

Evidence Based Practices For Correctional Re-Entry Programs That Reduce Recidivism

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Evidence Based Practices For Correctional Re-Entry Programs That Reduce Recidivism

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to recommend reentry strategies for adult male offenders that show promise to reduce recidivism. Reducing recidivism is a primary goal of corrections as it addresses mental health and addiction-based issues, improves public safety, reduces economic burdens, and prevents future victimizations in communities. By utilizing evidence-based practices, there is a better chance of reducing recidivism. However, not all correctional institutions use evidence-based practices (Dummermuth, 2019). With a public emphasis on police reform and correctional budgets, the significance of the study is providing options for policymakers and the future role of corrections.

Methods

The research method used for this paper is a review of research related to reentry programs. It will review current practices and programs in correctional institutions at the county, state, and federal levels. It will also review evaluations that have been done on programs related to reentry. Sources will include peer-reviewed journals, books, and governmental websites related to this topic. Strain theory is used to help ground the recommendations.

Key Findings

Evidence-based programming focusing on reentry and successful reintegration is highly important to reducing recidivism. With individual assessments such as the PATTERN and MnSTARR 2.0, corrections can identify personalized programs focusing on education, mental health, and substance abuse. Initiatives such as the Second Chance Pell Grant recognizes the importance of education for offenders along with Cognitive Behavior Therapy and the

Residential Drug Abuse Program for mental health and drug abuse issues. Specialized mental health and drug courts divert nonviolent offenders from the correctional setting while decreasing recidivism and the financial burdens of incarceration. However, once released, there is still an increased need for halfway houses with improved supervision for successful integration back into communities.

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Section 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Recidivism rates in the United States are high. In 2020, there were approximately six million individuals under the supervision of the adult correctional system in the United States (Kluckow & Zeng, 2022). While the correctional population decreased by 22.4% from 2010 to 2020, there is a significant disproportion of inmates compared to other nations. Incarceration rates result from changes in policy and underlying issues such as mental illness, lack of education, and drug or alcohol addictions (Kluckow & Zeng, 2022).

Although correctional facilities provide various reentry programs and resources, there is limited success for inmates' transitioning from the correctional to the community setting resulting in increased recidivism rates. Current reentry programs tend to focus on policy rather than a person-centered approach. With a person-centered approach, the correctional system can utilize evidence-based practices that promote the overall reduction of recidivism.

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2022), defines recidivism as a criminal's relapse into criminal behaviors within three years following their release for a previous crime.

According to the National Institute of Justice (2022) the most common post-release offenses from most to least prevalent were property, drug, public order, and violence-based crimes.

Rydberg and Clark (2016) noted that over the past few decades, political and policy changes to incarceration have led to increased levels of recidivism by offenders. Compared with prior decades, male offenders convicted of violent and nonviolent crimes are experiencing longer prison sentences before they are released. Violent offenders' sentences increased by 150% and 26% for nonviolent offenders from 2002 to 2012, respectively. Additionally, more than three-quarters of the individuals incarcerated in the United States are sentenced to two years or less.

(Rydberg & Clark, 2016). Despite increased prison sentences, recidivism rates in 2012 were 50%, with rates in 2022 at 68%. Felons are also rearrested on average five times once released from prison (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

Increased prison sentence lengths are not necessarily associated with decreased recidivism (Barnett & Fitzalan, 2018). Longer prison sentences have negatively impacted those incarcerated by making them more susceptible to recidivism. Susceptibility to recidivism originates from a lack of proper risk assessments such as the PATTERN or the MnSTARR 2.0, which recommend specialized programming for education, addiction, or mental health areas. When looking at recidivism, it is essential to distinguish between violent and nonviolent offenders, as the rates vary. Hausam et al. (2020) identified recidivism rates of violent and nonviolent male offenders at 25.7% and 38.5%, respectively. As highlighted, recidivism rates are high despite correctional facilities providing various reentry programs and resources. As such, the focus of this paper is to provide a review of evidence-based practices for an ideal reentry program for male offenders as they transition back into the community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to recommend reentry strategies for adult male offenders that show promise to reduce recidivism. Reducing recidivism is a primary goal of corrections as it addresses mental health and addiction-based issues, improves public safety, reduces economic burdens, and prevents future victimizations in communities. By utilizing evidence-based practices, there is a better chance of reducing recidivism. However, not all correctional institutions use evidence-based practices (Dummermuth, 2019). With a public emphasis on police reform and correctional budgets, the significance of the study is providing options for policymakers and the future role of corrections.

Significance of the Study

Recidivism in communities increases the chances of victimization while also placing a financial burden on the taxpayers. Evidence-based practices show that providing more mental health and addiction-based programming while offenders serve their sentences with additional resources and assistance once released can reduce recidivism (National Institute of Justice, 2022). Typically, post-release felons encounter additional obstacles and issues, such as housing, education, employment, and child care. Utilizing evidence-based practices within corrections saves, on average, \$1.47 to \$5.27 per dollar spent by taxpayers with the reduction in crime costs and long-term incarceration sentences (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018). As such, this paper will provide recommendations for more effective practices around the reentry of offenders.

Methods

The method used for this paper is a review of research related to reentry programs. It will review current practices and programs in correctional institutions at the county, state, and federal levels. It will also review evaluations that have been done on programs related to reentry. Sources will include peer-reviewed journals, books, and governmental websites related to this topic.

Limitations

The research used in this study is limited in scope to only that which is publicly available. There is also limited data on recently implemented reentry programs since recidivism is most likely to occur within the first five years of being released. Finally, original research is not being conducted, and with the recent pandemic, unpredictable societal changes to incarceration are not factored into current data.

Section 2: Literature Review

The literature review is divided into six sections. The first section defines recidivism and how it is calculated with the nuances associated with its high rates. The next section discusses current recidivism rates and patterns. This is followed by a review of inmate statistics and their associated crimes. The next section identifies risk assessment tools. The final section outlines some examples of evidence-based programs that have been shown to reduce recidivism.

Definition of Terms

The definition of recidivism used for this paper is from the National Institute of Justice (2022) and defines it as a criminal's relapse into criminal behaviors with an additional conviction within three years following their release for a previous crime. Determining recidivism, however, cannot solely rely on arrest data since it is not as accurate since not all crimes are reported. Along with arrest data, researchers can include interview data with offenders pre or post-release and look at additional offenses post-programming or treatment. This statistical method is more sensitive since the measurement definitions are loosely defined between different programs. One program may have stricter supervision post-release hence impacting post-program relapse and recidivism. For simplicity, the literature review will review arrest data to measure recidivism.

The NIJ (2022) also defines reentry as the transition of offenders from prisons or jails back into the community. As a result of failed reentry measured by recidivism, crime burdens communities, diminishes quality of life, and results in property losses, medical expenses, and victimization through crime (National Institute of Justice, 2022). Ultimately communities pay the price for crime in the form of declining property prices, decreased corporate investment, and missed employment opportunities (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

Current Recidivism Rates and Patterns

Federal inmates in the United States have access to correctional programming, which offers a wide range of treatments, including education, mental health care, and drug rehab. According to Duwe (2017), the literature typically uses four outcome metrics to evaluate the success of correctional programming offered to inmates. The four outcomes for inmates are misconduct or a failure to follow prison rules, recidivism, post-release employment, cost avoidance or financial gain that results from reducing crime. Overall, recidivism is the most commonly used for gauging programming since it is easily quantifiable but takes time to evaluate.

The United States has some of the highest recidivism rates in the world. The correctional system manages 25% of the inmates worldwide, which among many things, is a significant financial burden. For federal inmates, there is a 44.9% chance that a felon will get rearrested within the first five years post-release (The United States Sentencing Commission, 2020). Once rearrested, felons have a 26.0% chance of getting reconvicted, and 24.6% of those convicted will serve an additional prison sentence of varying length. Compared with state recidivism, the rearrest rates are significantly higher, with 76.6% of felons released from state prison getting rearrested during the same period. Fifty-five-point four percent of those rearrested will get another conviction, and 28.2% will serve an additional prison sentence (The United States Sentencing Commission, 2020).

There are some common trends indicated by re-offense rates once released from prison. The first trend is that felons over the age of 40 recidivate at 36.3%, while felons 24 years and younger recidivate at 64% (Vigne, 2021). Another trend is that most of those rearrested commit some form of public offense crime such as disorderly conduct, driving under the influence, or a

weapons violation (Vigne, 2021). These public crimes accounted for 54% of all recidivism with the offenders between federal and state inmates. While public crimes were the most common, original prior convictions correlate with recidivism. However, rates of recidivism are not indicative of the original conviction. Individuals that committed murder were 41.3% likely to recidivate within five years compared to 78.3% of individuals that committed a property crime (Vigne, 2021).

The United States Sentencing Commission (2020) reviewed federal offenders to learn more about the connection between prison time and recidivism. What the United States Sentencing Commission (2020) found was that the time incarcerated and recidivism was measured based on a felon committing another crime once released. A felon's likelihood of committing another crime once released was linked to their initial sentencing length and had three potential associations such as deterrent, criminogenic, and no association once released. The Commission discovered a statistically significant deterrence impact for offenders sentenced to more than 60 months. The Commission found no statistically significant effects impacting recidivism for criminals who received sentences of 60 months or less. Therefore, the Commission concluded that 60 months or less imprisonment had no criminogenic or deterrent impact.

The United States Sentencing Commission (2020) also investigated sentences of varying lengths to understand recidivism rates better. Offenders who had served more than 120 months in prison were found to have a statistically significant deterrent association between imprisonment and recidivism. Specifically, felons serving sentences of more than 120 months were 30% less likely to recidivate than those serving sentences of less time. Offenders who served 60 to 120 months in prison were shown to have a statistically significant deterrent association between

imprisonment and recidivism. However, the decrease in recidivism was only 17% once released.

The significant implication of prison length and recidivism is that most felons receive a 2.6-year sentence in state prisons and the majority of inmates serve less than a 4-year sentence in federal custody (Kaeble, 2021). The United States Sentencing Commission (2020) identified that sentences of less than 60 months had no significant impact in deterring recidivism, and sentences of 60-120 months only decreased the likelihood of recidivism by 17%. Considering these statistics, it is no surprise that most nonviolent criminals have additional offenses after their initial release since there was no association with deterring recidivism.

Overview of the Inmate Population

A staggering number of people are currently housed by the correctional system in the United States. The United States has 102 federal prisons, 1,566 state prisons, 2,850 local jails, 1,510 juvenile facilities, 82 native county jails, and 186 immigration detention facilities. With a combined housing capacity, there are almost 2 million people managed by correctional facilities between various levels of government. Although correctional facilities manage 2 million felons, a significant number of individuals fall under the United States' justice control. There are 2.9 million people on probation, with an additional 820,000 on parole (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022). While a small percentage of individuals will serve a life sentence in prison, most inmates will have less than a three-year sentence. While budgets for prisons have increased by 70% over the past 20 years, the United States spent over \$270 billion, 1.4% of GDP, on paying for the criminal justice system and maintaining prisons (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018). In 2016, the average yearly cost of incarceration was \$32,805 per person.

Federal

In 2022 the federal government has 209,000 inmates under federal custody. Further, there are 64,000 individuals under the U.S Marshals' control and not currently convicted of any crimes. The crimes these individuals are currently housed for other offenses (26,000), drugs (21,000), and immigration (16,000). The remaining 145,000 individuals have all been convicted and sentenced for their crimes. The felons currently housed by the Bureau of Prisons are 67,000 for drugs, 59,000 for public order, 11,000 for violent crimes, 7,000 for property crimes, and the remaining 1,000 for other crimes (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022)

Inmates housed in federal custody have varying sentence types and sentence lengths. A majority of the inmates strictly have a prison-only sentence (77.4%), probation only (14.1%), probation/community confinement (4.7%), or prison/community split sentence (3.9%). For the inmates that receive a prison-only sentence, their lengths of time served are up to 6 months (5.1%), 6-11 months (3.7%), one year (17.8%), 2-4 years (39.0%), 5-9 years (22.1%), and ten years or more (12.3%). As identified by the current trend, most inmates serve a sentence of fewer than four years (65.6%) (The United States Sentencing Commission, 2020).

State

At the state level, in 2022, there are 1,042,000 inmates housed at the various 1,566 facilities. Of these, 606,000 inmates committed violent crimes. In order from the highest prevalence, these crimes are rape/sexual assault (143,000), assault (141,000), murder (139,000), robbery (129,000), and manslaughter (16,000). There are 159,000 inmates housed for property crimes from burglary (86,000), theft (32,000), other crimes (17,000), fraud (16,000) and car theft (9,000). The following common crime at the state level was drug-related offenses, with 146,000

inmates. The two most common types of drug charges were other crimes (106,000) and drug possession (40,000). Finally, there are 124,000 inmates with a public order crime. The crimes identified were other crimes (64,000), weapons (42,000) and driving under the influence (18,000). There were also 8,000 inmates convicted of crimes that were not characterized (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022).

In one study (Kaeble, 2021), 44 states were analyzed for the average length of incarceration by crime committed. On average, both violent and nonviolent crimes resulted in a 6.7-year prison sentence. Specifically, violent crimes were 10.8 years, drug crimes were 5.2 years, property crimes were 4.9 years, and public order crimes were 4.4 years. However, most felons only served 44% of their initial sentence before being released. With the average time served from their initial sentence, most state prison inmates served 2.6 years.

Local

In 2022 at local jails, there are 547,000 inmates currently housed in the United States. Four hundred forty-five thousand individuals at local jails have not been convicted of their crimes. During the pretrial period, the individuals locked up are not convicted of their crimes but awaiting trial. The main reason is that the average bail in the United States is \$10,000, representing eight months of income from the regular person housed in those facilities. If the individuals could afford the bail, they could await their trial outside of correctional facilities. The crimes for non-convicted individuals were violent (141,000), drug (113,000), property (111,000), public order (78,000), and other crimes (2,000). The 103,000 that are convicted of their crimes are for public order (31,000), property (25,000), drug (24,000), violent (22,000), and other crimes (1,000) (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022).

Juvenile

Juveniles account for the smallest percentage of people currently housed in the United States correctional system, at 36,000 inmates. There are 2,200 individuals housed for “status” crimes. These crimes are not necessarily violations of the law but rather issues dealing with running away, incorrigibility, or truancy. For those convicted for their crimes, there are crimes against a person (17,200), property (9,900), public order (5,700), and drugs (25,000). A significant number of juveniles are confined due to technical violations (8,100) with their prior sentencing restrictions (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022).

Recidivism Demographics

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (2022) provides monthly statistics of their released inmates. On October 31, 2022, the Bureau of Prisons released 2,988 inmates throughout the 102 institutions. The released demographics by race were White (57.6%), Black (38.4%), Native American (2.6%), and Asian (1.5%). The ethnicity of the inmates was 69.8% non-Hispanic and 30.2% Hispanic. There have been 1,157,266 inmates released from federal custody since 1992, and the recently released inmates' statistics reflected the current recidivism statistics.

Antenangeli and Durose (2021) examined the post-release offending habits of former inmates. There were 409,300 felons released across 24 states in 2008, and the researchers randomly analyzed 73,600 felons released over 10 years. Of the total inmates released, 89% of the inmates were men. From the sample, Whites (40%) were the majority of those released from prison in 2008, followed by Blacks (37%) and Hispanics (21%). Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and other races made up around 1% of

the released felons. A majority of the released inmates ages were between 25 to 39 (50%), with ages 40 or older (34%), and a median age of 34 (Antenangeli & Durose, 2021).

During the first year after release, Blacks and Hispanics were arrested at 45% and 44%, respectively, with white felons arrested at 40%. White felons (72%) and Hispanic felons (73%) had comparable cumulative arrest percentages after five years of being released, whereas the figure for black felons was 79%. By the conclusion of the 10-year follow-up in 2018, recidivism rates for Black (86%), White (80%), and Hispanic felons (79%) (Antenangeli & Durose, 2021).

Federal Reform Efforts

The First Step Act was passed in 2018 and replaced the Formerly Incarcerated Reenter Society Transformed Safely Transitioning Every Person Act. The First Step Act was directed at addressing prison reform in the United States and decreasing the inmate populations of federal prisons. There are three major components of the First Step Act. First, the law addressed evidence-based practices and the need for individual risk and needs assessments for recommended program-specific treatment. Next, the law changed the penalties for some federal offenses and mandatory sentencing. Lastly, the First Step Act reauthorized the Second Chance Act of 2007, which aid in the reentry of offenders back into the community (The Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022).

The First Step Act established guidelines for prison reform and reentry programs to improve effective reentry into society and lower recidivism to address the high cost of crime (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018). The regulations implemented examined current incentives for reentry program participation and established rewards for successful program completion in prison. The federal system sought to encourage effective programs with evaluated evidence-based reentry initiatives. The initiatives assessed individual risk and ensured that all

prisoners had access to recidivism reduction programs that fit their requirements. Initiatives also expanded prisoner access-to-work programming so that all qualified convicts could acquire the necessary employment skills to transition back into society after release (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018). By utilizing public funds to decrease crime, improve public safety, and encourage the successful reentry of offenders, the principles also sought to improve the lives of all Americans while avoiding the wasteful spending of tax dollars on ineffective policies.

Since the First Step Act prison reform, there have been several trends observed. The reform's initial impacts allowed judges to implement a reduced sentence from the required minimums. The reform empowers the judicial system by enabling judges and their discretion with options for the offenders. The options for the offenders focus on rehabilitation during incarceration rather than punishment. Before the First Step Act was passed, only 75% of inmates completed programming since there were minimal incentives to reduce sentencing and further fuel recidivism (Grawert, 2020).

The First Step Act also addressed The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 and its forward-going sentencing. The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 reduced the 100:1 disparity to 18:1 but did not revisit crimes or convictions before it was enacted. After the First Step Act was enacted, the federal prison sentence was reduced by 5,000 felons overnight, with these considerations put into motion (Grawert, 2020). Currently, the policies have reduced prison populations by 15% from 2018 to 2020. However, with COVID-19 and the declaration of a health crisis, prison populations have also decreased by an additional 11%. They have since maintained a 16% decrease over the last several months (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022).

Risk Assessments

Once an inmate is in federal custody, a risk and needs assessment (RNA) tool identifies that individual's likelihood of violating a penal violation code and the likelihood of recidivating once released (National Institute of Justice, 2021). The RNA provides the Bureau of Prisons with restrictions, support, and programming options. It is important to note that the Bureau of Prisons is not the only agency that utilizes the RNA, as do other governmental agencies at the local and state levels.

The recently updated RNA that The First Step Act utilizes with the person-centered approach was the Prisoner Assessment Tool Targeting Estimated Risk and Needs (PATTERN), which was adopted in December 2018. The PATTERN accounts for 15 variables predicting males' general and violent recidivism. The tool provided an assessment and could recommend resources for psychological issues or chemical dependency while incarcerated. In December 2021, the annual report released by the NIJ found that the PATTERN displayed a high level of accuracy when predicting recidivism (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

While the Bureau of Prisons has updated its RNA tools, there is a need for other levels of government and correctional facilities to develop their current assessment tools. As other levels of government review their current tools for their facilities, a general principle must be replicated when updating their instruments. The RNA, known explicitly as the PATTERN that the federal government utilizes, follows four fundamental principles that support its overall success. The principles used by the RNA are fairness, efficiency, effectiveness, and communication (National Institute of Justice, 2021).

The first principle of the RNA, which is fairness, must account for ethnic and racial disparities. While accounting for these disparities, any biases must be removed to ensure a

person-centered approach for the incarcerated individual. Individuals needing specific programming the most will receive the treatment based on their needs. Fairness of the RNA ensures that more program outcomes are achieved and recidivism is reduced (National Institute of Justice, 2021).

The second principle for RNA instruments is efficiency. Efficiency considers demographics, risk factors, program participation, and criminal history. This portion of the RNA should be automated since background information of offenders often leads to biased scoring and subjectivity. Manual calculations for individual RNA should be utilized with computer-assisted scoring methods. Efficiency for determining the RNA ensures fairness while reducing the required resources and staffing (National Institute of Justice, 2021).

The last two principles of RNA are effectiveness and improved communication. Effectiveness involves updated and advanced statistical analysis based on research that involves data science and predictive analysis. With improved technologies that are machine computed, they can include data from multiple sources that include local and state jurisdictions that are geographically more accurate. The machine-computed algorithms, there is increased accuracy and reduced manual human error. Finally, improved communication improves information between correctional staff and inmates. The inmates know the clear incentives to their programming, which improves their involvement and reduces recidivism with the learned risks (National Institute of Justice, 2021).

Some states, however, have implemented effective programs that have indicated their success in preventing recidivism. In November 2016, Minnesota adopted the Minnesota Screening Tool Assessing Recidivism Risk 2.0 (MnSTARR 2.0), which is utilized for every inmate it houses. The MnSTARR 2.0 is a gender-specific recidivism risk assessment that is fully

automated based on the inmates' responses. The areas considered by the program are offense type, prior convictions, age, marital status, length of sentence, education, number of prior prison sentences, and severity of the offense. The tool provides static and dynamic items while measuring changes in state corrections. While the MnSTARR 2.0 is not a needs assessment, it predicts recidivism by prioritizing correction intervention resources (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2020).

Research conducted by Duwe (2021) validated the accuracy of MnSTARR 2.0, reaffirming the importance of the program's accuracy when predicting the recidivism of Minnesota inmates. Duwe (2021) reviewed the data of 8,977 individuals screened by MnSTARR 2.0 and released after their sentence. He determined that while the MnSTARR 2.0 typically classifies individuals at a higher risk for recidivating, the program was consistent with the observed individuals who reoffended once released. The result indicates the importance of MnSTARR 2.0 and providing correctional intervention resources.

Effective Programming

There are many different types of programming that has been provided to inmates, with some of the most common being those that center around education, mental health, and drug treatment. The following reviews some of the evidence related to the impact these are having on recidivism.

Education

Education initiatives often aim to assist convicts in achieving high school level aptitude since more than 40% of jail inmates have less than a high school education, and over a fifth have a learning disability. Although there are now 16,000 inmates registered in GED classes through

the federal system, there is a sizable wait list for these courses. According to the Bureau of Prisons (2022), one reason there is a sizable waitlist is that inmates that do not have a General Education Development (GED) or high school diploma must participate in a literacy program. The programming lasts a minimum of 240 hours or until they earn their GED. Additionally, any non-English speaking inmates must participate in programming that helps teach them English as a second language.

Inmates may be given a chance to continue their education through secondary and post-secondary education programs or to enroll in vocational education programs where they may obtain job-related skills. Institutions offer more advanced educational opportunities but are limited by specific facilities (Dick et al., 2016). Educational initiatives have had conflicting results related to reducing recidivism but it is necessary to continue working on improving assessment procedures established for educational evidence-based action (CEP, 2017).

Yoon (2019) studied the various benefits of GED and post-secondary education for incarcerated individuals. On average, individuals who complete educational programming while incarcerated were 48% less likely to recidivate compared with their peers who do not complete any educational programming. In comparison, multiple states, such as New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Texas, demonstrated a reduction in recidivism by 96%, 95%, 94%, and 92.2%, respectively. One issue with reducing recidivism was the standardization of programming for other states to replicate since these percentages vary by education type and length of programming. However, with the reduction in recidivism, it is proposed to reduce correctional funding by \$365.8 million yearly.

The U.S Department of Education (2021) expanded the Second Chance Pell Grant during the 2022-2023 school year which provides federal financial aid to felons who want a secondary

education. A pilot year took place in 2015 with over 22,000 participants during the academic, fiscal year, with only a 5.6% recidivism rate for the participants that completed their program. For the 2022-2023 fiscal year, 200 colleges and universities are enrolled in the Pell Grant, and 131 are currently participating in the Second Chance Pell Grant.

Mental Health

Mental health issues are an additional factor in recidivism with individuals incarcerated. It is proposed that one in four inmates serving a sentence has some form of mental illness (The Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022). More specifically, federal and state custody inmates receive mental health care at 34% and 26%, respectively. However, once released, 75% of felons diagnosed with a mental illness stop taking their medications within 18 months after release. There are various reasons why they stop their treatment plans, however, it typically stems from their inability to afford their medications, degraded family support, or lack of direct supervision once released (Link & Stansfield, 2019).

Once the United States government implemented the First Step Act, there was a significant overhaul of the staff involved with psychological services. Each facility under the Bureau of Prisons has a chief psychologist responsible for ensuring all inmates' essential services and mental health screening. Mental health treatment coordinators work directly with the Chief Psychologists of each facility and manage inmates with mental health illnesses as a doctor specializing in psychology. The psychologists and nurse practitioners monitor and interact with the inmates daily, ensuring the treatment plans are adhered to based on the higher guidance. All staff also receive training on mental health as a part of annual training and the yearly requirements. The knowledge of mental health and indicators helps all the staff understand mental health with its underlying issues (The Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022).

The First Step Act supports 14 new programs that aid individuals with mental health issues. The programs vary by institution and length, but promote the awareness and needs of the inmates identified in the PATTERN assessment. The programs are basic cognitive skills, Challenge Program, cognitive processing therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, emotional self-regulation, female integrated treatment, foundation, illness management and recovery, mental health step down, Residential Drug Abuse Program (RDAP), Resolve Program, Seeking Safety, Skills Program, Social Skills Training, Steps Toward Awareness, Growth, and Emotional Strength. The two programs discussed in depth are the basic cognitive skill and RDAP since they are the most common in the Bureau of Prisons.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) utilizes psychologists that restructure the thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals dealing with substance abuse and violent crimes. The current research by Feucht and Holt (2016) suggests that psychologists can impact some inmates' poor cognitive behavior. However, the program review noted that CBT was more effective in treating juveniles when compared with adult offenders. Additionally, CBT was most effective when dealing with adult sex offenders but ineffective in treating domestic abuse offenders.

In juveniles, CBT has significantly improved problematic behaviors that have resulted in criminal deviance (Feucht & Holt, 2016). Anger in juveniles often results in violence and antisocial behaviors, which is a behavior disorder. CBT for juveniles redirects how they experience anger, reduces aggressive mannerisms and improves social functioning. Typically CBT for these types of disorders requires 2 hours to one year of treatment to restructure cognitive abilities and problematic biases and modify and rehearse appropriate behaviors, which reduces the individual's stress impacting aggressive mannerisms. The three categories the CBT

has improved in juveniles that have resulted in a decrease in recidivism are aggression, anger experience, and self-control (National Institute of Justice, 2019).

In adults, CBT has effectively treated adults suffering from a deficiency in social competencies and problem-solving abilities according to the NIJ (2019). Typically sex offenders suffer from these mental disorders however CBT has had promising results in addressing these behaviors. CBT for these illnesses redirects impulses, moral reasoning, social perspective-taking, flexible thinking, and critical reasoning. The treatments typically require 16-300 hours and are delivered in correctional, medical, and community settings. Overall the CBT for adult offenders has reduced the recidivism of sex offender participants by 18.2% (National Institute of Justice, 2019).

Drug Programming

About half of all crimes committed at the federal level in the United States are linked to drugs (The Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) recorded 107,622 drug overdoses in 2021, and sixty percent of convicts are said to struggle with alcohol or drug use (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018). Although all federal convicts get substance addiction therapy while jailed, just 24% of them have an official diagnosis of a substance abuse disease. According to the research by The Council of Economic Advisers (2018), the most effective treatment plans address inmates' mental illness and substance abuse issues. Drug addiction programs reduce recidivism by 17% and mental health programs by about 21% using treatment (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018). Another effective diversion around the correctional system is the use of drug courts. Drug courts provide a person-centered approach for nonviolent offenders with a structured treatment plan for sobriety.

While the CBT program addresses dysfunctional cognitive processing, Residential Drug Abuse Program (RDAP) works with inmates while incarcerated with chemical dependency. Since nonviolent chemical male offenders are more susceptible to recidivism after incarceration than violent offenders, there is an increased need for intervention. Of all inmates who enter Federal custody, approximately 40% suffer from moderate to severe chemical dependency (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). The RDAP is a 500-hour volunteer-based program with proven results for preventing recidivism. Compared to inmates with known chemical dependency, there is a 16% improvement in recidivism for inmates participating in the program. There is also an incentive for completing the program since it can reduce the length of a nonviolent offender's prison sentence by 12 months. Even though more than half of convicts fit the requirements for substance usage, less than 10% of prisoners receive drug treatment.

Aversion therapy, drug testing, drug counseling, and relapse prevention trainings are a few more particular treatment services or behavioral change strategies that inmates with substance abuse may employ (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018). However, unlike CBT, which focuses on trauma and mental illnesses, motivational interviewing is utilized in conjunction with treatment plans. Motivational interviewing is a four-step process that includes engaging, focusing, evoking, and planning with the individuals receiving treatment. The individuals that receive treatment build self-motivation and commitment to their sobriety. Motivational interviewing is effective when implemented correctly with additional programs such as CBT.

Specialized Courts

Another evidence-based program that reduces recidivism uses specialized courts such as drug and mental health courts. Other courts, such as homelessness, prostitution, and domestic

violence, have also been experimented with but are not as readily utilized. Specialized courts focus on certain criminals and specific demographics based on evidence-based practices that have been proven to reduce recidivism (National Safety Council, 2019).

Drug Courts

Drug courts hold offenders accountable for treatment plans diverting them around the correctional system. Drug courts, however, are primarily for persistent drug users that are nonviolent offenders. After the individual is arrested for their crime, they must plead guilty during the sentencing process. They must also agree to their length of sentence, which ranges from one to three years if they fail out of the program. The individual checks in with the court during the first month after sentencing and every two weeks after. The case manager assigned to the addict then reviews their living situation, family support, criminal history, and drug choices. With the basic information collected, the case manager provides treatment program options while improving the areas lacking in the addict's life. If the individual has four consecutive issue free sanctioned months, they are permitted to continue in the program, all while receiving regular drug and alcohol testing (National Institute of Justice, 2019).

A review by the NIJ (2022) showed that drug courts reduced recidivism rates by 28% and 15% in two different groups in Oregon. On average, drug courts saved \$6,744 per participant diverted away from incarceration. While results have varied from state to state, the overall trend is a decrease in financial commitments compared to the correctional system. The factors that influence the program's success rates are proper assessment and treatment, judge and offender interactions, and the consistency of the staff involved in the program.

Mental Health Courts

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2021), mental health courts specialize in adult offenders with a mental disability or illness. Currently, there are 150 mental health courts in the United States, with more planned. The criminal justice system and mental health facilities work collaboratively on treatment plans. However, the offender must first fit specific criteria that make them eligible for this court. The individuals utilizing the mental health court must first have a diagnosed mental health illness. They must also have a nonviolent record that makes them eligible for this treatment plan.

During treatment, various factors are addressed that aid in the individual's rehabilitation. The treatment plan works with the individual on life skills, health care, social services, relapse prevention, and facility placement. The treatment occurs in inpatient or outpatient facilities but is strictly voluntary on placement. If the person completes the program, they may receive reduced sentencing or even have their charges dropped. The research also indicated that if the person completes programming, they have significantly lower rates of recidivating (U.S Department of Justice, 2021).

Utilizing Successful Evidence-Based

The foundation of evidence-based practices is ensuring they achieve an objective, utilize the most current and best data available, and are overall balanced (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018). Evidence-based practices in corrections have been shown effective when supported with empirical data. When evidence-based practices are successfully utilized in corrections, they provide required resources to inmates while incarcerated. As a result, there is a

decrease in recidivism, reducing the burden on taxpayers and victims by keeping individuals out of the correctional system.

The federal correctional and state systems are transitioning from a "us" versus "them" mentality and providing a person-centered approach to treatment. Individuals in the correctional system typically deal with a lack of education, mental health issues, or substance abuse issues. Ninety-five percent of individuals struggling with addiction are incarcerated at some point during their addiction, and 42% of inmates with mental health issues serve, on average, three sentences (National Safety Council, 2019). As inmates enter the correctional system, assessment tools such as the PATTERN and MnSTARR 2.0 identify the areas in which people suffer. Providing treatment options or mandatory educational programs assists these people with cognitive and educational impairments. The treatment options empower the incarcerated, building confidence and self-esteem to create change in their lives once released.

As felons transition into the communities, there is also a need for accountability and provided consistent resources. Community corrections ensure that felons still have access to in and outpatient care if they begin struggling with their mental health or substance abuse issues. Additionally, the current Second Chance Pell grant provides options for individuals seeking out post-secondary education and not restricting their abilities in making themselves more marketable while seeking out employment. However, there is an increased need for Ban the Box policies, which makes it so businesses cannot discriminate against felons as they apply for jobs. Currently, 37 states have adopted this policy, which further assists inmates' successful reintegration into communities once released.

Overall, these programs encourage self-motivation for felons that focus on reentry. The evidence-based practice has indicated the importance of consistent resources and interpersonal

relationships as felons integrate into communities. The correctional system must focus on identifying individual issues and providing the resources on a structured timeline. Most inmates serve only a few years and are released early, which furthers the importance of structured programming. The future of corrections is continuing in the right direction and is promising in improving society and promoting fiscally responsible funding.

Section 3: Theoretical Framework

General Strain Theory

Robert Merton first proposed the strain theory in the late 1930s, which helps explain the high rates of recidivism in the United States. Merton (1938) proposed that crime and deviance result from the social construct of today's society. Society strains individuals with economic expectations regardless of their actual means to achieve these societal goals. Individuals who cannot achieve these expectations or goals through legitimate means resort to illegal measures. Merton developed a model for the five different modes of economic adaptations for achieving societal goals. The five modes of adaptation are conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion.

Merton proposed that the two modes of conformity and innovation accept society's economic goals. Conformity accepts materialistic success and the foundation of "The American Dream" with legitimate methods for attaining these goals. An example is a successful businessman who started from a humble background. Like conformity, innovation also does accept society's cultural goals. However, these individuals do not believe in legitimate methods of achieving their goals, resulting in deviant and criminal behaviors (Merton, 1938). A drug dealer would be an example of the mode of adaptation for innovation.

The following two modes proposed by Merton were ritualism and retreatism, which both do not accept the economic goals placed by society. While ritualism does not accept cultural goals, it accepts legitimate means of achieving them. A ritualism adaption example is a blue-collar worker that will never get promoted but continues to work hard. Retreatism, however, does not accept cultural goals and does not accept legitimate means of achieving goals. A

retreatism example is a homeless person who continues deviant behaviors to survive. Finally, like retreatism, rebellion adaptation does not believe in cultural goals or legitimate means of achieving them. Rebellion adaptation goals are restructuring goals of society by whatever methods are deemed appropriate (Merton, 1938). One weakness of Merton's strain theory is that it only discusses individual financial goals and the legitimacy of achieving them but does not explain why individuals resorted to criminal deviance when placed under social strain.

Agnew's (2001) General Strain Theory (GST) further developed Merton's strain theory for how stressors or strains in individuals' lives result in anger and frustration from stress. Agnew (2001) proposed that individuals resorted to criminal deviance when they could not cope with negative emotions. He believed that individuals coping mechanisms were directly related to whether or not they would engage in deviant behaviors. Agnew (2001) explained that strain is experienced in every social class when an individual has a goal they cannot achieve. Three components increase one's frustration and stress, that fuel deviant behaviors. The first component of stress is losing something that an individual may value. Next, there is added stress if someone cannot attain their goals. Finally, there is a difference in treatment by others from your socioeconomic status if valued items are lost and you cannot reach personal goals.

Application of Theory

When reviewing recidivism, Agnew's GST has three components linked to the statistically high rates in the United States. The first strain identified by Agnew is losing something an individual may value. Once incarcerated, inmates lose materialistic items and the most important freedoms they valued before incarceration. When individuals are placed in the correctional setting, cognitive development is significantly damaged based on age and length of sentencing. Shaw (2020) studied the relationship between emotional responses such as hostility

and anger based on varying sentence lengths and the impacts on recidivism. The regression models Shaw (2020) generated indicated that juveniles placed in secured placement display high levels of hostility and regression. There were also correlations with negative relationships between time served and psychological development. After incarceration, increased hostility levels are directly related to delinquency and recidivism in juvenile offenders.

The next component that leads to stress is being unable to achieve personal goals. Once an individual is released from prison, barriers, such as background checks, limit their abilities to find legitimate employment. As a result, there is an increase in anger and frustration that only amplify deviant behavior. The person has a burden placed on them by the correctional system that stops them from achieving their goals once released. With the persistent strain and lack of resources, the benefits of deviant behaviors and crime outweigh the risk if caught. The final component that increases stress once released is the treatment of others once released. Individuals released from prison have a stigma to a higher disposition to future crimes, which increases their strain and susceptibility to committing such acts.

As identified by the contributing factors to recidivism, such as education, mental health, and addiction, Agnew's GST is highly related. If an individual lacks education, there are negative stigmas that they will never be successful or competitive in the traditional job market. As the person develops, they have different perceptions that fester into mental health-related issues and a lack of healthy coping mechanisms. These mechanisms often result in drug and alcohol abuse. If these mindsets and stigmas are not addressed during or after incarceration, it further promotes the likelihood of recidivism (Shaw, 2020). There is also an importance for diverting juveniles out of the correctional system, where there is a significantly higher rate of recidivism when under 24 years old (Vigne, 2021).

The correctional system can reduce the recidivism of offenders with properly implemented reentry programs. The programs have started to address individuals' negative perceptions and relationships once released within their social environments. Programming now identifies individuals' different areas that need improvements through risk assessment. Mental health and resiliency have been emphasized during programming that alters individuals' mindsets and coping mechanisms. Additionally, with continued education, while incarcerated, there are improvements in negative perceptions from others in the community. Cognitive training and development improve recidivism rates by providing legitimate coping mechanisms and preventing negative emotions that promote crime.

Section 4: Recommendations and Conclusion

Utilizing evidence-based practices in corrections is a multifaceted approach. It is shown that felons serving a prison sentence typically lack education, struggle with mental health-related issues, and have chemical dependencies. The First Step Act is the foundational framework that generates individual-based resources based on RNA. With the PATTERN and other assessment tools such as the MnSTARR 2.0, each person in custody receives programming resources for the underlying issues that contributed to their initial arrest.

As highlighted by Agnew's GST, individuals resort to criminal deviance when they do not have legitimate coping mechanisms for negative emotions. Whether a person has legitimate coping mechanisms directly relates to whether or not they would engage in deviant behaviors. However, incarceration often amplifies harmful strains such as losing something valuable, being unable to achieve goals, and being treated poorly by others. However, if time during incarceration is utilized correctly, it can change the mindset of offenders and the communities once released.

Resources during incarceration range from CBT, RDAP, rehabilitation, and community-based programs. Additionally, with the use of drug courts, individuals can receive chemical dependency treatment. The financial burdens are also decreased when a person has diverted from the correctional setting (National Institute of Justice, 2019). With drug courts, the felon receives addiction-based treatment, reducing recidivism and the continued cycle of incarceration. Overall, The First Step Act is moving in the right direction for reducing recidivism by promoting education, mental health awareness, and addiction treatment. The use of community-based programs also aids in the reentry of offenders back into the communities.

There are additional rehabilitation programs that reduce the negative impacts of recidivism. There are community-based programs that focus on inpatient facilities and hospitals. These programs also aid in halfway houses for felons with behavioral, mental health, social problems, and employment or educational-based issues. The multiple resources of rehabilitation programs are employed systematically throughout the judicial process and provide multiple services. Programming in the correctional setting needs to continue focusing on key fundamental areas that result in recidivism if not addressed. However, it is recommended that there is an improvement in resources and opportunities once released. Resources include continued mental health and substance abuse treatment, access to higher education, assistance with employment, and relationship-based counseling. With both in-custody and post-release resources, the correctional system can effectively transition to evidence-based practices that reduce recidivism.

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