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# A Case Study of Overcrowding in a County Jail in the Southeast United States

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Marquice Robinson

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

A Case Study of Overcrowding in a County Jail in the Southeast United States

by

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MS, Kaplan University, 2011

BA, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2007

AAS, Columbia Greene Community College, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2018

## Abstract

For the past several decades, the county jail in a large metropolitan city in the southeast United States has been overcrowded, which has resulted in violence within the jail, excessive costs to the Sheriff's Office, and a requirement of Federal oversight of the jail from 2005 to 2015. In spite of these events, little is understood about why jail overcrowding is prevalent in the county and what impacts overcrowding may have on the communities around the jail. Using Shaw and McKay's social disorganization theory as the foundation, the purpose of this case study was to understand the unique circumstances around in the geographic region that may contribute to overcrowding in order to avoid the risk of future federal government intervention. Data were collected through interviews with jail administrators and staff, commissioners, and judges. Additionally, publicly available data related to the operations of the jail were collected. These data were inductively coded and then subjected to a thematic analysis procedure. Key findings identified the primary causes of overcrowding to include increases in the number of correctional clients with mental health problems, increases in the number of youthful offenders, and deficiencies in capacity at the primary jail facility that has not kept pace with population changes in the county. Positive social change implications include recommendations to jail administrators and lawmakers to use statutory authority to alleviate some of the problems in and around the jail facility. These recommendations may reduce the financial and legal risk for the county and promote public safety both within and outside the jail.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and close friends. In particular, I am grateful to my wife Mrs. Tammi Robinson for her love and steadfast support during the dissertation process. I want to thank my children Dezaree Harris, Sincere Robinson, Kayden Robinson, and Tate Waldron for their love and support. I want to give special thanks to my mother Ms. Hazel Robinson and my grandmother Mrs. Lizzie-May Robinson for always supporting my decisions. I also want to thank my brother, sister, aunts, and uncles for all their love and support.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my close friends, who have helped me throughout the process. I dedicate this dissertation to every person who has a dream, to every person who continues to strive for excellence in the face of adversity, and to every person who has been told they could not do something: this is for you.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction: Overcrowding in a County Jail**

Prison overcrowding has become a serious issue, indeed. It is an incomprehensible phenomenon though; both the international and national actors dealt with the problem for decades. According to Garcia-Guerrero & Marco (2012), overcrowding in correctional institutions represents a characteristic which troubles the contemporary prisons from the time of its invention in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There has been an ongoing debate regarding the processes in which the issue can be resolved. In this manner, the issues faced by the prison systems during overcrowding have been highlighted along with the challenges faced by the politicians while looking for a rapid change in the prison system due to the pressure of the courts and fiscal issues. However, Specter (2010) commented that now, the problem is not only limited to the correctional authorities, but it has also become a serious threat and challenge to the whole criminal justice system. With the development of a number of prisons for punishment, the prison authorities are also facing different types of issues as a result of the overcrowding.

I chose the case study of a county jail in the Southeast United States to present the issue of overcrowding in correctional institutions. The county sheriff's office is the largest such office in the state and has more than 1000 staff members under the administration of the sheriff who is the highest law enforcement officer in the county. The sheriff office services the capital of the state. There are three types of employees in sheriff office: administrative personnel, detention officers, and deputy sheriffs (County Sheriff's Office, 2016). The sheriff office maintains and operates the county jail and

provides safety and security for the county courts system; the sheriff office also executes warrants and serves civil papers. There are three jails under the sheriff office operational control – one main jail and two smaller jails – which are spread throughout the county. It also provides security for the Superior Courthouse, Juvenile Courthouse, and two other smaller court annexes in the county. Under the order of the court, the sheriffs have the power to execute an arrest warrant throughout the entire state. The county deputy sheriffs are also tasked with serving civil process, which can be either a summons or a subpoena issued by the courts or a third party (County Sheriff Office, 2016).

### **Background**

Overcrowding in the county jail has been an issue since the 1980s (Cook, 2015). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015) noted that the total correctional population in the United States is approximately 6,741,400 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). Understanding why other correctional facilities are overcrowded is expected to suggest possible reasons for overcrowding in the county jail. This understanding could provide relief to the sheriff's office that has faced several setbacks throughout its history (*County Sheriff Office Annual Report, 2015*).

According to Bennett and Lattin (2009), federal guidelines require correctional institutions to have adequate space to house inmates, but space depends on the size of facility compared with the maximum capacity and the total number of inmates daily. According to the *report of Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015)*, it is essential that correctional facilities should operate below capacity to prevent overcrowding. The county jail is a seven-story facility with a maximum capacity of 2500 beds, which makes it a

mid-sized facility (Bennett & Lattin, 2009). Since the county jail has limited capacity, it might create an issue among the inmates in the jail. Thus, as discussed here, the jail should operate at 104% capacity with the minimum number of 2500 inmates. Otherwise, Albrecht (2012) argued that the authorities have to face daily issues. For instance, in 2011, an inmate shot and wounded another inmate inside the jail. A critical aspect of this incident is that on the day of the shooting, the staff could not accommodate all the inmates in cells: There was not enough space for all of them. Due to overcrowding, two prisoners had to share a small cell which is mainly designed for one. The two persons had to spend the whole time together and share everything. This created quarrels among them. They fought for sharing one single mattress which at one point in time became severe and resulted in serious injury for one of them as discussed by Wright (2014) on the “Independent” website.

Besides reporting on the issues and accidents faced in a correctional institution due to overcrowding, the researcher has also discussed issues regarding the money assured to the counties to provide proper housing to the prisoners. A detailed discussion on the same has been done in this section of the study. According to the *County Annual Report* (2015), the county jail was outsourcing inmates—temporarily housing inmates at another facility for a fee—to other facilities to help resolve its overcrowding problem. The idea was to save money so that more money could be allocated to renovating the three jails operated by the sheriff’s office. The office was paying other counties over \$100,000 a year to house their inmates temporarily.



The sheriff office outsourced inmates to another correctional facility in the Southeast United States. The sheriff office as discussed in this study was charged approximately \$30 a day to house inmates at the other correctional facility (Gurr, 2009). The sheriff office was housing approximately 100 inmates monthly at another correctional facility. The total cost the sheriff office had to pay to the other correctional facility to house 100 inmates was approximately \$3,000 a day (*County Annual Report*, 2015). Besides that, the inmates are housed throughout the county jail. The jail inmates are assigned the cells as per the security classification. Other than analyzing the correctional facility used to outsource the inmates, it is essential to measure the crime rates to understand the reason for overcrowding in the county jail.

I selected the concentric zone model to analyze crime rates around the central jail and the satellite jails of the sheriff office. The central jail has a larger housing capacity to hold more prisoners compared to the satellite facilities. However, it varies from one state to another. When offenders are arrested in the County, they are usually sent to the central jail. The central jail of the county consists of a higher number of prisoners than its total capacity which is causing the facility to be overcrowded. Hence, the crime rates are also high in these types of jails (Paulus, 2012). Adjacent to central jails, several security institutions build small security camps known as satellite camps, which are responsible for providing inmate labor to the central jail. The concentric zone model seeks to explain the economic disparities in neighborhoods (Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925).

According to the model, a city can be divided into five different categories or concentric zones: central business district (Zone 1), transitional zone (Zone 2), working-

class homes (Zone 3), residential homes (Zone 4), and commuter zone (Zone 5). The transitional zone represents low-income neighborhoods with usually high crime rates. The central jail is located within the transitional zone and has the zip code 30303. The socioeconomic status of the residents around the central jail is categorized as a low-income class. I used zip codes to look up income levels by using the Google search engine. The average household income around the central jail was \$38,982 and the median household income is \$19,000. The central jail is within the jurisdiction of the local city police department patrolling area, Zone 1 which has differentiated crimes as assault, auto theft, homicide, larceny, non-residential burglary, residential burglary, robbery, and vehicle burglary.

As per the location of the county jail, it was noted by Pitts, Griffin III, & Johnson (2014) that the crime rates are higher, for which the number of inmates in the jail has risen. This has over-crowded the facility leading to severe health issues and other accidental cases or self-harm within the prison. In the context of this, the researcher emphasized the various reasons for which the county jail is over-crowded which is resulting in increased rate of crimes in the facility. Technically, it was noted by Specter (2010) that overcrowding in jails has increased since the justice system is punishing more people and sending them to prison compared to the capacity of the prisons. On the other hand, Garcia-Guerrero, & Marco (2012) argued that the immediate reason for overcrowding is due to the overuse of imprisonment or because of the insufficient prison capacity. This issue can be resolved either by sentencing the prisoners for a short-time period or by building more prisons in the state. The following research focused on the

overcrowding in prisons with particular reference to the county jail, and at the same time has found some solutions to reduce the identified issues.

### **Problem Statement**

Prison overcrowding is increasing throughout the world which is ultimately creating a financial burden on the administrative system of the country. It has been estimated that more than 11 million people including both pre-trial and sentenced prisoners have been held in the penal institutions throughout the world in May 2011 (Atabay, 2013). It means almost 147 out of 10,000 people in the world are imprisoned. The county jail is not an exceptional case where the explosive growth rate of inmates in the jail started from the 1970s.

There is a problem of overcrowding in the county jail. Despite efforts made by its administrators, the jail still faces severe overcrowding (Cook, 2015). The sheriff office was released from a federal consent order, which mandated that the jail remains under its maximum housing capacity in the 2015 calendar year (O'Hayer, 2015). The federal consent order could be reinstated if the overcrowding problem at the county jail spirals out of control again, which could result in the Sheriff losing operational control of the jail (Cook, 2015).

Prison overcrowding is a significant issue in the United States (Walsh, 2015). The following paper has been developed qualitatively to explore the issues related to overcrowding in correctional institutions with particular reference to a county jail. Besides that, the reasons for correctional institutions overcrowding will also be explained to reduce the issues in the best possible ways. I explored several possible causes: the

maximum holding capacity (i.e., facility size) compared to the jail's current population, the location of jails compared with the crime rates, percentage of offenders in the age range of 18–25 years in the county jail compared to the current jail population, and the percentage of mental health inmates housed in the county jail compared with the current jail population. A qualitative case study that investigates the reasons for overcrowding could help alleviate the situation.

### **Research Questions**

Despite the efforts made by the administration to prevent the overcrowding of the county jail, the facility remains overcrowded. Such overcrowding poses a severe threat to the security of the inmates resulting in self-harm or accidents inside the facility and increases the complications for the sheriff's office. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the possible causes for such overcrowding to expanding understanding in the matter to enable the sheriff office administration to develop a plan for reducing overcrowding in the county jail. This study sought answers to the following guiding questions:

**Guiding question ():** To what degree can an improved understanding of the overcrowding problem in a county jail assist lawmakers to address the problem of overcrowding of correctional institutions in the United States?

**Subsidiary question ():** To what extent can determining the reasons for overcrowding improve the safety and security of correctional institutions?

## Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are an essential tool in research (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). The theoretical framework provides the reason for or importance of conducting a study and helps to analyze the research problem (Anfara, 2008). It acts as the conceptual model that is a guideline depending on which the literature review section is developed. The explanation of a theoretical framework is useful regarding understanding the context and perspective of the study. More research is needed on crime rates, which are believed to be contributing factors to overcrowding (Anfara, 2008). This study was conducted on overcrowding in the county jail, a problem that needs to be explored concerning the geographical influence and crime rates related to the locations in society.

The theoretical frameworks used in this study were the *concentric zone model* (Park, Burgess, & McKenzie) and the *social disorganization theory* (Shaw & McKay, 1969). The social disorganization theory helps in explaining the fact that the people belonging from low-earning areas mainly perform more crime compared to high-class societies. The social disorganization theory was most commonly used to explain crime rates; it can also be used to show why certain incidents occur in specific areas. The social disorganization theory can be used to explain overcrowding because crime rates are one of the reasons why correctional institutions are overcrowded. This theory was developed based on some of the principles of the concentric zone models' theory, which states that low-income areas have higher crime rates.

This study seeks to demonstrate a correlation between crime and its location as a possible contributing factor to overcapacity in correctional institutions with particular

reference to the county jail. However, according to previous studies and arguments of various scholars, there are specific other factors like the capacity of the prisons which led to overcrowding in the prisons. Further, Shaw and McKay studied a sample of juveniles between the ages of 10 and 16 years old and learned that low-income areas have high crime rates because of the lack of funding for community programs. The authors used social disorganization theory to show that the central jail's location in a low-income area could be a reason for overcrowding. By comparing the results of previous studies of the scholars, the researcher has made further comparisons to the fact whether the capacity of the prisons is leading to overcrowding with that of low-income areas as mentioned above.

This study could help the sheriff office explore reasons why the county jail is overcrowded. The result of this study could also help other correctional institutions explore reasons for overcrowding. The implications of the following study could lead to social change in the legal system and how punishment is appropriately given for crimes. The prisoners can be sentenced to short-term sentences instead of long-term sentences which is increasing the population in prisons. By addressing the impact on punishment for crimes, it could reduce the cost for taxpayers and levitate pressure from government officials to reduce overcrowding in correctional institutions. Future research can be provided based on the limitations of the study since the study is limited to a county jail and does not cover the scenario of other correctional institutions. Henceforth, keeping the limitations in mind, future research studies can be conducted while exploring more reasons for overcrowding and the possible solutions to the address situation.

### **Significance of the Study**

The following study is essential regarding analyzing the overcrowding in a county jail. In this context, the study has emphasized understanding the possible reasons for overcrowding in the jails which have also affected the health and mental conditions of the prisoners and led them to injuries, accidents, or self-harm. The researcher has further discussed the significant steps taken by the administrative departments of the county jail to develop a plan and reduce over-population in their prison. The location of the central jail being in a low-income area was also considered as a reason for which the overcrowding is rising in the facility. The following research study is also essential regarding understanding the overcrowding issues in the county jail while assisting the lawmakers to address those issues and reduce the time-period of a prisoner so that overcrowding can be eliminated in correctional institutions. This would also help in improving the safety and security of the prisoners in the jail. The following study is also significant regarding understanding how the growth of population in the jail is linked to the demand for punishment. By that, the researcher has also discussed the remedies against overcrowding. Suggestions have been provided in the study based on previous researchers. For instance, the researcher has highlighted the concept of social change which is vital regarding finding an alternative solution to address the issue of overcrowding in prisons. It has been further recommended that positive social change is possible if the youth are kept out of correctional institutions and more youth are finishing school and entering the workforce.

### **Limitations**

The study is limited to a county jail, rather than analyzing the conditions of other jails in different states. The research also lacks in explaining individual social and economic factors as significant causes of overcrowding in prisons. There is a limited discussion on how the criminal justice system can be improved to reduce the issue of overcrowding in the prisons.

### **Nature of the Study**

Case studies are a common qualitative methodology in which a sequence of events is recorded chronologically; this enables an investigation into the causes of a particular situation. A case study can also be explained as an intensive description and analysis of a single individual or (sometimes) group (Stake, 1995). Case studies can be conducted on both people and situations. One advantage of case studies is that they are very detailed (Stake, 1995). The data collected in case studies provide in-depth information about a particular situation. Case studies can be used to thoroughly explain a phenomenon in detail.

One of the significant disadvantages of a case study is that the collected data may not be relevant or useful. Case studies are not entirely theoretical because they incorporate situational factors in the study along with the theoretical foundations. Case studies lack generalizability. Finally, biases are possible in both data collection and interpretation (Yin, 2013).



### **Data Collection Techniques and Tools**

**Data types and its sources.** The researcher collected both primary and secondary data for the study. The mixed method is utilized in the study. The primary data was collected from interviews and observation of participants' body language. On the other hand, the secondary data were collected from public records, such as the 2015 *County Sheriff Office Annual Report*.

**Data analysis tools.** NVivo is a software which supports the mixed research method and qualitative data collection technique. NVivo helps in organizing, analyzing and finding insights in a qualitative and unstructured data, for instance, open-ended surveys, social media, web content, and interviews (Bazeley, & Jackson, 2013). NVivo also helps in saving time and managing the data efficiently. NVivo software has efficiently adapted to the growing popularity of the mixed method research which involves the use of multimedia and greater involvement in the qualitative aspects of the project (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). NVivo software is particularly useful in the current scenario with a worldwide increase in digitization of data. NVivo is increasingly flexible in adapting to the demands of modern research projects with greater ability to organize and analyze different types of qualitative information available in the forms of interviews, videos and audio clips (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The ability of the NVIVO software to code audio and video data was of great assistance in the transcription process of the interviews.

### **Gaps in Research**

Numerous studies have been conducted to understand the problem of prison overcrowding in the United States; however, the issue of overcrowding in county jails has not received the same attention because they are viewed as temporary holding facilities (Williams, 2014; Cunniff, 2002). Previous studies show that the prisons are lacking financial stability resulting in insufficient funding to properly operate the facilities. More research is needed on overcrowding in jails to ensure that adequate funding is allocated to them. Limited studies have been conducted on the basis of the importance of safety and security in a correctional institution even when it is overcrowded. It is seen that due to overcrowding in the prisons, the prisoners are not receiving proper security which is leading accidents and self-harm. Henceforth, the research gaps are the same issues that the county jail faces, such as lack of proper funds to effectively operate the jail, which is one of the causes of overcrowding. Overcrowding can also affect the physical health of an inmate. Depending on these research gaps, the following study has been conducted.

### **Summary**

There has been an explosive growth of prisons and prisoners in the United States since the 1970s and is an inevitable result of the concept of “tough-on-crime” policies. From the mid-1970s, the federal and state legislators have sanctioned laws which create draconian sentences to keep people in prison. Such policies include the mandatory minimum sentence of prison which forced the judges to hand down severe sentences. As a result, the number of offenders has increased in correctional institutions which have led to overcrowding. The lengths of stay followed by the number of admissions in prisons

have increased from the last few decades, and these two factors are also considered the main factors of overcrowding in prisons. The research in the following chapter provides a brief introduction to overcrowding in prisons along with the factors affecting the increases of prisoners in prisons. A particular reference has been given to a county jail in the Southeast United States. Other than these two factors, the researcher has also discussed the influence of the low-income or impoverished regions which have led to the increase in crime rates and inmates in the county jail. As a result, correctional institutions lack the required funds to operate the facilities adequately. The chapter also reveals how the overcrowding is affecting the mental health of the prisoners while leading to self-harm and accidents. In this context, it is further recommended to shorten the sentence of imprisonment and introduce some policies so that the identified issue of the research can be resolved. *Concentric zone model* and *Social disorganization theory* have been chosen to complete the theoretical framework of the research work. Proper justifications have been provided in the study to make the readers understand why the study is significant and what the possible gaps exist in the study. The limitations of the study have been explained in short. Besides that, the researcher discusses briefly that both primary and secondary data was chosen as the data collection techniques where qualitative data is further analyzed using the NVivo software.

### **Chapter Scheme**

The following research work has been divided into five main chapters to complete the study proficiently.

*Chapter 1- Introduction:* This is the first chapter of the study in which the researcher provides a brief introduction of overcrowding in prisons and the reasons behind it. Following this, the limitations and gaps of the study are identified and proper justification is provided regarding its significance. The methods that were used to collect the data are introduced in short in this section.

*Chapter 2 - Literature review:* This chapter presents an analysis of the literature on the issue of jail and prison overcrowding accomplished by reviewing the literature about overcrowding in correctional institutions. Detailed evidence is provided regarding the various factors which influence the rise of crime rates in a county jail in the Southeast United States. The ideas of various scholars were collected to complete this section of the research. This section of the study was conducted by analyzing secondary data collected from various relevant secondary resources like books, articles, journals, and educational websites.

*Chapter 3- Research design:* In the third chapter of the study. the researcher identifies various research methods using which the required information of the research has been collected. Different data collection techniques followed by it analysis tools have been introduced in this section.

*Chapter 4 - Thematic analysis and discussion:* In this chapter, the researcher has analyzed the qualitative data with the help of thematic analysis technique. The NVivo software was used here to transfer the audio and video files of interviews into themes and sub-themes so that the readers can understand it. The themes and sub-themes are further explained with the help of human brain interpretations.

*Chapter 5 - Results and conclusion:* In this chapter, the results of the study have been discussed to verify whether the research aim and questions are met or not through primary data analysis and secondary data. Further, the chapter ends up with a conclusion where a summary of the overall thoughts and results of the study have been discussed in detail.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The issue of correctional institution overcrowding first arose in the 1970s when former president Nixon launched a war on drugs (Carrol, 2016). In the 1980s, President Reagan expanded the war and the incarceration rates for drug offenses rose from approximately 40,000 to over 400,000 in the calendar year 2014 (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Albrecht (2010) noted that there are other two factors for which the number of prisoners inside prisons has risen. The growth rate of admissions followed by lengthy stays of the prisoners has resulted in the increasing number of prisoners. Additional research is needed into the overcrowding of correctional institutions (Walsh, 2015). Apart from identifying the various reasons which have influenced the growth rate of prisoners, the researcher provided adequate information regarding the different remedies to resolve the issue. For instance, in 2014, Petersilla noted that the U.S. Supreme Court Case decision of *Brown vs. Plata* could have a significant effect on correctional facilities nationwide. Although the Supreme Court's decision in the *Brown vs. Plata* case focused on the state of the California prison system, the issue of overcrowding in correctional facilities is a national problem and the decision made in this case could prove to be helpful for other correctional institutions in the future. In the case, *Brown v. Plata*, 563 U.S. 493 (2011), the Supreme Court of US handed down a decision which stated that the limitation of the court-mandated population is necessary to remedy the violation of the prisoners' Constitutional Rights (Eighth Amendment). Anthony McLeod Kennedy (senior associate justice of Supreme Court, US) filed the opinion considering the

judgment of United States District Court (Eastern & Northern) which ordered that the number of prisoners in California prison needs to be reduced to 137.5% to align with the capacity of the prison. Considering this decision, the researcher further suggested in the subsequent section of the study that other prisons including jails should follow the same opinion to reduce overcrowding.

### **Research Strategy**

To identify prospective, peer-reviewed articles and books, I searched different criminal justice databases such as ProQuest, Sage Journals, and Oxford Criminology Bibliographies. These databases were searched for the years 1995-2015, keywords such as prison overpopulation, jails, crime, and gangs were some words used. I used the Boolean operator's technique to optimize the results. Abstracts were used to judge an article's relevance to the research questions.

### **Review of Literature**

In 2015, the problem of prison overcrowding in Canada was addressed by Lanerville. In line with Lanerville, the problem of overcrowding is a worldwide phenomenon and overcrowding has been a problem for decades in Canada. Lanerville used the phenomenological approach as the foundation for the study by referencing historical reasons for overcrowding. Lanerville research examined the historical perspectives on the problem of overcrowding in Canada by addressing the problems of prison terms, non-payments, and electronic monitoring. The ideology of imprisonment leading to social change was formulated in Lanerville's research approach. Lanerville noted that the Canadian government was concerned with the issue of overcrowding, but it

was not a significant concern because overcrowding is not as severe as in other countries.

Developing alternative programs for incarceration is the best way to reduce crime, which would also result in decreasing the population. According to United States legislators, America's addiction to the use of incarceration is unstable and costs billions of dollars to the taxpayers while reducing the crime rates. Henceforth, the concept of "Smart on Crime Initiative" was introduced to US Attorneys to emphasize the federal resources to reduce the unnecessary incarceration. The modified policies are: a) transferring more criminal cases to the state courts, b) omitting the list of low-level drug cases, c) increasing the introduction of drug-treatment program as an alternative to imprisonment, and d) introducing a program of compassionate release so that the elderly prisoners who did not commit any violent crimes can be released. King (2010) addressed the problems in state sentencing policies and which could be used to address the issue of overcrowding in the county jail. As stated by King, the ideology behind using incarceration as a method to reduce crime is not a good alternative.

How prison overcrowding affects crime rates and leads to increase in crime and cost for housing prisoners was analyzed by Levitt (1995). Other studies conducted on prison overcrowding in comparison with crime rates did not address how low crime rates do not always lead to a decrease in prison overcrowding. The researcher used the case study methodology and analyzed crime rates within a particular city in comparison with the size and the population within a prison. Levitt argued that overcrowding litigation would be useful in helping solve the issue of overcrowding. The researcher noted that crime rates increased with prison reduction and there is no genuine social benefit gained



by reducing prison terms. Levitt noted that the taxpayers were paying for the criminals whether or not they were in prison.

Prison assaults can happen in any prison but are less likely to happen in larger prisons according to a Farrington and Nuttall (1980) study that addressed the issue of prison overcrowding, prison violence, and recidivism and asserted that the prison size has no impact on the behavior of inmates inside the prison. Farrington and Nuttall also noted that overcrowding in prisons only related to the effectiveness of prisons; the type of prisoners and the level of their crimes are what make prison overcrowding so dangerous. Farrington and Nuttall argued that larger prisons usually house the most dangerous inmates, and this could be the possible reason for overcrowding. Farrington and Nuttall also specified that prison overcrowding was a primary concern for governmental agencies and it needed to be addressed.

Prison overcrowding has a significant impact on inmate behavior as discovered by Franklin and Pratt (2006) when they examined the relationship between prison overcrowding and inmate misconduct. They noted that incarceration rates have significantly increased, and the issue of prison overcrowding has received national attention. Franklin and Pratt argued that the behaviors of prison inmates are influenced by psychological disorders, such as anxiety, which causes tensions between inmates. Finally, Franklin and Pratt noted that imprisonment is a stressful experience and stress levels increase when inmates feel clustered; which can lead to violent behavior. By analyzing other research studies related to overcrowding and inmate misconduct, Franklin and Pratt proved a strong correlation between prison overcrowding and inmate behavior.

Fry (1988) discussed how prisons should not be studied individually for overcrowding and how the issue needs to be looked into as a whole. The researcher conducted the study about a California prison. The researcher gathered information on issues, such as sick calls, grievances, and disciplinary reports. After he started to analyze the data, his opinion started to change about the effects of prison overcrowding. Before conducting the study, Fry did not realize that prison overcrowding could affect several different aspects of society. The findings of the disciplinary reports noted that there was a significant problem in the California prison system and each prison needed to be analyzed individually. Fry asserted that prison overcrowding has a significant effect on society, and officials must take a direct approach to combating this problem.

Prison overcrowding and how it can lead to several problems such as suicides by inmates were examined by Dye (2010). The researcher conducted the study on several state prisons to show a correlation between the conditions of the prisons in comparison to the total inmate population leading to high suicide rates in prison. The results of the study showed that prison suicides increased because of overcrowding issues and deteriorating prison conditions. Dye concluded that prison suicides could directly relate to overcrowding because of the organizational ineffectiveness of the prison system. Prison overcrowding is one variable that has been constant in many studies, and the issue should be a cause of significant concern for government officials.

An examination of how gangs have taken over the prisons was conducted by Morris and Worrall (2012). They noted that gangs have substantially increased within the prison system. As mentioned by Morris and Worrall, gang population in prisons is

overwhelming, and it is one of the significant factors of prison overcrowding. They determined there was a correlation between gangs, inmate violence, and prison overcrowding. Their study proved that gang members were more prone to commit acts of violence than non-gang members. Morris and Worrall argued that gang members were leading the drug trade in prison and that they also often have prison staff collaborating with them. The researchers concluded that the gang population in prisons is starting to become overwhelming, and if the gangs can be kept under control, it could lead to a decrease in violence within prisons.

Prison overcrowding could affect the quality of prison life according to Barrick, Cohen, and Ekland-Olson (1983) who examined the overcrowding issue in the Texas prison system. They looked at the disciplinary rates in correlation with the age of the inmates in the Texas prison system in comparison with the overcrowding rates. They also addressed how disciplinary problems keep inmates in prison for more extended periods and how increased prison sentences are leading to inmate overcrowding. Barrick, Cohen, and Ekland-Olson argued that in the Texas penal system, prison overcrowding has been an ongoing problem, and government officials needed to find a solution to the problem. The study concluded that disciplinary issues in prison are causing a significant problem for the Texas correctional system, and it is causing inmates to stay in prison longer than their initial sentence.

Prison overcrowding can lead to several issues such as inmate violence. Gaes (1994) addressed the issues relating to research already conducted on prison overcrowding by other researchers. The research conducted by Gaes showed that. Most

studies conducted on prison overcrowding fail to show a correlation between overcrowding and violence. Gaes noted that there is a lack of consistency in research involving prison overcrowding because intervention programs are not being adequately developed. The researcher found that inmate violence in prisons led to more extended stays for inmates, and there was not enough bed space within the prison system to adequately house all the offenders (Gaes, 1994). The study confirmed that inmate violence had a direct impact on prison overcrowding, and overcrowding would persist because of the lack of adequately developed intervention programs.

The use of alternative programs rather than sending people to prison was examined by Woods-Warrior and Connor (2009). They stated that the United States had the highest incarceration rate in the world with one in every thousand persons being in prison. Woods-Warrior and Connor asserted that the average cost to maintain a prison in the United States is over 40 billion dollars. Their study noted that one of the factors leading to prison overcrowding is recidivism. In their case study, the researchers stated that out of 600,000 prisoners released yearly more than two-thirds end up back in prison within the first one to three years. Consequently, they suggested transitional programs as an alternative to incarceration. Woods-Warrior and Connor argued that transitional programs could help reintegrate offenders back into their communities. Their study discussed two specific programs: the Geminschaft program and the Delancey Street program. These transitional programs offered housing, job placement, educational assistance, and other life-developmental training and skills.

A different perspective on why correctional institutions were overcrowded and why alternative programs would be more useful was provided by Woods-Warrior and Connor. Their study focused on finding alternative methods to deal with nonviolent offenders; these alternative methods would be the building blocks for the fight against overcrowding. Currently, the sheriff office has only one transitional program, which is called the Second Chance program.

Past studies on prison overcrowding fail to address essential methods, and they lack conceptual ideologies according to Praff (2008) who argued the increase in the prison population in the United States has grown over the past 10 years. The researcher also discussed limitations on prison overcrowding, such as budgetary concerns, and the risk model of dependency was shown to be one of the reasons why prison population was proliferating. Praff argued that government and prison officials will face a backlash from society if the problem of prison overcrowding is not adequately addressed. The study concluded that more research needs to be conducted to provide a holistic solution to the problem of prison overcrowding.

Chung (1999) reviewed how prison overcrowding is not only an internal issue; it is also a violation of fundamental human rights. He goes on to say that the United States has the highest prison population in the world with over two million people incarcerated. Chung found that the number of sentenced federal prisoners is higher than the number of sentenced state prisoners because of the investigative and prosecutorial work of federal law enforcement officials. Chung noted that federal prisons are operating over 27% of maximum capacity compared to state prisons, which operate over 22% of maximum

capacity. Chung discussed how prison overcrowding leads to a violation of the eighth amendment to the U.S. Constitution that calls for no cruel and unusual punishment.

The psychological effects that overcrowding can have on prisoners were analyzed by Haney (2006) who asserted that the ideology behind the use of prisons is that it can transform people positively or negatively. Haney argued that the psychological effect of prisons can cause painful experiences, and the result can lead to violence. Haney concluded that overcrowded prisons could cause unpleasant, unsafe living and working conditions for the staff and inmate, but that the psychological effect of prisons is not always harmful – it could also benefit a person. Incarceration can change a person into a productive and responsible citizen. The psychological effects of prisons influence each person differently (Haney, 2006).

In 2015, the impact of overcrowding in prisons was examined by Guetzkow and Schron. They conducted a quantitative study into cases involving overcrowding litigations in the U.S. prisons. Guetzkow and Schron (2015) studied five variables that impacted prison litigation such as overcrowding, release, spending, incarceration rates, and admission rates. Litigation related to overcrowding has affected the management of U.S. prisons. The dispute among lawmakers in litigations arising from the issue of prison overcrowding has caused a communication barrier. The study noted that talks of litigation had some positive effects on lawmakers trying to develop a solution to address prison overcrowding. Some of the positive effects assayed in the study regarding litigation were high spending and incarceration rates. Guetzkow and Schron concluded that litigation is a

significant factor in prison overcrowding because of the disagreements among lawmakers and prison officials.

The overcrowding problem at the county jail can be related to the study by Guetkow and Schron. One way in which their study related to the issue of overcrowding in the county jail was the lack of communication and the unwillingness of stakeholders to work collaboratively; this could have a negative impact on the problem of prison overcrowding. Litigation is a significant factor that influences the development and planning phase when trying to find a solution to something (Guetkow & Schron, 2015). Disputes among the Sheriff Office, the Commissioners, and the County Courts can cause unnecessary delays in combating the issue of overcrowding. A solution to the issue of overcrowding will require collaborative efforts from all stakeholders involved (Guetkow & Schron, 2015).

The increase in prisoners has a significant effect on the community, the government, and the prisoners' families according to Alinejad and Nazarinejad (2015); it increased violence in the city. They discussed the pathology behind prison overcrowding and conducted a qualitative study into the reasons for overcrowding in prisons with hopes of finding solutions to address the issue. A case study was conducted to show the increase of prisoners in Iran. Their research pointed out specific variables responsible for prison overcrowding, such as weak legislation, the abuse of authority, and the judiciary not understanding its roles. To combat the issue of overcrowding, the researchers offered various solutions; one solution was to use crime prevention programs to replace imprisonment. The researchers asserted that the judiciary must understand their role in

society, and how they play a significant role in reducing prison overcrowding by developing alternatives to incarceration.

The study by Alinejad and Nazarinejad is related to the issue of overcrowding in the county jail because it shows the importance of the role of the judiciary in reducing overcrowding. The ideas proposed by the researchers can also be used to help the sheriff office reduce its jail overcrowding problem. The county courts could play a significant role in helping to reduce the inmate population at the county jail. The research by Alinejad and Nazarinejad can be used as a foundation for county jail administrators. The sheriff office has taken much criticism on the management of the jail; however, the county courts must understand their role in the problem and start working together with the sheriff office to resolve the issue.

The legislation of the state of California on prison capacity was discussed by Misenas (2010). The researcher's primary focus was the Public Safety and Offender Rehabilitation Act, established in 2007, which mandated the expansion of housing units in prisons and jails within the state of California. The expansion of housing units can provide a reliable alternative to addressing some of the overcrowding issues faced by the California state correctional system (Misenas, 2010). In 2008, the governor issued a state of fiscal emergency because of the state financial deficit, and in 2009, the legislation was amended to address the budgetary concerns. The legislation required the rebuilding of housing units to house more inmates because of the increasing number people going to prison as a result of the increase in crime rate in the state of California. The California



Department of Corrections was charged with the duty of ensuring that the required renovations were accomplished.

Some of the issues faced by the county jail can be seen in Misenas findings. The rebuilding of housing units is a good idea that needs to be examined by the sheriff's office administrators. The inmate population in the county jail exceeds the bed space available by more than 1000 beds. The overcrowding problem could be resolved by expanding the housing units, but several factors must be examined. One of the significant factors is the jail design. Building inspectors will need to assess the building to see if such construction is possible. The sheriff's office will need to find alternative solutions to reduce overcrowding in the jail so that the federal courts do not take over jail management because the sheriff's office violated the federal court order to keep the inmate population within capacity.

The role played by the Affordable Care Act in prison overcrowding was examined in 2011 and according to Steadman, the issue of prison overcrowding should be looked at on a broader scale that encompasses the whole criminal justice system. The California prison system has some operational issues when dealing with mental health offenders (Steadman, 2011). A three-judge panel was established in California to develop four remedies to reduce overcrowding. The four remedies were early release programs, jailing or sanction of parole violators, sanctions for low-risk criminal offenders, and expansion of community rehabilitation programs. The researcher found that many offenders in the prison system have mental health issues and behavior disorders. Steadman also noted that the implementation of the Affordable Care Act is playing a role in prison overcrowding

by offering low-cost health care to offenders, which brings in more money to a correctional institution. Steadman underlined the importance of stakeholder involvement in the development of a plan to combat prison overcrowding.

The sheriff office is indirectly affected by Steadman's study (2011) because the county jail has an enormous proportion of the mentally ill population. The sheriff's office has one entire floor dedicated to mental health inmates; yet, there are still several other mental inmates in other parts of the jail (*County Sheriff Office Annual Report, 2015*). The issue of the Affordable Care Act playing a role in prison overcrowding has an indirect effect on the sheriff office; it is crucial to determine how many county administrators deal with the increase of mentally ill inmates in the jail. There is only one state-operated mental health facility within the state; however, there are several privately-owned facilities, but they do not have the resources to house and treat several mental health patients. Mental health offenders should be housed in mental health facilities, not in the correctional environment (Steadman, 2011).

In 2008, it was argued that determining the mean of prison lengths could help the legislature reexamine sentencing laws (Patterson & Preston, 2008). The researchers conducted a quantitative study using several charts and graphs to demonstrate the effects of lengthy prison stays in comparison to the prison population. The study was divided into two parts. The first part was the analysis of prison growth compared with the total population growth. The second part was the use of various lengths of prison time compared with the number of people entering and exiting the prison. The researchers

referred to the growth of prison population in comparison with the entering and exiting of offenders as an indirect factor that impacted prison overcrowding.

There is a direct correlation to some of the concerns in the sheriff office and the Patterson and Preston study (2008). The sheriff office has several inmates who have been in jail for over a year for various reasons—either they were awaiting trial, or they were lost in the system. The sheriff office can benefit from the research conducted on the length of prison stays because prison sentence lengths could be a reason for jail overcrowding. Jails are supposed to be temporary holding facilities, not permanent stays.

Society often forgets and shows no regard sometimes for people in prison. A prison is a dangerous place, and the issue of overcrowding is making prisons even more dangerous. Davis (2004) examined the increase in deaths in the prison system in the United Kingdom. The researcher pointed out that the prison population in the United Kingdom is approximately 73,000, and there is a high chance that the prisons will get more crowded because of the rise in crime (Davis, 2004). The researcher also stated that the problem of overcrowding is one of the leading causes of increased suicide rates. Overcrowding also causes an increase in inmate violence and chronic effects. Mental health inmates are more vulnerable in the prison system than non-mental health inmates (Davis, 2004). The researcher concluded that prison systems are being used as mental health facilities, which is one of the significant causes of overcrowding in the United Kingdom.

Davis findings can be related to the issues that the sheriff office is facing, especially that of the inmate population exceeding the housing capacity. The suicide rate

has also risen in the county jail, which is a matter of significant concern for the administrators in the sheriff's office. In the last two years, the sheriff office had five inmate suicides (WGCL, 2011). The mental health inmates in the jail are vulnerable to attacks; therefore, they are kept separate from the other inmates. The rise of inmates with mental health problems has caused problems such as the lack of beds and single-person cells. The sheriff office administrators will need to find alternative solutions to deal with the rise of mental health inmates and the increase in suicides within the jail (*County Sheriff Office Annual Report, 2015*).

In 2014, downsizing prisons in the state of California were identified by Petersilla as something that needs to happen in the near future. Most importantly, he investigated the problem of overcrowding and the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown vs. Plata*. California prisons systems will face several challenges over the next few years because of the prison overcrowding problem (Petersilla, 2014). The U.S. Supreme Court decision in the *Brown vs. Plata* case noted that the issue of overcrowding is a significant concern and poses a danger to inmates and staff (Newman & Scott, 2012). In 2011 after the *Brown vs. Plata* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a court order mandating that the state of California reduce its prison population in the next two years (Newman & Scott, 2012). The Public Safety Realignment initiative was started to help streamline the process of reducing prison overcrowding. Petersilla disagreed with the view of the U.S. Department of Justice on the issue of prison overcrowding nationwide.

The sheriff office overcrowding problem can be related to Petersilla's 2014 findings because inmates are being housed in jails longer than they should due to the

backlog of cases (Williams, 2014). The sheriff office was issued a court order by the U.S. District Court to reduce the overcrowding problem at the county jail; this court order is very similar to the court order issued by the U.S. Supreme Court mandating that the entire California prison system reduce its overcrowding problem. Both court orders set a timeframe for each organization to reduce its overcrowding problem. The Federal Courts are getting more involved in their effort to reduce overcrowding in correctional facilities. Currently, the sheriff office is the only agency in the state that was under a Federal Court order in the last 10 years that mandated the office to reduce the overcrowding problem in the county jail; the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Plata* can influence correctional institutions nationwide. It is vital that the sheriff office reduce its inmate population; otherwise, it will face sanctions from the federal court.

The privatization of prisons is an idea that government officials should consider as an alternative to reduce overcrowding according to Mitchelson (2014) who examined the ideology behind the privatization of prisons. The researcher described Correction Corporation of America and the GEO Group. The researcher applied the Henri Lefebvre theory of abstract space to the ideology of imprisonment and stated that the government had not taken seriously the issue of prisons being under-funded and lacking adequate bed space. The privatization of prisons would allow for better funding, which could help reduce the overcrowding in public prisons. The researcher argued that sometimes the number of actual beds in public prisons is too few. Mitchelson cautioned that the problem of inadequate bed space in public prisons poses a severe concern for government officials and privatizing prisons could help reduce the overcrowding issue.

The ideology of privatization would not work with the sheriff office because of the importance and statutory requirement of a county jail; nevertheless, the theory behind the idea is useful and the research conducted by Mitchelson directly relates to the sheriff office. Other alternative facilities could be used by the sheriff office because, currently, the sheriff's office operates two annex jails. The County Government funds the sheriff office, and the sheriff's office is given a specific operating budget. The sheriff's office must use all its available resources and facilities to help reduce the overcrowding problem because this could create more bed space. The sheriff office can benefit from the ideology of exploring all options to reduce the overcrowding issue at the county jail.

A 2013 study focused on how capital juries can predict future acts of violence in offenders when they are sentenced to prison; a Reidy, Sorensen, and Cunningham study focused on the sentencing phase of murder trials by sampling the records of 115 convicted male offenders sentenced to death or life imprisonment in the state of Oregon between 1985 and 2008. As mentioned by Reidy, Sorensen, and Cunningham (2013), prison behavior is not directly related to the predictions made by jurors. The researchers noted that the predictions of the continuing acts of violence in prison do not affect the sentencing phase of criminal prosecutions. Reidy, Sorensen, and Cunningham concluded that there is a 90% chance that major criminal felons will commit acts of violence in the future.

The study conducted by Reidy, Sorensen, and Cunningham can have an indirect effect on the sheriff office because several inmates in the county jail are currently awaiting trial for murder; if convicted, they could face life in prison or possibly the death

penalty. The sheriff office saw an increase in violence in the last six years (*County Sheriff Office Annual Report, 2015*). Acts of violence within the sheriff office has led to numerous cases of assaults on staff and other inmates (WGCL, 2011). The recidivism rates in the county jail are high, and the problem of overcrowding has led to a tremendous increase in the acts of violence (Cook, 2015).

The creation of Day Reporting Centers in New Jersey was meant to address the problem of overcrowding and to save money on the cost to fund prisons. Steiner and Butler (2013) discussed the reasons why Day Reporting Centers failed in the state of New Jersey. Day Reporting Centers need to be revisited, and a thorough evaluation should be conducted to address any problems (Steiner & Butler, 2013). One reason why these reporting centers failed was poor management of the facilities. The ideology behind the Day Reporting Centers is that it requires a level of trust between the offenders and the management. The researchers noted that if these Day Reporting Centers were better managed, they could have been more effective. Steiner and Butler noted that Day Reporting Centers were supposed to help reduce the overcrowding issue in the prison system in the state of New Jersey by providing an alternative solution to prisons; the program failed because of poor management and the impatience of government officials.

The study by Steiner and Butler indirectly relates to the problem of overcrowding in the sheriff office. The sheriff office has a similar program in which convicted offenders report to jail on the weekends. One of the problems faced by the sheriff office were the same as those faced by the day reporting centers in the state of New Jersey: poor program management. The ideology behind low-risk offenders serving their sentences on

the weekend was supposed to be an alternative to reducing the overcrowding at the day reporting centers in New Jersey. Future studies need to evaluate weekend jail programs thoroughly.

A study conducted from in 2003 and 2004 by Ruderman, Wilson, and Reid (2015) compared the rates of parole violators exposed to medium and high levels of overcrowding in comparison with parole violators exposed to low levels of prison overcrowding. They discussed the link between prison overcrowding and the rate of substance abuse parole violators. As mentioned by Ruderman, Wilson, and Reid, prison overcrowding causes financial disparity in resource allocation for correctional institutions. The researchers found that violence is a significant risk factor associated with substance abuse, which is one of the causes of recidivism in parolees. A sample population of 13,000 parole violators within California was used in the study. The results of the study proved that overcrowding has a psychological effect on prisoners which could lead to increase in parole violators.

Maes, Mine, De Man and Van Brakel (2012) examined the problem of prison overcrowding in the Belgium correctional system. The researchers noted that approximately 40% of the prisoner population would be a recidivist. As stated by Maes, Mine, De Man and Van Brakel, electronic monitoring could be a viable alternative to pretrial detention. The researchers point out that electronic monitoring was started in Belgium approximately in the calendar year 2000. The researchers concluded that electronic monitoring could be a possible solution to prison overcrowding, but it is



essential that the number of people on electronic monitoring is comparable to the number of workers who are hired to monitor them (Maes, Mine, De Man & Van Brakel, 2012).

Spencer (2012) demonstrated the overcrowding problem in the Alabama correctional system. The researcher conducted a study examining the state of Alabama annual fiscal year report from 2008 and the monthly report from August 2009. These statistical reports were used to show the seriousness of the issue of overcrowding in the Alabama correctional system. Spencer stated that stakeholders in the state of Alabama's criminal justice system need to become more proactive helping nonviolent offenders stay out of prison.

A study about the Alabama correctional system concluded that the state of Alabama could face severe financial hardships if there were a riot and prison property was damaged. Spencer specified that if the stakeholders in the Alabama correctional system do not concern themselves more seriously in the fight to reduce overcrowding in state prisons, two or more things can happen. First, the federal courts could step in and take over the management, or the state would be forced to start releasing a substantial number of prisoners, violent and nonviolent. The researcher points out that correctional workers are in constant danger because of the prison overcrowding problem in the Alabama prison system.

The issue of mentally ill inmates being housed in prisons has been an ongoing debate for years. Steadman addressed some of the concerns associated with mentally ill inmates being sent to prison. Mentally ill inmates are a problem for many correctional institutions. Steadman stated that mental health inmates do not belong in prisons. The

county jail has a large population with mental health problems, and Steadman's analysis on evaluating whether or not a person who is mentally ill should be in prison could be valuable information in helping the County Courts, County Mental Health Professionals, and the Sheriff Office Administrators. This information can help these organizations evaluate the inmates having mental health problems to see who should be categorized as mentally ill.

Prison overcrowding can be attributed to many factors. Housing mentally ill patients in prisons are one of the leading causes of prison overcrowding (Steadman, 2011). Steadman argued that the reason for the increase in the number of mentally ill inmates being housed in prisons may be money. The researcher pointed out that correctional institutions are given money from state governments to house mentally ill inmates to save the states some money. The sheriff office receives funding from the state to house mentally ill inmates in the jail (*County Sheriff Office Annual Report, 2015*).

Understanding the importance of the financial impact of mental health problems and overcrowding in correctional institutions could help the sheriff office address its overcrowding problem in jails. The state in which the county jail is located has only two mental health facilities operated by the state government. The judiciary is another cause of prison overcrowding. As mentioned by Alinejad and Nazarinejad, the judiciary can help reduce the overcrowding in prisons by working with the government and the law enforcement officials to develop community programs for low-risk offenders, which would be an alternative to incarceration.

A 1987 case study based on the county jail and found that the implementation of consent decrees can have a negative and positive effect when trying to address overcrowding in correctional institutions. The researcher Zingitwa pointed out that several different factors were hindering implementation of consent decrees. One factor is budgetary allocations. Zingitwa argued that the lack of funding to correctional institutions cause inadequate staffing, which can cause a dangerous work environment. The researcher also pointed out that consent decrees force jail officials to address specific problems, such as overcrowding, or face being held in contempt of court. Zingitwa believed that consent decrees do not always solve the problem that correctional institutions have; however, consent decrees can be beneficial in some situations. The researcher concluded that the implementation of the consent decree on the county jail had applied intense pressure on the sheriff office to address the problem of overcrowding and deplorable conditions in the jail or face the action by the Federal Courts.

### **Summary**

Overcrowding in the penal institutions has become a global human right and a security and health issue for the offenders, their communities, and families. After analyzing the secondary resources from various resources, the conclusion reached is that there is a need to change the issue of prison overcrowding following Eighteenth Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice on 16-24 April 2009. If the social marginalization and poverty are considered as influencing factors for which the crime rate increased, then there is a need to take action against these factors. Similarly, if it is noted that due to sentences finalized in the judgment, the prisoners have to stay in prisons

for a long time for minor offenses, then it is vital to reduce the time of imprisonment. This would result in gradually diminishing the issue of overcrowding. The review of the literature reveals that due to overcrowding, the prisoners' mental health is affected since they need to adjust with each other and at the time, two persons have to sleep in one small cell instead of one. Their health is affected in this way along with their privacy and they face injuries like accidents or self-harm. There is insufficient bed space also, and the facilities become limited since the administrative system of the prison fails to accommodate such a large number of prisoners which exceed the capacity of prison. Following the *Brown v. Plata* decision, 563 U.S. 493 (2011) (as discussed at the beginning of the chapter), there is a need to change the judiciary system or else bring a social change where the children will be away from correctional institutions and gain focus on their education. As a result, the crime rate will decrease followed by the number of prisoners in correctional institutions.

## Chapter 3: Research Design

### Introduction

For the last few years, the total number of people imprisoned in the United States has quadrupled as the number of incarcerated people has surpassed 2.3 million. In this context, the researcher chose the example of a county jail in the Southeast United States, to address the issue of overcrowding in prison which is the ultimate intention of developing this study. The researcher used various methods to collect relevant data to learn the reasons for which the crime rate has increased and lead to overcrowding in prisons as well as its impact on the prisoners' health.

The research design used was the case study method. A case study provides a descriptive and detailed analysis of a problem or situation. A case study is different from all other types of research because it is focused on one particular problem, person, place, or thing. The rationale for choosing the case study method was that it allowed me to observe and analyze a case over a one-month time frame. According to Abercrombie et al. (1984),

*“detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide reliable information about the broader class, but it may be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses, which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases”.* (p.34)

The nature of this study was qualitative. The case study approach is the best method for this research because it yielded a thorough analysis of the possible reasons for overcrowding at the county jail. The descriptive approach of the case study method will

be used to explore reasons for overcrowding in the county jail. The researcher's dissertation topic and research questions are aligned using the appropriate methodology (Brause, 1999). The case study of a county jail has been chosen to understand the reasons for overcrowding in correctional institutions and the possible ways to reduce the issue.

When conducting research, it is vital to ensure that the data collected is safe and secure (Hatch, 2002). As mentioned by Hatch, it is the researcher's job to safeguard data. Ensuring quality, trustworthiness, and credibility in qualitative research helps ensure the integrity of the study. Evaluating the data in qualitative studies is one of the first things a researcher does after collecting the data.

### **Research Questions**

The research methods were chosen to answer the research questions set for the study. The following guiding and subsidiary questions as set in the first chapter of the study need to be answered to meet the study aim.

**Guiding question (0):** To what degree can an improved understanding of the overcrowding problem in a county jail assist lawmakers to address the problem of overcrowding of correctional institutions in the United States?

**Subsidiary question (0):** To what extent can determining the reasons for overcrowding improve the safety and security of correctional institutions?

### **Sampling Method and Participants**

Sampling is a process of selecting the exact number of samples per the requirement of the study. Sampling is of two types: probability sampling based on quantitative data and non-probability sampling based on qualitative data. Since the

researcher has chosen qualitative study, hence, purposive sampling was chosen here so that the samples are chosen from a particular group for the interview process.

**Sample size choice.** Sample size means the number of participants in a study. Twenty former inmates of the county jail between the ages of 18 and 25 years and 20 administrative personnel were selected as participants. The administrative personnel included commissioners, judges, and former and current sheriff office employees. The ages of the former inmate personnel were checked by picture identification or any other identification document having their picture and the date of birth. By selecting the participants, I was able to learn about the possible reasons for the overcrowding problem faced by the county jail.

As stated by Maxwell (2013), there are two schools of thought regarding the choice of sample sizes. The first school believes that it is beneficial to have a large sample size and perform an in-depth data collection technique; whereas, the second school insists on having a small focus population for conducting an in-depth study. A researcher's choice of sample size usually depends on the focus of the study.

In qualitative research, choosing an appropriate sample size is an essential aspect of research (Mason, 2010). I chose a small sample size because the study is exploratory and a fewer number of participants will better help gain an understanding into determining the reasons of overcrowding. Patton (2002) posited that the sample size in qualitative research refers to the number of participants in a study as mentioned earlier. The rationale for the number of sample participants is due to the time frame that the researcher imposed on the study to identify the selected participants.

The interviews with the former inmates and administrative personnel were held in an office building in a conference room where I work. The location of the interviews was provided only to the selected participants in the study and I ensured that no one knew why the participants were meeting there. I ensured complete privacy and confidentiality during the interview by ensuring that no one would enter the room by locking the door and putting a sign on the door indicating that the room was in use. The interviews were held after work hours and on the weekend to ensure complete privacy for the participants. The office building is closed on the weekend, and after 5 pm on the weekdays, the building is usually empty. Conducting the interviews during these hours ensured complete privacy and confidentiality during the interview (Walden IRB approval no. 09-30-16-0500219).

To find volunteers who were former inmates of the county jail, I put up flyers seeking volunteers around the county courthouse, the county jail, and throughout the downtown area where the jail located. I searched for former inmate volunteers for 30 days. I verified the ages of the former inmates by checking their picture ID, driver license, birth certificate, or passport. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant received a \$10 Visa gift card for their participation.

I called and emailed the administrative personnel to set up a time to meet with them to determine whether or not they would be interested in participating in the study. I gained access to the administrative personnel by gathering their email addresses and phone numbers from websites and calling their offices. I searched for administrative personnel volunteers for 30 days. When contacted, each selected administrative personnel was given a brief description of the purpose of the study and then asked if they were



willing to participate in the study. I informed each potential participant that their participation in the study was voluntary. Selected administrative personnel who participated in the study included judges, commissioners, and current and former sheriff's office employees. At the conclusion of the interview, participants received a \$10 Visa gift card for their participation.

Interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study. Participatory observations were conducted minimally only to observe the body language of the participants during the interviews. Secondary data were also used, such as public records. The purpose of the interviews was to gather information. Asking the appropriate questions was essential to ensure the quality of the interviews. I asked open-ended questions so that better responses were provided. As mentioned by Hatch (2002), it is the researcher's job to ensure data is not altered. The trustworthiness of the interview will be based on the honesty of interviewees. I believed that each of the interviewees (given their levels of education, experience, and personal knowledge of the county jail) would provide honest answers to my questions.

Various distinct factors play a crucial role in deciding the appropriate sample size (Patton, 2002). A significant factor that contributed to my decision to interview the former inmates, is the inmates' experience of being housed in the county jail. Other subsidiary factors that contributed to the researcher's decision to interview the former inmates of the county jail instead of the current inmates is the staffing and overcrowding problem faced by the jail.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Interviews are the most common technique used in qualitative studies. Interviews in qualitative research can be structured; however, they should be conversational. Interviews were conducted using the open-ended question format to provide a better dialogue between the interviewer and the participant. According to Marshall and Rossman (2014), if possible, a researcher should practice their interviewing skills before interviewing the participants in their study. Having a better dialogue will provide more substantial information that can be useful in the data collection phase in a study.

There are many ways to help a researcher become a better interviewer. One way to practice interviewing is to conduct mock interviews with family and friends. Interviewers can also video record interviews conducted to critique themselves. Despite its efficiencies, the interview method has some drawbacks. One drawback to that interviewing requires digital devices for recording and these devices can malfunction. The second type of equipment is video recorders. The drawback of video recorders is that it can make the participants uncomfortable and wary of the interview process. It was also asserted by Patton (2002), researchers conducting interviews should never rely on their memories because some information could be subsequently overlooked.

The credibility of my research is based on how the interviews were conducted. As stated by Marshall and Rossman (2014), the researcher should be fair and impartial when conducting interviews. Ensuring the credibility of an interview ensures that each interviewee is given the same instructions and afforded the same opportunities. The

interviewer should also ensure that there are no leading questions asked and no favoritism is shown.

I used interviews as one of the primary sources of data. Interviewing is appropriate for this study because it aims to explore and determine reasons why something happens. Patton (2002) asserted that interviewing can be beneficial in qualitative studies when trying to determine why things occur. Overcrowding at the county jail is a major problem, and it has caused significant concern for the County Government, Sheriff Office, the citizens of County, and the Federal District Court. By using the interviewing method, the researcher obtained the opinions of the former inmates, judges, commissioners, and former and current employees of the sheriff office.

I conducted in-depth interviews with the participants in the study. The issue of prison overcrowding is a national problem, but I have confined this study to the county jail. The results of this study could be generalized to other prisons in the United States.

Interviews with former inmates will give me the opportunity to obtain an intimate perspective on the issue. The perspectives of inmates who have lived in overcrowded prison environment would be unique. A bias might result from the sheriff or his designee because of the progress made in the effort to reduce overcrowding in the jail since the sheriff took office. To gain in-depth responses during interviews, a researcher should try to ask open-ended questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). One of the stakeholders involved with sheriff's office is the commissioner, who would probably disagree with the Sheriff on the progress made to reduce the inmate population in the jail. Reducing the inmate population in the jail will require a combined effort from all parties involved. By

interviewing all the stakeholders in the sheriff's office, a collaborative solution could be developed.

Ethical concerns for this study could be my familiarity with the sheriff office. I was last employed with the sheriff office in 2014; I did not show a bias in the study and I reported the findings accurately.

I informed the interviewees that their participation was voluntary, and their identities would not be disclosed at any point of the study. The participants were notified that the interviews would be approximately 30–45 min. I informed the participants that their names will be kept confidential. The participants in the study were divided into two categories. The first category included the administrative personnel, and the second category included the former inmates. The 20 administrative personnel and the 20 former inmates that I interviewed were assured that their names would not be used in the study; instead, alphanumeric rankings would be assigned based on the order in which they were interviewed and their categories.

I refer to the former inmates as F1 through F20 and the administrative personnel as A1 through A20. For example, A1 represents the first person interviewed. The letter A represents the category (administrative) and the number represents the order in which the participants were interviewed. I also informed the interviewees that their answers would be kept confidential and they would not be altered. The interviewees then signed a consent form.

To establish a rapport with the participants and made them feel comfortable, I asked them a few starter questions about sports or the weather. I asked each participant at

the beginning and the conclusion of their interview if they had any questions. I asked each participant eight questions.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data management technique used in the study was the note-taking method. Video recordings can bring about some level of discomfort in the interview setting (Patton, 2002). Several software programs are available for use in qualitative research. Maxwell (2013) asserted that software programs could be beneficial in qualitative research. Software programs are used to analyze data by finding keywords or phrases that are comparable to each interview. The use of software programs can increase the overall effectiveness of data analysis. It is the researcher job to determine whether data coding software programs are necessary for his or her study (Hatch, 2002).

Using data management techniques helps ensure that none of the data are lost or altered. Merriam (1998) asserted that a researcher should have multiple data storage devices. I stored the data on flash drives, in electronic folders, and in private email. The collected data were analyzed using the thematic content analysis method. The thematic content analysis method is widely used but a rarely acknowledged technique for qualitative content analysis in the field of psychology (Braun & Clark, 2006). This analytical methodology provides a theoretically flexible and easily accessible approach for qualitative data analysis such as open-ended interviews. Therefore, this study adopted an inductive approach to the qualitative analysis of the data collected through the interviews from the respondents at the county jail.

The inductive approach allowed the researcher to derive the relevant themes and structures by analyzing the interview transcripts (Braun & Clark (2006). After reading the interview transcripts rigorously, the interview transcripts were converted to single phrases to derive an overall keyword which led to the development of themes for the study. The themes were developed in this manner separately for both research questions. Overall, twenty themes were derived from the textual analysis of the interview transcripts to enable the conceptual understanding of the research problem and to answer the research questions. Ten themes were developed to answer Research Question 1. The themes thus obtained highlighted the reasons for overcrowding of the jail facility and were further analyzed to comprehend its impact on the security of the jail facility and its officials. Further, ten common themes were developed to answer the Research Question 2 to propose the list of a possible solution that can improve the security of correctional institutes to attain the objectives of this study.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodology, research design, sample size, and data management techniques used in the study. The researcher used several methods which were relevant to the study. For instance, the researcher chose the case study design method to gather sufficient data for the study. The qualitative research method approach was chosen to collect the data through the interview process. This method was chosen as the primary data collection technique to collect the factual information. The secondary data were collected from various relevant secondary resources like books, articles, and journals. For the qualitative study, the researcher chose inductive approach here. The

collected data were analyzed through the process of thematic analysis where NVivo software was used to analyze the data and present it in themes and sub-themes. The data were collected from the administrative officials including the staffs, commissioners, and judges of the county jail. The researcher chose the note-taking method as a data management tool. Other than choosing the tools, the researcher complied with research ethics so that the study was completed ethically. The findings of the study were stored ethically and there was no bias.

## Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis and Discussion

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this interview-based, qualitative case study was to determine why the county jail was overcrowded. I conducted 40 interviews over 30 days. Each participant was asked eight questions over a period of 30 to 45 minutes. I used the note-taking method (the process through which I collected hand-written notes from the interviewees) on my laptop computer and typed the responses given to each question quickly. I typed the notes in short forms and translated it later into proper responses to find out themes and sub-themes. At the end of the interview, participants reviewed their answers to each question and verbally acknowledged that the answers were recorded accurately. To ensure privacy after the participant finished reviewing the document, I shredded it. To observe their body language, I conducted participatory observation of the participants.

Secondary data were collected by reviewing a public record document: The *County Sheriff Office Annual Report (2015)*. I present the findings in this chapter by pairing the interview question with the relevant research question that the interview question sought to answer.

### **Findings**

All participants read and signed a consent form acknowledging that they understood that their participation in the study was voluntary. Then, I read the interview protocol. Before the interview officially started, I asked each participant if they had questions or concerns. A majority of the participants were not comfortable with the use of



tape recorders; therefore, I adopted the note-taking method. I took notes on my laptop and ensured that the same recording method was used and conducted fairly and accurately for each participant in the study.

I attempted to establish a rapport with each participant by asking one or two general questions, such as “What are your hobbies?” or “What is your favorite sports team?” Casual questions helped ease the atmosphere and helped to establish an informal setting where the participants could share their opinions and become comfortable to answer my interview questions.

After the conclusion of each interview, I asked each participant if they had any questions or concerns. I presented each interview by date, time, numeric ranking, and by the pseudonym given to each participant. The responses and opinions shared by the interview respondents were analyzed into themes based on the research questions and discussed in the following chapters. I presented the set of interview data obtained from the former inmates first, which was then followed by the interviews of administrative personnel. The former inmates’ interview data are presented first because theirs were the first set of interviews to be conducted. I refer to myself as the interviewer and the respondent is referred to as the interviewee. The words “interviewer” and “interviewee” are placed in bold letters for the sake of clarity. All the participants in the study had normal body language. Table 1 and Table 2 in this study illustrated the themes found in the interview process. Both were analyzed under each research question that participants answered. Therefore, in this study, I conducted a thematic content analysis of the

interview transcripts to develop the following themes to answer the two research questions, RQ1 and RQ2.

RQ1. To what degree can an improved understanding of the overcrowding problem in a county jail enable lawmakers to address the problem of overcrowding of the correctional institutions in the United States?

Table 1

*Themes and number of interview responses for RQ1*

Themes	Number of responses that had the same theme out of total number of participants that were interviewed		Percentage of the number of responses that had the same theme	
Minor and nonviolent offenses	12/20	14/20	60	70
Youth and Young adults	15/20	10/20	75	50
Mental health	16/20	10/20	80	50
Poverty and drugs	11/20	11/20	55	55
Lack of educational opportunities	13/20	14/20	65	70
Lack of alternative programs	12/20	17/20	60	85
Drug Offenses	16/20	17/20	80	85
Reform sentence guidelines	14/20	18/20	70	90
Overhaul of the criminal justice system	14/20	16/20	70	80
Collaboration among lawmakers	18/20	11/20	90	55

### **Reasons and problems of overcrowding in correctional institutions**

**Minor and nonviolent offenses.** The first theme obtained from the interviews was that of minor and nonviolent offenses. Twelve administrative personnel and fourteen former inmates were convinced that lawmakers needed to consider alternative methods to incarcerate those who commit minor and nonviolent offenses. The 12 administrative personnel interviewees asserted that penalties for minor and nonviolent offenses need to be reexamined because they are too harsh. This idea will also help in reducing the overcrowding of the county jail with such offenders as those who can be alternatively penalized for minor offenses and need not necessarily be imprisoned in the county jail with other inmates. As rightly pointed out by a former inmate interviewee, “In my opinion, the overcrowding is consistent with not having adequate laws for petty crimes, which lead to people being in for too long” (F1). The interviewee further mentioned that “all crime does not warrant holding the physical body accountable” (F1). Another respondent said, “I believe the county jail is overcrowded because of the number of people with minor offenses incarcerated, example child support and trespassing cases” (F8). The theme of minor and nonviolent offenses is consistent with the literature (Woods-Warrior & Connor, 2009). Consider alternative methods to incarceration for those who commit minor and nonviolent offenses could be a solution to address the overcrowding problem in correctional institutions. A former inmate expressed the same opinion in his response in the following words: “I think that there should be a second-chance program so that people that have done lesser crimes are given a second chance and do not take up space in jail for crimes that are misdemeanors” (F9). In the views of

the administrators also jail overcrowding occurs “Because problems with our criminal justice system often give excessive sentences for nonviolent crimes” (A1). Another administrator stated, “I think if people that do not commit violent or serious crimes were given large fines and community service, along with probation, overcrowding would decrease” (A3).

**Imprisonment of youth and young adults.** The second theme that originated from the interviews was increased imprisonment of youth and young adults. Fifteen administrative personnel and ten former inmates were convinced that there were too many youth and young adults incarcerated in the United States. The interviewees agreed that youth and young adults are one of the leading causes of increases in overcrowding. According to an interviewee, “We need improved community efforts in cities and areas with high crime rates to mentor youth and provide affordable opportunities to learn skills to be able to support themselves and contribute to their own well-being and that of their communities” (A1). Another administrator resonated the concern over youth arrest by saying, “Too many young men especially teens are being arrested and could be locked away for years” (A12). One of the respondents identified the reason for the increasing number of young people in the county jail “Because as a youth growing up in the Southside of the County, there is nothing to do” (F1). This answer indicates that youth in some parts of the County engage in petty crimes due the lack of other opportunities. This theme was not found in the literature.

**Mental health.** The third theme obtained from the interviews was mental health. Sixteen administrative and ten former inmates were convinced that there were too many

mental health inmates housed in correctional institutions. The interviewees agreed that mental health inmates should not be housed in correctional institutions. According to an interviewee “in the county jail, many inmates are in for small violations such as child support, minor traffic violations, and mental health problems” (A7). A former inmate suggested that facilities should be built to treat offenders with mental health illnesses saying, “Build facilities to promote personal growth and life skills and treat substance abuse and mental health illnesses” (F10). This opinion was also supported by other interviewees who said, “Some prisoners shouldn’t even be in jail they should be in mental facilities” (A13) and “Treat the mental illness problems as a sickness. Doctors are needed for this problem, not jails” (A5). The theme of mental health population is consistent with the literature (Steadman, 2011).

**Poverty and drugs.** The fourth theme analyzed from the interviews was of poverty and drugs. Eleven administrative and eleven former inmates were convinced that jails and prisons were mostly filled with people who lived in poverty and who were on drugs. F3 shared that “too many people living in poverty who then resort to crime.” According to A18, “poverty is one reason because there are so many people that want and need more than what they have. They are robbing to feed their family, to live a better lifestyle, and to survive”. The interviewees agreed that poverty and drugs are reasons for overcrowding because the government does not provide enough assistance to people who deal with those problems. The respondents also highlighted that poor people are forced to serve longer time in jail because “if you are poor you more likely to stay in instead of being bailed out” (F1). Another interviewee mentioned that “poor black, 18-year-old

male gets two years while a middle-class white male, 18 years of age gets six months' probation for the same crime" (A8). Moreover, the issue of drug-related overcrowding was also indicated by the responses such as "drug offenders are treated as criminals; they should treat the addiction with treatment through drug addiction centers" (A5). Also "if inmates are successfully completing drug rehab programs, a year or two should be knocked off their original sentence" (A20). According to a former inmate "I think the sentencing related to nonviolent drug crimes should be reduced. The drug epidemic is a demand problem, not a supply problem. If the demand for drugs weren't as high, then the dealers wouldn't supply them. People convicted of possession crimes should receive more rehabilitation instead of jail time" (F18). Therefore, it emerged that offenders with drug and poverty-related crimes should be given alternate incarcerations and sent to rehabs instead of jails. This theme was not found in the literature.

**Lack of educational opportunities.** The fifth theme discovered was the lack of educational opportunities. Thirteen administrative personnel and fourteen former inmates were convinced that there is a lack of educational opportunities in the United States for low-income people. The interviewees agreed that if law-makers focused on creating more educational opportunities for low-income people maybe that could help curb overcrowding. As stated by a respondent that "Educating the public may help" (F4). Another interviewee mentioned that "A valid option could be increasing funding for education to teach kids growing up to think about crimes and their environment thoroughly" (F7), highlighting the significance and need to promote education among the

residents of the County to reduce overcrowding in jails. This theme was not found in the literature.

**Lack of alternative programs.** The sixth theme observed from the interviews was a lack of alternative programs. Twelve administrative personnel and seventeen former inmates were convinced that there needed to be more alternative programs created to alleviate overcrowding in correctional institutions. For instance, one respondent mentioned that “The government should consider creating alternatives to prison for nonviolent offenders like boot camps and halfway houses” (A14). Also, another administrator pointed out that “If reasons for overcrowding are predetermined, then it is possible to have alternative programs in place” (A7). The interviewees agreed that alternative programs could be used to help offenders obtain educational and job assistance training. As depicted by the opinion of interviewee F17 that “They could learn that if more alternative programs are not created, and more money is not put into the lower class, correctional institutions will always be overcrowded” (F17). Another former inmate suggested that “A valid option could be increasing funding for education to teach kids growing up to think about crimes and their environment thoroughly” (F7). Thus, many respondents indicated that “looking at alternative forms of punishment for nonviolent offenders” (F12). The theme of lack of alternative programs is consistent with the literature on why correctional institutions are overcrowded (Woods-Warrior & Connor, 2009).

**Drug offenses.** The seventh theme discovered from the interviews was drug offenses. Sixteen administrative personnel and seventeen former inmates were convinced

that sentencing guidelines for drug offenses needed to be reexamined. As one of the former inmates mentioned “I think the sentencing related to nonviolent drug crimes should be reduced. The drug epidemic is a demand problem, not a supply problem” (F18). Another administrative respondent stated that “Drug offenders are treated as criminals; they should treat the addiction with treatment through drug addiction centers” (A5). The interviewees agreed that the penalty for drug offenses is too harsh. According to one respondent, “I believe you need to take a hard look at the drug-related sentences, along with the individual, to determine whether that individual should be released” (F8). This view was supported by many respondents such as A15 who stated, “We must re-evaluate these harsh sentences for these nonviolent drug-related crimes. There is no way one should serve a longer sentence for selling drugs, than someone who's killed, someone”. Another respondent suggested that “if inmates are successfully completing drug rehab programs, a year or two should be knocked off their original sentence” (A20). The theme drug offense is consistent with the literature (Patterson & Preston, 2009).

**Reform of sentence guidelines.** The eighth theme obtained from the interviews was the reform of sentence guidelines. Fourteen administrative personnel and eighteen former inmates were convinced that the law on sentencing guidelines needed to be reformed. The interviewees agreed that sentencing guidelines for all crimes need to be reexamined. For instance, “Lawmakers should also learn to identify avenues to change laws that don't make sense so that overcrowding of jails and prisons would be an ongoing concern” (A20). Another interviewee said, “Based on my experience, overcrowding is a problem due to mandated laws and sentencing guidelines that judges and prosecutors



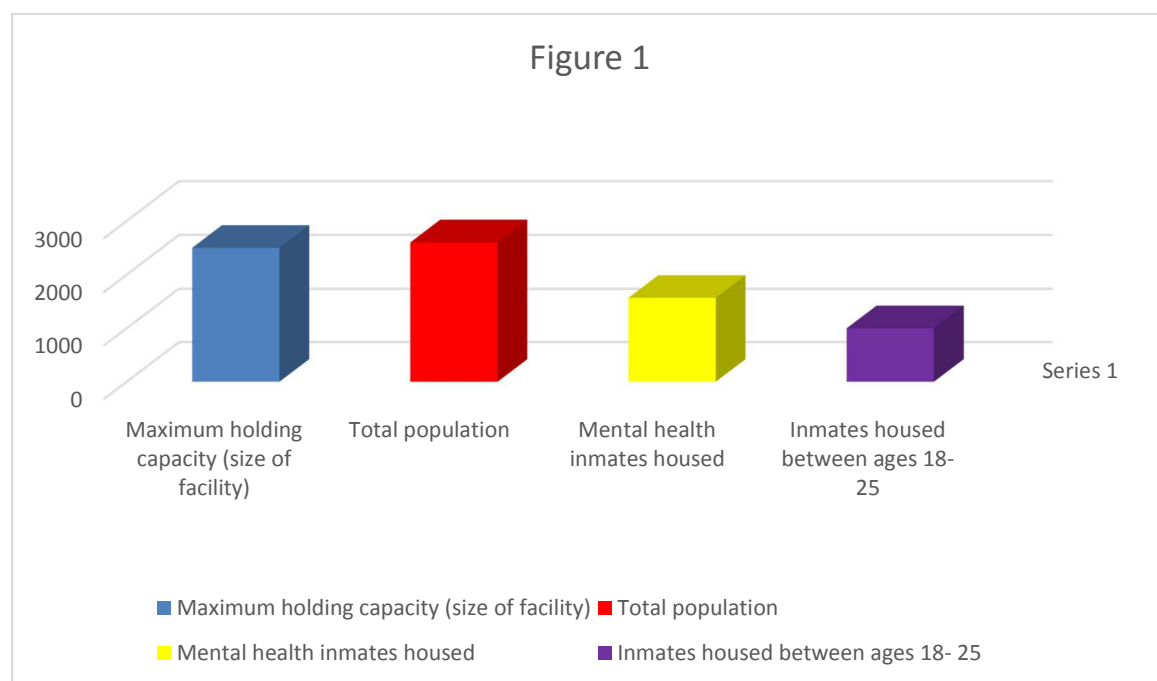
have to follow. The mandated laws and sentencing guidelines ultimately limit the amount of discretion that the judge and prosecutor can utilize when the time comes to sentence someone to jail/prison” (A2). Another respondent indicated that “the problem lies in many places, but some good places to start are mandatory minimum sentences, locking up people who await trial and officer training” (A16). The theme of sentencing guidelines is consistent with the literature (Patterson & Preston, 2009).

**Need to overhaul the criminal justice system.** The ninth theme analyzed from the interviews was the need to overhaul the criminal justice system. Fourteen administrative personnel and sixteen former inmates were convinced that criminal justice system needed to be overhauled. The interviewees agreed that the criminal justice is outdated and the system never evolved. As stated by the administrative respondent A18, “The lawmakers can be more involved in the process to ensure there are fair trials. But we, the community, must vote to ensure the correct lawmakers are in office that will support this change/growth. Lawmakers cannot look at ethnicity when making their decisions; they must look at the crime and agree to give the correct sentences. They should go to the institutions and see the conditions, instead of being told” (A18). This statement comprehensively covers the need to overhaul the judicial system expressed by many of the interviewees. In the words of a former inmate, “Lawmakers should make the correctional system fair and just. Knowing that locking everyone up isn't necessarily the answer instead let's rehab some of the inmates” (F19). The theme of an overhaul of the criminal justice system is consistent with the literature on why prisons are overcrowded (Petersilla, 2014).

**Collaboration among lawmakers.** Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the collaboration among lawmakers. Eighteen administrative personnel and eleven former inmates were convinced that lawmakers needed to start working together to develop a plan to solve the overcrowding problem. The interviewees agreed that lawmakers should stop letting their political views hinder their ability to work together. As suggested by an interviewee, “Address the issue of mass incarceration in the U.S. that causes us to imprison more citizens than any other country in the world. Pay attention to “best practices” domestically and from foreign countries that have proved to have solid results in rehabilitation and properly fund successful solutions” (A17). Respondent A6 pointed out that “lawmakers should look at current laws and see what is affecting the most inmates. They could look at other countries out in the world and see what they have done to reduce their prison populations, such as Sweden”. The theme of collaboration among lawmakers is consistent with the literature on why prisons are overcrowded (Spencer, 2012).

### **Analysis of the Quantitative Data for the Jail Population**

To analyze the three sub-categories of this study concerned with overcrowding, I used the secondary quantitative data collected from the county jails published records and presented the information through graphs to further support the findings from the primary qualitative data collected by way of interviews to answer RQ1. Figure 3 illustrates the three subcategories.



*Figure 1.* Subcategories in the jail population

Figure 1 represents three sub-categories: Maximum holding capacity compared to the total population; Mental health inmates housed at the county jail compared to total population, and inmates housed at the county jail between the ages of 18 and 25 years. It emerges from the analysis of the secondary data that while the maximum holding capacity at the county jail is 2500, the average of inmates housed in the county jail is approximately 2600. This number depicts the state of overcrowding at the county jail which is consistent with the findings of this research. The average mental illness population in the county jail is approximately 1500 inmates and the total inmates housed in the jail between 18 and 25 years is approximately 1000. This indicates that the county jail is also overcrowded due to the presence of mental health inmates and young criminals who get imprisoned for drug or poverty-related crimes. These results support and justify

the findings of the thematic analysis of the primary qualitative data obtained from the interviews with former inmates and administrators. According to the interviews, young population and mental health inmates emerged as two major themes for the overcrowding of the county jail. The exact numbers of each category except the maximum holding capacity can fluctuate, but on average the numbers are accurate.

RQ2. To what extent can determining the reasons for overcrowding improve the safety and security of correctional institutions?

Table 2

*Themes and number of interview responses for RQ2*

Old Themes	New Themes	Number of responses who had the same theme out of a total number of participants who were interviewed		Percentage of the number of responses that had the same theme	
Lack of Experience personnel	Experience personnel	17/20	11/20	85	55
Negative Media	Positive Media	08/20	06/20	40	30
Lack of bed space	Adequate bed space	10/20	16/20	50	80
Unsafe conditions	Safer conditions	17/20	18/20	85	90
Older facilities	Newer facilities	13/20	12/20	65	60
Increase Crime	Decrease crime in correctional institutions	14/20	07/20	70	35
Increase violence	Decrease violence	15/20	12/20	75	60
Stress	Less stress	12/20	16/20	60	80
An insufficient number of staff members.	A sufficient number of staff members.	18/20	13/20	90	65
Danger	Not as dangerous	19/20	17/20	95	85

**Factors Impacting the Safety and Security due to Overcrowding**

**Lack of experience.** The first theme obtained from the interviews was lack of experience. Seventeen administrative personnel and eleven former inmates were convinced that the lack of experienced personnel has an effect on the safety and security

of correctional institutions. The interviewees agreed that law-makers should rely on experienced personnel to gain an understanding of the effect that overcrowding has on the safety and security of correctional institutions. As one of the administrative respondents explicitly mentioned regarding the question of their understanding and knowledge of overcrowding of jails, “My knowledge comes from educational background and experience in the criminal justice system” (A1). Moreover, the participant mentioned that overcrowding “causes unsafe conditions in the jails, and there are not enough qualified staff members in these overcrowded facilities to handle the number of inmates” (A1). This theme was not found in the literature.

**Negative Media.** The second theme observed from the interviews was negative media. Eight administrative personnel and six former inmates were convinced that the media has played an indirect role in correctional institution overcrowding. As one of the respondents said, “I have read in magazine and newspaper articles about overcrowding in prisons” (A12), overcrowding is negatively reported in the media which discourages the people to work in such facilities. Another administrator also mentioned this as “it creates a hostile working environment for guards through the vast disproportion numbers between them and the inmates” (A8). The interviewees agreed that if the media could report positive things about working in correctional environments, it could help with recruiting efforts. The interviewees also agreed that the media plays a vital role in discussing the effects of overcrowding on the safety and security of correctional institutions because of their broad reach. This theme was not found in the literature.

**Lack of Bed Space.** The third theme discovered from the interviews was the lack of bed space. Ten administrative personnel and sixteen former inmates were convinced that the lack of bed space within correctional institutions affects the safety and security. Former inmates and administrators indicated how a lack of proper bed space can have an impact on their security negatively since “it can cause serious problem in the housing dorms, mainly inmate frustration due to lack of space” (F12) and “I have witnessed the effect of overcrowding as I have seen with my own eyes of inmates sleeping on the floor” (A3). Similarly, another former inmate highlighted the difficulties arising due to lack of space and saying, “Even animals need space, and when personal space is taken away, one becomes territorial; when one becomes territorial, he fights to the death to defend his space” (F14). The interviewees agreed that if the reasons for overcrowding were determined, larger correctional institutions with more bed space could be constructed or alternative to government-operated correctional facilities such as the privatization of prisons. The theme of lack of bed space is consistent with the literature (Mitchelson, 2014).

**Unsafe Conditions.** The fourth theme obtained from the interviews was unsafe conditions. Seventeen administrative personnel and eighteen former inmates were convinced that unsafe conditions within correctional institutions have a significant effect on the safety and security of the staff and inmates. Many interviewees stated that overcrowding “causes unsafe conditions in the jails” (A1). Another respondent added that “the jail is very overcrowded. It is unsafe and inhumane. People are sleeping on the floor, which should be a federal violation” (A4). Moreover, the overcrowding of jails leads to

health and fire safety issues as stated by A7, “it is a problem because when facilities are overcrowded, it can become a safety problem and a health code or fire code violation.” The interviewees agreed that if reasons for overcrowding were determined, correctional institutions could become a safer working and living environment for staff and inmates as it will “cut down on environmental issues, such as staph infections, rapes, and gang problems” (F5). The theme “unsafe conditions” is consistent with the literature (Davis, 2004).

**Older Facilities.** The fifth theme that emerged from the interviews was older facilities. Thirteen administrative personnel and twelve former inmates were convinced that older correctional facilities needed to be redeveloped and this had an effect on the safety and security. This is because “older buildings cannot handle such high numbers of inmates” (A1). Also, “most facilities are not equipped to handle overcrowded jails and prisons. It reduces the staff to inmate ratio” (A5). The interviewees agreed that if reasons for overcrowding were determined, more funding could be allocated to build newer technologically advanced correctional institutions. The theme of older facilities is consistent with the literature (Misenas, 2010).

**Crime.** Another theme that was coded was crime. Fourteen administrative and seven former inmates were convinced that crime plays a role in the safety and security of correctional institutions. According to an interviewee, by handling the overcrowding problem “officers will feel safer and there will be less crime” (A4). The increase in crime rate in overcrowded facilities could be because “the lack of work or work opportunities leads to inmate idleness, often reinforcing the maxim that idleness breeds discontent and



disruptive behavior” (F14) or as A8 mentioned “inmates are often mistreated and malnourished when prisons are overcrowded. It often leads to a hostile experience for inmates and increases crime within the prisons” (A8). The interviewees agreed if the reasons for overcrowding could be determined, crime could be decreased within correctional institutions (Levitt, 1995).

**Increase in Violence.** The seventh theme obtained from the interviews was the increase in violence. Fifteen administrative personnel and twelve former inmates were convinced that the increase in violence affects the safety and security of correctional institutions. While describing the impact of overcrowding of the prison on increasing the violence, an interviewee stated that “the staff will eventually not be able to keep an eye on the inmates, which will lead anywhere from inmates fighting to a staff member getting injured all the way to a prison riot or takeover” (A6). A former inmate said that “overcrowding allows for a person to change from a positive mentality into a violent one. It also creates more frustration and puts a person subject to violence. It can also cause a problem with the inmates” (F20). The interviewees agreed if the reasons for overcrowding are determined, violence could decrease within correctional institutions. As suggested by another interviewee that “it would allow the prisoners to do their time comfortably and in peace, which would probably lead to less violence” (F17). The theme of increase in violence is consistent with the literature (Worrall & Morris, 2012).

**Stress.** The eighth theme analyzed from the interviews was stress. Twelve administrative personnel and sixteen former inmates were convinced that stress had a direct effect on the safety and security of correctional institutions. For instance, one

former inmate said on the issue of overcrowding that “it creates a stressful environment and it contributes to jail misconduct and jail fights” (F16). The interviewees agreed if reasons for overcrowding are determined, stress levels could decrease the violent actions of both staff and inmates. As pointed out by an interviewee F14 “when you reduce overcrowding, you relieve stress; then everything is open, you don’t feel so deprived of something as little as space” or by F8 that “reducing overcrowding can alleviate stress on both the staff and inmates, which I believe would foster a safer environment”. The theme stress is consistent with the literature (Haney, 2006).

**Insufficient Staff Members.** The ninth theme attained from the interviews was an insufficient number of staff members. Eighteen former administrative personnel and thirteen former inmates were convinced that staff being outnumbered is a dangerous situation. A1 pointed out that “there are not enough qualified staff members in these overcrowded facilities to handle the number of inmates.” Furthermore, “the ratio of correctional officers compared to inmates is not properly proportioned. At any given time within a correctional institution, the inmates could take over the correctional institutions and cause havoc” (A2). Also, “if there are more inmates than the staff, then the people may try to physically overtake the staff; it is hard to maintain order, and the staff’s safety is jeopardized as well” (F13). The interviewees agreed if the reasons for overcrowding are determined, the problem of the staff being outnumbered could be decreased by hiring more officers and making the correctional environment safer. The theme of an insufficient number of staff members is consistent with the literature (Worrall & Morris, 2012)

**Danger.** The tenth theme that was identified was danger. Nineteen administrative personnel and seventeen former inmates were convinced that overcrowding puts a strain on the safety and security of the correctional environment, which is dangerous for staff and inmates. For instance, one of the administrative staff respondents rightly pointed out the dangerous situations that may be created due to overcrowding by stating that “some of the extra inmates may not be locked in cells as they normally would and this leaves officers at high risk for attacks. It is also not safe for inmates to be left out or just given an empty space like the floor or holding cells” (A3). The interviewees agreed if reasons for overcrowding are determined, the correctional environment would become less dangerous, which could improve the safety and security. The correction officers are also exposed to dangers of diseases as expressed by a respondent who stated, “I believe it is a problem due to the safety of the correction officers and the airborne diseases that can be passed. It is not conducive and psychologically unwise” (F15). Another respondent said that “it has put the safety of staff and inmates in danger a hostile and unclean environment” (F5). The theme of danger is consistent with the literature (Pratt & Franklin, 2006).

### **Summary**

This chapter highlighted the interviews’ responses and secondary data used in this study. I conducted 40 interviews and observed each participant’s behavior during the interview, which appeared to be normal. I used figures and tables to show the most common themes that derived from the interviews in relation to each research question.

Secondary data were collected and illustrated in Figure 1 by showing the relationship between the three subcategories.

In Chapter 5, I summarized the findings of the interview data and provided a synopsis of further research on the topic of overcrowding in correctional institutions.

## Chapter 5: Results and Conclusion

### **Introduction**

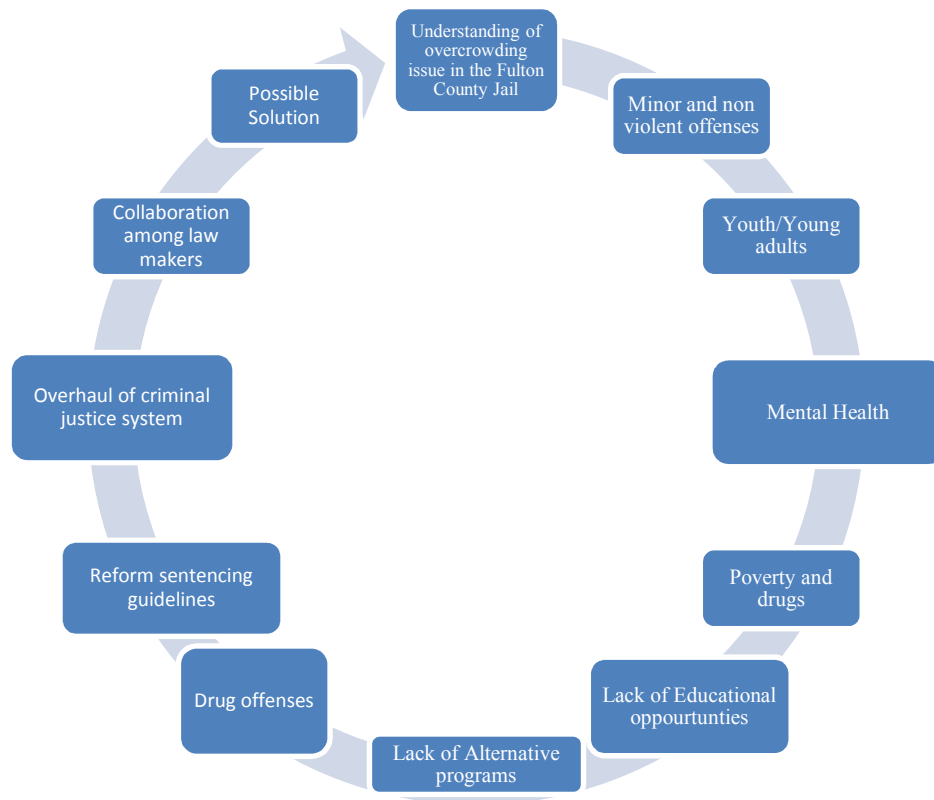
There is a problem with overcrowding in the county jail. The current facility was constructed in 1989. In 2009, the jail underwent renovations. The county jail has a maximum holding capacity of 2500 inmates, but the jail currently houses 2600 inmates. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine why the county is overcrowded. A case study was conducted on the county jail. I conducted 40 interviews as the primary source of data collection and limited participatory observation was used only to observe participants' body language. Secondary data used in the study was a public record document, the *County Sheriff Office Annual Report (2015)*. The interview participants were categorized into two groups: administrative personnel and former inmates. Three subcategories were created to analyze the secondary data.

The sheriff office is the largest office of the sheriff in the state. The county jail was subject to a federal court order to reduce overcrowding in 2005; the order was lifted in 2015. The jail still struggles with overcrowding. The sheriff office struggles with various problems related to overcrowding in the county jail. Besides overcrowding, safety and security within the jail are also matters of concern. Exploring the reasons for overcrowding would not only help the sheriff office, but it could also help other correctional facilities determine the reasons for overcrowding and perhaps develop a solution.

## Results

Three figures are used in this chapter (Figure 2, Figure 4, and Figure 5) to illustrate the themes found in the interview process. The figures are presented under the research questions that they answer. A new set of themes was derived from Figure 4 in relation to RQ2. The new figure is labeled Figure 5.

RQ1. To what degree can an improved understanding of the overcrowding problem in a county jail enable lawmakers to address the problem of overcrowding in correctional institutions in the United States?

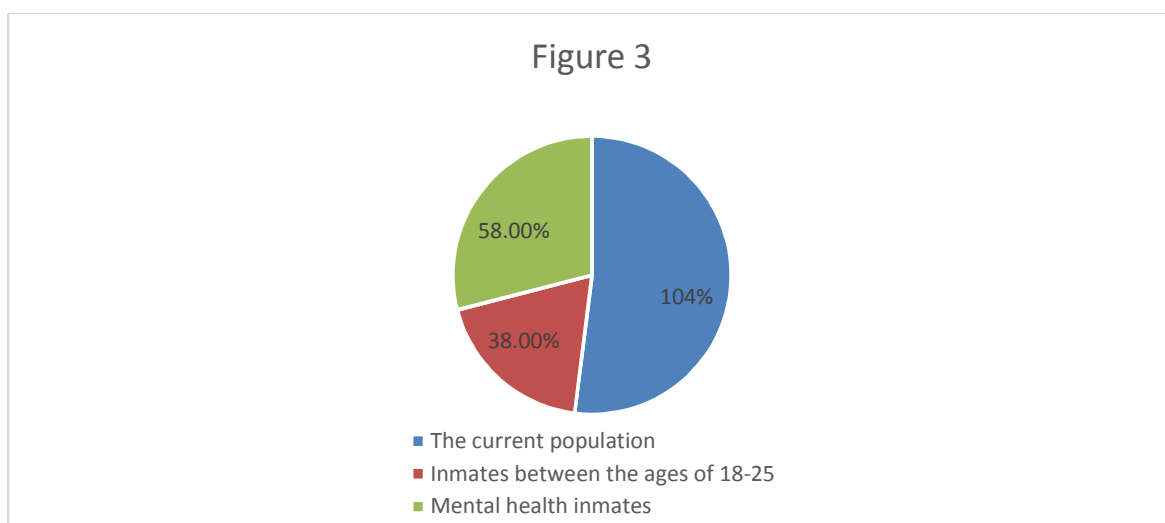


*Figure 2.* Diagram explaining the jail overcrowding cycle

The purpose of this study was to explore reasons for overcrowding in the county jail. I found throughout the interviews that there were ten shared themes on both research

questions; a new set of themes can be derived for RQ2 (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). The ten shared themes—not listed in any particular order—were analyzed and discussed for RQ1: minor and nonviolent offenses, imprisonment of youth and young adults, mental health, poverty and drugs, lack of educational opportunities, lack of alternative programs, drug offenses, reform of sentence guidelines, need to overhaul the criminal justice system, collaboration among lawmakers.

Secondary data were collected and analyzed into three subcategories. Figure 3 shows the three subcategories, which were analyzed in relation to the overcrowding problem in the county jail.



*Figure 3.* Pie chart showing the inmate percentage in different categories

In Figure 3, I note the following points:

The maximum holding capacity (i.e., size of the facility) in the county jail is 2500.

The current population at the jail is approximately 2600 inmates. Therefore, the county

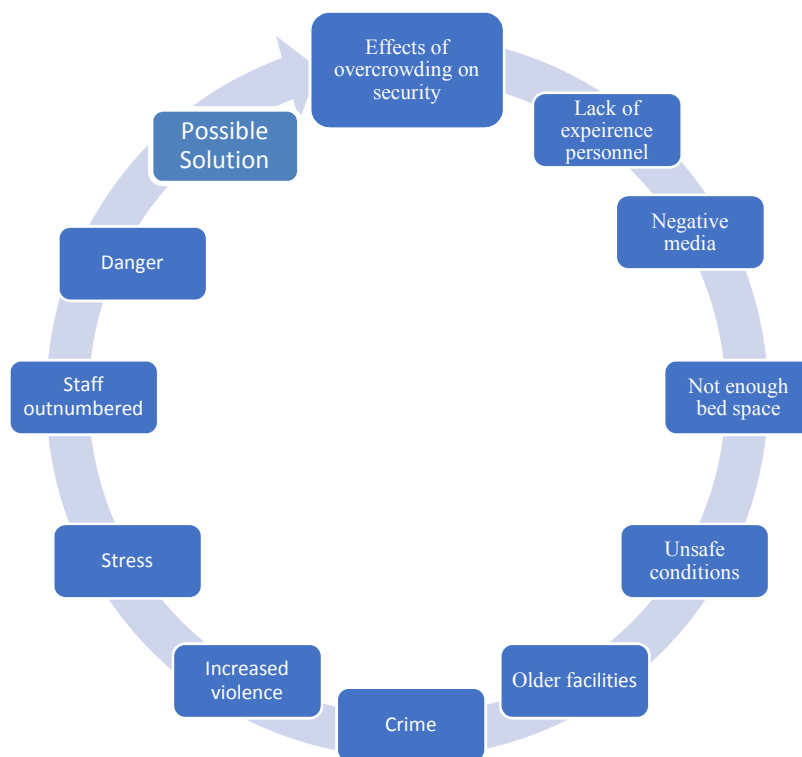
jail is approximately overcrowded by 100 inmates, which is 104% of the total housing capacity.

The inmates housed in the county jail between the ages of 18 and 25 years compared with the total population. The number of offenders between the ages of 18 and 25 years at the county jail was approximately 1000. The current population capacity of the county jail is approximately 2600 inmates. Therefore, the offenders between the ages of 18 and 25 years make up 38% of the current population in the county jail.

The total mental health population in the county jail is approximately 1500 inmates. The current population capacity in the county jail is approximately 2600. Therefore, the mental health population in the county jail makes up 58% of the current population.

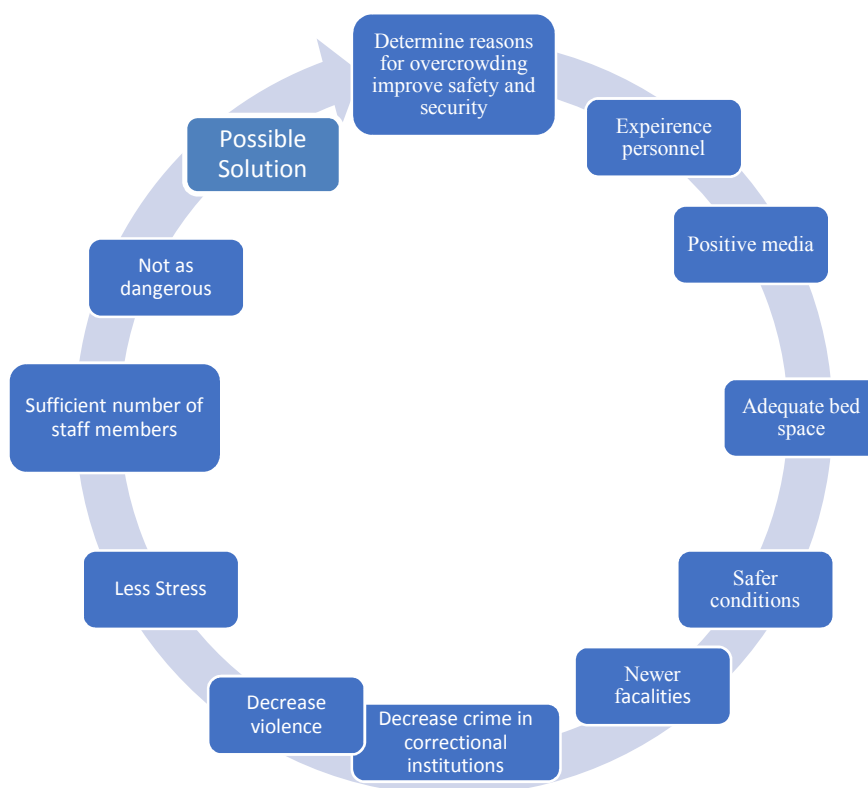
RQ2. To what extent can determining the reasons for overcrowding improve the safety and security of correctional institutions?





*Figure 4.* Diagram showing the effects of overcrowding on security

The above figure shows factors impacting the safety and security due to overcrowding and the subsequent effects of overcrowding in the county jail. These themes are Lack of Experience, Negative Media, Lack of Bed Space, Unsafe Conditions, Older Facilities, Crime, Increase in Violence, Stress, Insufficient Staff Members, and Danger. The following figure 7 depicts the possible solutions to solve the problem of overcrowding derived from the themes that answered the RQ2.



*Figure 5.* Diagram showing cycle for possible solutions

### **Practical Implications**

This study can be used to help professionals in other fields. For example, experts in the field of public policy can use this study to develop policies that can help government officials ensure that mental health inmates should be housed in mental health facilities, not in jail or prisons. Similarly, this study can help officials in the field of public administration to implement policies relating to providing alternative programs to incarceration for young adult offenders. Programs, such as the second chance program, could be used nationwide as an alternative program for young adult offenders, instead of incarceration.

### **Future Research**

Future research can focus on why the mental illnesses and young adult offenders are on the rise in correctional institutions. The mental illness population comprised more than 50% of the total population in the county jail. If the county jail has an overwhelming number of mentally ill inmates, it is entirely possible that other correctional institutions also have a large number of such inmates. Young adult offenders between the ages of 18 and 25 years comprised over 35% of the total population in the county jail. Future research can focus on the increasing number of mental health and young adult offenders in correctional institutions.

### **Conclusions**

I found that each category of participants, administrative personnel, and former inmates, gave similar insights and perspectives into the reasons why the county jail and other correctional institutions are overcrowded. The administrative category consisted of judges, commissioners, and current and former sheriff office employees. The former inmate category consisted of former inmates of the county jail. All the participants in the study were able to answer the interview questions based on personal experience, education, and work experience. These interviews provided new insights into the reasons why the county jail is overcrowded.

I note that each research question has been adequately answered. The first research question was answered by considering ten different themes and three subcategories. The second research question was answered by considering ten different themes and the ten emergent themes. I note that a solution to overcrowding could be

developed if lawmakers look at the several different themes and the subcategories that were discussed in this study. The findings of the study could be used to improve the safety and security of correctional institutions by determining the possible causes for overcrowding and finding solutions to address the overcrowding problem.

The three primary reasons for overcrowding in the county jail are the presence of mental health inmates, young adult inmates between the ages of 18 and 25 years, and the size of the facility. Mental health inmates and young adult inmates together constitute over 80% of the total population in the county jail. If the mental health inmates are reduced, and the young adult offenders are reduced, the total population in the county jail could be reduced by half, which would solve the overcrowding problem in the jail. I understand that reducing overcrowding will not be an easy task; it will require collaborative efforts by lawmakers and other government officials. I recommend that lawmakers and government officials consider building more mental facilities to house mental health inmates. I also recommend that lawmakers and government officials create more alternative programs such as the second-chance program for young adult offenders, instead of incarcerating these youngsters. A more massive jail could also be constructed in the county to ensure that there is adequate space to house the all the inmates without overcrowding.

Society stands to benefit from this study because reducing overcrowding in the jails and prisons can keep children out of these institutions. This study will also benefit the criminal justice system by helping lawmakers address correctional institution reform.

This study can also inform the process of policy and design on the federal, state and local levels for lawmakers to understand the importance of keeping mental health facilities funded and operational. From this study, it seems that that the county jail is being used as a mental health facility. The results of this study show that the mental health population is currently one of the leading causes of overcrowding in the county jail. Lawmakers can use the results of this study to assist them in the development of policies and programs that can be used to reduce correctional institution overcrowding. Further research could be conducted into why mental health offenders are being housed in correctional institutions.

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### Appendix A: Interview Script for Administrative Personnel

“Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.”

“The purpose of this interview is to get your feedback about reasons why the county jail has an overcrowding problem. Specifically, your thoughts on the problem. By conducting this interview, I hope to get your perspective as to why the county jail is overcrowded because of your knowledge training and experience with the county jail.

“The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes we will take written notes on the laptop computer so that I can accurately record the answers to your questions.

I also want to inform you that if any point during the interview that you do not want to continue with the interview for whatever reason, you are free to tell me to stop the interview and I will stop immediately.

“Do you have any questions for me before we begin?”

## Appendix B: Interview Script for Former Inmate's Personnel

“Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.”

“The purpose of this interview is to get your feedback about reasons why the county jail has an overcrowding problem. Specifically, your thoughts on the problem. By conducting this interview, I hope to get your perspective as to why the county jail is overcrowded because you have first-hand knowledge of the situation due to the fact you were housed there before.

“The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes; we will take written notes on the laptop computer so that I can accurately record the answers to your questions.

I also want to inform you that if any point during the interview if you do not want to continue with the interview for whatever reason, you are free to tell me to stop the interview, and I will stop immediately.

“Do you have any questions for me before we begin?”



### Appendix C: Questions Asked of the Administrative Personnel

1. What is your knowledge of prison and jail overcrowding?
2. Why do you think overcrowding is a problem?
3. Why do you think the county jail is overcrowded?
4. What do you think should be done to reduce the overcrowding problem in the county jail?
5. How can determining the reasons for overcrowding solve the problem of overcrowding?
6. What effect does overcrowding have on the safety and security of correctional institutions?
7. How can reducing overcrowding improve the safety and security of correctional institutions?
8. What can lawmakers learn from the issue of overcrowding in the county jail to better combat the issue of overcrowding in correctional institutions?

#### Appendix D: Questions Asked of the Former Inmates

1. What is your knowledge of prison and jail overcrowding?
2. Why do you think overcrowding is a problem?
3. Why do you think the county jail is overcrowded?
4. What do you think should be done to reduce the overcrowding problem in the county jail?
5. How can determining the reasons for overcrowding solve the problem of overcrowding?
6. What effect does overcrowding have on the safety and security of correctional institutions?
7. How can reducing overcrowding improve the safety and security of correctional institutions?
8. What can lawmakers learn from the issue of overcrowding in the county jail to better combat the issue of overcrowding in correctional institutions?