

2021

## Probation Officer's Experiences Regarding Juvenile Delinquency and Alternatives to Detention Centers

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Bailey Rodriguez

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Walden University

2021

Abstract

Probation Officer's Experiences Regarding Juvenile Delinquency and Alternatives to  
Detention Centers

by

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MA, Alliant International University, 2014

BA, San Francisco State University 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Psychology

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## Abstract

With a shift in focus from punitive measures to rehabilitation within the juvenile justice system, it is imperative that the efficacy of alternative resources is more closely examined. Given the existing research that highlights adolescent development and the negative or neutral impacts detention centers impose on juveniles, the conversation has now shifted to the use of alternative resources or alternatives to detention. The question now, however, is whether or not these alternatives are sufficient enough to ensure the safety of the community, victims, and the well-beings of the juveniles, when a violent crime has been committed. This study, which was grounded with general strain theory (GST) framework, examined the experiences of probation officers who supervise justice involved youth who, during their time on probation, were engaged in or had been engaged in alternative resources. Through qualitative interviews, this phenomenological study gathered, from the perspective of seven probation officers, the efficacy in relying on alternative services for violent juvenile offenders, and whether or not the utilization of alternative resources can, in their professional opinions, be considered sufficient enough to move away from using detention centers entirely. Results from this study showed that all participants have seen the shift in focusing on alternative services. The implications for positive social change brought on by this study include it being a viable addition to the existing body of knowledge which can lend itself to policy makers who can make adjustments to better serve justice involved youth.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my daughter, Phoenix. Everything I do is for you. I hope that one day you see, through my example, that anything is possible. I would also like to dedicate this study to my grandpa, who made me promise him I would graduate high school and then college. I took it a little further, Grap, and I hope I made you proud.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **Background**

In preparation for this section, an extensive review of the literature was conducted. Databases such as Thoreau, PsychInfo, Criminal Justice, and Google Scholar were utilized. Within these respective databases, keywords and phrases relevant to this topic were used to find relevant research. Examples of these keywords are: *juvenile delinquency, juvenile justice, juvenile psychopathy, juvenile psychology, juvenile hall, minor, violent juvenile, violent juvenile offenders, violent offender, probation officer, community supervision alternatives to detention, justice involved youth, justice involved juvenile, delinquency, detention center, evidence based practices, qualitative, quantitative, and meta-analysis.*

This section outlines the gap in the literature, which surrounds how current literature highlights the lack of information revolving the efficacy and long-term reliability of alternative interventions for violent juvenile offenders, and the experiences of probation officers who supervise this population. This study was needed to further the literature on juvenile justice as the system evolves to better serve its youth. Conducting this study through the lens of the supervising probation officer's experience was useful in navigating the evolution of the juvenile justice system.

## **Problem Statement**

There is a problem within the juvenile justice system, as there is a push for a focus on alternatives to the use of detention. While it is suggested that alternative services would best serve justice-involved youth, detention centers remain open, seemingly for a reason. The issue lies in whether or not alternative means to detention are successful enough to eliminate the use of a detention center, whether the need for functioning detention centers remain? A study that examines this issue, through the lens of probation officers who work with this population daily was warranted to provide necessary feedback to help bring understanding and relevant insight to this situation.

Current research and discussions around a juvenile's ability to commit violent offenses as well as a juvenile's experience in a detention facility all circulate back to factors such as the juvenile's still developing brain, familial and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as their exposure to violence and crime (Minkov & Beaver, 2016). While these factors are certainly important to examine, they have continued to be displayed as an implication that the used of secured juvenile detention facilities are not suitable to lowering, deterring, or eliminating the acts of violent juveniles. Ryan et al. (2014) noted the deficiency in evidence surrounding the efficacy of secured detention facilities or court ordered placements and community supervision, with respect to being reliable reducers of recidivism. In fact, Barnert et al. (2015) opined that an adolescent's prior history of juvenile detention is a precursor to future incarceration in both the juvenile and adult courts.

As of 2015, the United States was deemed the only developed country to have the highest rate of juvenile detention with approximately 60,000 juveniles detained per year (Barnert et al., 2015). A strong reliance on detention justice-involved youth has switched in the last decade to focus on alternative forms of supervision, such as probation, would be better suited for the youth (Ryan et al., 2014). This aforementioned notion is countered, however, by the fact that Hein et al. (2017) found that juveniles are able to reach a peak in their commission of violent crime by age 15, and, if it is determined the juveniles have lingering challenges with proper anger management, they are then categorized as likely to reoffend. With respect to youth who are being supervised in the community and who were directed, either by the court, or the probation department, to engage in alternative services, Gale-Bentz, Goldstein, Cole, and Durham (2019) explored how the language used in the reports from these services to the youth's probation officer has a gross effect on what sanctions may be recommended by the probation officer and imposed by the Court. Gale-Bentz et al.'s (2019) study showed how negative reports about the juvenile's engagement is more likely to lead to harsher sanctions when the juvenile returns to court.

Lambie and Randell (2013) asserted that current research shows that well over half of the justice involved juveniles who had been previously detained are rearrested within three years of their release. Further, when considering the low (1%) percentage of juveniles that are transferred to adult criminal court, the ramifications of such a transfer

leave the juveniles susceptible to accruing further adult convictions regardless of their age at the time of the offense (Lambie & Randall, 2013).

Regardless of the literature either for or against the benefits of a juvenile detention center, the problem remains in assessing if the understanding of juvenile justice and the use of a detention center are present within the community. Further, there is substantial research suggesting that juvenile detention centers are unequipped to adequately provide justice involved minors with the resources and skills necessary to avoid reoffending; however, there is little research surrounding the existing programming and academic support found in some juvenile detention centers. Additionally, the existing research highlights the need for alternative settings and programming. However, none of the research explores the impact the removal of a detention facility may have on the level of crime committed in a community if the deterrent of potential detention was minimal. Moreover, should the removal of a detention facility for justice involved youth happen, it would be crucial to obtain the insight of those who would be affected by this, such as law enforcement and the community.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences of probation officers who work with juveniles who have committed violent offenses. I did so to understand their perspectives surrounding the use of alternative programming and resources versus detention. This study was best suited by qualitative research as it focused on obtaining and exploring the experiences of probation officers who work with violent juve-



nile offenders. Participants were be asked questions relevant to their experiences in working with these youth, including how their case management strategies are decided and implemented (Haqanee et al., 2015). The ability to gather real world experiences from those who work firsthand with justice-involved youth who have committed violent offenses is crucial to the understanding of the overarching phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, violent offenders include juveniles who have committed offenses that are considered 707(b) offenses in the California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC/W&I; Shouse Law, 2017).

This qualitative study examined these experiences by use of a full literature review, relevant document analysis, ongoing journals kept by the researcher, and semi-structured, audio- reordereed interviews with a seven probation officers currently working with violent juvenile offenders. The goal of the interviews was to guide the participating probation officers in portraying their experiences in a manner relevant to the purpose of this research study, while still allowing participants the room to speak freely.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was a qualitative research design focused on gathering the experiences, perspectives, and insights of the participants. A phenomenological approach was used for this study given the focus on the participants' own relevant experiences. Quantitative studies are useful for providing measurable and testable results; however, in this case, a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach was more beneficial when the purpose and significance of understanding the experiences of these

probation officers who supervise these youth is taken into consideration. Given that intention for this study is to understand a given phenomena from the perspective of a specific group, a qualitative design afforded me the opportunity to obtain the participants' experiences in a more naturalistic fashion.

Data was first collected via an extensive review of the existing knowledge. The chiefs of various probation departments were contacted and provided with a brief overview of my topic and needs with respect to the necessary requirements needed for their deputies to participate, including potential participants' contact with the specific juvenile population as well as minimum years of service.

Consenting participants were then interviewed, face-to-face regarding the participants' experiences in working with the justice involved youth. I followed-up with the participants with clarifying questions, as well as provided the participants with transcriptions and the results of the project upon completion. The interview questions were focused on the officers' experiences in working with juveniles who have been adjudicated of violent offenses and are engaged in alternative resources. The data (the transcribed interviews) was then analyzed for common themes.

### **Research Questions**

From the perspective of probation officers, to what extent does the use of alternative resources impact violent juvenile offenders?

Given the experiences of a probation officer working with this population, in conjunction with the focus on the use of alternative settings, how would removing a juvenile detention facility affect this population?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Agnew's (1985) general strain theory was the theoretical framework of this study as it focuses on factors that lead to delinquency and the commission of crime. Strain theory's central notion surrounds a general intention to achieve financial status or success by meaningful effort such as going to school and finding employment. However, this ultimate goal could be argued as conditional on having the means to execute and complete the necessary steps to achieve the ultimate goal. That is, those in lower economic neighborhoods who do not have the access to attend quality schools or have the same opportunities afforded to them may still have the same ultimate goal of financial success. The difference would then fall into the means these individuals have to execute steps to still end up successful with the end goal; this is where crime becomes an issue as individuals could resort to crimes such as theft or robbery.

Strain theory has a history of being scrutinized for seemingly not being applicable to juveniles, given the idea of being concerned with achieving financial stability and success is a concern for adults. Agnew (2012) addressed this in his reflection of his 1985 strain theory article, by highlighting how a juvenile's propensity to commit crime could be pinpointed to their inability to change their living conditions or circumstances. Gener-

al strain theory has been prolific in helping researchers and professionals understand why crime is committed by different individuals, including juveniles.

### **Limitations**

Limitations for this study included finding probation departments who agreed to let their officers participate in the study. Other limitations include the exclusionary criteria I chose which prohibits the participation of probation officers with less than 2 years of experience. Additional exclusions include my need to focus on having probation officers who have specific experience in working with a focused juvenile population. Limitations involving myself specifically include my current employment as a probation officer. This is important to acknowledge that I had familiarity with the position and working with the specified juvenile population. Also, given my experience in working in two separate counties within the greater Bay Area region, I had both previous and current experience in working alongside some of the probation officers who could be participating in this project.

### **Significance of the Study**

The intention of this study was to address the gap in the literature surrounding juvenile justice by examining the discussion regarding the need for the juvenile justice system to focus more on alternative means of rehabilitation versus the use of a secured detention facility. Researchers have discussed how the detention of a juvenile can lead to trauma and how detention does not appear to be a valuable deterrent of crime. Further, researchers note various factors related to a juvenile must come into play when consider-

ing the reason for their committed offenses, including demographic information, financial and familial backgrounds, as well as a history of mental health. Given these findings, researchers highlight how the juvenile's brain is still developing, thus, alternatives to detention would better suit the juvenile by giving them the opportunity to learn and correct criminal behavior.

This study aims to explore the experiences of the probation officers who work with violent juvenile offenders, as outlined in the Welfare and Institutions Code 707(b), who were currently, at the time of the interview, or had, in the past, engaged in alternative resources. With the gap in the literature on a lack of information surrounding both the effectiveness of alternative interventions, as well as the feasibility of solely relying on these alternative interventions with the elimination of a detention center, the experiences of the officers gathered within this study may be a significant addition to the literature surrounding the improvement and community's understanding of the juvenile justice system.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the gap in the current literature and explained how the study addressed the gap by interviewing probation officers who supervise violent juvenile offenders, via alternative resources rather than detention. In the next chapter, an overview of Agnew's general strain theory will be highlighted. Chapter 2 will further include a review of the literature that will touch on the United States' overall juvenile population and the percentage of which has been justice involved. A brief history of the juvenile jus-

tice system will be provided, as well as the move from using deterrents for crime to a focus on rehabilitation.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study aims to examine the experiences of probation officers who are supervising, or have supervised, youth, who have committed violent offenses, and who have engaged in alternative resources during their time on probation. This chapter provides a review of the existing literature surrounding the juvenile justice system and how it has evolved. Agnew's general strain theory (GST), the theoretical framework for this study, was also reviewed in this chapter. Agnew's (1985) GST assumes that delinquency and crime occur due to the need to obtain financial status or success, and the commission of crime is seen as a means to reach this success.

Alternatives to detention, as well as the rates of recidivism for violent offenders were acknowledged. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the juvenile justice system, with the foundation of the chosen theoretical framework, in order to justify this study as a means to address the gap in the existing literature. This chapter concludes with a review of how positive social change can emerge from this study.

### **Description of Literature Search**

A review of peer reviewed literature was conducted through the use of online databases which included: of Thoreaux, Criminal Justice, PsycINFO, PscyARTICLES, and Google Scholar, through the Walden University library. Keyword and phrases searched across these databases included: *juvenile justice*, *juvenile delinquency*, *juvenile*

*offender, juvenile justice system, alternatives to detention, juvenile hall, recidivism, probation officers, violent offenders, violent juvenile offenders, efficacy, GST.*

### **General Strain Theory (GST)**

This study used Agnew's (1985) GST as a theoretical framework. GST postulates that the commission of crime derives from a person's overall intention to obtain financial status and success. However, Agnew (2012) argued that the ability to achieve this success could be seen as being dependent on whether or not the person has the means to complete the steps to obtaining their status. Thus, those who live in lower socioeconomic communities, whose access to quality resources, such as schools or other needs, is scarce, still have the aforementioned goal of financial success. However, the theory posits that when individuals do not have the resources or access to use these resources, they may turn to crime as a means to reach their intended successes.

In 1992, Agnew reiterated the theory's critical role in explaining the reasoning for delinquency. Agnew acknowledged other strain theory models, but differentiated GST from the others as it centers around an individual and their own personal social environment, most specifically, a person's negative relationship with others. Juveniles, Agnew (1992) opined, can be pressured, by anger and other relevant emotions, into delinquency. As such Agnew determined the need to include all forms of negative interactions with others as potential risk factors for juveniles to engage in delinquent behavior. Agnew highlighted notable strains into three categories, all of which include the reality of or the expected outcome of: the failure to successfully achieve positive goals, the elimination of



a positive catalyst, or the presence of a negative catalyst. Agnew clarified that these categories often overlap and can be seen in together in one example, such as when a student is not appropriately supported by their teacher. Given the addition of the need to incorporate negative relationships in this theory, Agnew noted the strain felt by a juvenile likely has a snowball effect on juvenile delinquency, once the youth has reached their limit. Agnew (2001) noted, however, that while two individuals may experience the same type of strain, they may cope with them differently, for example, one individual, following the strain, may be left feeling angry, while another individual may feel depressed. Due to differentiation in responses to strain, Agnew (1992) highlighted that since this is the case, juveniles can be taught strategies to better allow for them to cope with their emotions, in an effort to deter them from delinquency.

### **Juveniles in the United States**

#### **Population**

According to the 2010 US Census Bureau, the juvenile population increased from 19% in 1984 to 24%, with 74,181,500 youth under the age of 18 (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). At the time of this census, in California alone, the juvenile population between the ages of 10-17 years old, was 9,295,000 (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). The US Census Bureau estimated another 10% increase in the juvenile population between 2010 and 2035 (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). In 2018, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency (OJJDP), estimated the number of juveniles, ages 0-17, in the United States to be 73.4 million. OJJDP (2014) further estimates that juvenile minority

populations are expected to experience significant growth between 2015 and 2025; juvenile minorities may account for 59% of their population in 2045.

### **Living Arrangements**

In a 2004 study, McCurley and Snyder examined the connection between a juvenile's familial structure and self-reported behavioral challenges. McCurley and Snyder (2004) discovered that children between the ages of 12-17, who lived in a two-parent home, were overall less likely to engage in delinquency or result in arrest compared to other juveniles whose living arrangements varied. Between the years of 1970 and 2010, the number of juveniles residing in single parent homes increased significantly for Whites and African Americans from 9% to 22% and 32% to 53%, respectively (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). Hispanics juveniles living in a single parent home only slightly increased from 21% to 29%, during this time (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). Most single parent families include youths living with their mothers (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). Between 1970 and 2018, the proportion of juveniles residing with their mothers increased from 8% to 17% for Caucasians, while it increased from 30% to 48% for African Americans. Hispanic juveniles living solely with their mothers increased from 20% to 25% between 1980 and 2018 (OJJDP, 2019). Living in poverty became less likely for juveniles living in two-parent homes (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014).

### **Poverty**

Hawkins et al. (2000), examined various factors that may predict violence in juveniles. In their research, Hawkins et al. (2000) found that youth who were exposed to

living in poverty between the ages of 6 and 11 years old, were likely to engage in violent delinquency at some point between the ages of 15 and 25 years old. Hawkins et al. (2000) noted this risk was significantly lower for juveniles who were not exposed to socioeconomic hardships until the ages of 12 through 14.

Agnew et al. (2008), explained that low socioeconomic status can be viewed as the inability to have access to basic necessities or useful resources, which in turn can be greater predictors of future violence in juveniles than mere poverty status on its own. According to the US Census Bureau, 22% of American youths lived in socioeconomic hardship; in California alone, juveniles between the ages of 0-17 accounted for 23.4% of those living below the poverty level.

In recent years, OJJDP (2018) reported that likelihood of living below the poverty level doubled for juveniles residing with only their mothers versus juveniles who resided in single parent homes with their fathers. Although the likelihood was much greater for single-parent homes with the mother as the sole parent, in 2018, the US Census Bureau reported food stamps were provided to 17% of households with juveniles, and 3% of residences with youths received some sort of government assistance (OJJDP, 2019).

## **Education**

The OJJDP noted that a lack of education is often a predictor of unemployment (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). Individuals being institutionalized is also associated with unemployment (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). During the 2008-2009 school year, 370,000 juveniles dropped out of school at some point (Sickmund & Puzanchera,

2014). However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the rate of completion for high school steadily rose from the 1970s to 2017, showing 93% of juveniles had obtained a high school diploma (OJJDP, 2019).

## **Juvenile Justice System**

### **Juvenile Crime**

The majority of data related to juvenile crime comes from official records and self-reported accounts from the juveniles or former juveniles themselves (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Challenges with these methods of data gathering include poor recollection with respect to self-reports, as well as an individual's reluctance to fully divulge their criminal history (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Further, with official documents, a challenge remains in that not all crimes committed by juveniles result in an arrest for reasons that can include no suspect being identified or no report of the actual offense (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). It is likely the level of crime committed by juveniles may be underestimated.

While any kind of offense is possible for a juvenile to face charges for, this section focused only on violent offenses, which include murder, rape, arson, and robbery, as examples. Gangs are frequently coupled together with the assumption of violence and egregious offenses (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). The National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) is the primary source of gang information in the United States (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Local law enforcement agencies are responsible for collecting relevant data and reporting it to the NYGC in their annual Gang Survey (Sickmund & Puz-

zanchera, 2014). Although gang activity declined by nearly half between 1996 and 2001, it increased from 24% to 34% in 2005; nevertheless, between 2006 and 2010, gang activity has remained fairly steady and only fluctuating slightly between 32% and 35% (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014).

Between 1984 and 1994, juveniles involved in murders spiked, thus prompting some states to adjust their laws to allow for juveniles to be tried in the adult criminal justice system (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). In 2010, about 800 murders were committed by juveniles, which accounted by 8% of all murders in the United States that year (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Of these murders, 48% were committed by one juvenile, 9% were committed by one of more juvenile, and 43% of these murders involved at least one juvenile accompanied by at least one adult (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014).

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), from 2009-2010, 62% of all violent offenses committed by juveniles were executed on school days, 19% of which occurred in the first four hours following the end of a school day (3 pm - 7 pm), whereas 14% occurred during the standard hours of a juvenile's curfew (10 pm - 6 am) (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). This may suggest that pro-social, organized after school activities could be a suitable means for deterring juvenile crime (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014).

Mulvey (2011) reviewed the Pathways to Desistance study that has been following 1,354 justice-involved youth who have committed serious offenses ranging in age from 14-18 years old, over the course of a 7-year period. Through the researcher's com-

prehensive study, Mulvey (2011) highlighted the study's findings to include a juvenile's offending lowered overtime, community supervision was proven to be effective for serious justice-involved youth, and lengthier detentions did not appear to reduce the rate of recidivism. The study further found that harsh responses to offending increased the rate of offending (Mulvey, 2011).

The study further suggested that other factors impact the long-term outcome of a juvenile, including how well the youth was connected to resources equal to their needs, as well as how they perceived their overall treatment within the detention center to be (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). The Pathways study also examined a juvenile's perception of the legal system, including whether or not they felt each entity in the system, including law enforcement, probation officers, juvenile hall counselors, and judges, treated them fairly and with respect (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014).

### **Juvenile Courts**

During the 18th century, in the United States, seven-year-old children could face the adult court system; however, the 19th century shifted the perception of juveniles which decided their cognitive capacities were not fully developed (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). From there, facilities specifically for housing juvenile offenders, were constructed to focus on education and rehabilitation (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). Cook County, Illinois established the first court specifically for juveniles in 1899 (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). The notion of implementing a juvenile court stemmed from

the recognized that children should go through court intervention differently than adults, given they are still developing (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014).

Within the juvenile court system, there is room for discretion with respect to how a case can be handled within the court. If the Court deems it appropriate, a juvenile matter can be handled informally through the court which essentially allows the juvenile to bypass the majority of the court process, assuming the juvenile completes it successfully (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). Juvenile court matters may still be heard in adult criminal court depending on the statutes each state has in place (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). Each state has a minimum age requirement for a juvenile case to even be considered in an adult court, depending on the level of the offense in question (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). When a juvenile sustains a charge, their case is considered adjudicated (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). From here, a dispositional report is written by a probation officer; the purpose of this report is to examine the juvenile, their familial and social relationships, their educational, personal and mental health needs, as well as existing persons of support in order to best determine an adequate plan for the juvenile (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). Dispositional outcomes typically include the minor being supervised on probation, which comes with additional orders imposed by the court, including connections to relevant resources, such as therapy or substance abuse counseling, and, if articulated as necessary, time spent in detention (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014). The length of probation varies, as it can be set for a specific time frame or left somewhat open ended, nevertheless, ongoing progress report hearings are held so

the Court is able to also monitor the juvenile's progress (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014).

Juvenile Courts can also order a juvenile to a residential placement center for a specific or open-ended period of stay (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Placements vary from similar to an institution to more reminiscent of a home setting (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). When a juvenile is released from an institution or placement, there is an aftercare period in which the juvenile is supervised by a probation officer as they reintegrate, to ensure they remain on track and do not commit further offenses (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014).

### **Probation Officers in California**

#### **California Probation**

In California, Penal Code 830.5 categorizes probation officers as peace officers (CPOC, n.d.). Each of California's probation departments act as a liaison between the justice system and the courts (CPOC, n.d.). The probation department serves a unique function as it is responsible for community safety, victim advocacy, probationer rehabilitation and accountability, as well as a collaborator of the Court (CPOC, n.d.). The probation department is also responsible for implementing state reforms (CPOC, n.d.).

Within the probation department's role in maintaining community safety, officers are tasked with objectively examining the facts surrounding each case, and working with each client to change their criminal thought processes (CPOC, n.d.). The utilization of



evidence-based practices are the probation departments' preferred method of ensuring their responsibilities to the community and the clients are met (CPOC, n.d.).

Probation departments in California serve both adults and juveniles; however, for the purpose of this study, the focus was relevant to juvenile probation. With 112 juvenile halls, camps/ranches throughout 49 of the 58 California counties, under the probation departments' scope, juveniles are offered a number of resources to the served youth both in-custody and in the community (CPOC, n.d.). Services include various forms of therapy, including multi-systemic therapy (MST) and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), as well as anger management classes (aggression replacement training or ART; CPOC, n.d.). Additionally, case management and clinical services are offered through a level of services known as wraparound services (CPOC, n.d.). Further, juveniles can be referred to treatment for substance use or for mental health reasons; vocational and educational resources and referrals are also available to probation involved youth (CPOC, n.d.).

The probation departments emphasizes the importance of keeping the juveniles within their homes, in an effort to avoid disruption of the home, whenever the facts and needs of the youth allow (CPOC, n.d.). However, should the youth be found to require more specialized services and curriculum, such as juvenile sex offenders, the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) may be considered. Otherwise, since the 2007 implementation of SB 81 Juvenile Justice Realignment, the California Probation Departments have worked to try and serve the youth outside of detention, whenever possible (CPOC, n.d.). In instances where a juvenile is in need of substantial services but does not require a secure

setting, probation officers have the option of recommending, to the Court, the juvenile be committed to either a group home or a short-term residential treatment program (STRTP).

In 2016, California juvenile probation rates had seen declines, since 2007, of 60% in juvenile detention, 73% in overall juvenile felony arrests, as well as a decline of 74% in the DJJ population (CPOC, 2017). Ninety percent of the 2016 juvenile probation population were supervised in their communities including their homes, group homes, alternatives to custody, and camps/ranches (CPOC, 2017). The use of juvenile hall saw a decline of 60% in 2016, from 2007 (CPOC, 2017). Probation officers report their job functions are more frequently related to the social work component versus the law enforcement aspects of their job duties (Grattet, Nguyen, Bird, & Goss, 2018). In aligning with this notion, probation officers employ graduated sanctions in response to violations of probation, which can include missing a scheduled appointment with probation, the commitment of a new crime, or failure to comply with court imposed orders (CPOC, 2014). The graduated sanctions for a probation violation can range from the admonishment of the offender, to increased supervision of the offender or connection to additional services, and detention as the highest sanction (CPOC, 2014). Conversely, appropriate rewards and recognition should be given to probationers who have achieved a significant milestone or shown consistency in their engagement, as a means of highlighting their positive advancements, which could lead to continued success (CPOC, 2014).

### **Probation Officer Qualifications, Training, and Burnout**

Each California county's qualifications to become a probation officer may vary slightly; however, the minimum eligibility requirement includes the possession of a bachelor's degree in psychology, criminal justice, criminology, sociology, or a related area of study (Probation Officer Edu, 2020). Within their first year of hire, probation officers must successfully complete probation officer CORE, which is 160 hours of probation and legal related training (Probation Officer Edu, 2020). Probation officers are also required to complete ongoing training throughout the year, through their specific departments (Probation Officer Edu, 2020).

With probation being a common and well-relied on form of community supervision and engagement, there lies a difference in the functions of an adult probation officer compared to that of a juvenile probation officer (Hafoka et al., 2017). While many of the same roles and functions exist in both areas of probation, juvenile probation officers find themselves holding additional roles, outside of assessing their criminogenic needs, as a balanced approach is adopted to allow the officer the ability to take the minor and their family's circumstances into consideration when assessing adequate programming recommendations (Hafoka et al., 2017). Hafoka et al. (2017) analyzed and compared the duties of both adult and juvenile probation officers which showed how juvenile probation officers tend to carry a few more functions compared to their counterparts.

The shift in focus within the probation department requires probation officers to hone their ability to connect with their clients on a professional and human level; howev-

er, regardless of the officer's ability to show empathy in their work with each client, it is important to remember that there are limits to an officers endurance to the work they do (Lewis & Lewis, 2013). Various stressors can have long-term effects on probation officers including feelings of overwhelm with mounting paperwork, feelings of compensation not adequately representing the level of work, the need to always be hyper-vigilant, given the dangers associated in working with violent offenders, and compassion-fatigue (Lewis & Lewis, 2013). In a study of 309 adult probation staff, including officers, supervisors, and administrative employees, from California, Texas, and Arizona, participants completed various scales set to measure the different areas of work related stress (Lewis & Lewis, 2013). This results of this study supported previous researcher's findings that the level of work and context of their work impact the officers stress levels, which can ultimately lead to officer burnout (Lewis & Lewis, 2013).

### **Bay Area Juvenile Probation Programming**

Nine counties comprise of the Bay Area in California; these counties include Marin County, Solano County, Sonoma County, Napa County, Contra Costa County, Alameda County, San Francisco County, San Mateo County, and Santa Clara County. While all California probation departments are unified in their intentions to serve the juveniles, their families, the victims, and the communities, each county varies slightly in the evidence based programs they offer. The following highlights a few programs from various counties. Programs reviewed here are examples of one or more program each

county offers, and it should be noted that programming such as ART or CBT are also utilized with the counties.

Marin County identified in 2017 several years ago that their detained juvenile population needed an appropriate level of mental health services. With the help of a grant, Marin County was able to fund Programs of Responsive Treatment and Linkages (PORTAL) which includes four mental health staff, including a supervisor, all of whom are Functional Family therapy (FFT) trained (CPOC, 2017). The clinicians in this program are able to provide services to juveniles in detention, at school, or in their homes (CPOC, 2017). PORTAL is also able to provide crisis services and substance abuse resources (CPOC, 2017). Marin County acknowledges that the inclusion of PORTAL has been a vital component to their overall reduction in juvenile hall population (CPOC, 2017).

San Francisco County Juvenile Probation Department, which is a separate entity from its Adult counterpart, utilizes the Juvenile Collaborative Reentry Unit (JCRU). JCRU is built on the collaborative efforts of the juvenile, their family, the juvenile's probation officer, their case coordinator, their attorney and their case planner (CPOC, 2017). Prior to its evolution in 2013, the youth worked with many of the same players; however, they were mainly represented in court by their attorneys (CPOC, 2017). Now, youth are represented by all of the aforementioned players, which allows for stronger relationships between the juvenile and his team (CPOC, 2017). When a juvenile is committed to out-of-home placement (group home or STRTP; including Log Cabin Ranch, which is no

longer in use in San Francisco), a pre-entry plan is devised and eventually approved of by the Court (CPOC, 2017). Once the juvenile is released from their program commitment and return home, they are released with their after-care plan in place and return to court after a month for a progress report (CPOC, 2017). With JCRU's focus on education, family, housing, mental health, and employment, they have been able to see a reduction in recidivism rates from 69% in 2009 to 14% in 2016 (CPOC, 2017).

Contra Costa County utilized Girls in Motion (GIM) as a program that is gender responsive and centered around CBT treatment, to provide services to female juveniles while in-custody (CPOC, 2017). The program consists of five phases including an orientation phase, three in-custody phases, and the final phase which occurs after the minor is released and returns home (CPOC, 2017). The program, which is operated by the probation department, collaboratively works with medical and mental health staff, as well as a community based organization known as Community Violence Solutions (CVS) and an academic department (CPOC, 2017). The juveniles that are committed to this program are expected to participate in the myriad of evidence based programming it offers, including ART, substance abuse treatment (if necessary), Thinking for a Change (T4C), Moral Reasoning, Job Tech, as well as a number of cognitive based interventions, each with a different area of focus (CPOC, 2017).

Napa County has utilized their Evening Reporting Center (ERC) since its 2009 genesis (CPOC, 2017). The ERC is rooted in evidence based programming and acts as an alternative to detention for juveniles between 14-17 years old, who are determined to

be medium to high risk for reoffending (CPOC, 2017). Originally, the ERC was located within the justice center, but it was then moved into the community, thus giving the participating youth a separate space from the justice center (CPOC, 2017). The ERC then partnered with a local nonprofit called The Wolfe Center, which provided substance use treatment to juveniles (CPOC, 2017). Initially, the program's evidence based programming was a total of 30 hours; however, once additional support from another nonprofit agency, Aldea Children and Family Services, the program extended itself to 60 days in length (CPOC, 2017). With the Aldea Children and Family Services, juveniles would be able to receive a range of mental health services, including support offered to the juveniles' families (CPOC, 2017).. Some staff from the ERC and both local non-profits were trained in the evidence based program, FFT (CPOC, 2017). Napa County Probation also highlights how a juvenile's engagement in the FFT programming is not only effective in reducing the rates of recidivism, but it has also proven beneficial in supporting a juvenile's younger siblings and has likely played a part in the prevention of them entering the justice system at a later time (CPOC, 2017).

San Mateo County Probation shows overlap with the kinds of services offered. San Mateo County has been granted funding to support their juvenile hall, boys' and girls' camps, respectively (CPOC, 2017). Every location offers its own myriad of evidence based programming, including therapeutic services, gang and legal education, case management, as well as mentorship and recreational activities, such as yoga (CPOC, 2017).

Solano County Probation has allocated its received service funding to focus on the needs they saw their youth needed: mental health and substance use treatments (CPOC, 2017). The Solano County probation department also uses their available funding to support the use of the Juvenile Assessment Intervention System (JAIS), an assessment tool used to gauge a juveniles risk of reoffending (CPOC, 2017). The Solano County probation department emphasizes their use of mentoring services, re-entry and aftercare supports, as well as mental health and substance use treatment, offered through their partnerships with local community organizations such as Aldea Children and Family Services and Healthright 360 (CPOC, 2017).

### **Positive Social Change**

The findings of this study lend itself to enacting positive social change within the juvenile justice system. With research explaining the detrimental effects juvenile detention and juvenile court proceedings can have on a juvenile offender, the fact remains that juveniles do commit violent offenses, for various reasons. The results of this study could assist the juvenile justice system, including the juvenile courts and the probation departments, as well as the community-based organizations and programing they contract with, with understanding the needs of these juveniles as detailed by the probation officer's responsible for supervising them in the community. Adjustments can be made within the juvenile justice system based on the findings discovered in this study.



## Summary

In this chapter, a review of the literature was examined, which included a summary of this study's theoretical framework, Agnew's GST. This theory articulates how a person's environment, circumstances, and interactions with others plays a critical role in explaining why juveniles, specifically, turn to delinquency. This chapter overviewed the juvenile population in the United States, as well as some factors that can contribute to delinquency, per GST, such as poverty and education. Moreover, a background of the juvenile justice system was provided, and a synopsis of probation in California was discussed. More specifically, examples of alternative options for violent juvenile offenders were highlighted, specific to the Bay Area that this study focused on. The understanding, from current literature, is that detaining youth and their involvement in the juvenile justice system can have a negative impact on the youth; however, what is not known is whether or not alternative programming and resources are enough. More research is needed on understanding how effective these alternatives are and the question of whether or not a juvenile detention center is needed should be further examined. With the gap in the literature surrounding the efficacy of alternative resources for this population and my intention to examine this through the lens of the probation officers who supervise these youth, a qualitative framework would best suit this intended study and provide an extension of knowledge into the ever evolving juvenile justice system. Chapter 3 will rationalize and justify the research method, approach, and design. An explanation of the process for recruiting participants will be explored, as will a plan for data collection and analysis.

Issues in trustworthiness and ethical boundaries, such as the protection of the participants, will also be explored, as well as methods for reducing researcher bias.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

This qualitative study, with a phenomenological approach, aimed to gain a better understanding of probation officers' experiences in working with violent juvenile offenders, who have engaged in alternative resources. This research explored, through the probation officers' gathered experiences, the efficacy of alternative resources to detention. The rationale for this research study was outlined in the presented phenomenon of study. I adopted an emic role, as the focus is on the participants experiences and understandings from their perspective (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thus, I conducted interviews with participating probation officers and then coded their responses for analysis.

Chapter 3 expands on the methodological procedures surrounding participant recruitment, semi-structured interviewing, and possible coding techniques. Credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations were also addressed, alongside the identification of biases and the use of appropriate strategies to reduce researcher bias.

### **Research Design and Justification**

From the perspective of probation officers, to what extent does the use of alternative resources impact violent juvenile offenders?

Given the experiences of a probation officer working with this population, in conjunction with the focus on the use of alternative settings, how would removing a juvenile detention facility affect this population?

The phenomenon of study surrounds the experiences of probation officers working with violent juvenile offenders, who are engaged in alternative resources. The appropriate approach for this qualitative study was phenomenological. Phenomenological research centers around the lived experiences of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Phenomenological research uses the lived experiences of its participants to examine a meaning and understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants' experiences are gathered with the intention of describing the collective meaning of a concept (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A phenomenological approach is most appropriate for this study as the gathered common experiences of the human participants combine to describe a shared phenomenon, which can allow the researcher an opportunity to analyze the data for both common and under examined issues (Vagle, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Examining experiences that are common to groups of individuals is beneficial not only to the individuals involved in the phenomenon, but also policy makers who may enact valuable change (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, researchers are considered human instruments for collecting data. Due to this, it is imperative that qualitative researchers identify their own biases and assumptions, as well as any shared experiences that could affect his or her ability to gather and analyze data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Given my connection to the study topic, I used a journal to organize personal reflections and manage any biases that arose.

I gathered rich data through the knowledge and experiences of the participating probation officers through semi-structured interviews, held via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I also used bracketing to identify biases, as well as personal experiences and beliefs, as a means of preventing any influence from occurring (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Recruitment**

For this study, the population was probation officers who have experience in working with violent juvenile offenders who have engaged in alternative resources. Given the effects of and limitations associated with COVID-19, I recruited probation officers via a closed Facebook support group specifically for probation officers from various counties. I posted a flyer in the probation officer support group asking for interested and willing deputies, who fit the outlined qualifications to participate, to reply to my contact information in the flyer with their interest in volunteering to participate in this research. Participants within the support group, who have identified their interest, were purposefully selected and identified as information-rich based on exclusionary and inclusionary criteria developed by myself and supported by the participating probation departments' chiefs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

In addition to a participant's willingness and their feasibility to participate in the research, criterion were used to narrow the participant pool to those with the most experience relevant to the research topic (Seidman, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Re-

sponding probation officers who met the following criteria would be invited to participate in the research study. Probation officers with a minimum of two years of experience in working with violent juvenile offenders were considered. Specifically probation officers who have experience in working with this population of youth, who have participated in alternative resources. From this sample pool, probation officers who were willing to participate in a series of one-on-one, Zoom interviews, and were available during the scheduling timeframe were considered.

This research study aimed to utilize nine participants, one from each Bay Area county. When considering the number of participants for a qualitative, phenomenological study, the point of saturation should be the guiding factor (Gibbs, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Since there is no specified number of participants needed for a phenomenological study, the researcher must assess if content saturation can be reached with only a few participants, with several opportunities for interviews, or with a larger number of participants, with shorter lengths of interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Vagle, 2018). As many as fifteen participants can be used to feasibly reach saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Instrumentation**

Semi-structured and in-depth virtual interviews were conducted between each participant and me for data collection. The use of open-ended questions guided these phenomenologically structured interview, thus allowing the participants to recount their experiences in their own words (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Seidman, 2019). Semistruc-

tured interviews use a series of predetermined, open-ended questions as a guide to engage in a conversational interview (Seidman, 2019).

During each interview, I asked follow-up questions, allowing participants to expand on their responses. I also maintained notes during the interviews and employ bracketing for any biases or personal beliefs or experiences that may arise. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and later provided to each respective participant for his or her review for accuracy. At the end of each interview, I reiterated what the participant can expect in terms of when they will receive the transcripts, when the follow-up interview will be scheduled, and any other information needed to prepare them for what is to come.

### **Recruitment**

For this study, I posted a recruitment flyer in a probation officer support group on Facebook. I sought to identify nine probation officers, who expressed interest in participating, specifically one probation officer from each of the nine Bay Area counties. Probation officers who responded and meet the criteria received an invitation to participate in this research study, which briefly outlined the justification for the research. The probation officers would also be notified of my bias given my experience in the field.

When a probation officer agreed to participate in this research study, I provided documentation, consent forms, and additional information surrounding the criterion for which deputies would be considered for participation. With the help of the probation officers' brief description of their experience in the field, those who fit the minimum level

of experience with the phenomenon of study were further contacted. When a deputy, who meets the criterion, shows interest in participating in the research study, they provided me with permission to allow for further communication and scheduling.

Participants were made fully aware of their commitment to this study, their rights as a participant, and the expectations of confidentiality.

### **Data Analysis**

The primary data source for this study were semi-structured interviews conducted by me, using primarily open-ended questions, as well as follow-up questions for clarification purposes. The transcripts of these interviews and follow-up interviews were used to examine meaningful concepts within the examined phenomenon. Once the participants' interviews are transcribed, the data was coded using the coding software, NVivo. Transcripts were coded for themes and categories (Saldaña, 2015).

The interview questions, found in Appendix A, surrounded the research purpose and I used them as a guide during open-ended, semi-structured interviews with the participants, ultimately allowing for a dialogue to emerge.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Transferability**

By clearly outlining the methodology for this research, readers can determine transferability. Interviews, participant recruitment and criterion, as well as data analysis methods were clearly outlined and the amount of participants should be adequate to reach saturation of the phenomena. Despite focusing on a specific juvenile offender popula-



tion, the research is not limited to the number of arrests or whether or not the juvenile had a prior history. The research is instead focused on the probation officer's experience in working with these juveniles throughout the officers' respective careers.

### **Dependability**

Consistency, coupled with a thorough research approach allow for dependability in this research. Remaining consistent throughout the methodology, execution, and analysis of the research ensure the study is dependable. Participants were all chosen based on the same ability to meet the minimum requirement of the selection criterion. I sought to ensure thoroughness throughout the research by interviewing participants twice, once for the initial interview, and again for a follow-up interview to ensure their experiences were actually captured; both interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were reviewed to further ensure accuracy. With these measure in place, the results of this study should emerge dependable.

### **Confirmability**

I ensured confirmability of the study by continuously documenting efforts of checking and rechecking the collected data, throughout the process. Confirmability showcased my efforts to utilize a consistent system for making conclusions relevant to the research. With the use of an ongoing system for documentation of research efforts, readers will be confident that I did not act on any assumptions of biases while engaging in the research.

**Reliability**

The utilization of a coding software, such as NVivo, would allow for the consistency in my coding techniques. I ensured reliability by remaining consistent throughout the research process. Data was reviewed numerous times, including transcripts to ensure they were transcribed properly, as well as codes and meanings to account for any discrepancies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I further employed an independent researcher who can review the collected content and codes for accuracy and reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

**Ethical Procedures**

In order to proceed with the research, systematic measures needed to occur before this research can be deemed sufficient according to ethical standards. The University Research Reviewer (URR) reviews the research to check the quality of the research and evaluate it against university standards. The research then goes to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the study's compliance with federal regulations as well as Walden University's standards.

Measure to ensure ethical considerations are accounted for include efforts to employ anonymity for participating probation officers, as well as the juvenile cases (who should not explicitly be named) they are referring to, given their consideration as a vulnerable population. Informed consent forms was sent to each participant prior to the scheduled interview date. The consent form reviewed the purpose of the study, the participant's role in the study, the researcher's role and expectations for the interview

process, including the need for a follow-up interview at a later time, as well as a consent for permission to audio-record the interview. At the start of the interview, prior to any of the researcher's open-ended questions, the participant were provided with a copy of his or her consent form. This consent form was reviewed with the participant to ensure his or her understanding of its meaning and implication. The participants were further reminded of the need to audio-record the interview and the reasoning for doing so. The participants were reminded of their voluntary participation in this research, which thus afforded them to end the interview and cease their participation at any time.

The participants were informed of the measures utilized by me to ensure that their identities remain anonymous and that documents were securely stored. Finally, I addressed the connection I have to the topic and the field of probation, with an emphasis on the notion that this research is being conducted outside of this connection.

### **Summary**

This study was a qualitative, phenomenological design, utilizing probation officers from California probation departments. As the researcher, I aimed to recruit nine volunteer probation officers to provide their experiences in working with violent juvenile offenders who have engaged in alternative resources to detention. Eligible probation officers were decided based on their level of experience in working with this population, as well as their willingness and availability to engage in the process.

Interviews were audio-recorded and guided by a set of open-ended questions to ensure the interview remained on track and relevant to the research. I asked follow-up

questions to allow for the participants to expand on his or her recounts of their lived experiences. Following the first interview, I transcribed the interviews and provided to the participants for a review on accuracy. A follow-up interview was scheduled for clarification and expansion purposes on areas of need as to ensure data saturation has been achieved.

Chapter 3 outlined my methodology and justification for choosing a phenomenological approach. Recruitment and chosen sampling methods were explained, followed by my intention to ensure trustworthiness, reliability, transferability, and dependability. Measures for ensuring ethical standards would be met were also outlined.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

Given the shift in the utilization of alternative resources versus long-term or more frequent time in-custody, it is imperative to look at not only how youth are performing on probation, but also how the available alternative resources are lending to the youth's success on probation, if at all. The purpose of this research was to gather and analyze the

experiences of probation officers who supervised juveniles with violent offenses and were subsequently alternative resources. Factors examined within this purpose included the probation officers' outlining their supervision and recommendation processes, as well as their experiences, understandings, and opinions of the elimination of juvenile detention centers, specific to their use (past and present) in their respective counties, their potential for reform, and their meaning to those affected (i.e. the youth, the community, and the victim). The data was collected via semi-structured interviews, which I then transcribed, coded, and analyzed by me. Since the experiences of the participants were the focus, a phenomenological paradigm was adopted for this qualitative research study. The research questions for this study were as follows: From the perspective of probation officers, to what extent does the use of alternative resources impact violent offenders? Given the experiences of a probation officer working with this population, in conjunction with the focus on the use of alternative settings, how would removing a juvenile detention facility affect this population?

Chapter 4 presents my key findings stemming from the participants' interviews, which were transcribed and coded. Relevant direct quotes are presented when appropriate. Details regarding the methodology is reviewed for potential study replication. I also acknowledged any biases that may have influenced this study in any way. An explanation of how codes were found and how themes were developed is provided, and issues of credibility, relative to qualitative research are defined.

### Setting

Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study and provided the following approval number: 10-19-20-0980215. Further approval of the study was received by the committee chair, the second committee member, and the a university research reviewer (URR) from Walden University. With the current COVID-19 restrictions in place, a recruitment flyer was posted in a closed Facebook support group for probation officers, which detailed the intention of the study, the criteria for participation, and the next steps for contacting me with their interest in participating.

Self-disclosure was used as the primary means for asserting each participant who showed interest in participating met all of the criteria outlined, which included a minimum of 2 years of experience in working with violent juvenile offenders, specifically deputies who have experience in working with this population as they are engaged in alternative resources. Since the study focused on the Bay Area, a subcriterion was that they worked in one of the nine Bay Area counties. In order to ensure confidentiality, the names and any identifying information was left out of the data collection process. Instead, the participants' interviews are organized by numbers ranging from 001-007; for the purpose of referring to each interview or participant in the remainder of this study, I will refer to each participant with the number 1-7. Direct participant quotations were used when appropriate as it allowed for readers to better connect with the expressed experiences of the participants (Creswell & Crewell, 2017).

All participants were active probation officers in their respective counties. Since the nature of this phenomenological study did not require the need for additional demographic information, I only inquired about the county for which the participant worked and the number of years of experience.

### **Demographics**

State requirements for the minimum qualifications for probation officers in California was discussed in Chapter 2. Participants in this study had a range of experience from working in various alternative programs within their respective counties, which included in-custody programming, as that was deemed to be an alternative resource to a commitment to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). Table 1 outlines the participants' assigned code, their years of experience, and the county for which they are employed.

Table 1: *Participant Demographics*

Participant	Years of experience	County of employment
Participant 001	9 years	Santa Clara County
Participant 002	3 years	San Mateo County
Participant 003	2.5 years	San Francisco County
Participant 004	22 years	San Francisco County
Participant 005	5 years	Contra Costa County
Participant 006	2 years	Solano County
Participant 007	5 years	Contra Costa County

## **Data Collection**

### **Sample Selection**

During recruitment, I aimed to recruit nine probation officers, one from each of the nine Bay Area counties. A recruitment flyer was posted in a Facebook support group for probation officers and interested participants replied to the flyer indicating their interest. Ultimately, only seven qualifying probation officers replied to the flyer, which accounted for only five of the nine Bay Area counties; two of the counties were represented by two separate probation officers with experience in working with different programming. All seven of the probation officers who showed interest in participating in the study met the established criteria for participating and consented, via email, to their continued participation in the study.

Due to the current COVID-19 restrictions, each probation officer was interviewed via Zoom. Each participant had a scheduled interview date and time and received a corresponding Zoom link that required password access and permission for the host (me) to let them enter the virtual interview. The semi-structured, conversational interviews were conducted in private settings and audio recorded for later transcription. The interview participants and I engaged the interview in the privacy of our respective homes, and one participant joined the Zoom meeting in the privacy of an interview room located at their place of employment. The interviews lasted anywhere from 40 minutes to 2.5 hours. Initially, I planned on conducting a shorter follow-up interview; however, after correspond-



ing with the Chair, this extra interview was deemed unnecessary as data saturation was achieved from the initial interview.

### **Data Analysis**

The recruitment flyer seeking probation officers who met specific criteria was posted in a Facebook support group for probation officers. The use of criterion sampling allowed for the most experienced and diverse sample of participants to engage in this study. Seven probation officers responded to this flyer and they were asked to confirm their qualifications relevant to the intended criteria. All seven of the interested participants asserted their experience met the detailed criteria and wished to continue with the research process.

The use of guided interview questions (see Appendix A) provided me with a semi-structured guide. However, in real-time, I often asked each participant to define and elaborate on additional subquestions that came up during each individual interview. The overall structure and prepared order of the interview questions was maintained throughout. With the structure of this research study being phenomenological in design, it was important to be able to capture the experiences and knowledge of the participants. Each audio-recorded interview was conducted in as private of a location, without additional interference, as possible, as the virtual set-up allowed. I took ongoing notes during each interview as a means of not only noting pieces of importance, but also to highlight the use of a sub-question that may have been rooted in my prior knowledge of the juvenile justice system or probation departments.

Data analysis began after the interviews were transcribed. I hand-coded the transcripts by first reviewing the predetermined interview questions to gauge potential codes. As the researcher began coding the first interview, additional codes emerged. A color was assigned to each code and each of the seven transcripts were reviewed to highlight chunks of text associated with the developed codes. Initially, I, as previously described in Chapter 3, intended on using NVivo for coding; however, the software was incompatible with my computer, so with the permission of the supervising Chair, I proceeded to hand-code and analyze.

Emerging codes included the following: years of experience; available alternative services; frequency of reoffending; success on probation; risk assessment/concerns; opinion of detention center being eliminated (with respect to the minor, the community, and the victim) as well as the use and experience of the probation officer relevant to the detention center; youth at home; court comments; differences between counties; comments about community-based organizations; and former available services.

Themes began emerging early on in the coding process and I took note of them as they arose. Generally, codes repeated across all of the seven interviews, with the exception of three codes (court comments; differences between counties; and former available services) that only came up in a few of the interviews. The use of follow-up interviews was unnecessary as data saturation was achieved in the initial interview and the participants were given the opportunity to add on more information at the end of their interviews, as well as reach out if there was anything further they would like to add.

Throughout the data analysis process, I kept the supervising Chair apprised of the next steps and waited for approval before moving forward to the next step.

The emerging themes included the following: the use of and examples of graduated sanctions in each county/available alternative resources; the attitudes and beliefs of the youth and family buy-in to services and home/environment; and the use of the detention center and implications for its removal. Additional sub-themes that arose in a either briefly in all interviews or in some were: the role of the Court and other players (such as attorneys); community-based organizations and their rapport with the youth in conjunction to how collaboratively they work; and the probation officers defining their role as beyond probation.

The final step in data analysis involved a lengthy review of each color-coded transcription to identify which marked chunks of coded text were relevant to the identified themes. Connections of these identified pieces were also made to existing literature covered in Chapter 2.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Reliability**

Participants were recruited based on their qualifications and experience, with respect to the outlined criteria for participation, as well their willingness to continue. I gave the participants the opportunity to have all of their questions answered prior to consenting (via email). They were given adequate time to review the detailed consent form that reiterated the purpose of the study, the qualifications needed to participate, and the

hopeful level of commitment. The consent form further outlined example questions and the power the participant held in being able to end their engagement at any time.

Although I intended on conducting an initial interview of approximately an hour, followed by a second interview, lasting approximately twenty minutes, it was soon realized that the second interview was moot. I was able to ask all relevant questions and reach data saturation in the first interview, thus the follow-up interview was decided to be unnecessary.

The interviews occurred via Zoom based on COVID-19 restrictions and were later transcribed for coding. Initially, I intended on using NVivo coding software, but it was later discovered that the software was incompatible with my computer. Per the supervising Chair's guidance, I was allowed to hand-code instead, which first stemmed from deriving codes from the predetermined interview questions. The method for recognizing the relevant themes was adequately articulated and recorded for easy understanding.

### **Dependability**

Adherence to consistency regarding participant recruitment, data collection, analysis establish dependability. Although I planned on interviewing each participant twice, this was deemed unnecessary as data saturation had already been reached after the initial interview. Moreover, the raw data was adequately and thoroughly transcribed. I clearly articulated the adopted analytical method for easy duplication.

**Transferability**

The methodology for this study was well-outlined and generally adhered to with the exception of the use of Nvivo and a follow-up interview, due to software incompatibility and data saturation, respectively. This study was focused on the experiences of the participating probation officers who work with violent juveniles engaged in alternative resources. With this in mind, I was able to utilize the predetermined interview questions as a guide. Each of the predetermined questions were answered by all participants, but I asked additional, clarifying and expansive questions when appropriate. This allowed for the opportunity to adequately capture the experiences of the participants and gather rich data pertinent to this study.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability was achieved by my continued efforts of ensuring the raw data was transcribed accurately. Consistency was ensured throughout the analysis and data collection process, even when I asked additional questions, outside of the predetermined interview questions. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in the same manner.

With regard to analysis, I anticipated themes given the developed interview questions and the likely responses they would elicit. Nevertheless, I did not limit the acknowledgement of themes to only those that were anticipated. Additionally, there were a few themes that arose from only a small portion of interviews. These themes were not disregarded for not being present in each interview, as they were still deemed important

to acknowledge. These themes were clearly indicated as being relevant to only a few of the interviews, noting that it is possible they would have emerged in the other interviews had the opportunity arose. The findings reported in this study are rooted in the participants interview responses, from which the codes and themes emerged.

### **Results**

I began with broad themes derived from the coded data. These broad themes were then examined and condensed based on similarity of the initial broader themes to create a single, more cohesive theme. I used this study's two research questions to organize the interview questions and thus the participant responses.

Research question 1: From the perspective of probation officers, to what extent does the use of alternative resources impact violent juvenile offenders?

1. What kind of alternative services are available to violent juvenile offenders?
2. Who decides what alternative services are appropriate for each juvenile offender?
3. In your experience, how do violent juvenile offenders perform while on probation?
4. How often do you meet with your probationers?
5. What measures do you receive regarding their progress with the alternative services which they are engaged?
6. How often do you see this population reoffend? If the violent juvenile offender reoffends, what are typically the charges?

7. What are your concerns when working with a violent juvenile offender?
8. What characteristics do you take into consideration when deciding what level of supervision these offenders require?

Research question 2: Given the experiences of a probation officer working with this population, in conjunction with the focus on the use of alternative settings, how would removing a juvenile detention facility affect this population?

1. What are your experiences with the juvenile detention center?
2. In what ways can the use of a juvenile detention center affect a violent juvenile offender?
3. How do you feel about the possibility of the detention center being eliminated?
4. What are your thoughts regarding the elimination of a detention facility as an option for the minors? How would the elimination of a detention facility affect the minor, the victim, and the community?

Table 2 shows the risk assessments used by the participating counties.

Table 2: *Risk Assessment Tools Utilized*

County	Risk Assessment
San Mateo County	Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System (JAIS)
San Francisco County	Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI)

County	Risk Assessment
Solano County	Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI)
Contra Costa County	Ohio Youth Assessment System (OYAS)

Santa Clara County also utilizes a risk assessment tool; however, the name of the tool was not disclosed, but the use of the tool was discussed. Each County explained that the risk assessment is initially done when the youth's case is still in the investigation process, as the tool is used as the basis for the level of supervision needed. The assessment, as it was explained, assesses the youth's current offense, offense history, the beliefs of the minor, and the family dynamic. Several participants noted that the outcome of the assessment, low/medium/high risk, can be overridden with supervisor approval if the assessment score does not adequately assess the youth's level of needs. Of course, the probation officer requesting an override would need to articulate the needs of the minor and why the assessment tool should be changed to reflect the level of opinion of the supervising probation officer. Each participant further noted that the risk assessment is redone at a certain point of the youth's time on probation to account for any progress they have made, any new offenses or violations, or changes in any of the social domains.

Table 3 summarizes the available alternative services used by each county. It is possible that if one county is not listed as using a specific resource, it does not mean that



this county does not have it offered. Instead, this table is based on the experiences disclosed by the participating probation officers during their respective interviews.

Table 3: *Available Alternative Resources and Graduated Sanctions*

County	WRAP Services	Boys Ranch	In-custody program	GPS Monitoring	Resource Center	Juvenile Hall	Out-of-Home Placement
San Mateo County	X				X	X	X
San Francisco County	X			X			X
Solano County			X	X	X	X	X
Santa Clara County	X	X		X		X	X
Contra Costa County	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 3 overviews the main options for alternative services, all of which are available to violent juvenile offenders, and does not include options for various classes as there appears to be many. The classes may not be offered in every county, or they may be offered under a different name; it is also possible that this list is not as comprehensive, considering the focus of the study was on the main alternative services available. Contra Costa County mentioned offering the following classes, some of which occur in their in-

custody programs, and are also offered in the community: Cognitive Based Intervention Substance Abuse (CBISA; substance abuse programing), COPS class (theft awareness), Drive Smart and Alive at 25 (driving classes for those who drove while under the influence), fire setting (for arson charges), Thinking for a Change (T4C; a cognitive behavioral class), parenting classes, and a girls group for their in custody program, Girls in Motion (GIM), as well as a boys group for the other in-custody program, Youthful Offender Treatment Program (YOTP). Additionally offered is Aggression Replacement Training (ART; anger management class). San Mateo County explained the use of a Victim Impact Awareness program that is seven weeks in length. Participant 2 noted that all minors, including W&I 707(b) offenders, who have committed an offense that affected a victim, are referred to this program. Once completed with the program, they are able to engage in a mediation with the victim, if the victim is willing.

Solano County Participant 6 reported the use of a Youth Achievement Center which offers employment services, behavioral health, mentoring, learning services, and other various groups. In this center, which is in the community and at the responsibility of the youth to engage on their own accord, youth are assigned to a specific treatment group operated by a facilitator. Within this group, there is someone who assists with specialized support such as tutoring, cognitive behavioral groups, and more. Contra Costa County participant 5 further asserted the use of Bay Area community resources or the Rise Program that can assist in supporting the youth with obtaining employment skills and training, assist with transportation when needed, enroll in substance abuse program-

ming, obtain their state identification, and more. Further, the use of the StarVista program which connects and offers the youth substance abuse treatment, anger management, mental health support (individual and family therapy), peer support, and various skill development.

WRAP services generally include a clinician and a case manager that are connected to the minor and their family. Santa Clara County offers WRAP services, which is considered a step-down from Intensive WRAP services. The latter is characterized as intensive relative to the difference in frequency of contacts between the service providers and the youth. In San Mateo County, the Family Preservation Program is available to youth who continue to violate their conditions of probation and they are nearing the possibility of being removed from the home. Additionally, San Mateo County offers WRAP services through a specific unit; this unit is utilized as a more intensive level of service than the Family Preservation Program. Participant 2 clarified that these two units have recently combined into one unit, but operate independently. Solano County mentioned similar unit called the Family Preservation caseload for youth who are considered reasonable candidates. Participant 6 explained a reasonable candidate is someone who is at risk of removal from the home due to delinquency, the parent's inability to address/control the minor's behavior, or the home is deemed unsuitable. This caseload receives intensive therapeutic resources. San Francisco did not articulate their offered WRAP services operating as a separate unit, instead the probation officer would make this referral, which

would then need to receive approval. WRAP was also explained as a way for the youth to be connected to after school activities and help with finding employment.

In-custody programming is offered in Solano County through the Challenge Academy, and in Contra Costa County through the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility (OAYRF), GIM and YOTP. The Challenge Academy offers the same services as the community-based Youth Achievement Center, and commitments are generally geared for the violent juvenile offenders or those who continue to violate their probation or reoffend. The three Contra Costa County in-custody programs are similar in that they offer much of the same services and classes detailed earlier, and they all include an after care period where the youth would be released home, after their commitment, on a GPS monitor for continued supervision. All three programs also offer regular schooling for the minors to engage in throughout their commitment. OAYRF differs from both GIM and YOTP in that it is located in the community, in more of a dorm-like setting. Participant 5 described OAYRF as “staff secure” versus facility security, so technically, a youth, who are typically younger than those in YOTP, could run from the facility should they choose. An OAYRF commitment can be six, nine, or twelve months in length, though youth could be released early for good behavior. This program is also designed for the residents to engage in various field trips.

YOTP and GIM are similar in structure as they are both located in juvenile hall as separate units and operate in phases. YOTP has three in-custody phases including phase one with a focus on aggression management, phase two focusing on cognitive behavioral

curriculum, and the third phase as an opportunity for the youth to display everything they have learned while beginning to think about reintegration into the community. Phase three includes workshops in employment tech and skill building such as resume and cover letter writing, how to search for a job, and interview techniques. The youth are also assigned to an additional service based on their most recent risk assessment score; the additional programming would either be substance abuse curriculum or an advanced practice programming. The fourth phase of YOTP involves their return home and a period of aftercare, where they would return home, on ankle monitor, for a period of at least 30 days. With respect to how long the youth's commitment can last, it is open-ended. Their success in the program is focused more on their ability to display an understanding and adoption of the skills they have learned while in the program. Participant 5 noted that if a youth arrives in the program and consistently advances, the program could take anywhere from nine to ten months, "if they not only take in the classes, participate in the treatment, but more importantly they display appropriate behavior and additional treatment isn't determined to be necessary." A youth can be re-committed to YOTP as often as need and as often as timing and age permit. Participant 5 explained that the ages of those engaged in this program range from 16 to 20-year-olds.

For GIM, the program is usually six months in length, with three phases, or motions, at about six-weeks per phase. The classes in which they engage are based on their risk assessment score and the needs outlined by said assessment. In order to advance to the next phase, the youth must petition the in-house review committee, which includes

the probation officer, juvenile hall staff, and supervisors, to explain why they are ready to advance within the program, and they must complete the essay associated with the end of their current phase. If the youth's petition to advance is denied due to them not yet being ready to advance, either due to their lack of engagement or their inability to maintain their standing in the juvenile hall merit system (gold, silver, bronze), then the youth can repetition for the following week or whatever pre-agreed upon date set by the Motion Review Team (MRT). The fourth motion is an after care period. on GPS monitoring for a 45 day period. Prior to release, Participant 7 indicated it would be confirmed that the youth had a place to reside and was connected with community based resources, much like YOTP. Participant 7 explained that after the successful completion of the aftercare period, the youth would be transferred to a general supervision probation officer who would continue to supervise them until their probation term ended. This transfer to another probation officer should come with a re-assessment of their risk level, which, at the time, should have dropped down to a lower risk. As with YOTP, the female youth can be re-committed to GIM for multiple programs, if necessary and available to them.

Other options reported are out-of-home placement across all counties. Santa Clara County specified that that there are certain placements that offer specialized support for juvenile sex offenders (JSO) and for those who fall under the concern for the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). This county further confirmed a period of aftercare following a youth's return home. San Mateo County also utilizes their Community Care Program which occurs on the weekends. Youth can be ordered to en-

gage in this program which operates from 8 am to 5 pm and involves efforts such as cleaning the landscape of juvenile hall. This county participant also mentioned the use of community service hours and booking minors in juvenile hall for the weekend, as additional examples of available graduated sanctions. Contra Costa participant 7 mentioned the practice of booking minors into custody for the weekend is no longer in use in their county. Moreover, the use of therapeutic detention is used as another graduated sanction, though it is reserved for only when necessary and deemed appropriate given a minor's continued violations. Therapeutic detentions can be anywhere from a 30, 45 or 60 day commitment and the youth are given six days of good behavior for every 30 days they are committed, thus allowing the minor to earn a potential early release. Should the youth not behave well in juvenile hall, their earned days can be taken away from them in any increment deemed appropriate by the probation officer.

The alternative programs discussed above are utilized as graduated sanctions. All participants described the need to begin with the least restrictive option first and a reliance on the outcome of the risk assessment for guidance on what level of supervision a violent juvenile offender would require. If the current programming in which a minor is engaged is not working for whatever reason, the probation officer, and often with the collaboration of a supervisor, will assess what is not working and make any needed changes. These changes can be as simple as referring a minor to requesting a new service provider for an already connected minor (within community-based services/WRAP) due to a lack of developed rapport, finding a new out-of-home placement option, committing or

recommitting a youth to an in-custody program, increasing their level of supervision and connection to relevant classes/groups, or time spent in juvenile hall for a failure to program or a violation.

Each participant was asked to comment on how well their violent juvenile offenders engage in the programming with which they are engaged. Participant 1, from Santa Clara County, stated that, in their experience, the success of violent offenders on probation is much lower than those who committed lower-level offenses. The offenses committed by the youth in Participant 1's experience was described as "usually graduated" and gang related. Participant 1 estimated the frequency of reoffending to be 75-80% of their supervised violent offenders; although, they clarified that not all reoffenses are always a W&I 707(b) offense. Participant 2 expressed experience in their violent juvenile offenders violating their conditions of probation more often than reoffended. Participant 2 stated common violations include curfew violations and continued substance use. Participant 2 believes the reasoning for the infrequent reoffending is due to the youths' knowledge of "what is on the line," for example a long therapeutic detention or a commitment to the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

Participants 3 and 4, both from San Francisco, reported this population generally not doing well, with Participant 3 guessing two or three out of ten violent offenders will reoffend, while still on probation. Participant 4 stated there is a variation in reoffending as some violent offenders may not reoffend while on probation, others will several months into their probation term, and, as Participant 3 agreed, offenders will return to



probation for a new W&I 707(b) offense after having already been terminated from probation. Participant 3 noted that if a youth's juvenile court record had not been ordered sealed, which is typical of a W&I 707(b) offense, then this information can be taken into consideration for their newer case. Solano County participant 6 explained that this population generally "requires the most attention" are often in need of more services. Participant 6 recalled their experience with the current violent juvenile offenders they are supervising, stating that they were all, with the exception of one, offered the lower level of services, prior to their commitment of a W&I 707(b) offense and that level of services did not prove effective for them. Participant 6 provided a similar account to Participants 2, 3 and 4, in that W&I 707(b) offenders may not commit a new violent offense during their current term of probation. Participant 6 also commented on the general age range of youth who are committing these serious offenses, noting youth are typically between 15 and 17 years of age. If they were to commit another violent offense, they would likely be heard in adult court.

Contra Costa participants 5 and 7 agreed that, in their individual experiences, some offenders do better, while others do not. Participants 5 and 7 both commented that a youth's success also depends on their willingness to change. Participant 5 stated, "some youth come in receptive to the help and others have more barriers like distrust of law enforcement or treatment services." Both participants agreed that about 25% of their violent juvenile offenders re-offend, but noted that violations of probation are much more common. Participant 7 explained that it is likely the female youth do not reoffend due to

the potential of a commitment to DJJ. Participant 5 stated that after violations, common reoffenses include weapons possession, followed by robbery. Participant opined that the youth generally perform well while in custody, but then they are released home and either do really well or they get entangled with their environment. If the latter is the case, then Participant 5 noted the presenting issues were likely much deeper than the risk assessment was able to capture.

Table 4 summarizes the comments regarding the attitudes and beliefs of both the minor and the family, as well as comments surrounding the youth's home environment. This table is organized by county comment versus individual participant comment for easy reading.

Table 4: *Attitudes and Beliefs of Minor and Family*

	San Mateo County	Solano County	San Francisco County	Santa Clara County	Contra Costa County
Comments about minor buy-in		X	X	X	X
Comments about family buy-in		X	X	X	X
Comments about home or neighborhood	X	X	X	X	X

All participating counties commented on the youth returning to an environment that may not be conducive to their success, despite the resources they have and will continue to receive. Santa Clara Participant 1 expressed that the temptation to reoffend is present when a minor returns to their community which is impacted by gang violence and activity. San Francisco Participant 3 noted that juvenile hall can be considered a comfortable place for them as it provides the youth structure that they do not have at home. San Francisco Participant 4 added that the needs of the family and the minor in the home must also be considered for services to be successful, but it can be jarring to a minor and the family, to all of a sudden have seven or eight people, including the probation officer, involved in your life. San Mateo Participant 2 also articulated a need for an understanding of how the minor's home dynamic is, as Human Service Agency (HSA) contacts should be considered as they may detail a history of neglect or violence in the home. Participant 6, from Solano County, noted that understanding the parents' dynamic is important as well, as it is important to know if they are home, working multiple jobs and poorly supervising the youth as a result of working or are they struggling with substance abuse. Contra Costa Participant 7 further noted the parents of the minor may have a criminal history themselves, adding that offending behavior could be learned.

Contra Costa Participant 5 articulated that, in their county, there are certain areas that are considered more impoverished than others. They continued, family buy-in to services is crucial, but it is important to remember that the family has not been receiving

the same level of services they youth has while in program, so issues within the family dynamic have not yet been addressed at the time the youth returns home.

Participants 4 and 7 also commented on how the youths parents have a propensity to lie about how their child is doing, until the youth is beyond their control, at which point they will divulge what has been happening to the probation officer. Several comments were made by participants regarding being regarded as an additional parent and/or a social worker.

Table 5 portrays the participants thoughts regarding the potential elimination of a juvenile detention center. Participants were asked to comment on their experiences with juvenile hall, some of which was detailed above in how it is currently being used, as well as their perception of how the elimination of a detention center would affect the youth, the community, and the victim. Some participants offered suggestions for the evolution of juvenile hall moving forward.

Table 5: *Thoughts Surrounding the Elimination of a Juvenile Detention Center*

Comment	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Detention center as a deterrent	X	X	X		X		
Detention center as a means to hold youth accountable	X		X	X	X		X
Assist in making the victim feel whole again	X	X	X	X	X		X
Assist in keeping the community safe	X	X	X		X	X	X

Several participants alluded to seeing a change in how juvenile hall is being utilized presently. Many of the participants noted that the overall population of juvenile hall has gone down and it is no longer used as recommended disposition. The participants reported in only rare occasions where, in their experience, does a youth exhaust the options available to them, on more than one occasion, or refusing to continue programming in their original commitment, would they then be committed to juvenile hall for a period of time. San Mateo County was the only county to express the use of juvenile hall as anything beyond a “holding” place where a minor remains during the pre-adjudication.

San Mateo County participant 2 spoke about the use of juvenile hall not only for the weekend, but also as a means for therapeutic detention. Interestingly, Participant 2 also expressed this type of detention to be a strong deterrent for continued W&I 707(b) violations, at least in their interview.

Participant 1, from Santa Clara County, reported believing that juvenile hall does not seem to be “designed” to provide youth with the intensive resources like the other existing programming in their county, adding that juvenile hall staff continuously rotate. There is also a propensity for gang members, according to Participant 1, to glorify juvenile hall as they are proud of what they have done to be placed in there. Participant 1 expressed how, in their experience, they witness the youth who have committed violent offenses as lacking empathy for their victims. Participant 1 stated, “They (the youth) make it sound like it’s just such an easy thing to do and they feel that they’re not really hurting anybody and that it’s just property. These people can get things back so there’re like, ‘oh, you know what? I need it, I want it, I’m going to take it.’” Participant 1 went on to comment that some offenders are so “criminally involved” that if there is no accountability, the offending will merely continue. As a victim, the potential closure of a juvenile hall would be an “injustice” to them as it does not protect them and only adds fear to them and the community. Participant 4, of San Francisco County, made a similar comment regarding a youth’s disposition or mindset by noting that, in their experience, the youth that were most concerning were the violent offenders who were charismatic, personable, and respectful, because “you’re not expecting them to do whatever they’re going to do.” Par-

Participant 4 recalled one example of a youth they supervised where this behavior was exhibited and told this minor that they (Participant 6) felt as though they were dealing with two completely different people.

San Mateo County Participant 2 spoke highly of the juvenile hall staff and listed some of the options for programming inside the detention center. They went on to note that a detention center is necessary to not only make the victim whole, but to maintain community safety. Further, a detention center acts as a deterrent as previously explained. Participant 3 of San Francisco County noted that the removal of a detention center may be detrimental to the minors and the safety of the community. Otherwise, without a juvenile detention center, the offending behavior of a youth will be enabled and will eventually create an adult that believes they can get away with anything. Participant 3 reported being interested in seeing juvenile hall evolve potentially with more tailored, residential style programming that could potentially include a more student-centered academic curriculum, made to fit each youth's specific academic needs, as well as educating the youth on various life skills like how to pay bills, how to open a bank account, how to cook, and more. Participants 4, 5, and 6 agreed that an evolution of juvenile hall could be beneficial, but it is unclear what that may look like. Participant 4, of San Francisco County offered a suggestion of making juvenile hall smaller and perhaps one juvenile hall for two or more surrounding counties. Participants 4, 5, 6, and 7 commented on the risk of juveniles, regardless of in their current detention facility or a future, more evolved facility, linking up with one another on the inside, and continuing that connection in outside

of custody. Nevertheless, Participant 6 of Solano County asserted the need to some sort of locked facility, even residential in nature, to house the serious offenders to keep the community safe. Participant 5, from Contra Costa County, noted that the elimination of a detention facility may also re-traumatize the victim. This participant continued, the matter of accountability does not only apply to the minor, but also to the justice system. From the perspective of the community and the victim, they are relying on this level of accountability and if they do not have this reassurance, then they will lose trust in the justice system.

Participants 1, 5, 6, and 7 commented that in juvenile hall, the youth's basic needs are met, some of which are not when they are at home. On top of their services being met, they are receiving services or engaging in the programming within juvenile hall, as well as attending school. Further comments were made by some of these participants that juvenile hall is made to appear as homelike as possible. Participant 5 noted that YOTP has a couch, video and board games, and each youth has their own room, and the services are geared toward the youth's developing brain it is necessary to have the minor's buy-in to services, but also a level of "responsivity."

An additional theme that presented itself during data analysis was that of the community-based organizations. All participants reported receiving some sort of report or ongoing update from case managers, therapists, or whatever facilitator their youth was engage with. Many of the participants noted that the providers will reach out when there is a problem, usually surrounding being able to reach the minor. Participant 3 noted that



is a rare occurrence when a provider informs them of something for which they were not already aware. Participant 3 expressed that without probation's involvement, youth would be unlikely to engage in these services as the service providers alone do not have any "teeth" in making the youth stay with them. Participant 6 made a similar comment regarding the Youth Achievement Center noting that it is the minor's responsibility to show up and engage. Participants 3, 4, and 6, stated that some case managers are more proactive than others. Participant 3 stated that some community-based organizations are not always truthful in their reports to probation. Participants 3 and 4 agreed that some service providers have difficulty relating to the youth, with Participant 3 noting that some are more concerned with being the youth's friend. Participant 3 further mentioned the community-based organizations have a poor staff turnaround which leaves the youth having to get used to a new provider.

Two final themes that were briefly touched on in several of the interviews relates to how ultimately the Court has the final say in what options the minors are granted. Also touched on were the differences in how various counties charge and disposition the youth. Participant 2 recalled having conversations with youth who's committed an offense in San Mateo County and are anxious to get back to their county of residence, San Francisco, as they (the youth) anticipated a lenient outcome. Participant 4 also commented on youth coming from the East Bay to commit offenses and claim they live in San Francisco for the same reason.

## Summary

All participants reported seeing the shift in the use of juvenile hall shift and the subsequent reliance on alternative resources. All participating probation officers provided detailed reports of the available major alternative resources within their counties and explained how any combination of these services, with the approval of a supervisor, can be used to help the minor. The available services, ranging from support in home to out-of-home placement, including in-custody programming, are utilized as graduated sanctions. Each probation officer is responsible for keeping a youth's risk assessment up-to-date and relevant to their current progress or challenges.

San Mateo County was the only county that reported using juvenile hall as a therapeutic detention option, as well as for a weekend commitment. All counties reported that juvenile hall acts more like a holding place when a youth is awaiting disposition. Solano and Contra Costa Counties reported utilizing in-custody programming and each program, Challenge Academy, OAYRF, GIM, and YOTP, are considered alternatives to detention, as, per their respective county, it is an alternative to a DJJ commitment. Both counties reported a youth can be committed to these programs on multiple occasions, which also shows the county's willingness to work with the youth. Specialized units such as the Family Preservation Caseload in Solano County, or the Family Preservation and WRAP unit in San Mateo County are also examples of the various counties' efforts in engaging violent offenders in alternative resources. The use of wraparound services, available across all counties, with the exception of Solano County, although the services

similar to WRAP were described, is yet another example of how the counties are attempting to address the needs of the youth and family in the home, as so many of the participants highlighted as important.

Santa Clara, San Francisco, Solano, and Contra Costa Counties all agreed that the success of a youth engaged in the available alternative services is dependent on the buy-in of not only the minor, but their family as well. This includes the family's willingness to appropriately communicate with their child's probation officer. The San Mateo County participant did not comment on family or youth buy-in, but they did agree with the other counties about the concerns surrounding a youth being released back into their already questionable environment. Although the wraparound services and community-based organizations should be able to help with this, it appears, given the comments surrounding inaccurate reports, poor turnaround, or case managers being more concerned with being the youth's friend, there is a serious need to improve the linkage between service provider and youth. Perhaps the role of the service provider, if contracting with the probation departments, may need to be reviewed and community-based organizations can be reminded of such and trained accordingly.

With respect to the elimination of juvenile hall and its effect on the minor, the community, and the victim, there was a majority agreement that removing a detention center completely is ill-advised based on probation officer experience. Most of the participants asserted the existence of the detention center acts as not only a deterrence, but a way to acknowledge and protect the fear of the community and the victim. Half of the

probation officers interviewed expressed interest in seeing existing juvenile halls evolve by reducing the number of juveniles it can house, appearing more residential, and providing more life skill focused programming.

Through the use of audio-reordered interviews, participants were able to share their experiences regarding the supervision of violent juvenile offenders engaged in alternative resources. The semi-structured interviews allowed for a conversational interview, thus allowing for the participants to freely recall their experiences. The interviews were then transcribed and hand-coded; the raw data was then analyzed for overarching themes.

Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions on the findings of this study and connections to the existing body of knowledge will be made, as well as to the theoretical framework. Key concepts are revisited and concisely summarized.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

### **Introduction**

The experiences of probation officers who supervise violent juvenile offenders while they are engaged in alternative resources were gathered through semistructured interviews. A total of seven volunteer probation officers, who met the criteria for participation, were interviewed for this qualitative, phenomenological study. The interviews were later transcribed and data saturation was deemed to have been met, thus no follow-up interviews were conducted. Interviews were then hand-coded and emergent themes were identified, as reported in the previous chapter.

Chapter 5 will focus on an overview of the study beginning with participant selection and data collection and analysis. The findings are summarized and recommendations for future research are provided. Additionally, the implications for social change are discussed. Finally, a conclusion outlining the overarching themes and study findings is discussed.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Across the five of nine Bay Area counties represented in this study, the general consensus of participants was that the use of juvenile hall has drastically changed over the course of several years, and even more in the more recent years. Research has outlined the overall shift in the juvenile justice system from long-term and unnecessary detention to the reliance on alternative services. Despite the existing research, however, a gap in the literature remained; there was a need for understanding how this shift affects the juveniles, particularly the violent offenders, served by the probation departments. Part of this research gap included obtaining this insight from the perspective of those who supervise these youth while they are engaged in the alternative resources. Further, the experiences of the probation officers is crucial to understanding how to appropriately respond to the shift in the justice system, as there is a need to see how detention centers are currently being used and what implications are imminent if detention centers were to be eliminated or restructured.

This research study was structured around the following two research questions: From the perspective of probation officers, to what extent does the use of alternative resources impact violent juvenile offenders? Given the experiences of a probation officer working with this population in conjunction with the focus on the use of alternative settings, how would removing a juvenile detention facility affect this population?

A qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted to gather data relevant to gathering data on the lived experiences and insights of the probation officers supervising

the violent juvenile offenders engaged in alternative resources (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). For this study, the idea of an alternative service includes in-custody programs as they are considered an alternative, in their counties, to a commitment to DJJ.

This study intended on recruiting one probation officer from each of the nine Bay Area counties; however, after posting the recruitment flyer in the closed Facebook probation officer support group, only seven deputies showed interest in participating. For a phenomenological study, seven participants is satisfactory for reaching data saturation. All seven interested probation officers met the criteria for participating in this study, which included a minimum of 2 years working with violent juvenile offenders engaged in alternative resources. All seven probation officers consented to enrolling in the research study and the virtual interviews were subsequently scheduled.

A list of predetermined and approved interview questions were used as the guide for the semi-structured interview. In real-time, I asked the participants follow-up, clarifying, and expansive questions to ensure rich data was obtained. Initially, I intended on using a follow-up interview for clarification purposes, but after review of the initial interviews, and after conferring with the supervising chair of my committee, this extra interview was deemed unnecessary. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and two and a half hours. These interviews were transcribed for easy review and the coding process began. I did not use NVivo, as planned, to assist in the coding process. Instead, the transcripts were hand-coded and then analyzed for emerging themes. Overarching themes were first

noted, and after doing so, I noticed some of the initial themes corresponded with one another and they could therefore be simplified.

I have organized by research question and present the findings associated with each question. Research Question 1: I asked from the perspective of probation officers, to what extent does the use of alternative resources impact violent juvenile offenders? The use of graduated sanctions for violations of probation can lead to an increase in supervision of the youth and connection to additional services (CPOC, 2014). All participants expressed the availability of several major alternative resource options, with the exception of San Francisco County, that offers only wraparound services and support in the home or a commitment to out-of-home placement. When graduated sanctions can be used to increase the support for a struggling youth, rewards and acknowledgments can also be used to highlight successful progress in minors (CPOC, 2014). The participant who worked in San Mateo County was the only one to state that juvenile hall is still used for booking youth for the weekend as well as for an extended therapeutic detention. While this practice was not commonly expressed in the other participating counties, there was a reward system built into the therapeutic commitment. Participant 6 explained that for every 30 days of their commitment, the youth received 6 days of credit, which could ultimately allow them to return home early. Of course, should the youth not take this commitment seriously and misbehave, time was then taken away from this allotment in whatever increment the probation officer deemed appropriate.



Interestingly, with the structure of the in-custody programs of YOTP and GIM, the burden of success and the ability to move to the next phase lies with the youth. In both programs, it is reportedly the youth's responsibility to not only engage in the programming, which includes attending school, but they are to consistency display what they have learned. The youth can be recommitted to the programming if the probation officer sees this as necessary and it is so ordered by the Court. This practice, as seen in the other counties as well with their community and in-custody services (Solano County), allows for the justice system to continue to work with the youth, and their families, in hopes of eventual success.

Participant 5 expressed an important concept. While the continued offering and engagement of services is crucial, the needs of the family and their ongoing dynamics need to be addressed. Since it is the minor who is on probation, the services are generally geared to supporting them, with various life skills, academic support, mental health support, various programming, and more. However, as Participant 5 articulated, the minor, after having received an excess of programming and structure - specifically in an in-custody or out-of-home placement - is set to return home. This return may put the youth back in the very environment that was challenging, distracting, stressful, or worrisome in the first place. Participant 5 noted that when a minor returns to their home, it is important to remember that the family has not been receiving the same level of support and services that they (the youth) did. This leaves the troublesome family dynamic or situational/environmental stressors unaddressed. This notion should therefore be addressed to not only

give the family the tools to help reintegrate their child into the home, but ensure that everyone is on track to support one another. Participant 5 also noted that the minor's return home and potential challenges with success, are also telling of what the risk assessment that was conducted missed. Participant 5 described this phenomenon as a challenge that was likely deeply rooted and undetectable at the time of the assessment.

The aforementioned concept also speaks to the common disclosure among the counties of the need for both family and minor buy-in to programming. Participant 4 commented that when a minor leaves juvenile hall, even soon after disposition, they may be connected with various players, sometimes even up to eight. For a minor to go from their family dynamic, whatever that is to having eight additional people, let alone strangers, to all of a sudden involved in their life, can be a challenging and overwhelming experience. A few of the participants further commented on how their role is that of a social worker, much like Grattet et al. (2018) found. Additional comments from participants included referring to themselves as being viewed, by the family, as an additional parent, sometimes even teaching the parent how to parent.

Part of the concern with detaining youth lies in the fear of them becoming institutionalized. Participant 4 interestingly commented on how this phenomenon begins in school settings by administration and teachers labeling students as "bad kids." This is problematic for a myriad of reasons, but specific to this study, if this were to be assumed true, it may speak to the poor rates of youth graduating high school, something that should instead be encouraged and made to feel not only important, but attainable. More-

over, if this notion were to be assumed as fact, it speaks to GST as Agnew's 1992 concept of strains juveniles face, which includes the failure to achieve a positive goal, the elimination of a positive catalyst, and/or the presence of a negative catalyst. The idea that a child could be negatively labeled in a school setting, early on in their academic career, would effectively put the child in a position where all three of Agnew's strains could overlap. Many of the participating probation officers discussed the use of cognitive behavioral programming which is structured to help the minor change their way of thinking, presumably on both a grand scale and personal scale. One participant articulated the difficulty in helping a minor change the way they currently perceive the world and themselves, especially when their environment supports their current perspective. Another participant articulated the need for existing programming to meet the youth where they are. This idea is imperative, upon reflection to the minor's buy-in, the minor's likelihood of engagement and their possibility of immediate and long-term success.

GST postulates the reasoning for the commission of a crime is directly connected to their intention to obtain financial status and success (Agnew, 1985). Agnew (2012) argues that the ability obtain that status becomes difficult when the individual lives in a lower socioeconomic communities where access to the resources available to assist in achieving this success are scarce. Given the participants' noted concerns for their youth to their homes and family dynamics is sound. While the support received and the skills acquired through programming are noteworthy, one participant compared a youth who just completed programming and is returning home to removing "a fish out of its dirty

environment, cleaning it off, and the putting it right back in.” This begs the question about the community-based organizations. Many of the participants commented on how some case managers are not as proactive as others, how some are more focused on appearing to be the youth’s friend, or are providing false or inaccurate reports to the officers. Also reported was a lack of connection or reliability to the youth as well as poor turnaround, leaving youth, who may already be overwhelmed with services and strangers involved in their case, to begin engaging with yet a new stranger. Since the community-based organizations are already present in the community, more research would be beneficial to look into their outreach practices. This is not to say that these programs are not already, but, based on the accounts of the probation officers and their concern with the youths’ home environment, should the community-based programs focus on community outreach and support families with their dynamics, the minor academically, and perhaps with connecting them to employment, some of the concerns outlined in this study may be addressed earlier on.

Connecting the minor to employment opportunities, paid internships, or something similar would support the idea presented in the chosen theoretical framework. Participants also commented on the youth they supervise as stealing to satisfy a need. Also expressed by many of the participants is how juvenile hall satisfies their basic needs of shelter, food, and medical attention. With the amount of programming, staff interaction, and school, it likely also provides them with attention they may be lacking in their home

environment, which could be due to a number of reasons, such as an absent parent, or a parent who works long hours.

Youth who have been exposed to poverty between the ages of 6 and 11, are more likely to commit violent offense between the ages of 15 and 25 (Hawkins, 2000). Participants pinpointed the age ranges of the violent offenders whom they supervise as being generally between 16 and 20 years of age. The participants consistency reported that the minors tend to violate more than reoffend while on probation. While there are instances where the minor's do reoffend, some with a new W&I 707(b) offense, the topic of probation violations arose frequently, as did the likelihood of their commission of a new W&I 707(b) offense after they have already been terminated from probation. Further research into why this appears to be the case would be interesting as it raises some important questions around why they were able to complete probation the first time without committing a new offense; did something in their family dynamic change; did the programming work and if so, what caused the programing takeaways to wear off?

Research Question 2 I asked given the experiences of a probation officer working with this population in conjunction with the focus on the use of alternative settings, how would removing a juvenile detention facility affect this population?

All participants agreed there is a need for some sort of locked facility in which the violent juvenile offenders can be placed. The safety of the community, the responsibility to the victim, and the safety of the minor were all considerations for their statements.

Further, the idea that the youth need a tangible form of deterrence was also expressed. A

participant nicely articulated the need for accountability, not only for the minor but for the justice system, to ensure both the community and the victim do not lose their trust in the overall system.

Half of the participants expressed their interest in seeing the juvenile detention center evolve, perhaps into a smaller, more residential setting. Suggestions for programming and services that can be offered were provided and centered more around general life skills, mental health support, and academic support. One participant suggested there be a juvenile hall shared by multiple counties. Juvenile hall was described by one participant as “not necessarily a bad place” given the work that has been done already to make the setting as home-like as possible, on top of the needs of the youth being met.

Most of the officers agreed, however, that a change in the structure of the juvenile justice system would require a sound plan that none of them have seen quite yet. Some of the interviewed officers reported being unsure of what a newly structured juvenile hall may look like. Given the accounts of the probation officers, there appears to be both hesitation and interest in what the future of detention centers may look like. The officers have reported already seeing a change in the use of juvenile hall, so it is possible that any further evolution of juvenile hall can be hard to envision.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While the conducted interviews were in-depth, it is still possible that participants may not have completely articulated their experiences, relevant to the purpose of this study, as they were asked these questions in real time. Therefore, it remains a possibility

that there could be additional information they may add if they were asked the same questions a second time, but given the rich information received in the initial interview, a follow-up interview was not required. For the majority of the interview questions, including the additional, more expansive questions that I asked, the participants gave well thought out, unbiased answers that were based on their experiences of the phenomenon being studied. However, most participants did feel pretty strongly about how the complete removal of a detention center would not be a sound idea.

This study had a sample size of only seven participants; although this is sound for qualitative study grounded in a phenomenological approach, it still does not necessary apply to the majority of opinions in the Bay Area. Further, my intention was to recruit one probation officer from each of the nine Bay Area counties. The seven participants were representative of only five of these counties, with two of the five counties being represented by two separate probation officers. Counties not included in this study are Alameda County, Marin County, Napa County, and Sonoma County. The former county is considered a big county, so it is unfortunate that this county was not represented as it is located between San Francisco County and Contra Costa County, and considered a major county. Marin, Napa, and Sonoma Counties are further away and considered smaller counties, but it would have been ideal to have a representative from each county participate in the study.

As a result of COVID-19, the interviews took place via Zoom. Despite still affording a sound interview environment, the in-person engagement and body language cues often noticed in an in-person interview were not present.

Additionally, given my current experience as a probation officer, personal experience and understanding of the available programming, the court system, and the juvenile justice system may have caused bias in the follow-up and expansive questions asked. Bias may have also been present during the data analysis process as it is possible that my familiarity with the subject allowed for an easier identification of the themes; however, this is acknowledged throughout this study.

### **Recommendations**

Further research would benefit from a larger sample size of probation officers, preferably to account for all Bay Area Counties. Future research could also be done to include other California counties as well. Replication of the methodology is simple and can be applied to larger sample sizes. NVivo would be better suited for use with a larger sample size to assist with coding. All county participation would be helpful in being able to understand and compare what services are working in which counties. Additional research on whether or not a more uniform level of services or approach for handling various cases would reduce any cross county crime and limit the divide the community sees in the juvenile justice system.

The term “community-based organizations” suggest that the services the probation officers referred to exist in the community and that the respective probation depart-



ments contract with them. Considerations regarding how these services can increase community outreach in an effort to reach youth and families in need of their support, prior to a youth's connection to the probation department may act as a crucial component to addressing criminogenic behaviors before they rise to the level of court engagement. Additional research into what these community-based organizations are doing for community outreach and how they are keeping the youth and family engaged would be beneficial.

From this study, it does appear that there is somewhat of an overlap in the kinds of services offered, such as wraparound services, out-of-home placement, and GPS monitoring, but there are a few counties that offer more structured programming, some of which is in-custody. A more in-depth look into these in-custody programs would be imperative to understanding their efficacy, particularly in comparison to the counties that no longer have, or have never had the similar structured programming. One participant mentioned youth specifically commenting on the difference in the court outcome between counties, which should be concerning. Moreover, when discussing consistency across counties, additional research surrounding the practices of the district attorneys and their decision process on whether or not to file on some charges versus others should be examined. Furthermore, the several participants mentioned that the final decision lies with the judge's ruling. Although this was not the highlight of this study, it was mentioned enough, by participants, to raise the question about how a judge's ruling affects the outcome of a the youth discussed in this research.

Many participants mentioned that violations of probation seem to be a common occurrence with this population. Research into why these violations occur could be beneficial in providing more insight into the youth's home life. As several participants mentioned, the youth they serve are most often well-surrounded by services, but their return to their environment, which is likely already concerning, may render the extra support they get as moot. The services they are receiving, it is important to remember, is meant to be temporary, as the minor is not expected to be connected to juvenile probation forever, so research surrounding ways to not only keep the youth engaged, but show that these services are still available to them, in their communities will prove crucial.

Finally, it was discussed on several occasions that the ability of the service providers to not only work collaboratively with probation, but to connect with the youth, is crucial to the success of the minor. Considerations for how service providers are trained to engage with probation and the youth could be important for closing a service gap.

### **Implications**

While there is certainly research to suggest that the use of a detention center can be detrimental to the development of the youth, the concept of a detention center is still necessary. The shift to focusing on more alternative resources and lessening the frequency of use, as well as the length of stay is important, but it cannot come without further examination. Participants spoke of a risk assessment used to determine whether or not a youth, at point of police contact, should be booked into custody. This practice alone

shows the effort toward limiting a youth's exposure to detention. Several participants further noted that, from their experience, the use of juvenile hall has really lessened even in the last few years. A stronger switch to a reliance on alternative services, at least to begin with, remains imminent. Thus, it is imperative that the focus stray from a divide between detention versus services, and instead surround how new and existing services can be better structured to serve the youth beyond their time on probation. A restructuring of juvenile hall, specifically with how it looks and how it will be utilized also appears to be imminent and this could very well prove to be a sound transition.

Research that examines the experiences of those who not only supervise, but come in contact with these youth is relevant to gathering a closer understanding of the needs the youth need on an individual level, as well as within their homes and communities. The juvenile justice system is not supposed to be an entity that is involved in a juvenile's life for a long period of time. Ergo, should it be found that this is the case, as many of these participants expressed, further research is needed to examine why this is the case. Here lies the implication for social change; the idea that the professionals working this population express their experiences in a way that policy makers can utilize to make the necessary changes to the system and the services it offers is crucial.

The examination done in this study focused on the experiences of juvenile probation officers working with a specific population; however, there is more to be done. This research provided valuable insight from the probation officers who supervise these youth across five counties. The perceptions of the probation officers shown in this study articu-

late a need for consistency, transparency, adequate support, and youth and family buy-in to appropriately support these youth beyond their time with juvenile probation.

### **Conclusion**

A qualitative study, with a phenomenological approach, was utilized to examine the experiences of probation officers who supervise violent juvenile offenders as they engage in alternative services. The purpose of this study was to obtain the lived experiences of the probation officers working with this population to gain further insight into how the available alternative resources are working for the youth. Additionally, this study aimed to gain the insight of the probation officers with respect to the use of juvenile hall and the possibility of its elimination.

Probation officers were recruited through a closed Facebook support group for probation officers. A recruitment flyer was posted in the group and I hoped to recruit nine total probation officers, specifically one from each of the nine Bay Area counties. The recruitment flyer clearly outlined the inclusion criteria for participation in this study. Seven probation officers responded to the flyer by contacting me to show their interest. I confirmed their adherence to the participation criteria through self-disclosure. The participating officers represented the following counties: San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Contra Costa. The participants were emailed a copy of the consent form and given adequate time for review prior to consenting. All seven probation officers consented to enrollment in the study, so interviews were subsequently scheduled. Due to COVID-19, the interviews were held via Zoom and privacy was ensured by the require-

ment of a passcode needed to enter the meeting, as well as the reminder to the participants to be in a private room where they would be able to engage freely in the interview.

The interview was audio-recorded for easy transcription and hand-coded due to software incompatibility with NVivo. Data analysis was conducted to find common themes, which were later condensed by grouping similar themes together.

Themes that arose from analysis included the use of graduated sanctions and the available alternative resources in each of the participating counties. An additional theme that appeared is the focus on the importance of acknowledging the attitudes and beliefs of the minor and their family, as well as the youth's home environment. The last theme that arose surrounds the reasoning for the need of a detention center and its implications for the victim, the minor, and the community.

With regard to the first theme, participants were able to outline the available services in their county. Only one county reported using juvenile hall for a period of therapeutic detention and for booking minors for the weekends. All counties reported witnessing a shift in their counties with respect to how juvenile hall is utilized and how overall numbers in their institutions have significantly reduced. Also expressed was how violations of probation were more common among this population, though participants did report the minor's re-offending during their time on probation. San Mateo County was the only county to not report their W&I 707(b) offenders re-offending, possibly due to the graduated sanctions present in their county, which include the therapeutic and weekend detentions.

Participants further articulated the available benefits of working with community-based organizations, though several deputies suggested improvements could be made with their level of service, level of engagement with both the department and the youth, and their ability to connect with the minor and the family.

As for the attitudes and beliefs of the minor and the family, as well as the concern for the minor's environment, most of the participants articulated the importance of the family and youth's buy-in to services. Without this component, the minor is reportedly unlikely to engage, which would then be cause for them to be found in noncompliance of their court commitments. Moreover, tailoring the programming, as it appears to be already, to the minor's developing brain, allowing them to learn coping techniques and various skills that would carry into their adulthood is important.

Finally, the use of the detention center as a deterrent and a means for holding the minor accountable was a common theme among participants. Despite this, most of the interviewed officers articulated being interested in seeing how juvenile hall could evolve to better serve youth while being less traumatizing of an experience.

Additional research would benefit from a larger population of probation officers who supervise this population, especially to include the unaccounted for Bay Area counties. Further research is needed to examine the structure, role, and engagement of community-based organizations with respect to their efforts in engaging in community outreach. Of further importance would be to research the possibility for ensuring some level of consistency throughout the offered programming and probation outcome for juvenile

offenders as there appears to be a noticeable difference between some counties being more lenient than others.

The implications for social change rest in this study's intention of contributing to the existing body of knowledge regarding the juvenile justice system and its continued evolution. This study helps address the research gap in providing the insight of the probation officers who work with this population. The findings of this study can lend themselves to policy makers, probation departments, and community-based organizations in providing all parties with the lived experiences and knowledge of the deputies who supervise these youth so that improvements and adjustments can be made to better serve the youth, therefore supporting their short and long-term success, as this outcome would also contribute to positive social change.

Regardless of the outcome of detention centers and their use, it would be important to include the knowledge, experiences, and insights of the probation officers who supervise them as it is valuable to the intended outcome. While the youth who do find success through the use of alternative services should be commended for their progress, the probation officers who help ensure their adherence to the program and support them throughout any challenges should also be recognized. The collaboration between community-based organizations, the youth, and the probation departments is crucial, but until these services can find a way to reach the youth and families and remain a consistent force, prior to probation's involvement, the collaboration between the youth and their probation officer is an important first step in the youth achieving their success.

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#### Appendix A: Interview Questions

- How long have you been a probation officer?
- How long have you worked with violent juvenile offenders?
- What kind of alternative services are available to violent juvenile offenders?
- Who decides what alternative services are appropriate for each juvenile offender?

- In your experience, how do violent juvenile offenders perform while on probation?
- How often do you meet with your probationers?
- What measures do you receive regarding their progress with the alternative services in which they are engaged?
- How often do you see this population reoffend? If the violent juvenile offender reoffends, what are typically the charges?
- What are your concerns when working with a violent juvenile offender?
- What characteristics do you take into consideration when deciding what level of supervision these offenders require?
- What are your experiences with the juvenile detention center?
- In what ways can the use of a juvenile detention center affect a violent juvenile offender?
- How do you feel about the possibility of the detention center being eliminated?
- What are your thoughts regarding the elimination of a detention facility as an option for the minors? How would the elimination of a detention facility affect the minor, the victims, and the community?