3-21-2025

Probation Officer Perspectives of Rehabilitation Programs in the Federal Bureau of Prisons

Brandon Christopher Harper
Walden University

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Brandon Christopher Harper

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Tony Gaskew, Committee Chairperson,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Daniel Jones, Committee Member,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

Probation Officer Perspectives of Rehabilitative Programs in the Federal Bureau of Prisons

by

Brandon Christopher Harper

MS, Nova Southeastern University, 2012

BS, Bethune Cookman University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

May 2025

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand the federal probation officer's perspective of rehabilitation programs in the federal bureau of prisons. The following research question provided a guide: What are federal probation officers' perspectives regarding the success of rehabilitation programs offered in the federal bureau of prisons? Semi structured interviews were conducted with 10 employees of a federal probation office located in the southern United States. Interviews were conducted using Zoom and audio-recorded and transcribed to text files for thematic analysis. The main findings in this study included the need to tailor programs for prisoners to support their success. More funding is needed to reform prison rehabilitation programs, which will require the development of a task force using a bottom-up approach to inform policymakers. The task force should include federal probation officers, businesses, and community organizations to ensure collaboration throughout the reform process to gain the commitment of policymakers to reform. Recommendations are made for this effort, including suggestions for further research to build more consensus around this rehabilitation program reform effort. Rehabilitation program reform and additional funding may contribute to positive social change by providing a solid foundation to reduce recidivism and strengthen American society by ensuring prisoners, once released, are productive members of society.

Probation Officer Perspectives of Rehabilitative Programs in the Federal Bureau of Prisons

by

Brandon Christopher Harper

MS, Nova Southeastern University, 2012

BS, Bethune Cookman University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

May 2025

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family; thank you for your unwavering love and support throughout my life.

Acknowledgments

Words cannot express my sincere gratitude and appreciation. I give thanks to my heavenly father and lord and personal savior Jesus Christ, for the ongoing grace and fortitude provided to me through this academic pursuit. Thank you for allowing the Holy Spirit to provide me with comfort, guidance, and purpose during this academic exercise. My family, you have been my support, counselors, and inspiration; thank you for your active listening skills, re-enforcement, disapproval, reflections, summarizations, and compassion. I am forever appreciative of the sacrifices you made, so I could excel in my journey, and your unconditional love. I am forever grateful and indebted to you.

Special thanks to Dr. Tony Gaskew, my chair. Your knowledge, zeal, passion, and commitment to positive change is unmatched; it is infectious and motivates those around you to want and do better. You are awesome! Dr. Daniel Jones, my committee member, thank you for your scholastic knowledge and words of encouragement. To my mentors, thank you for your guidance throughout the research, writing, revisions, and providing constructive feedback and encouragement.

Lastly, I must recognize, as well, my friends, cohort members, professors, and colleagues who advised, assisted, and supported my dissertation journey. Thank you for challenging me to become more engaged in the rehabilitation and recidivism process. Furthermore, providing me the opportunity to mentor, educate, and impact the lives of those in need.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Currently, 158, 203 offenders remain incarcerated in the Federal Bureau of Prisons in the United States (BOP, 2023; Bureau of Prisons, Population Statics, 2023). High incarceration rates persist despite the offering of some rehabilitation programs offered in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, as these programs are designed for the purpose of preparing offenders to re-integrate into society, aid in their rehabilitation journey, and become productive citizens of the community (Gill and Wilson, 2017). To date, however, these programs have not been as successful as intended. According to the United States Department of Justice Bureau Statics (2023), as of October 2023, approximately 43% of offenders recidivate within three years of release from the Federal BOP.

Among all the challenges that the modern-day justice system in the United States faces, recidivism consistently serves as one of the most significant, and persistent, issues (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018). Recidivism, which occurs when a previously incarcerated individual is reincarcerated for a new offense, is associated with a significant number of negative effects for the nation, including substantial social, economic, and political costs (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Moreover, recidivism has been widely linked to prison overcrowding and other serious, persistent issues in the American justice system. Furthermore, the issue of recidivism is especially acute when considering the fact, the United States presently features one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, especially in comparison with other nations that feature advanced economies and relatively free societies (Robson & McCartan, 2016). As a result, numerous scholars have dedicated attention to the problem of recidivism, with an emphasis on varied factors that

underline chronic recidivism and strategies for helping to reduce the prevalence of recidivism (Taxman & Smith, 2021). Unfortunately, in spite of the growing body of literature regarding these concerns, significant gaps in scholarship, and corresponding application in policymaking, remain.

Background

Currently, the issue with the high recidivism rate in the BOP is the lack of funding in rehabilitation programs (Dahl & Mogstad, 2020). This absence of funding results in a minimum of vocational programs offered at facilities contingent upon their risk levels – minimal, low, medium, and high-risk camps – and understanding the risk, needs, and response of the person (Dahl & Mogstad, 2020). These factors contribute to lack of success in their rehabilitation process and recidivism rate within three years of release from prison.

The absence of success is problematic since one of the central objectives of prison reform in the United States is to reduce recidivism, or the rate at which offenders are reincarcerated (Canady, 2023). Recidivism has become an especially acute concern when evaluating incarceration trends across the United States and Europe since the 1980s. While incarceration rates in Europe have nearly doubled, incarceration rates in the United States have tripled (Dahl & Mogstad, 2020). In a bid to reduce recidivism rates, prisons have implemented varied rehabilitative programs, which are designed to help reintegrate previous offenders into society and encourage them to live a life free of crime (Casey, 2019). A wide variety of different rehabilitation programs exist in the prison system, including drug rehabilitation, cognitive-behavioral therapy, job skills development, and

other programs that help provide inmates with other paths post prison (Chamberlian, 2015).

Problem Statement

In 2016, the Federal BOP released data regarding 43,000 offenders had been placed on federal community supervision: Of these 43,000 offenders, nearly a quarter, or 23%, were sentenced to probation while over three-quarters, or 77% were sentenced to supervised release (Markman et al., 2016). In total, 43% of federal probationers were rearrested within 3 years and 35% were rearrested within 5 years (Markman et al., 2016). These statistics are even more striking when considering federal-level offenders tended to have fewer priors of violence or heinous offenses: The federal probationer had 5.6 average arrests for violent and heinous offenses (Markman et al., 2016). Nonetheless, despite having fewer priors, federal probationers still experienced recidivism at elevated rates. Furthermore, an additional study was conducted by the United States Sentencing Commission (USSC) regarding federal prisoners released in 2020, which involved data for 32,135 different federal prisoners. As detailed by the USSC (2022), "the results of this study, examining federal offenders released in 2015, are almost identical to the findings established in prior Commission research examining federal offenders released in 2005, 2010, and 2015, p. 2." In essence, the rate of recidivism for federal prisoners remains just as elevated now as it did in previous years, suggesting clear deficiencies in current rehabilitation programs (Chamberlian, 2015).

While incarceration rates across federal prisons have slightly declined since 2016, "there is no evidence that recidivism rates have improved" (Mears et al., 2016, p.83). Therefore, it is evident that the United States will continue to use incarceration as a

primary sanction for criminal behavior at a much higher rate relative to other Western countries (Visher & Eason, 2021). As argued by Monroe, "few nations – and no democracies – punish lawbreakers as energetically as the United States (qtd in Enns, 2016, p. 1). As a natural result of such energetic punishment, the nation features a remarkably high incarceration rate, which has been associated with myriad problems. These problems are further amplified by the fact that crime rates have, overall, been on the decline for the past 20 years, yet the United States has continued "[incarcerating] a historically and comparatively large segment of the population" (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018, p. 1153), suggesting a greater intensification of incarceration amongst select members of the population, in particular former inmates who are prone to repeat recidivism for varied reasons (Lewis, 2020; Loeffler & Nagin, 2022).

The expansive range of problems associated with perpetual imprisonment and recidivism have been well-documented in scholarship. First and foremost, imprisonment rates in the United States have directly correlated with public health challenges, including "profoundly harmful effects on physical and mental health after release" (Wildeman & Wang, 2017, p. 1464). Massoglia and Remster (2019) noted that these health ailments include mortality, infectious disease health functioning, and other chronic conditions. Furthermore, not only are prison inmates themselves impacted by health challenges, but the mental and physical health of their families and loved ones are also negatively impacted when they are incarcerated (Wildeman et al., 2018; Wildeman & Wang, 2017). In addition, another major problem associated with perpetual imprisonment and recidivism includes the disproportionate incarceration of individuals from underserved communities. Moreover, these problems are further reflected in comparative evaluations

of the United States with other liberal nations. As declared by Wildeman et al. (2018), "mass incarceration has increased both intra-country inequality in child health in the United States and inter-country inequality in child health between the United States and other developed democracies, p.146."

As a result, varied policymakers continue to push for continued prison reform, of which rehabilitation programs play a central role. The main promise of rehabilitation programs is their ability to reduce the rate of recidivism, which underlies many challenges, from prison overcrowding on a microlevel scale to persistent, systemic inequalities on a macrolevel scale. Some studies have revealed the promise of rehabilitation programs, especially from the inmate perspective. For instance, Gill and Wilson (2017) determined that rehabilitation programs tailored to individual needs have a higher chance of bringing about lasting change in an inmate's life. On the other hand, Berghuis (2018) conducted a thorough literature review regarding "reentry programs" and adult male offender recidivism rates, ultimately finding "mixed results of secondary outcomes of reintegration, p.4655." of former male inmates in the general population. At the same time, the mixed results suggest an opportunity for further research regarding varied reentry programs, including rehabilitation programs, given the absence of current scholarly consensus.

Moreover, the central importance of rehabilitation programs becomes even clearer when reflecting upon the fact that other factors have not demonstrated a clear correlation with a reduction in recidivism. For instance, Zapryanova (2020) determined that the amount of time served in prison does not appear to have an impact on overall reoffending rates, though it was hypothesized the amount of time may impact recidivism.

Furthermore, the degree of the role that rehabilitation programs may play is somewhat obscured by the deficiencies in literature regarding a key stakeholder in this context: probation officers. While fairly substantial research is available regarding prison rehabilitation programs, very limited research is available regarding federal probation officers' perspectives of rehabilitation programs.

This major limitation in research comprises the second key aspect of the problem statement guiding the dissertation. As probation officers are indisputable stakeholders in a prison rehabilitation program, they are in a position to offer valuable insight into what works and what does not work in rehabilitation programs. Their perspective is more valuable when considering that other scholars have recently admitted that "the mechanisms through which incarceration may lead to successful rehabilitation remain largely unknown" (Arbour et al., 2021, p. 56). In other words, while researchers may generally surmise that effective rehabilitation programs can have a favorable impact on recidivism rates, much detail remains missing. This dissertation theorizes that the inadequacy of detail may be attributed to inadequate stakeholder reputation in scholarship, especially when reflecting on the underutilized perspectives of probation officers (Casey, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to better understand the federal probation officer perspective of rehabilitation programs in the federal BOP. In doing so, I provide a detailed understanding of different perspectives regarding the diversity of federal prison rehabilitation programs while simultaneously providing a greater voice for probation officers in scholarship. I aimed to explore the complex connections between

rehabilitation programs and recidivism rates specific to a federal setting, an exploration that was amplified by obtaining detailed insights from federal probation officers, whose knowledge and experience have generally been underappreciated in scholarship.

Research Question (RQ)

RQ: What are federal probation officers 'perspective regarding the success of rehabilitation programs offered in the Federal Bureau of Prisons?

Theoretical Framework

The primary theory underpinning this study was risk-needs-responsivity theory. According to Lutz et al. (2022), this theory may be defined as one that not only focuses on the risk of recidivism, but also on the varied needs of individuals, which in turn contribute to either preventing or provoking criminal behavior. Furthermore, the model is also valuable for assessing an individual's capacity for responding favorably to varied intervention programs, such as rehabilitation programs in prison (Fritzon et al., 2021). As observed by Zubairu (2023), the model "emphasizes assessing and treating inmates according to their ability and risk of re-offending" (p. 177), which in turn would provide greater insight into rehabilitation programs that achieve this outcome.

Furthermore, this theory features numerous intersections with the field of criminal justice, especially when accounting for its applications to rehabilitation and prison reform. This intersection is replete throughout scholarship published since 2020. For instance, Gul et al. (2021) highlight the value of risk-needs-responsivity in achieving both legal and theoretical goals regarding prisoners' rehabilitation in society, including effective community readjustment. Moreover, Bäckström et al. (2022) noted that the theory may be used to distinguish amongst low-, middle-, and high-level offenders to

further stratify recidivism predictions. Taxman and Smith (2021) similarly highlight distinctions between offenders based on their assumed risk of reoffending, identifying "low risk" needs and "moderate risk" needs. As a result, risk-needs-responsivity theory has myriad applications closely aligned with the research question guiding the study, and it serves as the most appropriate theoretical framework.

This theoretical framework is particularly suited for this study, which was focused on giving federal probation officers a voice because they possess the knowledge and hands-on experience to understand how to assess prisoners for involvement in a rehabilitation program. Federal probation officers interact with prisoners and have a deeper understanding of what type of rehabilitation programs and efforts will be most effective for individual prisoners to assist them in realizing successful rehabilitation and lowering the risk of recidivism. Federal probation officers work closely with prisoners, enabling them to understand their risks and needs and assess how they will respond to rehabilitation programs. Additionally, federal probation officers' experiences support their ability to understand and convey pertinent information about the level of success of rehabilitation programs.

Nature of the Study

To address the research question, I used a qualitative research methodology. The research question is not hypothesis-driven, as quantitative research questions may oftentimes be instead, the research question is open-ended and exploratory, seeking to collect as much insight as possible into an underexamined area in scholarship (see Jain, 2021). Despite the prolonged dominance of quantitative studies in academic research, qualitative studies have become increasingly recognized in varied fields, including

criminal justice, public policy, economics, education, and any other field that would entail human participation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative studies are especially valuable through offering greater depth and nuance in results, which is oftentimes not available in specific quantitative studies. For instance, the participants in the forthcoming study are likely to relay a broad array of numeric and non-numeric information alike regarding specific situations, individuals, and experiences associated with federal rehabilitation programs and their relative effectiveness. Therefore, exploratory studies are well aligned with qualitative research designs.

Definitions

This study was underpinned by key concepts, each of which relates to the research question and general study purpose. These concepts include the following: *recidivism, rehabilitation, reform, bureau of prison, federal probation officer,* and *re-entry*.

Bureau of Prison (BOP): A community-based facility which provides work, opportunities, and assistance to federal offenders serving sentences for federal offenses (Department of Justice, 2023).

Federal Probation Officer: An individual supervising adult offenders released from the Federal BOP back into the community; to serve community supervision (Abadinsky, 2018).

Recidivism: The continued criminal behavior well after system contact (Caudill & Trulson, 2023). One of the most significant objectives of rehabilitation is to reduce the prevalence of recidivism, another key definition grounding the dissertation focus.

Re-entry: Assisting incarcerated persons with programs tailored to their behavioral needs (treatment, vocational, and education) while serving their prison stint;

and establishing an individualized plan tailored to their needs, to aid the person in living a productive and law-abiding lifestyle following their release (Miller, 2015).

Reform: According to the Department of Justice (2023), prison reform relates to both recidivism and rehabilitation. Specifically, in terms of recidivism, reforms are designed to address the core behavioral issues that result in criminality with the objective of ultimately reducing the likelihood that inmates re-offend, either during incarceration, or after their release (Department of Justice, 2023). In terms of rehabilitation, reforms relate to virtually every aspect of the federal prison system, ranging from an inmate's initial intake to his or her return to the community; these reforms tend to focus on evidence-based rehabilitation strategies (Department of Justice, 2023).

Rehabilitation: A planned correctional intervention that is designed to promote change via internal or social criminogenic factors; the ultimate goal of rehabilitation is to reduce recidivism, and wherever possible, improve other aspects of an offender's life to minimize the chance of recidivism (Negrini et al., 2022).

Assumptions

The study was grounded by varied assumptions. The first, and most important, assumption includes ontological assumptions, which pertain to reality (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I aimed to gather federal probation officers' perspectives, with the understanding that these perspectives will vary significantly. Therefore, a key ontological assumption of this study is that reality is subjective. As a result, different viewpoints regarding rehabilitation programs are unlikely to be perfectly in agreement with one another, though the divergence of perspectives provides additional data of value for crafting theory. Similarly, axiological assumptions of the study include the relativity of

values, in that different individuals hold deeply personal, likely different values (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These values directly influence their perception of rehabilitation programs and the prison system in general.

In addition, the dissertation is also characterized by clear epistemological assumptions, in that the researcher plays a direct role in the research process (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Specifically, I interacted with federal probation officers through conducting interviews, and the raw data collected from the interviews comprises the foundation of the analysis. Methodological assumptions are inductive, rather than deductive, in nature, as theories will not be developed until data is collected, analyzed, and synthesized (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As the resulting data analysis is based upon the qualitative information collected in interviews, the inductive approach is applied in the final chapters.

Scope and Delimitations

I focused on the perspective of probation officers and excluded the perspectives of other related stakeholders, including administrators and prisoners. Therefore, the study was delimited to a singular perspective, which may be beneficial for addressing the gap in scholarship regarding probation officers' perspectives. However, it is also potentially detrimental from a policymaking perspective, in that only one main set of stakeholder's viewpoints is considered.

Furthermore, the scope of the study is also delimited by the emphasis on federal prisons and corresponding federal rehabilitation programs. In general, scholarly literature is replete with studies that focus on state prisons; while federal prisons are discussed, they do not appear in as many peer-reviewed journal articles as state prisons, especially

in terms of recidivism and rehabilitation. This delimitation is especially worthy to consider from a gendered perspective. According to the BOP (2024), women constitute approximately 7% of the 152,000 federal inmates, and they "have comprised a steady proportion of the overall population (p.2)" despite the growth of female populations in prisons in general. As the rate of female incarceration in federal prisons has remained stagnant relative to state prisons, then interviews with exclusively federal probation officers may not fully capture the unique needs and considerations of women in rehabilitation programs.

Therefore, the study was delimited by an incomplete capture of gendered considerations. These gendered considerations are even clearer, given that the BOP (2024) admitted that "women have many different needs than men (p.6)." This admission has been supported in scholarship, as Fritzon et al. (2020) noted that current correctional models across prisons "are disproportionately informed by studies of male offenders," in spite of "disparities between offending pathways based on gender and histories of complex trauma" (p. 294), which in turn may impact their likelihood of recidivism, especially absent an effective rehabilitation program. Therefore, the interviews with federal probation officers are sensitive to this fact, accounting for the elements of rehabilitation programs that may work or not work for female inmates relative to male inmates.

Limitations

Despite its promise, the study is characterized by a few limitations. First and foremost, the study was limited by time and financial constraints. Time limitations directly impact the type of sampling employed for the planned interviews of probation

officers; while purposive sampling is preferable, the reality is that time constraints limited the sampling technique used to convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a commonly used strategy for researchers who need to recruit human participants in a relatively short period of time for a time-intensive qualitative study (Kriska et al., 2013). Furthermore, financial constraints further impact recruitment methods themselves. Researchers with more substantive financial resources may be able to recruit participants via social media platforms or other means, but financial limitations, much like time limitations, impacted the scale of the potential pool from which participants were recruited.

In addition to time and financial constraints, other limitations are associated with this type of study. Qualitative studies may also be hindered by a smaller number of participants (Elkatawneh, 2016). Moreover, another potential limitation is bias, especially when accounting for the array of responses that may emerge from federal probation officers' perspectives. Indeed, bias may skew the results of the study findings, especially as bias comprises an especially high risk in the data analysis of qualitative studies.

Limitations also emerge when considering the nature of the study itself, particularly when accounting for the research methodology and theoretical framework, which are crucial for evaluating the study results. First, the qualitative nature of the study raises issues with external validity, specifically transferability, or the applicability of the results to the findings of other studies in similar contexts. In general, the results for qualitative studies cannot be generalized as readily as the results for quantitative studies (Andrade, 2018). In addition, the theory underpinning the theoretical framework is also associated with some limitations. For instance, risk-need-responsivity theory, applied in a

qualitative study, has been associated with some common limitations, which include the length of time required to gather data and the complexities associated with crafting an objective coding system for evaluating interviewee responses (Elkatawneh, 2016). Other risks associated with the research method included the risk of a smaller sample than intended, especially as participants were recruited through convenience sampling.

These limitations can be addressed with reasonable countermeasures. In terms of transferability, some of the study's findings may still be generalizable, especially if they align with the findings of other scholars in other studies. Moreover, it is important to note that "nonprobability convenience samples are the standard within developmental science" (Jager et al., 2017, p. 13), a standard that may further improve validity concerns. The most important way to improve the external validity of the study is through creating a well-crafting coding system to facilitate thematic analysis of the interviewee responses, which enhances the systemic nature of the data analysis. With regard to bias, the participants' responses cannot be controlled, though my response to the responses can. Specifically, while designing a coding scheme for application to the interview transcripts, a researcher may create a system wherein all responses are evaluated by the same criteria (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Significance

The study offers several potential contributions to criminal justice scholarship. The first contribution addresses a clear gap in scholarship: the perspective of federal probation officers. This perspective is vital for bringing about policy change in the future, as the success of prison reform will be contingent on the degree of active participation from all relevant stakeholders.

The potential to impact policy is a particularly advantageous contribution to this project. The qualitative nature of the research design allowed gathering in-depth detail regarding personal experiences and beliefs of probation officers, which in turn may play a role in how future rehabilitation programs are created and implemented. As probation officers can play a direct role in prisoners' rehabilitation programs, their viewpoints regarding the most effective and least effective elements of such programs would provide invaluable insight into potential resolutions for an ongoing challenge that continues to plague the American judicial system. These viewpoints may also prove to be significant in contributing to broader policymaking efforts.

The potential for policymaking is not unreasonable, especially when evaluating past cases of successful stakeholder intervention. In 2003, the American Psychological Association announced that its practitioners were not only providing vital treatments and services to prisoners, but that they were also contributing to the debate regarding the nature of prison itself, specifically with regards to retribution or rehabilitation (Benson, 2003). Collectively, their efforts have contributed to a substantive body of scientific evidence with regards to political and philosophical implications with regards to the purpose of imprisonment (Benson, 2003). Consequently, with this study, I aimed to initiate positive change through debate, dialogue, and scholarship.

Summary

In summation, I sought to contribute to the broader conversations regarding prison reform, especially as recidivism occupies a central concern in the Federal BOP. This contribution is of integral importance when accounting for the present gaps in scholarship regarding recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform, notably from the perspective of

probation officers. The literature is scarce in terms of the perspectives of federal probation officers, despite the fact that recidivism rates in prison have continued to persist over the last several years. Obtaining greater insight into federal probation officers' perspectives regarding the impacts of rehabilitation programs, including both favorable and unfavorable impacts, sets the stage for making appropriate reforms for purposes of reducing recidivism. The following chapter, Chapter 2, provides greater insight into the present gaps in literature that have informed the research direction of this dissertation, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the methodology to follow.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Recidivism remains a longstanding problem in the American judicial system, despite the efforts of varied federal authorities to address this challenge. In this study, I aimed to better understand the federal probation officer perspective of rehabilitation in the federal BOP and to provide a detailed understanding of different perspectives regarding a diversity of federal prison rehabilitation programs. This study was designed to give probation officers a more significant voice while exploring the complex connections between rehabilitation programs and recidivism rates specific to the federal setting. Varied rehabilitation programs comprise one of the most effective tactics for combating recidivism, as they are designed to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to live a crime-free existence post release. However, as detailed in the subsequent literature review, the absence of key stakeholders' perspectives is a principal problem associated with the effective realization of rehabilitation programs' objectives. Specifically, while a broad swathe of research is dedicated to rehabilitation programs in general, few studies have focused on probation officers' perspectives, despite the integral role they play. Furthermore, even more limited research is available with regards to federal probation officers' perspectives specifically. Therefore, the purpose of the dissertation was to address key gaps in scholarship, which pertain to federal probation officers' perceptions of the relative efficacy, or lack thereof, of existing rehabilitation programs.

The following literature review provides context for the relevance of the problem of absent stakeholders' perspectives, notably the perspectives of probation officers, and

the subsequent purpose of seeking these perspectives in an original qualitative study. These stakeholders can provide valuable insight into their experiences with recidivism and rehabilitation amongst inmates, which in turn may play a valuable role in policymaking for prison reform. The literature review begins with brief insight into the search process, followed by succinct insight into the theoretical foundation. Following this commentary, the literature review provides substantial insight into recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform from a micro-, macro-, and meso-level perspective. Importantly, this scaffolded approach reveals significant research gaps, thereby fully justifying the purpose of the original study's focus.

Literature Search Strategy

An array of different databases and search engines were employed in the literature search. Academic databases include, but are not limited to, the following: JSTOR, EBSCO, ERIC, SSRN, Sage, Wiley, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, Taylor & Francis, and National Institutes of Health (NIH). In addition, meta-databases, such as Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic were also consulted to find doctoral dissertations, graduate theses, and additional peer-reviewed journal articles and other studies. Academic databases served as the primary means of locating peer-reviewed journal articles, as academic databases are distinct from Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic in terms of rigor: Whereas academic databases, such as Wiley, produce source results via expert cataloguing, Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic rely upon indexing and crawling. Furthermore, formal government websites, such as the Department of Justice and Federal BOP, were also consulted to obtain quantitative data and specific insight into different federal rehabilitation programs.

In addition, a variety of key search terms, and combinations of search terms, were also used over the course of the literature search. These terms not only included the three major concepts, namely *recidivism, rehabilitation,* and *reform*, but also ancillary concepts directly related to the key definitions. Search terms included *probation officer, probation, federal prison, federal funding, Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, life skills development, job training, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), narcotics treatment,* and *spillover effects.*

Theoretical Foundation

The primary theory underlying the dissertation was risk need responsivity (RNR) theory, which has influenced the ways in which different risk factors for recidivism are observed, analyzed, and evaluated (Zara & Farrington, 2015). Indeed, the RNR model has been associated with different rehabilitative efforts worldwide. However, the widespread use of the RNR model has also led to a few scholarly challenges, particularly the absence of a shared, coherent definition regarding the RNR model; in essence, there is a "lack of standard definitions of risk and needs categories" (Hanson et al., 2017, p.6

As suggested by the three elements of its name – risk, needs, and response – the RNR model consists of three different principles, each of which is based on each element. The first principle of the RNR model is the *risk principle*, which holds that various criminal behaviors can be reasonably predicted (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Furthermore, the first element of the RNR model holds that the highest risk criminals should be prioritized, in large part due to the risk of harm they pose to themselves and others. The second principle of the RNR model is the *need principle*, which emphasizes

the importance of varied criminogenic needs in both the design and the delivery of different treatments for offenders (Public Safety Canada, 2022). The specific needs will vary by individual, and they may include social, economic, and cognitive needs, amongst others, that need to be fulfilled for maximizing the likelihood of long-term rehabilitation. The third principle, the *responsivity principle*, provides explicit insight into how treatment should be provided to a given offender (Public Safety Canada, 2022).

Therefore, relative to other theoretical models, the RNR model offers strong value for my dissertation. First and foremost, this model has been "well developed" across adult correctional research (Brogan et al., 2015, p. 277), highlighting its clear applicability to this study. As I focused on federal probation officers' perspectives, bearing in mind that federal prisons are designed for adult offenders, the RNR model is appropriate given its well-established use in adult correctional settings. Furthermore, the RNR model has also been praised for "[providing] an overarching structure [upon] which intervention can be focused," which is critical for effectively reducing recidivism rates (Zara & Farrington, 2015, p. 316).

In addition, the RNR model has also been associated with a theoretical framework that stresses rehabilitation, rather than punitive, courses of action in the judicial system (Brogan et al., 2015). Newsome and Cullen (2017) noted that the RNR model is well known for demarcating the shift from "nothing works" to "what works" perspectives in criminal justice, stressing how RNR permits the opportunity for envisioning a different future for an otherwise disenfranchised individual, which may span to an entire community or society (p. 1030). Similarly, Hanson et al. (2017) argued that the RNR model provides an effective "roadmap for effective correctional rehabilitation initiatives,"

specifically by helping a variety of different correctional institutions "to provide the types and dosages of services that are empirically related to reductions in reoffending" (p. 3).

Therefore, the RNR model was a good fit for this dissertation as I focused specifically on the degree to which rehabilitation efforts may reduce recidivism. Other scholars have directly stated that the RNR model is the optimal theoretical framework for evaluating the effects of current rehabilitation programs in federal prisons. For instance, Jonson and Cullen (2011) stated that "effective programs tend to be consistent with the [RNR] model" (p. 517). Therefore, due to its inherent characteristics and explicit applicability to discussions of recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform, it is evident that the RNR model is ideal for evaluating these three "R's."

Literature Review

The following literature review provides the rationale for the selection of the key concepts guiding this dissertation, as outlined in Chapter 1 and the preceding framework sections in Chapter 2. Specifically, I focused on three major concepts: recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform. Each of these concepts is linked to the research question, and the following literature review provides insight into the current knowledge and controversies associated with each. Furthermore, the literature review also reveals major gaps in the current scholarship regarding rehabilitation, recidivism, and reform within the federal prison system, which illustrates the meaningful nature of the dissertation's approach.

Recidivism

One of the greatest challenges plaguing the prison system in the United States today is recidivism (LaCourse et al., 2019). Recidivism represents a significant challenge

for the nation from a micro-, macro-, and meso-level perspective. The micro perspective alludes to the impacts on individuals, who would be the incarcerated individuals in this study and their individual characteristics (Arbour et al, 2023; Baranyi et al., 2022; Blatstein, 2022; Buller et al., 2020; Canady, 2023; Dahl & Mogstad, 2020; Reingle Gonzalez & Connel, 2014; Visner & Eason, 2020; Zgoba et al., 2020). The macro perspective alludes to specific elements of society impacted by recidivism, namely the federal judicial system that is responsible for the management of prison systems. The meso-level perspective emphasizes the impact that recidivism has on society in the United States as a whole, as well as on the global perception of American justice. Collectively, these three different levels of perspectives underscore the importance of prioritizing the reduction of recidivism in research and practice, as well as policymaking. Furthermore, an evaluation of recidivism from three different perspectives provides insight into extant research gaps regarding recidivism. A gap also exists in examining the specific mechanisms that support rehabilitation program effectiveness and the sustainability of interventions (Ahidjo, 2024).

Microperspective

From a microlevel perspective, incarceration tends to have a profoundly negative impact on individuals who are eventually reincarcerated following their release, thereby continuing the trend of recidivism. At the individual level, several different factors may increase the risk of recidivism. Researchers have long evaluated "various barriers to reentry," including unemployment, financial challenges, and mental illness (LaCourse et al.,2018, p.46). As argued by Dahl and Mogstad (2020), "incarceration can also lead to

recidivism and unemployment due to human capital depreciation, exposure to hardened criminals, or societal and workplace stigma (p.49)."

One of the most significant factors is stigma, which many individuals endure upon their exit from prison and reintegration back into society (McNair-Williams, 2019). Following their release from prison, "the title of felon becomes a definite label," wherein "felons are seen as threats," thereby negatively impacting an individual's ability to successfully reintegrate into society (McNair-Williams, 2019, p.15). Overcoming barriers and overcoming stigma are oftentimes stressful and demanding activities, especially if an individual is routinely enduring the negative effects of mental illness or addiction; thus, "individual coping styles could act as a significant predictor of recidivism" (LaCourse et al.,2018, p. 52). These individual coping styles are further exacerbated by the presence of mental illness.

In a study involving a matched sample of 221 different parolees with and without mental illness, Skeem et al. (2014) found that the individuals with mental illness were equally likely to be rearrested relative to their peers without mental illness; however, individuals with mental illness were more likely to return to prison relative to their peers without mental illness. The return to prison is especially amplified by the fact that individuals struggling with mental illness also tended to struggle with other factors strongly associated with recidivism, including antisocial patterns (Skeem et al., 2014).

In addition, the RNR model also accounts for several major and minor risk factors, or criminogenic and non-criminogenic factors, which may help further tailor rehabilitation programs to different individuals. At the microlevel major risk factors include, but are not limited to, the following: antisocial personality patterns, pro-criminal

attitudes, substance abuse, school and work challenges, and family and marital difficulties (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Naturally, each of these microlevel risk factors is expressed through different indicators and is best addressed through specific intervention goals. For instance, antisocial personality patterns may be deduced from an excess of impulsivity and aggression, whereas family and marital problems may be signaled by openly problematic relationships with loved ones (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Given the different individual-level indicators of these risk factors, differences in interventions are also appropriate. For instance, antisocial personality patterns may be best addressed through helping individuals build self-management skills while undergoing anger management; repairing relationships within families may be achieved through programs that stress parenting skills while improving an inmate's capacity for warmth and caring.

Furthermore, the RNR model also identifies several minor, non-criminogenic factors that can lead to recidivism at the micro-level, or individual level. These minor risk factors include, but are not limited to, the following: self-esteem, physical health, major mental disorders, and a vague sense of personal distress (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Much like the major risk factors, minor risk factors at the micro-level are also expressed through different indicators. For instance, a vague sense of personal distress is oftentimes characterized by perpetual anxiety, whereas a major mental disorder is oftentimes characterized by a significant mood disorder, including major, unipolar depression and bipolar manic depression (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Furthermore, these minor risk factors can exacerbate the major risk factors. For instance, an individual with low self-esteem is oftentimes more predisposed towards abuse of drugs, poor performance at

work, or a combination of both major risk factors (Baranyi et al., 2022). Similarly, an individual struggling with the social challenges of autism may also find themselves unwittingly ensnared in a perpetual recidivism cycle, particularly if they suffer from substance abuse as well (Robertson & McGillivray, 2015). Overall, the RNR model deftly reveals the ways in which individuals may suffer from an array of different, unmet needs, thereby offering a clear direction for improved rehabilitation and reform moving forward (p.720)

Macroperspective

While the risk factors for recidivism at an individual, micro-level are pronounced and problematic enough, they become further compounded by risk-factors for recidivism at the macro-level. In this context, the macro-level reflects the perspective of an entire community, or a specific area of the United States in which arrests and recidivism rates are likely to be higher than the national average, as a direct result of unaddressed, macro-level risk factors. Indeed, risk factors at the macro-level oftentimes reinforce risk factors at the micro-level, especially when considering entire communities that feature a disproportionate number of individuals who have been routinely incarcerated. Indeed, researchers have increasingly concluded that individual-level attributes have long been important to understanding recidivism, yet they only represent of the story (Chen & Meyer, 2020). More specifically, the community context to which a recent parolee returns are increasingly viewed as one of the central factors that provides an explanation for rising recidivism (Chen & Meyer, 2020).

Recidivism rates may vary significantly between federal and state prisons, as revealed by data collected from varied federal, state, and local authorities. In general,

recidivism rates for federal prisons have been lower than state prisons, per studies by federal authorities. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (2023), a report from the U.S. Sentencing Commission determined that 34 percent of the inmates who had been released from the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) in 2005 were either rearrested or had their supervision revoked over a three-year period, resulting in a return to federal custody. While this rate is high, it is not as high as the general rate of recidivism for state prison populations (Bureau of Prisons, 2023). In general, the overall recidivism rate for federal facilities is 43 percent, which is lower than the recidivism rate depicted in most studies of state prisoners, assuming the use of similar methodologies and definitions across the studies. Nonetheless, the recidivism rate is still well above the desired level, and it is especially pronounced considering that a reduction in recidivism has not occurred, despite rehabilitative efforts to the contrary.

In addition, the RNR model also provides insight into macro-level factors that increase the risk of recidivism, in particular major risk factors, or criminogenic risk factors. These factors include, but are not limited to, the following: social supports for crime, as well as the absence of prosocial recreational activities (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Social support for crime is oftentimes indicated through an individual's deliberate association with other criminals, which oftentimes involves deliberate isolation from non-criminal peers. Moreover, the absence of prosocial activities is another major risk factor for crime, especially for youth who are devoid of beneficial behavioral outlets; oftentimes, these youth can become de facto career criminals, especially if they participate in gangs or other well-organized, antisocial factions. Even more problematically, social support for crime may actively reinforce micro-level tendencies

towards criminal behavior and perpetual recidivism. For instance, individual pro-criminal attitudes, which include rationalizations for committing crime coupled with a negative attitude towards law enforcement, can be further reinforced by peers who hold the exact same views.

Consequently, recidivism concerns, which have long been evaluated from a micro-level, or individual-level analysis, have become increasingly analyzed from a macro-level, or a community-wide perspective. The reasoning for an excess of attention on individual risk factors may be attributed to cultural and criminological factors. From a cultural perspective, the United States has long been a stalwart proponent of the attribute of individualism, which also extends to its varied rulings and interpretations in the judicial system. Unlike nations that stress collectivism, the longstanding emphasis on individualism in the United States is precisely why several phenomena have been evaluated from an individual, micro-level perspective. Furthermore, this individual perspective is magnified by trends in criminological research, which has long focused on psychological factors that may increase the likelihood of an individual committing crime.

However, as time has progressed and research has become more multifaceted, it is clear that considerations beyond individual-level factors have become important in efforts to reduce recidivism rates. Indeed, one of the most important changes has included the increased focus on sociological theories, rather than psychological theories, in recent studies published in criminology. Indeed, researchers have increasingly focused on sociological explanations of crime in addition to psychological explanations, which underscores the gradual shift from an exclusive micro-level focus to an emphasis on micro-level and macro-level explanations alike. As time progresses, attention may also be

increasingly turned to the meso-level perspective, which is perhaps one of the most critical of all for evaluating long-term factors that have likely contributed to longstanding, elevated rates of recidivism across the United States.

Meso-Perspective

Increasingly, the challenge of recidivism has been magnified by meso-level considerations that have undoubtedly elevated recidivism rates over time. Meso-level challenges refer to challenges that extend well beyond individuals at the micro-level and communities or other groups at the macro-level: Instead, meso-level challenges refer to difficulties that afflict the entirety of society, which in turn tend to have a disproportionate effect on specific communities and individuals at the macro-level and micro-level, respectively. For instance, the COVID pandemic is a clear example of a meso-level challenge, though it disproportionately affected Americans who were already living in underserved, economically insecure communities (Aburto et al., 2022). In much the same way, meso-level challenges associated with recidivism disproportionately affect communities and individuals already vulnerable to criminal lifestyles and corresponding recidivism rates. In essence, meso-level challenges amplify and extend both micro- and macro-level challenges with regards to persistently high recidivism rates. Given the dissertation's focus on federal prisons, it is especially crucial to account for meso-level considerations as well, which naturally occur at the federal level.

Therefore, while micro- and macro-level factors play a significant role in recidivism rates, they do not play the sole role, which is precisely why a meso-level reflection on recidivism is crucial for providing sufficient context for the study. Unsurprisingly, large scale studies that feature substantial participants provide an

especially clear picture of the meso-level challenges with regards to recidivism. In a study of 18,185 prisoners, Reingle Gonzalez and Connell (2014) found that approximately 26 percent had been diagnosed with a mental health problem at some point in their lifetime, with only 18 percent of inmates taking medication upon the time of their admission. Furthermore, over 50 percent of individuals who had been previously medicated for mental health issues did not receive appropriate pharmacotherapy in prison, which further amalgamated the negative impacts of their condition (Reingle Gonzalez & Connell, 2014). The most commonly treated mental ailments in prison were schizophrenia, while other mood disorders, including major depression, were largely ignored (Reingle Gonzalez & Connell, 2014).

In essence, the study reveals a broader, society-wide correlation between the prevalence of mental health challenges and the preponderance of recidivism. This observation is even more acute when considering nationwide closures of mental institutions over the past several decades, which seemingly correlate to the rise of recidivism and general incarceration rates. Moreover, the closure of mental health institutions coincided with federal laws and policies that ultimately led to a substantial increase in incarceration rates. In a full-length academic book, *From Asylum to Prison*, Parsons (2018) exhaustively traces the rise in incarceration rates, across state and federal systems alike, following the steady closure of mental institutions across the United States. As noted by Parsons (2018), incarceration rates across the nation began to steadily increase after 1945, which not only coincided with the end of the Second World War, but also the steady closure of mental institutions across the United States. The exhaustive

findings of Parsons (2018) are echoed by other scholars who have studied the correlation between these two variables,

A meso-level assessment of recidivism also entails the evaluation of major legislative changes and other policies that may have elevated recidivism rates, either unwittingly or deliberately. In this context, one of the most notorious federal level policies associated with elevated recidivism rates emerged during the 1970s: the ostensible "War on Drugs." A signature policy that emerged with the Richard Nixon administration, the federal level "War on Drugs" was designed to counteract the rise in narcotics abuse that emerged dramatically, and exponentially, throughout the Counterculture movement, amongst others, during the 1960s.

However, more than half a century after the "War on Drugs," virtually none of the stated objectives has been met. In some ways, the "War on Drugs" may be less successful now than it was upon its first introduction, especially when accounting for drug overdoses. Indeed, the abuse of drugs remains elevated across the United States, and it has been especially pronounced since the COVID pandemic of 2020. Indeed, the years of 2022 and 2023 have witnessed an elevation in deadly overdoses, primarily from fentanyl. The abuse of drugs is further magnified by the recidivism rates of individuals who abuse drugs, sell drugs, or engage in both activities to continue financing a life characterized by crime and addiction.

The negative effects of the "War on Drugs" are further exacerbated by existing laws and legislation that have further exacerbated incarceration and recidivism rates. Particularly problematic laws include those that appear to have a distinctly racialized motivation. One of the most notorious examples of such laws includes the distinction in

punishment for crack cocaine versus powder cocaine, with the penalties for distribution and possession of the former much higher than the penalties for distribution and possession of the latter.

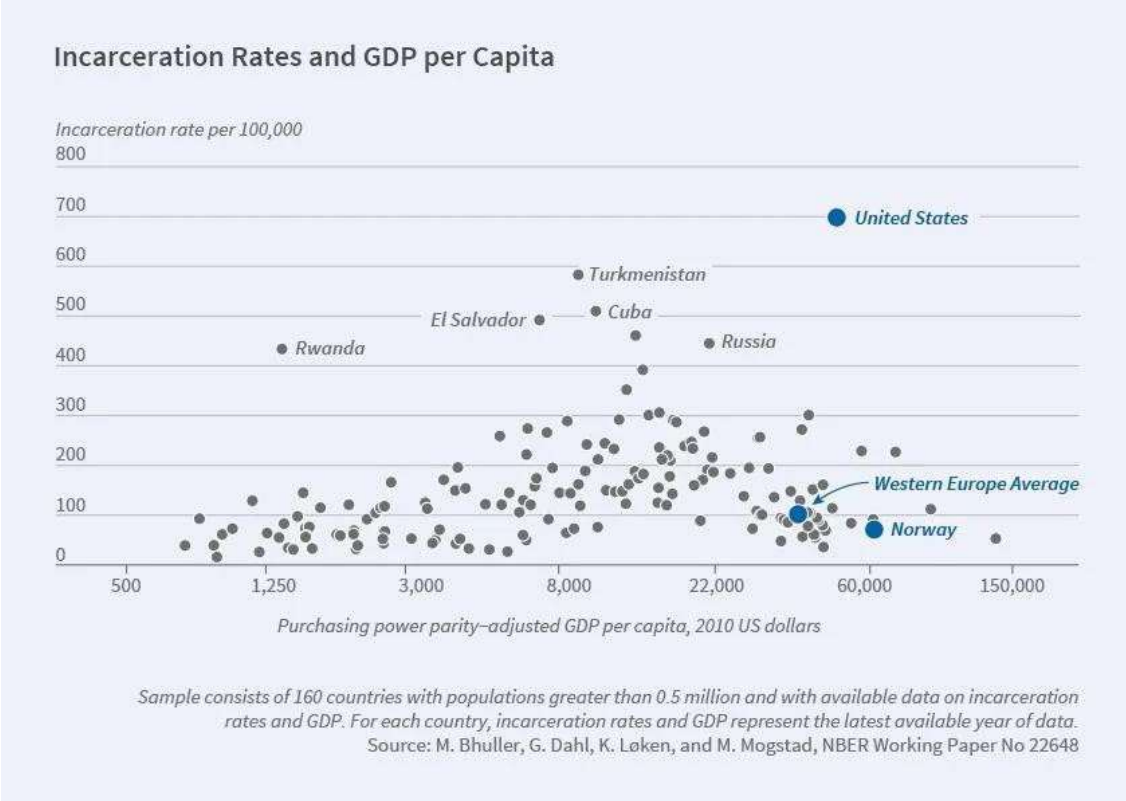
Indeed, the distinction between different federal laws governing the possession and distribution of varying forms of cocaine has been widely correlated to elevations in incarceration and recidivism rates. Moreover, these rates are especially pronounced from a racialized perspective, which in turn leads to another major, meso-level challenge associated with recidivism.

Therefore, a meso-level analysis on recidivism also reveals numerous persistent patterns across the American judicial system, especially from a racialized perspective. One of the most prominent patterns is the persistence of racial inequities, especially in terms of recidivism. As noted by McNair-Williams (2019), the demographic profile of prisoners has shifted from 70 percent white to 70 percent black or Hispanic since the mid-century is concerning, especially as "the patterns of criminal activity for these ethnicities have not greatly altered."

The meso-perspective may be even further broadened to a global perspective on American recidivism rates, which are especially egregious in an advanced nation already notorious for having one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. Indeed, clear evidence of such rampant incarceration is evident in the below visual: Not only is the incarceration rate in the United States well above the average incarceration rate in Western Europe, but it is also well above the incarceration rate of Cuba, Rwanda, and Russia (Dahl & Mogstad, 2020).

Figure 1

Incarceration Rates and GDP per Capita



Note. Dahl, G. B., & Mogstad, M. (2020). The benefits of rehabilitative incarceration. *NBER Reporter*, (1), 18-21. https://www.nber.org/reporter/2020number1/benefits-rehabilitative-incarceration

Research Gaps

Collectively, the studies regarding recidivism at a micro-level, macro-level, and meso-level perspective have revealed explicit insight into several phenomena that have yet to be studied regarding recidivism. One of the most substantial research gaps, which clearly aligns with the research question of the dissertation, is the fact that very limited evidence exists regarding the relative efficacy of a given rehabilitation program in federal

prison. As noted by Jonson and Cullen (2015), while “a wide diversity” of rehabilitation programs exists across the prison system, “only a limited number of rigorous evaluations have been conducted” (p. 517). Furthermore, Jonson and Cullen (2015) also argue that “a sustained effort to evaluate carefully designed programs rigorously is needed” (p. 517). Moreover, the researchers also note that many program effects tend to be “heterogeneous and at times criminogenic” (Jonson & Cullen, 2015, p. 517), further underscoring their complexity and need for revision to successfully combat recidivism.

The reference to heterogeneity also brings to mind additional gaps that scholars have broached with regards to rehabilitation efforts in the federal prison system. For instance, Loeffler and Nagin (2022) argue “that additional work is needed to better understand the heterogeneous effects of incarceration,” alongside “the mechanisms through which incarceration effects, when observed, are generated.” Furthermore, Chen and Meyer (2020) note that various criminologists have generally ignored the possible influence of neighborhoods on the rates of recidivism. Additional research gaps emerge when evaluating recidivism for specific types of crimes. For instance, researchers have noted “the need for additional, long-term studies that use a variety of different measures to assess whether or not sexual recidivism has occurred” (Scurich & John, 2019). In essence, virtually every specific subgroup that can be located within prison could benefit from additional research, in particular original studies.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation, specifically within an institutional facility, serves as a focal point of interest for multiple researchers, especially as rehabilitation has been widely perceived as one of the most important strategies for reducing recidivism rates. Similar to the

literature regarding recidivism, the literature regarding rehabilitation may be broadly divided into micro-, macro-, and meso-level perspectives, using the same definitions for each level. At the micro-level, rehabilitation has provided demonstrable benefits to some individuals, though success was contingent on varied factors. At the macro-level, rehabilitation has been a positive addition to the federal prison system, though its effectiveness and accessibility are subject to shifts in funding priorities. At the meso-level, rehabilitation has been associated with positive effects at the community level, and, with greater focus on rehabilitation in the future, the effects may be felt even more broadly at the national level.

Microperspective

From the micro-level perspective, several individuals serving time in correctional facilities have endured and continue to endure from an array of challenges that preclude their ability to lawfully participate in society. These challenges occur before and during individual incarceration, which is evident from a close analysis of the RNR model. As clearly indicated in the RNR model, different risks are likely to lead to recidivism if they remain unaddressed, which is precisely why individuals must undergo rehabilitation specialized to their needs to maximize the likelihood of their lawful participation in society. Therefore, barring sufficient access to rehabilitation programs, the challenges are likely to continue post-release, thereby amplifying the likelihood of continued criminal activity coupled with a high chance of rearrest and re-institutionalization.

Several challenges are oftentimes directly responsible for an individual's presence within prison in the first place. For instance, Canady (2023) notes that several inmates oftentimes suffer from intellectual disabilities, mental health issues, and substance abuse

challenges, all of which oftentimes contribute to their initial incarceration. Intellectual disabilities may include a lower intelligent quotient (IQ), autism spectrum disorder, or other intellectual differences that are oftentimes best treated by a cognitive psychologist or other specialist with a clear understanding of the science underling a given disability. Indeed, incarcerated individuals are 6.5 times as likely as the general population to report cognitive, or intellectual, disabilities; furthermore, cognitive disabilities are the most frequently reported disabilities amongst prisoners (Takemoto, 2016). This likelihood has also been affirmed by other scholars, with Reingle Gonazlez et al. (2016) noting that "disability prevalence remained substantially higher among prisoners than among the non-institutionalized population" (p. 517). These intellectual disabilities may be addressed through different rehabilitation programs at the federal level, such as the SKILLS program, which focuses on enhancing the general competence of inmates (Blatstein, 2022). However, a major challenge in the Bureau of Prisons is the fact that only two federal facilities provide adequate programs for individuals with cognitive disabilities (Blatstein, 2022), thereby signaling a strong need for the incorporation of greater care for individuals with disabilities likely to lead them towards recidivism, once again.

Mental health issues, on the other hand, may refer to an array of mood disorders, psychotic disorders, and personality disorders. Mood disorders may include bipolar disorder, unipolar major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and other mood disorders that can predispose one towards criminal activities. Psychotic disorders may include schizophrenia and other ailments that destabilize an individual's' perception of reality; these disorders are oftentimes suspected to be rampant amongst homeless

individuals who did not receive adequate mental care, if any. Lastly, personality disorders refer to psychopathy, malignant narcissism, borderline personality disorder, and other antisocial personality disorders, both of which are notoriously characterized by misanthropy and a general aversion to societal cohesion. Of all these challenges, personality disorders likely pose the most significant challenges in designing and implementing effective rehabilitation programs (Larsen et al., 2020).

Mental health issues may be addressed through interventions designed to alleviate the burden of substantial mental duress, and these interventions may be pharmacological and non-pharmacological in nature. Pharmacological interventions include prescription medication, which may be necessary in extreme cases, particularly cases involving schizophrenia. Non-pharmacological interventions include treatments that are not reliant on drugs or other tools utilized to modify individual biochemistry, but rather interventions designed to help individuals think differently and eventually behave differently. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is oftentimes cited as a highly effective intervention for individuals with poor impulse control (Van Dis et al., 2020). For instance, an individual suffering from bipolar disorder may find themselves committing crime during either manic or depressive states, depending on the nature of the crime and the motivation for committing it. In such a situation, CBT would be deeply helpful. Through implementing cognitive behavioral therapy interventions specific to the bipolar individual's needs, the chance of true recovery may be possible. Oftentimes, a blend of both pharmacological and non-pharmacological options is recommended for most individuals. For bipolar disorder, for instance, "medication alone is insufficient" given the different ways in which the mental illness manifests itself (Özdel et al., 2021, S66).

Furthermore, substance abuse and mental challenges have long stood as a major criminogenic risk factor for reincarceration, which is precisely why they are one of the most important challenges to address in individual and group rehabilitation efforts (Baranyi et al., 2022; Zgoba et al., 2020). Left untreated, these challenges are highly likely to predispose an individual to recidivism. Of these major mental health challenges, the most difficult to treat include personality disorders, especially as scholars remain conflicted over the best course of rehabilitation, if any, that may exist for veritable psychopaths. Indeed, some scholars hold that an antisocial psychopath may never achieve full normalcy with society, especially in extreme cases that involve mass killings and other seriously violent crimes (de Ruiter et al., 2015). However, cases involving mass killings are likely to lead to lifetime imprisonment without the possibility of parole, thereby precluding the need to be concerned about recidivism. On the other hand, some scholars have argued that individuals with personality disorders may respond well to rehabilitation, especially personality disorders that have a substantial mood component, such as borderline personality disorder (Rudge et al., 2017).

In addition to the challenges that preceded incarceration, other challenges directly related to an individual's experience of imprisonment oftentimes arise. As noted by Vishner and Eason (2021), "being sentenced to incarceration can be traumatic, leading to mental health disorders and difficulty rejoining society." In addition, individuals also endure loneliness, a loss of self-worth, high levels of uncertainty and fear, and debilitating idleness for long periods of time (Vishner & Eason, 2021). In general, "the most extensive needs" tend to be "concentrated in a small proportion of inmates," which is another reason why a diversity of effective rehabilitation programs is needed in the

federal prison system (Chamberlain, 2012). On the positive side, a smaller proportion of inmates with severe issues might result in more realistic treatment options, especially if one-on-one treatment ever becomes feasible at scale in extreme cases (Biswas, 2017).

Therefore, it is crucial for rehabilitation programs to account for a broad array of challenges that can preclude individuals from being susceptible to recidivism. For starters, numerous instances of recidivism involve individuals addicted to narcotics and committing crimes to fuel their addictions. Thus, drug treatment programs are oftentimes crucial. Moreover, the behavioral and cognitive issues that led to drug abuse in the first place may also be addressed. Indeed, "low self-control can be modified," which "[highlights] the relevance of targeting constructs," including impulsivity and risk taking in varied offender rehabilitation programs (Casey, 2019). A specific type of cognitive behavioral therapy to assist with improving self-control is social cognitive theory (SCT), which serves to "integrate cognitive and behavioral models of human self-development, adaptation, and change" (Casey, 2019)

Programs that emphasize skills development are also widely considered critical for preparing individuals for post-release employment opportunities. For instance, researchers have argued strongly in favor of rehabilitation programs that stress "the importance of enabling skills for employment, the so-called soft skills" (Bain, 2019).

Gill and Wilson (2016) also argue in favor of rehabilitation programs that are holistic in nature, as well as tailored to individual needs. While such a program would undoubtedly be more expensive and time-consuming, it may also be one of the most effective rehabilitation programs in the long run. Indeed, the scholars note that a major challenge associated with effective rehabilitation programs now includes "the lack of

specificity in matching services to individuals' unique risk and need profiles" (Gill & Wilson, 2016, p. 336).

Macroperspective

The creation of effective rehabilitation programs designed to address a diverse array of past struggles and future needs is crucial for rectifying significant issues and growing inequities within the federal justice system. In general, favorable changes at the micro-level eventually translate to favorable changes at a greater scale, or at the macro-level perspective from the entire prison, or federal prison system from an even broader, meso-level perspective. However, federal policy at the meso-level may not be transformed until sufficient evidence is derived from the macro-level regarding the validity of a particular program or array of programs that has a demonstrably proven impact on recidivism rates.

As detailed in the previous section, the risk of recidivism is especially pronounced for individuals who suffer from substance abuse disorders, mental disorders, or a combination of both, which is oftentimes the case.

While substance abuse disorders are challenging enough to rehabilitate in prison, especially if one has a long-term history of addiction, mental disorders may be even more difficult to resolve via rehabilitation. Indeed, substance use disorders are difficult to treat, yet the negative effects of these disorders remain at bay, provided that an individual stays clean, using the tools they acquired in an optimally well-designed rehabilitation program in a given federal prison. Mental disorders, however, that largely originate from genetics are likely to afflict a prisoner for life, in particular psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia, or major personality disorders, such as borderline personality disorder or

antisocial personality disorder. Indeed, a major challenge in effectively treating individuals for mental disorders in federal prisons is due to the "lack of treatment continuity is partially attributable to screening procedures that do not result in treatment by a medical professional in prison" (Reingle Gonzalez & Connell, 2014, p. 2328).

In addition, prisons that feature "programs addressing self-development, violent behavior, or education and employment deficiencies exhibit strong effects" in terms of improving the potential of numerous prisoners following their release into society (Arbour et al., 2023). These programs may be further emphasized with the establishment of "cognitive behavioral communities," including "immersive cognitive communities," which can help individuals collectively improve their behavioral responses to various stressors and other thought patterns that can lead to criminal activity in the first place (Vishner & Eason, 2021). Therefore, "time spent in prison with a focus on rehabilitation can be preventive for a large segment of the criminal population" (Buller et al., 2020), which is precisely why various rehabilitation programs have been supported by substantial investments.

Thus, researchers have also noted the importance of varied stakeholders in ensuring the effective implementation of rehabilitation programs from a macro-perspective. For instance, an "understanding of coping can increase the ability of the correctional staff to reduce later recidivism in the community" (LaCourse et al., 2018). In addition to correctional staff, probation officers also play a key role in evaluating the coping skills of prisoners and how they may serve, or not serve, them upon release. However, as the perspective and participation of key stakeholders, namely probation officers, is largely absent in current literature, various rehabilitation programs are

unlikely to be as successful as they could be. Multistakeholder perspectives are some of the most important for crafting high-stakes programs, such as rehabilitation, which is why obtaining the insights of probation officers is crucial.

Meso-Perspective

Rehabilitation programs not only impact the individual prisoner and prison system at the micro- and macro-level, respectively, but also at the meso-level perspective of society in its entirety. Prison does not exist in a societal vacuum, even if prisoners are temporarily separated from society. The prisoners still leave behind the aftermath of their crimes, which include direct impacts on their families. These impacts are known as spillover effects, which comprise another key consideration when crafting prison rehabilitation programs. Indeed, "capturing spillover effects is also important for evaluating criminal justice policy and designing effective prison systems," with effective prison systems including effective rehabilitation programs that reduce the chance of recidivism (Dahl & Mogstad, 2020).

One of the most important spillover effects pertains to the impact that incarceration may have on the children of an imprisoned individual: "Children in particular could be affected either positively or negatively by having a parent incarcerated" (Dahl & Mogstad, 2020). For this reason, rehabilitation programs should also emphasize the ways in which prisoners can heal their relationships with their family members. These programs could include parenting classes, family engagement workshops, anger management courses, and other opportunities for individuals to maximize their chances of minimizing the negative spillover effects (Vishner & Eason, 2021).

Furthermore, effectively implemented rehabilitation programs may have a favorable impact on society, especially if the programs eventually translate into broader improvements at the community- and city-level.

Research Gaps

In a sense, far more articles and other literature have been primarily published on rehabilitation relative to recidivism and reform, in large part due to the critical importance of rehabilitation for both recidivism reductions and reform considerations. In general, evidence for rehabilitation or other reentry programs remains "limited" (Gill & Wilson, 2016). This limitation is problematic when considering the "expensive" nature of rehabilitation programs: Iowa, for instance, spent $24M on rehabilitation programs from 2009 to 2011, though determining whether or not these programs ultimately reduce recidivism was complicated by the prisoners' ability to select into program participation and corresponding completion (Lee, 2017).

Reform

Reform is directly related to both rehabilitation and recidivism, in that the implementation of effective prison reform is crucial for reducing recidivism rates through effective rehabilitation programs. As with recidivism and rehabilitation, reform may also be evaluated from the micro-, macro-, and meso-level perspective. Reform efforts may begin at the individual, or micro-level, especially when accounting for the opportunity to implement changes on a small scale to begin, such as with a pilot program in a single facility. At the macro-level, the entire federal system may be impacted through substantial reform, which is oftentimes mandated legislatively. At the meso-level, lasting

reform will bring about long-term societal benefits, as well as improvement of the United States' global reputation in terms of its prison system.

Microperspective

The initial stages of prison reform may well be driven from the micro-level approach, or the "bottom up," versus "top down," strategies. In other words, sometimes the best programs may start with direct feedback from the inmate participants themselves, in particular inmates who demonstrated the ability to successfully reintegrate into law-abiding society upon their release.

In a study that evaluated 1,084 hours of ethnographic data, Viglione (2018) found that probation staff supervision practices routinely "misaligned with research evidence on RNR and associated agency trainings" (p. 655). In essence, different probation officers seldom utilized RNR assessments for informing supervision decisions, creating case plans, and making referrals to varied treatment programs, underscoring the numerous ways in which prisoners fall through the cracks of ill-designed rehabilitation programs.

Macroperspective

In contrast to the micro-perspective, the macro-perspective on reform underscores the ways in which the entire federal prison system itself may change, depending upon major policy shifts regarding incarceration and rehabilitation. Indeed, a major challenge associated with effective prison reform is securing adequate funding, which is oftentimes largely unavailable, precluding the ability of prisons to implement effective rehabilitation programs (Duwe, 2017). Therefore, achieving adequate funding is critical for bringing about effective prison reform across the United States.

Different researchers have argued for different funding designations. For instance, some of asserted the importance of "funding to support the implementation of Cognitive Communities" (Vishner & Eason, 2021). On the other hand, other researchers have stressed the importance of physical activity, noting "the potential social significance of sport and physical activity as vehicles for the limited expression of agency in situations of extreme deprivation or imposing disciplinary regimes" (Norman, 2017). Furthermore, other researchers have noted that "policy change within institutions has to begin at the state level through the departments of corrections" (Vishner & Eason, 2021). In all likelihood, each prisoner could benefit from the best elements of all these programs, though the main drawbacks appear to be funding limitations, implementation limitations, and other challenges that are inherent in the correctional system.

Thus, the macro-perspective also reveals the important role that legislators play in catalyzing genuine prison reform. As noted by Dahl and Mogstad (2020), sharp rises in incarceration, alongside the belief that "nothing works" in terms of rehabilitation, "ensuing policy discussions gradually led to rehabilitation programs playing a subordinate role to policies emphasizing punishment and incapacitation." Thus, of the most important actions that legislators can take is rectifying the inherent inequities in several laws that directly impact the rates of recidivism and the severity of the prison systems. For instance, the War on Drugs in the 1980s focused specifically on crack cocaine, which is largely found in low-income minority communities, even though powder cocaine usage had escalated amongst white Americans of all socioeconomic strata from the 1970s onwards (McNair-Williams, 2019).

Meso-Perspective

Lastly, from a meso-perspective, effective prison reform will bring about long-term benefits for society. First and foremost, meso-level changes are precisely what brought about several challenges endured in the federal Bureau of Prisons today, especially with regards to recidivism. As noted by Gawron (2019), "deinstitutionalization created the cultural, social, and political environment out of which mental health legislation and programming stemmed, underscoring the extent to which top-down federal policy has a profound impact at the macro- and micro-level (p. 87).

Given the challenges that have arisen at the meso-level it is not surprising that various scholars have issued varied recommendations for implementing genuine prison reform. For instance, Vishner and Eason (2021) recommend long-term reforms for ensuring effective rehabilitation and reducing recidivism, such as "[embracing] rehabilitative/restorative community justice models," and "[encouraging] collaboration between corrections agencies and researchers." In addition, other scholars have strongly advocated for blending pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches together. As argued by Özdel et al. (2021), "when the prevalence and inefficacy of drug treatments are considered together, the cruciality of psychosocial interventions in the treatment of the is undeniable" (p. 56).

Moreover, effective prison reform that demonstrates authentic lasting power will ameliorate the United States' negative reputation with regards to its highly incarcerated population. This reputation has worsened considering Europe and other advanced nations' shift towards a rehabilitative, rather than retributive, approach to justice. Per the European Court of Human Rights, "while punishment remains one of the aims of

imprisonment, the emphasis in European penal policy is now on the rehabilitative aim of imprisonment" (qtd in Balafoutas et al., 2020). Relative to other advanced economies, the United States introduced deinstitutionalization quite abruptly, which in turn has placed a disproportionate number of mentally ill individuals in prison. In contrast, the United Kingdom implemented deinstitutionalization far more gradually, in part due to funding issues (Gawron, 2019). Ironically, as a result of the gradual transition away from deinstitutionalization, more mental health cases are handled by the public health system of the United Kingdom, notably through the National Health Services (NHS), rather than the judicial system in the United States, in particular the state-level and federal-level prison system (Gawron, 2019).

Research Gaps

Significant gaps remain in research regarding prison reform, especially as effective reform of the prison system remains fairly elusive. Similar to the research gaps associated with recidivism and rehabilitation, the gaps regarding reform are especially pronounced at the federal level, especially in literature pertaining to criminology, public policy, and other related topics.

First and foremost, one of the most important gaps to resolve includes shared definitions regarding key concepts. Recalling that a major disadvantage of the RNR model includes generally inconsistent definitions for specific categories, it becomes clear that a lack of consensus in scholarship translates to a lack of consensus in potential reform efforts. Specifically, Hanson et al. (2017) argue that "this lack of consensus occurs not just across different instruments, but also across and within jurisdictions that use the same instrument but in different ways" (p. 3). Furthermore, this lack of consensus

negatively affects appropriate reform efforts, as it is more difficult to gather and utilize evidence from different studies when all the studies have employed different definitions for varied risks, needs, and other major elements omnipresent in federal prison reform efforts.

In addition to gaps that are evident between research and practice, more specific reform considerations for federal prisons remain elusive in scholarship, thereby presenting abundant opportunities for substantial scholarly dialogue. For example, Gill and Wilson (2016) argue that future scholars should emphasize the "[optimization of] the combination and tailoring of services and integrating perceived need with actuarial assessments" (p. 336), which is effectively advocating for a more customized, individualized approach to different treatment paths in prison.

Summary

In sum, the literature review provides extensive insight into recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform from multiple perspectives at the micro-, macro-, and meso-levels. This insight provides a valuable foundation for the study and context for the relevance of its arguments to current discussions regarding the American judicial system. First, the literature review's revelation of the interdependence of recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform strongly justifies the selected theoretical framework. Secondly, the literature review also highlighted what is well known amongst researchers and stakeholders about each of these concepts, individually and interdependently. Thirdly, the diversity of insights detailed in the literature review also highlights a number of research areas that remain underdeveloped, in spite of their application to resolving real-world challenges. These research gaps provide the context for the study's use value in ongoing

debates regarding the United States justice system, as well as appropriate transitional material for segueing to the study's methodology in Chapter 3.

Several studies related to recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform emphasized the lived experiences of prisoners, their families, law enforcement officers, and other key stakeholders, which justifies the selection of phenomenology as the primary theoretical framework in the study. Specifically, the phenomenological theoretical framework designed to support the overall purpose and sequential argument of the theoretical framework drives the use value of the study, in that lived experiences may well play a key role in shaping policymaking.

In addition to supporting the study's theoretical framework, the literature review also revealed widely known knowledge about recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform, at an individual and interdependent level. In general, recidivism is widely associated with negative effects, from the micro- to meso-level, especially when accounting for the ways in which it compounds inequities and other injustices. Furthermore, rehabilitation is theoretically accepted as one of the most important solutions for reducing recidivism. However, it has also been challenging to implement effective rehabilitation programs in practice, especially when accounting for unpredictable or significant changes in federal funding priorities.

Overall, researchers seem to generally agree that rehabilitation serves as an effective linchpin with regards to recidivism and reform. Rehabilitation is vital for reducing recidivism, as reductions in recidivism have been widely correlated with rehabilitation programs. Furthermore, the success of a given reform effort is dependent upon the successful creation and implementation of vital rehabilitation programs. The

introduction of these programs will maximize the likelihood of investments in prison reform resulting in a favorable return on investment (ROI), especially if the programs account for multiple stakeholder perspectives.

Lastly, and most importantly, the literature review directly or indirectly revealed insight into what has been less studied with regards to recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform. These research gaps justify the purpose and primary argument of the study, which centers on the importance of probation officers' perspectives on the linchpin of rehabilitation. Multiple stakeholder perspectives are vital for crafting informed, effective policy, and the dearth of probation officers' perspectives undoubtedly contributes to the ongoing challenges associated with recidivism rates in the judicial system. Moreover, the intersectional discussion of recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform is further nuanced through the inclusion of probation officers' perspectives, which align with the phenomenological elements of the study.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and research design the study employs to obtain the perspectives of probation officers, whose viewpoints remain deeply underrepresented in current academic scholarship. This deficiency is even more pronounced at the federal level, as relatively few studies are dedicated exclusively to the federal prison system, at least in comparison to various state- and international-focused studies. Framed from a phenomenological theoretical lens, the forthcoming study provides original insight into the perspectives of probation officers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

While researchers have dedicated ample attention to the reduction of recidivism and the role that rehabilitation programs may play in this reduction, substantial gaps remain in scholarship, especially when accounting for post-COVID developments across the American judicial system. In general, the effective reform of the American prison system has evaded policymakers, and, per some perspectives, the prison system has declined in quality over the past several years, in large part due to ongoing challenges associated with recidivism and related developments, including prison overcrowding. Moreover, substantial gaps persist in research, which further invite additional research opportunities on critically important issues associated with the judicial system in the United States. In this study, I provide an in-depth understanding of different perspectives concerning diverse federal prison rehabilitation programs and provide probation officers with a voice. The complex connections between rehabilitation programs and recidivism rates were examined in the federal setting by acquiring detailed insights from federal probation officers with the knowledge and experience to inform the research.

The major objectives of this chapter include outlining the research methodology and specific research design, including the clear justification for the selection of each. In essence, a qualitative research methodology that stresses a one-on-one research design maximizes the chance of collecting the most detailed data possible, which in turn provides for richer analysis, synthesis, and reflection in the dissertation's closing chapter. Specific methods of data collection and analysis are also detailed, given the challenges that are oftentimes inherent in qualitative data analysis (Castleberry et al., 2018). In

addition, the following chapter also outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis, providing clear justification for the selection of the RNR model. Alongside the key elements of the research methodology, design, and theoretical framework, other important elements are included, such as considerations regarding trustworthiness and ethics. Chapter 3 provides a context for the data to be collected in Chapter 4, as well as how that data is addressed in the context of the research question in Chapter 5.

Research Questions, Design, and Rationale

The foundational elements of the methodology include the research question, research design, and research rationale. Therefore, the following section is subdivided into three different sections, with the first section succinctly revisiting the research question provided in Chapter 1. The second section provides insight into the qualitative research design, including a brief description of the key attributes of qualitative designs. Lastly, the third section provides thorough insight into the justification for selecting a qualitative research design, with a particular emphasis on how the qualitative research design is ideal for addressing the research gaps addressed in Chapter 2, which in turn informs the research question guiding the dissertation. Moreover, the third section will also illuminate how the qualitative research design aligns with the varied objectives and assumptions detailed in Chapter 1, which are key to the forthcoming data analysis.

Research Question

As detailed in Chapter 1, the dissertation is guided by the following research question: What are federal probation officers' perspective regarding the success of rehabilitation programs offered in the Federal Bureau of Prisons?

Research Design

I selected the qualitative research design for my study. Qualitative research designs rely upon the collection, analysis, and synthesis of qualitative data. Qualitative data is distinct from quantitative data as it is generally nonnumeric, as well as admittedly more subjective in interpretation, given the inherent subjectivity of language, relative to mathematics. Qualitative data may be gathered through a variety of means, depending on the specific type of qualitative data collected. In general, qualitative data, much like quantitative data, can be characterized as primary or secondary data (Chatfield, 2020).

Primary data refers to data gathered directly by the researcher, or data that has not been previously published in another study. All original research studies, whether they are quantitative or qualitative in nature, feature primary data, as primary data is the hallmark of an original study (Chatfield, 2020). On the contrary, secondary data refers to data that has already been published (Chatfield, 2020), including the quantitative data regarding recidivism rates detailed in Chapter 1. Some studies may rely entirely on secondary data, especially systematic literature reviews that synthesize the findings of several previous studies that focus on one major topic.

My research design relies almost exclusively on primary data with the collection of new data from participant interviews. The data results, analysis, and synthesis are grounded in the primary data findings, which emerged following the completion of all interviews. Any secondary data referenced in forthcoming chapters merely serves to complement or otherwise add nuance to the central findings derived from primary data analysis.

Research Rationale

The rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology was underpinned by several different justifications. First and foremost, a qualitative methodology is the most appropriate research design for answering the aforementioned research question. The research question was neither quantitative nor hypothesis-driven in nature, which means that the results are not reliant upon specific numbers (see McAleese & Kilty, 2019). Instead, the research question is broad, thereby allowing for the greatest range of data collection possible. Secondly, qualitative research paradigms are especially useful for examining complex social phenomena that feature substantial research gaps. Moreover, qualitative studies have been cited as particularly valuable in criminological studies, as the "current criminal justice system does not do enough to repair the harm done to individuals," harm that can only be adequately explored through the flexible data collection offered via qualitative methodologies (McAleese & Kilty, 2019, p. 822) Beyens et al. (2015) emphasizing "the value of qualitative research to understanding prison life (p.66). Qualitative data captures insights that fall between the cracks of purely quantitative analysis (Schoonenboom, 2023).

As indicated in the literature review, substantial research gaps exist regarding the efficacy of rehabilitation programs in federal prison, which may be why recidivism rates remain elevated while any reform efforts are stagnated. A qualitative research design provides for a more substantial interrogation of these different elements, especially when the main information gathered on recidivism to date has been statistical in nature. In essence, many of the studies cited in the literature review used a quantitative approach, showing the effective "how," or lack therefore, of a given rehabilitation program. Fewer

studies adopted a qualitative approach, which is especially pronounced at the federal level. Few studies on reducing recidivism in federal prisons were published in the last 10 years; moreover, none were published with regard to probation officers' perspectives specifically.

Role of the Researcher

Recalling the study assumptions detailed in Chapter 1, in particular the epistemological assumptions, the researcher plays a direct role in the data collection process. Indeed, unlike some qualitative studies in which the researcher may neutrally observe participants, without direct interaction, I interacted directly with participants as I conducted one-on-one interviews with varied federal probation officers. I had to be aware of any undue influence they may place on the responses from each participant (see Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). In other words, I had to let the participant dominate in each interview, offering guidance as needed but never attempting to speak over or speak for the participant. Indeed, Bearman (2019) noted that semi structured interviews provide one of the best means of obtaining deeper understandings of human experience in complex situations, which is precisely why a one-on-one approach, rather than an open-ended survey approach, was selected.

In this study, I built rapport with the participants by introducing myself and talking casually before the interview began. Building rapport is critical to interviewing because participants are more willing to talk about their experiences (Horsfall et al., 2021). Therefore, I took the time to build rapport with the participants. While building rapport, I stressed to participants that there were no correct answers and that I was only seeking to examine the truth of their experiences, which will help avoid any social

desirability responses or responses based on the idea of what the participants believe is the right way to respond (see Horsfall et al., 2021). I had to consider the power dynamics between myself and the participants and any cultural dynamics that may have affected the interactions (see Kaaristo, 2022). Research indicates that the researcher is never objective or neutral in the data collection process but is aged, gendered, classed, and raced, among other characteristics that may influence the participants and the collection of data (Kaaristo, 2022). Furthermore, I was positioned as an outsider to the participants who are federal probation officers in the study (see Kaaristo, 2022). In this case, the power balance shifts to the participants (Kaaristo, 2022). Therefore, I had to be approachable and work to build common ground to build the needed rapport with the federal probation officer participants (see Hoogesteyn et al., 2023; Kaaristo, 2022).

Methodology

The first section provides thorough insight into the selected population, including the sampling strategies and specific procedures used for crafting a participant pool. The second section provides details regarding the instrumentation used for data collection, including the source for each instrument and the justification for the selected instrumentation's efficiency in answering the research questions.

Participant Selection Logic

In order to obtain greater insights into federal probation officers' perspectives on the relationship between recidivism rates and rehabilitation programs, it was critical to interface directly with federal probation officers themselves. The research population consisted exclusively of individuals who are working within the federal probation system. Therefore, the purposive sampling method was used in this study to select the

participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who meet the study's objectives and is a nonprobability sampling method (Obilor, 2023). Purposive sampling is also called judgment sampling, where the researcher decides who possesses the information they desire to examine, which, in the case of this study, is federal probation officers (Obilor, 2023). Purposive sampling is a cost-effective and credible method when there are not many participants, and the researcher cannot interview the entire population due to time and funding limitations (Obilor, 2023).

Moreover, a diversity of participants was selected to ensure the appropriate integration of the phenomenological framework with the original research findings. It was critical to obtain a diversity of viewpoints to understand the differences in varied federal probation officers' perspectives regarding recidivism and rehabilitation, as well as common areas in which diverse viewpoints may intersect. The intersection of viewpoints amongst diverse participants is an especially critical study finding, a consensus regarding specific elements of recidivism or aspects of rehabilitation amongst federal probation officers may make a stronger case for future policymaking.

In general, the phenomenological approach holds that at least five participants should be interviewed in an original qualitative study (Elkatawneh, 2016). The minimum number of five is logical, as it may be inferred that the findings of a study will be split relatively even amongst the five perspectives, which in turn will help minimize potential bias in responses. However, this minimum number is optimally expanded in order to reduce the risk of bias or other research caveats that may impact the validity of the study's conclusions (Elkatawneh, 2016).

Instrumentation

The data was collected through researcher-developed instruments, given the qualitative nature of the study. The interview questions are in Appendix A. The interview questions were formulated based on the literature reviewed and the tenets of the RNR theory to understand how federal probation officers view the usefulness and applicability of the assessment of prisoners according to prisoners' risks, needs, and the associated responsivity for rehabilitation. In terms of the collection of data, I used videoconferencing software, Zoom, and recording programs that can clearly capture every word spoken over the course of the interview. Each participant was allocated a specific folder in my personal laptop, and each folder includes the participant's audio interview transcript, written interview transcript, and research notes taken during the interview, alongside each participant's electronically signed informed consent and relevant background information. In terms of the data analysis process, other instrumentation includes traditional instruments.

In addition to the instrumentation necessary for facilitating the interviews, additional instrumentation may be employed during the interviews. Specifically, additional instrumentation will include a "risk/need assessment instrument," such as the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R), which is oftentimes used by parole and probation officers for assessing inmates (Zara & Farrington, 2015, p. 170).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To obtain the primary data necessary for addressing the research question at length in the forthcoming chapters, I followed a three-step process. First, participants were recruited; secondly, participants participated in the semi structured interviews; and,

thirdly, data was collected in a safe, reliable manner, especially when accounting for the personal nature of the interviews. As detailed in the following paragraphs, the three-step process does not have to be perfectly linear; for instance, the first step does not have to be fully completed before the second step commences. As one of the major study limitations outlined in Chapter 1 includes time constraints, it is critical to obtain as many interviews as possible within an appropriate time frame, with the understanding that they may be asynchronously staggered over the coming months, or in other words "not subject to time constraints" (Keeley et al., 2022, p. 5).

In terms of the first step of the process, recruitment was achieved by sending a formal letter to the targeted participation group introducing my study and my desire for participants. Participants had to be currently employed and have one year of service. There were no participant restrictions on age, race, or gender; my goal was to have as diverse a population of participants as possible. I sought at least 10 individuals to express interest in participating in the study, given that the study may experience natural attrition.

The second step of the three-step process occurred once one participant committed to participate in the study and all the necessary procedures were completed. As interviews were time-consuming and required the coordination of two different schedules, I conducted them as soon as possible, even while recruitment efforts remained ongoing. The participation process was effective and equivalent to the interview process, with each interview ranging from 60 to 90 minutes per interviewee. A total of two hours was delegated to each interview, though the entire two hours were not used with every participant. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, rather than fully open-ended or strictly Q&A. The purpose for the semi-structured interview, in other words, is to

allow just enough consistency between the different questions to ensure internal validity, but also just enough flexibility is allowed for the broadest diversity of data collection possible.

The interviews took place in different mediums, based on the location and availability of each participant. Optimally, interviews took place in person, in a face-to-face setting, which was the preferred method. Indeed, face-to-face interviews foster a greater interaction between the researcher and interviewee, which in turn favorably impacts the quality of the data collected. However, in situations wherein the interviewee lives further away, or is otherwise unavailable for a face-to-face interview, the interview took place via Zoom, which has demonstrated a clear value for conducting original research studies when time and financial resources are scarce (Archibald et al., 2019). Moreover, Lo Iacono et al. (2016) also advocated Zoom as an excellent means of conducting qualitative research interviews, allowing the researcher to interpret the verbal and nonverbal expression of participants alike. The least preferred method included telephone interviews, given the inability of the researcher to observe nonverbal communication and the greater difficulty of establishing rapport with the interviewee (Argyle, 2013). However, should the telephone prove to be the only viable medium for a given interviewee, then a telephonic interview is preferred over no interview at all (Argyle, 2013).

The third and final step entailed the actual collection and organization of data itself, which occurred during and after a given interviewee participated in an interview. Data was collected in three different ways: First, the interviews were recorded; secondly, the verbal transcript of the interviews were converted to text format; thirdly, notes were

taken during the interview, which further enhanced the overall quality of the data collected, as well as filled in any possible "gaps" that may emerge in understanding when evaluating the transcripts afterwards (Roulston & Choi, 2018). The data was organized and labeled for each interviewed participant, into specific folders per participant. Furthermore, a brief blurb of information regarding each participant was included in each of their respective folders.

This information is directly relevant to the dissertation, as it included the length of time the participant has worked for the federal government, alongside other key considerations that may impact their perspective. These considerations include, but are not limited to, the following: the gender of the participant; the race of the participant; the education level of the participant; the professional experience of the participant outside the Bureau of Prisons; and the history that the participant may have with the prison system. It is not uncommon for individuals to have experience with the judicial or prison system due to their own family or loved ones' experience in the system (Lambert et al., 2017), which could also strongly impact their views regarding rehabilitation, recidivism, and reform. In order to collect this data via these processes, it was necessary to use several instruments, which are outlined in more detail in the instrumentation section.

Importantly, while the RNR model serves as the theoretical framework from which the views and insights from the probation officers will be evaluated, the interviews themselves will stress a phenomenological approach. Oftentimes referenced in qualitative research studies, phenomenology relates directly to study participants' lived experiences. Therefore, a phenomenological approach calls for researchers to recruit participants from populations who have most certainly "lived the practices" with the phenomenon being

studied (Elkatawneh, 2016), therefore directly aligning with the needs of the dissertation. This study aims to analyze probation officers' experiences with federal rehabilitation programs, particularly in terms of their impact on recidivism and their role in prison reform efforts. In addition, the diversity of perspectives of the probation officers is expected, and directly dependent on a number of different factors, including the extent of their experience with the federal Bureau of Prisons, alongside other personal characteristics and experiences that may play a profound role in their perspectives regarding recidivism, rehabilitation, and reform.

Data Analysis Plan

After the three-step process is thoroughly completed, the most critical step of the research process can commence: analyzing and synthesizing all the data collected to make sense of the findings and thoroughly address each question. Unlike the other three steps that preceded it, data analysis does not begin until all the primary data has been organized and ready to evaluate. However, substantial interaction with this data is critical for arriving at the responses to the research question, which is why "constant interaction with the data is integral to design research methodology" (Maher et al., 2018, p. 1). Given the qualitative nature of the data and the subjective perceptions that inform it, it will be critical to evaluate the interviewee responses as objectively as possible, employing increasingly accepted methods of qualitative data analysis.

A major caveat of qualitative data analysis relative to quantitative data analysis includes the relative absence of different data analysis techniques, at least techniques that are widely recognized, respected, and ultimately accepted as quantitative data analysis methods. In quantitative research studies, the research question oftentimes features a

hypothesis associated with specific, measurable variables, which is then tested via several different data analysis strategies. For instance, a research question that hypothesizes a correlation between a dependent and independent variable is generally tested via regression analysis, and researchers can then instantly determine if their hypothesis is supported or unsupported by the resulting R^2 value, or other outcome that indicates degree of correlation, or lack thereof (Plonsky & Garbar, 2018).

However, as illustrated in this study, the qualitative nature of the research question discourages hypothesis-driven results in favor of more open-ended outcomes, especially given the general absence of other scholarship regarding federal probation officers' perspectives. Therefore, the data analysis methods must be sufficiently well-organized to provide a cogent response to each question, yet flexible enough to permit as much nuance and interpretation as possible. Fortunately, the increased interest in qualitative and mixed method research designs over the past several years has amplified the development of qualitative data analysis methods, which is evident from the rise of mixed method approach (Askun & Cizel, 2020). With this approach, one of the most widely accepted methods includes coding for the qualitative data collected. Through coding, it is possible to achieve "deep and insightful interactions with the data," (Maher et al., 2018, p. 1).

Therefore, coding will be used to formulate categories and themes based upon interviewee responses. Thematic analysis is one of the most widely accepted, recognized, and utilized methods for evaluating qualitative data. This technique helps streamline enormous troves of data and seemingly unrelated words into polished categories that illuminate explicit distinctions and intersections amongst interviewee responses.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is further supported by the theoretical framework, especially as it will highlight intersections amongst interviewees' unique experiences and perceptions within a phenomenological framework.

Thematic analysis involves several specific steps, according to Braun and Clarke (2012), including (1) becoming familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts, (2) generating the initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing the potential themes, (5) defining the themes and naming them, and (6) writing the report. Thematic analysis is a flexible method of analyzing data. The flexibility in thematic analysis is the ability to use open coding, which means there are no preset themes. The data analysis in this study will use open and inductive coding described as "a bottom-up approach and is driven by what is *in* the data. What this means is that the codes and themes derive from the content of the data themselves." (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 3).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness comprise one of the most critical considerations in research methodology. As noted by Kallio et al. (2016), "the development of a qualitative semi-structured interview guide contributes to the objectivity and trustworthiness of studies and makes the results more plausible" (p. 2954). Not only does trustworthiness directly impact the validity of the study results, but also the reception the study receives from other scholars. In general, studies that have accounted for multiple levels of trustworthiness are more respected, and cited, than others, which is precisely why this dissertation has taken all possible safeguards to be as credible and ethical as possible.

Thus, the penultimate section of the chapter is subdivided into two different sections, each of which addresses the two foundational elements of trustworthiness in an

original research study. The first section, validity, and credibility, provides detailed insight into how the study aligns with four different trustworthiness criteria, including specific strategies that will reinforce adherence to each criterion. The second section, ethical procedures, provides substantial insight into the various ethical safeguards the study has adopted to further reinforce trustworthiness, with a particular emphasis on considerations taken for human subject participation. Collectively, both sections reinforce the trustworthiness of the dissertation, justifying its publication alongside other related literature and scholarship.

Validity and Credibility

Validity and credibility constitute critical components of the dissertation methodology, regardless of whether the methodology is qualitative or quantitative in nature. In terms of internal credibility, the dissertation ensures that each participant is treated consistently and without bias; furthermore, all participants will be asked the same core questions as part of the semi-structured interview process. Carefully designed questions play a critical role in the collection of valid, diverse data, and "designing questions to gather the data in these multiple formats is integral to ensure collection of good data" (Castleberry et al., 2018). In order to ensure credibility in the study, I aligned the analysis and findings of the study with the statements of the participants (Nowell et al., 2017). The participants' direct statements are presented in the analysis to ensure credibility. Additionally, the participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcript to ensure that what they stated is accurately represented, in a process known as member-checking (Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability is another aspect of trustworthiness, and although I cannot determine other sites that may wish to transfer the

findings, they will make sure that they provide thick descriptions to enable others to make a judgment about transferability (Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability also relates to trustworthiness, so I will ensure that the steps taken in the research process are traceable and logical so the reader can follow the research. I will demonstrate that their findings are taken directly from the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

Ethical Procedures

Alongside validity and credibility, ethical procedures comprise another crucial element of the dissertation's overall trustworthiness. First and foremost, the research will take every opportunity to ensure that bias is not present at any point in the data collection and analysis process, from the initial interviews to the data analysis itself. Bias is an especially important consideration in this dissertation, as "bias is inherent" in studies that feature a qualitative methodology (Morse, 2015). Therefore, as bias tends to be an especially pronounced concern in qualitative studies, it is even more critical to be acutely aware of the different forms of bias that may cloud judgment or interpretation of the results (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

Moreover, the degree of ethical procedures instituted in a particular study depends on the research design of that study, especially when accounting for human participants. As this dissertation relies fully upon the insights from federal probation officers for finding sufficient data to address the research question, several ethical procedures must be followed in order to assure utmost credibility and validity, and, above all, adherence to ethical guidelines. The most important ethical considerations that must be taken into account in any research study involving human participation, regardless of the field of study, include informed consent and confidentiality. The informed consent form relates

the study's purpose and what participation will entail and describes how confidentiality will be achieved, emphasizing that participation is voluntary.

Through informed consent, participants are aware of their participation in an original dissertation study, and they should be fully informed about the degree of information that will be included for each participant in the dissertation (Roache, 2014). While no names or other identifying personal information will be included, thereby ensuring anonymity, other information, including their tenure in the federal Bureau of Prisons and their gender and racial background are likely to be included. In keeping with the phenomenological assumptions of the study, one's background and experience may have a direct bearing on their responses, which is why such information is critical. Furthermore, participants can be assured of their anonymity in that entire paragraphs of their responses will not be included in the dissertation, but rather snippets of phrases and sentences that align with specific research themes; as their responses will be placed alongside the responses of others, they can be assured that no identifying information can be linked to them (Kadam, 2017). Some participants may naturally provide more detail and insight than others, but all participants will be treated equally in terms of anonymity. Importantly, informed consent must be collected from all participants, likely electronically, to ensure that the researcher has complete files for all participants.

In addition, different ethical codes and guidelines will be consulted over the dissertation process, such as the respective elements of different codes of ethics for different institutions. First and foremost, the dissertation aligns with the Ethics and Compliance Policy that is detailed at length on the official webpage for Walden University (Walden University, 2024). Specifically, this dissertation will be considered

with both Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement: Whereas Quality Assurance pertains to "finding mistakes," Quality Improvement pertains to "supporting self-assessment among researchers" (Walden University, 2024). In addition, the dissertation also pays close attention to the "data integrity standards" that are stressed by Walden University with regards to graduate students' research, as detailed at length in the preceding trustworthiness section.

Not only will this dissertation adhere to the university's ethical guidelines, but it will also account for other universally recognized codes of ethics, such as the Code of Ethics from the American Psychological Association or any other organization that is familiar with substantial human participation in original research studies. The American Psychological Association is especially renowned for providing a Code of Ethics that is clearly applicable "to contemporary social issues in the conduct of responsible psychological science" (Fisher, 2021), which makes this Code of Ethics highly valuable for evaluating the major social issue of persistent recidivism borne of inadequate rehabilitation and reform.

Summary

Overall, Chapter 3 provides substantial insight into the methodology and research design through which the research question will be addressed in the forthcoming chapters. The purpose of the study has been restated, along with the methodological choices made by the researcher. Specifically, the study relies upon a qualitative methodology and one-on-one semi-structured interview research design, which collectively offers an opportunity for collecting the most in-depth knowledge possible. The interview questions have been prepared and are in Appendix A. The issues of

trustworthiness and how those will be ensured are presented in this chapter. The study will interview federal probation officers in a southern state in the United States. In person, online interviews using Zoom, for those people in other areas were utilized, all interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy and transcribed for analysis. I also took notes during the interviews. The interviews were analyzed using open coding on paper. The combined methodology and research design are also underpinned by the RNR model, outlined at length in Chapter 2 and utilized for the forthcoming data analysis in Chapter 5. As the study aims to contribute to substantial gaps in scholarship, which are detailed in the preceding literature review, it is crucial to ensure the highest degree of these attributes to enhance the chance of the study's acceptance and optimal applicability to ongoing challenges and problems within the federal Bureau of Prisons, in particular persistent recidivism rates that have, yet to abate in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 4. Data Analysis

Introduction

With this study, I sought to better understand the federal probation officers' perspective of rehabilitation programs in the federal BOP. I present a detailed understanding of different perspectives regarding the diversity of federal prison rehabilitation programs while providing a greater voice for probation officers in scholarship. The research question I sought to answer was *What are federal probation officers' perspectives regarding the success of rehabilitation programs offered in the Federal Bureau of Prisons?* In this chapter, I provide the results of the data analysis from semi structured interviews with federal probation officers. I also discuss the evidence of trustworthiness in the study, as well as the study's results.

Setting

The interviews were conducted with probation officers employed by a federal probation office in a southern state in the United States. Rather than holding all in-person interviews, some interviews were held online using Zoom. The interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy and transcribed into pdf files or Word files.

Demographics

Table 1 lists the study participants' demographics, including the participant number, gender, years with the agency, approximate age, and number of years in the probation arena.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participants	Gender	Years with agency	Approximate age	Years in probation arena
Participant 1	Female	11	40s	15
Participant 2	Female	5	30s	6
Participant 3	Female	4	30s	10
Participant 4	Male	17	50s	27
Participant 5	Male	11	40s	14
Participant 6	Male	6	30s	10
Participant 7	Female	3	30s	3
Participant 8	Female	19	50s	33
Participant 9	Female	21	50s	35
Participant 10	Male	22	50s	25

Sixty percent of the participants were female, and 40 percent were male. The average age of the participants was 40. Participants had an average of 11.9 years with their agency and an average of 17.8 years in the probation arena.

Data Collection

The data was collected in interviews with probation officers after obtaining approval and authorization from the district. Participants were required to have 1 to 20 years of service and included male and female participants. Semi structured interviews were conducted with the participants using Zoom. I used a phenomenological approach and recruited the participants from the probation officer population with experience in the federal BOP rehabilitation programs.

Data Analysis

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis method for the data analysis process. First, I read the interview transcripts several times to become familiar with the data. Secondly, I generated the initial codes by making notes on the printed

transcripts. Codes are described as “succinct and work as shorthand for something the analysts understand; they don’t have to be fully worked-up explanations” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 6). Thirdly, I began a search for themes, which involved reviewing the codes to identify similarities between the codes. Once the themes were identified, I searched for and examined the potential themes to determine if codes constituted a theme. After reviewing the themes to check for quality and ensuring the participants' statements supported each theme, I began the fifth step of naming the themes. After the previous steps were completed, I wrote the report. However, as noted by Braun and Clarke, the final analysis produces the report, but there was a great deal of writing and making notes throughout the thematic analysis process.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The validity and credibility of this study was ensured by carefully adhering to those components required by ensuring the identified themes in the thematic analysis are fully aligned with the participants’ statements, as set out by Nowell et al. (2017). The direct statements of the participants have been presented in the data analysis section to support the claims made under each identified theme. The participants were provided copies of the interview transcript to allow them to review their statements as reported and ensure they were accurately presented, known as member checking (see Nowell et al., 2017). The participants had no issues with their statements and provided confirmation that they were indeed accurately represented.

Transferability was also ensured by providing thick descriptions of the participants’ views about the rehabilitation program to ensure that other federal BOP locations may judge if the results are transferable to their situation. Ethical procedures

were carefully followed, and participants signed an informed consent form before participating in the interviews in the study, adhering to the American Psychological Association's Code of Ethics (Fisher, 2021). I carefully considered any bias they may have and ensured no personal bias impacted the presentation of the findings in the study.

Confidentiality was ensured in the study by not putting the exact age of the participants and referring to them as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and so forth to ensure that no specific statements can be linked to any participant (see Kadam, 2017). The study's data collection and analysis procedures aligned with the Ethics and Compliance Policy of Walden University, giving specific attention to the university's data integrity standards.

Results

This section of the study includes the themes identified in the interviews of the participants. Seven specific themes were identified: (a) Participants acknowledge that assessing prisoners for rehabilitation programs requires an in-depth analysis of eligibility criteria, (b) Eligibility assessment is a collaborative effort within the criminal justice system, (c) Disqualifying factors inhibit the ability of prisoners to enter the rehabilitation program, (d) characteristics for success and prisoner- and institution-specific, (e) Rehabilitation programs offer important services to promote success, (f) Rehabilitation programs are successful if the prisoner takes them seriously, but shortcomings exist, and (g) Probation officers perceive improvements could be made to rehabilitation programs, including more funding, more programs, and tailoring rehabilitation programs to the individuals and their interests. The following subsections present the themes and the participants' statements that support each theme.

Theme 1: Participants Acknowledge that Assessing Prisoners for Rehabilitation Program Requires an In-Depth Analysis of Eligibility Criteria

The first theme I identified from the participants' responses was the vital nature of assessing prisoners for eligibility. The participants revealed many aspects of eligibility assessment that assist them in determining the suitability of prisoners for the rehabilitation program. For example, Participant 1 stated that the eligibility assessment requires a "review of prior documentation pertaining to the individual (presentence report), criminal history, substance abuse, mental health, and barriers or issues of need from the outcome of the assessment." That statement is informative because it sheds light on all the considerations given before a prisoner is eligible for the rehabilitation program. Participant 2 revealed the same criteria for reviewing eligibility and added the need to assess any additional violations or charges that may have occurred. Participant 3 related the same factors for eligibility assessment and included "any violations on probation." This statement indicated that if the prisoner is incarcerated for violating their probation requirements, they might not be a good candidate for the rehabilitation program because they might not be willing to follow the rules and requirements.

Participant 4 also stated the same methods of eligibility assessment criteria but added that they "speak to the family." This statement indicates that families of prisoners are likely to have information that will help determine eligibility. Participant 5 also noted the same eligibility criteria. Still, they said that when assessing mental health, they review "current and past history" and indicated that they reviewed the prisoner's family history. Participant 6 stated the same criteria as the other participants but did not mention talking to the family. However, Participant 7 revealed they: "Review criminal history, assess

their age, employment status, the seriousness of the offense, remorse for actions and will to change, willingness to participate in a rehabilitation program." Participant 8 revealed that they: "Review the presentence investigation report, any risk assessment tool conducted on the individual, review criminal history, mental health, substance abuse, cognitive skills, education, job readiness, vocational prep, college prep." Participant 9 stated they conducted the assessment for eligibility by reviewing the following:

> The presentence investigation report, any documentation over the time frame of criminal involvement to seek consistency in crimes, review substance abuse, mental health documents for progression and completion of programs. Family, social, and relationship dynamics. Education and employment histories also.

Participant 10 revealed the importance of the factors stated by the other nine participants and added the importance of assessing the prisoner's social networks. As indicated in the participants' statements, no factor that might affect the eligibility of the prisoners for rehabilitation is left out. Assessing a prisoner's social network, not only in the prison setting, is essential to understand who they associate with, which helps determine their suitability and eligibility for the program. This theme reveals that serious considerations and assessments go into decisions about a prisoner's eligibility for the rehabilitation program. The participants in this study investigate the individual's background to ensure a proper assessment is conducted by examining issues related to family backgrounds and educational levels, determining if any mental health problems or substance abuse is present, as well as assessing remorse for their criminal behavior and willingness to change.

Theme 2: Eligibility Assessment is a Collaborative Effort Within the Criminal Justice System

There might be a general assumption that federal probation officers work in isolation to determine whether a prisoner is eligible for a rehabilitation program (Chamberlin, 2012). However, the second theme identified in the study was that it is a collaborative effort among many actors in the criminal justice system. The participants in the study revealed that they take many other stakeholder's assessments of the prisoners into account. For example, Participant 1 revealed that there is a high level of collaboration as they ensure a review of the previous assessments conducted by probation officers, case managers, and health professionals to understand the current needs of the individual and that they speak to family members, aligning with the findings in Theme 1 about the importance of family members' views on the suitability of prisoners' for rehabilitation programs. Participant 2 stated the precise methods of assessing eligibility and how they counted on the opinions of case managers, previous probation officers, or health professionals, and speaking to the prisoner's family, indicating it is assuredly a collaborative effort in determining eligibility.

Participant 3 has a similar response to Participants 1 and 2. Participant 9 noted the need to talk to the prisoner's family to gather information that the prisoner might not have shared. Participant 10 went further with collaborative efforts and indicated that they "solicit insight from collaterals (family, spouses, friends) as for goals they want to accomplish and how they plan to accomplish those goals." This theme reveals that assessing eligibility is a collaborative effort that considers the views and perspectives of many people in the lives of prisoners and is not based on just an interview with the

prisoner. Federal probation officers seek to gain an understanding of the complex factors in the lives of prisoners who desire to enter a rehabilitation program.

Theme 3: Specific Disqualifying Factors Inhibit the Ability of Prisoners to Enter Rehabilitation Programs

The third theme identified in the participants' responses was that specific factors disqualify prisoners from being chosen to enter a rehabilitation program. One of the primary factors is severe mental illness that is undiagnosed or untreated (Participant 4, Participant 5, Participant 7, Participant 8, Participant 9, and Participant 10). Participant 1 set out the disqualifying factors for prisoners being admitted to a rehabilitation program and stated that eligibility depends on their having "No history of substance abuse, mental health, a prior arrest, length of sentence and a lack of motivation towards positive change and growth," indicating that there are several specific factors that are considered for eligibility. Participant 2 revealed other factors and stated, "History of noncompliant behavior or failing to comply with the rules and regulations of the rehabilitation program," indicating that if prisoners have already been in a rehabilitation program and did not comply with the rules and regulations that they would not be considered again.

Participant 4 stated that disqualifying factors for a rehabilitation program included "antisocial thinking (criminal thoughts, behavior, and actions), severe mental illness (not treated), and intellectual deficiencies." This statement indicated that the mindset and behavior of prisoners are significant considerations for eligibility for a rehabilitation program. The statement of Participant 5 was much the same, but they added that an "unwillingness to participate in a rehabilitation program" was also a disqualifying factor. Participant 6 stated the same factors but added that an individual known for causing

problems would not be determined to be eligible. Participant 7echoed the statements of the other participants. Still, they also stated specific factors, including when the prisoner is “Defiant, no desire to comply with rules, no accountability, and severe mental health which is not treated.” Participant 8’s statements aligned with the other participants' statements, and they revealed that disqualifications include a “Violent person currently acting out, severe mental health issues (untreated or undiagnosed), rebellious and not willing to comply with the rules of the program.” Participant 8 also stated that a prisoner would be disqualified if they are a “problematic person who rattles the room and causes problems continuously (Chamberlin, 2012).”

Theme 4: Characteristics for Success are Prisoner- and Institution-Specific

The fourth theme identified in the statements of the participants in the study was that prisoners must possess specific characteristics if they are a good candidate for success in a rehabilitation program, but institution-specific characteristics also affect success. The most cited characteristic that prisoners must possess to be successful in a rehabilitation program was self-motivation toward change, which all participants cited. The second most cited characteristic that prisoners must possess to be successful in a rehabilitation program was a sound support system, which all ten participants also cited. For example, Participant One stated that participants must be “self-motivated, [have a] support system, [be] cognitively stable, and goal-oriented (short and long term).” Participant Two stated that prisoners should be “self-motivated [have a] willingness to change, and support from family and pro-social peers” to be successful in a rehabilitation program. Another aspect of a rehabilitation program noted to support the success of prisoners was cited by Participants Five, Six, Eight, Nine, and Ten as good

facilitators/instructors in the rehabilitation program, indicating that even with the best possible characteristics, such as a commitment and self-motivation for change and a sound support system, that facilitators in rehabilitation programs play a crucial role in prisoners' success.

Theme 5: Rehabilitation Programs Offer Important Services to Promote Success

The fifth theme identified in the participants' responses was that rehabilitation programs offer important services that contribute to prisoners' success once released from prison. Participant One stated the services provided by rehabilitation programs include "employment readiness, financial literacy, substance abuse and mental health treatment, housing resources, educational and vocational programs." Participant Two stated identical services. Participant Three noted the same but added to the services and revealed that the rehabilitation program also provides "financial courses [and] vocational programs." Participant Five added the components of "case-management, community resources, wrap-around services to keep a person in line with the goals (education, treatment-substance abuse, mental health, financial literacy, education, vocational, job readiness, and family reintegration."

Participant Six added to the previous list reported by participants and added services to assist prisoners in "resume writing." Participant Seven stated that the services offered by rehabilitation programs include "cognitive behavioral therapy, job skills, prep courses for college" and other services indicated by other participants. Participant Eight revealed much the same as other participants. Still, they added a rehabilitation service in the following statement: "Cognitive behavioral therapy, educational courses, vocational training, job skills, prep course for college and treatment sessions (substance abuse and

mental health), parenting courses and financial literacy." The participants revealed that rehabilitation courses adequately prepare prisoners in all areas of their lives before release from prison to function effectively in their personal and work lives. Participants Nine and Ten also noted the offerings of parent courses in rehabilitation programs.

Theme 6: Rehabilitation Programs are Successful If the Prisoner Takes Them Seriously, but Some Shortcomings Exist

All the participants in the study revealed that rehabilitation programs are generally successful if the prisoner takes them seriously. Participant One stated, "Rehabilitation programs work for those who take the program seriously and understand their why for participating in the program. It's 50/50." Participants Two and Six stated the same thing, citing the programs as 50/50 successful. Participant Three also noted the need for the prisoners to take the program seriously; when they do, the success rate is 80 percent. Participant Four stated that rehabilitation programs have a 60 percent success rate, while Participant Five noted a 70 percent success rate. However, although Participant Eight did not state a success rate percentage, they also pointed out that the participant must be "willing to put in the work and change their ways," indicating the need for prisoners to take the rehabilitation program seriously. The same was noted by Participant Nine, who stated, "Rehabilitation programs are effective as long as a person is applying themselves and taking the process seriously; this is their life, and they have to want better for themselves." Finally, Participant Ten revealed the same: "Rehabilitation programs are effective; however, it falls back on the person to make the best of the program." Participants Seven and Five noted a 50/50 percent success rate. This theme

indicates the crucial nature of prisoners being willing to commit seriously to the rehabilitation program.

Theme 7: Probation Officers Perceive Improvements Could be Made to Rehabilitation Programs, Including More Funding, More Programs, and Tailoring Rehabilitation Programs to the Individuals and Their Interests

The seventh theme identified in the participants' responses was that improvements could be made to the rehabilitation programs, building on the reason for the failure of a higher success rate for prisoners. Participant One stated the needed improvements to the rehabilitation programs that there is a need to:

> "Make program realistic and tailored to the events occurring in the real world. Implement technology courses and other skills to aid in the progression of growth for those incarcerated so when they are released, is not them being in the dinosaur ages and eager to return to the prison for the sake of comfort and familiarity. Providing more programs to the rehabilitation layout and utilize the funding in a more positive manner. Ensure the services are tailored to the individual person's needs, so the investment can become fruition once they leave the system."

According to Participant Two, another improvement that could be added to rehabilitation programs to make them more successful is to "Include the stakeholders (family and community) into the rehabilitation for outside support to continue influencing and streamlining the importance of rehabilitation and being a pillar of support for the individual. Treatment should be individualized and tailored to the individual's needs." Participant Four stated the need to improve the rehabilitation programs by being "more efficient and utilizing the funding provided to address the individual person's needs.

Participant Four also indicated the need to "provide more areas of interest besides the basic commercial driver's license (CDL), carpentry, dry cleaning, and sowing. It makes you question if the criminal justice system is actually eager to rehabilitate individuals." Participant Five agreed with the statement of Participant Four about the use of funding and stated it should be utilized "to bring about change in the programs at the prisons." Participant Five also stated, "Rehabilitation begins at the onset of a person's entering the criminal justice system, not at the point of incarceration. Treat every case as an individual and provide the needs to decrease recidivism."

Participants Four and Eight also noted the need to tailor the programs for the individual. At the same time, Participants Four, Five, and Seven agreed with the other participants about the need for more funding and directing the funding appropriately. Participant Six also stated a need for "funding for more programs, resources in the community, and inclusion of stakeholders in the rehabilitation process." Participant Seven stated the rehabilitation programs could be improved by individualizing the programs

> Remove timelines of completion, so a person is actually working the program and not faking their transition or process. Funding and the proper individuals, assessors, facilitators, participants have to work as a team and the better good for a positive outcome.

Participant Eight also noted the need to "individualize the programs to the person's specific need and not force them to partake in areas of non-interest, just to get out of their cell." Participant Eight stated further the need for "funding and providing a variety of programs for the individuals to participate and familiarize themselves with to utilize in

the real world once their release from incarceration to prevent recidivism." Participant Nine stated improvements in rehabilitation programs should involve "More funding and programs of options as everyone does not want to drive trucks. More meaningful programs." Participant Nine also added a statement indicating that there is a need for:

> "Funding and inclusion of all stakeholders prior to the person being released from prison, so a plan is established with the people most involved in their lives in the community and family, to know what the person has accomplished and working toward, and goals set for themselves to be productive and not recidivate."

Participant Ten echoed the other participants and stated rehabilitation programs could be improved by:

> "More funding and more program options to attend and participate in while incarcerated. Funding and setting the program goals around the person's interests and goals. The way the program is conducted with validity will bring about change in the person."

This theme offers unique and critical insights into how rehabilitation programs could and should be improved.

Summary

The thematic analysis in this study found that Federal Probation Officers conduct an in-depth analysis of eligibility criteria before placing prisoners in rehabilitation programs. There are many areas to consider, including examining previous documentation, talking to the families of prisoners, and reviewing their history. Also considered in the eligibility analysis is the presence of substance abuse and mental health disorders, the prisoner's cognitive skills, and educational factors. However, eligibility

determination involves more than just interviewing prisoners, talking to their families, and reviewing documentation because the Federal Probation Officers revealed that they participate in a collaborative effort with other actors in the criminal justice system, particularly by examining the assessments of various actors, such as health professionals and case managers to understand the needs of the individuals. The study found that talking to the prisoners' families offers a wealth of knowledge that does not exist in assessments or in reports generated in the criminal justice system.

Various factors inhibit prisoners from a determination of eligibility, such as undiagnosed or untreated severe mental illness. The statements of the participants indicated that when prisoners do not have a history of substance abuse that contributed to their crimes, it is less likely that they will be considered for rehabilitation programs. Prisoners known for non-compliance or failing at previous probation requirements would not be determined eligible for the program. Prisoners who are deemed violent, disruptive, rebellious, or troublemakers are not considered eligible for rehabilitation programs.

Success in a rehabilitation program for prisoners is based on their personal characteristics. However, institution-specific factors also impact success in a rehabilitation program. The personal characteristics that prisoners should possess are self-motivation, a sound support system, cognitive stability, and the capacity to focus on short and long-term goals. Prisoners must be willing to change. However, success in the rehabilitation program also depends on good instructors and facilitators.

When all the necessary elements are present, rehabilitation programs offer essential services that support prisoners' success. Rehabilitation programs prepare prisoners with financial literacy, employment readiness, and offer mental health treatment

and substance abuse treatment. Resources include those related to housing, education, and vocational training programs. Rehabilitation programs connect prisoners with case management, community resources, and wrap-around services that help the individual focus on their educational, occupational, post-incarceration plan and goals. Significant is the provision of job skills training and college prep courses to assist prisoners in developing a better life trajectory once released from prison. Parenting courses are also offered in rehabilitation programs, helping the families of prisoners to be more functional upon their release. However, some shortcomings exist, and as the research revealed, rehabilitation programs are not entirely successful, ranging from 50 to 80 percent success. Prisoners in rehabilitation programs must take them seriously to succeed. In cases where they are only participating in the program to get out of their cell, the likelihood of success is very low. The participants noted that the number one factor in rehabilitation program success is the commitment of the prisoners to make the best of the program with a serious commitment to the necessary changes available within the program.

Finally, the study revealed that Federal Probation Officers perceive that improvements could be made to the rehabilitation programs. The participants indicated that more funding should be directed to those programs to support the availability of more up-to-date occupational development. Rehabilitation programs currently only offer specific vocational training, including basic commercial driver's licenses (CDLs), dry cleaning, carpentry, and sowing. The rehabilitation programs should be updated to include information technology career training and other more contemporary skills. The probation officer participants in the study also revealed that the programs currently take a cookie-cutter approach rather than viewing the prisoners as individuals. There is a need to

tailor and individualize the programs for each prisoner because they do not all come from the same educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. In other words, the labor jobs offered might be a good fit for some prisoners, but other prisoners with more education would likely do better with different job skills training. The participants noted that individualizing the rehabilitation program would make prisoners more committed when their interests are included.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, & Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to better understand the federal probation officers' perspective of rehabilitation programs in the federal BOP. The study provides a detailed understanding of different perspectives regarding the diversity of federal prison rehabilitation programs while providing a greater voice for probation officers in scholarship. The study's research question was *What are federal probation officers' perspective regarding the success of rehabilitation programs offered in the Federal Bureau of Prisons?* In this chapter, I discuss the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, and the recommendations, implications, and conclusion. The following section contains the discussion and interpretation of the findings.

Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

The findings in this study align with the RNR theory because the participants revealed that the only focus is not on recidivism risk but on the diverse needs of individuals that contribute to the prevention of criminal behavior or what might provoke it (see Lutz et al., 2022). The findings in the study show that while the assessment for eligibility of prisoners for rehabilitation programs is all-encompassing, with assessments examining various issues for potential risk that would indicate a lack of success in the program, there is a need to tailor rehabilitation programs to the individual based on their interests, aligning with the RNR theory. The theory also emphasizes numerous interactions in determining the eligibility determinations for prisoners, including various health and criminal justice assessments (Lutz et al., 2022).

The participants in my study revealed that improvements should be made to rehabilitation programs, including additional funding and expanding the programs to

include more contemporary job skills training, aligning with previous research that shows that more is needed in rehabilitation programs to ensure successful prisoner reintegration into society (see McNair-Williams, 2019). When prisoners re-enter society without the skills required to function effectively, they are the object of a high level of stigma and are perceived as a threat. Many prisoners are not interested in the current job skills training, and lack of engagement can lead to a lack of success, specifically lowering success to only 50%, as cited by many participants. Federal probation officers have unique experience and insight into the programs, and the findings of this study reveal the need for program improvements. However, those improvements will require additional funding, which means new policies must be developed that address the lack of funding and changes to tailor rehabilitation programs to the individual interests of prisoners, which will increase engagement and success in the programs.

I found that the commitment of prisoners to the rehabilitation program is a significant determinant of success; therefore, policy and decision-making bodies should address the shortcomings of the offerings of prison rehabilitation programs and ensure funding to support the changes. Previous research has shown the need for rehabilitation program reform (see Vishner & Eason, 2021). From the view of the RNR model, the risk factors are based at the microlevel (individual), macrolevel (community context), and meso-level (mental health within broader society; Baranyi et al., 2022; Reingle Gonzalez & Connell, 2014; Parsons, 2018; Public Safety Canada, 2022). The RNR model examines all these levels and has provided a voice in this study for federal probation officers who work directly with prisoners and allow their experience to inform the research.

Although it did not constitute a theme in this study, running throughout the fabric of each theme was the importance that the family and community of prisoners play in their potential for success in a rehabilitation program. The participants continually emphasized the importance of family and the wealth of information they possessed about their family members in the rehabilitation program or during the eligibility phase. The emphasis on information gathering from the families of prisoners highlights the knowledge that federal probation officers possess about what supports rehabilitation program success, both while prisoners are in the program and after they re-enter society. The participants understood that a collaborative approach involving various actors in the criminal justice system and prisoners' families is required to understand better the individual and what is needed for their ultimate success.

Research shows that rehabilitation program reform is needed, and the views of the participants in this study bolster the claim, especially since they noted that success is not just reliant on prisoners and their actions alone but is also based on institution-level factors. The participants in the study stated frequently that good instructors and facilitators are needed, so this indicates a need for more training for those actors in the rehabilitation programs. Particularly if new job skills programs are going to be added to increase areas of interest for prisoners, funding will be required to hire and train instructors and facilitators to ensure that the commitment of prisoners is met with the most suitable conditions for success. The limitations of the study are described in the following section.

Limitations of the Study

As predicted earlier in the study, some limitations were present in the research. For example, only 10 federal probation officers participated in the study due to time and financial constraints, typical in time-intensive qualitative studies (see Kriska et al., 2013). Despite the potential for bias due to the small number of participants, the recurring themes in their responses indicated that little bias existed since there were few incidences of disagreement among the participants about the factors associated with rehabilitation programs. My potential bias was reduced by ensuring the participants' responses were presented precisely as stated. Therefore, the most significant limitations of the study were financial and time constraints. However, even with those limitations, I overcame the barriers. In the future, a similar examination might consider a mixed method research design and the inclusion of a more significant number of participants. In the following section I present the study's recommendations.

Recommendations

The recommendations arising from the research in the present study include that policymaking should be undertaken to reform prison rehabilitation programs to expand the types of job skill programs offered to reflect contemporary jobs in the economy, such as information technology jobs. I recommend more funding to reform policy changes to support more updated job skills training to better tailor the program to the individual interests of prisoners and support their success in the programs. I also recommend funding to support hiring more instructors and facilitators who are educated and experienced in the new job skills training that should be added to the prison rehabilitation programs. Funding will also be needed to support more training for current instructors

and facilitators to ensure they are prepared to meet the needs and commitment of prisoners to support success. I recommend an expansion of the rehabilitation program in collaboration with community organizations to ensure that prisoners have contacts in their communities once released to support their ability to find work and reduce recidivism. Future studies should include a more significant number of federal probation officers to build more consensus on the areas identified in this study to improve rehabilitation programs. In the following section I present the implications of the research in this study.

Implications

The prison population in the United States is exceptionally high, coupled with a high rate of recidivism (Markham et al., 2016). Even among federal prisoners who generally have fewer prior offenses than the general prison population, recidivism is a problem. However, rehabilitation programs hold promise for the prisoners, their families, and communities, if they succeed (Zapryanova, 2020). The research in this study implies that federal probation officers view rehabilitation programs as successful in reducing recidivism rates among prisoners. Rehabilitation programs provide prisoners with job skills training and prepare them to re-enter society and reintegrate into their families and communities successfully (Takemoto, 2016). However, despite the promises of rehabilitation programs, there are some shortcomings. For example, the federal probation officers in the present study cited some limitations, including the need for good instructors and facilitators of the programs to meet the commitment of prisoners and increasing the types of job skills training offered.

There have been pushes for prison reform, particularly concerning rehabilitation programs. My results imply that much still needs to be done to make rehabilitation programs more successful for prisoners. My study participants offered unique information that may inform possible rehabilitation program reform efforts. I examined the perspectives of probation officers from a federal probation office in a southern state in the United States. Although the sample was small, participants mentioned the same factors, providing credibility to the responses. The participants' perspectives informed the study and offered valuable information about how prison rehabilitation programs can be successfully reformed. Prison rehabilitation program reform will require a concerted effort from many stakeholders, including federal probation officers, policymakers, lawmakers, businesses, and organizations in the community (Bain, 2019).

The study's findings indicate a need to form a task force to examine the programs offered in job skills training and update those to reflect the needs of prisoners in the contemporary work world. It seems an assumption has been made that all prisoners are suited for labor jobs, which is not the case among any population in the United States. While some prisoners may be suited for a CDL or labor job, others are more interested in technology-related jobs, so they will have no interest in a rehabilitation program that only offers job skills training for labor jobs. They will not be engaged or lose interest quickly. The findings indicated that policymaking would be required to change the direction of rehabilitation programs and reform them to meet the needs of prisoners and ensure the programs are tailored to those individual needs. Tailoring programs to the individual needs of prisoners has been cited in previous research (Gill & Wilson, 2017). A task force would have the potential to formulate a plan and present it to lawmakers and

policymakers who would assist with the funding necessary to implement a rehabilitation program reform in federal prisons.

However, rehabilitation program reform must go beyond funding and tailoring programs to the needs of the individual. There must necessarily be the formation of ties with the communities and the organizations and businesses in the communities to build a base of support for prisoners' success once they have completed rehabilitation programs and returned home. Currently, much stigma surrounds prisoners once released. However, by developing support networks for the prisoners while they are still incarcerated, they will have contacts in the community and with various businesses to support their long-term success. Particularly for prisoners not imprisoned for violent charges and who adhere to all aspects of the rehabilitation program, it would be significantly valuable to allow them to have work release for two days a week to develop connections with organizations and businesses in the community. It is not enough for prisoners to complete a rehabilitation program if they have not developed the contacts needed to secure work once released. Furthermore, the likelihood of their success increases when they are engaged in job skills training that is relevant to them, in which they hold an interest, and which provides them with a decent livelihood once released. Implementing these components of policy reform for rehabilitation programs will take a concerted effort among prisons, probation officers, organizations, and businesses. However, the effort would be fruitful by setting up prisoners for success and reducing the potential for recidivism. The rehabilitation program reform will benefit the communities where prisoners return and help their families, ultimately benefiting the entire society of the United States.

However, another prong of the solution to reform probation programs is ensuring that instructors and facilitators are prepared because when they are less than competent, the commitment and engagement of prisoners in the rehabilitation programs will not be enough for them to succeed. The task force should push for more funding to train the existing instructors and facilitators and hire new personnel with experience and skills in the newly added job skills offerings to help prisoners develop those skills. Once prisoners have accomplished job skills training that interests, and inspires them, they will develop a feeling of accomplishment that will go a long way in reducing recidivism. The following section will present the study's conclusion.

Conclusion

The study's research question asked: What are federal probation officers' perspective regarding the success of rehabilitation programs offered in the Federal Bureau of Prisons? The research in the present study revealed that federal probation officers view interaction with the prisoners' families as essential to understanding the needs of prisoners in rehabilitation programs. Families contain a wealth of information about their loved ones in prison that will not appear in case reports produced by probation officers and case managers. Therefore, family involvement is key throughout the process of determining eligibility. The probation officers revealed that rehabilitation programs are successful if the prisoner is committed, but that commitment must be met by ensuring good instructors and facilitators are present in the program.

The main finding in the present study was that rehabilitation program reform is needed. The programs currently offer only a very limited number of job skills training options, and those are labor jobs, which are not suited to prisoners or are not such that

will engage and interest prisoners. Rehabilitation programs should provide a solid foundation for prisoners once they are released, and currently, they are falling far short. Federal probation officers spend a great deal of time determining eligibility for prisoners to enter probation programs. The probation officers expressed the value or including many stakeholders in assessment. The involvement of many stakeholders should continue throughout the rehabilitation program to meet the needs of prisoners as set out in the RNR model and informed by the deep knowledge of probation officers presented in this study.

This study took a bottom-up approach to determine what federal probation officers believe would help rehabilitation programs be more successful, and the findings are clear. Top-down approaches in policymaking and funding do not encompass the complete picture of what is occurring in prison rehabilitation programs. Rehabilitation programs require more funding supported by updated policies and program offerings to support prisoners' interests and increase engagement. Ultimately, prisoners who feel they have accomplished something positive and have made networks within the community businesses and organizations will be released from prison ready to fill a positive role in the world around them rather than falling back into the same behavior and returning to prison.

This study concludes that a task form should be formed to develop a prison rehabilitation reform plan that aligns with the RNR model. The task force should be comprised of federal probation officers since they are in the unique position to understand what is needed and how it should be implemented to achieve optimal success. Once the task force has developed a sound plan, policymakers should be approached with

the plan. The plan should be widely published and disseminated to policymakers. Involving businesses and organizations in the plan would also be significant because it would ensure policymakers understand the plan is doable. Prison rehabilitation reform will be an enormous undertaking, but the rewards will benefit the entire population, help build stronger, more resilient communities, and ultimately reduce recidivism.

References

Aburto, J. M., Tilstra, A. M., Floridi, G., & Dowd, J. B. (2022). Significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on race/ethnic differences in US mortality. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *119*(35), e2205813119.

Ahidjo, N. (2024). The efficacy of restorative justice programs in reducing recidivism rates. *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences, 2*(4), 38-51.

Andrade, C. (2018). Internal, external, and ecological validity in research design, conduct, and evaluation. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, *40*(5), 498-499.

Arbour, W., Marchand, S., & Lacroix, G. (2023). Prison rehabilitation programs and recidivism: Evidence from variations in availability. *SSRN*. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4444790

Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*, 1609406919874596. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596

Argyle, M. (Ed.). (2013). *Communicating by telephone* (Vol. 15). Elsevier.

Askun, V., & Cizel, R. (2020). Twenty years of research on mixed methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Studies*, (1). https://doi.org/10.14689/jomes.2020.1.2

Bäckström, P. J., Danielsson, M., Starfelt Sutton, L. C., & Andersson, D. (2022). Evaluation of the predictive validity of a risk-need-responsivity assessment tool (RNR-A) in the Swedish prison and probation service. *Prison Journal*, *102*(3), 367-390. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(22)00093-7

Bain, A. (2019). Skills for success: Understanding routes to desistance. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *58*(7), 644-660. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2019.1635244

Balafoutas, L., García-Gallego, A., Georgantzis, N., Jaber-Lopez, T., & Mitrokostas, E. (2020). Rehabilitation and social behavior: Experiments in prison. *Games and Economic Behavior*, *119*, 148-171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geb.2019.10.009

Baranyi, G., Fazel, S., Langerfeldt, S. D., & Mundt, A. P. (2022). The prevalence of comorbid serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders in prison populations: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Lancet Public Health*, *7*(6), e557-e568.

Bearman, M. (2019). Eliciting rich data: A practical approach to writing semi-structured interview schedules. *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Professional Journal*, *20*(3), 1-11.

Bergen, N., & Labonté, R. (2020). "Everything is perfect, and we have no problems": Detecting and limiting social desirability bias in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, *30*(5), 783-792. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732319889354

Berghuis, M. (2018). Reentry programs for adult male offender recidivism and reintegration: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 62*(14), 4655–4676. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X18778448

Beyens, K., Kennes, P., Snacken, S., & Tournel, H. (2015). The craft of doing qualitative research in prisons. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *4*(1), 66-7

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P.M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.) *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology* (pp. 57-71). American Psychological Association.

Brown, A., & Danaher, P. A. (2019). CHE principles: Facilitating authentic and dialogical semi-structured interviews in educational research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *42*(1), 76-90. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2017.1379987

Bhuller, M., Dahl, G. B., Løken, K. V., & Mogstad, M. (2020). Incarceration, recidivism, and employment. *Journal of Political Economy*, *128*(4), 1269-1324. https://doi.org/10.1086/705330

Biswas, J. (2017). When jails become hospitals: The fallout from a fragmented mental health system. *Criminal Justice*., *32*, 4.

Blatstein, M. (2022, January 7). Facing the BOP with: Intellectual disabilities, neurological impairments, social deficiencies or autism. https://www.pprsus.com/incarceration-in-the-bop/

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2019). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Brogan, L., Haney-Caron, E., NeMoyer, A., & DeMatteo, D. (2015). Applying the risk-needs-responsivity (RNR) model to juvenile justice. *Criminal Justice Review*, *40*(3), 277-302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734016814567312

Bureau of Prisons. (2024). *Female Offenders*. https://www.bop.gov/inmates/custody_and_care/female_offenders.jsp

Canady, V. (2023). Collaborative to support reentry efforts, reduce recidivism. *Mental Health Weekly*, *28*(16), 5-6. https://doi.org/10.1002/mhw.31423

Casey, S. (2019). Psychologically relevant theories of crime and offender rehabilitation. *The Wiley International Handbook of Correctional Psychology*, 337-353. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119139980.ch21

Castleberry, A., & Nolen, A. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds?. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, *10*(6), 807-815. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019

Caudill, J. W., & Trulson, C. R. (2023). Comparing official measures of recidivism in juvenile justice. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *48*(2), 319-344. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-022-09672-x

Chamberlain, A. W. (2012). Offender rehabilitation: Examining changes in inmate treatment characteristics, program participation, and institutional behavior. *Justice Quarterly, 29*(2), 183-228. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2010.549833

Chatfield, S. L. (2020). Recommendations for secondary analysis of qualitative data. *Qualitative Report*, *25*(3), 833-842.

Chen, E. Y., & Meyer, S. E. (2020). Beyond Recidivism. *Beyond Recidivism: New Approaches to Research on Prisoner Reentry and Reintegration*, 13.

Crawford, L.M. (2020). *Conceptual and theoretical frameworks in research*. SAGE.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Cullen, F. T., & Jonson, C. L. (2011). Rehabilitation and treatment programs. *Crime and Public Policy*, 293-344.

Dahl, G. B., & Mogstad, M. (2020, April 6). The benefits of rehabilitative incarceration. *NBER Reporter*. https://www.nber.org/reporter/2020number1/benefits-rehabilitative-incarceration

Department of Justice. (2023). *Prison reform: Reducing recidivism by strengthening the federal bureau of prisons*. https://www.justice.gov/archives/prison-reform

de Ruiter, C., Chakhssi, F., & Bernstein, D. P. (2015). Treating the untreatable psychopath. In The Clinical and Forensic Assessment of Psychopathy (pp. 388-402). Routledge.

Duwe, G. (2017). The use and impact of correctional programming for inmates on pre and post-release outcomes. US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. https://doi.org/10.1037/e497732006-001

Elkatawneh, D. H. (2016). The five qualitative approaches: Problem, purpose, and questions/the role of theory in the five qualitative approaches/comparative case study. *SSRN*. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2761327

Enns, P. K. (2016). *Incarceration nation*. Cambridge University Press.

Federal Bureau of Prisons. (2023). Incarceration and Recidivism Chart. https://www.bop.gov/about/agency/#:~:text=The%20BOP%C3%AF%C2%BF%C2%BDs%20overall%20recidivism,using%20comparable%20definitions%20and%20methodologies.

Fisher, C. B. (2021). *Decoding the ethics code: A practical guide for psychologists*. Sage Publications.

Fritzon, K., Miller, S., Bargh, D., Hollows, K., Osborne, A., & Howlett, A. (2021). Understanding the relationships between trauma and criminogenic risk using the

risk-need-responsivity model. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, *30*(3), 294-323.

Gawron, C. R. (2019). Funding mental healthcare in the wake of deinstitutionalization: How the United States and the United Kingdom diverged in mental health policy after deinstitutionalization, and what we can learn from their differing approaches to funding mental healthcare. *Notre Dame J. Int'l Comp. L.*, *9*, 85-115. https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1108&context=ndjicl

Gill, C., & Wilson, D. B. (2016). Improving the success of reentry programs: Identifying the impact of service–need fit on recidivism. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *44*(3), 336-359. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854816682048

Gul, R., Muhammad, B., & Hussain, R. (2021). An Analysis of Risk-Need-Responsivity Model to Reform Pakistan's Prisons. *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, *13*(3).

Hanson, R. K., Bourgon, G., McGrath, R. J., Kroner, D., D'Amora, D. A., Thomas, S. S., & Tavarez, L. P. (2017). A five-level risk and needs system: Maximizing assessment results in corrections through the development of a common language. WS Hein. https://saratso.org/pdf/A_Five_Level_Risk_and_Needs_System_Report.pdf

Hoogesteyn, K., Verigin, B. L., Finnick, D., & Meijer, E. H. (2023). Rapport-building: Chat versus in-person witness interviews. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling, 20*, 162-178.

Horsfall, M., Eikelenboom, M., Draisma, S., & Smit, J. H. (2021). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(10858), 1-10.

Jain, N. (2021). Survey versus interviews: Comparing data collection tools for

exploratory research. *The Qualitative Report*, *26*(2), 541-554.

Kaaristo, M. (2022). Everyday power dynamics and hierarchies in qualitative research: The role of humor in the field. *Qualitative Research, 22*(5), 743-750.

Kadam, R. A. (2017). Informed consent process: a step further towards making it meaningful!. *Perspectives in clinical research*, *8*(3), 107-112.

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of advanced nursing*, *72*(12), 2954-2965. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031

Keeley, P., Edmondson, A., & Kendal, S. E. (2022). Perspectives of an international sample of adults of Trichotillomania on the acceptability and feasibility of asynchronous qualitative email interview method. *Research Methods in Medicine & Health Sciences, 3*(2), 1-24. Doi: 10.1177/26320843221080733

LaCourse, A., Listwan, S. J., Reid, S., & Hartman, J. L. (2019). Recidivism and reentry: The role of individual coping styles. *Crime & Delinquency*, *65*(1), 46-68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128718790497

Lambert, E. G., Hogan, N. L., Keena, L. D., Williamson, L., & Kim, B. (2017). Exploring the association between different types of social support with role stress, work–family conflict, and turnover intent among private prison staff. *Journal of Applied Security Research*, *12*(2), 203-223. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3952

Larsen, R. R., Jalava, J., & Griffiths, S. (2020). Are Psychopathy Checklist (PCL) psychopaths dangerous, untreatable, and without conscience? A systematic review

of the empirical evidence. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, *26*(3), 297.

Lee, L. M. (2019). The impact of prison programming on recidivism. *Corrections*, *4*(4), 252-271. https://doi.org/10.1080/23774657.2017.1399095

Lewis, C. (2020). The paradox of recidivism. *Emory LJ*, *70*, 1209.

Loeffler, C. E., & Nagin, D. S. (2022). The impact of incarceration on recidivism. *Annual Review of Criminology*, *5*, 133-152. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-030920-112506

Lo Iacono, V., Symonds, P., & Brown, D. H. (2016). Skype as a tool for qualitative research interviews. *Sociological research online*, *21*(2), 103-117.

Lutz, M., Zani, D., Fritz, M., Dudeck, M., & Franke, I. (2022). A review and comparative analysis of the risk-needs-responsivity, good lives, and recovery models in forensic psychiatric treatment. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, *13*, 988905. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2022.988905

Markman, J. A., Durose, M. R., Rantala, R. R., & Tiedt, A. D. (2016). Recidivism of offenders placed on federal community supervision in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010. *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, *2*(1), 1-16.

Massoglia, M., & Remster, B. (2019). Linkages between incarceration and health. *Public health reports*, *134*(1_suppl), 8S-14S.

McAleese, S., & Kilty, J. M. (2019). Stories matter: Reaffirming the value of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *24*(4), 822-845.

McCoy, A. W. (2021). *War on drugs: studies in the failure of US narcotics policy*. Routledge.

McNair-Williams, S. S. (2019). The Impact of a Felon's Overall Well-Being on

Education, Employment, and Recidivism. *Liberty University*. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3256&context=doctoral

Mears, D. P., Cochran, J. C., Bales, W. D., & Bhati, A. S. (2016). Recidivism and time served in prison. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 83-124.

Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigor in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative health research*, *25*(9), 1212-1222. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315588501

Negrini, S. Selb, M., Kiekens, C,Todhunter-Brown, A.,Arienti, C.,Stucki, G. & Meyer, T; 3rd Cochrane Rehabilitation Methodology Meeting participants. (2022). Rehabilitation definition for research purposes. A global stakeholders' initiative by Cochrane Rehabilitation. *Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair*, *36*(7), 405-414. https://doi.org/10.23736/S1973-9087.22.07509-8

Newington, L., & Metcalfe, A. (2014). Factors influencing recruitment to research: qualitative study of the experiences and perceptions of research teams. *BMC medical research methodology*, *14*, 1-11.

Newsome, J., & Cullen, F. T. (2017). The risk-need-responsivity model revisited: Using biosocial criminology to enhance offender rehabilitation. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *44*(8), 1030-1049. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854817715289

Norman, M. (2017). Sport in the underlife of a total institution: Social control and resistance in Canadian prisons. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *52*(5), 598-614. https://doi.org/10.1177/101269021560996

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis:

Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*, 1-3. Doi: 10.1177/1609406917733847

Obilor, E. I. (2023). Convenience and purposive sampling techniques: Are they the same? I*nternational Journal of Innovative Social Sciences Education Research, 11*(1), 1-7. https://seahipaj.org/journals-ci/mar-2023/IJISSER/full/IJISSER-M-1-2023.pdf

Pettit, B., & Gutierrez, C. (2018). Mass incarceration and racial inequality. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, *77*(3-4), 1153-1182.

Plonsky, L., & Ghanbar, H. (2018). Multiple regression in L2 research: A methodological synthesis and guide to interpreting R2 values. *The Modern Language Journal*, *102*(4), 713-731.

Public Safety Canada. (2022). Risk-need-responsivity model for offender assessment and rehabilitation. https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/rsk-nd-rspnsvty/index-en.aspx

Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., Cannell, M. B., Jetelina, K. K., & Froehlich-Grobe, K. (2016). Disproportionate prevalence rate of prisoners with disabilities: Evidence from a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *27*(2), 106-115.

Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., & Connell, N. M. (2014). Mental health of prisoners: Identifying barriers to mental health treatment and medication continuity. *American journal of public health*, *104*(12), 2328-2333.

Roache, R. (2014). Why is informed consent important? *Journal of Medical Ethics*. https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2014-102264

Robertson, C. E., & McGillivray, J. A. (2015). Autism behind bars: a review of the

research literature and discussion of key issues. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, *26*(6), 719-736. https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2015.1062994

Robson, C. & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real world research*. Wiley.

Roulston, K., & Choi, M. (2018). Qualitative interviews. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection*, 233-249.

Rudge, S., Feigenbaum, J. D., & Fonagy, P. (2017). Mechanisms of change in dialectical behaviour therapy and cognitive behaviour therapy for borderline personality disorder: a critical review of the literature. *Journal of Mental Health*.

Schoonenboom, J. (2023, January). The fundamental difference between qualitative and quantitative data in mixed methods research. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 24, No. 1).

Scurich, N., & John, R. S. (2019). The dark figure of sexual recidivism. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, *37*(2), 158-175. https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2400

Skeem, J. L., Winter, E., Kennealy, P. J., Louden, J. E., & Tatar II, J. R. (2014). Offenders with mental illness have criminogenic needs, too: toward recidivism reduction. *Law and human behavior*, *38*(3), 212-224. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/lhb0000054

Takemoto, C. (2016). Supporting Successful Reentry Programs for People with Disabilities. https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/reentry-for-people-with-disabilities-resources.pdf

Taxman, F. S., & Smith, L. (2021). Risk-need-responsivity (RNR) classification models: Still evolving. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *59*, 101459.

Van Dis, E. A., Van Veen, S. C., Hagenaars, M. A., Batelaan, N. M., Bockting, C. L., Van Den Heuvel, R. M., Cuijpers, P, & Engelhard, I. M. (2020). Long-term outcomes of cognitive behavioral therapy for anxiety-related disorders: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA psychiatry*, *77*(3), 265-273.

Viglione, J. (2019). The risk-need-responsivity model: How do probation officers implement the principles of effective intervention?. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *46*(5), 655-673. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854818807505

Visher, C., & Eason. A better path forward for criminal justice: Changing prisons to help people change. *Brookings*. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-changing-prisons-to-help-people-change/

Visher, C., & Eason, J. M. (2021). Changing prisons to help people change. *Contexts*, *20*(4), 22-27. https://doi.org/10.1177/15365042211058121

Walden University. (2024). Ethics and Compliance. https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/research-center/research-ethics/policies

Wildeman, C., Goldman, A. W., & Turney, K. (2018). Parental incarceration and child health in the United States. *Epidemiologic reviews*, *40*(1), 146-156.

Wildeman, C., & Wang, E. A. (2017). Mass incarceration, public health, and widening inequality in the USA. *The Lancet*, *389*(10077), 1464-1474.

Zapryanova, M. (2020). The effects of time in prison and time on parole on recidivism. *The Journal of Law and Economics*, *63*(4), 699-727.

Zara, G., Farrington, D. P. (2015). Criminal Recidivism: Explanation, Prediction and Prevention. Taylor & Francis.

Zgoba, K. M., Reeves, R., Tamburello, A., & Debilio, L. (2020). Criminal recidivism in

inmates with mental illness and substance use disorders. *J Am Acad Psychiatry Law*, *48*(2), 209-215.

Zubairu, N. (2023). The Risk-Need-Responsivity Model on Inmate Rehabilitation. *Journal of Contemporary Sociological Issues*, *3*(2), 177-202.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Please explain how you assess the risks of prisoners to determine if they are eligible for a rehabilitation program

2. Please describe the standard eligibility requirements for prisoners to participate in a rehabilitation program.

3. Please describe how you assess the specific needs of individual prisoners before supporting their entry into a rehabilitation program.

4. Please describe the characteristics that would disqualify a prisoner from eligibility to participate in a rehabilitation program.

5. Please describe the factors that are key to prisoners' success in a rehabilitation program.

6. Please describe the services rehabilitation programs offer to prepare prisoners for rehabilitation.

7. Please describe the living situations after the rehabilitation program that contributes to a prisoner's success following a rehabilitation program.

8. How do you view the success of rehabilitation programs?

9. How do you think rehabilitation programs could be improved?

10. Is there anything you would like to tell me that I have not directly asked?