

2022

Effects of Educational Curricula on Recidivism in a Community-Based Correctional Facility

Todd Angello
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Walden University

College of Education

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Todd Angello

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University

2022

Abstract

Effects of Educational Curricula on Recidivism in a Community-Based Correctional
Facility

by

Todd Angello

MA, University of Cincinnati, 2013

BS, University of Ashland, 2007

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Higher Education, Leadership and Management

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Recidivism in a community-based correctional facility (CBCF) was high. The average recidivism rate was 32.7%; however, in a Northeast Midwest U.S. state, the CBCF was 44%. The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the effects of three educational curricula on recidivism at one CBCF. The Positive Reentry for Midwestern State Offenders certificate courses (vocational), the credit-bearing courses (college), the ASPIRE General Education Degree (GED), and no additional courses taken were tested on their predictive power of recidivism. The theoretical framework was Hirschi's social bond theory. A binomial logistic regression was conducted to determine the effects of each curriculum and no course taken on the likelihood that participants will or will not recidivate. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 10.23, p = .017$. The model explained 2.9% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance in recidivism. Of the three predictor variables compared to no courses taken, those taking college courses were 2 times more likely to recidivate, and there was no significant difference for those who took GED or vocational courses. A policy paper was written, which included recommendations to join the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium and study other services that reduce recidivism. These recommendations could promote positive social change for stakeholders involved in identifying effective strategies for lowering the recidivism rate and contributing to more productive members of society.

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Dedication

In the hopes that this work may in some way contribute to reducing recidivism among those we touch.

I dedicated my project study to my family and friends. I would not have been resilient and persevered through this process without the influences of my wife, Cecilia, and my daughter, Cali, who have been a constant source of support and encouragement. Each of you have withstood the sacrifice of time, something we can never get back.

To my father, thank you for watching over me during this process.

To my mother, thank you for always supporting my decisions.

To my sister, thank you for giving me guidance throughout life.

To all my work friends, Lar, Renee, Smitty, and Mig, I appreciate all the words of encouragement.

To my close friends, Brett, Brian, Jim, Frank, Sandy, Ray, Jane, Chris, and Morningstar, and the fact that “music is the ultimate power” to motivate.

Every day I feel is a blessing from God...

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I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Patterson and Dr. Baltes, whose work demonstrated to me that social change in my area of study is a quest for not only today, but also tomorrow. In addition, my final thanks to Walden University and all the professors who helped me along the way.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Recidivism in community-based correctional facilities (CBCFs) is still high despite educational programs (Castro, 2018; Yukhnenko et al., 2019). A 2018 study from the Ohio State Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections revealed that 32.7% of all former offenders recidivate within 3 years of their release, steadily increasing from 2010 by over 5% (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, 2018). The problem that was addressed in the current study was that the average recidivism rate is 32.7%; however, in a Northeast Midwest state, the CBCF remains at a higher rate of 44% (University Director of Criminal Justice, personal communication, October 23, 2019). In a special report for the U.S. Department of Justice, Alper et al. (2018) noted that 4 in 9 offenders nationwide recidivate, consistent with the Ohio State Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (2018) report (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, 2018).

The CBCF provided the ordinary plea courts within two participating counties with an economical, local alternative to state prison commitments for 102 male and 28 female adults, low-level felony offenders. The facility's goal was to provide a range of services that offered each offender the best opportunity to successfully reintegrate into their home community. The facility started in 1997 with its first admitted man, and the first admitted woman was in 2005.

The CBCF is a 3- to a 4-month facility with an option based on behavior to become a 6-month holding facility. The Midwestern State Risk Assessment System

(ORAS) is a dynamic risk/needs assessment system used to determine appropriate sanctions, interventions, case plans, and length of stay at the CBCF. Moderate-risk offenders have a minimum stay of 90 days, and high-risk offenders have a minimum stay of 120 days. In any year, the number of offenders released on average is 545.

The CBCF has remained American Correctional Association accredited since 2003. The CBCF was awarded the 2016 Cliff Skeen Award based on many contributing factors, including the education department. To reduce the high percentage of recidivism, the U.S. Department of Justice implemented the Positive Reentry for Midwestern State Offenders (PROP) grant in this CBCF for low-level offenders in a Northeast Midwest state from 2015 to 2017. The current study focused on 2016, during which 545 offenders were released.

The CBCF teamed with the local community college to implement specialized curricula to have a lasting impact on the recidivism rate for 2016. The idea was to offer courses in a limited setting, with minimal online access at a faster pace to earn a certificate, credits for continuing education, or a general education degree (GED). If offenders chose to participate, this fast-track method included all 545 offenders who passed through the facility that year. All credit-bearing courses and certificate courses were offered in 6-week modules. Depending on the certification, more than one class was taken simultaneously at a 6-week pace. The credit-bearing classes were converted to a condensed level of 6 weeks. These credit-bearing classes were part of a transfer module, which allowed transfers for completed modules to any college in the state. With the

approval from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, implementation of the curricula began on January 1, 2016.

Rationale

Recidivism in CBCFs remained high despite educational programs (Chouldechova, 2017). To address the issue, I conducted the current study to determine correctional education curricula that work. The current study provided insight into how three educational curricula offered by the CBCF—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, and ASPIRE GED—affect recidivism. The findings from this evidence-based study may assist administrative decisions on selecting a proper educational curriculum that shows a reduction in recidivism. I sought to ascertain the effect of completing the three types of educational curricula offered on recidivism.

Recidivism has been declared by Mears and Cochran (2018) and Ellison et al. (2017) as a severe problem that needs to be addressed by CBCFs. Ellison et al. ascertained that educational curricula offered to offenders could reduce recidivism and increase the employability of the offender during reentry. By offering educational curricula, CBCFs may be able to contribute to a reduction in recidivism among offenders.

The CBCF and the PROP (grant) were committed to reducing recidivism through education. CBCF offered three types of curricula: The students received a GED on completion, two students received credit for college courses, and three students received a certificate (e.g., an apprenticeship). Given the importance of reducing recidivism and the focus of CBCF on education to reduce recidivism, the rationale behind the current study was to analyze the effects of these educational curricula on recidivism. Many

researchers have assessed the influence of other factors on recidivism (Hamilton et al., 2016). However, few studies had been conducted on the effect of completing one of the three educational curricula options offered— PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, and ASPIRE GED—on recidivism in a CBCF.

The PROP curricula grant included three curricula, which were voluntary, apart from the GED. ASPIRE GED was mandatory according to standards and policies for some offenders who were not high school diploma holders or had received a high school equivalent. The purpose of the current quantitative study was to examine the effects that the three educational curricula had at one CBCF on recidivism. Using a correlational design, I investigated the possibility of an odds ratio between recidivism and the three types of curricula completed. The independent variable was the completion or noncompletion of one of the three types of curricula of the PROP curriculum. The dependent variable was recidivism. Students who stayed longer could complete two of the three curricula based on the time restraints per offender.

Definition of Terms

ASPIRE GED: A program that offers free services for people who require assistance in acquiring skills so that they can be successful in requiring a high school equivalent. The services include writing capabilities and mathematics, and the program is mostly aimed at adults (Grim et al., 2019).

Community-based correctional facility (CBCF): A center that offers a local option to a prison sentence. The center is usually used for nondangerous people who have the

urge to be rehabilitated using local sanctions, treatment, education, and work (Latessa & Lovins, 2019).

Low-level offender: Any person who would have committed their first crime and/or committed a less serious crime, for example a drug offense; this person would have no priors and a history of nonviolence (Basanta et al., 2018).

Midwestern State Risk Assessment System: A dynamic need check system used for adult offenders. It gives criminal justice parties the power to supervise persons (Toro, 2015) at different decision points across the system.

Positive Reentry for Midwestern State Prisoners (PROP): An initiative that supports the return of offenders in a Midwest State community. Program staff apply several practices, policies, and reinforcements to ensure that resources for supporting the former criminals are attained (Chamberlain & Wallace, 2016).

Recidivism: The reengagement in criminal law breaking (criminal behavior) after a person has received an intervention or sanction (Johnson, 2017).

Reentry: The transition of criminals or offenders from jails or prisons back into the community (Hyatt & Han, 2018).

Rehabilitation: The act of assisting an individual who has suffered from an illness or injury. Rehabilitation aims to restore lost skills and help individuals regain maximum self-sufficiency (Gallant et al., 2015). Rehabilitation enables offenders to recover their previous achievements.

Reintegration: The process of returning to society by people who have been in prison. Reintegration involves engaging in the freedoms that have been forbidden because an individual was in jail (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018).

Significance of the Study

Those who may benefit from this research are offenders because new standards could be set that would impact educational programming for offenders. The study may also help correctional institutions offer courses and help offenders gain education certification to facilitate their reintegration into society. This study may provide awareness of the effect of different educational curricula—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, and ASPIRE GED—offered at a local CBCF with a high recidivism rate. In addition, the results of this study may provide information on whether active engagement of offenders in any of the three educational curricula offered in prison has a significant effect on recidivism in a CBCF. Educational curricula can be offered to imprisoned people, but identifying the one that most effectively addresses the problem of recidivism is a challenge (Berk, 2017). The current study results may be used to inform policies and future relevant project implications.

Most studies had not focused on the impact of educational curricula offered to offenders on recidivism in a CBCF. The current study was unique because I assessed the impact of three types of curricula offered to prisoned individuals (PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, and ASPIRE GED) in addressing the problem of recidivism. The study findings might also contribute to positive social change by identifying which education curricula can improve convicted offenders' behaviors as they

reintegrate into society, which would help to create a safer community (see Duwe & Rocque, 2017).

Research Question and Hypotheses

The problem was that the CBCF did not know whether offenders who were enrolled in educational curricula experience reduced recidivism. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effects, if any, of completing one of the three educational curricula on recidivism. I used a quantitative correlational design.

RQ: What were the effects of completing one of the three types of educational curricula offered—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, ASPIRE GED—on recidivism?

H_0 : There was not a relationship between completion of one of the three types of educational curricula offered—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, ASPIRE GED—on recidivism.

H_a : There was a relationship between completion of one of the three types of educational curricula offered—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, ASPIRE GED—on recidivism.

The dependent variable was recidivism. The independent variable was the type of educational curriculum. I used multiple binary logistic regression as the statistical test.

Review of the Literature

Each year, approximately 650,000 offenders are released from incarceration across the United States (Troy, 2018). However, failure to provide the proper education, supervision, preparation, motivation, and opportunities to the exoffenders is likely to

affect their reentry and subsequent social integration (Visher et al., 2003). Over time, efforts have been made to devise strategies to improve offenders' conditions in psychological, social, and economic terms. Mainly, integration of education and provision of vocational skills have been critical components of this objective (Newton et al., 2018). Under prison education, offenders have been encouraged and required to undertake various programs and courses, including literacy skills, GED programs, credit-bearing college classes, and certificate courses. The purpose of the current quantitative study was to examine the effects that the educational curriculum—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, and ASPIRE GED—at one CBCF had on recidivism. The independent variable was the completion or noncompletion of one of the three types of curricula. The dependent variable was recidivism. Literature related to the variables and the theoretical framework is shared in this section.

Theoretical Foundation: Social Bond Theory

The theoretical framework for this study was social bond theory. Hirschi (1969) has been credited with developing the social bond theory, also referred to as the social control theory. The search for justice and the need for disciplinary actions in the United States are two intertwined concepts. Crime has been an undesired but unavoidable part of society due to the complexity of human behavior and thoughts. Narrowing the discourse to the concept of recidivism, Botchkovar et al. (2017) pointed out that increasing cases of repeat offenses can be explained by various theories that address human actions. The current study was grounded in Hirschi's social bond theory. According to Hirschi's theory, there are four dimensions of basic bonds individuals develop that may or may not

influence them to engage in criminal activity (Pratt et al., 2015): (a) attachment, (b) commitment, (c) involvement, and (d) belief.

Attachment

According to Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory, attachment is the emotional connection between a person and the people close to them, such as family, friends, and other members of society. Forsyth and Braithwaite (2020) noted that people without these emotional connections take longer to integrate into society and exhibit a high recidivism rate. Kandala (2018) posited that attachment is the most fundamental element in the social bond theory due to its role in internalizing societal norms and establishing consciousness for self-restraint. The other model concepts were considered contingents of attachments possessed by the individual toward the society or family.

Bender (2018) suggested that the impact of high recidivism worsened by lower educational attainment levels also shows the failure of the criminal justice system. When incarcerated individuals leave prison, those who have low educational levels often find themselves without social support systems or financial resources. Bender found that these people face a higher risk of committing more crimes when reintegrating into society. Robinson (2000) provided credible evidence that postsecondary correctional education programs can provide support and help people achieve many critical goals. Attachment has been linked with low recidivism rates after the end of programs (C. Smith, 2017).

Commitment

According to Wikström (2019), commitment is the value a person might lose by engaging in crime. Hirschi's theory presents the idea that by actively engaging in regular

activities, an individual's propensity to commit an offense is minimized (Carlson, 2018). Commitment in the current study referred to the investments in the form of time and effort made engaging in the classroom. Education demonstrated dedication within correctional facilities.

Commitment to McNeeley education by incarcerated individuals has been shown to reduce recidivism (Duwe and McNeeley, 2021; Howard, 2020; Rodriguez, 2017). and examined recidivism rates related to obtaining a diploma from higher learning from a collation of postsecondary prison education programs in Texas. McNeeley and Duwe established that as the education level increased, the recidivism rate decreased. Those who obtained a master's degree did not recidivate, people with a bachelor's degree recidivated by 6%, and those with an associate's degree had a recidivism rate of 14%. The results demonstrated that the continuation of education decreases the rate of recidivism. Yearwood (2020) also analyzed the impact of correctional education on the recidivism rate of those incarcerated. Yearwood found that educational programs contributed to low violence within the populations in prison and that offenders were interested in participating when they could see the benefits the programs bring. McNair-Williams (2019) also found that recidivism rates for offenders who commit to education programs have been low upon the conclusion of the programs.

Involvement

Carlson (2018) described involvement—as used in the social bond theory—as the time used in doing something instead of crime. In the current study, entering one of the three educational curriculums offered at the CBCF was considered time used to do

something instead of criminal behavior. Clark (2016) observed that educational programs offer offenders a place to keep themselves engaged with the activities that preoccupy them and help them stay out of trouble. In the current study, the school environment acted as a place where the offenders participated in activities and contributed to good behavior within the institution. Jäggi et al. (2020) noted that the school's climate matters for offenders who have completed their sentences and are returning to the communities. However, Patterson (2022) evaluated the level of involvement of incarcerated adults in the correctional education programs and found that only a small percentage of offenders involved themselves in these activities. The educational programs within the CBCF in the current study were voluntary (with one exception), so involvement depended on the incarcerated individuals' choice.

Belief

In the current study, belief referred to the individual's ability to accept the conventional ideas and thoughts in the society, thereby believing in the rule of law and obeying it (see Forsyth & Braithwaite, 2020). If an individual considered that the social bond in the society was strong enough, they might not recidivate. As Kandala (2018) noted, attachment is the most fundamental element in the social bond theory. An attachment could lead to increased belief in the internalization of societal norms, which could lead to reduced recidivism.

Summary of Four Dimensions

Hirschi (1969) explained the criminal actions of humans and proposed a theory that established a link between solid bonds and people's tendencies to deviate from the

rule of law. The theory was constructed on an underlying assumption that all people have the tendencies to engage in a criminal act; however, they can be controlled through the power of social bonds (Hirschi, 1969). Wikström (2019) posited that social bonds are characterized by a commitment to a course, attachment to a culture or group of people, sharing of a belief, and a sense of belonging. Kandala (2018) found that individuals with a secure attachment to society are less likely to deviate from the norms or commit an offense.

Despite the use of the theory to explain the various concepts of criminal behaviors in society, Hirschi (1969) revised the social bond theory in response to numerous criticisms. According to Petrich (2020), the main critique of the theory was based on the variations of the building elements. Hirschi argued that the concepts of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief vary too much compared to the theory's definition, making it challenging to combine them. Botchkovar et al. (2017) challenged the elements by questioning the foundations of these aspects. Botchkovar et al. claimed that the social bond theory does not explain the origin of attachment or whether attachments are prosocial (made through the legally accepted interactions such as with mentors) or detrimental (by associating with illegal contacts such as drug dealers or leaders of a criminal gang). Benda (2005) added to this criticism by questioning the socioeconomic nature of the involvement, arguing that it is not known if the engagement was on economic activities or religion. Furthermore, people could be using their leisure time to promote participation, thereby compromising their social welfare.

Apart from the weakness in the elements of social bond theory, Petrich (2020) raised concerns about the theory's inability to explain continued defiance. According to these critics, the theory can be used only to predict the possibility of an individual committing an offense but cannot provide any information on the crime that can be repeated or escalated. However, Wikström (2019) observed that, despite the criticism, the social bond theory remains an integral framework in criminological discourses because prisons that apply the theory have a better chance of predicting defiance of an offender from the norms immediately after release.

Although the theory has weaknesses, correctional centers and community-based organizations can use it to determine what curricula will enable them to reduce recidivism by installing positive attachments and involvement with an offender during their stay. The social bond theory functions from the assumption that all human beings are predisposed toward deviancy or the commission of criminal activities. However, they are controllable via social bonds of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief.

Social Bond Theory in Relationship to Recidivism

Rocque et al. (2018) argued that recidivism is a concern in criminal justice because of an individual's ability to reoffend, specifically a person's capacity to relapse into activities involving crime or lawbreaking actions. Bersani et al. (2014) indicated that social bonds affect behavioral reform. Similar assertions were made by Laub and Sampson (2015) in the context that adult roles transform activities such as the acquisition of a meaningful job and marriage, which assist in abandoning a criminal career. The same findings were corroborated by Uggen (2014), who noted that attachment is having a

spouse or an accepting marriage that helps reform their character more. In concurrence, Savolainen (2015) held that social bonds have a fundamental role in correctional contexts; increased bonds relate to less recidivism. Tripodi (2015) disagreed, stating that there are no studies that demonstrate how the changes in terms of social bonds that take place during incarceration impact later behavior.

Rocque et al. (2018) sought to understand the relationship between social bonds versus recidivism and the changes that occur at the time of incarceration. A survey was administered to a group of first-time offenders within two sets of environments to test whether social bond changes during entry to release had predictive effects on the future behavior of the offenders. The results confirmed that a decline in recidivism was recorded as an outcome of change drawing from social bonds in particular beliefs and attachments. In agreement with these assertions, Benda (2015) and Benda and Toombs (2016) concurred that social bonds and commitment have a fundamental role in recidivism among offenders freed from correctional programs. For instance, Benda and Toombs recognized that employment and marriage remain vital in the future behavior of the participants. In concurrence, Hepburn and Griffin (2015) and Piquero (2017) held that high bonding among offenders and a commitment to norms and beliefs on prescribed values resulted in lower recidivism upon their release from correctional programs. Similar views were presented by Rocque et al. (2014) and Bales and Mears (2017) who asserted that commitment and occupational involvement are instrumental in enhancing offenders' character reformation.

Similarly, Andrews and Bonta (2010) argued that prison therapeutic programs could ameliorate attitudes that lead to antisocial behavior or beliefs. Inculcation of offenders into projects that required commitment and involvement led to a reduced degree of offending behavior during or upon release. Dissenting views from Lopoo and Western (2015) and Pettit and Western (2014), however, reflected on the effects of incarceration on the social bonds of the offenders. Both studies indicated that activities such as employment or marriage have less impact or are not likely to reduce recidivism.

Other literature supporting the role of social bonds in reduced recidivism include Taxman and Ressler (2016), Edin et al. (2014), and Rocque et al. (2014). These researchers held that incarceration is considered a turning point in the transformation journey of the offenders because it provides them with an opportunity to invest more time in social bonding. The researchers further asserted that prison initiates a controlled environment in which offenders can reenergize their relationship with communities and facilities, thereby stimulating more commitment and attachment. The outcome usually indicated cases of reduced recidivism when the offenders were released from prison. Taxman and Ressler further added that incarceration provides therapeutic programs, physical and mental health facilities, and education components that might not be available at the community level. Incarceration provides an opportunity to rebuild relationships, commitment, and beliefs to a prescribed moral code that enables offenders to reform their character when released from prison or correctional program.

How Social Bond Theory Related to the Study Approach

Fisher et al. (2020) stated that attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief moderate the linkage between victimization that occurs in school and long-run attainment and development of educational needs. In concurrence, Chen (2015) stated that social bond theory, in particular involvement and commitment, creates a buffer to overcome low attainment in education among a victimized cohort. Fisher et al. related the same victimization to the psychosocial effects that offenders succumb to during incarceration, noting that involvement and commitment bring success in their general education development. In harmony with these assertions, Catalano et al. (2014) noted the mutual relationship in the case of weakened social bonds, offending behavior (recidivism), general education development, and college attainment. The assertion was that negative consequences of offensive behavior lead to unsuccessful education outcomes at the college or vocational level; this was catalyzed mainly by weak or incomplete aspects of social bonding among the individuals. In concurrence, Schwartz et al. (2015) stated that when there are increased initiatives for social bonding, especially opportunities for attachment and commitment to prescribed norms, more offenders are motivated and self-driven to pursue educational goals and academic achievement. Schwartz et al. noted that offenders who received more opportunities for social bonding through involvement and commitment reported more success in completing vocational training. This suggested possible interconnection between recidivism, social bond theory, and successful completion of goals in PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, and ASPIRE GED.

Catalano et al. (2014) held that offenders and other victimized individuals report the more unsuccessful experience and failure to complete college or vocational training due to weak social bonds, thus affirming that the same triggers adverse educational outcomes. Similarly, Ripiski and Gregory (2016) stated that upon release from corrective programs, individuals reported successful education attainment at college, including general education development, when they access more opportunities for attachment, involvement, and commitment. For instance, Wilson (2014) asserted that attachment could drive young offenders to pursue a college education because they did not want to disappoint their loved ones who supported or provided them with assistance for character reformation, primarily through educational attainment. Still, Ripiski and Gregory (2016) reflected harmonized thoughts in stating that belief and commitment to established societal norms and values encouraged present and past offenders to aim at conventional goals. A weak social bond system rendered offenders to achieve less success in their educational pursuits, which triggered more negative outcomes in the long-term future (Catalano et al., 2014).

Summary

The literature review related to the theoretical framework documented the four aspects of social bond theory and the effects on the capacity of individuals to reform from offensive behavior. Which created opportunities for social bonds characterized by attachment, belief, commitment, and involvement are landmark achievements that can be used to motivate past offenders to pursue educational goals at college and vocational levels. Therefore, the central argument in the reviewed literature was that social bonds

have a two-edged impact regarding reduced recidivism and education attainment. The gaps in knowledge addressed rely on either thematic deductions or hypotheses-driven research, that is, the use of either qualitative or quantitative analysis. Moreover, an experimental design was sought to have controlled environments for pretest and posttest examinations of cohort groups that had been incarcerated in the present or past due to offensive behavior; these were changes caused by the four aspects of the social bond theory.

Search Strategies

This literature review was researched using Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, ERIC, and ProQuest. The keywords used to search included recidivism, behavior theories, social bond, attachment, commitment, involvement, belief, recidivism and gender, age, sex, race, employment, ORAS, Midwestern State and recidivism, Midwestern State County, and recidivism, PROP, education, and reentry. These terms were used in combination and individually.

While exploring contributing reasons for recidivism, Tegeng (2018) discovered that some of the top reasons addressed in this literature review are employment and offender characteristics and their relationships to the implementation of educational curricula. The most plausible reasons to explain the relatively high recidivism rate among released offenders were centered on the offenders' lack of education, lack of vocational job skills, and lack of interpersonal skills (Tegeng, 2018). Thus, this study aimed at filling the gap in practice by analyzing data collected by the CBCF and the relationship it

had with the three types of educational curricula (ASPIRE GED, PROP Certificate, Credit-Bearing Courses) and recidivism in a CBCF.

Employment and Recidivism

While there are many reasons why people commit different kinds of crime, the association between criminal activity and low-income areas led to the inference that there was a strong association between high recidivism rates and unemployment (Crabbe, 2016). This inference has been confirmed by Duwe (2018) and Ellison et al. (2017), thus making it practical to argue that recidivism can be reduced if correctional education programs give offenders skills that will make it easier for them to be employed once released. According to Lee (2017), engagement in employment opportunities has proven to be one of the most effective ways of reoccupying former offenders and preventing them from reverting to their old criminal behaviors. Further studies (Canady, 2018; Moak et al., 2019; Ruch & Yoder, 2017) also showed that getting a job after a coerced education program significantly reduced recidivism among many formerly incarcerated individuals. Based on the information above, one way to distinguish the three curricula offered at the CBCF in this proposed study was to look at each curriculum's employment opportunities.

GED Opportunities and Employment

Starting in the 1960s, the statistical education level of offenders was eighth-grade education compared to the population of the United States, which was an average of a 10th-grade education (Salmony, 1973). In the late 1960s, 80% of the offenders were not high school graduates, and only 3% of the offenders had taken any college work.

Moreover, 30% of the offenders were functionally illiterate (Salmony, 1973). In the late 1970s, Mace (1978) found that earning a GED was not significant for employment, although the success rate was four times higher than the failure rate, and individuals were less likely to recidivate. In the 1980s, a follow-up was conducted by Mason (1988), in which those who completed a GED entered back into the community at a higher rate of gaining employment and stability than those who did nothing.

Many studies have shown the ups and downs of relationships among nonparticipants and GED participants through the years. According to the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (2006), offenders who earned their GED while incarcerated recidivate at a significantly lower rate than offenders who were admitted with a high school diploma or GED. The study tracked the recidivation rates of all offenders released in 2005. Thirty-two percent of released offenders who earned their GED while incarcerated and had gainful employment returned to a New York State correctional facility. Meanwhile, 38% of offenders admitted with a degree returned to state custody. Nally et al. (2012) found that offenders who had not attended any correctional curricula programs during their confinement were 3.7 times more likely to become recidivists after release than those who at least participated in GED. Of those in this study who did not participate in an education curricula program, 67.8% recidivated after being released. The GED Testing Service Website (2018) created a focused study and found a link between receiving a GED and gainful employment. GED graduates are more likely to be employed more quickly upon release, most times less than a year, compared to those who did not participate or earn a GED.

Furthermore, those earning a GED are likely to be paid on average 200 dollars more a week than nongraduates. Lastly, those earning a GED have an average 2% lower unemployment rate than non-high school grads. Midwestern State Bureau, Labor Market statistics were noted for those with a GED or less between 2016-2026. Figure 1 shows the distribution of jobs by their typical education level in 2016. That year, about 64% of all jobs had a typical education level of a high school diploma or less. However, in Figure 2, the projection for 2026 shows a declining growth of jobs for those that have a high school diploma or less at 36%.

Figure 1

2016 Employment by Typical Education Levels Source

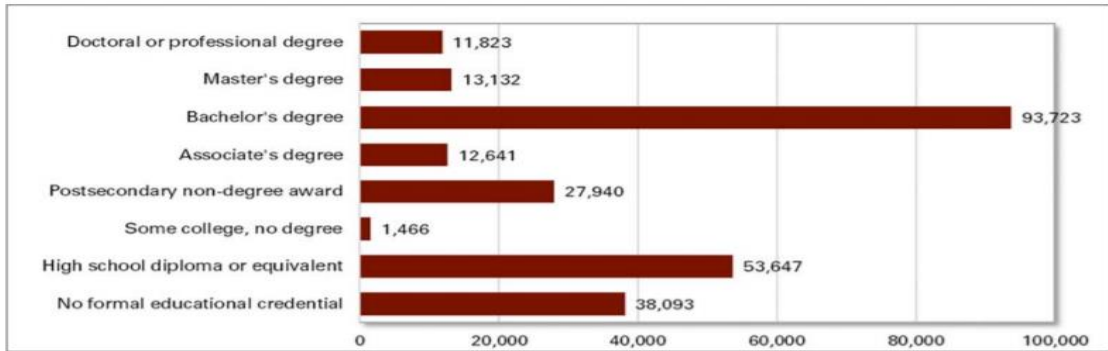
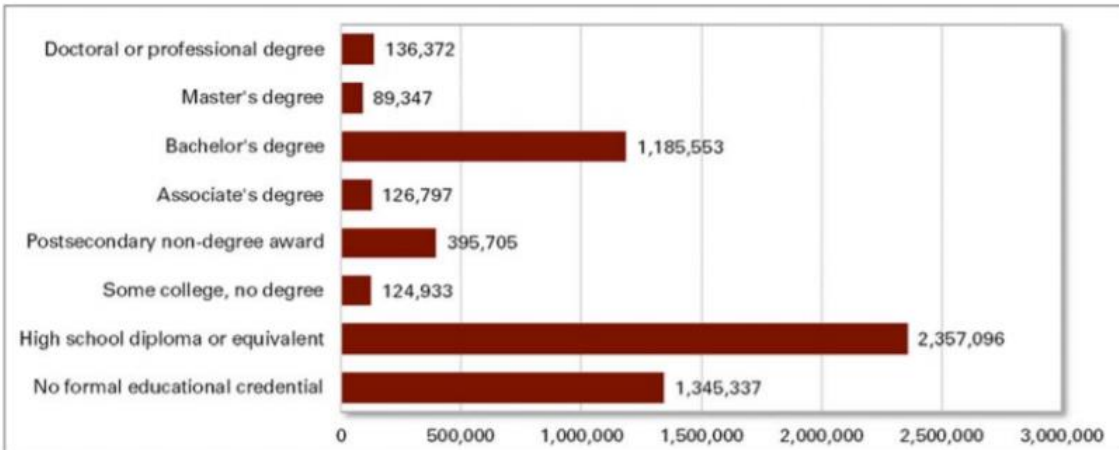


Figure 2

Projected Net Job Growth by Education Level, 2016–2026 Source



Certificate Training and Employment

Studies show that those incarcerated who received certificate training were less likely to recidivate. Beginning in 1978, one study proved through 146 released offenders with a certificate that they were twice as likely to be employed and were also 35% less likely to be rearrested (Luftig, 1978). Through the 1980s, certificate-training offenders were 33% less likely to re-offend, which continued to lower the recidivism rate for the next 8 to 10 years (Saylor, 1997). Allen (1988) continued to track offenders in Midwestern states with employable certifications and found that 68% gained employment. Another study by Anderson (1995) only showed employment gains by 4% in Midwestern states for exoffenders holding a certificate. With different results, Batiuk et al. (2005) studied 972 offenders in Midwestern states and found that 19% were less likely to return to prison based on employability with that certification. Overall, through many studies and meta-analyses, the picture was revealed that lowering the recidivism with certification led to 36% fewer people likely to be reincarcerated, and 28% were more likely to be employed (Davis et al., 2013). From those considerable reductions in recidivism and higher employment rate, a missed opportunity based on funding occurred. Although completing a certificate training course had great benefits, access to these programs was limited based on budget shortfalls. After Congress officially lifted the Pell Grant ban in December of 2020, Alumni University and the RAND corporation saw the overall effects this can have on offenders. With new certificate programs in place, the RAND corporation stated that those participating in a certificate program, not just Alumni University (the leading correctional program in the United States), were less

likely to recidivate compared to those nonparticipants. More specifically, the numbers in Midwestern State for those that hold a certificate from 2016-2026 the job market should grow based on the Midwestern State Labor Market (see Figure 2). The growth was substantial compared to those in Figure 1; total growth would result in 17% growth per year over the next 5 years.

Credit-Bearing Courses and Employment

For incarcerated students, the cost is a crucial obstacle to obtaining a college education. Before 1994, those who were incarcerated were eligible to receive Pell Grants to help cover the costs of participating in these programs. However, the 1994 Higher Education Act (HEA) amendment eliminated Pell Grant eligibility for students incarcerated in federal and state prisons (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). Participation by incarcerated individuals in college courses nationwide fell from 14% in 1991 to 7% in 2004 (New York State Bar Association, 2016). In terms of the number of states that offered college courses, an analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data indicated that 59% of states offered college programs in prison in 1990; following the 1994 amendment to the HEA, this dropped to 31% of states in 1995. By 2005, only 36% of states reported offering such programs (Turner, 2018). In 2013, RAND published the results of a comprehensive literature review of 30 years of studies of correctional education programs and a meta-analysis to assess what is known about how effective correctional education programs are in helping to reduce recidivism for incarcerated adults in state prisons (Davis et al., 2013). The results indicated that individuals who participated in credit-bearing college courses while incarcerated had 43% lower odds of recidivating than

individuals who did not (Davis et al., 2013).

Furthermore, credit-bearing college courses reduced an individual's risk of recidivating by 16 percentage points compared to those who did not participate in correctional education programs (Davis et al., 2013). The link to employment with a college degree after incarceration was noted by the Vera Institute of Justice and Georgetown Center. The Vera Institute of Justice and Georgetown Center study found that employment rates for former offenders also increase by nearly 10%, on average, after completing a college degree than someone who does not hold a degree. The National Institute of Justice concluded that it is more likely to be successfully employed coming out of prison with a college degree and found that employment at a 12% higher ratio in the first six months than someone who did not receive correctional education. The most recent years have seen an explosion of College courses in prisons. The president of Alumni University (2021) explained the recent boom of the last five years in college classes being offered in prisons. With the opening of the PELL funds for offenders, nearly 10,000 enrolled in correctional programming. The research data indicated that those earning a degree were 28% less likely to recidivate when compared to offenders who did not participate.

Summary

Through this section of the literature review, the three types of education curricula within federal and state prisons reduce recidivism to some extent were examined. These studies failed to show how these same programs reduced recidivism in a CBCF. It was also evident that employment was attached to reducing recidivism through the

educational curricula; again, to what extent it had on a Northeastern city in a Midwest state CBCF was further discovered in this study.

Offender Characteristics and Recidivism

Wooldredge and Steiner (2017) noted that over the past decade, the number of violent and nonviolent offenders earning GED certificates, equivalent to the high-school level of education, had significantly increased. Hall (2016) argued that while there is a need for violent and nonviolent offenders to earn a GED, enrollment of offenders into the high school diploma or GED system should be prioritized. Carver and Harrison (2016) supported this observation by noting that, compared to the general population, offenders were far less likely to earn high school diploma certificates, contributing to recidivism and criminal behaviors after incarceration. According to Wooldredge and Steiner (2017), only 13% of violent and nonviolent offenders earn a GED, which equates to a minimal reduction of recidivism compared to those that did not participate or earn a GED.

On December 21, 2018, the First Step Act was passed. This act aimed to improve opportunities for different types of offenders returning to their communities through certificate programming. The results through the National Institute of Justice (2019) maintained that it did not matter the type of offender, whether violent or nonviolent, the opportunity for an offender was available. Through a 16- monthly follow-up program, the reoffense risks, no matter the type of offender, were lowered. Thus, the results for certificate programming, offender type, and recidivism showed an overall reduction but not explicitly linked to any offender category.

Anderson et al. (2016) noted that there was a need to develop efficient processes that systematically collect data in all States, thus making it less challenging to analyze and compare the prevalence of College Education for offender types of offenders. In a report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), the findings showed that across one Midwestern State, only 34 and 46% of the State's correctional facilities provided college courses, which informed the significant disparity in college-level programs (Pompoco et al., 2017). Because there was no tracking (according to Anderson, 2016), it was hard to distinguish a relationship between offender type, college programs, and recidivism.

Age

According to many studies (Aebi & Bessler, 2010; Bindler & Hjalmarsson, 2017; Rudin et al., 2020), age had not only been found to be a determinant of recidivism but had also been identified to be a statistically significant factor in this context when earning a GED. Dube-Mawerewere and Chiborise (2017) concurred with this claim and observed a negative correlation between earning a GED, age, and the rate of recidivism and went ahead to link this inverse association between these variables to the concept of maturity that comes with an increase in age. In support of this argument, Rudin et al. (2020) posited that age advancement comes with maturity and commercial awareness, thus, there is higher risk aversion among older people. As an individual grows old, it is expected that they have more responsibilities and therefore will be more reluctant to venture into criminal opportunities, which may have numerous uncertainties (Bindler & Hjalmarsson, 2017).

On the contrary, Spooner et al. (2017) refused to associate the decrease in recidivism with age to economic responsibility. Instead, they stated that older people have a choice but are compelled to avoid crime as their age increases. Thus, the proposition was constructed on the assumption that old-age GED holders had a low return on offense compared to nonparticipants because most offenses require more physical ability and creativity, which tend to decline with an increase in age (Bindler & Hjalmarsson, 2017). According to Rudin et al. (2020), 80% of the recidivism cases reported in Midwestern State counties and their environment were associated with young offenders aged below 18 years with no education. Further evidence has shown that the more youthful the offender, the higher the recidivism rate. Dube-Mawerewere and Chiborise (2017) found that almost 56.6% of the offenders who were released at the age of 25 years or less recidivated as compared to approximately 14% aged 55 years and above with a GED.

Looking at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) study on certificate programming (2017), 19% of total offenders were involved in certificate training courses. Research on certificate programs showed that these studies' findings were mixed and based on age. The research on vocational education programs suggested that the program's quality was an essential factor in reducing recidivism and not the offender's age (CDRC, 2017). There were no studies based on the offender's age and the certificates earned. In a study done in Australia (2017), The RAND Study (2013), the CDRC report (2017), and other small state reports, age was rarely used to earn a certificate and reduce recidivism. The only study that mentioned age, certificate, and

recidivism was by Gordon and Weldon (2003), who found that completers of such programs helped reduce recidivism by 8.75%. Thus, certifications earned, the age of the offender, and the reduction of recidivism were inconclusive.

The United States Sentencing Commission report published in 2017 noted that the relationship that college had on age and recidivism was relevant. For example, among offenders under age 30 at the time of release, college graduates had a substantially lower re-arrest rate (27.0%) than offenders who did not complete high school (74.4%). Similarly, among offenders age 60 or older at the time of release, college graduates had a somewhat lower rearrest rate (11.6%) than offenders who did not complete high school (17.2%). The National Justice Institute (2017) concurred that college was the leading factor in reducing recidivism overall.

Race

According to information from the United States Department of Justice, White males made up the most significant number of offenders in the country across almost all states. However, the statistics also indicated that Black males were disproportionately large in number within prisons (Maschi et al., 2019). For example, Atkin-Plunk et al. (2017) stated that in the year 2010, it was reported that 3,074 Black male offenders had a GED ratio, which was exponentially higher than 459 White males per 100,000. Maschi et al. (2019) found that 48% of approximately 40,000 offenders who were released in 2017 were Black. Rudin et al. (2020), in a different study, posited that Black people were 9.7% more likely to be rearrested for the same or new crime in the United States while earning a GED, while White people were 7.4% more likely to be taken in again after release after

earning a GED. Further findings have also shown that over 50% of Asian offenders in the country are less likely to be prosecuted over the same or new crime regardless of educational attainment (Atkin-Plunk et al., 2017). However, Dube-Mawerewere and Chiborise (2017) posited that despite the existence of considerable evidence of race's impact on the level of recidivism and GED attainment, not much had been done to explain this event.

The only apparent research was a grant-funded study completed and published in 2005 by the U.S. Department of Education and Howard University on certificate training, race, and recidivism. Looking through other studies, none had specifics about certification, race, and recidivism. Overall, authors of this study found that African Americans were more accepted in a program and less recidivate, with a lower percentage for European Americans and the same for Hispanic Americans. However, a data study by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in 2017 noted that 36% of European Americans earned a certificate, while only 29% of African Americans earned a certificate. Thus, Landa et al. (2019) stated that the African American population with a certificate was more likely to recidivate, drawing that this was inconclusive.

According to Koo (2016), while racial discrimination was prevalent in other areas of the criminal justice system, such as in apprehension, prosecution, and conviction, the vice is also observed in the enrollment of offenders in college programs. In particular, Koo found that, though Black Ohioans form close to 50% of the total number of people imprisoned in the State, fewer than 8% of them were enrolled in in-prison college programs. Koo also observed that Black and Latino people were likely to be incarcerated

close to five times more than the White Ohioans for the same offenses; however, the rate of introduction and enrollment to education programs for the Black and Latinos, such as college, tended to be slower than with White Ohioans.

Gender

Rudin et al. (2020) observed that over 91% of the approximately 400,000 offenders released in the country in 2017 were men, with women making up fewer than 9.9%. Studies (Aebi & Bessler, 2010; Dube-Mawerewere & Chiborise, 2017; Maschi et al., 2019) also showed that men had a higher chance, over 10%, to recidivate, as compared to women earning a GED. Dube-Mawerewere and Chiborise (2017) supported this finding and posited that over 64% of all the released men were rearrested compared to 57% of the men. Nevertheless, Spooner et al. (2017) held a contrary opinion stating the rate of recidivism had no association with the gender and education providing the evidence indicating only 40.9% of the recovering males recidivated as compared to 39% of women reoffended. Therefore, there was no universal agreement regarding the effect of gender on the rate of recidivism and GED attainment.

Wooldredge and Steiner (2017) also referred to the element of gender disparity in the prison education program. According to Wooldredge and Steiner, a significant variance was observed regarding the male and female offenders being allowed to undergo certificate programming. For instance, Wooldredge and Steiner found that women are 20% more likely to be enrolled in vocational and community training programs than men. However, Reet (2019) argued that this form of measuring perceived bias only analyzed the number of male and female offenders in prison and the nature of their offenses. Reet

premised this argument on the fact that studies have shown most female offenders are nonviolent, which informs the higher rate of enrollment into vocational or reentry programs among the male offenders, and the women were less likely to recidivate than men.

Historically, research about recidivism and college predominantly focused on men. Because female-perpetrated crime was less prevalent and less severe compared to male-perpetrated crime, researchers have generally overlooked women (Brown et al., 2019). However, feminist-driven scholarship, coupled with the influx of women into the justice system over the last three decades, has propelled justice-involved women to the forefront of correctional research and policy. For example, the proportion of arrests in the United States attributed to women continued to grow, rising from 20% in 1985 to 30% in 2015, even though overall crime continued to decline in the United States (Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018). Furthermore, Puzzanchera (2018) found that the recidivism rates within 3 years after release for college program completers were 9.4% for women and 17.1% for males, respectively. Few rigorous studies of gender, college, and recidivism existed (Cullen et al., 2011, Nagin et al., 2009), and, to my knowledge, none existed that systematically examined the relationship between college and recidivism in a CBCF for males and females.

Summary

Over 15 empirical investigations (Adams, 2011; Caudy, 2018; DOJ, 2011; Grann et al., 2008; Harris, 2011; Huebner, 2007; Humphrey, 2012; Maliek, 2017; Minor, 2003; NCSAC, 2018; Olson, 2000; Olson, 2003; Peillard, 2012; Sims, 1997; Wood, 2015) in

five countries (United States, Chile, Wales, Sweden, and Ireland) that looked at different characteristics (offender type, age, race, and gender) about education and the reduction of recidivism. Although this section implies that they have been used in prior studies, these characteristics are not used in this study. I have included these factors in the descriptive statistics section of the analyze to show a random selection of all characteristics.

Furthermore, these characteristics were in the makeup of the 2016 population of the CBCF, the empirical investigations of the personal factors–recidivism relationship, using a criminal thinking assessment, such as the ORAS, had yielded mixed results; a moderately robust link had been found in some studies (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Walters, 2012a, for meta-analytic support), but not in others (Simourd & Van De Ven, 1999; Taxman et al., 2011).

Although many authors had found a link, my interest was what the curriculum could impose on the personal factors and the relationship to recidivism. I included descriptive statistics for the factors without the analysis because I did not want to approach this as a one-size-fits-all approach for just personal factors, whereas other factors may play a role, such as education, employment, and a lack of skills.

Lack of Vocational Job Skills

Offenders receiving vocational training for a variety of skills showed a reduced likelihood to recidivate compared to those who did not receive this training (Mardirossian & Esmail, 2017; Rampey et al., 2016). As Farley and Pike (2016) noted, when individuals with vocational job skills entered the community, they were likely to establish stronger social bonds than those without such skills, reducing their likelihood of

recidivating. However, as much as vocational programs were believed and seen to reduce recidivism effectively, some scholars have highlighted closer scrutiny and research on particular parts of the educational programs that work better (Scott, 2016). Moreover, while it was clear that individuals incarcerated have less education or opportunities for education than their general population counterparts, Amasa-Annang and Scutelnicu (2016) contended that creating educational opportunities in prisons helped apparent such gaps while also changing community stigma on these individuals.

GED

Duwe (2018) revealed that the majority of offenders within the American prisons were both undereducated and underemployed, representing 65% of those who did not secure employment. Moreover, the same report by Duwe (2018) highlighted that compared to adults in the United States, offenders are at least three times more likely to lack general education development (GED) or high school diploma. According to Ellison et al. (2017), there were consistent indications from research showing that offenders out of prison, when left unemployed and uneducated on critical vocational skills for job placement, increased their likelihood of recidivism. Moreover, employers require a high school diploma or at least a GED qualification (Cundiff, 2016). Mardirossian and Esmail (2017) agreed with Cundiff's (2016) statement that taking a test in a GED offered offenders an opportunity to develop fundamental skills that were pivotal for being employed when they left prison. According to Gill and Wilson (2017), most industries had various jobs available for individuals with high school education. Lack of vocational job skills among offenders released from prison increases the likelihood of

unemployment, which raises the risk of reoffending (Scott, 2016). In agreement with what Mardirossian and Esmail (2017) explicated, Visher et al. (2017) stressed that undertaking a GED-based program and passing the test assured employers that these individuals had the necessary vocational job skills needed to perform particular demanding tasks they qualified for.

Additionally, Ellison et al. (2017) insinuated that prison-based GED enhanced post-prison employment reduced recidivism and misconduct, and provided a strong return on investment. Even though GED only modestly minimized recidivism, Duwe (2018) asserted that it generated relatively huge cost-avoidance estimates by delivering low-cost programs to a large population of offenders. Further, Alladin and Hummer (2018) responded to Mardirossian and Esmail's (2017) statement, claiming that GED was an opportunity to not secure employment for offenders after their release from prison but also to impart critical vocational skills that promote them in creating their businesses. Getting these skills was inversely related to recidivism (Scott, 2016).

Certificate

Rampey et al. (2016) highlighted vocational training certificates as significant in fostering skills that incarcerated adults needed to return to and work effectively when released from prison. Mirroring Rampey et al.'s (2016) statement, Martin (2017) also claimed that educational and vocational certificates offered to offenders equipped them with crucial skills training and job readiness sessions that were critical policies that promoted re-integration into the community, enhanced post-release job skills and reduced the potential to reoffend. A similar emphasis is projected in a Specter program carried out

in the Florida Department of Corrections, where offenders who acquired a Specter certificate had statistically significantly reduced recidivism rates 3 years after their release from prison than those who did not earn the certificate (Hill et al., 2017).

Moreover, some studies have highlighted that one of the most effective ways of reducing the number of recidivate offenders was to provide them with vocational certification programs during their incarceration. While certificate programs provided significant avenues for offenders to acquire vocational job skills fundamental for reentry into their communities, scholars such as Amasa-Annang and Scutelnicu (2016) stressed that they were effective correctional programs that should not be underscored. As emphasized by Hill et al. (2017), the vocational job skills were often passed to offenders through apprenticeship training, job training, and classroom-based instruction, including several programs that permitted official certification of official skills. However, despite the importance given to certificates for offenders in vocational job skills, Martin (2017) revealed that challenges abounded regarding federal and state cuts for vocational job skills training for offenders. Comparatively, Amasa-Annang and Scutelnicu (2016) recognized employment restrictions due to criminal background checks as the significant challenge that impacted offenders securing jobs even when holding certificates. Moreover, Whissemore (2017) added that the removal of the Pell Grants was a significant drawback to efforts towards vocational certificate training for offenders, something that was associated with an increase in the risks to recidivate.

College

Several studies have demonstrated that participation in college education is linked to lower recidivism rates and an increased likelihood of being employed (Scott, 2016; Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). A similar meta-analytical study by Duke (2018) recognized that offender college education was the most effective correctional and community reintegration strategy that effectively reduced recidivism. Brown and Bloom's (2018) statement aligned with Sokoloff and Schenck-Fontaine (2017), who stressed that while successful community re-entry of people relies on a range of factors such as an individual's desire for a job, education, mental and physical health, housing, treatment of substance use, connection with families, the most important was a college education. A lack of education was the most significant impediment to successful re-entry of individuals into the community as they lack the essential knowledge and skills needed to thrive and adapt in a community (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). Although vocational job skills were recognized as substantially effective in supporting individuals' secure employment, additional college education helps to reinforce these skills (Farley & Pike, 2016). One of the significant effects of college education for the offenders was that it increased the chance of developing self-esteem, problem-solving skills, stable employment, and safety when they were out as they acquired a new image from the society (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). In the long run, Scott (2016) argued that higher education can potentially decrease the risk of recidivating more than even apprenticeship certificates or GED tests. In a recent study by the RAND Corporation, as indicated by Sokoloff and Schenck-Fontaine (2017), offenders who

participated in correctional educational programs showed 43% lower odds for recidivism than those who never participated in these programs. The findings of the RAND Corporation study, among others presented by Farley and Pike (2016) and Brown and Bloom (2018), emphasized the significance of college education in addressing recidivism. Providing a college education reduced recidivism and addressed issues inherent due to lack of vocational job skills, such as employment, low wage rates, and isolation (Baranger et al., 2018). As Evans et al. (2018) explicated, these college education programs in prisons are cost-effective approaches to promoting individual transformations and surety for safer communities.

Summary

GED, certificate, and college programs in correctional facilities were effective for community re-integration of the previously convicted individuals (Ellison et al., 2017; Rampey et al., 2016; Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). While all the three educational programs can substantially equip individuals with critical skills needed to increase their employability, college or higher education was seen as the most effective (McCorkel & DeFina, 2019). The social bond theory explained individual re-entry and recidivism tendencies better. Proposed by Hirschi in 1969, the social bond theory referred to social ties that an individual developed or possessed with their group. Reviewing this theory, Shanka and Buvik (2019) stressed that although a person is naturally predisposed to committing a crime, individuals having stronger social ties or bonds were less likely to engage in deviant or antisocial behavior. This was a unique element of re-entry programs that sought to inculcate in ex-offender values that increased their social acceptability,

hence getting the support they need to restart their life again (Weir et al., 2019).

However, when social bonds were minimal or nonexistent, individuals released from prison often felt isolated, which agrees with Atkin-Plunk and Armstrong's (2018) suggestion on the root cause for recidivism where people resorted to crime as a way of keeping themselves engaged in an inherently repulsive society.

Lack of Interpersonal Skills

GED

According to Baranger et al. (2018), comprehensive crime prevention and recidivism must incorporate effective measures across several personal, social, economic, and cultural factors. One of the critical strategies, besides vocational job skills, is developing and strengthening offenders' interpersonal skills. In a survey, Berman et al. (2019) highlighted that criminal justice authorities have often struggled to develop effective ways to reduce recidivism in crime, yet little attention has been given to interpersonal skills. The introduction of GED in the correctional justice system offered an opportunity to review the impacts of interpersonal skills on recidivism rates (LaCourse et al., 2019). To a certain extent, Berghuis (2018) stressed that strengthening GED services within prisons had proven to be significant in molding desirable behavior for offenders. Berghuis's (2018) study supported Pelletier and Evans's (2019) statement that highlighted the development of positive behavior skills in offenders, such as social/interpersonal (cognitive), social skills, problem-solving, or even self-control. While other areas such as inculcation of positive values, thinking, and attitude had been identified in some studies as key in offenders' GED programs, others identified more of a

focus on problem-solving given that criminal behavior was a subset of inability to solve recurrent problems (de Vries et al., 2018; LaCourse et al., 2019). Although GED programs offered an opportunity to develop critical interpersonal skills among offenders, there were no reliable scientific data that backed a possible positive relationship between specific interpersonal skills and recidivism (Mardirossian & Esmail, 2017). However, based on Long et al.'s (2019) argument that a lack of knowledge among offenders on the impacts of their interpersonal skills when reentering communities can risk the potential to recidivate, it can be agreed that incorporating a GED program with interpersonal skills as a module can be effective in the prevention of reoffending.

Certificate

While the lack of interpersonal skills among offenders released and wishing to reintegrate into their communities was linked to an increase in recidivism, lacking knowledge of the impacts of their interpersonal skills on members of their communities were riskier for reoffending (Tripodi et al., 2019). Jalongo (2019) argued that organizing certificate programs around specific interpersonal skills could provide significant awareness of particular skills needed to form strong social bonds with most members of society. Similar to Jalongo's (2019) contention, Rampey et al. (2016) claimed that implementing certificate-based soft skills training for offenders could potentially decrease reoffending rates. Valentine et al. (2019) noted that while attention to interpersonal skills was only starting to gain momentum in the US criminal justice system, substantial evidence indicates they are effective in rehabilitation processes. For instance, a study by Bain (2019) identified that soft skill development in the correctional

justice system was linked with an increase in an individual's emotional intelligence, language, communication, personality traits, personal habits, social graces, and optimism in relating to others and friendliness. Based on Bain's (2019) comments, evidence of interpersonal skills taught during the correctional period being directly linked to postrelease employability were strong, although this was not intensely exploited in the criminal justice system.

College

College education for offenders was believed to be one of the most effective opportunities to develop personal-supporting skills for offenders before their release (Kamalu & Onyeozili, 2018). In a systematic review, Cotugno (2018) concluded that offenders who attended college education demonstrated more role-taking abilities post-release. This was complemented by another study by Kurlychek and Brian (2019), who cited that offenders who attended college education were more responsible and willing to take on challenges compared to those who do not attend such education. This result highlighted the significance of interpersonal skills to offenders and the community postrelease (Baur et al., 2018). In their work, Basanta et al. (2018) attempted to investigate the impacts of particular behavioral skills exhibited by individuals post-release. The results showed that educational programs that reinforced particular behaviors successfully supported the re-entry of offenders into society after prison. Some studies have identified confidence as a critical interpersonal skill that college education offers (Clute et al., 2019). While confidence promoted one's expression and presentation when seeking social acceptability and employability, it was also directly associated with low

recidivism rates.

Moreover, more focus on college education on interpersonal skills has been linked to more robust pro-social behavior. According to Farley and Pike (2016), despite most individuals understanding what was expected of them in terms of societal behavioral expectations, attending courses that reinforces the same set of behavior imparted in them the need to practice and exhibit the same behavior when released. Therefore, a college education was essential for planting interpersonal skills among offenders if they have positively and effectively been reintegrated into their communities. These only promoted their ability to cooperate and work as a team with other members of the society but also helped bring down the rates of recidivism.

Summary

This review highlighted that interpersonal skills could be promoted through GED, certificate, and college programs. While each of these programs offered an opportunity to develop practical and positive behavioral skills that helped individuals re-integrate into the community post-release, they provided a significant opportunity to prevent recidivism (Mardirossian & Esmail, 2017). The theory of the social bond better explains this. Based on the social bond theory, avoidance from committing crimes occurs when individuals know how to best relate with the community, but also by exploiting the skills acquired through experience or training. The social bonds theory also argued that conformity was obtained through social control, which determined four distinct forms of bonds: commitment, attachment, belief, and involvement (Shanka & Buvik, 2019). These bonds were expressed in individuals with explicit interpersonal skills, which helped explain why

individuals with these skills exhibit reduced tendencies to recidivate.

Further, education offered to implant interpersonal skills determined the level of dedication that released individuals had towards becoming reformed individuals in society. Additionally, exploring recidivism and interpersonal skills on the grounds of the theory of the social bond were weakened when adolescents were involved or in situations where the social bonds between these individuals and their parents or families weakened due to delinquent activities outside (Walczak et al., 2019). However, such a weakness laid the groundwork for more research to focus on particular skills that should be incorporated into educational programs to help prevent recidivism.

Implications

According to information by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), the data depicted that in 2018, 31.45% of the offenders released recidivated within 6 months. The situation was worse in a Northeast city in a Midwest state with a recidivism rate of 32.7% for a single CBCF (University Director of Criminal Justice, personal communication, October 23, 2019). Reduction of recidivism has remained a top priority of the government; therefore, there was a need for a more effective remedy to the situation. ODRC had one of the most commonly used strategies, “correctional education” of the offenders, which helped reduce reoffense by about 24% (University Director of Criminal Justice, personal communication, October 23, 2019). The implications for possible project directions include a position paper that provided administrators and faculty at the local CBCF with recommendations based on the study’s findings to determine necessary changes to the CBCF’s educational curricula. The study

will provide the CBCF with information about what curricula are used and for what purpose.

This study intended to provide specific information regarding the efficacy of three specific educational curricula (ASPIRE GED, certificate courses, and college classes) offered at a CBCF in a Northeast Urban County on recidivism. The findings of this research will give an insight into the educational curricula that the county's department of rehabilitation and correction should adopt to ensure success in the fight against repeat offenses among recovering offenders. Furthermore, connecting a specific course to the decline in re-offense offers a foundation for further exploration of other interventions that can be employed in managing the rate of recidivism in the county and the entire state. Finally, new insights from this study will expose the need for the researcher to explore and design other viable educational curricula that can be used in corrections. The local authority will also apply the recommendations from the study to formulate better policies that will enhance the reentry and retention of exoffenders in society.

Summary

In summary, the literature illustrated that prison education programs were pivotal in positively influencing the life of offenders while in facilities and after being released. These educational programs promoted the employability of offenders and provided them with a more straightforward process of community integration. However, there were notable concerns, such as diversification of the training program and increased system funding. Although the review indicated that researchers agreed on the positive impact of prison programs on employability, other factors that could affect exoffender

employability, such as racial discrimination, had not been addressed. The motivational factors were not researched enough, and there was a lack of information on the full range of those, especially for different types of offenders. The review revealed varied perspectives on the factors that motivate the enrollment of offenders in certificate programs, which informed further research studies to explore additional motivating factors. Therefore, there was a need for additional research in these areas.

In the review of literature on the relationship between recidivism and social bonds, that was, attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, specific gaps were still present because previous authors had not demonstrated how each of the four elements of social bond theory influenced recidivism. Secondly, another gap was the lack of adequate literature to address the matter of change against the levels of each social bond that previous scholars did not clarify. In the same context, there were visible gaps in the studies on the relationship between the four aspects of social bond theory and educational curricula: PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, and ASPIRE GED. In this case, it was vital to understand which aspects of the social bond theory had more impact on educational curricula or recidivism, which offered a more focused and hypothesis-driven investigation of the matter in question.

The problem initiating this study was a lack of knowledge of what specific types of curricula in a Northeastern city in a Midwest state CBCF had on recidivism. The study's future use will have implications on policy changes for the local CBCF and other CBCFs for proper educational purposes. Section 2 includes the study's methodology,

research design and approach used, specifics of setting and population, and the instruments and materials.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The design of the quantitative study was correlational. Within correlational designs, there are different types; I used logistic regression analysis. A correlational study aids in investigating secondary data to find the predictors among the independent variables (Western, 2018). The binary logistic regression models, unlike analysis of variance, are well suited for analyzing binomial distributed categorical outcomes. Logistic regression also provides the researcher with more information on the directionality and size of the effect compared to the analysis of variance output (Jaeger, 2008). I investigated the relationship between successful completion of the three educational curricula (PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, ASPIRE GED) and recidivism to determine the effects of completing different educational curricula on recidivism in a CBCF. I used secondary data to identify completion of the three curricular types. Educational curricular data were based on information from 545 offenders released in 2016 who completed a PROP certificate course, credit-bearing courses, or ASPIRE GED and those who did not complete courses in the CBCF. The dependent variable of recidivism was based on 3 years postrelease; therefore, I examined the status of the 545 offenders released in 2016. From the research data, I determined whether individuals had recidivated or not in 3 years. The Excel spreadsheet was distributed through the local college and sent to the program director at the CBCF. At that time, the director filled in the remaining data needed. All of the deidentified data that I received came from the CBCF. These included the type of educational curricula completed.

The purpose of qualitative research did not fit the current study because of the humanistic style of the research, which is based on the social and emotional dimensions of participants (Liebling, 2015). An in-depth investigation of offenders' perceptions was not possible due to their incarceration and their status as a vulnerable population. Within the quantitative approach, I chose the correlational design because I wanted to look at the relationship between specific educational programs (ASPIRE GED, credit-bearing courses, and PROP certificate) and recidivism among those who completed compared to those who did not. The odds ratio reflected the number of times a graduate from one of the curricula would not return compared to an offender who did not finish. Liebling (2015) noted that quantitative methodology could be used to collect data on facts, incidents, and categories to make decisions on programming and budgeting, which was what the findings of the current study were intended to do.

Setting and Population

The setting for this study was a public county and state entity in which low-level offenders were sentenced instead of prison. The local community college provided three educational curricula to offenders for employment in certified courses, courses for those needing a GED, and/or credit-bearing classes. All of the offenders at the facility had an equal opportunity to be part of the three curricular options offered. For a full explanation of the educational offerings within the CBCF, see Appendices B, C, and D.

All credit-bearing courses and certificate courses were offered in 6-week modules. Depending on the certification, more than one class was taken simultaneously at a 6-week pace. The credit-bearing classes were also modified to a condensed level of 6

weeks. ASPIRE GED classes were mandatory for all offenders with no high school diploma or equivalency. ASPIRE GED classes ran the entire stay of each offender, between 3 and 4 months. Offenders were no longer mandated to sit in class if they received their GED during their stay. Credit-bearing courses and certificate courses were completed before release. GED, although mandatory, did not have to be completed before release. For the current study, everyone released in 2016 had completed their respective curriculum.

The population of 545 offenders released from January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016, were included in this study. I used the entire population from the CBCF in 2016. The inclusion criterion was that the offender had to complete one or no curriculum. No other characteristics such as age range or offense type were used for inclusion. If an offender completed no curriculum, it was their decision. The data collected were archived and stored by CBCF. Although this was a vulnerable population, permission was not needed from the offenders because the data were archived. The program director deidentified the data by recoding the offender's name before the Excel spreadsheet was emailed to me. The program director supplied me with an Excel spreadsheet with no names and five columns for each released offender. Column 1 was assigned number, Column 2 was GED, Column 3 was course credit, Column 4 was certificate, and Column 5 was recidivated.

This Excel document indicated which educational curricula the 545 offenders completed and whether they returned to prison within 3 years of release. The names of the offenders were removed because of the vulnerable population, and the program

director relabeled the names of offenders 1, 2, 3, etc. The program director researched each individual to determine whether the offenders recidivated from 2016 to 2019 (within 3 years of release). The sample size was estimated at 463 using an a priori G*Power analysis. I used G*Power and assumed an estimate of .25 in GED, .25 in college, .25 in certificate, and .25 did not participate in either option, with a recidivated rate of 44%, to create equal groups of offenders among the curricula. The probability of returning and being in any curricular group was $(.44 * .25) = .11$. The G*Power sample indicated the sample size for $\alpha = .05$, power = .8, and $R^2 = .25$ (an estimate that 50% of the variation in recidivism was based on the independent variables GED, certificate, and college course credit). I could not estimate further because no previous studies provided a better estimate for CBCFs. Given that the four groups were equal and there was a chance of an offender in each of the groups recidivating based on the 44% recidivation rate at the facility, the sample size needed was 463.

Data Collection and Analysis

I met Walden University's ethical requirements through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number 04-23-21-0967067. Receiving approval through the IRB ensured that the data collected and the way the data were collected adhered to the ethical standards of Walden University's IRB. A provisional letter of support from the director of the CBCF was received and approved by the Walden IRB. No consent was needed because the data were archived and deidentified for the vulnerable population.

The data archived and deidentified by the director were coded on an Excel spreadsheet into categories called recidivated, educational curriculum taken, and personal

factors (age, gender, offender type [violent and nonviolent], and race [Black, White, Hispanic, and Other]). These data were pulled from Lotus Notes and Correct Tech software systems. The program director searched accessible websites from 2016 to 2019 to determine whether offenders had recidivated in any way. The category was marked “yes” or “no.” The program director then assigned a unique identifier to the person and removed their name.

I then received the data from the program director of the CBCF through a jump drive that was encrypted. The encrypted data were secured with a password-protected Excel spreadsheet. I focused on the year 2016 to examine the relationship between the four elements that reduced the chance of recidivating (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief) and educational curricula (PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, and ASPIRE GED). This included the nature of the scale for each variable in a simple category of yes/no (ASPIRE GED obtainment, successful completion of credit bearing classes, and certificate received) or none. This study focused on offenders who completed one or none of the curricula. This information was merged with complete data on all 545 released offenders from 2016, creating a new category for offenders who did not take courses. After obtaining these data and finalizing the categories, I was able to begin analysis through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Logistic Regression Rationale

Logistic regression was the analysis needed to answer the research question, which addressed the relationship between multiple independent variables (curricula) and

a single dependent variable (recidivism). There are two forms of regression: linear and logistic. I used logistic because linear is used to measure linear relationships, which would have required a numerical variable. Logistic regression is used when the dependent variable is binary or categorical, which was the case in the current study with no recidivism as 0 (no new presence in court documents) and yes recidivism as 1 (new presence in court documents). With two values of the dependent variable, logistic regression was used to calculate the relationships between the independent variables (curricula) and the probability of occurrence (recidivism). SPSS was used to calculate the coefficients, which were interpreted similarly to linear regression coefficients.

I used logistic regression instead of chi-square because logistic regression is an effective way of estimating the odds ratio that an event will occur. Through logistic regression, I could determine how often someone would be likely to become a repeat offender. Although I was not able to predict behavior, logistic regression indicated the likelihood that any person in my 545 population with a given set of conditions (curricula) could become a repeat offender. The use of logistic regression offered ways of interpreting relationships by examining the relationships between a set of conditions and the probability of an event reoccurring.

Assumptions

The assumption made in the study related to the elements of Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory (commitment, attachment, involvement and belief) in that if the students put forth a sincere effort in education, positive change could occur resulting in a reduction of recidivism. An assumption made in this study was that all offenders who

took part in different educational curricula did their coursework and did not plagiarize or cheat. Another assumption was that all offenders who participated in the program could read proficiently and comprehend at a ninth-grade level. I assumed the Midwestern State risk assessment system in the study for placement was reliable and valid. The ORAS was used for order and after the program was over. The ORAS reassessed the person at the end of the program to determine whether their risk level had changed. If an offender was on the cusp of being moderate and achieved a GED and/or a certificate, their risk level could drop. I also assumed offenders took the Adult Basic Education Test without help or for grade-level placement. The Adult Basic Education Test affects where the student is placed in the educational courses. Those scoring below ninth grade needed remediation and sat in GED classes; those scoring above ninth grade and above had a choice of either credit-bearing college classes or PROP certificate courses. I assumed the Adult Basic Education Test was reliable and valid as an assessment.

Scope and Delimitations

Leedy and Ormrod (2016) described delimitations as the boundaries surrounding the study. The scope of the study was one CBCF that offered uniquely designed curricula. The study included 545 offenders released in 2016. A delimitation of this study was that it focused on offenders released in 2016 at one CBCF. Recidivism was defined as a new presence in court documents within 3 years of release (2016–2019). The results of this study are not generalizable to correctional facilities other than CBCFs because the curricular variables were uniquely designed for CBCFs and were not offered at other

institutions. The study's boundaries were specific to CBCFs because of their unique function in rehabilitating low-level offenders.

Limitations

Leedy and Ormrod (2016) mentioned that limitations are the weaknesses of the study. I attempted to limit the effect of these limitations by using a large sample. The study focused on 545 released offenders in 2016 and the parsed data for gender, race, offender type, and age. This limited the overall conclusion of the data as a general offender population. A further limitation was that recidivism had to be defined based on the offender's presence in court documents, without further details. Because of this, recidivism would include failure to contact the proper probation/parole officer or lack of appropriate follow-up.

Protection of Participants' Rights

The approaches used for identity protection included the CITI Program basic class on research, ethics, compliance, and safety training. In addition, there was no risk to the participants because deidentified archival data were used. The data were stored on the CBCF server. The executive director approved the use of anonymous data. Approval was also provided by Walden's IRB.

Data Analysis Results

The deidentified raw data were made available in an Excel spreadsheet and were cleaned and uploaded into SPSS. The dependent variable was the dichotomous variable recidivism. The independent variable (curricula) was nominal, so dummy variables were created. GED, vocational, and college were created, with the baseline being those

offenders who did not complete any educational curriculum or no course taken. I also included other nominal variables such as age, race, offense type, and gender for descriptive statistics. The labeling of my dichotomous dependent variable was 1 for recidivated and 0 for non-recidivated. The independent variables were coded as a 0 for noncompletion of any curriculum and 1 for completion for college, vocational, and GED.

Although I did not use descriptive statistics to determine the odds ratio on recidivism, I included stacked bar graphs to show the sample demographics, including those who recidivated in each category. Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 display those recidivated and those who did not by the demographics collected: gender, race, offender type, and age. Visually, the distribution appeared equal for each demographic factor. According to Sokoloff and Schenck-Fontaine (2017), offenders who participated in correctional educational programs showed 43% lower odds for recidivism than those who never participated in these programs. In the current study, taking GED, vocational, or college had no meaningful impact on recidivism compared to those taking no courses. As for the significant education curricula, those enrolled in the college curriculum were nearly 2 times more likely to recidivate than those taking no courses.

Figure 3

Recidivism by Gender

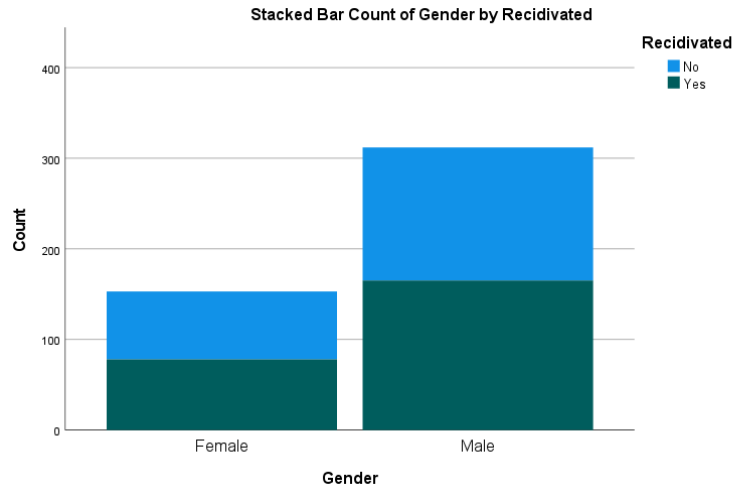


Figure 4

Recidivism by Race

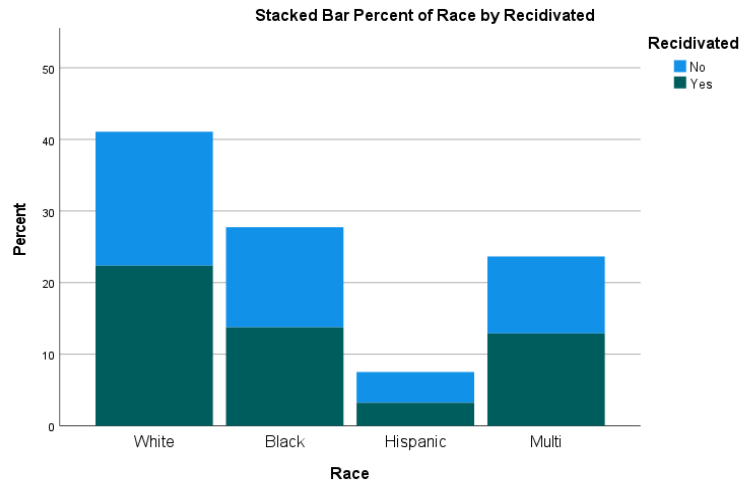


Figure 5

Recidivism by Offender Type

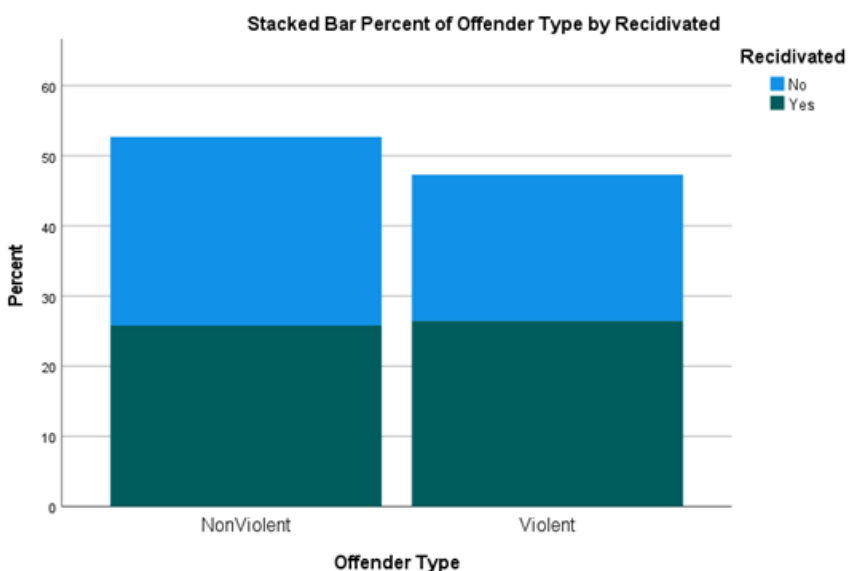
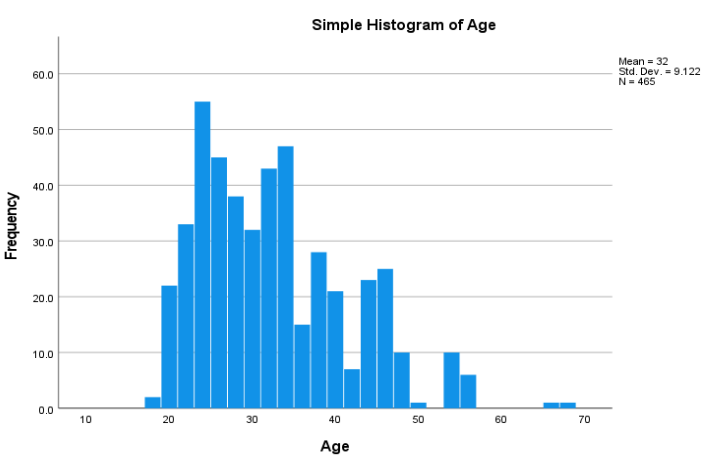


Figure 6

Numerical Age

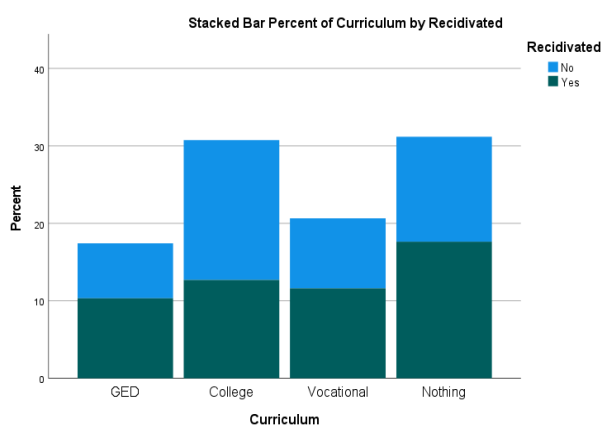


These characteristics were only included for demographic information. Gender, race, and offender type were within or close to the 50% mark for the facility’s entire population. As for the histogram of age, it was typically distributed also.

The curricula included 81 GED participants, 143 college participants, and 96 vocational participants, and among those who took no curricula were 145 participants. Only one predictor variable was statistically significant: College (Figure 8). Participants in college classes were 1.853 times more likely to recidivate than those who took no course.

Figure 7

Percentage of Recidivism by Curricula



Statistical Assumptions

Six assumptions must be met to perform a logistic regression study (Laerd, 2017). The first assumption is that the response variable is binary. For this study, the dependent variable was whether an offender recidivated or not, and the assumption of only two possible outcomes has been met.

The second assumption is that observations are independent, which was met because offenders could participate in only one curriculum or none; therefore, the participants were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. If the offenders did not take any curriculum, they were in the baseline group. I used the entire population of the facility

and did not use duplicate individuals; the rest of the observations do not influence one observation.

The third assumption of multicollinearity and the fourth assumption of outliers did not occur. Because I had no continuous variable, the outliers and Box-Tidwell do not apply. These assumptions should not be correlated as they would otherwise reduce the precision of the estimated coefficient.

The fifth assumption for this study showed that there were no continuous independent variables because they are categorical, so there was not a linear relationship.

Finally, the sixth assumption related to sample size and whether the dataset were large enough to draw a valid conclusion for the model. To check this, an a priori G*Power analysis was conducted for a two-tailed z test with a power of 0.8 and an alpha of 0.05, which indicated a needed sample size of 463 participants minimum. Each category having at least 15 participants, meeting the sample size requirement.

After the assumptions for a binomial logistic regression had been tested, the actual analysis was conducted, and several tables were generated.

Reporting

Binomial logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of GED, Vocational, College, and no course taken on the likelihood that participants will or will not recidivate. The logistic regression model is statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 10.23$, $p = .017$. The model explained 2.9% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in recidivism. Of the three predictor variables, college was statistically significant, meaning an increased odds-ratio based on recidivism compared to those who took no courses (see Table 1). The p -

value for analysis of variance less than .05. This meant at least one significant predictor, and the null hypothesis was rejected. For this facility, education was not a predictor of recidivism. GED and vocational were no different than taking no courses.

Table 1

Variables in the Equation

| | | <i>B</i> | <i>S.E.</i> | Wald | <i>df</i> | Sig. | <i>Exp(B)</i> |
|---------|----------------|----------|-------------|-------|-----------|------|---------------|
| Step 1a | GED (1) | -.111 | .281 | .156 | 1 | .693 | .895 |
| | College (1) | .617 | .239 | 6.685 | 1 | .010 | 1.853 |
| | Vocational (1) | .012 | .265 | .002 | 1 | .963 | 1.012 |
| | Constant | -.254 | .484 | .276 | 1 | .599 | .775 |

Note. *B* = Intercept, *S.E.* = Standard Error, *Wald* = Wald Test, *df* = Degrees of Freedom, *Sig* = Significance level, *Exp(B)* = Odds Ratio.

Summary

The results showed that the curriculum offered did not lower recidivism for any of the three curricula types. Still, more importantly, it showed that those taking college courses while at the CBCF were two times more likely to recidivate than those offenders not participating in education. These results were contrary to the literature review. According to Fantuzzo (2022), The Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) is one of the country's most rigorous and well-established college-in-prison programs within the consortium. The program's recidivism rate is impressive, slightly lower than 2%. However, the possibilities of not using a college in a consortium knowing what works and what does not for college programming could have caused these adverse effects on recidivism at the

CBCF. Pearson et al. (2022) follow Fantuzzo by stating that the frequency of re-arrest is substantially lower based on specific education programs. Jackson et al. (2022) furthered the dialog of reducing recidivism by using health education college classes that help the offender's conflict resolution skills. In a prison setting, offenders participating in a college curriculum reduces recidivism. The two other curricula, vocational and GED, were not predictors. This means that the students taking either vocational or GED had the same recidivism rate as those taking no courses.

Section 3: The Project

In this study, the problem I addressed was that although the CBCF had the PROP curricula in place for 4 years, the recidivism rate remained high. Compounding the problem, the three different curricula and their related data had never been analyzed to determine whether the curricula had any effect on the rate of recidivism. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (Powers, 2021) found that the higher level of education, the lower the recidivism rate. Furthermore, the Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that all three curricula (GED, vocational, and college credit courses) reduced recidivism inside a prison, but nothing had been analyzed in a CBCF. Because the CBCF data had not been analyzed, I used the predictors from prison research and found that the results were not like a prison; therefore, the recommendations are unique to the CBCF. In a prison setting, there was a reported recidivism rate of 14% for those who earned an associate's degree, a 5.6% recidivism rate for those who earned a bachelor's degree, and a 0% recidivism rate for those who earned a master's degree (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021).

In Section 3, I provide information about selecting a policy paper that proposes policy recommendations to the CBCF governing board and administration team. This section provides an overview of the project and its goals, along with the rationale, literature review, implementation process, and evaluation plan. I also describe implications for the institution and the community (see Appendix A).

Project Description and Goals

Project Description

The project is a policy paper derived from the research findings to make recommendations to the CBCF administration team and governing board to lower the recidivism rate based on the educational offerings. The policy paper recommends joining the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium and creating a request for proposal that would outline a prison with similar program offerings that had seen a reduction based on the programming. Second, the recommendation is to study other services that reduce recidivism that have proven successful in a CBCF. I will deliver the policy paper to the CBCF administration team and the governing board at one of the monthly meetings.

I aimed to examine the effects of curriculum on recidivism rates for those returning to the community. To that end, the policy paper leads with an executive summary condensing the problem and the evidence that led to the two recommendations. The policy paper continues with an introduction describing the situation, the gap in practice, and the lack of policy surrounding the topic. The policy paper continues with the study's methodology and data analysis. This analysis, with peer-reviewed literature, guided the policy recommendations. The policy paper concludes with an implementation plan, conclusion, and references.

Project Goals

The policy paper has two primary goals. The project will communicate the following to the governing board and executive staff of the CBCF:

1. Create a request for proposal to join the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium.
2. Consider ways to lower the recidivism rate using other services that reduce recidivism, such as the comprehensive intervention model.

The results showed a significant relationship between the college curricula offered and recidivism to the extent of recidivating at a 2 times higher rate than taking no courses. I recommend beginning the request for the proposal process to join the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium, which has proven to reduce recidivism through education. While this is taking place, I recommend working on changing from an evidence-based practice with education to a comprehensive model. These recommendations will not only help reduce the recidivism rate, but they will also help the offenders return better educated than before their incarceration and become productive members of the community. Future research should be noted on the characteristics of the offenders that may be used to target an even more specific age, race, or offender type.

Rationale

I selected a policy paper because this will provide the CBCF with direction on recommendations related to education opportunities. Policy papers are necessary to lead to positive social change locally and nationally (Fischer et al., 2017). This policy paper involves a proposal for addressing the problem and formulating strategies to resolve the recidivism issue. The problem prompting this study was the high recidivism rate at one CBCF. The policy paper addresses the current educational curricula and encourage improvements that tie successful curricula completion to recidivism reduction based on

new recommendations. Policy papers are often used to help communicate clearly about change (Helgetun & Mentor, 2020).

Policy papers are helpful because they lead readers to recommended solutions based on significant findings (Herman, 2018). The findings of the current study indicated the ineffectiveness of the education curricula at the CBCF compared to the results from prisons. This study was the baseline for results for a CBCF because all other data and results were from prisons. These findings indicated a need to change the education curricula, reinforcing the decision to deliver a policy paper with recommendations not used in a CBCF before.

Policy papers have continued to gain popularity in support by education decision makers in developing policies. Policy papers continue to increase in evidence-based references (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2020). Steiner-Khamsi et al. (2020) described how policy papers support local initiatives and open communications that share new perspectives nationally. Shannon (2019) described the policy paper's role in invoking critical discourse to promote lifelong learning. Shannon highlighted how policy papers are critical in providing data and accountability necessary for evidence-based policymaking. Establishing evidence-based practices should provide education staff, administrators, and policymakers with a more objective indication of effective practices and begin to change perceptions of trustworthiness, relevance, and the importance of how the educational curriculum is delivered.

Review of the Literature

An in-depth search of literature related to the project's aim was essential in gaining an understanding of the project study as well as being able to develop policy recommendations (see Appendix A). I focused on peer-reviewed literature with an emphasis on certain keywords. They included *policy recommendations for prison education, white paper, institutional changes on prison education, stakeholders, policy papers for higher education, writing policy recommendations, presentation of policy recommendations for prison superintendents, potential improvements to the prison education system, failures of the prison education system, statistics of incarcerated individuals in the United States, and higher education policy*. Similarly, with the help of these terms, I searched databases in the Walden University Library to access more detailed information about the project's aim. Databases included Taylor and Francis Online, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, PsycINFO, Education Source, SocINDEX, Google Scholar, and Psychotherapy. With these search terms, I developed an outline for the literature review, starting with a justification for a policy paper, followed by the importance of stakeholder involvement and the use of the paper in developing the needed policies.

Policy Paper Justification

According to Helgetun and Menter (2020), a policy recommendation or a policy paper facilitates the sharing of data-driven information to orient stakeholders facing policy change. The benefit of a policy paper is that it provides a recommendation based on research and evidence (Fleming & Rhodes, 2018). The example would be to use the

CBCF and the university to show how education could affect recidivism by encompassing the mission, vision, and core values of both institutions, making this policy paper motivational to encourage action on the part of the stakeholders who are vested in showing the change. Cairney and Oliver (2020) gave several features and essential requirements that a policy paper should meet, including being written in a manner that can be understood by organizations, agencies, officials, and nonacademic audiences. Shannon (2019) concurred with Cairney and Oliver that a policy paper should be written persuasively and efficiently. According to Hadley and Gray (2017), a paper policy justifies information on data collected and presents the outcome of research conducted and the evidence obtained. Rose et al. (2018) concurred with Mensh and Kording (2017) that the aim of a policy paper is to persuade the audience that the judgment is authentic and legitimate. Paananen et al. (2020) stated that to present a policy paper, there are critical requirements that the policy paper should meet, and the paper should be documented in a way that can be comprehended by the target audience, such as organizations and agencies. The current policy paper is expected to drive a change in policy to improve the educational curricula for all stakeholders involved.

Policy Paper Best Practices

Policy papers are recommendations based on best practices (Gorard et al., 2020). However, new recommendations never used before are not always enough to move toward change. Through the analysis of data presented in the study, the idea is to lead the reader to the recommended suggestion and what, if anything, could be yielded from the new policies (Gorard et al., 2020). In the current study, the education offered to offenders

did not result in a significant reduction in recidivism. The results demonstrated that a college education resulted in twice as much recidivism, corresponding to recidivism rates not requiring any education. This problem needs a solution. Herman (2018) suggested that by the end of the policy paper, the stakeholders should not only clearly understand and identify the problem but also understand how the recommendations lead to a solution.

Evidence-Based Policies

Gamoran (2018) highlighted the need for policy papers to be grounded in evidence to support the specific positions or recommendations. Shannon (2019) concurred with Gamoran on the importance of policy recommendations, stating that they are educative and provide the chance to stimulate critical thinking while being communicated through deeply researched data containing concise and valid facts. The goal of the current project was to lower the rate of recidivism through a policy paper highlighting recommendation for change that could improve the educational services as a means to minimize recidivism. This paper provides the proper direction for institutional stakeholders to use these recommendations along with the educational mission and vision of the CBCF as a less resistant path backed by evidence.

Policy Papers Are Essential

Evidence in any policy paper becomes the foundation of the recommendations. As Bennett (2019) mentioned, the policy paper is the vehicle for all readers to make informed decisions. The essentials of the policy paper distill the findings in plain language and draw links to specific initiatives. The findings contrast prior reports by

Hunt and Dumville (2016), who showed an inverse relationship in which being educated in accredited colleges might significantly reduce recidivism. In this respect, the tendency not to recidivate increases with an increase in the level of education from secondary, vocational, and college to university. Therefore, based on the outcomes of this study and prior literature (Hunt & Dumville, 2016), the correctional facility should ensure they link their offenders with only accredited educational institutions based on the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium partnership.

Because the critical foundation of policy papers is evidence, Matheus et al. (2020) stated that for a decision to be informed, the policy paper should focus on the provided evidence. Fischer et al. (2017) affirmed that the policy paper should indicate the results in clear terms and provide links to the particular initiative. Delmon (2017) stated that it is essential for a policy paper to contain a guide that will help policymakers come up with recommendations and decisions.

In addition to the findings guiding recommendations, the current study indicated a need to establish a policy that can guide the accreditation of educational institutions that partner with correctional facilities to support offenders post release (see Hollands et al., 2019). Such a policy should be able to provide offenders with equal opportunities to gain an education, including support in their reentry efforts. As Gould (2018) noted, any efforts to initiate and implement policies obliging offenders to access education can significantly reduce recidivism. The data in the current study provided the quality assurance to describe how policy recommendations can be effective in the future.

Persuasion

According to Shahab et al. (2019), there is a notable difference between the notions of policy criteria, political adequacy, practical standards fairness, effectiveness, and other facets of evaluative criterion. The current policy paper was intended to alleviate retrogression based on educational curricula through a ternary of recommendations. The recommendations of this policy paper are based on the findings and call on the audience to decide based on the evidence.

Bardach and Patashnik (2019) found that there is a need to differentiate between policy criteria, political acceptability, practical criteria, fairness, efficiency, and other evaluative criteria. The current project's policy paper was based on the findings and peer-reviewed journal articles. C. F. Smith (2020) noted that the policy recommendations should flow logically from the policy choices and criteria in persuasively selecting the most appropriate ones. Carrier (2017) explained that the evidence is necessary to create the policy paper to persuade the audience and create a call for action.

Stakeholders

When creating a policy paper, it is essential to understand the group of stakeholders to whom this paper will be presented (Suldovsky et al., 2017). The current policy paper may affect the community, administration, and staff. The offender (student) will also benefit (see Bourne, 2016). Managing recommendations is prevention (Azeroual et al., 2019). Caputo et al. (2018) stated that it is essential to understand the stakeholder group to persuade the stakeholders to consider a recommendation. Beaudry et al. (2021) reported that some policy recommendations in corrections are often not shared with

others because no data exist. The current policy paper aims to reduce recidivism based on educational curricula through a trio of recommendations.

Project Description: Policy Paper

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations has continued the mission of reducing recidivism through offender programming (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, 2018). One area in which the DRC has attempted to meet this mission is by providing education in the CBCFs. The policy paper aims to provide recommendations to achieve this mission through the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Join the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium

This is the first CBCF studied, and the findings do not fit with studies based in prisons. Based on significant results that have shown that accredited colleges reduce recidivism that is part of a state penal education consortium, the CBCF would join the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium. Through the Vera Institute of Justice (2019), joining a consortium removes the barrier of higher postsecondary education, which in turn would prepare those students to secure jobs and other opportunities and help them avoid recidivating later. Furthermore, the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium would increase employment rates by 10% and save states \$365.8 million in costs, per the Vera Institute of Justice (2019). Hunt and Dumville (2016) stated that the data on recidivism by type of education after eight years shows a significant reduction in recidivism for those that have some college education by an accredited college, compared to the CBCF, which does not have an OPEC accredited college that showed an uptick of 2 times the odds to recidivate than those who took no course. Postsecondary education

using an Education Consortium in prisons is not a new idea; however, it would be for a CBCF.

Recommendation 2: Study Other Services That Reduce Recidivism

The findings of this study showed that education made no difference in recidivism. The second recommendation is to study other services that have proven to reduce recidivism in CBCFs, beginning with the comprehensive intervention model. The comprehensive intervention model has been used for high-risk young men in Massachusetts (Baldwin & Zeira, 2017). This model has shown a reduction in recidivism through educational practices at a steady rate between 15%-19% in one CBCF (ODRC, 2022). This is compared to other counties hovering at higher rates, with upwards of 60% recidivism (ODRC, 2022). The comprehensive intervention model was introduced in 2017 by Baldwin and Zeira in Massachusetts. The main component of the comprehensive model is stage-based programming that is data-driven. This is important because quality data would show the link of what type of education, employment, and life skills programming is needed, even if participants are in the early stages of changing their behavior. This means that even if participants are not yet at a point where they actively choose to change their behavior and attend programming irregularly, they still learn new skills and move toward the starting line of self-sufficiency. Over time, this approach expands participants' toolboxes considerably and keeps them in constant forward progress.

Needed Resources

The CBCF does not have any of the needed resources in place to implement either of the recommendations. Starting with the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium, a cost will be attached to the facility based on what the college would charge for educational programs. There would be additional costs, like union dues to stay in the consortium. This could be offset by asking for additional grant money through the state. Additional staff will need to be hired to implement the policy recommendations. Additional staff would include a program manager, additional certified teachers, possibly additional correctional officers, and possibly additional program staff to manage the plethora of enrolled offenders. As for the printed materials, the college involved with the proposal would usually take care of all the necessary setup and initial paperwork. This would include textbooks, supplies, and sometimes technology. The CBCF has the proper technology installed to help with the policy recommendations based on data collection, analysis, and quality control. For the data quality control, a program manager would need to be hired. This person would oversee the general initiatives on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis of the scope of the data. The program manager would be the leader in the vision for quality data. In short, two more possible positions could be open: a change manager and a data analyst, depending on how in-depth the CBCF would want to get. The data analyst would define the needs of the CBCF, which are turned into the data models, and it would all be communicated back to the change manager. The change manager is precisely that. Change management plays a role in the data quality organization.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Many barriers can prevent positive change. That is why a policy paper is the best solution to this problem locally and potentially statewide. Based on the article by Fang (2016), the idea of a change-resistant culture may also be a problem for those that think everything is good enough as it is now. This barrier goes hand in hand with another barrier of how enthusiastic the stakeholders are involved or want the change. If they do not understand the need or believe it cannot be done, the needed change will not occur.

Barriers exist everywhere, not only just in correctional education. However, a barrier should be considered a chance to persuade stakeholders of the importance of the change process. Although persuading the stakeholders to change, the importance of understanding what the stakeholders can contribute should also be noted for a buy-in to promote necessary change.

Implementation and Timetable

The CBCF has a dual governance system, the administrative staff, and governing board. The process would start with a presentation to the administrative staff and board. A discussion would take place, and then someone on either the board or staff would recommend adopting the policy proposal, in whole or in part. After approval, meetings would be held on who would be in charge of what recommendation. A committee would be adopted to begin the request for proposal process to join the Midwestern Penal Education Consortium and write out specifics on what college programs would be needed. Seeing this being the longest of all the recommendations from the beginning processes to implementation, this would be the first one to get started. Once the proposal

is written and submitted, it could take from 3 months to a year or longer to fully implement. While waiting on this recommendation and developing the consensus on what is needed to move the project forward, the use of data quality control and consideration of the comprehensive intervention model would start. These two are not as long to implement, but they would be essential to get a grasp on what specific curricula reduces recidivism. The data quality control and the comprehensive intervention model could be used with the new intake population as they come in and move through the program, phasing out the old and instilling the new comprehensive intervention model.

Roles and Responsibilities

This policy paper and the recommendations to lower the recidivism rate are a group effort. The CBCF has not responded to education as the research literature has shown. As education in a CBCF has not been studied, the suggestion of doing something different is a priority, as shown in the primary recommendation. The main recommendation of requesting a college from the education consortium could significantly reduce recidivism. However, the stakeholders will be challenged because they need to not only help show interest in the programs but also provide and maintain them using the proper comprehensive intervention model and data quality control.

The most crucial aspect is bringing all the stakeholders together to work collaboratively with the Midwestern Penal Education Consortium. The program manager will work alongside the administrative staff and governing board from this recommendation.

Project Evaluation Plan

With these recommendations, I aimed to advance the overall educational curricula to help lower recidivism. As educational facilities such as Alumni University strive to improve the outcome of their educational curricula on reducing recidivism among offenders, there may be an increase in the number of offenders seeking rehabilitative services. Thus, the first recommendation would require using an OPEC University for the RFP process. The offenders took the courses, completed them, yet still recidivated at a significantly higher rate of two times those that took no course offerings. Thus, there is a need to provide evidence on the significant recidivism rates, including the courses or programs that need to be added or changed to motivate positive behavior change and lower the rate of recidivism. Based on the above recommendations, data quality control and other services that reduce recidivism, like the comprehensive intervention model presented in the policy paper, can help determine the effective curricula. Also, using surveys and questionnaires in future research would allow offenders to answer specifically designed, anonymous, open-ended questions that effectively align with the educational curricula. Lyle (2019) posited that goals-based evaluation establishes goals while providing resources per expected outcomes. As the educational center explores more opportunities than those at their disposal currently, they will most likely increase the interactions they have with incarcerated students, enabling them to create an exceedingly supportive environment through which more offenders can be helped to avoid recidivism. For example, in comparing an institution with a lower recidivism rate in a neighboring county, an exit interview for college should take place upon reentry. The

student should be given information about whom to contact, when to contact them, and how to finish the semester or start a new semester, leading up to the final release day. The CBCF in question did not provide these necessary steps to continue college, resulting in those released not knowing where to begin or continue their college career. Thus, they may return to old behaviors upon release and the chances of committing a new crime. Davila-Centeno (2016) demonstrated that a strong reentry structure is needed from start to finish to reduce recidivism.

In evaluating the success of the educational curriculum in reducing recidivism, the academic assessment cycle should be directed by an annual timeline calling for various academic programs to assess student learning through each academic year. Every year, the programs should evaluate a minimum of one student learning outcome through assessment. On the other hand, the annual assessment report, which will be due June 1st every year, will call for various programs to integrate information regarding the assessment activities for the previous academic year. Programs will clearly outline the outcomes after the assessments, the data collection techniques, the primary targets for the established students' success, and the analysis and interpretation of the data. These programs will also outline how actionable data will be utilized to develop other action plans or improve them. In this respect, actionable data may refer to information generated from the investigation that provides sufficient insights for future actions that can guide decision-making (Ross et al., 2021). The report will also provide programs with valuable opportunities to discuss the fundamental factors that could impede or accelerate different

assessment efforts and acknowledge the evaluation successes while communicating the next academic year's outcomes.

Project Implications

Local Level

The findings of this project have significant local social change implications. This policy paper should create that change for the local community and stakeholders. The suggestion of trying an approach that has worked for prisons will be utilized by joining the Midwest Penal Education Consortium, which has shown proven recidivism in the prison population. The stakeholders, being the offenders in the CBCF program, should come out better educated with the support compared to the primary curriculum offered, which should reduce recidivism. This implication helps them become better members of society, it also would save local taxpayers money based on court costs, policing, and prison stays.

This policy paper recommends that the CBCF join the Midwest Penal Education Consortium. This new aged curriculum works based on the new data quality control that was never used before at the facility. These implications can lead offenders to employment upon release. In addition, because the college is free for those that started while at the CBCF, these students may decide to continue their education in further studies.

Larger Context

In the larger context, the offenders who will be experiencing the new changes from the CBCF and curriculum should have a high college participation rate and degree

obtainment. The implications of a higher degree, in turn, come with higher wages compared to those with just a high school diploma (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The college program will be delivered at no cost to the CBCF offender; as long as they continue to maintain academic standards upon release, they can continue in the community. This would alleviate the debt problem for newly reentered offenders of the facility and help lower recidivism because a college education is obtainable for free.

The results showed in a CBCF without the consortium that the college students recidivated at a higher rate than the offenders taking nothing. The reason why college is essential is that the consortium has had positive results. As we can see these results through the Vera Institute of Justice (2019), the higher the educational obtainment is inside a consortium, the lower the recidivism rate. This recommendation is suggested because of the lack of data on this CBCF.

Ma et al. (2019) found that society benefits from a better-educated population. This also relates to higher earnings based on higher degree obtainment. As a community, the higher the education, the more pay received, and the higher the tax revenue. This also relates to higher levels of participation in civic duties like voting (Ma et al., 2019). All of these more substantial implications break down the barriers for those in reentry and begin to lower the recidivism rate as they become productive members of society.

Summary

In Section 3, I provided a detailed outline of the project. A policy paper is the most appropriate deliverable for the project. The literature provides evidence of the need for a policy paper and offers necessary recommendations. The CBCF does not have the

resources in place to provide these recommendations; thus, there may be pushback from the stakeholder group of the administration and governing board. If anything, these recommendations should help with the idea of buy-in and the first step of engagement with the stakeholders on the higher level.

In Section 4, I discuss the experience and the knowledge and skills I gained. I will also discuss the benefits the policy recommendation will offer the CBCF. I will continue explaining the study's limitations and suggestions for further research. Finally, I will offer some closing thoughts about how the policy changes can lead to positive social change.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

This section includes the strengths and limitations of the project, as well as the recommendations for alternative approaches to reduce recidivism. I also discuss scholarship, project development, and multiple reflections regarding the implications for future research.

Strengths

This policy paper and study were needed to address the gap in practice for the CBCF. Understanding what programs lowered the recidivism rate was crucial to comprehend what was needed. The main strengths of this project included the extensive literature review used to identify objectives and recommendations. The project deliverable included peer-reviewed literature in the analysis. Relying on peer-reviewed articles provides credible and valid evidence that helps researchers and experts overcome the risks of falsified work (Behzadi & Gajdacs, 2020). Having clear recommendations was another strength.

Having specific and clear recommendations ensures high levels of validity and applicability of the study findings (Gaur & Kumar, 2018). Bloomfield and Fisher (2019) argued that adopting a policy paper as a deliverable lead to findings that are more applicable, even when the investigator does not have good knowledge of the situations or individuals taking part in the investigation. The quantitative techniques used for this policy paper made it easy to classify the variables and identify relationships between them.

The recommendations for this policy paper were based on the evidence collected in the study. The gaps in practice became easily identifiable after the data were collected to narrow the problem and identify a solution. With recidivism rates being collected in intervals, it was best to use the data and offenders pre-COVID because the 3-year results represented a current problem that needed a solution. Therefore, I targeted the curricula of the CBCF and the need to lower the recidivism rate based on the odds ratio of what curricula were taken.

Limitations

The policy paper had two limitations. The first limitation was the transferability to different CBCFs in the same state or other states based on specific policies. Because the study was performed in an urban area, there could be a difference in how recidivism is defined and the type of courses offered based on other geographical areas. The inconsistencies related to defining and measuring recidivism were a second limitation of the study and policy paper.

Inconsistencies and lack of a universal approach to measuring recidivism meant that the recommendations for practice and policy may have been based on less reliable findings. Ruggero et al. (2019) argued that there is no right way to measure recidivism, and errors are bound to occur. Navarro et al. (2020) concurred that it is hard for criminologists and other stakeholders in the criminal justice system to determine whether a crime has happened. However, in the present study and policy paper, the definition of recidivism was based on reengagement in criminal lawbreaking (criminal behavior) after a person has received an intervention or sanction (see Johnson, 2017). Some of the

aspects that were considered in the measure of recidivism were arraignment, rearrest, imprisonment, reincarceration, and reconviction.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The policy paper was based on determining the effects of educational curricula on recidivism at a single CBCF in one state. Other approaches can also be used. For instance, I could have studied how assessing the needs and risks of an individual would reduce recidivism rather than using education. However, given that time was insufficient, I concluded that this option would not be ideal because this would include a stepwise process that would consume considerable time and be best for a future study.

Instead of a policy paper, I could have completed an evaluation report. The evaluation report could have been on the curriculum specifically or it could have been on specific needs for the educators that could have turned into professional development for teaching in prisons. However, the results were significant, which led to recommendations being best communicated through a policy paper.

Scholarship

After 15 years in correctional education, I thought a change was needed. Working in higher education for 10 years, I learned some things I did not know about correctional education in higher education. Walden's online doctoral program in higher education and leadership management helped me become knowledgeable in my field. All of my course work has helped me consider ways to reduce recidivism in correctional higher education. This has been a valuable experience because I have evaluated myself as a lifelong learner

and advocated for social change. This change has been significant based on my new interactions with colleagues, administrators, and those incarcerated.

Project Development and Evaluation

Everyone is unique, bringing their wealth of knowledge and experience to their project. I understand that this paper may contain bias; however, my intent was to be objective throughout the study. After the tiring nights of going through publications and peer-reviewed literature and speaking to many administrators in corrections, I can identify the importance of utilizing others when developing a policy recommendation for social change.

To guide the development of my project, I relied on my doctoral team and took the peer-reviewed literature into consideration. The main focus was to develop a policy paper with essential recommendations that could lead to change. I realized that different prisons have different policies compared to CBCFs. I also learned that the standards are higher among educational consortium colleges compared to those not in that group by looking at the different stakeholders and how to engage them. Understanding the institutions under the umbrella was conducive to promoting positive changes based on the recommendations.

I have faith that the CBCF will accept the policy recommendations, I support these policies because there is evidence showing that they have lowered the recidivism rates in other CBCFs and facilities. With the evidence speaking for itself, I believe that, over time, this CBCF and local community could see a lower rate of recidivism. The

recidivism cycle lasts 3 years postrelease, and when the policies go into effect, the next study would need to be completed in 2027.

Leadership and Change

As a doctoral student, I have learned that I am the catalyst of the change. In this study, I provided evidence to develop policy recommendations to lower the rate of recidivism. To move this policy forward, I must partner with the CBCF and other stakeholders involved. Listening to others has been a tremendous learning experience. Being able to evaluate what others have to say, I could synthesize information to begin the lengthy process of change.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The administrative team was gracious enough to provide me the opportunity to study the recidivism rate based on the educational curricula for 2016; for this I am grateful. By conducting this study, I determined that by taking a college course at this CBCF, the offender had an odds ratio 2 times higher to recidivate than another offender taking no courses. I determined that the curricula offered at the CBCF are ineffective in helping reduce recidivism. Knowing what education curricula help reduce recidivism is critical so CBCFs can focus on providing a proper curriculum. Significant behavioral changes can be achieved through practical educational programs, which apply to everyone including criminals (Fogarty & Giles, 2018). The offenders receiving a GED, certificate, or college credits have the opportunity to be placed in the workforce as they exit the CBCF.

Education improves employment opportunities. This enables incarcerated individuals to reintegrate into society quickly and seamlessly and have more financial stability to take care of themselves without committing crimes to fulfill their needs. In the long run, more desirable results, particularly regarding recidivism reduction, will be achieved.

Implications

The policy recommendations are intended to lower the recidivism rate. Lowering the recidivism rate can allow for successful reentry into the community with a higher level of education. With a higher level of education coming out of prison, offenders have a greater chance of being hired. Those graduating with an associate's or bachelor's degree may be able to enter the workforce or continue their education and not succumb to student loan debt if the policy recommendations are appropriately followed. Upon reentry, the offender might make a higher wage and impact the community positively. In addition, with the use of data quality control and future studies based on all CBCFs, researchers could identify what curricula work at these institutions, which would result in a higher completion rate of education and would lower the recidivism rate.

Applications

At the time of the study, the CBCF was partnered with a local community college in the same state, with standards that were different from those in the education consortium. This study could be used by other institutions, such as colleges, to broaden the understanding of what programs are more effective than others. The idea would be to

use this study as a template for how certain educational programs impact not only employability but also sustainability among students.

Directions for Future Research

This study produced data that showed that education did not affect recidivism at this CBCF. However, other education programs might do better with reducing recidivism; that is where the recommendations of this policy paper come into play. The CBCF may be interested in reaching out to surrounding colleges in the education consortium to see what programs can tie not only reducing recidivism but local industries to secure employment.

Future researchers could be interested in expanding and improving the study by looking at all of the CBCFs in the state. Future studies could also address the role that characteristics play in reducing recidivism. These include race, religion, gender, age, education program, geographical location, and employability.

Conclusion

This policy paper aimed to establish awareness of the effects of educational curricula offered at a CBCF with a high recidivism rate. Through an incredible team from Walden's doctoral program and the knowledge and skills I gained from the course work, I prepared a policy recommendation paper. My findings from this study will be shared with the CBCF administrative team and governing board to solicit change.

I leave Walden as a different person. I leave Walden wanting to continue research in correctional education, furthering the idea of reducing recidivism. I leave Walden knowing how to do professional research, something I learned throughout the

requirements of this doctoral program in higher education in leadership and management.

This study may provide the CBCF with a way to improve the educational curricula and contribute to lower recidivism in the community.

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Appendix A: The Project

Reducing Recidivism through Curricula

Prepared by Todd Angello, Doctoral Candidate January 2022

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Executive Summary

Background

A Midwestern State's recidivism rate is 31.45% based on the three years from the Midwestern State Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. The issue is that, although education programming (College, GED, and Certificate Courses) has been found to lower recidivism in prisons and other correctional institutions, this CBCF has an alarming rate of 44% of recidivism with those education programs. With never using the educational data at the facility, the results showed students were two times more likely to recidivate by taking college classes than not participating in education at all.

The Problem

Although this facility has been offering GED, vocational certificates, and college, there has been no analysis of data relating to these different curriculums as it relates to the recidivism rates overall. The facility needs to know what works and what does not when it comes to GED, vocational certificates, and college while using those variables to reduce recidivism.

The Demographics

Although my study did not address these predictors, I included these stacked bar graphs to show the makeup of the sample. The sample was based on all 463 offenders that were deidentified in the 2016 year, over a 3-year-old period based on recidivism. Throughout the literature review, the implied idea of a positive reduction in recidivism, similar to the RAND Corporation study in 2017 by Sokoloff, showed 43% lower odds of recidivating did not occur (Powers, 2020). Although GED and Vocational have no

bearing on recidivism, those enrolled in college in the facility were two times more likely to return than those taking no courses.

Figure 1

Stacked bar graph showing recidivism by gender.

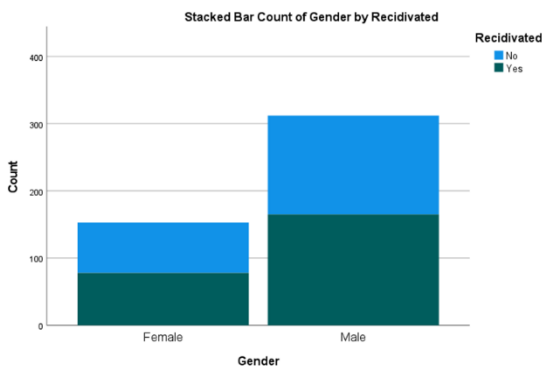


Figure 2

Stacked bar graph showing recidivism by race.

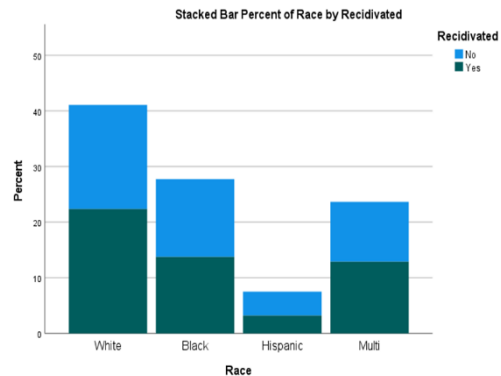


Figure 3

Stacked bar graph by offender type. Histogram showing numerical age.

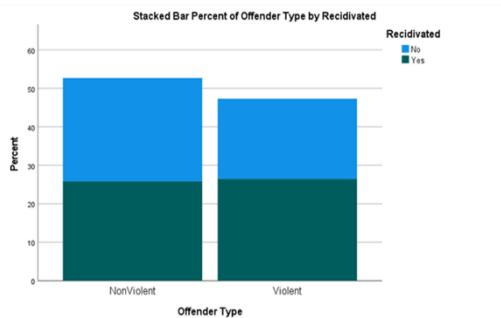


Figure 4

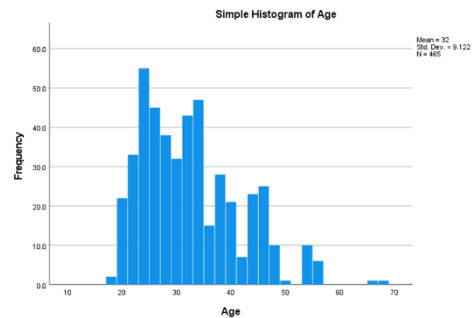
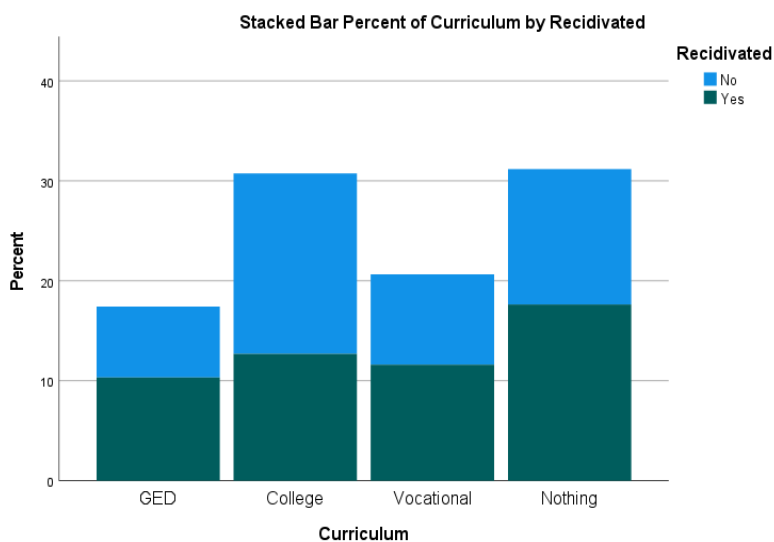


Figure 5

Percentage of Recidivism by Curricula



Statistical Analysis

The results show no significant difference between GED and those that took no course, Vocational and those that took no course based on recidivism. With no significant difference, it was even more surprising that inmates who took college courses compared to those that took no courses were two times more likely to recidivate.

Recommendations

1. Formulate a request for proposal to join the Midwestern Penal Education Consortium.
2. Study other services that reduce recidivism, including a comprehensive intervention model.

Introduction

The Problem

The problem of practice is that despite years of use, the CBCF in a northeastern city in a Midwest state does not know the effect that the educational curriculum—PROP

certificate courses (vocational), credit-bearing courses (college), and ASPIRE General Education Degree (GED)—have on recidivism. The recidivism rate within the CBCF remains high, a local problem. The gap in practice at this facility is that although the facility collects data on each offender, including educational attainments, dosage hours, placements, treatment plans, and whether they return to prison, that data were not analyzed to know the effect of what specific educational curricula—PROP certificate courses (vocational), credit-bearing courses (college), ASPIRE GED—has on recidivism in a CBCF.

The Purpose

The purpose of the proposed quantitative study is to examine the effects that the three distinct educational curricula have at one CBCF on recidivism. Using a correlational design, I will investigate the possibility of a connection, an odds ratio, between recidivism and the three types of curricula completed. The independent variable is the completion or noncompletion of one of the three types of curricula of the PROP curriculum. The dependent variable is recidivism.

Methodology

Research Questions

The problem is that the CBCF in a northeast Midwestern state does not understand whether offenders who were enrolled in educational curricula experience reduced recidivism. The purpose of this proposed quantitative study is to determine the effects, if any, of completing one of the three educational curricula offered on recidivism. I will use a quantitative methodological design.

RQ: What are the effects of completing one of the three types of educational curricula offered—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, ASPIRE GED—on recidivism?

H_0 : There is no relationship between completion of one of the three types of educational curricula offered—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, ASPIRE GED—on recidivism.

H_A : There is a relationship between completion of one of the three types of educational curricula offered—PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, ASPIRE GED—on recidivism.

The dependent variable is recidivism. The independent variable is the type of educational curriculum. I will use multiple binary logistics regression as the statistical test.

Study Design

The design of the quantitative study was correlational. Within correlational designs, there are different types; I used logistic regression analysis. A correlational study aids in investigating secondary data to find the predictors among the independent variables (Western, 2018). Through this research study, I investigated the relationship between successful completion of the three educational curricula offered: PROP certificate courses, credit-bearing courses, ASPIRE GED, and recidivism. This will show the effects of completing different educational curricula on recidivism in a correctional facility in a northeast midwestern county. I used the secondary data to identify completion for the three curricula types. Educational curricula data were based on

information from 545 offenders released in 2016, who completed a PROP certificate course, credit-bearing courses, or ASPIRE GED, and those who did not complete courses in the CBCF.

Analysis for Findings

The results show no significant difference between GED and those that took no course, Vocational and those that took no course based on recidivism. With no significant difference, it was even more surprising that offenders taken college courses compared to those that took no course were two times more likely to recidivate as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Variables in the Equation

| | | B | S.E. | Wald | df | Sig. | Exp(B) |
|---------|----------------|-------|------|-------|----|------|--------|
| Step 1a | GED (1) | -.111 | .281 | .156 | 1 | .693 | .895 |
| | College (1) | .617 | .239 | 6.685 | 1 | .010 | 1.853 |
| | Vocational (1) | .012 | .265 | .002 | 1 | .963 | 1.012 |
| | Constant | -.254 | .484 | .276 | 1 | .599 | .775 |

Table 1 shows the positive values of Exp(B) recidivate equaling 1, which suggests are favorable than taking nothing and damaging more likely to not recidivate, based on offenders that took no course in 2016. The table shows the most significant in college classes; you were 1.853 times more likely to recidivate than those that took no course. Thus, the need for a remedy on how to use education as a benefit in reducing recidivism. Studies have demonstrated that participation in accredited college education is linked to

lower recidivism rates and increased employment likelihood (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017; Scott, 2016). A similar meta-analytical study by Duke (2018) recognizes that offender college education is the most effective correctional and community re-integration strategy that can effectively reduce recidivism.

Project Recommendations

Other Services that Reduce Recidivism

Weinberg (2021) acknowledged the significant contention of the approaches that usually exist between anecdotal-based policymaking and the action taken. Nevertheless, Weinberg postulated the need for public policy based on adequate consideration and an encompassing consultation with various stakeholders. This process of anecdotal policymaking has been significantly misunderstood by several institutions offering education programs to offenders, which has increased recidivism rates. As of 2017, in Massachusetts, Baldwin and Zeira used the comprehensive intervention model instead of anecdotal-based practices and continue to this day. This model operates in four areas and serves over 21 communities. This is a data-driven approach to bridging the gap between education and recidivism. According to Gamoran (2018), anecdotal-based policymaking is mostly faced with the challenge of shifting from evidence to action. Other notable problems include producing useful evidence that is reliable and valid. Another problem is ensuring that the research evidence is used and considered when decisions are made regarding social programs. The last problem involves ensuring that the decisions arrived at are fully supported by reliable evidence that, once the policymakers implement them, their benefits will be felt by the individuals and society.

Along these lines, Slavin (2020) explained that social researchers and scientists should have a sophisticated and in-depth understanding of the psychology of the policymaker, the roles of various factors like group dynamics, and the rules followed by people within an organization. Even though researchers have to ensure that their findings are proven theoretically and scientifically, it should be noted that policymakers usually focus on things that seem reasonable, contain a concise message, and can be accessed in times of need (Slavin, 2020). Journey et al. (2018) explained various ways through which various policymakers' attention could be captured. These include cultivating cooperative relationships between policymakers and researchers in which engagement is realized via negotiations, face-to-face discussions, and meetings. This occurs through advising, while informally, it takes the form of lobbying. McConnell and Hart (2019) also provided suggestions on effectively capturing the attention and speaking to policymakers, including knowledge of scalability, timeliness, and process. Similarly, Cairney and Kwiatkowski (2017) added that being upfront about the barriers or enablers of success is an important consideration. Thus, demonstrating how the proposed educational curricula can help reduce recidivism will play a major role in its acceptance. On the other hand, policymakers can be influenced via public pressure that could take the form of advocacy and activism. This includes cases in which the researchers engage in public messaging and campaigning via mass media to develop public awareness and solicit support, thereby building public pressure for specific policies. Slavin (2020) explained further that programs based on solid evidence and enacted as the original research are more likely to result in better and improved student outcomes. At the same time, Slavin emphasized that

the selection criteria for a product typically ensures that education is on a virtuous cycle, including progressive improvement, evaluation, and innovation similar to that which has changed different fields like agriculture, technology, or medicine (Germanis, 2017). Similarly, evidence-based reform occurs when different policymakers and stakeholders, such as educators, use research evidence to make recommendations for change (Cook & Cook, 2016). In the same respect, evidence of effectiveness is derived from rigorous experiments that compare students over different periods, such as an academic year. In this specific study, the data has shown that the students are passing. Furthermore, Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) continued to outline the requirements for a shred of evidence to effect change in education. Three main conditions have to be met. Firstly, there is a need for various proven programs in the most vital education areas at each grade level. Secondly, there must be impartial, trusted, educator-friendly reviews of the study to allow policymakers and educators to note the specific successful practices and programs. Lastly, governmental policies have to encourage and incentivize districts and schools to implement the proven programs. It has also been shown that educators prefer several policies from which they can choose. For instance, CBCF-2 county had a 19.7 rate of recidivism with better college and certified teachers, whereas CBCF had neither. In comparison, CBCF-1 county had a 15.6 rate of recidivism with more structured college options. In contrast, both CBCF-2 and CBCF-1 county used the comprehensive intervention model. CBCF-2 and CBCF-1 had a lower recidivism rate based on the 2020 recidivism report by the Midwestern State Department of Rehabilitation. CBCF-2 was served through the Eastern Midwestern State Correction Center (EOCC; ODRC, 2022).

CBCF-1 was served through Midwestern State Regional Community Correction Center (SRCCC). Both had a lower rate of recidivism. Combined, both were lower than the facility my study was based on. Both facilities offer college education programs, some funded by grants, but others through a regular funding stream through the colleges themselves. Again, the CBCF in my study only offered programs during a federal grant, which were not sustainable. The Eastern Midwestern State Correction Center for CBCF-2 county had a recidivism rate of 19.7%, and Midwestern State Regional Community Correction Center had a recidivism rate of 15.6% (ODRC, 2022). The CBCF in the study had a rate of 44%. The county in my study had a rate of 33.9%, whereas both CBCF-2 and CBCF-1 hover at the same rates as the correction centers. These two counties embody a lowered recidivism rate based on the comprehensive intervention model. Certified teachers provide education for the EOCC resident with an emphasis on individualized instruction. The offenders did not have this at the CBCF in my study. Offenders were encouraged to complete the GED program, improve basic skills, attend college classes, take computer classes, receive vocational training, and use self-help resources. Education at the SRCCC includes postsecondary enrollment, which the CBCF in my study lacked. Normal enrollment through the selected school was scheduled for offenders interested in and eligible for university or technical college education. Again, the educational process from SRCCC was more structured and gave the offenders more options than the CBCF in my study. Previous studies have indicated that advancing to a comprehensive education strategy can reduce recidivism in most facilities (Mastrobuoni & Terlizese, 2014). Thus, apart from just providing GED, vocational, or college

curricula, the facility should place itself in a position to offer more than just educational programs to reduce recidivism. Studies indicated that education programs that focus on modifying behavior might play a similar or more important role in lowering recidivism.

Therefore, to effectively lower recidivism, the facility should incorporate its education curricula programs with cognitive-behavior therapy sessions, which will help limit the risks from some of these elements and aid in offering more coping techniques, such as training in regulating emotions as well as impulse control techniques (Scot, 2018). Cognitive-behavioral therapies are positively correlated with lowering recidivism, yet this facility did not include the needed amount of this therapy for the incarcerated population. The facility should make participation in and completion of cognitive therapy programs necessary for admission into job training education programs. The facility may be offering programs that are not directly related to the needs of the incarcerated population, which may show why there are few participants in their programs and high recidivism rates. Incorporating basic cognitive skill training with the comprehensive intervention module in the education curricula in this facility may help limit recidivism (Walker & Davidson, 2018). More intensive education programs are also necessary for individuals suffering from moderate mental health issues. These persons can be provided therapy and education programs that can assist them in reducing their rates of recidivism. The facility should also raise its program portfolio quality by sharing effective practices. It should carry out random assessments to consistently improve the accountability and quality of training programs, such as educational, cognitive, occupational, and behavioral, and those aligned to life techniques and release preparedness.

The provisions should be updated and related to the incarcerated individuals' present demands (Shirley, 2019). For instance, occupational education should not be a responsibility of a particular warden. It should be nationalized or regionalized to benefit from academic resources beyond the immediate area and distance learning. Providing an advanced comprehensive education model will help the offenders gain occupational skills and help them reenter society smoothly. Follow-up after release to check on the progress of the individual will help prevent recidivism. The facility should ensure that participation in cognitive-behavioral therapy sessions is necessary before enrolling offenders in education programs. The facility should hire skilled social workers, educators, psychologists, and clinicians who will help facilitate the education program and make it effective by reducing the recidivism rate. (Quilter & McNamara, 2019). The education programs offered by the facility must go along with the opportunity of accessing steady paying jobs for formerly incarcerated individuals, thereby helping them find sustainable jobs that will keep them away from reengaging in criminal activities. The programs within the industry must align with the demands of industries, making it easier for former offenders to access sustainable jobs.

Midwestern Penal Education Consortium Recommendation

I propose that this facility request proposals for offering quality education to those incarcerated (Ohio gov, n.d). This would be considered the primary recommendation. The Midwestern State central school system has been successfully offering advanced occupational education to offenders with the aid of universities and colleges around the Midwestern State to help incarcerated individuals reenter their communities and attain

sustainable employment that will enable them to earn income and support their families. The facility needs to ensure that the contractor providing education to offenders hires staff willing to work in a highly secured prison setting. They should also ensure that classroom space is available whenever needed. The number of classes provided each term should be enough for the offender to complete the authorized study course reasonably. The contractor should employ qualified staff and educators for all college courses and offer at least one full-time worker to become the institutional coordinator for every site. For the RFP to be accepted, the contractor must provide supplies and textbooks as demanded. The supplies include audio-visual devices, tablets, writing tools, and paper. Once approved, the contractor must secure a university or college alternative educator or rearrange any class canceled because of the absence of an educator. For the facility to offer quality education, a Higher Learning Commission must recognize and acknowledge the contractor receiving the tender. The college or university must have the capacity to offer scholarships or grants to aid the offenders after and before release. They must also offer pre-and post-release career counseling reflecting what is offered on their university or college campuses.

The facility had to evaluate the proposal process before awarding the contract to the college or community. It needs to review the proposal by checking the format and completeness. Any late proposal should be instantly rejected and must not be opened or evaluated. The highest-ranked prospects must be selected to meet the committee for further interviews. The facility must also assess the offeror's performance history in other jurisdictions. It should invite the selected proposers for interviews, demonstrations, and

presentations. The proposers should provide financial information for the previous years if the assessment committee is worried about the financial ability to conduct the program. The committee should engage in a contract negotiation with the successful proposers. An example of this was using Alumni University for an RFP. The Department of Corrections puts together the RFP, saying what are the bare minimums of what they want to offer, including appropriate sites for such programs. The reason for an RFP would be to bring in a proven university like Alumni University that was proficient in postsecondary education in a correctional setting known for reducing recidivism. The university, through the RFP, would be accredited, professors would be appropriately licensed, and partner with the Midwestern State Penal Education Consortium (OPEC). All college credits should be transferable, college should be free up to a bachelor's degree, and a reentry program should be offered after release. Proposals should be screened, and then Midwestern State DRC should explain who is accepted, how much they can spend, and what sites they will serve. In other states, a college might approach a facility, or an agency might reach out to a college. It is usually an agency and not an individual facility. The RFP process can last months and sometimes years to get started. That is why the prior two recommendations of moving to a comprehensive model and data quality control should be implemented before the RFP. Alumni University has already been chosen and has gone through the RFP process. Since 1964, Alumni University has operated a transformative educational experience for those incarcerated in prominent state of correction departments across the United States. With support from a conglomerate of stakeholders and continuing to show positive results in reducing

recidivism based on their college curriculum, they have pursued a vision of developing any student into an essential part of society. Along these lines of conducting its correctional programs, Alumni University changed various peoples' lives.

Hager (2020) of the Marshall Project argued that Alumni University runs the largest and most effective correctional education program in the United States. The institution has enrolled more than 4,000 incarcerated students at one hundred and twenty facilities in various states. The university has graduated about 1,000 students since 2016.

Conclusion

As more colleges and universities consider offering higher education in CBCFs, Directors may struggle to determine which programs best suit their needs and students. The recommendation to reexamine the mission of the institution is essential. Usually, the mission involves reducing recidivism with the safety of individuals in mind; however, this new statement could include developing higher education among students while strengthening the community and engaging the facility in a positive light. With this idea in mind, the opportunity to identify changes in education in a holistic approach would be encouraged. The directors can identify where students are not developing and design interventions to create even more change and helping reducing recidivism. Institutions of higher education serve as valuable resources within the community. Being able to show that would also strengthen the partnership within community organizations that would be more welcoming to these individuals upon reentry, which will ultimately positively impact these individuals.

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Appendix B: ASPIRE GED Curriculum

Aspire programs provide free services for persons who need assistance acquiring the skills to be successful in post-secondary education. Programs offer classes at flexible locations, and on different days and times to meet diverse needs, including correctional settings. All Offenders who do not have a high school diploma/equivalency are required to attend orientation, where an assessment is given to help determine the individual's educational needs and goals. Services available include:

- Math, reading and writing skills
- Adult Secondary Education/GED preparation
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Transition services – including employment and post-secondary
- Life skills, employability skills and computer literacy
- Distance education

Appendix C: College Credit-Bearing Class Curriculum Guide

Strategies for College Success SDEV 102

SDEV 102 is an introductory interactive course designed to introduce valuable resources and to teach strategies for creating success in college and in life and improving academic performance. Topics include personal responsibility; motivation, personal, academic and career; goal setting; learning styles; study skills; decision-making; problem solving; and priority management. 3 credit-bearing hours was earned for successful completion of this class.

Introduction to Psychology 151

An introduction to psychology as the science of behavior and an overview of current psychological thought. Topics include the science of psychology, biological bases of behavior, learning, memory and cognition, motivation, stress and adjustment, personality, psychological disorders and their treatment, and social psychology. 3 credit-bearing hours was earned for successful completion of this class.

Introduction to Sociology 151

This introductory course is the study of human behavior in society. Its primary focus is on the influence of social relationships on people's attitudes and behavior, and on how societies are established and changed. Some of the topics covered are cultural, deviance, the family, globalization, social inequality, the mass media, ethnic and race relations, socialization, religion, research methods, and organizations. 3 credit-bearing hours was earned for successful completion of this class.

Health and Wellness 156

This course emphasizes the adaptation of a wellness lifestyle through behavior modification in the following areas: physical fitness, nutrition, weight management, stress management, cardiovascular health, and the reduction of at-risk lifestyle behaviors. The student will engage in a variety of health-related and physical fitness labs, service learning activity and critical thinking exercises. 3 credit-bearing hours was earned for successful completion of this class.

Stress Management 151

An introduction to a study of the physiological and psychological effects of stress upon the human body. The focus is on the investigation and practical application of specific skills for managing stress throughout one's lifetime. 3 credit-bearing hours was earned for successful completion of this class.

Job Strategies 101

This course will help you plan your job-search, including setting goals, organizing, and managing your time. In the current environment, understanding current industry needs and job openings will be essential to having a successful job search. This session will cover how to adapt in these changing times – including understanding timelines, in-demand jobs, and how to use your skills and experience to your advantage. 3 credit-bearing hours was earned for successful completion of this class.

Appendix D: PROP Certification Curriculum Guide

Welding Specifications-Print Reading 111 & Welding Wire Fed Processes 216

111. This course cover basic engineering drawing principles, fundamental concepts of welding specifications, symbols, and blueprint reading as used in industry, and types of welding equipment and operational safety issues. Emphasis is on print reading, interpretation and analysis and safety procedures.

216. This course covers the basic principles and practices of gas metal arc welding (GMAW). Laboratory work involves the application of GMAW as it is used in industry today. Use of various metal transfer modes for aluminum and steel, joint styles, welding positions, and manipulation techniques will be emphasized. Wire fed processes will include sub-arc theory. Laboratory exercises will include flux-covered arc welding. Welding equipment, design, use, care, safety and maintenance are emphasized.

First Aid and Safety 153 & CPR 154

153. This two-part course includes the American Heart Association Health Care Provider CPR and the American Red Cross Responding to Emergencies First Aid. The course incorporates hands on training to provide the citizen responder with the knowledge and skills necessary to perform in emergency situations to help sustain life, reduce pain and minimize the consequences of injury or sudden illness until professional medical help arrives. Red Cross Responding to Emergencies and American Heart Association Health Care Provider certificates will be awarded upon instructor's recommendation and student successful.

154. Identification of warning signs and application of life-saving techniques for individuals experiencing medical emergencies (e.g. respiratory distress/arrest, airway obstruction and cardiac arrest). Course taught according to American Heart Association (AHA) guidelines for Health Care Providers, other professionals, and the layperson. An American Heart Association Health Care Provider certificate will be awarded upon successful completion of the AHA - Basic Life Support (BLS) examination (a score of 84% or higher) and all core BLS skills.

ServSafe

The ServSafe program is a complete solution that delivers consistent food safety training to employees. The Culinary Arts Institute delivers certification Level 1 and Level 2 – National Manager ServSafe & Sanitation Training.

Kitchen Essentials

The coursework for the one-year certificate in culinary arts provides hands-on instruction in a variety of basic cooking and baking techniques. In addition, you'll gain essential knowledge about food prep safety, nutrition, and kitchen management. The certificate gives you the basic foundational skills for entry level employment in various types of restaurants and food businesses.