

2022

## Juvenile Recidivism Risk Factors from the Juvenile Justice Professional Perspective

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Juvenile Recidivism Risk Factors from the Juvenile Justice Professional Perspective

by

Fotini Stamidis

MA, Walden University, 2021

BS, University of Phoenix, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Human & Social Services

Walden University

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## Abstract

Juvenile crime and recidivism have devastated Baltimore City, Maryland, especially in the quality of life and social bond, producing fear in the city's communities. The current situation is increasing the need to promote a better understanding of juvenile recidivism and delinquency of the risk factors causing juveniles to re-offend. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to add to the knowledge base on juvenile recidivism risk factors from the perspectives of juvenile justice professionals. Hirschi's social bond theory was used to explore juvenile justice professionals' experiences and perspectives on recidivism risk factors. Research questions focused on the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors that may lead juveniles to recidivate, and how juvenile justice professionals work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to re-offend. Ten juvenile justice professionals who had at least two years of experience and currently working with juvenile delinquents responded to semi-structured and open-ended questions. After coding and categorizing the collected data, two primary themes emerged: a) Participants perceived that risk factors related to lack of parental bonds, social bonds, school and community interactions, and mental health history have a significant effect on juvenile recidivism and delinquency. b) Specialized rehabilitation programs are available, but they may need to be modified to target individual needs. Implications for positive social change include recommendations to Maryland state juvenile agencies and policymakers to implement, modify, and improve services to reduce recidivism for delinquent juveniles.

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## Chapter 1

Juvenile crime and recidivism (tendency to reoffend) are nationwide social problems that require attention from the authorities and policymakers (Dill & Ozer, 2016). For more than a decade, juvenile crime and recidivism have had a distinct impact on the communities surrounding Baltimore, Maryland (Hall et al., 2018). Violence erupted in Baltimore City after Freddie Gray's death in 2015, bringing national attention to the city's many problems, including the lack of opportunities for its youth (Golden et al., 2018). During the unrest, more than 49 youth were arrested and detained for looting, destroying properties, and arson (Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), 2019). Between 2016 and 2018 of the 410 individuals released from prison, about 50% were rearrested, more than 22% faced reconviction, and more than 27% were rearrested for different crimes (DJS, 2019).

The above-average rates of juvenile crimes have put pressure on the city's leaders to investigate the roots of the violence, revisit the existing prevention programs, and possibly revise some of the city's crime policies (Cho, 2019). Current research revealed the critical risk factors that predict the likelihood of juvenile reoffending: socioeconomic factors, lack of family stability and relationships, community exposure to violence, peer interaction, mental instability, and lack of academic sources (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2020). There is limited research in existing literature regarding these risk factors. This study can provide much needed information for local agencies tasked with reforming policies and investing in specific individual programs that target risk factors to reduce crimes and lower incarceration costs (Dill & Ozer, 2016). This chapter will

include a brief history of juvenile recidivism in Baltimore City, the background of the problem, an introduction to the research question, and the purpose of the study.

### **Background**

Juvenile delinquency and recidivism are national problems and require attention from local authorities and policymakers (Dill & Ozer, 2016). The shooting and killings that followed the death of Freddie Gray in April 2015 placed the city among the top three deadliest cities in the United States (Hall et al., 2018). The murder rate was higher at the end of the year, shootings and killings tripled from April 2015 to the end of the year. During this time period, 42 people were killed (Baltimore Police Department, n.d). Scholars claimed that the lack of systemic change is why violence in the city continues to rise (Ortega-Campos et al., 2020). As the statistics revealed a persistent pattern of juvenile crime, Baltimore City and the local authorities continued to try and control crime in the area. Counselman Schleiferis called for transparency and accountability for youth offenders and how their cases are handled (McHenry, 2018). As pressure is added on the local authorities to reduce crime, policymakers seek answers through research and data (Teigen, 2018).

A vast amount of research has examined family, community, school, mental disorders, and peer factors as having a contributing role in contributing juvenile delinquency and reoffending (Forsyth et al., 2018; Poyraz et al., 2019; Rose et al., 2017). Socioeconomic factors, lack of family stability and relationships, community exposure to violence, peer interaction, and lack of academic sources were factors seen as responsible for juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Forsyth et al., 2018). Bray et al. (2020) noted

that a lack of family relationships, single parenting, and peer pressure are blamed for leading youth to join gang groups. Furthermore, Poyraz et al. (2019) added that multiple psychiatric disorders, along with the typical social and environmental factors juveniles face, may be a factor in reoffending.

Although researchers have explored these risk factors in many ways, they have not been explored in how they relate to offenders aged 14 through 18 from the juvenile system professionals' perspective. As they provide intervention to young offenders, it is crucial for juvenile justice professionals to utilize tools that assess the risks of reoffending and inform decisions about the intervention used (Ortega-Campos et al., 2020). For instance, probation officers can provide feedback to the court system on ways to reduce an offender's sentence or recommend a treatment alternative (Jones, 2018). Jones (2018) pointed out that parole and probation are set to fail individuals, families, and communities and must be reformed. Clarke (2019) agreed that probation and parole policies should be improved and reinvested in specific individual programs targeting risk factors, reducing crimes, and lowering incarceration costs. The study results could provide valuable information to local agencies and inform new policies and individual programs that target these risk factors, work to reduce crimes, and lower incarceration costs (Dill & Ozer, 2016).

### **Research Problem**

Dill and Ozer (2016) pointed out that juvenile crime and reoffending are nationwide social problems that require attention from authorities and policymakers. In Baltimore City, Maryland, juvenile crime, and recidivism have been devastating,

especially with the quality of life and social bond, producing fear in the city's communities (Hall et al., 2018). Forsyth et al. (2018) found that socioeconomic factors, lack of family stability and relationships, community exposure to violence, peer interaction, and lack of academic sources were causes found to be responsible for juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Bray et al. (2020) added that lack of family relationships, single parenting, and peer pressures increased the likelihood for youth joining gang groups. Mercer et al. (2018) agreed that peer pressure and perceived risk encouraged future criminal activities among juveniles. Although the researchers mentioned that family, peer, community, mental disorders, and school factors contribute to juvenile recidivism, there is limited research on these risk factors from the juvenile system professional's perspective. For this reason, further research is warranted to examine juvenile delinquency risk factors from the juvenile system professional's perspective to address the documented problem of juvenile recidivism (Dill & Ozer, 2016).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative case study design was to explore the perceptions of the juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors leading juveniles to recidivate and how they work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend. Finding ways to reduce juvenile recidivism has been challenging, and most studies reveal risk factors in the family, community, peer interaction, education, and mental disorders (Mercer et al., 2018; Okros, 2019; Poyraz et al., 2019). This research will help address the gap in understanding juvenile recidivism risk factors from juvenile justice professionals'



perspectives, as well as providing much-needed information to local agencies that focus on reforming policies and investing in specific programs that target risk factors, reduce crimes, and lower incarceration costs (Dill & Ozer, 2016). The findings could assist policymakers in implementing or modifying intervention and prevention programs based on individual needs.

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to answer the two questions below that specifically address the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals have of the risk factors that play a role in leading underage offenders to recidivate and strategies such professionals implement to lessen the risk of juveniles reoffending.

RQ1. What are the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors that may lead juveniles to recidivate?

RQ2. How do juvenile justice professionals work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory is the theoretical foundation of this study. Hirschi suggested that social bonds are the primary inhibitors to delinquency, and that humans naturally tend toward delinquency (Bradford, 2016). The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of this study include Hirschi's theory of elements attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, which concludes that youth who do not incorporate those elements are more likely to become delinquent and commit crimes (Bradford, 2016). Hirschi's social bond theory explains that deviance is learned

through interaction with others (Hirschi, 1969). According to Hirschi (1969), juvenile delinquent behavior is not a learned behavior but a natural urge; however, the theory also states that social bonds that include family, peers, or community encourage socialization and conformity. Thus, the stronger the bond youth have with their family, the less likely they are to exhibit delinquent behavior. This theory is vital to understanding how social bonding opportunities impacts juvenile delinquency and violent behavior.

Furthermore, the theory concludes that juveniles interacting with delinquent peers or deviant parents are more likely to be influenced to commit crimes. The theory is suitable for explaining acts of delinquency; thus, in this study, it is assumed that juveniles associated with delinquent peers and parents with a criminal history are more likely to be negatively influenced and prone to recidivism. If juveniles have weak social controls, the opportunities to get involved with delinquent peers increase; as a result, they are more likely to get involved in criminal activities, potentially increasing recidivism. Based on Hirschi's theory and its elements, I examined the risk factors that directly influence youth behavior in this study, including interactions with family, peers, community, mental health, and school factors from the perspectives and experiences of juvenile justice professionals. Moreover, it is possible that the findings may assist officials in viewing the problem beyond the numbers for delinquency or recidivism, enabling them to respond to the needs of the youth. Winters (2020) noted that juvenile justice professionals are tasked with assessing juvenile offenders to determine risk factors, develop treatment goals, and link with specialized services.

### **Nature of the Study**

The specific research design was a case study approach that can be used to investigate and understand risks factors responsible for juvenile recidivism in Baltimore City and the complexity of a particular group's behavior patterns (Creswell, 2018). The approach is appropriate since the study focuses on the boundaries of a specific phenomenon within a particular group (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The researcher often uses semi structured questions about a topic under investigation (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that case study research is a detailed investigation of a phenomenon with data collected over a period of time to analyze the context and processes. Yin (2017) further posited that in a case study, questions of "how" or "why" are asked about a set of events over which the researcher has little or no control. The purpose of using the case study design is to shed light on the current study and get in-depth details about an event, person, or process (Reye-Quilodran et al., 2019). The design can be applied to explain the influencing factors of a social unit and the relationship between these factors and a social unit, describe and explore an intervention, or conduct a meta-evaluation (Lee et al., 2017). In this study, the phenomenon is the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals currently working with juvenile delinquents on the risk factors leading to recidivism. The data were collected through semi-structured questions and a document review process.

### **Definitions**

The following are terms and phrases central to this study.

*Juvenile delinquent:* A young person whose antisocial behavior leads to violent or criminal acts (Smith, 2019).

*Juvenile recidivism:* Refers to youth released from custody who will have an arrest or conviction or are arrested for new offenses while under supervision (Meehan, 2021).

*Juvenile justice professionals:* Juvenile justice professionals work closely with juvenile offenders and include probation officers, caseworkers, judges, and prosecutors (Bernuz-Beneitez & Dumortier, 2018).

*Risk factors:* Risk factors are those variables, characteristics, or hazards contributing to developing an individual character that can cause a disorder or lead to committing criminal acts; these include family, community, peers, mental disorders, and academic failure factors (Aquilar-Ruiz & Pereda, 2021).

*Socioeconomic status:* Socioeconomic status refers to environmental factors affecting a particular population, including poverty, academic failure, and lack of employment opportunities (Connolly et al., 2017).

### **Assumptions**

One of the things assumed at the beginning of this study was that the perspectives of juvenile justice professionals would provide insights into the lives of the juveniles with whom the professionals worked with or have worked with in the past. Additionally, I assumed open-ended interview questions would allow the professionals to express themselves and provide additional information on delinquency and recidivism risk factors. Lastly, it was also expected that the open-ended interview questions would

provide themes, categories, and concepts central to the study. The reason for these assumptions was my aim to add to the knowledge base on juvenile recidivism risk factors from the perspective of juvenile justice professionals. Recognizing themes, categories, and concepts will help in identifying underlying commonalities and patterns.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study was to explore the risk factors leading to juvenile recidivism from the perspective of juvenile justice professionals currently working with juvenile delinquents. The sample study was recruited utilizing snowball sampling, which allows for picking participants with relevant experience. Participants were chosen from government agencies and included juvenile caseworkers working directly with juveniles to maximize diversity within the study (Shakman et al., 2017). Snowball sampling is a nonprobability method of sample selection commonly used to locate hidden populations (Johnson, 2005). Moreover, the method relies on referrals to other persons with characteristics of interest from respondents who already agreed participate in the study (TenHouten, 2017). The inclusion criteria included a) a minimum of 2 years of experience in the juvenile system and knowledge of juvenile delinquency, recidivism, and the available intervention programs; b) being a resident of Maryland; and c) currently working with juvenile offenders. In utilizing the snowballing method, limitations include procedures that are not random, differences between network size, selection probabilities, and confidentiality concerns (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). Persistent observation, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data collection and research are suggested to ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data (Ummel, 2018).

Qualitative research seeks to produce trustworthy findings, and the study process is intended to meet the standards of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Simmons-Horton, 2020). Nowell et al. (2017) claimed that a study's credibility depends on the researcher's experience and how they address the findings presented within the respondents' answers. Moreover, Almeida (2017) indicated that the results should be confirmed and corroborated by peers while the researcher checks and rechecks the data throughout the study to ensure confirmability. Another way of meeting trustworthiness is through transferability, which includes prioritizing diversity in sampling to allow broader applicability (Guetterman, 2015). Qualitative research assumes that findings will bring a unique perspective to the study, and Simmon-Horton (2020) suggested adopting research methods like those used in similar research to ensure optimal congruency with the findings. Lastly, combining theories, methods, or empirical materials allows the researcher to overcome weaknesses, biases, and other problems from single theory and single method studies (Yin, 2017).

### **Limitations**

Limitations and anticipated barriers are always present in a study. Potential limitations include a lack of sample or that the studied problem may go unnoticed (Almeida, F, 2017). The study sample was limited to justice professionals from the Maryland region; as a result, their perceptions, experiences, or knowledge may not be accurate for another region. Another limitation is that the voices of juveniles currently experiencing recidivism will not be heard. Additionally, in qualitative research, the

process is time-consuming. Since, data will be collected primarily as open-ended answers, I may have a problem verifying the results (Keenan, 2017).

### **Significance**

This study was significant because it addressed the lack of understanding of the risk factors contributing to juvenile recidivism from the perspective of juvenile justice professionals. Juvenile justice professionals are tasked with assessing juvenile offenders to determine risk factors, develop treatment goals, and connect offenders to specialized services (Winters, 2020). The study results provided valuable information to local agencies and inform new policies and individual programs that target these risk factors, work to reduce crimes, and lower incarceration costs (Dill & Ozer, 2016). Understanding juvenile recidivism from the juvenile justice professional perspective can reframe the role parental neglect, a lack of guidance, peer and community interactions, or mental health issues has on juvenile recidivism as well as how these factors impact it. Finally, the findings may contribute to policy reform and improve intervention programs while benefiting local public juvenile agencies.

### **Summary**

Research has shown that juvenile recidivism is an ongoing nationwide problem stemming from family relationships, community and peer interactions, mental disorders, academic issues, and other factors. In this chapter, the major sections include an introduction, background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, nature of the study, theoretical framework, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, the significance of the study, and a summary. Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review

of the literature about the risk factors leading to juvenile recidivism. The risk factors of family, peer influence, community interactions, mental disorders, academics, and age of first offense will be discussed.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The situation or issue that prompted me to this study is the juvenile crime and recidivism that have had detrimental effects on the quality of life and peace of mind in Baltimore City, Maryland (Hall et al., 2018). Socioeconomic factors, lack of family stability and relationships, community exposure to violence, peer interaction, and lack of academic resources were all reported to be contributors to juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Forsyth et al., 2018). Bray et al. (2020) added that lack of family relationships, single parenting, and peer pressure work as motivators for youth joining gangs. Additionally, Poyraz et al. (2019) added that mental disorders and social and environmental factors also contribute to recidivism. While researchers have investigated this issue and come to the conclusions above, the topic has not been explored from the juvenile justice professional's perspective.

The purpose of this qualitative case study design was to explore the perspectives of juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors for recidivism, as well as to explore what can be done to mitigate the risk factors. Finding ways to reduce juvenile recidivism has been challenging as most studies reveal a variety of risk factors across family, community, and health (Okros, 2019). The findings could assist policymakers in implementing or modifying intervention and prevention programs based on individual needs. The literature review includes background information on risk factors contributing to juvenile recidivism such as family factors, peer influence, school factors, community experiences, and mental disorders. In this chapter, I will begin by providing my literature

search strategy, explaining the theoretical foundation, and defining recidivism before discussing the risk factors contributing to delinquency and recidivism.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature assessment includes articles retrieved from various search engines such as Google Scholar, criminal justice databases, SocINDEX, APA PsycInfo, and Thoreau via Walden Library. The keywords used to conduct research were juvenile delinquency, juvenile recidivism, social factors, interventions, risk factors, juvenile crime, parole officers' perceptions, and juvenile justice professionals. There were no issues finding research literature when using the above keywords; however, EBSCOhost was the easiest to utilize.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory states that social bonds are the primary inhibitors to delinquency, which is more of a natural urge than a learned behavior (Bradford, 2016). Hirschi's theory notes that youth without important bonding elements, such as an attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, are more likely to become delinquent and commit crimes (Bradford, 2016). As social bonds (family, peer to peer, or community-centric) encourage socialization and conformity, the absence of strong bonds indicates an increased likelihood for delinquent behavior. This theory is vital in understanding the way social bonding opportunities impacts juvenile delinquency.

Hirschi's social bond theory explains that deviance is learned through interaction with others (Hirschi, 1969). Furthermore, the theory concludes that juveniles that are exposed to or connect with delinquent peers or deviant parents have a higher likelihood

of committing crimes. Thus, it is assumed that juveniles exposed to individuals with a criminal history are more likely to repeat what they see and are also likely to reoffend. The study will examine the risk factors impacting youth behavior, including interactions with family, peers, and community members, as well as mental health and school factors, all from the perspective of juvenile justice professionals. The purpose of the study is to gather findings that could assist officials in viewing the problem of recidivism through a different and more proactive lens.

A vast amount of research has examined family, community, school, mental disorders, and peer factors for juvenile delinquency and reoffending (Forsyth et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2017). Socioeconomic factors, lack of family stability and relationships, community exposure to violence, peer interaction, and lack of academic sources were all identified as probable causes of juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Forsyth et al., 2018). More specifically, the absence of close family relationships, the absence of a second parent in the home, and peer pressure were found to be common factors for youth in gangs (Bray et al., 2020). Factors often linked with reoffending were the presence of multiple psychiatric disorders and social and environmental factors (Poyraz et al., 2019).

### **Literature Review**

The literature review provides the background and context for the research problem. The findings may contribute to knowledge about the existing problem and may inform rehabilitation programs in Maryland. This is important to my study as the suggested management strategies may contribute to developing community socialization and conformity per the Hirschi theory.

**Risk Factors to Recidivism**

Risk factors are defined as those variables, characteristics, or hazards contributing to developing an individual character that can cause a disorder or lead to committing criminal acts; these factors can include but are not limited to family, community, peer, school experiences, and mental health (Aquilar-Ruiz & Pereda, 2021).

**Family Factors**

Poor parenting skills, family structure, and parent or sibling criminality have been identified as family risk factors for juvenile delinquency (Rathinabalan & Naaraayan, 2017). Forsyth et al. (2018) examined the family risk factors and delinquency associations for three antisocial behaviors of youth ages 14 or older. They concluded that a lack of family stability and close relationships was a contributor to juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Forsyth et al., 2018). Poor parental skills and the inability to establish boundaries were also deemed risk factors for delinquent behavior, putting the risk of youth engaging in delinquent behavior four times higher than those from structured families (Kennedy et al., 2019). Boccio and Beaver (2019) identified the family structure as a factor in delinquency, suggesting that parental divorce and single parenting have negative consequences such as psychological problems, poor academic performance, or mental health issues. Family structure impacts the lives of youth in areas of behavior development, and brokenness can create a sense of rejection (Goldstein & McMuellen, 2018). In Maryland, 47.3% of youth ages 16 through 19 were raised within a structured family which is the lowest level of family intactness in the state (Fagan, 2015). Additionally, parent or sibling criminality exposure predicts juvenile recidivism with a

higher rate of serious crime, while sibling delinquency predicts general recidivism (Bosick & Fomby, 2018).

### **Community Factors**

Community disorganization, single-parent neighborhoods, poverty, exposure to violence, and availability of drugs and firearms are factors that may contribute to crime and violence (Tillyer & Walter, 2019). Additionally, children from broken families face several unique community experiences, including but not limited to peer rejection, academic failure, or gang involvement, all of which put them at risk for delinquency (Nurwianti et al., 2018). According to Boyd and Clampet-Lundquist (2019), future criminals seek companionship with other individuals whose childhoods were hostile and similar to theirs because they feel comfortable with them. Some adolescents join gang groups because they feel a sense of connection and are given a chance to find their identity; others join to ensure protection for their family or themselves, or because a family member belongs to a particular group (Vashisht et al., 2018). In Baltimore, Maryland, community violence perpetrated by youth has been on the rise, pushing the numbers of homicides to 190, and nonfatal shootings to 380 for the year which is a 50% increase from 2020 (Jackson, 2021). Out of this number, 25 youth were under the age of 18, 10 were homicide victims, and five were struck by gunfire in March, making 2021 the worst year in Baltimore's history for crime (Cho, 2019; Jackson, 2021).

### **Peer Interactions**

Peer-related factors include delinquent siblings, and delinquent peers are believed to be a source of influence for young individuals (Homel et al., 2018). Finan et al. (2018)

stated that although siblings are essential to support agents within the family system, having delinquent siblings by age 10 predicts later violence convictions. Moreover, the involvement of peers who use drugs and alcohol may negatively impact the youth interacting with them, leading to deviant or dangerous behavior (Crawford et al., 2018). Weerman et al. (2018) examined the association between delinquent siblings and their violent criminal history and concluded that antisocial siblings negatively influence their siblings' development. Additionally, delinquent peers may significantly affect the individual adolescence more so than in earlier development stages (Nivette et al., 2019).

### **School Experiences**

School is equally as essential as the family in preventing delinquent behaviors. Factors such as academic failure, truancy, dropping out of school, and poor educational standards may contribute to delinquent behavior (Williams, 2017). According to Bray et al. (2020), children from married families have better academic performance and the ability to achieve higher education than those from broken families. Furthermore, high school students from intact families have grade point averages (GPAs) 11% higher than those from divorced families (Bray et al., 2020). However, research has demonstrated that behavioral problems could lead to poor academic performance, and poor educational standards that can negatively affect the child's performance (Rud et al., 2018).

Additionally, it was found that poor school conditions are connected with youth not showing up at school, having low interest in academics, mental health conditions, and less retention of teachers (Hettleman, 2021). In Baltimore, 155 schools were rated as inadequate for their quality and condition, and more than 28 schools are without air

conditioning, forcing the schools to close due to hot temperatures (“28 Baltimore schools”, 2021). Shwe (2020) stated that at least 97 schools in Baltimore city were found to have problems with temperature controls, causing a loss of 1.5 million hours of instruction over the past five years.

According to Johns Hopkins researchers, 100 schools filed complaints about heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) problems (Shwe, 2020). On that note, truancy and dropping out may be indicators of low school bonding, but children may also miss or leave school early for other reasons, such as due to the poor conditions of the buildings (Vashisht et al., 2018). Although bonding to school is found to be a protective factor against crime, truancy rates at ages 12 through 14 were found to engage in violence as delinquent juveniles or adults (Dick et al., 2019). Recent studies have shown that students who do not attend or are left unsupervised after school hours engage in violent activities, increasing the number of crimes committed by teens in Baltimore City dramatically (Rector & Anderson, 2017). Shapiro (2018) stated that students are unsupervised for about 20 to 25 hours a week, resulting in boredom and an increased possibility of developing patterns that lead to violent activities. Williams (2017) added that youth with a tendency towards delinquent behavior have poor verbal memory or ability to grasp, fail to learn reading, have low aspirations for school, and begin to be truant in their teens. Although researchers have tried to understand the relationship between academic failure and juvenile delinquency without establishing a direct connection, poor education and school engagement are frequently found to lead to criminal activity (Open Society Institute-Baltimore (OSI-Baltimore), 2020).

## **Mental Disorders**

There is an increased interest in the mental health of juveniles and recidivism, but little is known (Zeola et al., 2017). Hirsch et al. (2018) examined mental health referral rates and recidivism in the juvenile justice system and reviewed juvenile justice mental health screening to improve detection and treatment. Poyraz et al. (2019) examined the mental disorders and the factors related to recidivism in juveniles under probation in Turkey. The findings revealed that juveniles in the justice system face multiple psychiatric disorders and social/environmental adversities. Walker and Herting (2020) investigated the impact of pretrial detention and mental health issues on more than 46,000 juvenile cases across 32 jurisdictions. They used propensity score matching, and their findings showed that pretrial detention was associated with a 33% increase in felony recidivism and an 11% increase in misdemeanor recidivism within one year. Psychiatric disorders are found everywhere in juvenile justice populations, and studies indicate that as few as 30% and as many as 70% of youths involved with the juvenile justice system may meet the criteria for a mental health disorder (Development Services Group, Inc., 2017). Youths with official records of abuse or neglect, mental health issues, and personal crime victimization are more likely to recidivate sooner than those without a similar history (Wylie & Rufino, 2018). Broader or even universal mental health referrals for juvenile offenders could reduce future legal system involvement and costs to society (Robst et al., 2017).

Although there has been research on factors contributing to juvenile recidivism, there are very few studies that address the risk factors associated with youth recidivism



from the perspective of the juvenile professional. This insight would be useful in providing a more thorough understanding about what leads youth to break the law and to reoffend (Dill & Ozer, 2016).

### **Summary**

In Chapter 2, a literature review of risk factors contributing to juvenile recidivism, including family factors, peer influence, school factors, community experiences, and mental disorders was discussed. Thus far, a vast amount of research has examined family, community, school, mental disorders, and peer factors for juvenile delinquency and reoffending (Forsyth et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2017). Socioeconomic factors, lack of family stability and relationships, community exposure to violence, peer interaction, and lack of academic sources were causes that are found responsible for juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Forsyth et al., 2018). Bray et al. (2020) noted that lack of family relationships, single parenting, and peer pressure are blamed for leading youth to join gang groups. Furthermore, Poyraz et al. (2019) added that juveniles face multiple psychiatric disorders to blame for reoffending, along with the social and environmental factors juveniles face. However, there is limited research that has examined these risk factors from the juvenile system professional's perspective. Given such, further research is warranted to examine juvenile delinquency risk factors from the juvenile system professionals' perspective to address juvenile recidivism's documented problem. This study will provide a more in-depth understanding of the problem and the risk factors contributing to juvenile delinquency and recidivism from the perspectives of juvenile

justice professionals. Chapter 3 will discuss the researcher's role, participant recruitment, data collection, methodology, and ethical issues.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study design was to examine how juvenile justice professionals perceive the risk factors leading juveniles to recidivate, as well as how they work to mitigate these risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend. Department of Juvenile Services (2019) reported that in 2018, out of the 671 juveniles released, 45% were rearrested, 19.2% were reconvicted, and 11.8 % were incarcerated again for different crimes. A 12-month comparison of the years 2017 through 2019 for the State of Maryland revealed that juvenile crimes and recidivism are increasing (Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services, 2019). Godlen et al. (2018) mentioned that the rate of violent crimes increased significantly in Baltimore City after the death of Freddie Gray, which brought national attention to many problems the city is facing, including the lack of opportunities for its youth. The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention statistics shows that juvenile recidivism rates are higher even after the youth are placed in a juvenile detention center or other alternatives (GOCCP, 2019). Furthermore, many studies revealed risk factors including families, community interactions, peer interactions, education, and mental disorders, making it challenging to find ways to reduce recidivism (Okros, 2019). This study explored the risk factors responsible for juvenile recidivism from the perspective of juvenile justice professionals. The findings could assist policymakers when implementing or modifying intervention and prevention programs based on individual needs. In this chapter, I will present the

research design and explain the methodology, participant selection, recruitment process, data collection sources, analysis plan, and ethical considerations.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What are the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors that may lead juveniles to recidivate?

RQ2. How do juvenile justice professionals work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend?

The phenomenon of this study was the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals currently working with juvenile delinquents on contributing factors such as family history, mental health disorders, school experiences, peer influence, and age at first offense.

Unlike other studies, case study research is considered a design or an evaluation method in which the researcher aims to understand the complicity of a case in the best way possible by using multiple methods of collecting data, including participant observation, interviewing, and collection of artifacts and texts (Cresswell, 2018; Yin, 2017). The purpose of using the case study design is to shed light on the current research problem and get in-depth details about an event, person, or process (Reye-Quilodran et al., 2019). The case study can be applied to explain the influencing factors of a social unit and the relationship between these factors and a social unit, describe and explore an intervention, or conduct a meta-evaluation (Lee et al., 2017).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative studies require the researcher's consideration before and during the research process to articulate their position, biases, and worldviews (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Qualitative research aims to gain insights into people's feelings and thoughts, assumes that findings will bring a unique perspective to the study, and adopts research methods similar to those used in similar research to ensure optimal congruency with the results (Simmon-Horton, 2020). Nonetheless, gaining access to the people's thoughts is not easy as some of the questions may be personal to the participants. Whiting (2008) stresses that questions need to be planned well by the researchers as some may cause embarrassment or discomfort to the participant. In addition, the questions should ensure that critical issues are addressed and that the interview flow is maintained. The primary data collection should involve interviews with open-ended and semi-structured questions, followed by why or how questions, while interviews can be done through Zoom or by phone (Adams, 2015). The researcher's primary responsibility is to ensure the participants' confidentiality and safeguard their personal information (Patton, 2015).

Furthermore, as the researcher seeks to produce trustworthy findings, the study process should meet the standards of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Simmons-Horton, 2020). Nowell et al. (2017) claimed that a study's credibility depends on the researcher's experience and how the individual addresses the findings presented with the respondents' views. Persistent observation, peer debriefing, and triangulation on data collection and research are suggested to ensure validity and reliability of the collected data (Ummel, 2018). Moreover, Almeida (2017) indicated that

the results should be confirmed and corroborated by peers while the researcher checks and rechecks the data throughout the study to ensure confirmability. Another way of meeting trustworthiness is through transferability, including the participant characteristics comparable with other samples with diversity in sampling to allow broader applicability (Guetterman, 2015). Qualitative research assumes that findings will bring a unique perspective to the study, and Simmon-Horton (2020) suggested adopting research methods similar to those used in similar research to ensure optimal congruency with the findings. Lastly, the researcher can overcome weaknesses, biases and other problems from single theory and single method studies by combining theories, methods, or empirical materials (Yin, 2017).

### **Participant Selection**

Participant selection was based on their knowledge and experience of the investigated phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The participants in the study were contacted via e-mail. The sample was recruited from the juvenile justice agencies in Maryland utilizing snowball sampling and included juvenile social service caseworkers working directly with juveniles. Snowball sampling can provide a population pool of potential participants for this study, allowing me to choose participants who know the contrast investigated and the need to be flexible to keep progressing with my study (Edmonds, 2019). However, snowballing sampling can lead to bias, respondents may be hesitant to provide their peers' names, and it is not possible for the researcher to determine the sampling error (Frey, 2018). The inclusion criteria were as follows: a) Have a minimum of two years of experience in the juvenile system and knowledge of juvenile delinquency, recidivism,

and the available intervention programs, b) a resident of the state of Maryland, and c) current role working with juvenile offenders.

The sample size anticipated for this study was between eight to 15 participants. The recommended sample size in a qualitative study is usually 20 to 30 persons, but a sample size of as little as eight is acceptable if a variety of opinions are present and the sample size reaches saturation point (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Saturation is a common concept in qualitative research for estimating sample size (Guest et al., 2020). Saunders et al. (2018) identified four approaches to saturation: the extent of the inductive rationale; the extent of the deductive rationale; the significance of the data received in the data analysis; and theorizing.

Although face-to-face interviews are the most common and preferable method to collect data, e-mail and online surveys are new communication forms that allow data collection compliant to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions, which will likely remain in place for the foreseeable future (Hill et al., 2021; Opdenakker, 2006). However, all methods have advantages and disadvantages. For instance, the cost to administer email interviews is less than making phone calls or traveling to meet with the participant, and e-mail allows more than one participant to interview at a time; however, there may be a delay before the data collection is complete (Meho, 2016). During a phone interview, the researcher has the advantage of continuous access to a participant when site access is limited, and they can record the conversation (Opdenakker, 2006). However, the e-mail format was the preferred method of participation for this study as it required minimum resources and was designed to obtain confidential information (Menon & Muraleedharan,

2020). Furthermore, minimal sampling error occurred due to the low cost per survey, and there were minimal measurement errors as there was no direct contact between the interviewer and the participants (Menon & Muraleedharan, 2020). Following the regulations posed by the IRB's Office, the revised interview guide was included with the invitation and informed consent form. The introductory statement was followed by the interview, and a closing statement was e e-mailed to the participants after the interview.

### **Instrumentation**

The study explored how juvenile justice professionals work to support juveniles and mitigate the risk factors that may lead them to reoffend. The qualitative study utilized a case study design with open-ended, semi-structured, and follow-up questions to obtain more information from the participants. Question types included questions on experience and behavior, opinion and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory input, and background/demographic questions (Patton, 2015). I used the interview guide worksheet in this study to identify keywords and phrases, such as risk factors, juvenile recidivism, social bonds, health, parent modeling, programs, services, and aggressive behavior. Furthermore, I created additional interview questions to explore the risk factors of why adolescents engage in deviant acts leading them to detention, the services they receive while incarcerated, and the effectiveness of the services, all from the perspective of juvenile justice professionals. A copy of the complete interview guide is included in Appendix A.

### **Data Sources**

Data were collected from:



1. Interviews with juvenile justice professionals currently working with juveniles with at least two years of experience in the field.

2. Secondary data were collected from the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services. The data is published on the website, monthly, quarterly, or yearly, and is visible to the public. The reports provide information on delinquents, family structure, and available programs to assist the study with possible conclusions or recommendations.

A participation request was sent out to juvenile justice professionals selected utilizing a snowball sampling online survey. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the preferred data collection format was an online survey. Online survey interviews have many benefits that include less cost than phone or face-to-face interviews and cost decreasing of transcribing (Meho, 2016). The IRB guidelines were followed, including the participants' invitation, to ensure a smooth interview process. An e-mail reminder was also sent out to the participants' supervisor to encourage the participation of additional individuals. A search for secondary data was conducted to the website of department of Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services. The reports were published on the website, monthly, quarterly, or yearly, and are visible to the public. However, the data reported was only parental separation, incarcerated family members, mental illness, substance use, emotional abuse, and sexual and physical abuse and be used only to compare results on the same area.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, and experiences (Patton, 2015). However, many researchers consider data analysis complicated and mysterious (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Qualitative data comes in various forms: in-depth interviews, focus groups, recorded observations, notes, text, documents, and e-mails (Meriam & Tisdale, 2016). If the collected sample is large, it can be overwhelming for the researcher to manage, but utilizing approaches that include sociolinguistic methods based on grounded theory and thematic analysis may ease the process (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This study was based on a case search design that allowed the use of a small sample to explore how juvenile justice professionals work to support juveniles and work to mitigate the risk factors that may lead them to reoffend.

### **Coding**

In analyzing the data, Roberts (2015) suggested that the researcher's first step is to do an early analysis of the data collected through interviews. The data collected for this study was connected to the research questions to add knowledge to the risk factors causing juveniles to recidivate and how do juvenile justice professionals work to mitigate those factors. I used NVivo software to assist with decoding the information obtained from the questionnaire. I uploaded the survey answers from the participants into the software and used the auto coding feature. The software produced themes, patterns, and allowed me to create charts, inspect, transform and model data to discover useful

information informing conclusions, and support decision-making. The table below shows the auto coded themes emerged.

programs			good qualities		adult intervention		
community programs	talk prog...		good qualities	adult intervention			
	successful...						
school programs		step progr...					
adult			role models		risks kids		
adult intervention		positive adult rol...	positive adult r...	risks kids		good example	
					good exa...		
			supportive role ...				
community programs			family			peer	
community programs			whole family	st...		reformed...	
			supporting ...				

Hierarchy Chart Summary

Hand coding builds theoretical sensitivity and brings the researcher closer to the data (Patton, 2015). It works well with a small sample but can be overwhelming with extensive data as the only tools utilized are a pen, paper, a hard copy of the transcript's documents, and the use of Microsoft Excel to be coded (Meyer & Avery, 2008). Excel is useful as a qualitative tool since it can handle large amounts of data allowing various

display techniques (Meyer & Avery, 2008). However, transcribing the data is not as effective as the qualitative data analysis software. Like every electronic data analysis tool, Excel requires creating the table or formula and may take additional time and training. Hand coding on paper is acceptable to analyze data if the sample is small but takes more time to locate coded data (Patton, 2015).

Moreover, hand coding does not allow the researcher to see what emerges from the data unlike the software program. LaPelle (2004) notes that software programs enable the investigators to code data of any size with more or fewer details. For instance, the user will be able to code every key concept or idea from the participant and, instead of two codes in a paragraph, may create 25 (LaPelle, 2004). Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) consists of tools to help the researcher organize and analyze extensive data in text e-mails and audio recordings and ensure effective data management (Lewi, 2004). More than 20 qualitative data analysis software compared the tools offered by NVivo and Atlas.ti was picked when searching the Internet. Scientific Software Development and NVivo developed Atlas.ti by Qualitative Solutions and Research Thousand Oaks London (Lewi, 2004). Both programs allow the researcher to associate codes or labels with texts, good pictures, or videos and install them on the computer desktop offering a trial option to explore the tools before buying the software. The customer support by NVivo is better than Atlas.ti, but both can handle large samples and offer options to export the files for review. To better understand both program tools, I downloaded both to my computer and uploaded the same data to both. Like every new program, it took some time to learn the features of each.

Considering the benefits and challenges a researcher may encounter with qualitative data software, it is essential to understand how to code as it is challenging to learn and may take some time. However, I found it interesting that NVivo has the option of auto coding but Atlas.ti did not. It is essential to understand how to code and set the project as I chose to code by hand (Patton, 2015). As there was not much time to transcribe by hand, NVivo is a favorable option to use since it allowed for query of the data, which can save time in writing reports and searching for relationships among the codes and attributes. Moreover, NVivo software works well with many qualitative research designs and data analysis methods, including grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, literature reviews, and mixed methods (Zamawe, 2015).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

However, qualitative research seeks to produce trustworthy findings, and the study process should meet the standards of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Simmons-Horton, 2020). Nowell et al. (2017) claimed that a study's credibility depends on the researcher's experience and addressing the findings presented with the respondents' views. Ummel (2018) suggested persistent observation, peer debriefing, and triangulation on data collection to ensure validity and credibility. Peer debriefing in qualitative research helps establish the findings' trustworthiness and credibility, involving extensive discussions as the peer provides feedback about data collection and conclusions (Spall, 1998). The interviews were conducted through an anonymous online survey. The transcripts were forwarded to a peer to identify any misunderstandings that the participants might have encountered with their responses.

A qualitative data software, such as NVivo 12, can be used to cross-check and query codes for consistency. Peer debriefing was completed to ensure credibility while the author checked and rechecked the data throughout the study to ensure confirmability (Almeida, 2017). Another way of meeting trustworthiness is through transferability, including the participant characteristics comparable with other samples with diversity in sampling to allow broader applicability (Guetterman, 2015). Transferability was established by providing a specific description of the participants and utilizing snowball sampling in recruiting participants from the State of Maryland government to eliminate bias and increase trustworthiness. Confirmability can be established using journals throughout the course to minimize bias, and NVivo software was used to ensure that the findings were based on the participants' own words. Qualitative research assumes that results will bring a unique perspective to the study, and Simmon-Horton (2020) suggested adopting research methods like those used in similar research to ensure optimal congruency with the findings. Therefore, combining theories, procedures, or empirical materials allows the researcher to overcome weaknesses, biases, and other problems from single theory and single method studies (Yin, 2017).

### **Ethical Procedures**

I followed procedures recommended by the American Psychological Association (2010) on conducting ethical studies and policies in place by the Walden University IRB. Informed consent forms were sent to all participants along with a letter explaining the inquiry of the study. An explanation of the process, data collection, analysis, and why their participation is essential was included. The participants were required to sign an

electronic consent at the beginning of the process and were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Examples of the participant invitation, informed consent, and the survey questions can be found in Appendixes A, B, and C. The anonymity and privacy of the participants was assured. The files for the study will be stored in a secure place for five years per IRB requirement.

### **Summary**

In this qualitative case study, I explored the risk factors associated with recidivism from the perspective of juvenile justice professionals' perspectives. Chapter 3 presented the research design, method, data collection, and analysis procedures and explained the researcher's role. In chapter 4, I describe the results of the data collection and the data analysis. Approval from Walden University IRB was obtained before proceeding with data collection (05-26-22-0674452).

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors leading juveniles to recidivate, as well as how they work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend. The foundational research questions that guided this study were: (a) What are the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors that may lead juveniles to recidivate, and (b) How do juvenile justice professionals work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend. Upon receiving approval from the Walden IRB, I began my study with data collection focusing on the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals who understand the factors that cause juvenile offenders to recidivate. In Chapter 4, I provide the findings collected from the investigation of a sample of ten juvenile professionals in Maryland. Chapter 4 includes the following sections: a description of the setting, demographics, data collection methods, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and a summary of its findings.

### **Research Setting**

The study participants were juvenile justice professionals working with and either providing or recommending for juveniles. Participants were required to have a minimum of two years of experience in the field, be currently working with juvenile delinquents, and be residents in the State of Maryland. The study was conducted using an online survey sent by e-mail. Once approval was received from the Walden University IRB, I



submitted the email invitation with the survey link and consent form to the supervisors of the social services and probation services. The supervisor from the social services forwarded the information to the individuals that met the inclusion criteria. However, the supervisor of the probation services was absent, and I did not collect any data from that department. The online survey contained 25 questions that I previously developed. The study sought eight to 15 participants and received 10 responses. Additional data were collected from the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services providing information on

### **Demographics**

Ten participants were included in the study. The potential participants were recruited utilizing snowball sampling. Snowball sampling focuses on generating a pool of participants for study through referrals from other individuals who share a specific interest within the target population (Frey, 2018). The participants were selected based on their jobs (social service workers) and their experience with and knowledge of juvenile delinquents and re-offenders. To maintain confidentiality, the participants completed an anonymous online survey that did not identify their identities or collected any data that could be used either alone or with other information to identify the participants.

### **Data Collection**

The study sought to recruit eight to 15 participants for the study and received responses from 10. Participant recruitment lasted for three weeks, and I collected the data for this study using an online survey. The survey data did not identify the participants nor was any data collected that could be used either alone or with other information to

identify the participants. The participants all worked with and provided services to juvenile delinquents to reduce recidivism. All participants answered the same questions in the same order. The survey questions were different from the research questions, which enabled the participant to share their opinions as they desired. The data were coded based on patterns, themes, and categories in the NVivo software. In compliance with the IRB Walden policy, the files will be stored on my Cloud drive for five years before being deleted.

### **Data Analysis**

I applied a case study research design in this study and adapted the six-phase thematic analysis process. Unlike other studies, case study research is considered a design or an evaluation method (Creswell, 2018). In utilizing the case study design, I aimed to understand the complexity of juvenile delinquency and recidivism in the best way possible. The case study design was used to shed light on the current topic and obtain in-depth details about an event, person, or process (Reye-Quilodran et al., 2019). The case study can be used to explain the factors that influence a social unit and the relationship between these factors. The thematic analysis approach was adopted, which generated themes, categories, and codes rigorous enough to generate meaningful findings. The thematic analysis involves six phases and includes: familiarity with the collected data, developing initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and presenting and discussing results (Clarke and Braun, 2014)). The themes were based on the relationships discovered in the coded data. The NVivo software helped

identify two main themes based on the research questions, which also aligned with the participants' responses. The themes appeared in at least six of the participants' responses.

### **Results**

The online survey consisted of 24 questions based on juvenile justice professionals' perceptions of juvenile recidivism. Most of the questions had multiple-choice answers prompting the participants to choose one of the following: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree. The last five open-ended questions encouraged the participants to express themselves freely. I uploaded the data into NVivo software and used the auto coding feature. The software produced themes, patterns, and allowed me to create charts, inspect, transform and model data to discover useful information informing conclusions, and support decision-making. The following primary themes emerged to answer the research questions: a) Participants perceived that risk factors related to lack of parental bonds, social bonds, school, and community interactions, and mental health history have a significant effect on juvenile recidivism and delinquency. b) Participants perceived that specialized rehabilitation programs are available such as family-centered treatment to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend. However, they perceive a need that those programs are modified to target individual needs. Table 1 below shows the NVivo-generated auto coded themes.

**Table 1***NVivo -generated auto themes and Questions*

Factors to juvenile delinquency.	Questions
Family	Q1: Family factors are most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
Peer	Q2: Peer interactions are most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
Community	Q3: Community factors are most likely to predict juvenile recidivism
School attendance/nonattendance	Q4: School factors most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
Mental disorders	Q5: Mental disorders most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
Modeling	Q6: Modeling and imitating aggressive behavior plays a role in recidivism.
Imitating aggressive behavior	Q17: Does modeling and imitating aggressive behaviors (i.e., parent, other family, peers) play a role in recidivism by juvenile offenders?
Lack of social bonds with parents	Q18: Lack of social bonds formed with parents led juveniles to join gang groups.
Peer bonds	Q19: Social bonds formed with peers are important.
Youth Crime	Q7: Youth crime is a major issue in today's society.
Theft	Q8: Youth are prone to commit theft.
Disorderly conduct	Q9: Youth are prone to engaging in disorderly conduct
Drugs	Q10: Youth are prone to consuming drugs
Alcohol	Q11: Youth are prone to consuming alcohol
Extortion	Q12: Youth are prone to committing extortion
Vandalism	Q13: You are prone to indulging in vandalism.
Hate crimes	Q14: Youth are prone to conduct hate crimes
Kidnapping	Q15: Youth are prone to kidnapping
Sexually exploit people	Q16: Youth are prone to sexually exploit people
Effectiveness	Q21: Do these programs work?

*(table continues)*

Themes (Services)	Questions
Program ideas	Q22: Please provide some program ideas that can help prevent juveniles from returning to detention.
Recommendations	Q23: In the area below, please describe what will work to break the recidivism cycle.
Support	Q24: In the below, please describe how these young people need to be supported.

a) Themes that Addressed Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors that may lead juveniles to recidivate? The following themes are addressing the research question: Peer, community, school, mental disorders, imitating aggressive behavior, peer bonds, lack of parental social bonds and modeling. These factors lead juveniles to commit crimes that include theft, drugs, alcohol, disorderly conduct, extortion, hate crimes, kidnapping and sexual exploitation.

### **Q1: Family**

The first question for the participants was what their perceptions of family risk factors were and how likely these factors were to predict juvenile recidivism. The results support the literature presented in Chapter 2, stating that family factors, including poor parenting skills, family structure, and the parent or sibling criminality, have been identified as family risk factors for juvenile delinquency (Rathinabalan & Naaraayan, 2017). Seven out of the 10 participants (70%) agreed, and three (30%) strongly agreed that family factors contribute to juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

**Q2: Peer**

The second question asked the participants to share their perception of peer interactions and their impact on juvenile recidivism. Hirschi's social bond theory explains that deviance is learned through interactions with others; thus, juveniles who interact with delinquent peers are more likely to commit crimes (Hirschi, 1969). Homel et al. (2018) stated that peer-related factors such as having delinquent siblings and peers, are believed to be a source of influence for young individuals. Seven out of the 10 participants (70%) strongly agreed, while three agreed that peer interactions are factors likely to predict juvenile recidivism.

**Q3: Community**

The third question asked participants to share their opinion of community factors and their role in predicting juvenile recidivism. Four of the participants strongly agreed (40%), four agreed (40%), one stayed neutral (10%), and one disagreed (10%) in response question three. Community disorganization, single-parent neighborhoods, poverty, exposure to violence, and availability of drugs and firearms are factors that may contribute to crime and violence (Tillyer & Walter, 2019).

**Q4: School attendance/Nonattendance**

The fourth question asked study participants to share their opinion on the impact school factors have on juvenile recidivism. Six out of the 10 participants agreed (60%), and four strongly agreed (40%) that school factors impact juvenile recidivism. School is as essential as the family is in preventing delinquent behaviors, and factors such as academic failure, truancy, dropping out of school, and poor educational standards may

contribute to delinquent behavior (Williams, 2017). According to Bray et al. (2020), children from married families have better academic performance and the ability to achieve higher education than those from broken families. Furthermore, high school students from intact families have GPAs 11% higher than those from divorced families (Bray et al., 2020). However, it has been demonstrated that behavioral problems can also lead to poor academic performance, and poor educational standards can negatively affect the child's performance (Rud et al., 2018). Additionally, it was found that poor school conditions can lead to youth not showing up at school, low interest in academics, mental health conditions, and poor retention of teachers (Hettleman, 2021).

#### **Q5: Mental Disorders**

The fifth question asked participants to express their opinions on how mental disorders may be responsible for causing juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Hirsch et al. (2018) examined mental health referral rates and recidivism in the juvenile justice system and reviewed juvenile justice mental health screening to improve detection and treatment. Poyraz et al. (2019) examined the mental disorders and the factors related to recidivism in juveniles under probation in Turkey. The findings revealed that juveniles in the justice system often had multiple psychiatric disorders and social/environmental adversities. Seven out of the 10 participants agreed, two strongly agreed, and one disagreed.

**Q6: Modeling & Imitating Aggressive Behavior**

The participants were asked to share their perceptions on modeling and imitating aggressive behavior factors and the role these factors are playing in recidivism. Nine out of the 10 participants strongly agreed, and one agreed.

**Q7: Youth Crime**

The participants were asked to share their perceptions on youth crime, and if they believed it is a major issue in today's society. The responses from all 10 participants suggest that youth crime is a major issue.

**Q8: Theft**

In this question, the participants were asked to share if they thought youth were prone to committing theft. Two of the participants strongly agreed, four participants agreed, and four were neutral.

**Q9: Disorderly Conduct**

This question encouraged the participants to share their perceptions of how prone youth are to engaging in disorderly conduct. Five participants agreed, four strongly agreed, and one was neutral.

**Q10: Drugs**

With this question, the participants were asked to share their thoughts on how prone youth are to using drugs. Seven participants agreed, and three strongly agreed that youth are prone to using drugs.



**Q11: Alcohol**

The participants were encouraged to share their perceptions on how prone youth are to consuming alcohol. Six participants strongly agreed, three agreed, and one participant was neutral.

**Q12: Extortion**

This question asked participants if youth are prone to committing extortion. Five participants agreed, three strongly agreed, and two participants were neutral.

**Q13: Vandalism**

This question was designed to encourage the participants to share their perceptions on how prone youth are to committing vandalism. Seven participants agreed, two strongly agreed, and one participant was neutral.

**Q13: Hate Crimes**

This question was designed to encourage the participants to share their thoughts on how likely youth are to commit hate crimes. Four participants strongly agreed, and six agreed.

**Q15: Kidnapping**

The participants were encouraged to share their perceptions of how prone the youth are to kidnapping. Again, six participants agreed, three strongly agreed, and one participant was neutral.

**Q16: Sexually Exploit People**

This question asked the participants if youth are prone to exploit people sexually. The results showed that six out of the 10 participants disagreed, two agreed, and two strongly agreed.

**Q17: Modeling and Imitating Peer and Family Aggressive Behaviors**

The participants were asked to share their thoughts on how peer and family relationships and modeling and imitating aggressive behaviors impacts recidivism by juvenile offenders. Seven out of the 10 participants strongly agreed, and three agreed.

**Q18: Parent Social Bonds**

The participants were encouraged to share their perceptions on how the absence of strong parental social bonds leads youth to join gang groups. Eight out of the 10 participants strongly agreed, and two agreed that a lack of parental social bonds could lead youth to join gangs. Forsyth et al. (2018) examined the family risk factors and delinquency associations for three antisocial behaviors of youth ages 14 or older and concluded that the lack of family stability and close relationships were some of the causes found responsible for juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Poor parental skills and the inability to establish boundaries are also reported risk factors for delinquent behavior, which puts the risk of youth in these situations engaging in delinquent behavior four times higher than those from structured families (Kennedy et al., 2019).

### **Q19: Peer Social Bond**

With this question, the participants were encouraged to share their perceptions on the importance of peer-to-peer social bonds. Nine out of the 10 participants strongly agreed, and one participant agreed that the peer social bond is an important factor that may contribute to delinquency and recidivism.

b). Themes that addressed research question 2: How do juvenile justice professionals work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend?

Programs, services, program effectiveness, program ideas, support, recommendations, and therapy groups.

### **Q20: Programs**

The participants were asked if they knew the available programs for juvenile offenders. All 10 participants answered yes and mentioned programs, such as youth clubs, sports, and counseling that can prevent the youth from becoming repeat offenders.

### **Q21: Program Effectiveness**

The participants were encouraged to share their perceptions of the effectiveness of the programs. Table 2 shows the different answers participants answered to this question.

**Table 2**

*Responses to Q21: Program Effectiveness*

Responses	Number of Respondents
Yes, they do.	1
To some degree.	5
No.	3
Depends who is running it.	1

*Note.* 10 participants responded to this question

### **Q22: Recommendations**

The question was designed to allow the participants to express their perceptions and recommendations on programs and ideas that will help and prevent juveniles from returning to detention. Some of the programs mentioned were spiritually based groups to include martial arts, afterschool and community programs, family programs to include therapy, aggression replacement training, sports, peer groups, church groups, Polics Activity League (PAL), and mentorship programs.

### **Q23: Break the Recidivism Cycle**

Some strategies mentioned by the participants include using data to drive recidivism reduction efforts, ensuring the effective use of risk and needs assessments, improving the effectiveness of supervision to reduce recidivism, and providing people under supervision with the resources they need to succeed. Participants were also allowed to describe ideas that would work to break the recidivism cycle. They mentioned that children need to be taught how to cope positively. They also recommended that children should be kept busy with afterschool and summer programs for unattended times. Moreover, they believe that providing inmates with opportunities to gain an education and exposing them to technologies such as tablets, can significantly reduce the rate of recidivism.

## Q24: Support

In this area, the participants were encouraged to describe how delinquent youth need to be supported. The participants expressed the need for parents to step in and support their children and to be positive role models. Also, institutions must provide quality services, positive experiences and possible adding therapy groups that fit the youth's needs. Furthermore, they believe that building community support for young people in the transition years, keeping them active in sports, church, and schools, and having a solid family unit will assist them in making correct decisions or getting involved with the wrong crowd. Finally, mentorship, education, and financial literacy will also assist youth in becoming good citizens. Table 3 shows the main themes and the NVivo-generated auto themes in addressing the research questions.

**Table 3**

*Themes answering the research questions*

Research Questions	Main Themes	NVivo Generated Auto themes
1)What are the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors that may lead juveniles to recidivate?	a) Participants perceived that risk factors related to lack of parental bonds, social bonds, school and community interactions, and mental health history have a significant effect on juvenile recidivism and delinquency.	Peer, community, school, mental disorders, imitating aggressive, peer bonds, lack of parental social bonds and modeling.

2)How do juvenile justice professionals work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend?	b) Specialized rehabilitation programs are available, but they may need to be modified to target individual needs.	Programs, services, program effectiveness, program ideas, support, recommendations, and therapy groups.
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Subtheme: Juvenile crime	Theft, drugs, alcohol, disorderly conduct, extortion, hate crimes, kidnapping and sexual exploitation
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### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is increasingly recognized and valued, and it is vital to produce trustworthy findings with meaningful and valuable results (Nowell et al., 2017). Simmons-Horton (2020) noted that for the study to be accepted as trustworthy, the researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise and consistent manner, disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail enabling the reader to determine whether the process is credible. Furthermore, the study process should meet the standards of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Simmons-Horton, 2020). In order to meet the standards of trustworthiness, I used the NVivo Software, Excel analysis, and by-hand analysis to receive an accurate and transparent picture of the data while the results provided an audit of the data analysis process as a whole. Transferability was established by providing a specific description of the participants and utilizing snowball sampling in recruiting participants from the State

of Maryland government to eliminate bias and increase trustworthiness. Confirmability was established using journals throughout the course to minimize bias, while the NVivo software was used to ensure that the findings were based on the participants' own words. Moreover, to make it easy to navigate the data in various ways, I used tables to bring order and make sense of the data. Furthermore, done well, tables help researchers communicate research findings and theoretical insights in a parsimonious, easy-to-understand, and convincing way (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021)

### **Summary**

This chapter provided the findings of an anonymous online survey with 10 participants. The participants were recruited from a government organization in the state of Maryland. I obtained a letter of inquiry and obtained approval from Walden University IRB to collect data. I sent an email invitation and the consent form to the agency's supervisor, who forwarded it to the individuals who met the inclusion criteria. The chapter provided the data collection, demographic of the participants, settings, research questions, themes, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary. Data were analyzed using the NVivo software, Excel, and hand-coded data to ensure that the themes aligned with the research questions. Chapter 5 includes an overview of the study, interpretation of the findings, limitation of the study, recommendations, social change implications, and conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

This qualitative case study was conducted to examine the risk factors leading juveniles to recidivate from the perspectives of juvenile justice professionals, as well as how they work to mitigate those risk factors. Researchers Dill and Ozer (2016) pointed out that juvenile crime and reoffending are nationwide social problems that need attention and intervention by authorities and policymakers. In Baltimore City, Maryland, juvenile crime and recidivism have had devastating effects on quality of life and social bonds in the community, producing fear across the city (Hall et al., 2018). Furthermore, Forsyth et al. (2018) found that socioeconomic factors, lack of family stability and relationships, community exposure to violence, peer interaction, and lack of academic sources were all reported as contributors to juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

With an understanding of the risk factors leading to juvenile recidivism and delinquency, I used a snowball sampling of 10 participants and an online survey to collect data perspectives and experiences of juvenile justice professional. All participants responded to the same questionnaire provided through an anonymous online survey. The participants answered 24 questions, and I analyzed the collected data using NVivo software and Microsoft Excel.

The NVivo-generated auto coded themes that provided an understanding of the research questions were family, peer, community, school attendance/nonattendance, mental disorders, modeling, youth crime, theft, disorderly conduct, drugs, alcohol, extortion, vandalism, hate crimes, kidnapping, sexual exploitation, imitating aggressive



behavior, lack of parental social bonds, peer bonds, programs/services, program effectiveness, program ideas, recommendations, support, and therapy groups. The study provided much-needed insights for policy reform and how to bolster specific individual programs that target risk factors, reduce crimes, and lower incarceration costs (Dill & Ozer, 2016).

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The data analysis collected in this study provided insights regarding the perspectives and experiences of juvenile justice professionals with juvenile delinquents and offenders. The findings were relative to the two research questions in Chapter 1. The Nvivo generated auto coded themes that provided an understanding of the research questions and indicated a definite link between juvenile recidivism and family, peer, school, community, and mental disorder factors. As discussed in Chapter 2, this study was grounded in Hirschi's theory of social bonds, which includes the elements of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief; the theory also posits that those who do not experience those elements are more likely to become delinquent and commit crimes (Bradford, 2016). The collected data illustrates the participants' stance on the risk factors linked to juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

The first research question was, "What are the juvenile justice professionals' perceptions of the risk factors that may lead juveniles to recidivate?" The findings in this study showed that the risk factors leading juveniles to recidivate are associated with family, peers, school, community, and mental disorders, which were also discussed by Forsyth et al. (2018) and Poyraz et al. (2019). Forsyth et al. (2018) examined the family

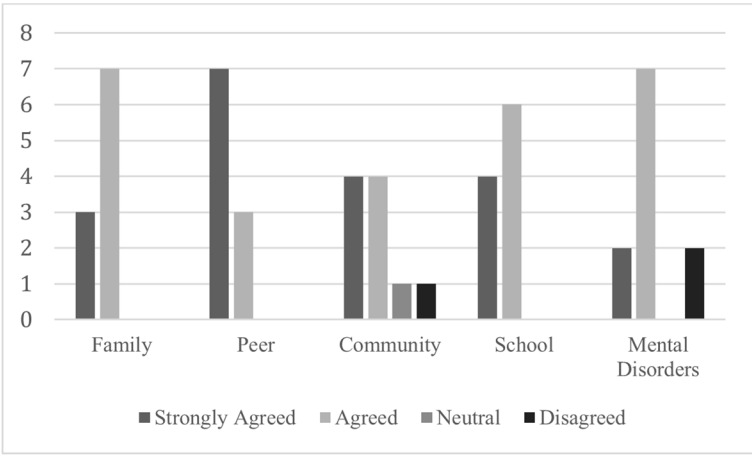
risk factors and delinquency associations for three antisocial behaviors of youth of the ages 14 or older and concluded that lack of family stability and relationship were some of the causes found responsible for juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Poor parenting skills, family structure, and parent or sibling criminality have been identified as family risk factors for juvenile delinquency (Rathinabalan & Naaraayan, 2017).

Poor parental skills and the inability to establish boundaries are risk factors for delinquent behavior, which puts the risk of youth engaging in delinquent behavior four times higher than those from structured families (Kennedy et al., 2019). The participants in this study believed that the leading risk factors of juvenile delinquency and recidivism are family and peer interactions, closely followed by mental disorders, schools, and community, which is related to the literature review in Chapter 2.

Figure 1 illustrates the participants’ answers as strongly agreeing or agreeing that family, peer, school, community, and mental disorders are risk factors leading to juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

**Figure 1**

*Results Q1-Q5*



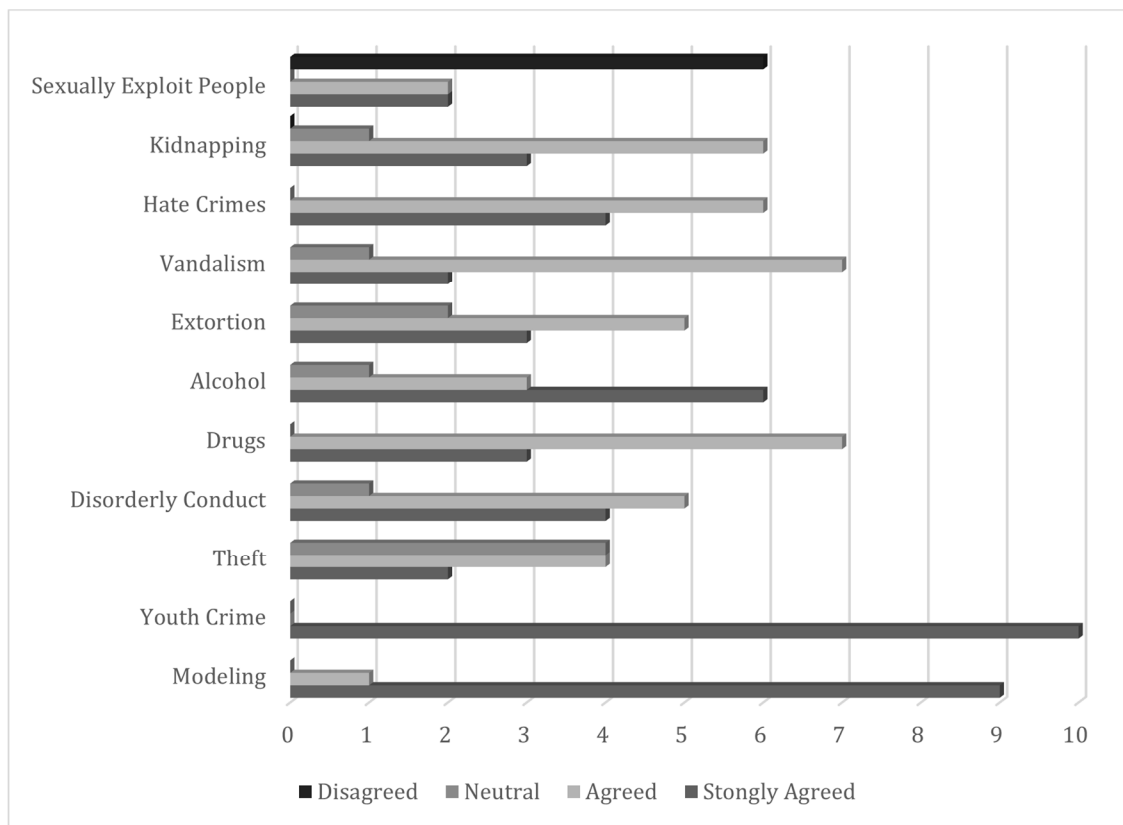
While all the participants believe the above risk factors lead to juvenile delinquency, family and peer social bonds are at the top of the list. All participants either agreed or strongly agreed that peer and parent social bonds play a significant role in juvenile delinquency. As mentioned in Chapter 2, peer-related factors include delinquent siblings and peers, which are believed to be a source of influence for young individuals (Homel et al., 2018). Moreover, Finan et al (2018) stated that siblings are an essential element in the family system. However, it can be predicted that by age 10, youth are likely to have violent convictions if their siblings are delinquent (Finan et al., 2018). Furthermore, the involvement of peers who use drugs and alcohol may negatively impact the youth interacting with them, leading to deviant or dangerous behavior (Crawford et al., 2018).

Additionally, the lack of family stability and relationships was found to be responsible for juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Forsyth et al., 2018). Poor parental skills and the inability to establish boundaries are risk factors for delinquent behavior, which puts the risk of these particular youth engaging in delinquent behavior four times higher than those from structured families (Kennedy et al., 2019). Goldstein and McMuellen (2018) stated that family structure influences youth behavior development, and brokenness can create a sense of rejection. In Maryland, 47.3 percent of youth of the ages 16 through 19 were raised in structured families which is the lowest level of family intactness in the state (Fagan, 2015). Additionally, the parent or sibling criminality exposure predicts juvenile recidivism with serious offenses, while sibling delinquency predicts general recidivism (Bosick & Fomby, 2018).

The participants were also asked to share their opinions about modeling and imitating peer and family aggressive behaviors, followed by the type of crimes of juvenile offenders. The participants suggested that modeling peer and family aggressive behavior is a cause of juvenile delinquency and recidivism, ultimately, leading juveniles to commit serious crimes. As mentioned in Chapter 1, youth crime is a significant problem, and the participants' answers verify that. Juveniles are reportedly involved in crimes including disorderly conduct, theft, drugs, alcohol, extortion, vandalism, hate crimes, and kidnapping. Figure 2 illustrates how participants view these factors.

**Figure 2**

*Crimes*



The second research question asked, “How do juvenile justice professionals work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend?” To answer this question, the participants were asked to share their opinions on juvenile programs and their effectiveness. However, they mentioned that some programs work, others work to some degree, and some fail to provide the necessary support the juvenile needs. The participants believed that institutions must provide quality services and positive experiences that meet the needs.

The participants also pointed out the need for parents to step in, be positive models, and support their children. Furthermore, building community support for youth in the transitional years keeps them active with sports. Church, school, and having a solid family unit will help them make correct decisions and avoid getting involved with the wrong crowd. Finally, providing additional education, mentorship, and financial literacy sources will also assist youth in becoming good citizens.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations and anticipated barriers are always present in a study. In this study, one limitation was the lack of sample as it was limited to justice professionals from the state of Maryland who shared their perceptions and experiences, which may not be accurate. Another limitation was that the juveniles' voices currently experiencing recidivism and are delinquent were not heard. Furthermore, due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, person-to-person contacts were limited because of social distance guidelines.

Therefore, the data were collected using an anonymous online survey and included multi-choice and open-ended questions creating a problem with verifying the results or contacting the participants for additional information (Keenan, 2017).

### **Recommendations**

Future research should be to replicate this study in different settings. This study suggested that further research is needed on the risk factors responsible for juvenile delinquency and recidivism. The findings of this study show that family and peer social bonds may be the lead causes of juvenile delinquency and recidivism, followed by programs that may not be as effective. As more studies are exploring what causes delinquent behavior, the researchers should look in more detail at the risk factors. A suggestion would be to evaluate the available programs for their effectiveness and recommend ideas to help improve them so they can help prevent juveniles from returning to detention. Another area that warrants further research would be to focus on either the family settings, peer social bonds, or mental health as risk factors for juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Another idea would be to conduct a study with the parents of juvenile delinquents or the delinquents who are reoffending and hear directly from them what needs to be done to help them succeed.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of the juvenile justice professionals on the risk factors leading juveniles to recidivate and how they work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend. The study focused on family, peer, school, community, and mental disorders risk factors. As indicated in the

literature and this study, family and peer social bonds, school and community interactions, and mental disorders influence juvenile delinquency and recidivism. The findings yielded information about the risk factors that significantly impacted juvenile delinquent behaviors. Although the school, community, and mental disorders influenced juvenile delinquency, the participants suggested that family and peer social bonds were the most significant risk factors for their delinquency. The findings aimed at promoting a better understanding of juvenile recidivism risk factors from the juvenile justice professionals' perspectives. The study provided much-needed insights to local agencies and focused on policies that should be reformed and invested in specific individual programs that target risk factors, reduce crimes, and lower incarceration costs (Dill & Ozer, 2016). The findings also could assist policymakers in implementing or modifying intervention and prevention programs based on individual needs.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this qualitative case study design was to explore the perceptions of juvenile justice professionals on risk factors leading juveniles to recidivate, and how they work to mitigate the risk factors that lead juveniles to reoffend. Ten participants completed the survey in the study. The findings revealed that family settings and lack of bonds, peer interactions, school, community, and mental disorders are causes of juvenile delinquency and recidivism. The participants expressed the need for parents to step in to support their children and be positive role models. Lack of family social support is one of the most relevant factors contributing to juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Forsyth et al., 2018). Moreover, institutions must provide quality services and positive experiences

that fit the youth's needs. Finally using data to drive recidivism reduction efforts, ensure the effective use of risk and needs assessments, improve the effectiveness of supervision to reduce recidivism, and provide the resources to the youth under supervision are all necessary to succeed.



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## Appendix A

### Participant Invitation

#### **Study is seeking participants currently working with delinquent juveniles**

There is a new study called “Juvenile Recidivism Risk Factors from the Juvenile Justice Professional Perspective” that will fill the gap in understanding the risk factors affecting juvenile recidivism from juvenile justice professionals' perspectives. The study will provide much-needed insights to local agencies and focus on policies that should be reformed and invest in specific individual programs that target risk factors, reduce crimes, and lower incarceration costs. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences interacting with juvenile offenders, describe the risk factors that lead to juvenile recidivism, and your opinion on the current rehabilitation programs. This survey is part of the doctoral study for Fotini Stamidis, a Ph.D. student at Walden University.

About the study:

- One 30-minute e-mail survey
- To protect your privacy, no names will be collected

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- History of working with juvenile offenders for at least two years
- Be a resident of the state of Maryland

You can contact me by phone 410-371-7573 e-mail [fotini.stamidis@waldenu.edu](mailto:fotini.stamidis@waldenu.edu) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Fotini Stamidis, BA, CECFE, 3CI

PhD Candidate Human & Social Services

Specializations: Disaster Crisis & Intervention

## **Appendix B**

### **Survey Questions**

1. Family risk factors are most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
2. Peer interactions are most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
3. Community factors are most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
4. School factors are most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
5. Mental disorders are most likely to predict juvenile recidivism.
6. Modeling and imitating aggressive behavior play a role in recidivism.
7. Youth crime is a major issue in today's society.
8. Youth are prone to commit theft.
9. Youth are prone to engaging in disorderly conduct.
10. Youth are prone to consuming drugs.
11. Youth are prone to consuming alcohol.
12. Youth are prone to committing extortion.
13. Youth are prone to indulging in vandalism.
14. Youth are prone to conduct hate crimes.
15. Youth are prone to kidnapping.
16. Youth are prone to sexually exploit people.
17. Does modeling and imitating aggressive behaviors (i.e., parent, other family, peers) play a role in recidivism by juvenile offenders?
18. Lack of social bonds formed with parents lead juvenile to join gang groups.
19. Social bonds formed with peers are important.

20. Are programs and services available for juvenile offenders?
21. Do these programs work?
22. In the area below, please provide some program ideas that can help prevent juveniles from returning to detention.
23. In the area below, please describe what will work to break the recidivism cycle.
24. In the below, please describe how these young people need to be supported.