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# A Survey of Probation Officers' Opinions: Risk Assessments

Kenika Kianté' Canty  
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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Kenika Canty

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

A Survey of Probation Officers' Opinions: Risk Assessments

by

Kenika K. Canty

MS, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

BS, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2015

## Abstract

The U. S. criminal justice system has used risk assessment tools in an effort to reduce recidivism and risk assessment tools are now commonplace. Correctional organizations, however, have struggled with officers' resistance to these tools in spite of the evidence for their utility. There is limited research that explores the impact of resistance to organizational change within the context of correctional agencies. To address that gap, this correlational study used organizational change theory to examine officers' resistance to the use of risk assessment tools based on officers' opinions of the risk assessment tool being used in North Carolina. Data were collected through an online survey of 109 North Carolina probation and parole officers. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the statistical relationship between officer use of risk assessment tools and the dependent variables which included officers' opinions of the risk assessment tool, knowledge of risk assessments, training for use of risk assessments, risk assessments in the sentencing process, and officers' length of time employed. Findings indicated that opinions of the risk assessment tool and training to use the tool statistically impact officers' use of the tool in daily supervision of offenders. Organizational change theory predicted these findings as officers' resistance to policy change was manifested in their opinions of that policy. Implications for positive social change include recommendations for corrections agencies to refine training regarding risk assessments in efforts to minimize officer resistance of properly applying risk assessment tools in daily job duties with the intended outcome of reducing recidivism, and therefore preventing future harms to the community.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

Probation is being used across the United States as a means of supervising criminal offenders in the community and has been increasing in use since 1985 (Teague, 2011). Risk assessments are being used in probation to determine an individual's level of risk to commit a new crime, thereby determining the level of supervision that individual should receive based on evidence-based practices (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Shaffer, Kelly, & Lieberman, 2011; Teague, 2011). Risk assessments are tools which have been developed through statistical research to determine offenders' risk level for potentially committing new crimes in society (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Shaffer et al., 2011; Teague, 2011). In this study, I examined probation officers' opinion of risk assessments and probation officers' opinions of how supervision practices are being shaped by current organizational requirements to incorporate the use of risk assessments in the supervision of offenders.

Policy changes in community corrections and sentencing have been constant since the introduction of community supervision. During the implementation of a new policy, individual opinions can affect not only the accurate implementation of the policy, but also the ability for the new policy to affect change in probationary cases (Farrell, Young, & Taxman, 2011; Steiner, Travis, & Makarios, 2011). Probation officers are the line level staff responsible for the supervision of offenders in the community (Ferguson, 2002). The duties of probation officers include the implementation of risk assessments and the use of risk level to supervise offenders (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). The opinions

that probation officers have regarding the use of risk assessments are important because probation officers' professional judgment has been the basis for supervising offenders in the community (Brennan, Dieterich, & Ehret, 2009; Oleson, VanBenschoten, Robinson, & Lowenkamp, 2011). Professional judgment is noted as the first generation of risk assessments (Brennan et al., 2009; Oleson et al., 2011). While risk assessments have been accepted as an effective tool for supervision (Brennan et al., 2009; DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Oleson et al., 2011; Shaffer et al., 2011; Teague, 2011; Warren, 2007), it is imperative to research the implementation of these practices by probation officers based on the officers' opinions. This research was conducted to determine a relationship between probation officers' opinions of the risk assessment tool and their perceptions of the incorporation of risk assessments in the supervision of adult offenders in an effort to develop a statistically significant relationship. Additionally, this research was conducted to determine probation officers' opinion of training to implement the risk assessment tool to determine their knowledge of the risk assessments and to determine officers' opinions regarding the incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing. These opinions were examined to determine if a relationship existed regarding these opinions and officers' perception of policy implementation in probation supervision.

This study has promoted positive social change by providing policy makers with information regarding probation officers' opinions of risk assessments. This information can be used to develop effective implementation strategies for correct use of risk assessment. By identifying officers' opinions regarding risk assessments, policy makers will be able to better equip probation officers to meet their daily duty requirements and to

implement current policy correctly. Additionally, training can be developed that successfully prepares probation officers for the implementation of policy and the administering of risk assessments. Implementation of a new policy starts on the frontline of services (Ferguson, 2002; Steiner et al., 2011). For this reason, it was necessary to determine if officers' opinions were affecting implementation. It was also necessary to determine if there were any negative opinions of the risk assessment tool and what the causes of those opinions were in an effort to implement current policy. By correctly implementing risk assessments, social change can be achieved through a decrease in recidivism rates as offender needs can be accurately met. The use of risk assessments has a positive impact on recidivism (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Shaffer et al., 2011; Warren, 2007). Offenders will benefit from decreased contact with the law enforcement officials and the court system. Currently, the cost of corrections in the United States is estimated at \$75 billion dollars (Welsh & Farrington, 2011). The financial costs associated with the criminal justice system will decrease as crime decreases, which will be beneficial to the general public, the criminal justice system, and criminal offenders.

This chapter includes the basis for this study in the form of a background of evidence-based practices, risk assessments, and sentencing. Further, I provide the theoretical background for the basis of this study, the problem statement, the purpose of the research, the hypothesis associated with the study, and specific variables that were researched. It concludes with a transition into the literature that provides the basis for this research study.

## **Background**

The focus of this research was officers' opinion of the use of risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders. This research was developed from the theory of organizational change, which has a focus on factors that affect efforts to change an organization's policy, focus, and/or initiatives (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Probation officers caseloads have increased 120% across the United States in the last 3 decades because offenders are being placed on probation in lieu of receiving time in jail or prison (Drapela & Lutze, 2009). One of the initiatives implemented across the United States is the use of intermediate sanctions (Merrington, 2006). The use of intermediate sanctions includes increased supervision and increased requirements for offenders on probation given in court (Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005). The goal of these sanctions is to discourage criminal behaviors and to decrease recidivism rates among probationers (Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005). The development of evidence-based practices, specifically risk assessments, has led to policy changes across the United States (Teague, 2011). These changes include the use of risk assessments tools as a means of determining the level of supervision an individual will receive while on probation to include increased sanctions (Oleson et al., 2011; Shaffer et al., 2011; Teague, 2011). While an individual may be given increased supervision requirements in courts, that individual may be found to have a low level of risk based on the risk assessment conducted by the probation officer. In this instance, the individual will be supervised based on individual risk level and not the supervision conditions outlined in court (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). Individual risk level determines the frequency of probation

officers' contact with offenders as a part of the risk assessment process (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009).

The use of risk assessments in probation has been adopted in the state of North Carolina in accordance with evidence-based practices for supervision of criminal offenders. Due to the incorporation of risk assessments, supervision requirements for probation cases have changed. The North Carolina Justice Reinvestment Laws (2011) made changes to intermediate and community level sentencing. Intermediate sentencing requirements no longer require an assignment of a special condition, such as electronic house arrest, curfew, or in-patient treatment in order for a case to be classified as intermediate (NC General Assembly, 2011). The separating factor between community level cases and intermediate level cases can be the suspended sentence imposed (NC General Assembly, 2011).

Contrary to previous policy, the courts no longer determine who is in need of increased supervision. The revised legislation and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections policy states that the risk assessments will determine offender minimal supervision requirements (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). Probation officers, however, are still the sole proprietor of their individual cases. In the officers' discretion, they determine how much an offender is seen while staying within minimal policy requirements. This change in policy means that officers' completion of the risk assessment is now being used as the determining factor for level of supervision in North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections policy. This change requires the level of supervision given to offenders to be based on the risk

assessment conducted after sentencing rather than the sanctions provided in court.

Intermediate sanctions were previously given to ensure that a higher level of attention was given to offenders during supervision. Current legislation and policy has changed this requirement to incorporate the use of risk assessments as the determining factor in individual cases.

Given the changes in probation policy and legislation over time, understanding how officers perceived these changes is important. There is a gap in current literature regarding officers' opinion towards the use of risk assessments. Officers' perception and cynicism have been researched previously to form a relationship between the officers' opinion of organizational factors and the implementation of policy (Farrell et al., 2011; Steiner et al., 2011). There is little research on officers' opinions towards the use of risk assessments, training to incorporate risk assessments, understanding of risk assessments, the use of risk assessments in sentencing, or length of time employed by the department as factors in probation officers' perceptions regarding the implementation of current policy, more specifically implementation of the risk assessment tool. This research has added to the current literature by exploring the relationship between probation officers' opinion of risk assessments and their perceptions regarding the use of the risk assessment tool in their daily job functions.

This research was necessary in the effort to understand officers' perceptions of policy. By understanding the officers' opinions regarding the implementation of the risk assessment tool, implementation requirements developed can focus on preparing officers to properly implement current policy in community supervision. Probation officers are at

the forefront in the rehabilitation process for convicted offenders and the overall goal of maintaining safe communities. Understanding officers' views and perceptions allows policy makers to prepare probation officers to meet the duties of their positions. In addition, the proper implementation of policy is an overall objective for the implementation as well as evaluation of newly created policy and legislation.

### **Problem Statement**

In this study, I addressed officers' opinions regarding the implementation of risk assessments based on the current policy of supervising offenders using risk levels in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections. Scholars have validated the use of risk assessments tools to predict recidivism rates (Brennan et al., 2009; Johnson, Lowenkamp, VanBenschoten, & Robinson, 2011; Shaffer et al., 2011). Probation officers are critical in the implementation of court sanctions, and their opinion of policy impacts how well they implement that change (Ferguson, 2002; Steiner et al., 2011). To ensure that the goals of probation supervision are being achieved, it was necessary to determine if probation officers were incorporating risk assessments in their daily duties while also determining what, if any, factors were deterring officers' use of risk assessments. Researchers have focused on organizational factors as predictors of officers' perception towards implementation of change (Farrell et al., 2011; Friedman, Taxman, & Henderson, 2007; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Tamer, 2011; Steiner et al., 2011; Taxman, Young, Wiersema, Rhodes, & Mitchell, 2007). There is no previous literature on officers' opinions of specific policy as a basis for explaining resistance to implementation of that policy. This research has filled the current gap in literature

through the development of a statistical relationship regarding officers' perceptions towards risk assessments and officers' implementation of the risk assessment tool.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Risk assessments have been researched in probation as a means of reducing recidivism (Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Long, 2011; Oleson et al., 2011; Schwalbe 2008). The purpose of this quantitative research study was to evaluate officers' opinions towards the use of the risk assessment tool in the supervision of criminal offenders and to determine how probation officers' opinions influence their individual implementation of policy. Several factors were examined to determine a relationship between the probation officers' individual perceptions regarding the implementation of policy (the dependent variable) and the following independent variables: officers' opinions of risk assessments, officers' understanding of risk assessments, officers' opinions of training provided for the proper implementation of risk assessments, officers' opinions of the incorporation of risk assessments in the sentencing process, and officers' length of time employed by the department. Covariates were also used to determine if these variables had an effect on officers' implementation of risk assessments. The covariates included gender, education, race/ethnicity, age, and judicial division.

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

The research question examined in this study was as follows: Based on officers' perceptions of the risk assessment tool, how are current policy requirements to implement risk assessments being affected?

The following hypotheses were used to address the research question.

$H_{01a}$ : The opinions of North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections probation officers regarding risk assessments has no impact on the likelihood they will implement risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{11a}$ : Probation officers working for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections who have negative opinions of risk assessments are less likely to support the implementation of risk assessments in their daily duties than probation officers who have positive opinions of risk assessments.

$H_{01b}$ : The length of time a probation officer has worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections has no impact on the likelihood they will implement risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{11b}$ : The longer a probation officer has worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections the less likely they are to support the implementation of risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{01c}$ : There is no difference in implementation of risk assessment policy requirements by probation officers' based on officers' opinion of training given by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections to administer risk assessments.

$H_{11c}$ : Officers who have a negative opinion of the training to administer risk assessments received by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections are less likely to support the implementation of current policy requirements than officers who have a positive opinion of the training.

$H_{01d}$ : There is no difference in implementation of current policy requirements by probation officers based on knowledge of risk assessments.

$H_{11d}$ : Officers who have less knowledge about risk assessments are less likely to be positive about implementing current policy requirements than officers who have a greater knowledge of risk assessments.

$H_{01e}$ : There is no difference in officers implementation of risk assessments in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections based on officers' opinion regarding if risk assessments should be used in sentencing.

$H_{11e}$ : Officers who believe that risk assessments should be used during the sentencing process in the state of North Carolina Courts rather than in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections are less likely to support the implementation of risk assessments than officers who do not believe that risk assessments should be used in the state of North Carolina courts sentencing process.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

Organizational change theory helped to explain how probation officers react to the implementation of risk assessments. Organizational change theory has been developed to explain resistance to change and issues that occur during the implementation of new policy in different organizations (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). This theory was applied to this study because probation officers are required to use risk assessments in their daily duties, which is a change to previous policy. I looked at officers' opinions of risk assessments in the supervision of offenders and how probation officers are reacting to the use of risk assessments.

Organizational change theory can be used to address the continued issues faced by organizations when changes to policy initiatives occur (Elrod & Tippet, 2002; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001). Organizational change theorists outline the factors that have been vital in both successful and unsuccessful organizational change attempts (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). In order to determine how individuals react to change, research regarding organizational reform has continued (Pettigrew et al., 2001). Due to resistance to organizational change and the implementation of new policy, there have been different organizational change models developed (Tummers, 2011). The research was conducted in an effort to explain possible resistance to change and to aid in the efforts to successfully implement new policy (Tummers, 2011). Inquiry into organizational change theory has led to the idea that organizational change is often resisted by staff (Tummers, 2011). Additionally, organizational factors are essential in the change process (Farrell et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2002; Friedman et al., 2007; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Latessa, 2004; Steiner et al., 2011). Organizational factors have dominated the organizational change theory in the effort to determine viable ways to implement changes in policy. This research study has added to literature on organizational change by looking at a specific policy to determine a statistical relationship between opinions of the policy and opinions regarding implementation of the policy. Organizational change theory is elaborated upon in Chapter 2.

Research regarding organizational reform began in an effort to determine how organizations react to change (Pettigrew et al., 2001). In this study, I examined officers'

opinions toward the use of risk assessments in probation cases and the sentencing process to determine how probation officers are reacting to the current organizational changes. Probation officers' opinions of risk assessments were examined in the current study to determine if opinions were effecting implementation of policy based on officers' perception. I explored officers' opinions regarding the implementation of risk assessments and the effect it had on probation supervision. In addition, officers' opinions regarding an understanding of risk assessments and training for the implementation of risk assessments were examined through this research. With these findings, administrators and policy makers will be able to develop training plans for the correct implementation of risk assessments throughout the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections by understanding how probation officers are reacting to the change.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study was a descriptive quantitative research study using a cross-sectional survey design. To determine how probation officers view a topic, it was necessary to ask probation officers directly; thus, survey research was an ideal design for this study. In research, surveys are used to gain information on topics that have not been fully explored (Wolfer, 2007). Survey research can be used to evaluate programs (Wolfer, 2007). In this case, I sought to evaluate officers' opinions of risk assessments and officers' perceptions of the implementation of risk assessments making survey research the optimal research design for this study. Several independent variables were tested. The independent variables included probation officers' opinions of the risk assessment tool,

probation officers' understanding of risk assessments, probation officers' opinions regarding training to implement the risk assessment tool, probation officers' opinions regarding possible incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing, as well as the length of time employed with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections. The dependent variable was officers' perceptions regarding individual implementation of current community corrections policy, which was the use of risk assessments. Covariates in this study included sex, age, ethnicity, education level, and judicial division.

The target population was North Carolina Adult Probation/Parole Officers. A cross-sectional electronic survey using Survey Monkey was e-mailed to probation/parole officers. To access e-mail addresses for this population I called each state probation office in North Carolina and requested e-mail addresses from the receptionist. Both e-mail addresses and office phone numbers are public record. To determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between the dependent and independent variables, SPSS software was used to analyze the data. A more detailed discussion regarding the research methodology is provided in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions**

*Community sanctions:* Those individuals sentenced to supervised probation that includes supervised probation, along with one or more of the following conditions: monetary obligations, outpatient drug/alcohol assessment and treatment, community service hours, and/or any other conditions of probation that are not considered an

intermediate sanction (Craddock, Gallagher, Hevener, Flinchum, Hall, Katzenelson, & Perdue, 2011).

*Criminogenic needs:* The values, attitudes, or behaviors of offenders that have been related to the possibility of committing criminal offenses (Pérez, 2009; Warren, 2007). These needs have been defined as having low self-control, antisocial personality, antisocial values, criminal peers, substance abuse, and dysfunctional family (Warren, 2007).

*Evidenced-based practices:* Correctional practices that have been proven through scientific research to be effective in the efforts to reduce recidivism (Pérez, 2009; Warren, 2007). Those principles include the risk principle, the need principle, use of a risk/need assessment tool, treatment and responsivity principle, motivation, and integration of treatment (Warren, 2007).

*Implementation:* Officer completion of risk assessment within first 60 days of supervision, officer assignment of Risk Level 1-5, and officer supervision of offenders based on the assigned risk level per policy (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009).

*Intermediate sanctions:* Those individuals sentenced to supervised probation with at least one of the following conditions: split sentence, assignment to a residential treatment program, house arrest with electronic monitoring, intensive probation, assignment to a day reporting center, and assignment to a drug treatment court program (Craddock et al., 2011).

*Probation/parole officers:* Individuals working for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections who are responsible for aiding and

encouraging persons under their supervision to bring about improvement in their conduct and condition. These officers ensure offender compliance with the court's judgment, effectively rehabilitate offenders, and protect the public safety (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011).

*Recidivism:* For the purpose of this study, recidivism was defined as repeated criminal behavior. This was measured based upon subsequent arrest rates while on probation (Craddock et al., 2011).

*Risk assessments:* An assessment tool used to predict offender risk of committing subsequent crimes based on individual needs (Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Long, 2011; Oleson et al., 2011).

*North Carolina adult probation risk assessments:* Consists of three parts to include the offender traits inventory, the self-assessment, and the officer impressions section (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). Risk assessments per policy are to be conducted within the first 60 days of probationary sentence and determine offender level of supervision (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011).

*Risk principle:* The risk or possibility of an offender committing a new criminal offense while on probation (Pérez, 2009; Warren, 2007).

*Supervised probation:* Offenders who were sentenced in North Carolina based on the Structured Sentencing Act used in NC courts and received a supervised probation sentence in lieu of an active sentence (Craddock et al., 2011).

### **Assumptions**

There were assumptions made that were necessary for the completion of this study. It was assumed that survey participants would answer the questionnaires truthfully and to the best of their ability because participation in this study was voluntary and confidentiality was assured. It was assumed that the list of all current North Carolina Probation and Parole officers obtained via phone calls to the offices was current and accurate. It was further assumed that all officers would not return the survey. The entire population was given the option to participate. It was assumed that a representative sample of officers, to include a representation of demographics, was the basis of the findings as the actual demographic factors for the population was not publically available. When conducting survey research, one concern in the data collection process was the percentage of returned surveys. There are approximately 1,900 probation/parole officers working on the state level in North Carolina (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). To achieve statistical significance, 456 surveys needed to be returned or a response rate of 24%. This amount of returned surveys would have yielded a 95% confidence interval of plus/minus 4. These assumptions were made due to the chosen data collection method which was cross-sectional survey research.

Cross-sectional survey research was chosen due to the exploratory nature of this research (Wolfer, 2007). The goal was to determine officers' opinions of risk assessments at one point in time. The survey was administered, and probation officers were given the opportunity to complete the survey once. To ensure that as many participants were reached as possible, initial contact was made with an additional e-mail

following to thank those who have participated while reminding others to complete the survey. Survey research was the chosen methodology as I sought to gain data regarding individual opinions or risk assessments. These opinions were collected through the use of a questionnaire to probation officers.

### **Scope and Delimitation**

I addressed probation officers' opinions regarding implementing the current policy of supervising offenders using risk assessments in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections. I used a questionnaire as the primary means of data collection. The population was limited to those field officers to include probation/parole officers employed by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Community Corrections. The number of current probation officers working for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Community Corrections was approximately 1,900 (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). The state of North Carolina was chosen for this research due to the many changes in policy that have occurred in the last four years. Over the last four years, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections developed a policy that is centered around the supervision of criminal offenders based on their level of risk to the community and themselves (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). The changes occurring in policy in North Carolina included the incorporation of evidence-based practices and risk assessments in supervision. Due to the efforts to incorporate risk assessments, probation officers job requirements and procedures have undergone changes.

The results of this study can be generalized to other probation officers in other states as it is suspected that other officers will have similar characteristics as the officers surveyed in this research. For this reason, administrators in different areas may find it beneficial to reference the findings of this research and to duplicate it in efforts to understand officers' opinions regarding the implementation of risk assessments.

### **Limitations**

Several factors might influence the results of the study. First, the population in which the data was collected was limited to probation officers in the state of North Carolina. Second, I used a self-administered survey instrument to collect data. If any participants did not understand or misunderstood the questions, skipped items, or answered carelessly, erroneous data may result. Third, the survey reported only participants' intentions and current attitudes. I assumed that if probation officers were implementing policy, they are doing so in accordance with current policy and procedures.

Bias maybe noted in this study in that I was a probation officer during the development of this study, but not during the execution. To combat bias I focused on the literature regarding risk assessments. The findings presented are based on standard statistical analysis, which also used level of significance to develop data results. More details about the creation of the survey instrument and statistical analysis are provided in Chapter 3.

### **Significance**

Scholars have focused on the effectiveness of risk assessments through the use of evidence-based practices (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Warren, 2007). Opinions towards

policy change have been researched pertaining to the role that probation officers have in implementing a new policy (Ferguson, 2002; Steiner et al., 2011). Researchers have examined cynicism towards policy change and the affects cynicism has on the implementation of new policy (Latessa, 2004; Steiner et al., 2011). Organizational factors such as leadership have also been researched to determine the impact of officers' perceptions of policy change (Farrell et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2002; Steiner et al., 2011). Organizational factors have been researched to develop a relationship between officers' opinion and implementation of new policy. There is little research on how officers' opinions of a new policy, in these case risk assessments, are related to officer opinion of implementation of the new policy.

Research on risk assessments in probation as a means of reducing recidivism has continued (Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Long, 2011; Oleson et al., 2011, Schwalbe, 2008). Risk assessments tools to predict recidivism rates are continuously being validated (Brennan et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011; Shaffer et al., 2011). Officers' opinions and thoughts regarding the implementation of risk assessments have been limited. The gap in research regarding officers' opinions towards new policy needs further research. Information regarding officers' perceptions of training, understanding of risk assessments, and the use of risk assessments in the sentencing process can aid in future implementation efforts. By determining if a relationship existed between officers' opinions and the variable identified (officers' opinions of training for risk assessments, officers' current understanding of risk assessments, and officers' opinions towards

incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing), knowledge in the field of risk assessments as well as organizational change will be advanced.

Practices in probation will be advanced through an understanding of probation officers' opinions of risk assessments. North Carolina administrators can target best practices for training these officers on risk assessments and implementation of risk assessment policy. The main focus of this research was to determine if officers understand the concepts being used in policy as a means of conducting daily job requirements for supervising offenders. This research can ensure those officers' concerns regarding risk assessments will be addressed in future training. This will advance both the practice of training to use risk assessments, as well as the incorporation of risk assessments in supervising cases.

Implications for social change exist in the underlying goal of community corrections, which is the rehabilitation of offenders. Probation officers' concerns can be acknowledged and addressed if officers' opinions regarding the implementation of the risk assessment tool, officers' opinions regarding training to implement the risk assessment tool, officers' opinions regarding understanding of risk assessments, and officers' opinions regarding incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing are determined. Accurately incorporating risk assessments in the supervision of offenders on probation has been determined to reduce recidivism rates of offenders. Social change will be seen in lower criminal activity, offender needs being met, and overall less contact with the criminal justice system. This will aid in the goal of offenders becoming productive members of society. Another benefit to social change is that it will be cost

effective for society in that the \$75 billion dollars used yearly for criminal justice will be decreased (Welsh & Farrington, 2011). Currently, over \$50 billion is spent in corrections alone with prisons at the forefront of cost (Bosh, 2011, 2012). Breaking the cycle of recidivism has been identified as the most important goal of corrections in the effort to prevent future criminal acts and reduce the increasingly high cost of corrections (Bosh, 2011, 2012). A reduction in crime means a reduction in the cost of putting individuals through the criminal justice system. Strategies to reduce criminal behavior and recidivism are becoming the focus of criminal justice agencies (Bosh, 2011, 2012). Understanding of officers' opinions and thoughts regarding risk assessments and implementation will be of benefit to the successful implementation of current policy and social change.

### **Summary**

This chapter was an overview of the focus of this research study. This chapter included an introduction of the topic for this research study, which was organizational change and officers' opinions. The problem addressed in this research was officers' opinions regarding the use of risk assessments in their duties and how officers' opinions toward the use of risk assessments influence officers' perception of risk assessment implementation. I attempted to identify a possible relationship between officers' opinions of a new policy, risk assessments, and officers' perception regarding implementation of that policy. The purpose of this study was to determine officers' opinions towards current policy changes to incorporate risk assessments; if officers have a good understanding of risk assessments; if negative opinions exist towards training for

implementation of risk assessments; and if officers believe that risk assessments should be incorporated in the sentencing process.

Chapter 2 is a review of literature that includes a historical look into risk assessments, officers' cynicism, and sentencing for probation cases. I will also outline supervision practices in the state of North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections and the direction in which probation supervision is currently moving. In this chapter, I will develop the basis for why this research was necessary and also outline the specific gaps that existed in current literature.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In adult probation, there have been changes in the methods used to supervise criminal offenders. In this study, I addressed probation officers' opinions regarding implementing the current policy of supervising offenders based on the results of the risk assessment in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections. I sought to determine if officers' opinions of the risk assessment was affecting implementation of current policy regarding the supervision of offenders in the community. The purpose of this research was to evaluate officers' opinions towards the use of risk assessments in supervision and how probation officers' opinions influence policy implementation.

Risk assessments in probation supervision have been developed over the last 30 years in efforts to reduce recidivism (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Shaffer et al., 2011; Teague, 2011). Implementation of risk assessments has become a national and international focus of community correction programs (Fitzgibbon, Hamilton, & Richardson, 2010; Ugwudike, 2011). Due to implementation initiatives for risk assessments, it has become necessary to research officers' perceptions towards risk assessments. Research regarding perceived opinions towards policy is necessary as line staff officers are responsible for the daily implementation of new policy (Latessa, 2004; Steiner et al., 2011). Officers work directly with the offender population in the supervision of offenders in the community (Drapela & Lutze, 2009; Kerbs, Jones, &

Jolley, 2009). Understanding officers' perceptions towards policy can facilitate the proper implementation and development of policy (Steiner et al., 2011).

The use of policy derived from evidence-based practices in the supervision of offenders is being incorporated in criminal corrections across the United States and has been for over 30 years (Holloway, 2010). Evidence-based practices in the criminal justice system include the use of effective interventions programs to address criminal activity (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Warren, 2007). Risk assessments are one of the evidence-based tools used across the United States (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Warren, 2007). Risk assessments have been determined to yield positive results in the effort to lower recidivism and address offenders' needs (Andrews, 2006; Brennan et al., 2009; Kleiman, Ostrom, & Cheesman, 2007; Long et al., 2011; Shaffer et al., 2011).

The incorporation of the risk assessment tool has been implemented in the state of North Carolina probation supervision policy. The implementation of risk assessments has led to several changes in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections policy and procedure requirements for supervision of criminal offenders. If resistance towards policy exists, implementation can be negatively affected (Steiner et al., 2011). Researchers have established a relationship between organizational issues and the development of officers' opinions towards change in policy (Farrell et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2002; Friedman et al., 2007; Higgs et al., 2011; Steiner et al., 2011; Tummers, 2011). Literature regarding organizational commitment to a new policy in the effort to implement risk assessments has been conducted, and scholars have found that if the organization has not clearly committed to policy changes, implementation of those

changes will be negatively affected (Ferguson, 2002). Friedman et al., (2007) explored a relationship between organizational structure, leadership, culture, and climate to determine if these affected the implementation of substance abuse treatment practices. The implementation of a new policy is influenced by the leaders of the organization clarifying the value of the new policy (Tummers, 2011) to the organization. Higgs & Rowland (2011) explored leadership regarding the leaders' behavior as a focal point for the implementation of new policy changes. Scholars have focused on the relationship between organizational factors and officers' opinions as the determinant for implementation of new policy (Farrell et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2002; Friedman et al., 2007; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Steiner et al., 2011; Tummers, 2011).

There is little literature on the policy itself as the basis for officers' opinions. This research has filled this gap in that the study's goal was to determine a relationship between probation officers' opinions of risk assessments and if those opinions had an impact regarding officers' perceived implementation of risk assessments. The gap in literature was addressed in this research as I examined officers' understanding of risk assessments, acceptance of risk assessments as a legitimate means of determining offender risk, as well as officers' opinions towards the incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing. This research differed from previous studies on organizational change in that I did not focus on organizational issues, such as leadership, the organization's structure, climate and culture of the organization, or other organizational issues as seen in other studies (Farrell et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2002; Friedman et al., 2007; Steiner et al., 2011;). I focused on probation officers' opinions of risk assessments as a valid tool to

reduce recidivism, probation officers' opinions regarding understanding of risk assessments, probation officers' opinions regarding training to incorporate risk assessments, and probation officers' opinions regarding the possible use of risk assessments during the sentencing process.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation includes several sections culminating with the literature review of key variables for this study. The strategy for conducting research is explained in this chapter to include specific databases used and key terms. The theoretical foundations are outlined to include the origins of organizational reform theory as it relates to risk assessments. Risk assessments and the origin of risk assessments are identified as this is the policy in which probation officers were surveyed. The chapter includes a history of supervision and sentencing requirements in the state of North Carolina leading to current supervision practices that require risk assessments. A literature review outlining research related to risk assessments and organizational reform is specified in this chapter. This section also includes previous studies on survey research methodology to determine probation officers' opinions.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Walden University online library was the primary resource strategy used to develop this review. Many different research databases were used to include criminal justice periodicals, SAGE premier, and Walden's online E-book collection. Google Scholar and North Carolina Department of Public safety websites were also used. The keywords used to search the stated databases included *probation, supervision, cynicism for change, intermediate sanctions, sentencing practices, sentencing laws, community*

*corrections, punishment, rehabilitation, criminal justice system, criminal justice outcomes, evidenced-based practices, risk assessments, risk/need principle, sanction, reform, and organizational change.* The scope of this literature review included literature that is peer-reviewed, government-conducted research, and current policy and procedural manuals. The bulk of the literature gathered for this literature review was developed and published in various journals between the years of 2007-2012. There was limited current research which directly surveys probation officers' opinions regarding risk assessments in the form of studies and dissertations. Additionally, there was little research that surveys probation officers in general. For this reason, similar survey research studies (Drapela & Lutze, 2009; Kerbs et al., 2009) were used as referencing points to create this dissertation.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Organizational reform theory helps to explain how probation officers react to correctional policy changes. Research regarding organizational reform began in efforts to determine how organizations react to change (Pettigrew et al., 2001). Organizational reform states that organizational change is similar to the change process that occurs when an individual is faced with a crisis (Elrod & Tippett, 2002). One of the earliest change process identified includes three steps: unfreezing, moving, and freezing (Elrod & Tippett, 2002; Tummers, 2011). This theory was further expanded on to include the phases that individuals go through when faced with a crisis or change (Elrod & Tippett, 2002). This expanded theory of phases was further developed to include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance as phases of this theory (Elrod & Tippett, 2002).

The steps outlined by Elrod & Tippett (2002) have been determined to be associated with the challenge of organizational change.

Implementing organizational change over a variety of disciplines has continually been unsuccessful (Elrod & Tippett, 2002; Higgs, 2011; Pettigrew et al., 2001).

Resistance to change and implementation of new policy has been one reason for the unsuccessful outcomes of organizational change (Tummers, 2011). Change theories in early stages, planned change, were based in the premise that organizational change could be achieved by change managers and steps (Elrod & Tippett, 2002; Tummers, 2011). Change theory has evolved to include emergent plans which consider change to be a continuous and unpredictable event (Tummers, 2011). Emergent plans are not planned by an individual and have no defined steps (Tummers, 2011). Willingness to implement change is shared in what is considered planned change and emergent change (Tummers, 2011). Without the willingness of employees to implement change, both planned and emergent change efforts cannot succeed (Tummers, 2011).

Change to correctional policy regarding supervision of offenders has been met with resistance on the individual level (Steiner et al., 2011). One theoretical proposition of organizational reform theory is that organizations must be fully committed to changing in order for implementation to be effective (Ferguson, 2002). This commitment to change must be seen on all levels of the organization for implementation to be effective (Ferguson, 2002). Change in an organization can be affected by organizational factors such as leadership behavior and attitudes, organizational structure, organizational climate, and organizational culture (Ferguson, 2002; Friedman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011,

Higgs & Rowland, 2011, Latessa, 2004; Steiner et al., 2011). Survey research has been dominant in the effort to investigate organizational change (Farrell et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2002; Friedman et al., 2007; Steiner et al., 2011). The use of survey research in this study will be elaborated on in Chapter 3 of the current study.

Organizational reform theory was chosen as the theoretical basis for this study because the focus of this research was on officers' opinions of risk assessments. There is a national and international shift toward the incorporation of risk assessments in community corrections (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010; Ugwudike, 2011). Due to the current changes in community correction policies towards the incorporation of risk assessments, it has become essential to increase knowledge in the criminal justice field based on research of officers' opinion as well as literature regarding organizational reform theory as it relates to community corrections. As the use of risk assessments increases, it is important to ensure that risk assessments are being implemented correctly by probation officers to supervise offenders in the community. If implementation is effected by officers' opinions towards risk assessments, then it will be beneficial to policy makers to know officers' opinions and to address any concerns that may arise in the efforts to improve correctional reform.

### **Current Probation Practices: Risk Assessments**

The use of evidence-based practices to supervise offenders in the community is the driving force behind the implementation of risk assessments in community corrections. Evidence-based practices include a variety of tools that are based in scientific research and have been proven to be effective in the efforts to reduce recidivism

(Pérez, 2009; Warren, 2007). A tool used as a part of evidence-based practices is determining individual risk of committing a new offense through the use of risk assessments (Andrews, 2006; Long et al., 2011; Oleson et al., 2011). Risk-needs-responsivity model, or rather risk assessments theory, has a history rooted in the theory of predicting offender risk to commit subsequent crimes (Oleson et al., 2011). Attempts to predict offender risk level has been accepted across the United States as an appropriate means of reducing recidivism (Oleson et al., 2011; DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Warren, 2007). The following is a historical overview of the development of assessing offender risk as well as a look at rehabilitation in probation.

Evidence-based practices, such as the use of risk assessment tools, are based in the belief that effective intervention programs must be used in order to address the criminal population and criminal behavior (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Warren, 2007). Programs must be implemented and analyzed using an applied scientific approach to determine if the programs affect recidivism rates in the offender population (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Warren, 2007). The use of evidence-based practices is new in North Carolina's Division of Adult Corrections, but research has been developed over the last 30 years that supports its use (Holloway, 2010). The evidence-based approach requires criminogenic needs in each offender to be targeted and identified to determine risk factors that may affect the offender's possible rate of recidivism (Holloway, 2010).

Predicting offender risk began in corrections through the use of professional judgment (Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Oleson et al., 2011). Correctional staff used professional experience to determine the level of risk and level of supervision given to an

offender (Andrews & Dowden, 2006). This professional judgment was also reflected in the sentencing process. During the early 1900s into the 1970s, rehabilitation was the focus of the criminal justice system in an effort to address the issues of criminal behavior (Phelps, 2011). The state court systems and the federal court system in the United States were all operating under indeterminate sentencing laws by 1960 (MacKenzie, 2006). Judges during indeterminate sentencing were considered to be equivalent to doctors in that it was their responsibility to provide sentences that adequately addressed the risk and needs of offenders (Gertner, 2010). Indeterminate sentencing was believed to act as a deterrent during this time in that an increased sentence would allow the offender to remain free of further criminal behavior while going through rehabilitation (Cullen, Smith, Lowenkamp, & Latessa, 2009; Sessions, 2011). The focus was to assess or diagnosis an individual's criminal behavior and to provide the proper treatment to deal with that criminal behavior (Phelps, 2011). This was accomplished through individualizing sentences for offenders as the range of sentencing discretion was so wide (MacKenzie, 2006).

First generation risk assessments focused on individual judgment of professionals in contact with criminal offenders (Andrews & Dowden, 2006). As state, these professionals included judges, correctional staff, probation officers, and treatment providers (Andrews & Dowden, 2006). During the sentencing process, risk assessments were conducted by judges who were considered the sole experts on sentencing (Gertner, 2010). Due to the large range of discretion provided to judges, many of the federal statutes held maximum terms of fines and sentencing allowing the judge to make

individualized determinations (Stith & Koh, 1993). These sentencing practices led to the disparity in the courts as there were no set guidelines by which judicial authorities had to sentence (Stith & Koh, 1993).

Risk assessment instruments were developed to address issues of disparity regarding professional judgment (Andrews & Dowden, 2006). Efforts began to predict possible recidivism through the use of risk assessments (Oleson et al., 2011). The goal was to develop a reliable statistical instrument to predict offender risk. This phase of assessment was based in past criminal behavior and static factors and did not account for individual change or dynamic factors that require an offender's risk level to remain the same over time (Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Shaffer et al., 2011). The third phase of risk assessments incorporated changes in offender circumstances or dynamic factors (Andrews & Dowden, 2006). While this generation allowed for offender change, there were still criticisms against the use of third generation risk assessments. This phase of risk assessments included the use of static and dynamic factors to assess risk, yet response to those criminogenic needs through effective case management was not identified fully until the development of the fourth generation risk assessments (Shaffer et al., 2011). There are several validated risk assessments tools being used in correction that are both third and fourth generation, which have yield success in identifying high risk offenders (Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Shaffer et al., 2011). The focus of this and other assessing tools is based in individual risk. This is the basis for the use of risk assessments in community corrections and has led to the continued development of evidence-based practices in corrections.

The basic principles of evidence-based practice approach to risk assessments are rooted in the fourth generation assessment tools. Conducting a thorough assessment of offender risk/needs, enhancing offender intrinsic motivation, targeting the appropriate interventions for that offender, engaging the offender in skill training and practice, increasing positive reinforcements with the offender, assisting the offender in engaging the community and familial support, and also measuring the progress of the individual case to provide feedback to the offender are necessary steps in the risk assessments process (Holloway, 2010). Risk assessments identify high risk individuals who require a high level of attention (Long et al., 2011).

The treatment and level of services provided should match the risk level of the offender (Bonta, Wallace- Carpretta, & Rooney, 2000). The need principle is focused on the separation of criminogenic needs from needs not related to criminal behavior (Bonta et al., 2000). Assessments to determine criminogenic need identify those areas that require extensive attention in individual cases (Long et al., 2011). Following the identification of risk/needs, case planning must be focused on those areas identified to achieve rehabilitation (Long et al., 2011). The identification of risk/needs has led to decreases in recidivism rates (Long et al., 2011; Oleson et al., 2011; Shaffer et al., 2011).

The use of individual risk level to supervise offenders, which is determined by risk assessments, has been widely accepted throughout community corrections. Different studies have been conducted to measure the validity of different risk assessment tools with results advocating the use of these tools. The post-conviction reassessment tool (PCRA) was validated using a multivariate analysis to determine which predictor factors

were significantly related to the outcome of new arrest (Johnson et al., 2011). The results of this study suggest that the PCRA tool used has predictive validity in determining offender risk level (Johnson et al., 2011). Additionally, research has been conducted to determine if probation officers judgment regarding offender risk could be increased through the use of a risk assessment tool (Oleson et al., 2011). Data in this study found that assessments made with the PCRA by probation officers were more accurate than unstructured clinical judgment (Oleson et al., 2011). Luong & Wormith (2011) found that reductions in recidivism rates were associated with the use of the needs principle. In addition, the Level of Service Inventory–Saskatchewan Youth Edition assessment was validated as an accurate means of predicting recidivism (Luong & Wormith, 2011). Again, several studies have validated the use of risk assessment tools and risk assessments as a means of supervising offenders and lowering recidivism rates (Luong & Wormith, 2011; Oleson et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2011; Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Shaffer et al., 2011; Brennan et al., 2009; Kleiman et al., 2007). The current study was not developed to validate the risk assessment tool being utilized in the state of North Carolina; instead it looked at officers’ opinions regarding the use of risk assessments in the state of North Carolina in an effort to develop a statistical relationship between officers’ opinions of risk assessments and officers’ perception of current policy implementation.

### **Community Corrections Practices in North Carolina**

In order to understand supervision requirements for community corrections policy in the state of North Carolina, it is necessary to understand sentencing laws. Community

corrections policy for supervising offenders in the community has been historically derived from sentencing laws in the state of North Carolina.

Sentencing requirements and guidelines in North Carolina have changed and evolved to meet the needs of the community. The state of North Carolina adopted the use of structured sentencing on October 1, 1994 and this system is still being used today (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). Structured sentencing replaced determinate sentencing laws, which in turn replaced the even older system of indeterminate sentencing laws previously used by the North Carolina Courts (Freeman, 2009). The 1980s began an increasingly difficult time in the North Carolina Criminal Justice system in regards to the level of overcrowding in the prisons (Freeman, 2009). The shifts in sentencing that occurred in the state of North Carolina are similar to those that were taking place on the national level which includes indeterminate sentencing, fair sentencing act, and structured sentencing (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009).

Indeterminate sentencing laws, used prior to 1981, in essence gave judges the power to sentence individuals based on individual discretion and opinion (Freeman, 2009). These laws further allowed the parole commission heightened discretion regarding when an offender would be released from his/her given sentence (Freeman, 2009). The use of these laws was in accordance with many of the prevalent themes utilized in criminal justice at the time such as the “Get tough on Crime” initiative and the “War on Drugs” initiative (Freeman, 2009). Indeterminate sentencing allowed disparity in sentencing in that the length of the sentence for each individual was based in judicial discretion (Collins & Spencer, 1999). Similarly, disparity in the release of offenders onto

parole was based in parole board discretion (Collins & Spencer, 1999). Without specific guidelines, no accountability or justification was necessary for judges or members of the parole board. Furthermore, the use of indeterminate sentencing gave way to issues regarding rehabilitative goals as the goals were not specifically defined or implemented as the need to increase public safety was the major focus (Collins & Spencer, 1999).

Determinate sentencing laws were developed in order to have more consistency in the judicial and release process (Lanni, 1999). Enacted in 1981 by the North Carolina Fair Sentencing Act, determinate sentencing developed a presumptive range of time in which an offender could be sentenced for the various crimes (Freeman, 1999). This range required that judges not sentence any individual to a prison sentence that exceeded the maximum time set for that crime (Freeman, 1999). Determinate sentencing was setup to reduce racial disparity and reduce targeting of individuals through sentencing (Lanni, 1999). Furthermore, the Fair Sentencing Act in its original form eliminated discretionary parole for many felony charges (Freeman, 1999). Determinate sentencing further changed the judges' role in sentencing in that the jury became responsible for sentencing due to the fact that a verdict became the determining factor in the sentence (Lanni, 1999).

While determinate sentencing was a step forward in ensuring fair sentencing for all, many issues were not addressed under this system. Consequently, due to the enactment of Fair Sentencing Laws disparity was still an issue in that judges could choose to sentence outside the presumptive range if the court believed that aggravated factors existed in the case as mitigated and aggravated sentences were not developed under these guidelines (Freeman, 1999). The judge could also go against the presumptive

sentence if the offender pled guilty to the case without reason (Freeman, 1999). It was also still solely in the discretion of the judge to determine if an individual should be awarded an active sentence or a probationary sentence which could yield racial disparity (Lanni, 1999). In reference to the Parole Commission, provisions were added to the Fair Sentencing Act as no thought was given to the strains that not allowing the parole commission discretion would place on prisons and jails (Freeman, 1999). Forcing all offenders to serve the entire sentence given to them by the courts was an unrealistic financial goal. For this reason, the use of good time was adopted as a part of Fair Sentencing (Freeman, 1999). Gain time allowed offenders to take time off their sentence for good behavior or specific programs they entered (Freeman, 1999). The initial focus of determinate laws was to ensure consistency in sentencing for all, however, the use of good time somewhat undermined this effort. Offenders were able to work towards a lowered sentence which did not equate to consistent sentences across the board. Furthermore, the focus of this sentencing structure was still punishment as no emphasis was placed on the incorporation of rehabilitative programs when given probation or an active sentence.

The Structured Sentencing Act implemented in 1993 moved further towards ensuring that individuals in the criminal justice system were receiving the necessary sentence based on their crime. The Sentencing Commission was developed by the North Carolina General Assembly in order to recommend the parameters in which the courts should utilize when sentencing offenders (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). The Sentencing Commission consisted of judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, law

enforcement officers, victims, citizens, and the individuals holding positions in the various branches of government (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). This panel of individuals took three years to develop recommendations for sentencing in the courts (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). These individuals developed a system to classify crimes based on the type and degree of harm in each case while also developing a chart to classify offenders based on their criminal history (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). The courts began to sentence these individuals based upon the charts developed which also included a point system (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). In the event that mitigating and/or aggravating factors were presented during the criminal proceeding, the point system was used to sentence the offender (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). The three levels of punishment, or rather the three categories developed included active sentences in which the offender was placed in prison or jail, intermediate punishment, and community level punishment (Freeman, 1999).

Intermediate level punishment was designed to supervise offenders in the community who committed a serious offense that did not warrant jail or prison time (Freeman, 1999). Sanctions utilized under intermediate punishment included intensive probation, electronic house arrest, curfews, split jail sentences with probation, inpatient treatment programs, as well as day reporting centers (Merrington, 2006). Intermediate sanctions were established to setup controls over offenders in the community that paralleled that of controls set up in prisons (Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005). The focus of intermediate sanctions was to increase the level of punishment as a means of protecting the general public through deterrence of future crime. Community level punishment had

sanction such as community services, fines, and restitution (Freeman, 1999). The reasoning behind the development of these levels was different. The focus of all three levels of sentences were retribution although intermediate case had some underlying focus in rehabilitation while the community level cases were simply focused on monetary repayment (Freeman, 1999). While structured sentencing has indeed reduced judicial sentencing disparity, issues of ensuring the public safety and rehabilitation of the offender were not fully addressed.

With the implementation of the distinction between intermediate sanctions and community level sanctions, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections developed policy regarding the supervision of offenders around these sentencing distinctions (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). Offenders assigned to intermediate sanctions were the focus of the department. Intermediate cases had increased contact requirements regarding office visits as well as field contacts, whereas community level cases had infrequent contact requirements (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). Under structured sentencing probation supervision requirements were based on the court order. The sentence was developed from prior record level, and the officers developed the focus of the supervision term. This is noted in the fact that offenders who were given intermediate sanctions were required to be seen in the office as well as at home every 30 days (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). Cases given community level sanctions had initial office visit and home contact in the first 30 days, but interactions was not required in the home following the initial home contact (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). Additionally, office visits for community level sanctions were only

required in the once every 60 days (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). The focus under structured sentencing for supervision was not risk assessments. Instead, the use of deterrence theory was the focus as seen through the use of prior criminal records to determine supervision requirements

Structured sentencing has been utilized in the courts since being enacted in the 1990s. While these sentencing guidelines have been used for over 15 years, it has become apparent that the use of these guidelines has had little effect on criminal activity in the state of North Carolina, specifically recidivism rates of offenders (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). Rehabilitation of the offender population was discussed during the creation of this policy, but rehabilitation was not the focus (Spainhour & Katzenelson, 2009). The number of offenders being supervised in the community has been steadily increasing overtime (Homant, 2009). Although intermediate sanctions gained popularity due to the decrease in cost to the government to place these individuals on supervision in the community versus putting them in jail, whether the use of such sanctions has an effect on an individual's rehabilitation has not been determined (Homant, 2009).

North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections changed its policy December of 2011 in that officers are not required to supervise offenders based on their sentence, be it intermediate or community (NC Policy and Procedure, 2009). While the distinction is still made in sentencing law, probation officers are now required to administer a risk-needs assessment in the first sixty days of receiving a new case of probation (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). The risk assessment used in North Carolina was developed specifically for North Carolina Department of Public

Safety Division of Adult Corrections and is used consistently throughout the state for adult probationers (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). A committee was formed in North Carolina to develop an assessment which would be used to identify offender risk/needs (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010). The committee was charged with conducting a review of current literature regarding risk/needs assessments being used by other agencies and to assess internal reliability as well as predictive validity of the risk assessment tool (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010).

The research conducted led the committee to focus on the four specific needs areas to include antisocial personality, criminal peers, dysfunctional family, and antisocial values (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010; Andrew & Bonta., 2010). These needs are categorized as the “big four” and are the main determining factor for risk level (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010; Andrew & Bonta., 2010). Additionally, the committee included a category of lesser needs to include substance abuse, self-control, employment, academic/vocation level, and financial status which were gathered from research conducted by the committee (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010). The risk assessment was then created through the development of questions centered on the stated categories “big four” as well as the lesser needs categories identified (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010). The focus for the committee was to develop questions that are able to flag areas of concerns and provide referrals for those needs identified (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010). To validate the questions being used in this risk assessment, correctional professionals including field officers, managers, administrators,

and a psychologist were charged with administering the assessment throughout the state to offenders to gain face validity (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010). The risk assessment was then adopted by the department, and statewide administration by probation/parole officers became current policy (North Carolina Office of Research and Planning, 2010).

The risk assessment consists of four parts to include the offender traits inventory, the self-assessment, the officer impressions section, and the static 99 (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). The offender traits inventory is a checklist that includes offender criminal history, high school completion or lack thereof, age, if the case was a driving while impaired case, and other individualized information regarding the offender. The self-report is a survey completed by each offender to determine the offender's opinion regarding their family, criminal behavior, and individual mental state. The officer impressions portion of the risk assessment allows the officer to include their initial opinion regarding offender behavior through the use of a survey. The static 99 is a survey used for offenders, 18 and older, who were court ordered to register as a sex offender (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). These four documents are loaded into the risk assessment system by probation officers and the risk level, Level 1-5, is computed.

After administering this assessment, the probation officers' are then charged with supervising the offenders based on the results of the assessment (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). Whether the individual is a high risk offender or low risk offender is determined by the proper execution of the risk assessments and is no longer based in the offender's sentence. Furthermore by policy, this assessment determines the amount of

interaction the probation officer has with the offender as well as what other evidence-based practices will be applied to the offender during the probationary sentence (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). The incorporation of risk assessments in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections has changed how probation officers designate an offender's threat level to the community and to themselves. Use of risk assessments by officers is essential to the safety of the community as well as the successful rehabilitation of the offender population again making this study essential in the effort to add to literature regarding organizational change theory as it relates to community corrections.

### **Literature Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

The following includes a review of literature that provides the basis for the current study. Specifically the literature outlines what is known about organizational change, how it has been previously studied, what previous literature has determined and what is still unknown. The variables used in this research were chosen in efforts to determine what if any variables influence probation officers' opinions towards the use of risk assessments. The variables include opinions of training to implement risk assessments, understanding of risk assessments, opinions of training to implement risk assessments, officers' opinion of incorporating risk assessments in the sentencing process, and length of time employed by the department. The following is current literature regarding organizational change and implementation of new policy. This literature will be used as a reference for how organizational change has been researched and what is still unknown in this area.

Friedman et al. (2007) research hypothesis included organizational structure and leadership, culture and climate, resources and staff training, administrator attitudes, and network connectedness to determine if these factors contributed to the use of evidence-based practices in a substance abuse program. The primary goal of this research was to determine if the identified organizational factors had an effect on implementation of policy in the substance abuse treatment program. Similarly, Farrell et al. (2011) utilized survey research to examine the relationship between staff's self-reported use of current practices and their perceptions of organizational functioning within their offices. The study conducted by Steiner et al. (2011) was developed to assess officers' perception of organizational reform initiative to use a sanction grid for violation response guidelines. This study used organizational factors as predictor variables for officers' implementation of the sanction grid for violation responses guidelines (Steiner et al., 2011). Each of these studies focused on organizational factors in their hypothesis as a means of predicting officers' opinions of new policy as well as implementation of the individual policies.

The focus of organizational factors influencing officers' opinion of new policy and implementation is mirrored in other studies as well (Taxman et al., 2007; Higgs, 2011; Tamer, 2011). While organizational factors are relevant in the phenomenon of organizational change, the current study will focus on the specific policy of using risk assessments to determine how opinions of risk assessments influence organizational change. Officers' opinion of risk assessments was chosen as the predictor variable in this research because of the lack of research available that develops a relationship between

officers' opinions of a specific policy and implementation of that policy. While organizational factors may influence officers' opinion of current policy, it is necessary to determine if the policy itself is influencing officers' opinion and therefore also influencing implementation of policy. This is an area that has not been explored through research. Additionally, understanding the possible disconnect and cynicism that officers may have regarding the use of risk assessments has not been explored through research.

The use of survey research was also mirrored in many of the studies focused on organizational change (Taxman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011; Friedman et al., 2007; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Tamer, 2011; Steiner et al., 2011; Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). This data collection method has been proven in each of these studies to be supreme in gaining information on individual opinions. Some studies have also utilized a mix methods data collection to include focus groups (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). The target population in these studies has differed. There are studies which identified line level staff as the target population (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010; Tummers, 2011; Steiner et al., 2011) while other studies had a focus in the organizations' leaders and administrators (Higgs, 2011; Friedman et al., 2007). One study used both probation officers and supervisors as the target population however this was done due to some supervisors being required to provide direct supervision to an offender caseload (Farrell et al., 2011). The use of frontline staff, probation officers, in the effort to determine officers' opinion of risk assessments has yielded the best results for the current study. A Likert type scale was used as the survey instrument in two previous studies (Farrell et al., 2011; Steiner et al., 2011). The method of delivering the survey to participants varied in each study to

include mailed surveys and in person surveys (Friedman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011; Steiner et al., 2011). Previous literature has set an accepted precedent of using individual opinions through survey as a primary means of gaining data when the focus of the research is individual opinions. This precedent will be continued in this study.

One study was located that was setup similarly to the current research which is the study conducted by Fitzgibbon et al. (2010). This study was conducted overseas in Dublin to gain data regarding officers' perceptions of risk assessments, specifically the advantages and disadvantages from the officers' perspective (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). The researchers acknowledged the limitation of the study due to size and focus on Dublin (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). The research showed a consistent agreement of those officers surveyed wanting to retain clinical judgment when making decisions about offender risk (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). Individuals who participated in the focus group stated that the use of the standardized tool did not allow offenders to be assessed individually (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). The use of risk assessments as a tool to confirm professional views rather than replace them was also noted in the study (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). Moreover, the study found that a large percentage of officers did not believe that training to incorporate risk assessments were adequate in providing understanding regarding the nature of risk assessments, definitions, and variability (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). While this research was limited due to the number of participants, the focus of this study is the most closely related in the literature to the current study.

Collectively, the scholarly literature has found cynicism towards the implementation of new policy although each study focused on a different policy. In

addition, there has been consistent evidence that opinions towards organizational factors such as leadership can affect the implementation of new policy. The bulk of research that has a focus in organizational reform theory has attempted to develop relationship between opinions of the organizations and implementation of new policy. What is missing from the literature is research that has developed a relationship between individual opinion of new policy and implementation.

Perception towards organizational change has been consistently approached with the use of quantitative survey research due in large part to the information that is being gathered which is individual opinion (Friedman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Steiner et al., 2011; Tamer, 2011; Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). A major weakness that can be identified in determining implementation of new policy can be noted in the surveying of administrators and supervisors who are not charged with the daily implementation of the new policy (Friedman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011). It has been noted that implementation occurs on the line level of staff (Latessa, 2004, Steiner et al., 2011) making this the optimum population to gain data regarding implementation. Previous literature has a focus in organizational factors as a predictor of officers' perceptions (Friedman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011; Higgs et al., 2011; Tamer, 2011). There is very little literature that focuses on specific policy changes such as risk assessments as a predictor of officers' opinions. One study found that does focus on opinion of risk assessments as a predictor of implementation stated in the research that an inadequate target population was used and the results could not be generalized back to the larger population (Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). Research regarding officers' perception of

training should be researched further as findings' regarding perception of training has seen conflicting results (Steiner et al., 2011; Fitzgibbon et al., 2010). This forms the basis for what remains to be researched. Previous literature has specifically outlined future research endeavors to include opinions of risk assessments, training for risk assessments, and understanding of risk assessments. This study has addressed this gap in literature.

Risk assessments were chosen as the focus of this study as the implementation of validated risk assessments are becoming a wide spread phenomenon nationally and internationally (Brennan et al., 2009; Oleson et al., 2011; Teague, 2011; Shaffer et al., 2011). While some assessments have been validated and others have not, the development of validated risk assessments for use in the supervision of criminal offenders is now a focus in the reduction of recidivism (Long et al., 2011, Oleson et al., 2011, Shaffer et al., 2011). For this reason, it is necessary to determine if risk assessments are indeed being implemented in daily job duties of correctional staff. The predictor variables for this study were chosen as they have been noted in previous literature to include perception of risk assessments effectiveness, perception of training, and understanding of risk assessments (Friedman et al., 2007; Fitzgibbon et al., 2010; Farrell et al., 2011; Steiner et al., 2011). Officers' perception regarding the use of risk assessments in sentencing is a variable being examined as there is no literature which examines risk assessments in sentencing as a predictor of officers' implementation of current policy.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Current literature has a focus in organizational factors as predictors of officers perception towards implementation of change (Taxman et al., 2007; Friedman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Tamer, 2011; Steiner et al., 2011). Several organizational factors effect implementation of evidence-based practices in corrections to include organizational structure, perception of leadership, resources, staff training, cynicism for change, professional respect, adequacy of training, and level of satisfaction with coworkers, supervisors, and regional administrators (Friedman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011; Steiner et al., 2011). Very little is known regarding officers' perceptions towards specific evidence-based practices as a predictor of officers' implementation of those practices. This study has filled this gap in the literature by determining if there is a relationship between implementation of current policy and officers' opinion of risk assessments, officers' opinions of training for the use of risk assessments, and officers' current understanding of risk assessments principles. This study has also examined the relationship that exists between officers' perception of risk assessments in regards to incorporating risk assessments in sentencing as well as officers' length of time employed by the department as research in these areas is limited. The study has determined if officers believe risk assessments should be used in sentencing and it has examined if officers' perception of risk assessments would be affected by the use of risk assessments in the sentencing process.

Determining if a relationship exists between officers' opinions of the risk assessment tool and officers' implementation of the risk assessment tool has filled the

gap that currently exists in literature on organizational change. The use of survey research methodology was the best methodology to gain data on this subject. Chapter 3 includes the research design for the current study and the rationale for choosing this design. The methodology for this study is detailed to include the population used for the research, the rationale for sampling, procedure for recruitment of the population, development of the instrument used to gather the research, operational definition of all variables, as well as ethical considerations in the development of the study.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### **Introduction**

In adult probation, there have been several changes to policy, procedures, and legislation. The purpose of this research study was to determine if probation officers' opinions of risk assessments had an effect on how each officer perceived implementation of current policy in the state of North Carolina. This was a quantitative study which used a survey research design. This chapter includes information regarding the research design, the methodology used, characteristics of the target population, an explanation of the survey instrument, how the data were collected via survey monkey, and how the data were analyzed using SPSS. Ethical protection of participants is also addressed in this chapter. Additionally, information regarding the variables used in this study, as well as the measurements of each variable is provided in this chapter.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

In this study, I used a survey-based research design. I attempted to determine the significance of attitudinal predictors for probation officers' perceptions regarding their willingness to implement risk assessments, the dependent variable for this study, in their daily duties. The independent variables included officers' knowledge of risk assessments, officers' opinions of training provided for the proper implementation of risk assessments, officers' opinions of the incorporation of risk assessments in the sentencing process, and the length of time employed by the department. In order to determine if probation officers' opinions of risk assessments affected the implementation of current policy, a quantitative descriptive research design using survey method was the prevailing

research method. A survey design was ideal due to the nature of the information needed to answer the given hypothesis. Surveys are utilized to provide numeric descriptions of trends regarding attitudes and opinions of those being surveyed (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative design would not have been appropriate in this study because I was interested in finding a statistical relationship between officers' opinions of risk assessments and officers' implementation of current North Carolina policy for community corrections. When conducting qualitative research, focus is on developing themes instead of statistical relationships. Using mixed methods approach allows the researcher to collect data using qualitative and quantitative methods. Further insight into probation officers' opinions of risk assessments would likely be gained through the incorporation of qualitative methods, such as a detailed opened-ended questionnaire. Due to time constraints this was not possible. The approach chosen was consistent with other similar research studies conducted regarding probation officers' opinions.

The use of survey methods was prevalent for this research because survey research allows the researcher to gain data specific to individual opinions (Wolfer, 2007). Survey research is used to explore a topic that little is known about and to evaluate a program (Wolfer, 2007). These two goals were applicable to the current study in that little is known regarding probation officers' opinions of risk assessments and I evaluated probation officers' perceptions regarding the use of risk assessments. There are some weaknesses in this data collection technique. The response rate in the use of survey method is crucial for the success of the study. Creswell (2009) noted that issues regarding Internet access by respondents may hinder response rates in research studies.

A concern of survey research is the percentage of responses received. The use of a larger than necessary sampling group was needed due to the possibility of low response rates among the officers surveyed and officers' willingness to participate in the survey. Low response rates were counteracted in this research by attempting to survey the entire population via e-mail.

### **Methodology**

The target population for this study included the probation/parole officers working for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections. This position was the only position included in this study as these are the individuals administering risk assessments and providing direct supervision of offenders based on their risk level. There are about 1,900 certified positions in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections (NC Department of Public Safety Website, 2013). The population that was used included all probation/parole officers who had active state e-mail accounts at the time of the study. Through the use of North Carolina state probation e-mail accounts, it was feasible to survey the entire North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections staff to include all probation/parole officers through the use of an Internet-based survey.

Sampling was not necessary in this study as the entire population was given the opportunity to respond. It was necessary to learn the needed return rate in order for the survey to have statistical validity. To determine how many surveys needed to be returned so the results can be generalized to the population, a sample size calculator was used (Creative Research Systems, 2013). Confidence levels are typically expressed in social

science research as 95% or 99% with a standard error of plus/minus four (Wolfer, 2007). To achieve a confidence level of 95% with a confidence interval of plus/minus 4, 456 surveys from the population of 1,900 officers needed to be returned or a response rate of 24%. To achieve a confidence level of 99% with a confidence interval of plus/minus 4, 672 surveys needed to be returned or a response rate of 35%. To increase the response rate, the entire population had the opportunity to complete the survey.

This survey was administered via probation officers' e-mail addresses which are public record. Phone numbers and e-mail address are public record and are given out when calling each office. I called each probation/parole office in the state of North Carolina to obtain the officers' work e-mail. An e-mail was sent to each officer that included a link to the Internet-based survey. The survey was conducted through the Survey Monkey website. The demographic information that was collected included gender, age, level of education, judicial division, and ethnicity.

Each participant was provided an implied consent form found in Appendix A via e-mail. The implied consent form explained the goals of the study, procedures for the study, probation officers' rights, probation officers' responsibilities, and the potential risks/benefits involved in the study. This implied consent form gave participants the choice to participate in the research study or not. Participants were informed that participation in the research study was anonymous and confidential. To exit the study, a follow up e-mail was sent to the population thanking each individual for their participation and reminding those who had not participated to complete the survey.

I developed the survey instrument (see Appendix B) in this study. The basis for developing a survey instrument was due to the lack of previous literature and research that had been conducted regarding probation officers' opinions of the use risk assessments. To validate the survey instrument used in this research, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study included a convenience sample of 12 probation/parole officers working in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections. The study was carried out in the coffee shop located in the same building as the probation office in Charlotte, North Carolina. I approached individual officers and asked if they would participate in the study. Those who agreed were provided a consent form and detailed information regarding the purpose of the study, risk, and importance of their participation. Each officer was given the choice upon debriefing to participate in the survey or to decline. I discussed the survey with the individuals to ensure that they understood the questions in the survey. Those individuals who accepted were provided a survey to complete. Using SPSS, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied to determine the reliability of the instrument. The use of the pilot study increased reliability and also validated the use of the survey instrument. Through the pilot study and feedback from the convenience sample, sufficiency of instrumentation to answer the research question was established.

### **Operationalization of Variables**

The independent variables that were studied in this research included the following: officers' opinions of risk assessments, knowledge of risk assessments, opinions of training for use of risk assessments, officers' opinions of the incorporation of

risk assessments in the sentencing process, and officers' length of time employed by the department. The dependent variable was officers' implementation of risk assessments. The data were collected from a specially designed survey instrument entitled Officers' Use of Risk Assessments within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections, which is found in Appendix B. With the exception of length of time employed by the department, all of the independent and dependent variables were measured based on an index of multiple survey responses on the Likert scale (See Table 1 Variables Related to Survey Questions). The choices on the Likert Scale included the following: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neutral*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. Length of time employed by the department was measured by years based on the date of employment. An index was developed using the responses from the survey to measure the variables. The index gave each variable a score of 1-5 depending on the answers provided on each survey to evaluate opinions of risk assessments, opinions of training, knowledge of risk assessments, perceptions of implementation of risk assessments, and the use of risk assessments in sentencing. The average score of the questions obtained for each variable was then used to calculate and determine officers' opinions of that variable. Each variable was measured using five survey questions, with the exception of length of time employed by the department. This number was chosen both in an effort to appropriately gather data regarding officer opinions and to also ensure that the length of the survey would not deter participation. The following is an example of this calculation for questions associated with opinions of risk assessments. Questions 1-3 on the survey are written so that *strongly agrees* reflect a positive opinion of risk assessments.

Questions 4-5 are written so that a *strongly agree* reflects a negative opinion of risk assessments. Positive answers were given 5 (*strongly agree* or *strongly disagree* depending on question). All subsequent answers were given numerical numbers as well based on a positive response or a negative response. Neutral was given a 3. The average of the numbers determined if the officers had an overall positive or negative view of the variable. Answers to the five questions of opinion of risk assessments included *strongly agrees* for Question 1 and 2, *disagree* for Question 3, *neutral* for Question 4, *strongly agree* for Question 5. In this example, the officers will have a total of 10 for positive opinion and 3 for negative. This total will then be added and divided by 5 to determine the average. The highest score that can be obtained was 25 making the average fall from 1-5 for each variable. The above example had an average of 3.2. This officer had a positive opinion of risk assessments. This same technique was used for the dependent variable. Length of time employed by the department was measured as a numerical variable because the question requests specific date of employment. Through the use of Survey Monkey, the questions on the survey were randomly ordered for each participant. Table 1 depicts which questions on the survey are being used to address each variable.

Table 1

*Variables Related to Survey Questions*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Questions Used to Create Scales</b>
<b>Opinion of Risk Assessments</b> Independent Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using risk assessments has increased my ability to supervise offenders.</li> <li>• Risk assessments categorize offenders correctly as low risk or high risk offenders.</li> <li>• Risk assessments are more accurate at determining a high risk offender than I am.</li> <li>• It is necessary to supervise an offender at a higher or lower risk level than the risk assessment has determined.</li> <li>• Risk assessments do not accurately determine an offender's level of risk. (Response recoded for alignment)</li> </ul>
<b>Opinion of Training</b> Independent Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was trained by the department on the use of risk assessments to supervise offenders.</li> <li>• Training given by the department prepared me to use risk assessments in my daily work.</li> <li>• I was trained by the department on how to use risk assessment tools to assign offender risk level.</li> <li>• Training given by the department has prepared me to supervise offenders based on individual risk level.</li> <li>• I would benefit from more training on how to incorporate risk assessments in supervision.</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge of Risk Assessments</b> Independent Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I understand what a risk assessment is and how it relates to offender supervision.</li> <li>• I understand through the department training the steps of assigning an offender a risk level.</li> <li>• I understand through the department training what factors influence an offender's risk level.</li> <li>• I understand why risk assessments are used in offender supervision.</li> <li>• I use the risk assessment to determine what programs the offender will be referred to.</li> </ul>
<b>Perception of Risk Assessments in the Sentencing</b> Independent Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low risk offenders should not be placed on probation. (Response recoded for alignment)</li> <li>• Risk assessments should be incorporated in the sentencing process.</li> <li>• If risk levels were determined during sentencing I would be able to supervise offenders more accurately.</li> <li>• If the courts implemented risk assessments as a part of sentencing, I would rely on risk level more in supervision.</li> <li>• The courts have accepted the use of risk management to supervise offenders.</li> <li>• How long have you worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections?</li> </ul>
<b>Length of Time in the Department</b> Independent Variable	
<b>Personal Implementation of Risk Assessments in work</b> Dependent Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I conduct risk assessments on every new probation case I receive.</li> <li>• I use risk level to determine the level of contact I have with each offender.</li> <li>• When an offender is given a risk level, I supervise the offender based on that level.</li> <li>• I focus on an individual risks I have identified that were not identified by the risk assessment.</li> <li>• I rely on an offender's risk level to determine if, how, and when the offender should be violated.</li> </ul>

The covariates used in this study were chosen to ensure that basic demographic differences were not impacting implementation of risk assessments. Age as a control variable was measured at the ratio level. Gender as a control variable was measured at the nominal level as the category is dichotomous. Race/ethnicity was measured on the nominal level of measurement as the race/ethnicity identified by each officer was equal to all others, exhaustive, and mutually exclusive. While the survey included several distinct race/ethnicity choices to choose from, this variable was coded as a dichotomous dummy variable for analysis purposes which included White and non-White. The level of education attained by each officer was measured on the ordinal level. In this case, grade level went up from the lowest level of education, high school diploma/GED, to the highest level of education, doctoral degree. Judicial division was measured on the nominal level as the state of North Carolina is divided into four judicial divisions by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Community Corrections. These control variables were applied as a means of determining any other aspects that may affect implementation of risk assessments among probation/parole officers in the study other than the independent variables identified. Table 2 summarizes which questions on the survey are being used to address each covariate.

Table 2

*Covariates Related to Survey Questions*


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<b>Covariate</b>	<b>Related Question</b>
Gender	Survey Question 26 What is your gender?
Age	Survey Question 27 What is your current age?
Education	Survey Question 28 What is the highest level of education you received?
Race/Ethnicity	Survey Question 29 What is your ethnicity?
Division	Survey Question 30 What Judicial Division are you currently employed in?

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**Data Analysis**

SPSS version 18.0 was used to perform the statistical analysis of collected data. The data in this study were captured using Survey Monkey. The survey was uploaded to Survey Monkey and also prepared for analysis in this system. Through the use of the Gold Membership with Survey Monkey, the survey instrument was distributed to participants, data were captured, and all information was uploaded into SPSS for testing. Surveys turned in that were incomplete or missing data were dropped from the data that were tested. The following hypotheses were analyzed in this study.

$H_{01a}$ : The opinions of North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections probation officers regarding risk assessments has no impact on the likelihood they will implement risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{11a}$ : Probation officers working for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections who have negative opinions of risk assessments are less likely to support the implementation of risk assessments in their daily duties than probation officers who have positive opinions of risk assessments.

$H_{01b}$ : The length of time a probation officer has worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections has no impact on the likelihood they will implement risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{11b}$ : The longer a probation officer has worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections the less likely they are to support the implementation of risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{01c}$ : There is no difference in implementation of risk assessment policy requirements by probation officers' based on officers' opinion of training given by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections to administer risk assessments.

$H_{11c}$ : Officers who have a negative opinion of the training to administer risk assessments received by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections are less likely to support the implementation of current policy requirements than officers who have a positive opinion of the training.

$H_{01d}$ : There is no difference in implementation of current policy requirements by probation officers based on knowledge of risk assessments.

$H_{11d}$ : Officers who have less knowledge about risk assessments are less likely to be positive about implementing current policy requirements than officers who have a greater knowledge of risk assessments.

$H_{01e}$ : There is no difference in officers implementation of risk assessments in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections based on officers' opinion regarding if risk assessments should be used in sentencing.

$H_{11e}$ : Officers who believe that risk assessments should be used during the sentencing process in the state of North Carolina Courts rather than in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections are less likely to support the implementation of risk assessments than officers who do not believe that risk assessments should be used in the state of North Carolina courts sentencing process.

Multiple regression was used to analyze the data. Multiple regression analysis examines the relationships between two or more independent variables and one dependent variable (Rubinfeld, 2013). In this study the five stated independent variables were used to predict the dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data collected in efforts to best understand how implementation of risk assessments is being influenced, if at all. Descriptive characteristics of the officers and data were presented as means, medians, mode, and standard deviations.

### **Threats of Validity**

Reliability and validity are very important when conducting survey research. External validity refers to the ability to generalize results back to a larger population (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). In this case the larger population would be probation officers in other states and agencies. The use of risk assessments across the United States is increasing in the supervision of criminal offenders on probation (Oleson et al., 2011; DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Warren, 2007). It is believed that these results can be generalized back to this larger population in that it is suspected that probation officers in other states will have similar characteristics as the officers surveyed in this research study.

Internal validity was also of concern in this research study. Internal validity refers to the constructions of the research in a way that ensures the independent variables being tested are in fact impacting the dependent variable (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Several independent variables were chosen in this study to determine what, if any, variables effect the implementation of risk assessments. Covariates were also chosen in an effort to ensure that demographics which separate individuals were not impacting the dependent variable as well. Another issue of internal validity that may arise when conducting survey research is individuals being honest when completing the survey. Since the data collected will be based on individual opinion, it is important to illicit truthful answers from the population and not answers that they believe the researcher wants to receive. This research had to assume that individuals participating were forthcoming and honest in their answers. It is understood that some individuals chose not to

complete the survey. The entire population was given the opportunity to participate in the survey. Due to the approximate size of the population, individuals who decided not to participate for reasons such as time or simply an unwillingness to be a part of a research study may have impacted the study. However, the statistical results of this study will be reported based upon participation.

Reliability in research is the extent in which a research instrument measures the same way each time it is used or applied (Creswell, 2009). While it is ideal to use a previously validated instrument (Creswell, 2009), officers' opinion of risk assessments has not been widely researched requiring a survey to be constructed for this research study. As stated above, each of the opinion based dependent and independent variables will be measured using multiple questions to ensure all questions are measuring the same underlying concept. Cronbach's alpha coefficient test provided a measure of the internal consistency expressed between 0 and 1 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This test allowed the researcher to determine if the constructs in the survey instrument have acceptable reliability. Construct validity was addressed through several steps. The pilot study was the first step and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied to each of the variables as an additional step. Questions in the survey instrument were then considered for revisions or removal from the survey-based on the findings of the pilot study. Once changes were made Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied again. Questions that were not internally consistent were dropped from the index measuring the dependent and independent variables. As stated, to address possible issues of construct validity, a pilot study was

conducted. The pilot study increased initial reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied again to the overall study to ensure increased reliability.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate officers' opinions towards the use of risk assessments in supervision. When conducting research, the researcher must be cognitive of not allowing any harm to be accrued by the subjects of the study, to the researcher, to any third parties that may be involved in the study, or any third parties who can be affected because of the study. This research has gone through the Walden IRB process. Due to the fact that this study included probation/parole officers who are currently employed by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Community Corrections it was necessary to obtain informed consent from each of the participants. Consent was obtained through an implied consent form which was e-mailed with a link to the survey instrument. The consent form included the goals of the research study, procedures of the study, probation officers rights and responsibilities, and any potential risk and benefits involved in conducting the study.

Ethical concerns related to recruitment materials and processes include the use of e-mail to contact participants. It was not necessary to obtain permission to send out the e-mail as state e-mail accounts are public record. Recruitment included the initial e-mail requesting participation in this research project and a follow-up e-mail. Officers were not contacted outside of these e-mails in efforts to recruit participation as only the receptionists were called to provide initial e-mail addresses.

Ethical concerns related to data collection included participants refusing participation prior to or during the survey. It was stated in the informed consent letter that was sent to each participant and found in Appendix A that participation is completely voluntary. Additionally, after beginning the survey if the decision was made by participant not to be a part of the research, consent could be withdrawn at any time. There will not be a list kept by the researcher or any other persons which has information regarding who has or has not participated in the survey. This information will remain anonymous.

Sensitivity of information when conducting research has to do with the potential threat the information being collected may have on the participants' life (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Information that falls into this category is individual preference. Individual preference may affect the individuals in this study because of the opinions they may hold toward risk assessments and the use of risk assessments. Participants are protected in this regard as the information provided in this study will not be linked to the e-mail address of those participating. Therefore individual preference will be protected. Since the use of risk assessments are required in their careers it is necessary to ensure that their individual opinions were not directly linked to them so that honesty and real opinions were expressed in the survey.

Due to the nature of this study and the fact that I will not be linking survey answers in any way to the respondents e-mail addresses, the research will be anonymous. Again, this assures that the identities of those involved in the study are protected and their individual opinions are protected as well. Outside of the two e-mails being sent, no

contact will be made between the subjects and the researcher. There was little threat of harm to those involved in the study. The data for this study was stored online via Survey Monkey, in an excel file, as well as in the SPSS data system. The committee members and I will be the only ones with access to the data. The data will be destroyed approximately three years following the completion of this research study.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The methodology used in this research was that of cross-sectional survey research. The methodology was chosen based on the focus of the research which is the opinions that probation officers have regarding risk assessments. The survey instrument used in this study was developed and validated through the use of a pilot study. The survey was an Internet-based survey that was disseminated to e-mail accounts on file for individual probation officers. The study was to be administered to the entire population of North Carolina probation/parole officers and a follow up e-mail was sent to thank all participants as well as to encourage individuals who did not originally participate to complete the survey. The above sections included the variables and how each was measured, the data analysis plan, threats to validity, and ethical procedures/concerns. The next chapter, Chapter 4, includes specific information regarding collection of the data for this study, analysis of the data, and the results yield.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine probation officers' perceptions of the risk assessment tool used in the supervision of adult offenders on probation in the state of North Carolina. The research was a survey-based quantitative research design. The research question addressed in this research study included the following: Based on officers' perceptions, how are current policy requirements to implement risk assessments affected by officers' perceptions of risk assessments? The five hypotheses and null hypothesis are listed below.

$H_{01a}$ : The opinions of North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections probation officers regarding risk assessments has no impact on the likelihood they will implement risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{11a}$ : Probation officers working for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections who have negative opinions of risk assessments are less likely to support the implementation of risk assessments in their daily duties than probation officers who have positive opinions of risk assessments.

$H_{01b}$ : The length of time a probation officer has worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections has no impact on the likelihood they will implement risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{11b}$ : The longer a probation officer has worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections the less likely they are to support the implementation of risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders.

$H_{01c}$ : There is no difference in implementation of risk assessment policy requirements by probation officers' based on officers' opinion of training given by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections to administer risk assessments.

$H_{11c}$ : Officers who have a negative opinion of the training to administer risk assessments received by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections are less likely to support the implementation of current policy requirements than officers who have a positive opinion of the training.

$H_{01d}$ : There is no difference in implementation of current policy requirements by probation officers based on knowledge of risk assessments.

$H_{11d}$ : Officers who have less knowledge about risk assessments are less likely to be positive about implementing current policy requirements than officers who have a greater knowledge of risk assessments.

$H_{01e}$ : There is no difference in officers implementation of risk assessments in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections based on officers' opinion regarding if risk assessments should be used in sentencing.

$H_{11e}$ : Officers who believe that risk assessments should be used during the sentencing process in the state of North Carolina Courts rather than in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections are less likely to support the implementation of risk assessments than officers who do not believe that risk assessments should be used in the state of North Carolina courts sentencing process.

Chapter 4 includes information regarding the pilot study, data collection from the pilot study, as well as the results of the pilot study. The data collections for the research study that followed the pilot study will be presented to include the time frame of the research study, information regarding the use of Survey Monkey to collect the data, and baseline information regarding the population that responded. The results section presents specific information regarding the test conducted and statistical results.

### **Pilot Study**

I conducted the pilot study in Mecklenburg County North Carolina on May 17th, 2014. The pilot study included 12 probation/parole officers who were employed in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. The officers who participated were asked randomly to participate. The pilot study purpose was explained to each participant prior to completion of the survey. Additionally, all participants were advised that participation in the research study was strictly voluntary and confidential. Participants were provided a paper copy of the survey and the implied consent form. Each participant was allowed to complete the survey in his or her own time frames, and each participant was allowed to ask questions regarding the survey. I collected all data for the pilot study in accordance with the proposal approved by Walden Institutional Review Board #04-29-14-0236918.

The primary goal of the pilot study was to gain further insight regarding the content of survey questions as well as the length of the questions, specifically to determine if survey questions were capturing intended information. According to the results of the pilot study, the proposed survey achieved the goals of the research study. During the pilot study, I shared with the participants the research question for the study.

The participants were asked if any of the questions written in the survey seemed confusing or if the wording of anything should be added to, altered, or changed. The discussion yielded no necessary changes as the participants of the pilot study stated that the questions were easily understood and required no additional information regarding clarity. Furthermore, there were no suggestions regarding the addition of questions to gain officers' opinions. There was some discussion regarding the length of the survey, more specifically the amount of questions. Some participants believed that the survey should be shortened due to the time involved in completing the survey. When asked which questions should be omitted, no consensus was met as those participants who thought the survey may be too long determined that the removal of questions may not capture complete opinions. Several questions were posed regarding the dissemination of the results in that participants would like to see the results shared across the state and with department officials in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Scales were used for the independent and dependent variables as the survey was designed with five questions to address each concept. The only exception to this was the variable length of time employed by the department which was measured with one question. The scales were as follows: Opinions of Risk Assessments (Questions 1-5), Opinions of Training (Questions 6-10), Knowledge of Risk Assessments (Questions 11-15), Implementation of Risk Assessments (Questions 16-20), and Perceptions of Sentencing (Questions 21-25; see Appendix B).

I used Cronbach's alpha coefficient as well as item-to-item correlations to determine the reliability of each scale. To estimate the average possible reliability

coefficients, Cronbach's alpha was used and a score of .70 or greater is reliable (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). As summarized in Table 3, Opinions of Risk Assessments had a Cronbach's alpha of .757 with item-to-item correlations between -.189 and .775. As summarized in Table 3, Opinions of Training had a Cronbach's alpha of .878 with item-to-item correlations between .200 and .902. As summarized in Table 3, Knowledge of Risk Assessments had a Cronbach's alpha of .496 with item-to-item correlations between -.307 and .850. As summarized in Table 3, Implementation of Risk Assessments had a Cronbach's alpha of .635 with item-to-item correlations between -.258 and 1.697. As summarized in Table 3, Perceptions of Sentencing had a Cronbach's alpha of .666 with item-to-item correlations between -.050 and .752. The pilot study's Cronbach's alpha results are found in Table 3.

Table 3

*Cronbach's alpha Pilot Study*

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Item Correlation Minimum</b>	<b>Item Correlation Maximum</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>
First Scale: Opinions of Risk Assessment (Independent Variable)	.757	-.189	.775	5
Second Scale: Opinions of Training (Independent Variable)	.878	.200	.902	5
Third Scale: Knowledge of Assessments (Independent Variable)	.496	-.307	.850	5
Fourth Scale: Perception of Sentencing (Independent Variable)	.666	-.050	.752	5
Fifth Scale: Implementation of Assessments (Dependent Variable)	.635	-.258	1.697	5

Positive correlations for each scale are ideal as positive correlations are an indicator that the item assesses the relevant construct (Green & Salkind, 2011). It is normal practice to choose items that have positive scales and delete items that do not; however, there may be constructs that have scarcely defined constructs within in a broader item (Green & Salkind, 2011). Three of the five scales fell below the desired reliability of .70. Due to the small sample size of the pilot study and the relatively close

scores, I chose not to delete any items during the pilot study. Based on the results of the pilot study, no changes were made to the survey instrument, intended data collection process, or the intended data analysis process.

### **Data Collection**

I collected all data for the study in accordance with the proposal approved by Walden Institutional Review Board. From the month of June 2014 to August 2014, I called each county throughout the state of North Carolina in efforts to retrieve all e-mail addresses for North Carolina probation/ parole officers across the state. While I attempted to contact each of the counties and retrieve e-mail addresses for each officer, each office was not reached and, subsequently, each officers e-mail address was not provided. Of the total 1,900 officers, I was able to obtain 651 e-mail addresses. The total number of e-mails sent or the initial sample was approximately 34% of the entire population. Data collection was as anticipated in Chapter 3 for this survey. The only discrepancy noted is that I was unable to reach all officers currently employed with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Community Corrections because not all offices had updated phone numbers listed and some offices would not provide e-mail addresses.

The survey and the implied consent letter were sent to an initial sample on September 22, 2014 via e-mail. The e-mail included a link to the Survey Monkey website where the survey was created and administered. A follow up e-mail was sent on October 7, 2014 to gain further participation and to thank those who had already participated. Of the 651 e-mails sent out, a total of 109 individuals responded to the

survey with only 103 of those surveys being complete. All incomplete surveys were removed from the data set.

Based on the completed surveys, the response rate of the sample population was approximately 16%, and the response rate of the entire population was approximately 5%. The confidence interval for this study was not met as the required number of respondents did not complete the survey. Based on the participation of this study and the actual population of officers, it was determined that to achieve a confidence interval of 95%, it was necessary to have at least 320 respondents. The actual margin of error found in this study based on participants and populations was 9.39%.

The demographics of the respondents surveyed are presented in Table 4. Of the respondents, 57 (55.3 %) were male and 46 (44.7%) were female. The ages of respondents ranged from 24-years-old to 60-years-old. Of the respondents, two (1.9 %) reported having an associate's degree, 73 (70.9%) reported having a bachelor's degree, and 28 (27.2%) reported having a master's degree. Of the 103 completed surveys, 64 (62.1%) reported being White, 35 (34%) reported being Black/African American, two (1.9%) reported being American Indian or Alaskan, and two (1.9%) reported being of Hispanic Origin. North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Community Corrections is divided into four divisions across the state. Of the completed surveys, 19 (18.4%) were from Division 1, 22 (21.4%) were from Division 2, 18 (17.5%) were from Division 3, and 44 (42.7%) were from Division 4. The descriptive results of this study are found in Table 4.

Table 4

*Descriptive Variables of Sample*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gender:		
Male	57	55.3%
Female	46	44.7%
Race/Ethnicity:		
White/Caucasian	64	62.1%
Black/African American	35	34.0%
Hispanic Origin	2	1.9%
American Indian/ Native American	2	1.9%
Education:		
Associates Degree	2	1.9%
Bachelor's Degree	73	70.9%
Master's Degree	28	27.2%
Judicial Division:		
Division 1	19	18.4%
Division 2	22	21.4%
Division 3	18	17.5%
Division 4	44	42.7%

### **Initial Data Analysis**

Scales were used for the independent and dependent variables with the exception of the length of time employed by the department to address each concept. The scales were as follows: Opinions of Risk Assessments, Opinions of Training, Knowledge of Risk Assessments, Perceptions of Sentencing, and Implementation of Risk Assessments. As summarized in Table 1, each of the main concepts under investigation, aside from length of time employed by the department, was measured by five survey questions.

Similar to the pilot study, I used Cronbach's alpha coefficient as well as item-to-item correlations to determine each scale's reliability. As summarized in Table 5, Opinions of Risk Assessments had a Cronbach's alpha of .728 with item-to-item correlations between .135 and .764. As summarized in Table 5, Opinions of Training had a Cronbach's alpha of .810 with item-to-item correlations between -.040 and .808. As summarized in Table 5, Knowledge of Risk Assessments had a Cronbach's alpha of .809 with item-to-item correlations between .107 and .730. As summarized in Table 5, Implementation of Risk Assessments had a Cronbach's alpha of .566 with item-to-item correlations between -.453 and .568. As summarized in Table 5, Perceptions of Sentencing had a Cronbach's alpha of .733 with item-to-item correlations between -.064 and .787. All of the independent variable scales created met the statistical requirements and were used in the study as planned.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of one scale, Implementation of Risk Assessments, fell short of the .70 required reliability score. Based on the item-to-item correlations, I excluded those questions in the Implementation of Risk Assessments scale

which had a negative or low correlation to the other questions. Two questions were eliminated from the scale as noted in Table 5. This process resulted in the Implementation of Risk Assessments scale falling between the desired Cronbach's alpha reliability score of .70 to .95 with a Cronbach's alpha of .807 and item-to-item correlations between .459 and .724 using three of the five questions. The scale was created using three questions instead of five. The questions used were as follows: I use risk level to determine the level of contact I have with each offender; when an offender is given a risk level, I supervise the offender based on that level; I rely on an offender's risk level to determine if, how, and when the offender should be violated. The dependent variable was the only scale that required alterations. The Cronbach's alpha results are found in Table 5.

Table 5

*Cronbach's alpha Full Study*

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Item Correlation Minimum</b>	<b>Item Correlation Maximum</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>
First Scale: Opinions of Risk Assessment (Independent Variable)	.728	.135	.764	5
Second Scale: Opinions of Training (Independent Variable)	.810	.040	.808	5
Third Scale: Knowledge of Assessments (Independent Variable)	.809	.107	.730	5
Fourth Scale: Perception of Sentencing (Independent Variable)	.733	.064	.787	5
Fifth Scale: Implementation of Assessments (Dependent Variable) All five questions	.566	-.453	.568	5
Fifth Scale: Implementation of Assessments (Dependent Variable) 2 questions removed	.816	.475	.749	3

Officer opinions were the focus of this study. Table 6 provides the opinions of each variable for the population surveyed based on the scales created. Higher figures regarding opinions indicate positive opinions. Based on the scales created, officers do not have a positive opinion of the risk assessment tool as 18.5% reported a positive opinion of the risk assessment tool while 56.3% reported a negative opinion, and 25.2% reported neutral feelings. The overall opinion of training, however, was positive in that 45.7% reported a positive opinion of training, while 30.1% reported a negative opinion, and 24.2% reported neutral feelings. Officers' opinions regarding knowledge of risk assessments was evenly distributed in that 36.9% of individuals reported a positive knowledge of risk assessments while 35.9% reported a negative opinion, and 27.2% reported neutral feelings. Implementation was likewise evenly distributed as 36.9% of the population surveyed reported positive perceptions regarding implementation of the risk assessment tool while 35.9% reported negative perceptions of implementation, and 27.2% reported neutral perception of implementation. Officers' opinions regarding implementation of risk assessments during sentencing had an overall positive view as 69.9% reported a perception that implementation of risk assessments should be incorporated during the sentencing process while 10.7% reported a negative perception of implementation of risk assessments during sentencing, and 19.4% reported neutral feelings. The average length of time reported as being employed by the department was 7 years with a range of 0 to 29 years employed. The descriptive statistics are found in Table 6.

Table 6

*Population Percentages: Opinions of Variables*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Opinions of Risk Assessment (Independent Variable)	2.45	1.0	4.20	.76
Opinions of Training (Independent Variable)	3.06	1.0	5.0	.81
Knowledge of Assessments (Independent Variable)	3.47	1.0	5.0	.76
Perception of Sentencing (Independent Variable)	3.49	1.0	5.0	.81
Length of Time Working (Independent Variable)	8.73	0 years	29 years	6.92
Implementation of Assessments (Dependent Variable)	3.01	1.0	5.0	1.01

After the composite index scales for each of the variables were created from a group of responses as an average score, I conducted a correlation test on each scale with the anticipated covariates of gender, age, educational level, race/ethnicity, and judicial division. I determined that only three of the covariates, gender, race/ethnicity, and judicial division, had significant relationships with the variables. Gender had a correlation of  $-.29$  with the variable Length of Time Employed. This indicates that females have been employed in probation for a shorter amount of time than males. Race/ethnicity coded as dichotomous dummy variable had a correlation of  $.37$  with the

variable Perception of Sentencing which indicates that there is a minimal, positive relationship that exists between race/ethnicity and the perception of incorporating risk assessments in sentencing. Among the dummy variables used for judicial division there was a correlation of .28 with the variable Opinions of Training, and judicial division has a correlation of .26 with the variable Knowledge of Assessments. This indicates that the division of employment of the probation officer is correlated with the variables officers' opinions of training and knowledge of risk assessments. Since these three covariates correlated with one or more of the independent and dependent variables, they were included in the multiple regression analysis. The other covariates, age and educational level, were dropped from the analysis.

### **Results**

I used multiple regression technique to analyze the data collected per Chapter 3. An assumption of multiple regression technique is normal distribution of the variable, (Green & Salkind, 2011). I conducted a normality test to determine if normal distribution of the variables exists. The results determined that normal distribution was not found in the independent or dependent variables of this study based on the Shapiro Wilks Test, skewness, and kurtosis. The Shapiro Wilks Test requires a p-value greater than .05 to indicate a normal distribution. As seen in Table 7 none of the variables had a p-value of more than .05 based on the Shapiro Wilks test. Additionally, the skewness and kurtosis values were not between -1.96 and +1.96 for each of the variables. This is an indication that the variables were not normally distributed. The normality results are found in Table 7.

Table 7

*Normality Results*

	<i>Shapiro Wilks</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Skewness Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	<i>Kurtosis Standard Deviation</i>
Opinions of Risk Assessment (Independent Variable)	.038	.138	.238	-.613	.472
Opinions of Training (Independent Variable)	.026	-.084	.238	-.611	.472
Knowledge of Assessments (Independent Variable)	.000	-.780	.238	.898	.472
Perception of Sentencing (Independent Variable)	.001	-.707	.238	.304	.472
Length of Time Working (Independent Variable)	.000	.922	.238	.024	.472
Implementation of Assessments (Dependent Variable)	.001	-.221	.238	-.909	.472

A non-linear relationship may still exist between variables even if the normality assumption is violated (Green & Salkind, 2011). Although the normality assumption is violated in this study, in a moderate or larger sample size the use of multiple regression technique can still yield reasonably accurate values (Green & Salkind, 2011). A sample size of 15 cases has been noted as a baseline for accurate values (Green & Salkind, 2011). A standard moderate sample size is routinely considered to be 30 subjects or more (Green

& Salkind, 2011). The current study has 103 cases which surpasses the necessary moderate sample size.

I conducted a multiple regression analysis to determine if there was statistical evidence that the independent variables can be used to predict the dependent variable while controlling for the covariates. The multiple regression analysis indicates that four independent variables in this study, to include opinions of risk assessments, opinions of training, knowledge of risk assessments, and perception of sentencing, account for a significant amount of impact on the dependent variable implementation of risk assessments  $R^2 = .667$ ,  $F(9, 93) = 20.67$ ,  $p < .01$ . The results of this analysis are found in Table 9.

Table 9

*Regression Analysis Summary for Officers' Opinions*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	-1.257	.413		-.3043	.003
Gender	-.077	.135	-.038	-.569	.570
Race/Ethnicity	-.108	.147	-.050	-.734	.465
Division 1	.004	.180	.002	.024	.981
Division 2	.041	.174	.017	.237	.813
Division 3	-.230	.181	-.086	-1.273	.206
Opinions RA	.430	.097	.320	4.424	.000
Opinions Training	.336	.123	.268	2.739	.007
Knowledge RA	.506	.128	.377	3.940	.000
Perception Sentencing	.142	.090	.113	1.586	.116
Length Employment	.004	.010	.026	.395	.694

Note.  $R^2 = .67$  ( $N = 103$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

After gender, race/ethnicity, and judicial division were controlled for, the five independent variables had an R squared of .673 which means that 67% of overall variance can be predicted or explained by one or more of the independent variables after

inclusion of control variables. Additionally p-value of the model is .000 which is less than .05. This suggests that one or more of the independent variables significantly contributed to the implementation of risk assessments.

The first hypothesis examined was the opinions of North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections probation officers regarding risk assessments has no impact on the likelihood they will implement risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders. This null hypothesis was rejected as officers' opinions of risk assessments have a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments with a p-value of .000.

The second hypothesis examined was there is no difference in implementation of risk assessment policy requirements by probation officers' based on officers' opinion of training given by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections to administer risk assessments. This null hypothesis was rejected as opinions of training to use risk assessments have a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments as the p-value is .007.

The third hypothesis examined was there is no difference in implementation of current policy requirements by probation officers based on knowledge of risk assessments. This null hypothesis was rejected as knowledge of risk assessments has a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments with a p value of .000.

The fourth hypothesis in this study states there is no difference in officers implementation of risk assessments in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety

Division of Adult Corrections based on officers' opinions regarding if risk assessments should be used in sentencing. This null hypothesis was accepted as perceptions of incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing do not have a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments as the p-value is .116.

The last hypothesis was the length of time a probation officer has worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections has no impact on the likelihood they will implement risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders. This null hypothesis must then be accepted as length of time employed by the department does not have a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments having a p-value of .694.

### **Summary**

The research question for this study was how are current policy requirements to implement risk assessments affected by officers' perceptions of risk assessments? To address this research questions I had to first gather data regarding officers' opinions. Based on the survey findings about 18.5% of officers reported a positive opinion of the risk assessment tool while 56.3% reported a negative opinion and 25.2% remained neutral. Over half of the officers surveyed had a negative opinion of the risk assessment tool.

Through the use of multiple regression I tested five hypothesis in order to determine officers opinions regarding the assessment tool being used, opinions of training, officers' knowledge of risk assessments, officers' perceptions regarding the implementation of the risk assessment tool in the sentencing process, and officers' length

of time employed by the department to determine if these variables statistically impact the implementation of risk assessments. Three of the five hypotheses tested were accepted. I have found support that opinions of risk assessments have a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments. I have found support that opinions of the training received for implementation of the risk assessment tool has a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments. I have also found support that knowledge of risk assessments has a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments.

In contrast, two of the five null hypotheses tested were accepted. Based on the analysis, I have found no support that length of time employed by the department has a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments. Further, I found no support that perceptions regarding of incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing has a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments.

Based on the analysis conducted, I elaborate in Chapter 5 on the results regarding the statistical impact or lack thereof that each variable has regarding implementation of the risk assessment tool. This includes an interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendation for future research, and implications of social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into how probation officers' react to organizational change in regards to the implementation of risk assessment tools as an integral aspect of daily job duties and requirements of probation officers. I used survey research as this is the most accurate way in which to gain insight into individual perceptions. Specifically, 103 officers completed this survey, and these responses were used as the basis of analysis. The purpose of this study was to evaluate how officers' opinions impacted implementation of policy based on officers' opinions towards the use of risk assessments in supervision. I sought to determine a relationship between the implementation of policy by probation officers and their opinions of risk assessments, officers' knowledge of risk assessments, officers' opinions of training provided to for implementation of risk assessments, officers' opinions of the use of risk assessments in sentencing, and officers' length of time employed by the department.

Five hypotheses were tested using a multiple regression technique to determine officers' opinions regarding the five variables of this study. Three of the five hypotheses tested were accepted in that I found support that opinions of risk assessments had a statistically significant impact on the implementation of risk assessments, training received for the implementation of the risk assessment tool had a statistically significant impact on the implementation of risk assessments, and knowledge of risk assessments had a statistically significant impact on the implementation of risk assessments. Two of the five null hypotheses tested were accepted. I found no support that officers'

perceptions regarding the incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing had a statistically significant impact on the implementation of risk assessments, and I found no statistically significant support that length of time employed by the department had an impact on implementation of risk assessments.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The use of evidence-based practice is the focus of correctional policy on all levels to include federal, state, and local government. Predicting offender risk level via risk assessment tools has been widely accepted through the use of evidence-based practices as an appropriate means of reducing recidivism (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Oleson et al., 2011; Warren, 2007). Outlining individual risk of committing a new offense through the use of risk assessments is a tool used in evidence-based practices (Andrews, 2006; Long et al., 2011; Oleson et al., 2011). The theory of predicting offender risk to commit subsequent criminal activity is the basis of the risk-needs-responsivity model and is carried out through conducting risk assessments as a means of supervising offenders.

Implementing changes to policy and procedures has continually been unsuccessful (Elrod & Tippett, 2002; Higgs et al., 2011; Pettigrew et al., 2001). Those individuals charged with the implementation of new policy have historically shown resistance to change which has been one reason for the unsuccessful outcomes of organizational change (Tummers, 2011). Without employee willingness to implement new policy, execution of new policy cannot succeed (Tummers, 2011). Specific to the current study, modifications to policy regarding the supervision of offenders have been met with resistance on the individual level (Steiner et al., 2011). This resistance is seen

in this research study in that North Carolina probation officers charged with the implementation of risk assessments do not support the risk assessment tool that is required by current correctional policy. Organizational reform theory's theoretic postulation is that in order for implementation to be effective, the organizations must be fully committed to changing (Ferguson, 2002). The commitment to change must occur on all levels for successful and effective implementation of new policy (Ferguson, 2002).

The North Carolina Department of Corrections Division of Community Corrections policy makers and executive level staff support the implementation of risk assessments as these individuals have adopted the changes into policy. Changes were made to policy as of December of 2011 which requires officers to supervise offenders based on the risk assessment conducted by probation officers whether or not the individual is sentence to intermediate or community level supervision in court (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). While the distinction between community level and intermediate level is still made in sentencing law, probation officers are now required to administer a risk-needs assessment in the first 60 days of receiving a new case of probation to determine what level of supervision the offender will receive while on probation (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011). North Carolina adult probation was chosen for this research due to the recent changes to policy regarding sentencing laws as well as the changes to probation officers' policies to use the risk assessment tool as the determining factor in the supervision of adult offenders. The risk assessment tool being used in the North Carolina Department of Corrections Division of Community Corrections was

developed specifically for North Carolina Division of Adult Corrections (NC Policy and Procedure, 2011).

With so many changes to organizational requirements, it is essential to build upon knowledge regarding organizational change theory and any possible resistance to change that maybe occurring regarding the incorporation of risk assessment tools in not only North Carolina, but in all community corrections agencies. Building upon the organizational change theory is important because the focus of community corrections guidelines has become the use of risk assessment tools through evidence-based practices. It is imperative that line staff, in this case probation officers, support the implementation of risk assessments to ensure the correct execution of the risk assessments by probation officers in the supervision of adult offenders.

I sought to build on the knowledge base regarding organizational change theory. Previous scholars have focused on researching organizational change theory based on organizational factors as a means of predicting officers' opinions of new policy as well as the implementation of the individual policies (Farrell et al., 2011; Friedman et al., 2007; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Tamer, 2011). Such factors included organizational structure and leadership, culture and climate, resources and staff training, administrator attitudes, and network connectedness in one study (Friedman et al., 2007). In another study, the relationship between staff's self-reported use of current practices and their perceptions of organizational functioning within their offices was the focus (Farrell et al., 2011). Organizational factors formerly researched in regards to organizational change theory focus on the organization as a whole. Officers' opinion of the organization its self,

individual attitudes towards administrators and leaders within the organization, and how connected an individual may feel towards the organization has been the focus of previous literature. The opinion that a person has towards the organization in which he/she is employed with has been the focus in determining how resistance to changes in policy affects implementation of new policy. This area of focus regarding organizational change is valid in that individual opinions regarding organizational factors have found statistical support that these opinions impact organizational change (Farrell et al., 2011). Additionally, the current study was framed around previous literature in that key elements from these previous research studies were used to develop this study to include the use of a survey instrument and the fundamental examination of individual opinions to determine resistance to organizational change. I sought to highlight another variable, the specific policy of using risk assessments, in the phenomenon of organizational change theory.

Little research has been conducted to determine if officers' opinions of a specific policy impact implementation of the policy. In spite of the lack of available research on the subject of officers' opinions regarding the use of risk assessment tools, resistance to organizational change, may be affected by an employee's individual unwillingness to implement new policy. The variables used in this study are centered on individual opinions toward the risk assessment tool.

This study supports the organizational change theory as it has been determined that officers' opinions of risk assessments, opinions regarding training to implement the risk assessment tool, as well as individual opinions regarding knowledge of the risk

assessment tool affect implementation of new policy. Individual policies should be examined when considering organizational change to determine if there is resistance from line staff to policy changes because of the specific policy being incorporated. By identifying if there is resistance to the policy being incorporated into an organization, policy makers can then determine best practices regarding clarification of the policy to line staff and effective training practices to ensure the policy is being implemented correctly.

I have determined that officers have an overall negative opinion of the risk assessment tool being used in North Carolina adult probation. According to data collected, more than half the population surveyed had a negative opinion of risk assessments while only 19% had positive opinions of the risk assessment tool. Additionally, there was a statistically significant impact on officers' opinions regarding the implementation of risk assessments based on opinions of the risk assessment tool. The overall negative opinion of the risk assessment tool affected officers' implementation of the tool as required, which has not been the focus of previous literature. Specifically, 56.3% of officers surveyed reported a negative opinion of the risk assessment tool. There were about 18.5% of officers who reported a positive opinion of the risk assessment tool, and 25.2% remained neutral. The multiple regression analysis I conducted also determined that opinions of risk assessments had a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments.

There is individual resistance to changes in correctional policy (Elrod & Tippett, 2002; Tummers, 2011). Previous literature is expanded through this study in that the

policy of incorporating risk assessments was analyzed. Scholars have not focused on the opinions of a correctional policy, but instead there is a focus in organizational factors to explain organizational change. This research has extended findings in this area in that I found support that opinions of probation officers regarding the risk assessment tool was affecting the implementation of the risk assessment tool in adult probation. This information is important as identifying officers' opinions is the first step in combating current resistance to change in the efforts to implement the use of the risk assessment tool and ensuring that accurate incorporation of the risk assessment tool is being achieved in community corrections.

Officers were surveyed to determine how long they had been employed by the department to determine if there was a statistical relationship between time employed and implementation of the risk assessment tool. It was determined that length of time a probation officer had worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections had no impact on the implementation of current policy. There was not a significant difference in probation officers' opinions based on time employed by the department. There was a statistically significant impact on officers' opinions regarding the implementation of risk assessments based on training given by the department. The percentage of officers who had a positive opinion regarding training received from the department was about 45%, while about 30% had a negative opinion, and the remainder held neutral opinions. The examination of training was closely related to the organizational variables that were the focus of much of the previous literature.

Opinions of training received were found to impact implementation in new policy in this study as well as previous literature.

I found data that determined there was almost an even distribution of officers who had negative, positive, and neutral opinions regarding the knowledge or understanding of risk assessments. Officers' opinions regarding knowledge of the policy being implemented had not been examined in previous literature. While there was a statistical relationship between knowledge of risk assessments and implementation of risk assessments, understanding of this relationship needs further analysis. Lastly, I sought to determine officers' opinions regarding when the risk assessment tool should be incorporated, which also has not been addressed in previous literature. Incorporation of risk assessments during the sentencing process did not have a statistically significant impact on opinions regarding implementation of risk assessments.

The variables incorporated in this study were derived from a lack of research regarding individual opinions of specific policy. However, I wanted to incorporate what is already known regarding how organizational factors affect implementation of new policy with how individual opinions of a specific policy can affect implementation. I found statistical support that officers' opinions of individual correctional policies warrant further examination in building knowledge regarding organizational change theory.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were many factors which may have influenced the results of the study. First, the population in which the data were collected was limited to probation officers in the state of North Carolina. Specifically, the individuals surveyed in this study were

limited to those probation offices in North Carolina that I was able to make contact with and were willing to provide e-mail addresses for this study. I was unable to reach all officers currently employed with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Community Corrections because not all offices had updated phone numbers listed and some offices would not provide e-mail addresses.

I used a self-administered survey instrument to collect data. If any participants did not understand or misunderstood the questions on the survey, skipped items, or answered carelessly, erroneous data may have resulted. The survey reported only participants' intentions and attitudes during the execution of the research study. The basic assumption of this study was that if probation officers are implementing policy, they are doing so in accordance with current policy and procedures.

The study was limited in that I attempted to gain data from the entire population of probation officers working for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Community service and was unable to obtain these data. It was assumed that a representative sample of officers, to include a representation of demographics, was the basis for the findings. Actual demographic factors for the population of North Carolina State Probation Officers are not publically available. The results of this study can be generalized to other probation officers in the state of North Carolina as well as officers in other states as it is suspected that other officers will have similar characteristics as the officers surveyed in this research.

Additionally, there were limitations regarding the survey questions that were created. While previous literature was the basis for the creation of this study, there has

not been previously developed survey instrument to evaluate officers' opinions regarding risk assessment tools. I took several steps to increase the quality and validity including conducting the pilot study and the use of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. However, due to the exploratory nature of the survey instrument, the ability to test validity was limited.

### **Recommendations**

The focus of this study was organizational change theory as it related to the incorporation of the policy to conduct risk assessments in the supervision of adult offenders. I carried out this research to explore officers' individual opinions of the risk assessment tool which has been incorporated into policy in the state of North Carolina. Previous scholars focused on the individual opinions of the organization in which the policy is being incorporated to determine resistance to change; however, I focused on individual opinions of the newly incorporated policy. I found statistical support that individual opinion of policy, in this case opinion of the risk assessment tool in adult supervision, impacts implementation of the policy. Additionally, probation officers' knowledge of the risk assessment tool as well as training to implement the tool statistically impacted implementation of the risk assessment in adult community supervision. This study has helped to build upon organizational change theory in that I determined that opinions of individual policy changes can impact implementation of that policy and, therefore, the success of the entire initiative.

I determined that probation officers' opinions of risk assessment tools showed a significant impact on the implementation of risk assessments in offender community supervision. Future research studies could include a more in-depth survey of the risk

assessment tools based on officers' opinions and experiences. This survey could include an analysis of the actual risk assessment tool being used to include asking officers' opinions regarding how they believe the risk assessment tool is working, officers' opinions regarding any areas or questions of the current risk assessment tool which need adjustments, and questions regarding how the risk assessment tool could more accurately address officers concerns regarding predicting offender risk of recidivism. This would be helpful information to gather for future research in the effort to continue to evaluate the risk assessment tool being used in North Carolina and the similar risk assessment tools being incorporated across the country.

This study found statistical support that training to implement risk assessments as well as individual knowledge of the risk assessment tool affects the implementation of risk assessments. As training would increase officers' knowledge of the risk assessment tool as well as incorporation of the risk assessment tool, future research would benefit from an overall analysis of current training practices regarding risk assessments. This analysis could take place in the form of surveying officers, surveying instructors, and surveying supervisors prior to as well as following training. This information can aide in determining if training requirements are being attained based on individual understanding of requirements/goals and performance outcomes to achieve requirements/goals. Information that can be gained in future research includes information regarding how the risk assessment tool is being introduced to officers, if the risk-needs-responsivity model is being taught during training in an effective way for officers to understand risk needs, and if there is enough hands on experience provided to officers to execute the risk

assessment tool in daily job functions. Through conducting further research on training practices and outcomes, the proper execution of the risk assessment tool can be achieved in community corrections and best practices can continue to be identified.

In this study I found no support that perceptions of incorporation of risk assessments in sentencing has a statistically significant impact on implementation of risk assessments. Notably, 70% of the officers surveyed had positive opinions of risk assessments being incorporated in the sentencing process. This implies that while officers believe that risk assessments should be incorporated during the sentencing process, these opinions do not impact daily implementation. Future research would benefit from an analysis regarding the incorporation of risk assessments during the sentencing process. Such research could include an exploratory study in which the risk assessment tool is conducted on criminal offenders prior to sentencing to determine if lowered recidivism rates are achieved through community corrections when evidence based practices are included in the sentencing process.

Another research endeavor that could be beneficial in determining if the risk assessment tool should be incorporated during the sentencing process would be to survey court officials such as prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges. Including these individuals in the survey could help determine what information would be most beneficial in a risk assessment tool designed to determine appropriate sentences based on the risk-needs-responsivity model. It would be beneficial to determine court officials' opinions regarding whether or not the risk assessment tool should and/or could be conducted prior to sentencing as well as if it would be beneficial to identify specific

individual risk prior to sentencing to assist in making judicial recommendations.

Determining the opinions of those directly affected by organizational change prior to organizational change is imperative in the development and incorporation of new policies. For this reason gaining insight regarding court officials' opinions as a first step in determining if risk assessment tools should be incorporated in sentencing would be an integral part in gaining further insight into accurate implementation of risk assessment tools.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to conduct this research on the different risk assessment tools being implemented across the country on the local, state, and federal levels of government. While evidence-based practices have been incorporated across the country in correctional policy, each government entity is using a different risk assessment tool and/ or risk assessment practices to determine offender risk of recidivism in adult corrections. This study has drawn a connection between officers' opinions of the risk assessment tool and implementation of the risk assessment tool. Future research may benefit from other local, state, and federal agencies examining line staff opinions to gain knowledge on what officers believe is effective in regards to the different risk assessment tools and what is not effective. A comparison of officers' opinions based on the different risk assessment tools being used across the country could provide further knowledge in the effort to develop a evidenced based risk assessment tool for the supervision of adult offenders. Organizational change theory helps to explain how probation officers react to changes in correctional policy. Continued research in this area is needed as correctional

policy changes quite consistently. Understanding the best strategies to deal with these changes is paramount in the implementation of new policy.

### **Implications**

The organizational change theory has historically been used by researchers to examine organizational factors influencing officers' opinion of new policy and implementation (Higgs, 2011; Tamer, 2011; Taxman et al., 2007). These organizational factors included individual opinions of organizational structure and leadership, culture and climate, resources and staff training, relationship between staff members, etc. (Ferguson, 2002; Latessa, 2004; Friedman et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2011, Higgs & Rowland, 2011, Steiner et al., 2011). The focus on organizational factors to explain resistance to change has left a gap in literature in that there is little to no research which has focused on individual policy changes to explain resistance to change. The gap in literature was filled in that officers' opinions regarding the risk assessment tool were gathered in this study and used to explain organizational change theory. This study focused on the opinions of the risk assessment tool to determine if officers' opinions regarding the risk assessment tool are affecting the implementation of the risk assessment tool in daily duties. Through the examination of officers' opinions, this research built upon organizational change theory by finding statistical support that the opinion of an individual policy may impact resistance to implement changes to the policy by line staff.

This study has brought forth areas in which leaders of the North Carolina Department of Corrections Division of Community Corrections as well as other community corrections agencies across the country and abroad should consider in

developing training and/or best practices to implement the use of risk assessments in community corrections. Based on the findings, I recommend that practices regarding training be examined to determine effectiveness regarding officer understanding and knowledge of risk assessment. The results of this study indicate that clear understanding or rather knowledge of the risk assessment tool may not be received via training among probation officers. New probation officers go through initial seven week training once they are offered positions by the department. Following initial hiring, officers receive yearly refreshers regarding current policy and training as needed when new policy is implemented in the form of in person training, webinars, as well as online training sessions. It may be necessary for administrators to look into training initiatives for officers so that understanding/knowledge of the risk assessment tool can be clarified to advance the individual skills and abilities to implement the risk assessment tool in supervising criminal offenders. An examination of current training practices could boost officers' opinions of the current risk assessment tool as well.

To affect social change in the rehabilitation of offenders, officers concerns must be addressed regarding the risk assessment tool being used as risk assessments have become the center of the rehabilitation process. Predicting offender risk level via risk assessment tools is the current focus of correctional policy which is centered in the use of evidence-based practices to reduce recidivism (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Oleson et al., 2011; Warren, 2007). Risk assessment tools are the way in which correctional policy is determining what areas to focus on to address individual offenders' risk of recidivism. The data collected in this study has determined that probation officers have a negative

opinion of the risk assessment tool being used in the state of North Carolina. To ensure proper implementation, understanding of officers' opinions of the new policy being implemented should be the first step.

This study has determined that the opinions of the risk assessment tool, opinions of training to implement the risk assessment tool, as well as individual knowledge/understanding of the risk assessment tool statistically impacts implementation of the risk assessment tool. Previous literature has determined that by conducting a thorough assessment of offender risk/needs, enhancing offender intrinsic motivation, targeting the appropriate interventions for that offender, engaging the offender in skill training and practice, increasing positive reinforcements with the offender, assisting the offender in engaging the community and familial support, and also measuring the progress of the individual case to provide feedback to the offender are necessary steps in the risk assessments process (DeMichele & Payne, 2010; Holloway, 2010; Warren, 2007). This process is the accurate incorporation of risk assessment tools in supervising criminal offenders and can reduce recidivism rates of offenders. For this reason it is imperative to get to the root of why officers seem to have such negative opinions of the current risk assessment tool being used in the state of North Carolina. Since this research has determined that officers' opinions statistically impact implementation of the risk assessment tool, understanding and addressing officers' opinions can ensure accurate implementation of risk assessments which will accurately identify offender risk/needs and lead to the eventual decrease of recidivism.

Accurate implementation of the risk assessment tool is an essential step in reducing recidivism by addressing individual risk of recidivism and their individual needs while on supervision. Positive social change is the ultimate goal and result of correct implementation of the risk assessment tool achieved through lowered criminal activity among offenders and overall less contact with the criminal justice system for individuals on supervised release. Previous research studies have validated the accurate use of risk assessment tools and risk assessments as a means of supervising offenders and lowering recidivism rates (Luong & Wormith, 2011; Oleson et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2011; Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Shaffer et al., 2011; Brennan et al., 2009; Kleiman et al., 2007). Social change will be seen in criminal offenders becoming productive members of society if the identification of risk/needs is accurate and those risk/needs are addressed through supervision (Long et al., 2011, Oleson et al., 2011, Shaffer et al., 2011).

Reducing criminal behavior means reducing the overall costs associated with criminal behavior in our justice system. Society will benefit from reduction in the cost for the criminal justice system if officers' opinions of the risk assessment tool, opinions of training to incorporate the risk assessment tool in their duties, and knowledge of the risk assessment tool are not negatively effecting implementation of the risk assessment tool.

Implementation of an accurate risk assessment tool in community corrections maybe viewed as the key element in breaking the cycle of recidivism and preventing future criminal behavior throughout society. The findings of the study can help in reducing criminal behavior and recidivism through understanding officers' opinions regarding implementation of the risk assessment tool.

## **Conclusion**

The use of risk assessment tools and the incorporation of evidence-based practices are the current focus of the criminal justice system. Criminal justice professionals working in the community as well as those working inside prisons are charged daily to address the needs of the criminal population by appropriately identifying risk/needs and working with the offender to address those risk/needs. Simply punishing the individual for his/her behavior via the criminal justice system is no longer the focus. Instead officers are charged with helping these individuals figure out how to be productive members of society by making positive, lifelong changes in the way they think, react and behave. Officers are entrusted with the almost daunting task of literally figuring out how a person thinks about every decision he/she makes in order to change their core principles. To do this, criminal justice professionals have to be appropriately trained and equipped to handle the task.

Through this research I have determined that organizational change theory, specifically resistance to change, has a clear relationship with officers' opinion of the risk assessment tool being used in the state of North Carolina to supervise adult criminal offenders. Officers' opinions of the risk assessment tool, training to incorporate the risk assessment tool, and understanding/knowledge of the risk assessment tool has a statistically significant impact on the implementation of risk assessment tool in offender supervision. Literature conducted which has examined risk assessment tools in the effort to reduce criminal behavior has determined that accurate incorporation of risk assessment tools reduces recidivism rates. If officers are not accurately implementing the risk

assessment tool based on negative opinions of the risk assessment tool, ineffective training, or a lack of understanding/knowledge of the risk assessment tool, reductions in recidivism rates cannot be seen throughout the criminal justice system. Officers have to understand the task of accurately implementing the risk assessment tool through effective training as well as understanding the tools given. Through training and building of knowledge, opinions can be changed. The individuals who daily interact with the offender population are the best source of information for policy makers, administrators, and supervisors. Gaining insight through individual opinions is paramount for the continued success of risk assessments and continuing to strive for the overall goal of reducing recidivism across the country.

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## Appendix A: Letter to Participants

Date

Dear Probation Parole Officers,

My name is Kenika Canty and I am a PhD candidate in the school of Public Policy and Administration with a specialization in Criminal Justice at Walden University. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a study to determine probation officers' use of risk assessments in the supervision of criminal offenders based upon five variables: officers' opinion of risk assessments, understanding of risk assessments, opinion of training for use of risk assessments, officers' opinion of the incorporation of risk assessments in the sentencing process, and length of officers time in the department.

The findings of the study will be useful for the North Carolina Department of Corrections administrators in the effort to properly implement the use of risk assessments.

You are one of the officers invited to participate in this study. All probation/parole Officers working for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice who have been selected for this study as well. In order for the study to be representative of the entire department, each officer will be afforded the opportunity to complete and return the attached survey. Your response is very important. There is no direct benefit to you for participation in the study. While there is some risk that you could be identified by the demographic information you will provide, I will not ask for your name and I will not link survey answers in any way to your e-mail addresses nor will I collect the IP address of your computer. Furthermore, the only persons who will have access to the data set will include the researcher and the researcher's dissertation committee. Department of Public Safety staff will not conduct this research project. They will not get a copy of your name or of your answers. The Department may receive a copy of the overall results at the end of the study but will not be able to identify you personally from the copy they receive.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research survey. Your participation is strictly confidential and voluntary. There will be no way to track whether you responded to the survey, all the analysis conducted will be in aggregate and the data collected will only be reported as frequencies of the demographic and then used as control variables in the analysis. Your decision whether or not to participate will not in any way affect your current work assignment, work duties, and/or future work evaluation. As a former employee of the North Carolina Department of Corrections, I may possibly be known to some participants of this study. This study, however, is separate from my previous role as a probation officer and should not have any impact on your participation. If you decide to participate initially, you are still free to discontinue participation at any time. Incomplete surveys will not be included in the final data set. The survey should take only 15 to 30 minutes to complete. If you agree to participate in this study, please access the link below to complete the survey. There is no compensation for your participation and no penalty if you do not participate. If you choose to participate please retain/print a copy of the consent form for your records.

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to contact the university's Research Participant Advocate. Phone Number: 612-312-1210. You contact me at the below e-mail address.

kenika.canty@waldenu.edu

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Kenika K. Canty  
PhD candidate in Public Policy and Administration,  
Specialization Criminal Justice  
Walden University

## Appendix B: Survey Instrument

## Officers' opinion Of Risk Assessments

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Using risk assessments has increased my ability to supervise offenders.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Risk assessments categorize offenders correctly as low risk or high risk offenders.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Risk assessments are more accurate at determining a high risk offender than I am.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is necessary to supervise an offender at a higher or lower risk level than the risk assessment has determined.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Risk assessments do not accurately determine an offender's level of risk.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I was trained by the department on the use of risk assessments to supervise offenders.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Training given by the department prepared me to use risk assessments in my daily work.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I was trained by the department on how to use risk assessment tools to assign offender risk level.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Training given by the department has prepared me to supervise offenders based on individual risk level.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I would benefit from more training on how to incorporate risk assessments in supervision.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I understand what a risk assessment is and how it relates to offender supervision.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I understand through training given by the department the steps involved in assigning an offender a risk level.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I understand from training by the department what factors influence an offender's risk level.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I understand why risk assessments are used in offender supervision.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I use the risk assessment to determine what programs the offender will be referred to.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I conduct risk assessments on every new probation case I receive.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I use risk level to determine the level of contact I have with each offender.	1	2	3	4	5
18. When an offender is given a risk level, I supervise the offender based on that level.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I focus on an individual risks I have identified that were not identified by the risk assessment.	1	2	3	4	5

<b>20. I rely on an offender's risk level to determine if, how, and when the offender should be violated.</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>21. Low risk offenders should not be placed on probation.</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>22. Risk assessments should be incorporated in the sentencing process.</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>23. If risk levels were determined during sentencing I would be able to supervise offenders more accurately.</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>24. If the courts implemented risk assessments as a part of sentencing, I would rely on risk level more in supervision.</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>25. The courts have accepted the use of risk management to supervise offenders.</b>	1	2	3	4	5

26. What is your gender?  Male  Female

27. What is your current age?

\_\_\_\_\_

28. What is the highest level of education you received?

High School Diploma/GED

Associates Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctoral Degree

29. Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic. Latin or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican AM., Chicano

Yes Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin—Provide below

\_\_\_\_\_

30. What is this person's race/ethnicity?

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaskan Native—Print name of enrolled or principal tribe

\_\_\_\_\_

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian               | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Guamanian or Chamorro |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian-- Please Print | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander—Please Print |  |

Some other race/ethnicity

31. What Judicial Division are you currently employed in?

Division 1

Division 2

Division 3

Division 4

32. How long have you worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Corrections?

Months \_\_\_\_\_

Years \_\_\_\_\_