14 VOID AFTER 3/15/14  
 IRB SW1151 CHAIR *[Signature]*

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
 School of Social Work

**INFORMED CONSENT**

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the reasons people on parole and probation return to prison and jail at a high rate (recidivism). This study is being conducted by Noe G. Gutierrez under the supervision of Dr. Laurie Smith, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-Committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to generate feedback from people on parole and probation to help determine some of the causes of high rates of return to prison and jail in the desert region of Riverside County.

**DESCRIPTION:** You will be asked a series of questions related to the topic of recidivism. Your answers are completely confidential and anonymous. You will not use your name in this research. You will be assigned a number. Once you have completed the questionnaire you will place it in a sealed envelope and the researcher will obtain your answers for research purposes only.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.

**ANONYMOUS:** Your participation in this study will remain anonymous. All of your questionnaires will be collected once you have completed them. Your name will not be used. A number will be assigned to each questionnaire. The questionnaires will be kept in a locked cabinet to which the researcher has the key. Once your answers are tallied, all questionnaires will be destroyed.

**DURATION:** It is expected that your participation in completing the survey will take between 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete. If you participate in the interview process, this will take no more than 30 minutes. The researcher will contact you prior to scheduling an interview.

**RISKS:** No foreseeable risks for participation in research noted.

**BENEFITS:** There are no direct benefits to the participants. Participants will be able to see how their input can influence how they are served and can make a positive impact on the parole and probation populations thus potentially reducing recidivism. Stakeholders can benefit through their active participation in the study process to better understand the viewpoints of parolees and probationers.

909.537.5501 - 909.537.7029

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University - Bakersfield - Channel Islands - Chico - Dominguez Hills - East Bay - Fresno - Fullerton - Humboldt - Long Beach - Los Angeles - Maritime Academy - Monterey Bay - Northridge - Pomona - Sacramento - San Bernardino - San Diego - San Francisco - San Jose - San Luis Obispo - San Marcos - Sonoma - Stanislaus

APPENDIX B  
IRB APPROVAL

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO**  
**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**  
*Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee*

Researcher(s) Noe G. Gutierrez  
Proposal Title Reducing Recidivism: people on parole & probation  
# SW1656

Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

.....  
Proposal is:

- approved
- to be resubmitted with revisions listed below
- to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- faculty signature missing
- missing informed consent  debriefing statement
- revisions needed in informed consent  debriefing
- data collection instruments missing
- agency approval letter missing
- CITI missing
- revisions in design needed (specified below)

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair Signature

3/16/2017  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

APPENDIX C  
FOCUS GROUP FLYER

# FOCUS GROUP

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## TOPIC OF REDUCING RECIDIVISM: *THE PEOPLE ON PAROLE & PROBATION PERSPECTIVE*

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LOOKING FOR INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS WITH A PRIOR PRISON TERM WHO ARE CURRENTLY ON PROBATION OR PAROLE OR HAVE COMPLETED THEIR TERMS AND CONDITIONS

---

### *WHAT IS A FOCUS GROUP?*

A FOCUS GROUP IS A FORM OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN WHICH A GROUP OF PEOPLE ARE ASKED ABOUT THEIR PERCEPTIONS, OPINIONS, BELIEFS, AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS A PRODUCT, SERVICE, CONCEPT, ADVERTISEMENT, IDEA, OR PACKAGING. QUESTIONS ARE ASKED IN AN INTERACTIVE GROUP SETTING WHERE PARTICIPANTS ARE FREE TO TALK WITH OTHER GROUP MEMBERS.

REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED

---

TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2017 12 PM &  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2017 5 PM

---

THE FOCUS GROUP IS PART OF A CONFIDENTIAL RESEARCH PROJECT BY  
**NOE C. GUTIERREZ,**  
A MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENT AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN BERNARDINO.

CONTACT NOE C. GUTIERREZ, FOCUS GROUP FACILITATOR, FOR MORE INFORMATION.  
PHONE: 760-345-0945  
EMAIL: PAROLE.PROBATION1STUDY@GMAIL.COM

APPENDIX D  
FOCUS GROUP  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## **Focus Group Interview Guide**

### **Reducing Recidivism: People on Parole & Probation**

#### **Purpose**

First, we want to thank all of you for taking the time to participate in this focus group discussion.

The purpose of this project is to generate feedback from people on parole and probation to help determine some of the causes of high rates of return to prison and jail in Riverside County with an emphasis on the Coachella Valley.

We are not here to “evaluate” your affiliation with parole or probation but rather to learn from your experience. By talking about these issues with you we hope to better understand how people on parole and probation cope with their release from incarceration, re-integration back into society and prevent a return to custody. I would like the results of these focus groups to help agencies and individuals on parole and probation to address the high rate of recidivism.

For this discussion, we’d like you to think about your experiences or reflect to the time you were on parole and/or probation. We’re interested in hearing from all of you in your own words about the challenges and successes in this process. You’ve all been asked to participate in this group based on your life experience and we expect that this discussion will last about 90 to 120 minutes.

The hypothesis is that the punitive approach to policing and monitoring of individuals on parole/probation is not working and lacks the impression of the population themselves. Many previous research projects on the subject of recidivism did not include the judgments of parolees/probationers.

It is anticipated that the outcome of the study will benefit all parolees/probationers by providing a voice to this population.

Local law enforcement agencies will gain new insight into recidivism and to a greater extent include parolees/probationers in developing methods to decrease recidivism.

#### **Informed consent**

The information you give me is completely confidential, and I will not associate your name with anything you say in the focus group.

I would like to tape the focus groups so that I can make sure to capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas I hear from the group. No names will be attached

to the focus groups and the tapes will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed.

You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at anytime.

I understand how important it is that this information is kept private and confidential. I will ask participants to respect each other's confidentiality.

If you have any questions now or after you have completed the focus group, you can always contact me by phone (760) 485-0948 or email [parole.probation.study@gmail.com](mailto:parole.probation.study@gmail.com)

Please place an 'X' on the lines on page 2 of the Informed Consent form to show you agree to participate and be recorded in this focus group.

### **Introduction:**

#### **1. Welcome**

Introduce myself and send the sheet with a few demographic questions around to the group while I introduce the focus group.

Review the following:

Who I am and what I am trying to do

What will be done with this information?

Why I asked you to participate.

The information discussed in this group is confidential. Outside of this group, please do not discuss any information shared by anyone else in the group in any way that would enable anyone else to identify that person or his or her family. Please keep this information in this room.

Explain parking, restrooms and refreshments.

Materials available for review

#### **2. Explanation of the process and procedure**

Ask the group if anyone has participated in a focus group before. Explain that focus groups are being used more and more often in health and human services research.

##### **About the focus groups:**

A focus group is a relaxed discussion

I learn from you (positive and negative)

We are not trying to achieve consensus, I am gathering information

No virtue in long lists: I'm looking for priorities

In this project, I am facilitating focus group discussions. The reason for using this tool is that I can get more in-depth information from a smaller group of people in focus groups. This allows me to understand the context behind the answers given in a focus group.

Outcomes of the sessions and qualitative data gathered will be collected and evaluated for content and themes.

All data (note pads) and informed consent forms gathered will be sealed after receipt and no names will be used. After the data is collected it will be temporarily stored in a locked cabinet at the site of the study where only the researcher has access to the key. All precautions will be taken to protect the identity of all participants involved. Participants will be reminded periodically during the focus groups of the confidential and voluntary nature of the study and to not discuss the study with any future potential participants. All paper data will be destroyed once it is collected in aggregate form and stored on a password sensitive file that only the researcher has access to

I will be taking notes and tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. I explained these procedures to you when we set up this meeting. As you know everything is confidential. No one will know who said what. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. However, I would appreciate it if only one person did talk at a time. The discussion will last approximately one hour. There is a lot I want to discuss, so at times I may move us along a bit.

The researcher will provide note pads and pencils/pens for participants for the purpose of writing any thoughts or ideas that may come up for them during the process. Participants will also be asked to use the pad if there are any additional comments about the subject or any other issue.

That concludes our focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with me. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments will be very helpful.

At the conclusion of the focus group I have a short evaluation form that I would like you to fill out. If you have additional information that you did not get to say in the focus group, please feel free to write it on this evaluation form.

### **Logistics**

Each focus group is not to exceed two hours

Feel free to move around and stretch

Where is the bathroom? Emergency exits?

Help yourself to refreshments

### **3. Ground Rules**

Ask the group to suggest some ground rules. After they brainstorm some, make sure the following are on the list.

Everyone is encouraged to participate.

Remind participants that information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential

Stay with the group and please don't have side conversations

Turn off cell phones if possible

### **4. Turn on Tape Recorder**

**Ask the group if there are any questions before we get started, and address those questions.**

APPENDIX E  
FOCUS GROUP  
QUESTIONNAIRE

## **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Demographics**

What is your gender?

How old are you?

What is your Race/ethnicity?

What is your current level of education?

What is your current employment status?

What is your current living situation?

What is your current transportation status?

When were you incarcerated and what length of time did you spend in prison?

Please list each term.

How long have you been out of prison?

How long were you or how much longer are you on parole/probation?

### **QUESTIONS**

- 1) What was it like for you when you went to prison?
- 2) What kinds of challenges did you experience in prison?
- 3) What kinds of supportive services were offered to you while you were in prison?
- 4) What was it like when you returned to the community?
- 5) What types of challenges did you experience when you returned to the community?
- 6) What types of support were offered to you when you returned to the community?
- 7) How do you define reintegration into the community from prison?
- 8) How would you describe your mental health before you returned to the community?

- 9) How did your mental health change while you were reintegrating into the community?
- 10) Which behavioral health or other services have you been referred to?
- 11) What kind of behavioral health or other services did you receive?
- 12) What kinds of barriers did you experience when accessing behavioral health or other services?
- 13) Is there anything else that you would like to say, good, bad, or indifferent about incarceration and/or reintegration?
- 14) Why does recidivism continue to be a problem in your eyes?
- 15) What has worked for you with regard to reintegrating?
- 16) What is missing for you to avoid returning to custody?
- 17) What have been or are your struggles after/since being released from prison?
- 18) What are the necessary resources you believe you need most?

Developed by Noe Gutierrez

APPENDIX F  
FOCUS GROUP  
MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

### Materials and supplies for focus groups

- Consent forms
- Evaluation sheets, one for each participant
- Pads & pencils for each participant
- Focus Group Discussion Guide for Facilitator
- 1 recording device
- Batteries for recording device
- Extra tapes for recording device
- Permanent marker for marking tapes with focus group name, facility, and date
- Notebook for note-taking
- Refreshments

APPENDIX G  
FOCUS GROUP  
EVALUATION FORM

## Focus Group Evaluation Form

If you have additional information that you did not get to say in the focus group, please feel free to write it on this evaluation form.

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