

2023

The Recidivism Rate in Correlation to the Effectiveness of the Bridges To Life Reentry Program in Texas

Steven Steen
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Walden University

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

The Recidivism Rate in Correlation to the Effectiveness of the Bridges To Life Reentry

Program in Texas

by

Steven J. Steen, Jr.

MA, Webster University, 2017

BA, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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February 2023

Abstract

This research explored the relationship between reentry programs and recidivism in the state of Texas. One program in particular, Bridges To Life (BTL), has had an impact on recidivism in the state, and this research analyzed how the overall organization of BTL correlated to recidivism. Recidivism is the repeated or habitual relapse into crime. The purpose of this quantitative research study was to determine whether there was a direct correlation between the reduction of recidivism and the effectiveness of reentry programs through BTL in the state of Texas. The research question for this study explored the correlation between BTL and the recidivism rate in Texas. The primary theoretical framework used for this research was general strain theory (GST). A quantitative approach was chosen because data allowed for the analysis of the research question. According to GST, strains or stressors enhance the chance of unpleasant emotions, such as anger and irritation. These emotions put pressure on authorities to take remedial action, and crime is one possible reaction. Secondary data were collected from BTL and Texas Department of Corrections and Justice. The results of this study showed that there was a direct correlation between the effectiveness of reentry programs through BTL in the state of Texas and the reduction of recidivism. The implications for positive social change as it relates to this research may allow those who influence policy and law to have more accountable information to make decisions that positively affect citizens and the criminal justice system.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to all the people who wish to help those behind bars achieve rehabilitation.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge every educator who has influenced my life in academia, including my committee chair and my family, as well as those who have passed away and are not able to witness this personal milestone. To my mother and father, Cordelia Brown and Steven Steen, Sr. To my grandmothers, Sarah Steen and Lula McHenry, to my grandfathers, Booker Steen and Timothy McHenry. I acknowledge Dr. Donald McLellan (chairperson) and Dr. Carolyn Dennis (committee member) as my doctoral committee.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Bridges To Life (BTL), a 21-year-old 501(c)(3) organization based in Houston, Texas, is a restorative justice program that rehabilitates offenders and brings healing to victims of crime. The program has been replicated across the state. The mission of BTL is to connect communities to prisons to reduce the recidivism rate of violent crimes and enhance public safety. The spiritual mission of BTL is to minister to victims and offenders to show them the transforming power of God's love and forgiveness. The BTL program has two main goals: reduce recidivism (reoffending) rates of program graduates and facilitate the healing process for victims and offenders. To date, more than 52,000 offenders have completed the BTL program (BTL, 2020).

Each year, BTL tracks a large and diversified sample group of BTL graduates after they are released from Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) prisons. According to BTL's 2020 Annual Report, the recidivism rate was 15.6% in Texas, in contrast to the statewide rate of 21.2% from 2011 to 2015. Additionally, exactly 3% of released offenders in the BTL group returned to prison for committing a violent crime and current national recidivism rates are estimated to be 37% (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018).

One of the most widely discussed innovations in the realm of crime and justice is restorative justice. Although widely discussed, there is a literature gap that shows how specific restorative justice programs affect recidivism. Its proponents and practitioners believe that state penalties, which have long been the standard reaction to crime, neither

fulfill the needs of victims nor prevent reoffending (BTL, 2020). Examples of the proponents of restorative justice include victim assistance, community service, victim-offender mediation, peacemaking circles, and family group conferencing (Zernova, 2007). They argue that offenders' families and communities urge them to accept responsibility for the consequences of their acts, express regret, and repair the harm they have caused (Johnstone, 2011).

Central features of restorative justice involve direct involvement of participants; recognition of victim rights and offender responsibility/accountability; holistic understanding of the offender; removal of the stigma of crime through restorative action; possibilities for repentance and forgiveness; focus on problem-solving, dialogue, negotiation, restitution, and repairing social injury; and community facilitation of the restorative process. According to BTL's 2020 Annual Report, the recidivism rate of BTL graduates remained low at 15.6%, compared to the national rate of 37%.

There is a large body of work on the psychology of criminal behavior. The First Step Act focuses on rehabilitation and finding ways to give people opportunities to come home and succeed. According to Hylton (2018), one's proclivity for crime is closely linked to one's psychological ability to delay pleasure, which appears to be developed early in life. These and other factors contribute to overloaded prisons and recidivism.

Problem Statement

As stated before, current national recidivism rates are estimated to be 37% (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018). The problem is that freed convicts have high rates of recidivism. Among the top causes of recidivism are drug arrest, property crimes, and

domestic violence offenses. A report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) for 2021 showed that an estimated 3,890,400 adults were under community supervision (probation or parole), down 276,500 from January 1, 2020. An estimated 1 in 66 adult U.S. residents were under community supervision at the end of 2020. The adult probation population declined 8.3% during 2020, the largest annual decrease since 1980 when BJS began the probation collection (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

Some Americans live lifetimes without ever being convicted of a crime or even arrested, but others continually find themselves in the criminal justice system. Many may go through the criminal justice system once more for a new offense after being freed from the control of a criminal justice agency as suspects, defendants, or offenders (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021). Thus, the purpose of this research was to identify whether there is a direct correlation between recidivism and reentry program participation.

Research Questions/Hypothesis

The research question for this study was as follows: Is there a correlation between BTL and the recidivism rate in Texas? The dependent variable was recidivism, and the independent variables were the programs provided by the organization. The role of the theoretical framework lent itself to the cause of recidivism, which is explained in the next section. The hypothesis was that BTL programs do have a positive effect on the reduction of recidivism for its participants. The null hypothesis was that the BTL programs will not have any effect on the reduction of recidivism for its participants.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical framework that was used in this research was the general strain theory (GST). Merton (1957) established the strain theory in 1938 as a sociology and criminology hypothesis. Merton asserted that individuals are pressured by society to accomplish socially acceptable objectives, even if they lack the resources to do so. Agnew (1992) expanded on Merton's theory by explaining why people chose one adaptation over another. Agnew (2001) identified the types of strains most likely to result in deviance: failure to achieve core values, parental rejection, negative secondary school experience, abusive peer relations, criminal victimization, and gender/race discrimination.

Nature of Study

This study was quantitative, involving descriptive and comparative methods. Using secondary data collected by BTL and the TDCJ, I addressed the impact of reentry programs, specifically BTL, in the state of Texas. I compared recidivism rates of individuals who participated in the program for different values of the independent variables, which are the programs provided by the organization.

Definitions

In this section, I define terms that are used frequently throughout the study.

Bridges to Life (BTL): BTL is a manualized prerelease ecumenical faith-based 12-week in-prison program that is built on the restorative justice model. BTL graduates have an appreciatively lower recidivism rate than the general population of released inmates.

Recidivism: Repeated or habitual relapse into crime. According to the National Institute of Justice (2014), in criminal justice, recidivism is a key topic. It is described as a failure in judgment or behavior, and it is common for those on probation or supervision for past criminal acts to face intervention. Recidivism is defined as a return to jail or prison after being released from prison.

Restorative justice: The objective of restorative justice is to empower individuals who have a direct stake in a conflict to take part in an inclusive process that allows them to reach an agreement on how to fix the harm caused by the conflict. It comprises programs that employ a variety of techniques, including victim-offender mediation and conversation, truth-and-reconciliation commissions, family-group conferencing, citizen and neighborhood accountability boards, and community conferencing, as well as hybrids of these techniques (Levad, 2012).

Assumptions

An assumption is an untested belief: Something people believe without recognizing it (Dusick, 2104). Judgments are frequently founded on assumptions that have not been critically examined. Furthermore, judgements serve as one of the research's foundations. According to the Bureau of Prisons (2020), policies and programs promoting family stability and parenting classes, visitations, social furloughs, and locating inmates close to their home residences should be maintained as they enhance the reentry process. However, offenders may not achieve the quality of life of those who have never committed a crime because of their criminal record. GST lends itself to

external triggers that may influence an offender's behavior; however, there may also be other factors that contribute to an individual's behavior or none at all.

Scope and Delimitations

The study's scope refers to the parameters within which the research was conducted. Delimitations relate to the study's borders, which are determined by the researcher's choice on what to include and exclude. The scope of this research was to reveal the correlation between the various programs offered through BTL and the recidivism rate of those who participate. According to TDCJ (2020), it is difficult to calculate a recidivism rate by county. Counties where offenders reside before reception by the TDCJ are not official data. The only useful information is county of release, but residences for offenders discharged from the TDCJ or placed on community supervision or probation are not tracked. Only offenders released on parole supervision have an approved residence on file with the TDCJ. For those offenders not released on parole, the legal county of residence of the offender at the time the offense was committed was presumed to be where the offender would return upon release, but they may not remain in the county of release. Therefore, this research addressed how stakeholders and policymakers can affect positive social change through the implementation of high-quality reentry programs in the state of Texas.

Limitations

Limitations are external forces over which the researcher has no control (Dusick, 2014). They are flaws, circumstances, or factors that are outside the researcher's control and impose limitations on the approach and results. Because the research was based on

secondary data, one limitation was that the research design did not include a random sampling, specifically with the data obtained from BTL. Another limitation was that I looked at the impact of BTL to inmates in Texas and did not take into account any other similar programs or states.

Significance of Study

Recidivism is a distinct type of crime and one of the biggest societal issues confronting modern nations. Reducing recidivism continues to be a sign of both the efficacy of programs and systems that have inmates or ex-offenders as their target population. Building an institutional framework to support the former prisoner toward a positive change, from the attitude of things should be earned in life rather than taken without permission, with the active involvement of the community and institutions with the role of crime control, is necessary in order to support those who have received criminal sanctions, with a preference for those who have been released from prison (Toader, 2021).

The findings of this quantitative study may contribute to social change and expand knowledge of the relationship between reentry programs in Texas and recidivism. According to Merton (1957), there is a correlation between external influences on those who tend to recidivate. Therefore, policymakers should use continue to use these data to propose programs to assist those who have been incarcerated soon after their release from prison. The results of this research can inform policymakers regarding issues about recidivism and assist with criminal justice reform. In addition, this research helps to close the gap in the literature involving factors that contribute to recidivism.

Summary

When it comes to criminal justice, rehabilitation, and reform, restorative justice is either undercommunicated or overlooked. Restorative justice attempts to reconcile the perpetrator and the victim of a crime. If this conversation occurs, it is expected that the offender will be less likely to repeat the same offense because of the new impression they may have gained from the meeting. As a result, BTL is at the forefront of efforts to reduce recidivism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I review existing literature related to the relationship between recidivism and rehabilitation programs associated with BTL. According to research conducted by the BJS (2012), freed convicts often have high rates of recidivism. The purpose of this research was to identify whether there is a direct correlation between recidivism and reentry program participation. Recidivism was the dependent variable in this research, and the independent variables were the programs provided by the organization, with GST used as the lens of exploration. The major chapter sections are comprised of factors associated with why an offender may recidivate, criminal justice reform, cost-benefit analysis, and preventative systems that address the needs of offenders.

As a special form of crime, recidivism is one of the most serious social problems facing contemporary societies. Reducing recidivism remains not only an indicator of the effectiveness of structures that have target groups of prisoners or former prisoners but is also an indicator of community health. To support the criminally sanctioned persons, with the predilection of those released from prison, it is necessary to build an institutional framework to support the former prisoner towards a positive change. Restorative justice supports that rehabilitation should shift from the attitude of all support should be given to the offender, towards one of active and concrete preparation of a life away from crime. It should also include the active involvement of the community and institutions with the role of crime control (Toader, 2021).

In a study for the U.S. Department of Justice, Kaeble and Cowhig (2016) estimated that the total correctional population in the United States was 6,613,500, with a decline since 2010. The United States Department of Justice announced in 2010 that the total correctional population was 7,154,70000 (as cited in West & Sabol, 2010). Individuals in prison, and those under community supervision, such as probation and parole, constitute the total correctional population. I reviewed current research on the causes of incarceration to ascertain why the correctional population remains large in Texas. This chapter focuses on several areas that correlate to the importance of programs such as BTL. GST is discussed as well as cost-benefit analysis as it relates to the financial impact of BTL on budgets of state and federal governments. Prisoner Assessment Tool Targeting Estimated Risk and Needs (PATTERN) will be explored. PATTERN is a system used to evaluate the needs of offenders that is aimed at addressing preventative measures to help avoid recidivism. Moreover, no contest, the cash bail system, and employment barriers are also explored in this chapter.

Merton's (1957) anomie theory discussed why crime rates in lower social classes are higher than those in upper social classes via a series of hypotheses that poverty, conditions, and weak-mindedness cause deviant behavior. The theory of anomie is consistent with opportunities and social structures that affect rates of criminal deviance (Merton, 1957). Merton's anomie theory ties into other theories; however, they do not explain why patterns of behaviors tie into authentic possessions that lead individuals to achieve culturally accepted goals (Merton, 1957).

Releases from federal and state prisons decreased during 2020 (down 58,400 or almost 10% from 2019), but at a lower rate than the decrease in admissions (BJS, 2021). Therefore, each day offenders are attempting to successfully reintegrate back into their communities. The BJS conducted several studies on offenders during the 1980s and reported that recidivism rates, defined as rearrest within 3 years, are 43% for felony probationers and 62% for parolees (as cited in Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013).

Literature Search Strategy

Databases such as Proquest through the Walden University library were used to search relevant topics such as recidivism rates, common repeated crimes, and previously researched factors and their correlation to recidivism. A significant amount of data was obtained from BTL's website and annual reports. A quantitative approach was chosen as opposed to a qualitative method because there are data that show the correlation between recidivism and specific rehabilitation programs in prisons. Through this research, I seek to influence those legislatures and those in the judiciary sector to make it a part of their agenda to call for criminal justice reform.

Theoretical Framework

The GST (Agnew, 1992) informed the theoretical framework for this study. This theory supports the notion that there are specific pressures in life that contribute to recidivism. Agnew described four characteristics of strains that are most likely to lead to crime: (a) strains are seen as unjust, (b) strains are seen as high in magnitude, (c) strains are associated with low social control, and (d) strains create some pressure or incentive to engage in criminal coping. GST argues that these strains or stressors increase the

likelihood of negative emotions like anger and frustration. For instance, poverty can be seen as a strain or stressor. These emotions create pressure for corrective action, and restorative justice is one possible response (Agnew, 1992).

Rehabilitation has been a topic across the correctional systems and as a subject of correction beginning largely around 1970. The rehabilitation movement should go back to the word rehabilitation's beginnings, focusing at least as much on efforts to erase and reduce ex-prisoner stigma as it does on therapy and change (Maruna, 2011). This objective of rehabilitation is predicated on the belief that persons may be changed and return to a life free of crime. In the last 4 decades, the positive theme of rehabilitation programs has waned (Huebner, 2009). This theme has been given special attention as the movement towards criminal justice reform continues. Mental health, drug addiction, and educational services are all part of the rehabilitation process. Specialized programs for women, sex offenders, and parolees have also been established. In the judicial system, rehabilitation has also been implemented (Huebner, 2009).

Merton's five adaptations to strain were retained, but Agnew improved on Merton's theory by offering a justification for why people choose one adaptation over another (Agnew, 1992). Various theories have been used in research surrounding recidivism. For instance, the life course theory has been used to support the examination of differences in recidivism among individuals based on demographic variables (Elder et al., 2003). The life course theory's central premise is that observers may comprehend people's lives by looking at their structural, social, and cultural surroundings. The life course of an individual is a series of socially determined events and roles that the

individual plays throughout time. The connection between the two theories is predicated on what stressors an individual may be consistently exposed to overtime. GST essentially looks at the strains or stressors that may cause individuals to commit a crime, for example, trying to escape poverty with little to no education. Rehabilitation programs equip offenders with skills and information that may alleviate the strains or stressors in life (Elder et al., 2003).

BTL

Although restorative justice has emerged internationally as a viable response to harm caused by crime, initiatives have been used primarily, if not exclusively, as a front-end diversionary option reserved for nonviolent property crimes and minor assaults. BTL is a manualized prerelease ecumenical faith-based 12-week in-prison program that is built on the restorative justice model. BTL graduates have an appreciatively lower recidivism rate than the general population of released inmates. A partial cost-benefit analysis based on 3-year recidivism rates indicated that BTL might prove to be a valuable approach for the criminal justice system in terms of reducing recidivism (BTL, 2021).

According to Nugent et al., 2001, restorative justice programs in the United States have been seen as useful in terms of handling nonviolent property crimes and minor assaults and have many iterations. Victim-offender mediation programs, sometimes referred to as victim offender reconciliation programs, are limited to the victim and either juvenile or adult offender and their immediate family members. Family group conferencing involves the victim, offender, and family, friends, and key supporters of both parties who decide the resolution of a criminal or delinquent act. Diversionary

programs are the most widely used and empirically substantiated form of restorative justice. Victim-offender mediation participants reoffended at a rate 32% lower than nonparticipants (Nugent et al., 2001).

Cost-Benefit Analysis

BTL is a nonprofit organization, with the mission of connecting communities to prisons in order to reduce recidivism and, as a result, crime in Texas (Sage, 2004). The group has two objectives: (a) to minimize recidivism among program graduates, and (b) to aid victim volunteers and offenders in their recovery journey (BTL, 2021). These objectives are met for victims by providing a safe environment in which they can interact with offenders on a regular and meaningful basis, feel their deepest pain and find often-elusive healing, learn about the impact of restorative justice, and feel empowered to turn a traumatic experience into a positive outreach (BTL, 2021).

These objectives are met for offenders by creating a secure environment where they may realize the consequences of their actions, feel their deepest humiliation, embrace their guilt, accept responsibility for their crimes, learn ways to avoid reoffending, and have a change of heart (Sage, 2004, p. 28). The objectives for accomplishing the BTL goals reflect restorative justice theory. Again, central features of restorative justice include a definition of crime as a violation of one person by another; direct involvement of participants; recognition of victim rights and offender responsibility/accountability; holistic understanding of the offender; removal of the stigma of crime through restorative action; possibilities for repentance and forgiveness; focus on problem-solving, dialogue, negotiation, restitution, and repairing social injury;

and community facilitation of the restorative process. Although the spiritual mission of BTL "is to minister to victims and prisoners to show them the transforming power of God's love and forgiveness" (Sage, 2004, p. 28), the program stipulates that "evangelizing, proselytizing and preaching are not part of the mission of Bridges to Life" (Sage, 2004, p. 28). Rather, according to BTL's mission statement they strive to ensure that people of all faiths or no faith feel completely comfortable expressing their feelings in the group. Expressions of personal faith, therefore, must be made as "I" statements. BTL's goals and objectives are achieved through a 12-week intensive program that sends victim volunteers inside prisons to meet with prerelease criminals face-to-face in small, guided groups for 2 hours weekly. Victims recount the narrative of their victimization to offenders who have injured others like them, and offenders tell the story of their damaged life and criminal activity, finally admitting to the victims the agony their acts have caused innocent individuals like the victims in the group. Victim panels are used at various points during the program to help offenders understand the victim's perspective and the devastating consequences of their actions. A volunteer community facilitator starts and ends each session, as well as monitoring curriculum adherence, modeling active listening, encouraging participation, and speeding up discussion between victim volunteers and offenders. To guarantee the required security for sharing, all parties agree to abide by a stringent confidentiality standard.

First Step Act

First Step Act, H.R. 5682 is a step in the right direction, but it is not complete criminal justice reform. The Formerly Incarcerated Reenter Society Transformed Safely

Transitioning Every Person Act, often known as the First Step Act, is a bipartisan criminal justice measure that was enacted by the 115th Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump in December 2018. The First Step Act improves federal prisons and sentencing regulations, among other things, to minimize recidivism, reduce the number of federal inmates, and protect public safety. Because of the First Step Act, H.R. 5682, judges are able to award defendants fairer punishments, defendants will not be punished for numerous offenses for a single event, pregnant inmates will not be shackled, and \$75 million will go toward reintegration programs for those who have just been released (First Step Act, H.R. 5682). Reintegration is key in lowering the recidivism rate. A fresh start is more likely when there has been focus added to how a released convict reenters society.

Compassionate release was seldom ever used in the federal criminal court system until the First Step Act. After the Act was passed, the federal judiciary began to weigh requests for compassionate release more heavily. The COVID-19 epidemic created a serious public health emergency in the United States, particularly in jails, which led to an increase in the number of requests for compassionate release. Many federal district courts, although not all, deviated from earlier administrative rules that were in conflict with the First Step Act's legislative text. An uneven patchwork of case law has been produced throughout the federal judiciary as a result of these different levels of discretion (First Step Act, H.R. 5682).

Research has been conducted to examine the various justifications used by district courts to grant or reject requests for compassionate release. It has been contended that

district courts should maintain their considerable authority to decide whether compassionate release is appropriate in light of the goal and legislative intent of the First Step Act (First Step Act, H.R. 5682). The Act also makes the case that any future administration advice on compassionate release should provide judges a lot of latitude in deciding whether to grant it, subject to appellate review (Ferraro, 2021).

PATTERN

One of the provisions and initiatives of the First Step Act is a new risk and needs assessment system called PATTERN. The criminal justice department attempted to make the First Step Act's advantages as broadly available as feasible without jeopardizing predicted accuracy when designing the system. The system is a good first start, and I will work to improve it with more time, consultation, data, and study. The development of PATTERN was a significant advancement for the Department of Justice. The PATTERN assessment tool has a high level of predictive performance and outperforms other risk assessment techniques used in correctional settings in the United States. The PATTERN instrument makes extensive use of dynamic elements, allowing offenders to try to improve their behavior while inside. The predictive performance of PATTERN eliminates bias and attempts to enhance parity across race and ethnic groups. The PATTERN instrument is a single evaluation with a design that aims to assist offenders to reduce their risk over time (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019).

The Bureau Risk and Verification Observation-Recidivism (BRAVO-R) assessment tool, on which PATTERN is based, is used as part of this process as well. The BRAVO-R instrument is a modified version of the existing classification assessment that

the BOP devised in the 1970s and has been updated regularly as part of regular reviews. After receiving sentence documentation from the U.S. Probation Office, staff can use the BRAVO instrument to conduct an initial evaluation at the DSCC. After 7 months in jail, a convict has a reclassification exam, which is repeated every 12 months thereafter (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019).

The initial assessment includes questions on the inmate's detainer (a distinct pending sentence of procedure), the severity of the offense, criminal history, history of escape/attempts, history of violence, voluntary surrender/precommitment, age, drug use, and educational level. These items are included in the reclassification assessment, as well as the proportion of time served, program participation, living skills, prison misconduct type and frequency, and family/community relationships. As a result, the BRAVO instrument includes not only static but also dynamic items that assess whether a prisoner's danger has increased or decreased while incarcerated. Males and females receive the same version of both assessments—initial and reclassification—but the groups are measured using different cut points to account for gender differences in risk. As a result, the risk and needs assessment system is effective. Using data metrics, the expert team developed PATTERN, an ideal risk instrument that specifies a single evaluation with a design that fosters risk reduction behavior (i.e., fewer infractions and increased program participation) over time (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019).

Criminal Justice Reform

Criminal justice reform is like peeling back an onion. Few, know just how to attack it. But with “no bail” theories and other approaches change is imminent and

necessary. Cyclic processes in our systems complicated the recidivism process rather than make it better. Where do we go from here? For instance, expunging records of those who were convicted in states on drug crimes where marijuana has now become legal is a start. And if jobs will not hire you if you have a felony on your record, how do we expect felons to get back on their feet and not resort to crime to make a living? Offenders are thought to act rashly, and genetic research suggests that convicted violent offenders have a proclivity for impulsive behavior. According to one recent study, the proclivity for crime is significantly connected to one's psychological capacity to postpone satisfaction, a skill that appears to be established early in life, (Hylton, 2018). On January 26, 2021, newly elected President Joe Biden wrote an executive order entitled, "Reforming Our Incarceration System to Eliminate the Use of Privately Operated Criminal Detention Facilities." In this order, President Biden sets an initiative to decrease incarceration levels. He declares that we must reduce profit-based incentives to incarcerate by phasing out the Federal Government's reliance on privately operated criminal detention facilities, (EO 14006, 2021).

No Contest

The criminal justice system in the United States has received a great deal of attention in recent decades. The arc of the law should bend in the same direction as the morality of the case; yet evidence suggests that morality bends to meet the suspicions of people who practice law. The unraveling of the puzzle begins along these lines. To begin this journey, a closer look at "no contest" or *nolo contendere* is necessary. The vast majority of criminal defendants never benefit from the constitutional protections

established at trial due to the enormous prevalence of plea agreements. Instead, strict sentencing guidelines that increase the authority of prosecutors during plea-deal discussions impact the experiences of many defendants in our criminal justice system.

When plea agreements are placed before the courts, the judge's attention is given to the defendant's awareness of prospective jail time and penalties rather than her awareness of the potential repercussions of a conviction. These circumstances interact to create a judicial system in which many defendants forego important trial rights without fully understanding the consequences of their decisions. The Supreme Court mandated that a criminal defendant be "fully cognizant of the direct implications" of pleading guilty in *Brady v. United States* in order for it to be valid under the Fifth Amendment due process. This comment has been construed by lower courts to suggest that defendants have a constitutional right to know the immediate, but not collateral, repercussions of their plea. In a recent decision, *United States v. Muhammad*, the Tenth Circuit determined that some consequences, such as trouble obtaining credit, employment, federal financial aid, and Section 8 housing, were collateral, and that a guilty plea could be known and voluntary even if the defendant was unaware of those consequences. Muhammad relied on circuit precedent, but *Padilla v. Kentucky*, a 2010 case in which the Supreme Court ruled that defense counsel had violated the Sixth Amendment by failing to inform his client that a guilty plea would result in automatic deportation, may have called into question the validity of that precedent. The Muhammad court ought to have seized the chance to review Tenth Circuit doctrine on collateral implications in light of *Padilla*, (Criminal Law, 2015.) A defendant might plead guilty, not guilty, or no contest

to the charges. However, as some people seem to believe, winning a case does not imply that you are not guilty. However, some lawyers believe that entering a no-contest plea is akin to admitting to the facts of the case but not guilt. The benefit is that if the defendant does not have a good defense, they will be protected from a trial. I believe that the no-contest plea should be eliminated or that politicians should enact legislation limiting the use of this plea to specific, less serious instances allowing a defendant who is not particularly knowledgeable about the law to submit a plea in which they do not have a broad, clear understanding of the idea and the potential consequences of such a plea agreement is hazardous. The middle ground is a no-win situation because it is too ambiguous. Either a person is guilty of murder, or they are not. Law's technique is doctrinal by default. Erroneous convictions are caused by a variety of issues. Eyewitness misidentification, police-induced false confessions, bad science, jailhouse informant perjury, prosecutorial misconduct, inept defense counsel, and racism are just a few of the reasons (Leo and Gould, 2009). Therefore, no-contest please poses a severe threat on the rate of recidivism.

History of Prison Rehabilitation

Treatment programs that are aimed at minimizing the likelihood of reoffending are largely regarded in the rehabilitation literature as being successful. The rehabilitation model of prisons first appeared in the 1930s and peaked in the 1950s. Qualified staff members were supposed to identify the root of an offender's criminal behavior, prescribe a treatment plan to help the person change, and judge when the person was rehabilitated. The strategy included group therapy, counseling, and behavior modification. These

tactics did not work with all convicts, particularly those convicted of serious crimes; most states did not spend enough money for their correctional institutions to meet these aims; and there were too many convicts for the prison personnel to successfully treat, (Bosma et al., 2016). However, when considering BTL and programs like it, there is a direct correlation of success. Rehabilitation takes time, money, and other resources in order to prove effective.

Phenomenology and the treatment of prisoners were impacted by the rise of humanitarian thought and shifting social mores. Discussion is held over the system's expansion from the northeast to the southern and western states as well as regional differences in system design, regulation, and overall philosophy. In the post-Civil War era, widespread human rights movements gained importance and the reformatory idea gained traction. During the industrial revolution, prison factories grew and the use of convict labor grew. prisoner education projects after that. The condition of prisons in the 1890s is assessed, along with prison administration, living conditions, and discipline. Chain gangs, racism, and brutality are examined in a chapter on the changes in southern prisons. Prisons in the great west developed from the territories' "makeshift penology." new perspectives on rehabilitation and classification, as well as an interest in psychological testing, arose in the twentieth century. Conflict, riots, concern for prisoners' rights, and a search for alternatives to incarceration all appeared in the 1950's and 1960's. Future opportunities are projected, (Mckelvey,1977).

The cost of keeping 2.3 million people in jail in the United States exceeds \$80 billion. Despite these costs, 68 percent of convicts who are released are imprisoned three

years after returning to society, 79 percent within six years, and 83 percent within nine years. Prisoners emerge from their confinement more alienated, traumatized, and lacking in prosocial abilities than when they went in. Failure of jail rehabilitation has obvious causes. Punishment is the prevalent mentality in jails, which psychology has shown in multiple studies to promote fear, wrath, violence, dishonesty, and frequently propensities for depression and suicide. In addition, the majority of inmates have gone through trauma and abuse before being locked up. By perpetuating a sense of dread and insecurity and a suspicion of authority, the punishment-based prison culture serves as retraumatization. This, in turn, fosters animosity and violence, which, after release, exports to the outside world. We provide our observations from more than 8 years of dealing with "violent" inmates in a high security state prison, coupled with supporting research that suggests more productive alternatives. We offer detailed advice on how trauma-informed methods should be implemented to address these issues, which will considerably increase public safety, (Bloom & Bradshaw, 2022).

Cash Bail

Cash bail effectively criminalizes poverty by holding those who cannot pay bail for weeks or even months while they await trial. Cash bail exacerbates judicial inequities that disproportionately impact persons of color and the poor. If they spend even a few days in jail, they risk losing their employment, homes, and possibly custody of their children. Studies have indicated that pre-trial detention increases the chance of re-arrest after release, perpetuating an unending cycle of arrest and imprisonment. Furthermore, the cash bail system frequently results in the incarceration of persons who do not

constitute a danger to the public. Therefore, putting an end to the cash bail system would help in the prevention of recidivism, (Gold & Wright, 2020).

Because of the significant number of defendants who stay jailed pretrial due to a lack of financial resources, cash bail has come under increased criticism. Critics argue that this amounts to a penalty based on poverty rather than criminality. As a result, releasing offenders on their own recognizance (ROR) is becoming a more common policy that cities and states are implementing, (Monaghan et al, 2020). Therefore, research shows that increased re-arrest rates are associated with higher cash bail amounts and longer time spent awaiting release.

With good reason many nations use the United States' bail system as an example of how their own systems should not be run. Interestingly, England, a nation whose bail system shares the same origins as that of the United States, has virtually no cash bail, a commercial bail bond market, or bounty hunters. In addition to virtually lacking monetary bail, the English bail system appears to have fundamentally different purposes from the American one. The English bail system's designers were largely motivated by the goal "to make bail more equitable to the poor," as opposed to the American bail system, which is driven by profit.

It is clear that there are problems with our bail system. The American bail system criminalizes poverty, has a negative impact on innocent people and low-risk offenders, and is economically wasteful. It does neither its intended function of insuring that defendants attend at trial nor does it reflect punishments appropriate for the defendants' offenses. Additionally, America has accepted a for-profit bail bond sector that exploits

the individuals it is meant to assist. The bail system in England and the one in the United States may be compared to further illuminate these concerns in the United States.

Although England's bail system also has Anglo-Saxon roots, it seldom rarely employs cash bail and has opposed the creation of a commercial bail bond sector. It is clear that the United States may benefit from studying the bail system in England, (Feiler, 2022).

Employment Barrier

A criminal record affects 75 million Americans or almost one in every three persons. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, almost 700,000 people are released from jail every year, with 75% of them remaining jobless for a year. SHRM and Koch Industries launched the Getting Talent Back to Work project to eliminate non-inclusive hiring practices after President Donald Trump signed the First Step Act into law in December 2018. Hundreds of individuals and businesses have signed a promise to carefully consider qualified formerly imprisoned people for jobs as a result of SHRM's effort. Employers can use the toolkit to learn about compliance issues, background checks, interviewing and assessment, screening, risk analysis, insurance, negligent hiring, hiring incentives, and comprehending criminal background report language, (Brzozowski, 2019).

Recidivism is the dependent variable in this research and the independent variables were the programs provided by the organization. When researching recidivism, it is important to look at potential causes. Therefore, GST was chosen as part of this research as opposed to other theories. BTL uses the restorative justice method in its

programs. SO, understanding the strains or stressors offenders are faced with might help BTL and other programs like it to better address the needs of their participants.

Domestic Abuse

The BJS of the U.S. Department of Justice compiles statistics on cases of domestic abuse that result in arrest and conviction. In their report, the victims per 1,000 persons are stated. Domestic violence affected 15.6 Whites, 20.3 Blacks, and 18.8 Hispanics per 1,000 individuals in 1994, according to the statistics. However, by 2010, the proportions had decreased to 6.2 Whites, 7.8 Blacks, and 4.1 Hispanics. The number of victims of intimate relationship violence per 1,000 victims decreased generally by 64% between 1994 and 2010. Once more, the BJS statistics only include instances when someone was detained and found guilty.

One research using undergraduate students compared the harshness of sentences given to male offenders found guilty of domestic violence assault to those found guilty of non-domestic violence assault. Over time, surveys have revealed shifts in societal perceptions of domestic violence as a more severe problem and a better knowledge of the behaviors that constitute domestic violence offenses. The objectives of the study were to (a) determine whether public perceptions of the severity of sentencing differ between assault offenses involving domestic and non-domestic violence when they were committed under similar conditions, and (b) determine whether those perceptions persist after adjusting for victimization experiences, personal attitudes, and sociodemographic factors. A poll asking 284 undergraduate students about their opinions about suitable sentence results and length was conducted after they had read vignette scenarios

illustrating domestic and non-domestic violence. Results showed that the alteration of the victim-offender connection was a significant predictor for evaluations of punishment harshness, regardless of participants' punitiveness (and other characteristics).

Notably, as compared to participants who were given the non-domestic violence scenario, the results showed a leniency impact in participants' opinions of domestic violence perpetrators. The results of the study suggested that undergraduate students do not view domestic assault perpetrators as deserving of harsher punishment than those who commit non-domestic assault because they perceive domestic assault to be less serious. The study showed that the claimed movement in public opinions toward considering domestic violence as a major public issue is not aligned with how seriously people see the punishment severity for those who commit domestic abuse. The results underline the need of ongoing community education about domestic abuse and the need for caution when thinking about involving the public in sentencing procedures for domestic violence perpetrators (Hortsman et al, 2021).

Probation and Parole

Officers of probation and parole (PPOs) depart from evidence-based procedures put in place to lower the recidivism rate for adult felons. The outcomes of the risk-need assessment are not followed by PPOs throughout case management, although the reasons for this departure have not been identified by past research. By addressing the criminogenic needs of adult felons, one qualitative phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of PPOs adopting the risk needs responsivity (RNR) paradigm. In Stephenson (2020) conducted a study in which six individuals were interviewed in-depth,

one-on-one, and semi-structured for the study. With regard to PPOs resolving criminogenic demands, the study's findings revealed three key themes: (a) individual-centric variables; (b) organizational-centric factors; and (c) inherent-centric aspects. The findings of the study showed that PPOs favor noncriminogenic requirements above criminogenic ones, notwithstanding their efforts to fulfill criminogenic demands. Community supervision groups effectively applying RNR to have a larger influence on lowering offenders' risk factors is one of the study's implications for social transformation. Additionally, PPOs and society may better understand how they affect recidivism and how people get past labels that obstruct recovery. To meet criminogenic needs, future research should investigate how probation and parole officials, correctional officers, and community stakeholders perceive certain demographic groups, (Stephenson, 2020).

Parole officers serve a critical role for inmates who are reentering society by monitoring the transitional and rehabilitation process post incarceration. Recently, there has been increased concern among correctional professionals regarding addressing economic and management barriers of aging inmates. Elderly offenders require unique resources about their health and housing and parole officers represent the initial contact for this population when providing the assistance; however, little is known about the role parole officers play in the reintegration process for older inmates. Therefore, a study conducted examined the perceptions of 19 parole officers who work with older parolees in a southern state. Through semi-structured, qualitative interviews, they explored parole officers' primary role in the reintegration process to gain better understanding of

demographics, management, and established goals when assisting older parolees. They discovered that if they work closely with their parole officers they tend to be more successful.

An evaluation of data presented on recidivism suggests that while the recidivism rate is decreasing, it does not maximize the potential role of Probation Officers. Also, training along the lines of Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICs) programs can be considered to enhance lower recidivism rates. Lastly, it is recommended that Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) be conducted for evidence-based policy making in the criminal justice system, since RCTs can be useful in assessing the efficacy of probation as a community-based sentencing tool, particularly whether the policy orientation of probation meets the goal of reducing crime.

Cannabis Legalization

According to Schlusser (2021), cannabis legalization and criminal record reform policymaking had a historically unique time in the first half of 2021. Four states passed legislation legalizing marijuana use for recreational purposes between February and April. Along with legalization, four states (New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Virginia) also passed novel changes to their criminal laws, including as the automatic erasure of a wide range of prior marijuana offenses, as well as a number of social equality measures. These new rules help persons with criminal records in a number of ways while also reducing the negative effects the judicial system has had in the past. First, the comprehensive automatic expungement laws in all four states will free many people from the burden of a criminal record while increasing the threshold for marijuana record relief

nationally. Additionally, these states legalized more comprehensive changes to criminal records, which will aid those with a variety of criminal histories in their efforts to reintegrate into society. Finally, by providing tax money and economic possibilities for legal marijuana to people and communities that are disproportionately impacted by criminal law enforcement, these four states particularly addressed racial inequities in marijuana criminalization. The revolutionary criminal reforms implemented this year as part of marijuana legalization are summarized in this report and are placed in the national perspective by an infographic that goes along with it.

The ACLU research paper, *A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform* (2020), investigates racial inequalities at the national, state, and county levels while providing information on marijuana arrests from 2010 to 2018. The report shows that the racial war on marijuana is far from done, updating their earlier study, *The War on Marijuana in Black and White*, which looked at arrests from 2000 to 2010. Between 2010 and 2018, there were more than six million arrests, and even in states where marijuana is legal, Black people are still more likely than white individuals to be detained for marijuana possession. The report offers a comprehensive road map for ending the War on Marijuana with specific suggestions for governments and law enforcement organizations.

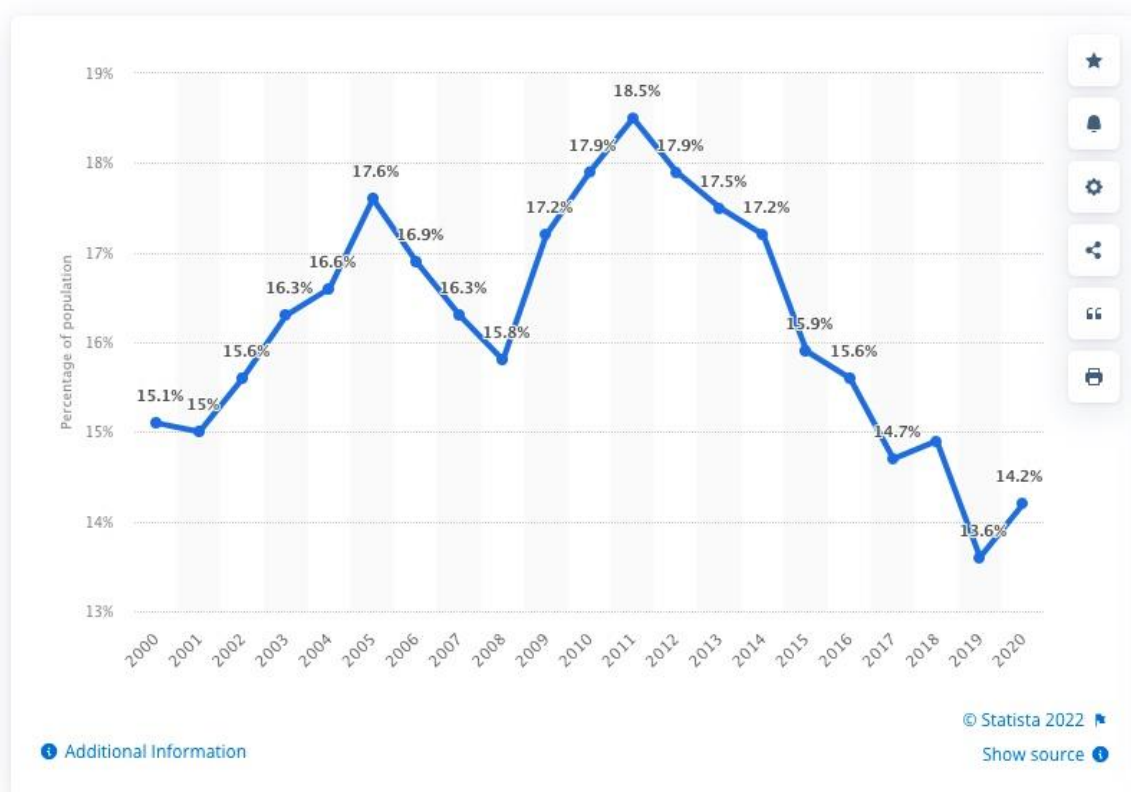
The Texas House approved a bill that would reduce the fine for having small amounts of marijuana and provide those Texans accused of such a misdemeanor the opportunity to have the accusation erased from their records. The law covers possession of up to one ounce. One of numerous initiatives to lessen marijuana possession's criminal

consequences in the state is HB 411. The subject is covered by ten legislations in the Legislature, but only one has emerged from committee. House Bill 99 would replace marijuana possession arrests and license suspensions with a fine-only penalty, (Munce, 2021). Figure 1 below shows the poverty rate in Texas from 2000 to 2020.

Figure 1

Poverty Rate

Poverty rate in Texas from 2000 to 2020



Note. Adapted from *Statista*, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/314935/poverty-rate-in-texas/>.

In 2020, about 14.2% of Texas's population lived below the poverty line. This was an increase from the previous year, when about 13.6 percent of Texas residents lived

below the poverty line. There is no question that poverty influences crime. Although, there are a number of theoretical approaches about this viewpoint, Deller and Deller (2011) that there is a direct correlation between poverty and crime. One aspect of BTL is that they inspire participants to seek education and employment opportunities as soon as they are released from prison. They even encourage participants to take advantage of some of the skills that are offered while they are incarcerated.

Only when the costs of committing the crime are less than the rewards are people willing to do it. As a result, because they stand to benefit more from each crime, those who are poor have a considerably higher likelihood of committing property crime than the general population. Burglary, larceny-theft, auto theft, and arson are all examples of property crimes. There is no doubt that crime is a serious issue that has to be addressed. Zhao (2014) contended that the effectiveness of treatment and disability programs does have an impact on overall crime rates. However, the annual expense of holding a person in a federal prison is from \$20,000 to \$30,000. A jail cell costs between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per year as well. From an economic perspective, we can see that keeping everyone in prison really costs society more money than committing crimes. As a result, balancing becomes the problem. The ultimate objective is to lower crime to a point where the sum of the costs of reducing crime and the costs of the crime that still exists is less than the sum of the costs of crime under the status quo. It is well recognized that reducing poverty or toughening up on punishments once crimes are committed help to reduce crime. It seems to reason that if one or both intervention criteria are raised, crime will go down. However, because a practical solution is sought in a society where resources are

few and cost is constantly taken into account, crime cannot be decreased by merely eliminating all poverty or by imprisoning all offenders. Instead, a cost-effective approach to reducing crime is taken into account, (Zhao et al, 2014).

Summary

Rehabilitation has the expectation of being the most successful way of criminal justice, positively affecting both the offender and the community. It takes a lot of preparation and an understanding of the reasons of criminal conduct, as well as the needs of individual offenders. But this research seeks to take a closer look at the rehabilitation aspect of the criminal justice theory under the lens of GST. The literature in this chapter addressed factors that affect recidivism from aspects of the criminal justice system such as cash bail, employment barrier and no contest. These things can be seen as strains or stressors under GST. This chapter also addressed factors that may assist in reducing recidivism such as the First Step Act and PATTERN. In Chapter 3, I discuss all the components of the research methods and explain the theory selection in detail.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to identify whether there was a direct correlation between recidivism and reentry program participation. The research question was as follows: Is there a correlation between BTL and the recidivism rate in Texas? In this chapter, I explain the strategy I used to examine the recidivism rates of people who completed BTL's program. I evaluated how the recidivism rate changes dependent on participation in BTL's program using secondary data about the paths of jailed individuals. A deeper understanding of the link between BTL involvement and recidivism might aid in the formulation of policies and procedures targeted at reducing the number of individuals imprisoned in Texas.

To answer the study's research question and hypotheses, I gathered and evaluated data from the TDCJ (2020) as well as data from BTL on repeat crimes. In this chapter, the specifics of the chosen approach are addressed. The justification for using a quantitative technique is discussed. I also review data gathering, analysis, validity, and ethical considerations. The chapter finishes with an overview of the study methodology's key points. In this chapter, the methodology is addressed. This includes the population, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, data analysis plan, role of the researcher, and ethical considerations.

Research Design Rationale

The research question that this study explored was as follows: Is there a correlation between BTL and the recidivism rate in Texas? The dependent variable was

recidivism, and the independent variables were the programs provided by the organization. The programs provided by BTL directly involve spirituality, forgiveness, relationship and interaction with others, and empathy. The primary theoretical framework used in this research was the GST. According to GST, strains or stressors enhance the chance of unpleasant emotions, such as anger and irritation. These emotions put pressure on authorities to take remedial action, and crime is one possible reaction (Agnew, 1992). Four characteristics of strains that are most likely to lead to criminality have been discovered by Agnew: (a) Strains are thought to be unjust, (b) strains are thought to be substantial, (c) strains are linked to a lack of social control, and (d) strains create some pressure or incentive to engage in unlawful coping. As with any research, phenomena have a role in the overarching theme.

Quantitative research aims to gain a better understanding of the social world through data collection. Quantitative methods are used by researchers to observe conditions or events that have an impact on people. Quantitative research yields objective data that can be expressed effectively using statistics and numbers. According to Agnew (2001), GST is the focus of examining the effect of strain on crime. GST is the primary theoretical framework for this research. GST argues that strains or stressors increase the likelihood of negative emotions like anger and frustration. As a result, it is worth investigating whether these negative emotions play a factor in criminal behavior as a response.

The phenomenon was the high rate of recidivism. Rehabilitation has been promoted as a primary objective of the penitentiary system. This objective is predicated

on the belief that persons may be rehabilitated and return to a crime-free existence. Rehabilitation was a common subject in penal institutions in the latter part of the 20th century. The positive theme of rehabilitation programs declined in the last 40 years; however, there has been a reemergence of this theme in recent years (Huebner, 2009). Rehabilitation encompasses a wide range of programs, such as mental health, substance addiction treatment, and educational services. Specialty programs for women, sex offenders, and parolees have also been established. Rehabilitation has also been introduced in the court system (Huebner, 2009).

This design choice is consistent with research designs needed to advance knowledge in this discipline as I sought to better understand the contributing factors of recidivism in order to discover ways to reduce it. In this research, I analyzed data provided by the TDCJ showing the number of times an individual committed a felony in Texas between 2014-2015 in conjunction with those who participated in a reentry program, specifically, the BTL program. The overall hypothesis was that there is some correlation between the recidivation rate and those who participate in reentry programs in Texas, specifically, BTL.

Methodology

A quantitative approach was chosen as opposed to a qualitative method because there are data showing the correlation between recidivism and reentry programs, specifically BTL. There is a significant amount of statistical data out in the field, but it still appears that there is not a solution to the enigma of recidivism. The goal of this study is to persuade legislators and members of the judiciary to make criminal justice reform a

priority on their agenda. The data used were received from the statistician department from TDCJ as well as data from BJS. In addition, I used data from BTL that documents the rate of recidivism of those who participate in the program.

Convenience Sampling Method

A convenience sampling method was chosen for this research. Secondary data obtained from BTL, TDCJ, and BJS were analyzed. A convenience sample is a nonprobability sampling method that takes a sample from a group of people who are easy to contact or reach. This sampling method does not necessitate the generation of a simple random sample (Saunders et al., 2012). BTL was chosen as an organization using the restorative justice method as part of its rehabilitation programs. The data are a matter of public record. This method was chosen as BTL works directly with TDJ and maintaining and analyzing data as they pertain to its participants. The data were analyzed using BTL's annual reports from 2019 to 2021. BTL's annual reports provides recidivism data on its participants by year. The sampling frame is inclusionary. The data from 2018 to 2020 included 17,500 participants, which was more than enough participants to show the effectiveness of the program.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

For this study, there was no recruitment required. Data were taken from secondary sources such as BTL and TDCJ. The data are a matter of public record. Data were collected from April 2022 until September 2022. In 2018, 6,439 inmate participants graduated from BTL. In 2019, in 107 jails, juvenile and alternative institutions, 7,004 men and women graduated from the BTL program, reaching the milestone of 50,000

graduates since its inception by the end of 2019. In 2020, due to impacts from COVID-19, 2,978 participants graduated from BTL (BTL, 2021).

Population

With permission from BTL's chief executive officer, I obtained and analyzed information from the 2018, 2019, and 2020 annual data report of the BTL and data collected from the TDCJ. The data from 2018 to 2020 included 17,500 participants. Since 2011, BTL has produced 55,000 graduates. BTL tracks its participants over time to monitor their success in not recidivating. The information from BTL was gathered from the website of the company where it was set free and made available for download. The information from the TDCJ was obtained by the statisticians who work there. All material is available in the public domain; however, permission was granted by BTL's chief executive officer to rely on their data for this research. The data contained no names or other ways of defining anyone to whom the data related, so there was no need for informed consent. I had access to archival information made accessible by BTL and TDCJ and had no contact with the persons to whom the information related.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Recidivism was the dependent variable in this research, and the independent variables were the programs provided by the organization, with GST used as the lens of exploration. The instrumentation used in this quantitative research study was an analysis of secondary data provided by the organization BTL and the TDCJ. The data were used to determine the rate at which inmates recidivate, specifically, and those who have participated in the BTL rehabilitation program. The dependent variable was recidivism,

and I obtained and analyzed information from the 2019, 2020, and 2021 annual data report of the BTL and data collected from the TDCJ. The data from BTL and TDCJ represented the best source of data for this research. BTL produces annual reports that show the trends of their participants as they relate to recidivism. Given their lines of communication with their participants and the close monitoring of these individuals, their data are sufficient. The dependent variable was recidivism, which was measured nominally. I operationalized BTL and its programs as one variable. Recidivism was also operationalized as one variable. Essentially, the data showed the recidivism rate of those who have successfully graduated from the program. All participants must successfully complete each component of the program to be eligible for graduation.

Data Analysis

I analyzed descriptive statistics for the success of reentry services, specifically BTL and recurrence, to provide context and history for the study question and hypotheses. Pre- and post-evaluations were conducted on offenders participating in BTL. Answers from victims and facilitators to a BTL-created anonymous program evaluation are carried out by the executive director and regional coordinator at the conclusion of each jail project. In this study, replies to open-ended questions from the BTL program assessment were thematically analyzed. The Likert scale was used to evaluate these data. Also, I conducted inferential statistical studies to compare the recurrence rates of incarcerated persons according to their involvement in the reentry program. Recidivism was the dependent variable, and BTL's programs were the independent variable. The hypothesis was that BTL's programs have a positive effect on the reduction of recidivism

for its participants. The data were analyzed inferentially using BTL's annual reports. In each report, charts were produced showing the correlation between the program's participants and recidivism rate after graduation.

Role of the Researcher

As the investigator, during data collection and analysis, I acted as a data collector and analyzer. I maintained objectivity and accountability. I analyzed the secondary data from TDCJ and BTL to determine the correlation between BTL's programs and its participants recidivism rates. Any biases were minimized or eliminated simply by allowing the data to speak for itself. As the researcher, I simply showed the data's downward trend of recidivism as it related to those who participated in BTL's program.

Threats to Validity

The validity of the results of this research relied heavily on BTL, TDCJ, and BJS. The data were collected from those sources. To ensure the data were relevant, I used the latest produced annual reports from BTL, from 2019 to 2021. In this study, my duty as a researcher was to act as a neutral facilitator, maintaining neutrality throughout the data gathering and analysis process. There were limited threats to internal validity as the data used were the most current.

The data are stored on a flash drive in encrypted form in a safe location, which will be in my possession for 5 years, at the end of which the data will be irretrievably deleted. I have put in place precautions to ensure that, like electronic calendar reminders, certain protocols are followed over the 5-year cycle.

Ethical Considerations

The secondary data were a matter of public record. There were no significant ethical concerns related to recruitment or information access. All data were anonymous, and no personal information was made available or revealed. No private information was released or used in this research. I adopted the American Psychological Association's (2010) guidelines for research ethics to safeguard the research knowledge obtained by those it applied to. When doing this research, I expected that there would be no risk to the individuals in question. The information examined did not expose anyone to possible harm or discomfort due to the scope of this research. With no identifiable details, I used only secondary data, so there were no or minimal risks to those in question. The IRB approval number is 04-12-22-0753398.

Summary

I identified the research methodology in Chapter 3 that I used in this research. The goal of this quantitative was to compare criminal offenders' recurrence rate through involvement in reentry programs, specifically BTL. The population of this study consisted of people who enrolled in BTL who were incarcerated. The information was retrieved from the annual BTL 2019 report and TDCJ. The independent variables were the programs provided by the organization, while the dependent variable was the rate of recidivism in the state of Texas.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine whether there was a direct correlation between the reduction of recidivism and the effectiveness of reentry programs through BTL in the state of Texas. The research question for this study was as follows: Is there a correlation between BTL and the recidivism rate in Texas? Data collection and analysis took 4 months. The dependent variable was recidivism, and the independent variables were the programs provided by the organization. The hypothesis was that BTL's programs have a positive effect on the reduction of recidivism for its participants. The null hypothesis was that BTL's programs did not have any effect on the reduction of recidivism for the participants. I used secondary data and descriptive statistics to address the research question and hypothesis that guided the study, which is as follows:

Research question: Is there a correlation between BTL and the recidivism rate in Texas?

Hypothesis 1: BTL's programs do have a positive effect on the reduction of recidivism for its participants.

Hypothesis 2: BTL's programs did not have any effect on the reduction of recidivism for its participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

I obtained data from secondary sources collected from BTL and TDCJ. The data were analyzed through SPSS, Version 25. I reflected on the impact of reentry programs, specifically BTL, in the state of Texas on recidivism. The data from recidivism rates of

individuals who participated in the program were compared to different values of the independent variable, which were the programs provided by the organization. The programs provided by BTL directly involve spirituality, forgiveness, relationship and interaction with others, and empathy.

The BTL program has proven to reduce recidivism, which is the rate at which released offenders return to prison. This study showed that offenders need more interpersonal and intrapersonal intervention to be successful in not recidivating, unlike other rehabilitation programs. A 2020 National Police Foundation independent research study compared the recidivism rates of a group of parolees who had taken the BTL program during their incarceration with those who had not. Participation in the BTL program decreased the odds of recidivism by 30%. Most significantly, only 1.4% of BTL parolees were reincarcerated for a violent crime, compared to 3.7% of the non-BTL group. This equates to a 62% reduction in those returning to prison for a violent crime. This reduction in recidivism has significant economic and societal impact, saving taxpayer dollars and making communities safer. The cost to the taxpayer to incarcerate an offender in a Texas prison over the length of the average sentence is approximately \$105,000, and that is without the collateral costs of judicial process prior to incarceration (BTL, 2022). Furthermore, the most recent recidivism studies of BTL graduates compiled with the assistance of the TDCJ (2021) revealed that 84% of BTL graduates do not return to prison within 3 years after release.

Statistical Analysis

Figure 2 shows the revenue breakdown for BTL in 2021. In 2021, BTL received \$1,587,873 in cash donations and other revenue. The fundraising objective is to continue to build a diverse funding structure, without relying on any one source for support. BTL has had a broad base of donors (585 in 2021) who continue to support their mission. With frugal spending and careful planning, they have been able to build a reasonable cash reserve to sustain their program during the year, as more than 50% of their funds arrive in the last quarter of each year (BTL, 2022).

Figure 2

Revenue

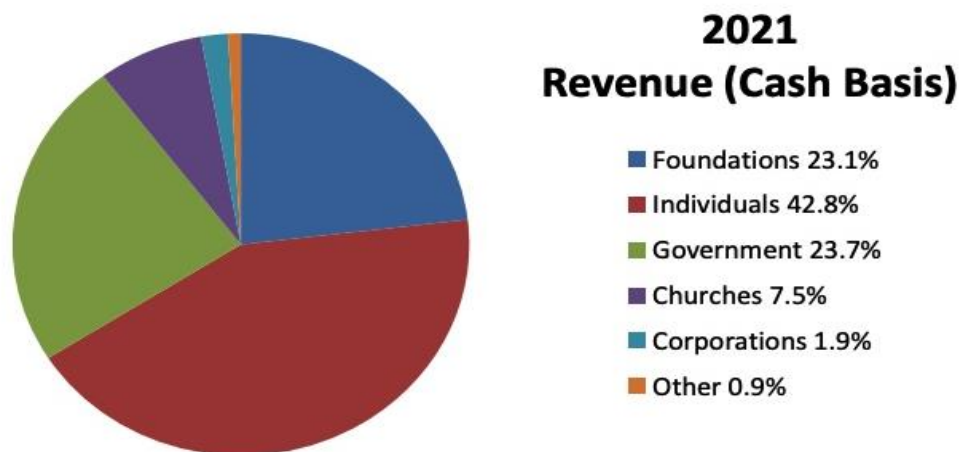
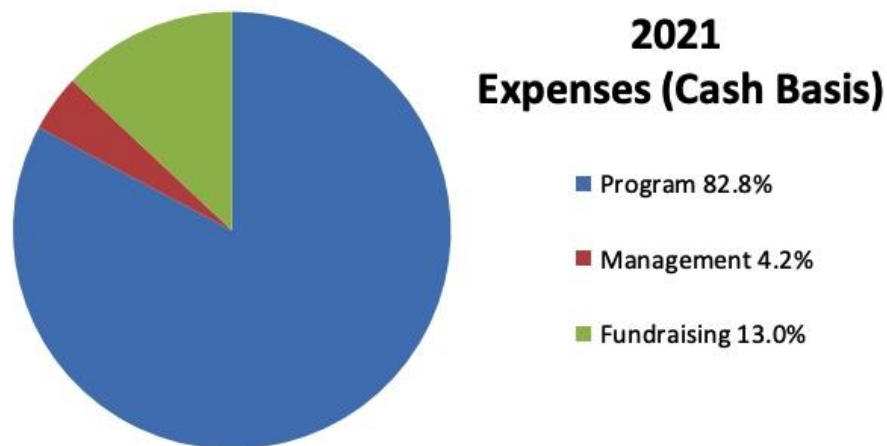


Figure 3 shows the 2021 expenses of BTL. BTL is fiscally responsible. Cash expenses in 2021 totaled \$1,337,379, of which 82.8 cents of every dollar was spent on program services. There is no published information to show how much money was allocated for each specific program within BTL. BTL is a Better Business Bureau

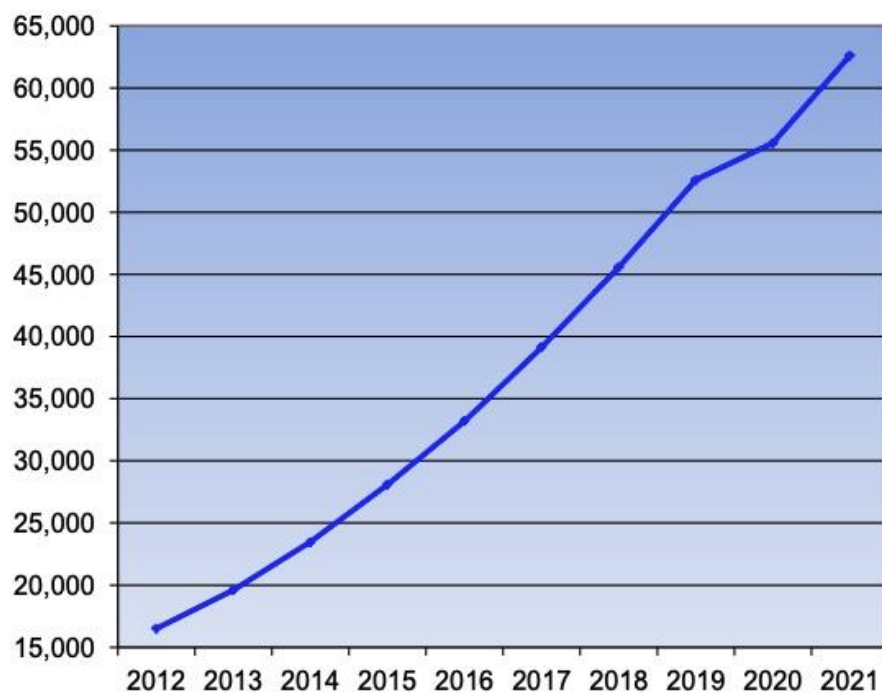
Accredited Charity and a GuideStar Exchange Gold Participant. The agency's IRS 990 and audited financials can be found on the GuideStar profile or by contacting BTL's office. The information presented here shows how funds were transacted but does not show specifically how much money was allocated to each specific component of the organization.

Figure 3

Expenses



As seen in Figure 4, in 2021, 7,047 men and women graduated from the BTL program in 112 prisons and alternative facilities, totaling 62,636 graduates since inception. This demonstrates the momentum and progression of the organization. The data imply that the graduation rate will continue to rise as BTL duplicates its program across the state of Texas.

Figure 4*Graduation Rate From BTL*

Note. From <https://www.bridgestolife.org/annual-report>

Table 1 shows eighty-four percent of participants do not reoffend within the first 3years of release. This data comprises both males and females combined.

Table 1*TDCJ: Recidivism Rate*

Return Rate	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid Return	16	16%	16%	16%
Do not return	84	84%	84%	84%
Total	100	100%	100%	100%

Figure 5 shows the most recent recidivism rate for BTL. Recidivism studies conducted with the assistance of the TDCJ revealed that over 84% of BTL graduates do not return to prison within 3 years after release. Each year, BTL tracks a large and diversified sample group of BTL graduates after they are released from TDCJ prisons. Those who returned were typically involved in nonviolent crimes and technical parole violations.

Figure 5

BTL's Recidivism Rate

Do not return ■
Return ■

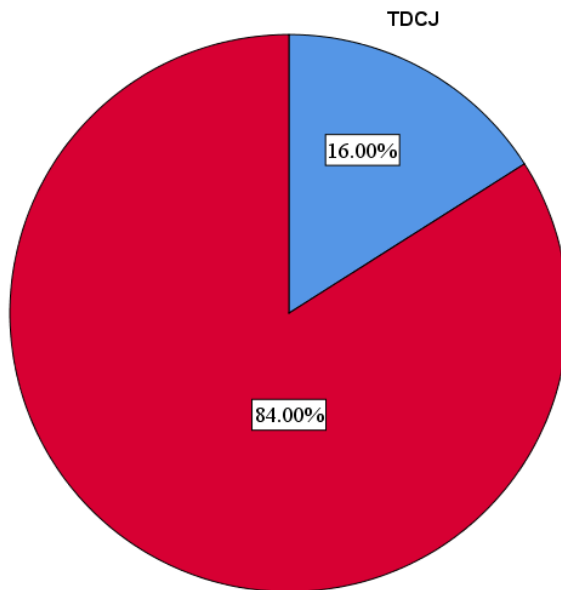
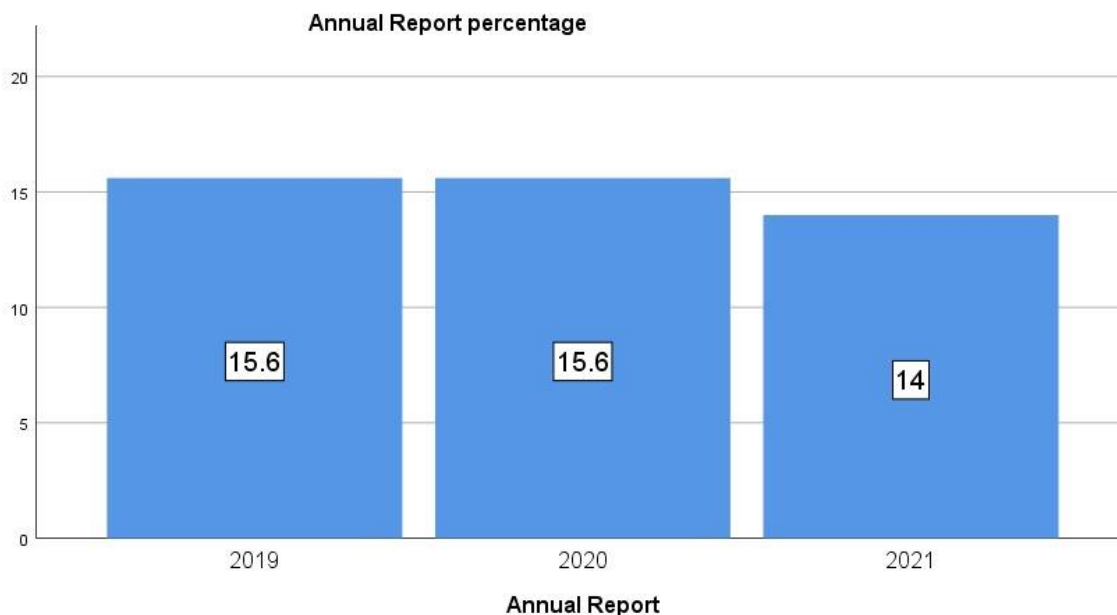


Figure 6 shows that in 2019 and 2020, the recidivism rate of BTL graduates remained low at 15.6%, compared to the national rate of 37%. In 2021, the recidivism rate of BTL graduates remained low at 14%, compared to the national rate of 37% (BTL, 2022).

Figure 6

Annual Recidivism Rate



The latest data produced on those who recidivated after graduating from the program was conducted between 2005 and 2009 (Armour, 2007). One-thousand six-hundred ninety-three prisoners who participated in BTL in 18 different prisons and were released during that timeframe made up the big, diverse sample population. In contrast to the national average of 38 to 40% for this same time period, the recidivism rate for this

group was 18.6%, which was 4.6% higher than the most recent data (with just 2% of offenders returning to jail for committing a violent crime). For this BTL group, the 18.6% recidivism rate was divided into the following categories (BTL, 2022):

- Offenders returning for nonviolent crimes—14.2%
- Offenders returning for minor parole infractions—2.4%
- 2.0% of offenders who committed violent crimes later returned to jail

This indicates that the program has an impact on reducing recidivism as there were no extraneous or intervening variables identified. The low rate of recidivism shows that BTL's programs are effective.

At the end of the program, a 9-item satisfaction survey is conducted. On a 5-point Likert scale, participants are asked to score their degree of satisfaction with four program elements (outstanding, excellent, good, fair, poor). There are four main components: victim impact panels, materials to read before weekly small group sessions, subjects chosen for study, and debate. Participants are prompted to describe what they gained from the program in three open-ended questions. Participants are prompted in two open-ended questions to provide feedback on the program's strengths and weaknesses as well as suggestions for expanding its availability to additional TDCJ facilities. Table 2 shows responses participant ratings of program components.

Table 2*Participant Ratings of Program Components*

<u>Program Component</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Outstanding</u>
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
1. Materials for study prior to weekly small group meetings.					
Offender		.6 (6)	8.7 (75)	34.5 (298)	56.3 (487)
Victim			11.2 (10)	36.0 (32)	52.8 (47)
Facilitator		3.8 (2)	1.9 (1)	51.9 (27)	42.3 (22)
2. Topics chosen for study/discussion.					
Offender		.5 (4)	5.2 (45)	30.1 (260)	64.2 (555)
Victim			10.0 (9)	27.8 (25)	62.2 (56)
Facilitator			2.0 (1)	51.0 (26)	47.1 (24)
3. Victim impact panels.					
Offender	.3 (3)	.8 (7)	4.6 (40)	14.4 (124)	79.8 (688)
Victim		1.1 (1)	10.0 (9)	28.9 (26)	60.0 (54)
Facilitator			15.4 (8)	30.8 (16)	53.8 (28)
4. Small group meetings.					
Offender		.8 (7)	3.0 (26)	16.5 (143)	79.7 (690)
Victim	2.2 (2)	2.2 (2)	7.8 (7)	32.2 (29)	55.6 (50)
Facilitator		11.5(6)	1.9 (1)	21.2 (11)	65.4 (34)

Using a 9-item satisfaction survey, data were gathered. On a five-point Likert scale, participants were asked to score their degree of satisfaction with four program elements (outstanding, excellent, good, fair, poor). There are four main components: victim impact panels; materials to read before weekly small group sessions; subjects chosen for study and debate. Participants are prompted to describe what they gained from the program in three open-ended questions. Participants are prompted in two open-ended questions to provide feedback on the program's strengths and weaknesses as well as suggestions for expanding its availability to additional TDCJ facilities.

Participants were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the various aspects of the program. The ratings are listed in Table 1. 90.8% of offenders, 88.8% of victims, and 94.2% of facilitators gave the study materials for the weekly small group meetings an excellent or outstanding rating. 94.3% of offenders, 90% of victims, and 98% of facilitators regarded the study/discussion topics as excellent or outstanding. 84.6% of facilitators, 88.9% of victims, and 94.2% of offenders assessed victim impact panels as excellent or outstanding. 86.6% of facilitators, 87.8% of victims, and 96.2% of offenders evaluated small group meetings as excellent or outstanding. Although all participants gave all components excellent marks, offenders expressed greater satisfaction with study materials, themes, victim panels, and small group meetings than victims or other offenders. Nearly all offenders evaluated the components as good or outstanding, as evidenced by the fact that the mean offender scores for all components were over 4.50. For all components, the offenders gave the most frequent response, which was 5.00, or exceptional. The majority of victims rated each component as great or outstanding, with

the mean ratings for all components being over 4.00. For all categories, the victims' most frequent reaction was 5.00, or exceptional. The facilitators rated each component as excellent or outstanding on average, with all components having facilitator ratings over 4.30. The themes chosen for study or debate had an average response of 5.00 from the facilitators for the victim impact panels and small group meetings. All participants preferred victim panels and small group discussions over study materials and subjects.

Research Question

Table 3 shows the *p*-value analysis used in this research. The *p*-value is used in hypothesis testing to help support or reject the null hypothesis. The *p*-value is the evidence against the null hypothesis.

Table 3

P-Value Analysis (Correlations)

Add missing heading		Reduction of	BTL's programs
Reduction	of Pearson	recidivism	
recidivism	Correlation	1	.734***
	Sig. (2-tailed) <i>P</i> -		.000
	Value		
	<i>N</i>	100	100
BTL's programs	Pearson	.734***	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed) <i>P</i> -	.000	
	Value		
	<i>N</i>	100	100

Note. ***. Correlation is significant at the 0.000 level (2-tailed).

The research question for this study is: Is there a correlation between BTL and the recidivism rate in Texas? The p -value is less than 0.05 so it can be concluded that BTL's programs have a positive effect on the reduction of recidivism for its participants. The BTL's programs have strong positive correlation with reduction of recidivism for its participants. In order to graduate from BTL, participants must complete all programs within the organization. The curriculum includes: crime & conflict, faith, exploratory store, responsibility, accountability, confession, repentance, restitution, and reflection. Positive strong correlation means that when BTL's programs are enforced it increases the reduction of recidivism for its participants. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Summary

In summary, the goal of this study is to see if there is a direct link between recidivism decrease and the success of re-entry programs like BTL in Texas. Is there a link between BTL and recidivism in Texas? That is the research topic for this study. The dependent variable is recidivism, whereas the independent variables were the programs provided by the organization. Again, all participants must complete all components or programs under within the organization in order to be eligible for graduation.

According to the data, BTL's programs have a significant impact on the reduction of recidivism for its participants. As a result, it can be inferred and concluded that restorative justice programs such as BTL can be influential in criminal justice reform and rehabilitation. The hypothesis was proven to be true. The results of this study can have a positive impact on social change. Restorative justice programs such as BTL show

offenders ways in which to deal with life in ways despite the implications of GST. In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of the results, suggest how the findings could be applied and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter, I summarize the results and conclusions of the study. The chapter begins with a summary of the study and its results, which provided a basis for my interpretation of the findings, recommendations for practice and research, and the implications of the results for a professional practice and social change. In this study, I sought to examine whether there was a direct correlation between the BTL program and the recidivism rate in Texas. Through this research, I identified statistically significant results to the research question posed in this study. My findings expanded the evidence that restorative justice programs like BTL do help to reduce recidivism. BTL graduates' recidivism rate remained low in 2021, at 14%, compared to a national rate of 37% (BTL, 2022). There were no extraneous or intervening factors discovered, indicating that the treatment had an effect in reducing recidivism. These results are reaffirming in that intensive restorative justice programs positively affect the reduction of recidivism.

Summary of the Study

Restorative justice programs seek to rehabilitate offenders and bring healing to victims of crime. The goal of this study was to determine if there is a direct link between recidivism decrease and the success of reentry programs like BTL in Texas. The dependent variable was recidivism, whereas the independent variables were the organization's programs. It was hypothesized that BTL's programs had a favorable impact on the decrease of recidivism among its participants. Secondary data from BTL and TDCJ were used to make this assessment. The GST lent itself to this study in that there

are ways to circumvent areas that can help to prevent people from offending or reoffending. The intervention provided by programs such as BTL showed that offenders can get the help they need to prevent reoffending.

Summary of the Findings

I developed one research question and a corresponding hypothesis to guide this study. In the following subsections, I summarize the results by the research question and discuss the corresponding findings. Overall, the findings suggested that restorative justice programs like BTL have a significant impact on the reduction of recidivism in Texas. The implication is that programs like BTL can have an impact on reducing recidivism nationwide.

Facilitation of the healing process for victims is achieved through the dialogue between victim volunteers and offenders. Although there is no way to directly measure the benefit to victims, they often comment that they receive more benefit from the BTL process than do the offenders. As part of the survey responses obtained in reference to table 2, one victim volunteer shared,

Not only do the victims get to share their story and begin healing, they also know that they may make an impact, by putting a face to the crime, on the lives of people who may otherwise go out and commit those same crimes again (Armour, 2017).

Perhaps the single best indicator that healing is taking place for victim volunteers is the fact that, since its inception in 2000, more than 400 victim volunteers have participated in

the BTL program, and more than 125 participate every year—many in more than one project a year (BTL, 2022).

Research Question

The research question for this study was as follows: Is there a correlation between BTL and the recidivism rate in Texas?

Limitations of Study

Because the research was based on secondary data, one limitation was that the research design did not include a random sampling, specifically with the data obtained from BTL. Another limitation was that I looked at the impact of BTL to inmates in Texas and did not take into account any other similar programs or states.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and my interpretation of the findings in respect to the current literature, I have a few recommendations. The recommendations are divided into two categories: (a) practical recommendations for policymakers and other stakeholders interested in prison reform and recidivism, and (b) research recommendations for other researchers interested in the topic of recidivism and its relationship to the variable of restorative justice programs.

Practical Recommendations

Restorative justice is important to social change and criminal justice reform. Direct participation of participants; recognition of victim rights and offender responsibility/accountability; holistic understanding of the offender; removal of the stigma of crime through restorative action; opportunities for repentance and forgiveness;

a focus on problem-solving, dialogue, negotiation, restitution, and repairing social injury; and community facilitation of the restorative process are all important features of restorative justice (Zernova, 2007). Restorative justice that takes a more personal approach is proven to be more effective in reducing recidivism based on this research.

Research Recommendations

The primary theoretical framework used in this research was the GST. The results expanded the application of this theory through an exploration of the association between recidivism and the variable of the restorative justice program of BTL. I recommend that future researchers continue to build upon my findings to expand the application of this theory in areas reflecting multiple contexts.

I recommend, therefore, that future researchers consider the study of emotional intelligence and how it might play a role in the restorative justice process. Emotional intelligence involves knowing how emotions combine, link to situations, and the likely time course of an emotion. Emotion management involves knowing which responses will be most effective for regulating one's own and other's emotions in a given situation, (MacCann et al., 2020). Taking into consideration how emotion management might drive or effect decision making might prove pivotal in understanding of recidivism.

Moral reconnection therapy (MRT) is a research angle that can be researched in correlation with recidivism. A cognitive-behavioral technique called moral reconnection therapy lowers the probability of criminal recidivism (Armstrong, 2003). Although MRT is often used in correctional settings, its efficacy in lowering recidivism among people involved in the judicial system in noncorrectional contexts is unclear because there are no

randomized controlled studies of MRT. If patients receive at least a minimal dosage of the intervention, MRT may have some advantages in lowering the probability of recidivism. Future studies to evaluate the efficacy of MRT for other groups and settings may be necessary given that these findings are specific to individuals receiving residential mental health care (Armstrong, 2003). Trials examining an altered MRT that includes a motivational element and/or makes use of collaborations with the criminal justice system may also serve to improve patient participation and hence boost efficacy. Alternately, the sector should consider additional strategies for treating individuals who are at risk of recidivism (Blonigen et al, 2022).

Bibliotherapy is another angle that can be researched in correlation to recidivism. Bibliotherapy, a therapeutic approach that uses literature to support good mental health, is a versatile and cost-effective treatment option often adapted or used to supplement other types of therapy (Rottenberg, 2022). Nonconventional therapy approaches and group work have been developed in counseling literature. Many case studies have investigated the application of group therapy and bibliotherapy as cutting-edge therapeutic approaches. Through collaborative learning, introspective learning, and perspective-taking in interpersonal connections, this intervention improves intrapersonal intelligence. This approach should be studied in the future as a method to help offenders reenter society and reduce the likelihood of offender's inclination to recidivate (Rawls et al., 2020).

Social Change Implications

I conducted this study with the goal of filling an identified gap in existing literature regarding whether restorative justice programs like BTL and recidivism differentiated the trajectories of individuals. The results of this study add to the body of knowledge in the field of criminal justice about how restorative justice programs and recidivism interact. The results may help in the development and improvement of tools for anticipating and combating crime and recidivism. This can happen through improving on the current general knowledge of the relationships between recidivism and elements like restorative justice as well as ongoing initiatives for criminal justice reform.

The results of this study imply that the tools offered by restorative justice initiatives like BTL can assist in identifying a vulnerable population—those who are at risk of recidivism. Legislative and judicial authorities can discover that paying for these programs help the government save money on prison expenses. By questioning conventional knowledge, a basic grasp of the relationships between recidivism and the variable of restorative justice programs might improve the efficacy of current policies and programs.

Conclusion

Previous researchers have used demographic variables, such as age, gender, and race to assess the recidivism risk of individuals. For instance, Mohahan and Skeem (2016) found age to be a risk factor, concluding that younger people were more likely to recidivate than older people. With the aim of addressing a vacuum in the existing body of knowledge, I conducted this study to see whether a factor like restorative justice affected

people's recidivism trajectories. The results of this study indicated that taking part in a restorative justice program significantly increases the likelihood that recidivism can be reduced. The development of new laws, regulations, and procedures that will lessen recidivism can be influenced by this greater understanding of the subject.

The findings of this study contribute to social change by extending the criminal justice literature on the relationship between recidivism and restorative justice programs such as BTL. Individuals are ultimately responsible for their own actions, but society and policymakers can share that responsibility by ensuring viable resources are available to all, regardless of previous circumstances. Facilitators and practitioners in the criminal justice field can use the results of this study to create additional tools with the aim of reducing recidivism. The implications for positive social change reveal that a restorative justice approach can help both the offender and the victim. In other words, both parties are positively affected in ways that lead them to become better members of society.

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