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# Probation Officers and Parole Agents' Perceptions of Institutional Obstacles to Reducing Recidivism in a Midwestern State

Gertha Lee Lusby  
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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Gertha Lee Lusby

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2019

Abstract

Probation Officers and Parole Agents' Perceptions of Institutional Obstacles to Reducing  
Recidivism in the Midwestern State

by

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Governors State University, 2004

Trinity International University, 1998

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Applied Management and Decision Science

Walden University

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## Abstract

Prison management and key stakeholders lack an understanding of how institutional obstacles interfere with probation officers and parole agents' ability in managing offenders to reduce recidivism in a Midwestern state. In 2014, 1 out of 52 adults in the U.S. were under the supervision of probation officers or parole agents. The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to identify the institutional obstacles that exist for probation officers and parole agents in terms of their lived experiences in their jobs. The participants were 5 probation officers and 6 parole agents from a municipal district in a county in a Midwestern state. The conceptual framework that grounds this descriptive phenomenological study is Meadows' three concepts of systems thinking (elements, interconnections, and purpose). The data collection process involved in-depth interviews and field notes. One hundred percent of the participants identified several themes as institutional obstacles including: lack of community programs, lack of jobs, and heavy caseloads. The implications for positive social change for the key stakeholders identified in the study to reduce recidivism in the criminal justice system were to remove the institutional barriers outlined in the themes and improve institutional practices. Making policy reforms that included drug and alcohol treatment, addressing the issue of prison authority and the creation of rehabilitation programs that feature cognitive development would aid in reduction of recidivism.

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## Dedication

To my five children and my late husband, I honor you for your support and courage to continue to fight the good fight of faith through God, regardless of the challenges. Challenges are roadblocks that propel us to the next level. This dissertation is also dedicated to family and friends; thank you for believing in me. When you work with what you have, what you have will always work with you. I love you all.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In 2015, approximately seven million adults were incarcerated in the United States (Topel et al., 2018). Between 1970 and 2005, Curtis, Derzis, Shippen, Musgrove, and Brigman (2013) stated that the U.S. incarceration rate increased by 700%. Pfaff (2016) indicated that the United States prison population rose from 250,000 to 1.6 million by the end of 2014. Seven out of 10 people in the prison population were under the community supervision of probation officers and parole agents (Teague, 2016).

The United State of America incarcerates more people than any developed country in the world. Arter (2014) noted that America had 68 million residents with criminal records at the end of 2008, which is more than France's population in 2013. The U.S population was 323,060,189 at the end of 2014, with an estimated 6,851,000 offenders incarcerated (U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) 2015a; Worldometer - World Population, 2016). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015a) revealed that in 2015, one out of every 53 adults in America was under some form of correctional supervision.

The United States correctional system operates through two systems, prisons, and jails, and the responsibility to maintain low rates of recidivism falls on the probation officers as well as the parole agents (Corbett Jr., 2015). Community supervision is a term used interchangeably for probation and parole officers (Klinge, 2013). *Probation* is a community sentence imposed instead of imprisonment, and *parole or supervised release* is an early release of incarcerated criminal offenders into

community supervision (Klinge, 2013). Some states have probation officers and parole agents working interchangeably. Illinois is one state where probation and parole officers have worked in both capacities, but not at the same time. Illinois is the focal point of this study because probation officers and parole agents face institutional obstacles that affect their clients in Cook County to reduce recidivism. Their clients are comprised of the majority of inmates in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and come from seven communities of the 77 neighborhoods in Chicago (SRWG, 2007; IDOC, 2018). The seven communities are Austin, East Garfield Park, North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Auburn/Gresham West Englewood, and Roseland

### **Illinois Corrections Population**

In the state of Illinois, at the end of 2016, the correctional population was 204,200. Cook County is the largest county in the state of Illinois and within Chicago city limits, which has the largest correctional population among the state's 102 counties (see Appendix H; IDOC, 2018). Illinois legislators and the IDOC are counting on probation officers and parole agents to help decrease high rates of incarcerations and recidivism. The decisions of probation officers and parole agents play a critical role in the incarceration and recidivism of offenders who receive technical violations while on probation or parole.

The population in Illinois in 2015 was estimated to be over 12.8 million people, of which 151,800 were under the management of probation officers and parole agents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; IDOC, 2015). According to the IDOC, 2015) African Americans were the majority of the Illinois prison population. The IDOC



prison population was 57.6% African American, 29.3% Caucasian, 12.5% Hispanic, 0.4% Asian, and 0.1% American Indian, with 0.14% unknown (IDOC, 2015a).

The total parole population in the IDOC during 2015 was 28,478, which included 17,147 African Americans, 8,927 Caucasians, 2,927 Hispanics, 76 Asians, 36 American Indians, and 16 unknown (IDOC, 2016). Prison population figures are vital in this descriptive phenomenological study because the majority of probation and parole officers' clients are disproportionately people of color. Eisenberg (2016) noted that one in nine African American males ages twenty to thirty-four has a higher rate of incarceration and recidivism. One in three will spend some time in jail or prison during their lifetime. According to Adult Redeploy, Illinois Annual Report of (2012) said, "Illinois is facing a corrections crisis in which innovative solutions are desperately needed" (p. 3), with large numbers of African-American males incarcerated and recidivating.

The rationale for this study is to help key stakeholders reevaluate or remove institutional obstacles that interfere with probation officers and parole agents reducing recidivism among offenders in Illinois. Probation officers and parole agents' perceptions through systems thinking may have an implication for social change by helping key stakeholders improve institutional practices, reduce or remove institutional barriers, policy reform, and rehabilitation programs that include cognitive development programs to help ex-offenders with reentry. Probation officers and parole agents know the most effective programs for offenders.

Chapter 1 contains an outline of the problem that guides the study. I will describe the relationship between Illinois government regulators, decision-makers in the criminal justice system, probation officers and parole agents as well as barriers that may represent institutional obstacles for offenders and thus affect recidivism in Illinois. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, and conceptual framework. The final sections are the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of the study in terms of filling the gap in the literature with implications for social change.

### **Background of the Study**

Reducing recidivism is widely understood as an important goal for the U. S. criminal justice system, stakeholders, and probation officers and parole agents who manage convicted offenders re-entering communities (U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS, 2015b). Mass incarceration increased dramatically in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and a decarceration era emerged in 2010 that involved probation officers and parole agents managing offenders to reduce recidivism (Eisenberg, 2016). Meadows (2008) noted that shifting the burden of a problem is done purposefully to acquire a desirable intervenor state within a system, which is one of the goals for organizations. In Illinois, stakeholders in the criminal justice system are blaming each other for the high rate of recidivism, shifting the burden of the responsibility for the problem. Shifting the burden is taking the pressure off of one stakeholder and putting it on another stakeholder, even if it is

only a temporary solution that strategically absolves an organization from assuming responsibility for high levels of recidivism. However, the root cause of the problem should be addressed and solved; if not, the problem reappears. When problems become apparent, it may be difficult to answer; systems thinking allows individuals to see how systems work and the relationship between structure and behavior, along with what makes them produce poor results and how to shift to more productive behavior patterns (Meadows, 2008).

### **Systems Thinking**

Systems thinking is used in this study to relate real-world management problems with probation and parole officers' perceptions of institutional obstacles in terms of reducing recidivism in Illinois. This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study uses systems thinking theory to support the research question, with Meadows' three concepts of systems thinking theory: the elements, the interconnection, and the purpose. Each of the concepts is related to a particular stakeholder, with each stakeholder having a positive or negative impact on the decision-making of each other.

The stakeholders in this study are the elements because they are the major part of the system that controls goal-seeking, evaluates behavior, and sets the foundation (Meadows, 2008). The probation officers, the parole agents, and the ex-offenders are the interconnections because they are responsible for the information in producing the purpose. The purpose concept informs the decision-making of the probation officers, the parole agents, and ex-offenders, whose primary goals are to assist ex-offenders in

having a successful reentry and reduce recidivism. Davis, Dent, and Wharff (2015) noted that systems thinking offers potential for management to move from the traditional models of management with uncertainties and complexities within an institution to an adaptive model. It allows the emergence of other complex systems to respond to other agencies with growing complexities.

### **Institutional Obstacles**

Society and policymakers have helped shape institutions by their decisions on laws, regulation, and budget cuts. The purpose of institutions is displayed in two areas, to encourage socially desirable activities and to discourage undesirable activities through economic factors which will have disincentivized or incentivized institutions by societies' and entrepreneurs' interests (Mathias, Lux, Crook, Autry, & Zaretski, 2015). Mathias et al. (2015) identified stakeholders as individuals who have control and enables entrepreneurs as well as governmental agencies with their decision making; these are government, law regulators, courts (attorney and judges), professional business management, and interest groups.

Incarceration has climbed sharply after 40 years with overcrowdings due to drug laws and lack of policy reforms (Western, & Muller, 2013). During the 1950s and 60s, in the United States, 50% of convicted offenders were sentenced to probation (Klinge, 2013). In 2001, the U.S. had 60% of convicted offenders under community supervision, and from 1977 to 2010, offenders on probation quintupled from 800,000 to more than 4,000,000, and the number of parole offenders grew from 173,000 to 841,000 (Klinge, 2013). Prison management and key stakeholders believed

incarceration with some rehabilitation programs would change offenders' behavior. However, many educational and training programs have been reduced, which causes an increase in institutional barriers and recidivism (Opperman, 2014).

Incarceration has been a standard form of punishment in the United States throughout U.S. history and has put a financial burden on taxpayers. Incarceration is not always the best solution for offenders, the cognitive-based educational programs are more effective and are less expensive than incarcerating offenders (Miller, Miller, Djoric, & Patton, 2015; Kroner & Yessine, 2013). The incarcerated need the cognitive characteristics enhancement during the reentry process, according to Baldwin (1985) there are three pedagogical processes in teaching offenders, (1) how they should operate in the social world, (2) what an appropriate response to their disparate social conditions should be, and (3) how to interpret their experiences going forward (Miller, Miller, Djoric, & Patton, 2015; Kroner & Yessine, 2013, p. 326).

Miller, Djoric, and Patton (2015) noted that economists believe the skill sets from cognitive-based programs have shown to be effective in addressing conflict, anger management, soft training skills, and decision-making strategies, which make offenders more favorable to employers to hire them. Cognitive behaviorally-based programs allow offenders to take responsibility for their actions with the assumption of guilt in determining the outcome. It helps offenders to see how other people perceive them and how they perceive themselves. It helps produce restorative justice, creating an opportunity for giving back to the community. The Lack of attention from key stakeholder supporting probation officers and parole agents with their clients

having rehabilitation programs that include cognitive behavioral that have contributed to the influx of prison overcrowding, and a rapid rise in recidivism among offenders that produce higher workloads for officers and agents (Payne & DeMichele, 2011). The probation officers and parole agents' supervisors do not always support their decisions on technical violations. The courts were asking probation officers and parole agents only to request that the courts hear the more serious technical violation cases to reduce recidivism (Payne & DeMichele, 2011).

Oleson (2014) stated that stakeholders such as judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys are using the court to problem solve the issue of reentry and the reduction of recidivism. This development, combined with the *evidence-based* practice which is sound based research that has been proven, and used in decision-making. The actuarial risk assessment instruments have redesigned post-conviction supervision, a recidivism reduction collaboration that was once the primary responsibility of probation officers. Eisenberg (2016) believes the United States has entered into a decarceration era because the prison population decreased for three consecutive years starting in 2010, Eisenberg, further states legislators have enacted early release bills and have begun to decriminalize- low offenses such as marijuana possession. Some states have eliminated or revised mandatory minimum, reducing prison populations and costs. Eisenberg also noted increased opportunities for early release of prisoners, an advantage that was eliminated in tough on crime era. Additionally, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act in 2010, eliminating the five-year mandatory minimum for first-time possession of crack cocaine.

Lewis, Lewis, and Garby (2013) stated that cognitive restructuring and behavioral change programs are needed to help probation officers and parole agents work with offenders to reduce recidivism. Within the past two decades, from the late 1990s and the 2000s, probation officers, parole agents, and ex-offenders have experienced traumatic stress in their lives. This added stress come from the lack of rehabilitation programs have lagged in the area of cognitive behavioral programs (Lewis et al., 2013; Phelps, 2011). Miller et al. (2015) noted that another effective program involved restorative justice and restorative practices, which emphasized ex-offenders taking responsibility for their actions to repair the harm they have caused victims or a community of victims. The lack of cognitive behavioral programs for offenders has obstructed the way probation officers and parole agents manage their clients to reduce recidivism. Hercules (2013) used the term social deprivation mindset indicating that offenders should think about their preconceptions on life, that it is a better way to live regardless if their circumstances do not seem to change and taking responsibility for their actions.

Change is an inevitable part of any business, especially with probation officers and parole agents. Probation officers and parole agents managed 6.8 million offenders nationwide in 2011 (Boutwell & Freedman, 2014). In 2013, there were 152,000 probationers and parolees under community supervision in Illinois (BJS, 2015c). Probation officers and parole agents supervised 4,537,100 adults in 2016, and one out of every 55 adults in the United States was under some form of community supervision at the end of 2016 (BJS, 2016). For probation officers and parole agents to

manage offenders effectively, change is a requirement for offenders. Eisenberg (2016) noted that managerial support from the U.S. governmental branches such as the legislative and judicial branch is an effective key to reducing recidivism. However, there are interest groups such as the prison industry and private prisons, as well as some public correctional officers who resist decarceration era policies.

The U.S. government has decreased funds for rehabilitation programs that once helped probation officers and parole agents manage their clients and reduce recidivism. Poinski (2011) and Laurin (2015) noted that probation officers have a difficult time completing their duties due to financial constraints, evidenced by higher caseloads and workloads. In Illinois, the budget increased from \$15 billion in 1982 to \$53.5 billion in 2001, then decreased to \$48.4 billion per year from 2002 to 2010, with a decrease in rehabilitation programs (BJS, 2014). Opperman (2014) said that “prisons fail to rehabilitate prisoners fundamentally because they do not focus enough on doing so due to the lack of funding” (p. 224).

### **Probation Officers’ Workloads and Caseloads**

Workloads and caseloads have increased for probation officers (Poinski, 2011). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, community supervision in America has changed with an increase in caseloads, new laws, and policies that emphasize law enforcement and rehabilitation. Many states have abolished the parole board system, leaving to probation officers and parole agents the responsibility to rehabilitate and prepare offenders for reentry (Kuziemko, 2013). Probation officers’ primary responsibility is



to manage offenders to reduce recidivism by helping ex-offenders become productive members of their families and communities (U.S. Probation Office, 2016).

The information probation officers and parole agents obtain from their clients is given to courts and agencies to aid in dispositional decision-making. Probation officers and parole agents are vulnerable to constant criticism as well as political and philosophical tension due to failure rehabilitating offenders for reentry (Lutzel et al., 2012). Probation officers and parole agents are often torn between basing decisions and recommendations on their experiences and expertise and satisfying political strategies traditionally emphasizing punishment over rehabilitation (Lutzel et al., 2012).

Poinski (2011) noted that probation officers' caseloads and workloads are overwhelming in every state in America. The average caseloads can range from 60 to 300 offenders. The turnover rate for probation officers varies, depending on the state and county. Many agencies have implemented new technologies to help manage workloads because of the increase in sentenced offenders and hiring processes of new officers. Budget cuts and the retirement of baby boomers force probation officers to increase their workloads. The term *baby boomers* refer to a demographic group of the unprecedented number of individuals born after the Second World War between 1946 through 1964, which totaled about 76.4 million babies (Obal & Kunz, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

According to Poinski (2011) the Division of Probation Management (DPM) wanted to bring probation officers and parole agents caseloads down by 50%;

therefore, DPM used a federal grant of \$440,000 in 2011 to purchase electronic kiosks to help reduce probation officers and parole agents' workloads. Electronic kiosks are used to help probation officers manage offenders and reduce their workload by allowing them to communicate with offenders through kiosks instead of face-to-face meetings. Kiosks help reduce the amount of time probation officers spend with offenders, including activities such as routine check-ins, and it also verifies reports of technical violations. The electronic kiosk identifies offenders by scanning their handprint and asking a series of questions that offenders must answer before having a meeting with probation officers. The data from the electronic kiosk helps probation officers analyze reports for administrators. These reports are used by policymakers in their efforts to reduce recidivism.

Fabelo and Thompson (2015) indicated that reducing the recidivism rate depended on the actions of decision-makers. It is important that states collect, analyze and report data on the criminal justice system often, to allow policymakers opportunities to review and change policies as needed. Fabelo and Thompson stated that "states must have the capacity to report data on a routine basis so that policymakers can monitor trends" (p. 41). This analyzation helps decision-makers achieve the targeted reduction of recidivism and holds administrators accountable for outcomes, and to adjust policies and funding accordingly. The decision-makers that include Illinois stakeholders affect the Illinois criminal justice system. The stakeholders in this study are Illinois government regulators, judges, prison management, prosecutors, attorneys, probation officers, parole agents, offenders, and

watchdog groups. Also, these stakeholders are looking for ways to improve policy reforms and create safer communities. Under the former President Obama administration, the DOJ improved some policy reforms.

Former President Obama who stated, “Throughout my Presidency and beyond, I will continue working to keep our communities safe and ensure our criminal justice system aligns with our highest ideals” (B. Obama, personal communication, September 2016). The DOJ announced reform at the bureau of prisons to reduce recidivism and promote inmate rehabilitation. This reform will help probation officers and parole agents assist offenders, their families, and their communities.

The Federal Interagency Reentry Council has worked on policy reforms to prepare offenders with the tools needed for reentry, to have the skills and fair opportunity to be law-abiding, productive citizens in society with safer communities. These reforms include improving employment, education housing for offenders, health and child welfare, which contribute to a successful reentry (B. Obama, personal communication, September 2016). (President Barack Obama stated that his administration had enhanced public safety and lowered the incarceration rate with pathways to success instead of pipelines to prison. Implementing these reforms would effectively enhance rehabilitation programs that work to reduce recidivism by reinvesting in resources in communities and crime prevention services (B. Obama, personal communication, September 2016).

The Obama administration promoted policy reforms to ensure fairness within the criminal justice system, enhance public safety, and ensure that juvenile offenders

have an opportunity to reach their fullest potential without being trapped in recurring patterns of recidivism. The DOJ established a series of reforms which are, building a school District within the federal prison system, reforming federal halfway houses, covering the cost of state-issued ID's, and enhancing programs for the female inmate (DOJ, 2016). The DOJ is working with states in developing strategies to reduce incarceration and reinvest resources into communities with crime-prevention services.

Throughout the United States, the success rate for community supervision was low and two-thirds of the ex-offenders recidivated within 3 years of their release from being incarcerated (Sabet, Talpins, Dunagan, & Holmes, 2013). Probation officers and parole agents have low success rates in supervising offenders because of their clients' involvement with drug activities, heavy caseloads, and the lack of rehabilitation can be attributed to the low success rate. Another factor that contributes to low success rates are probation officers and parole agents imposing sanctions for positive drug tests for offenders. Waiting for results from the drug reports can be a slow process. When officers or agents write the technical violations on the offenders, management often ignores the violations, which gives lead way for offenders to continue in their negative and sometimes illegal behavior (Sabet et al., 2013).

Offenders need physical and mental health, job training and placement, living skills, and housing and family assistance, all which limit probation officers and parole agents' ability to manage offenders effectively. Probation officers and parole agents are responsible for placing offenders in programs to help reduce recidivism and allow them to become productive citizens. They are required to adhere to specific rules, supervision conditions, and policies from management.

According to Klingele (2013) community supervision is an alternative to incarceration when offenders are placed on probation or parole, which is intended to reduce the disproportionately high incarceration rate. Legal reformers have advised lawmakers to divert offenders to probation officers or parole agents for monitoring and to help offenders with the reentry process to reduce recidivism, the correctional budget and save taxpayers' dollars. However, offenders are returning to prison, not as a result of new crimes but because of technical violations, causing a revocation of their probation or parole (Klingele, 2013). Klingele (2013) indicated that until decision-makers support probation officers and parole agents; community supervision is not an alternative to incarceration but a temporary delay. When offenders are not receiving the proper rehabilitation programs and support, they will recidivate.

Schoenfeld (2012) noted, throughout the U.S. criminal justice system, the government had budget cuts in healthcare, education, social services, and in rehabilitation programs for the offender. States are addressing the problem of mass incarceration and reviewing evidence-based research in crime control to develop juvenile and adult prison programs. Some programs that are being developed are in education, and drug abuse. These programs may address offenders' needs, reduce incarceration while trimming the correctional budget and maintaining public safety. Illinois is welcoming evidence-based research which is sound based research that has been proven and used for decision-making. Key stakeholders will use the research for IDOC to improve programs for successful reentry for ex-offenders in their communities throughout the state. This study targets those communities that have the

largest population of ex-offenders. There are 102 counties in Illinois, and offenders mainly reside in 16, of these counties, but the majority of the offenders in IDOC live in seven communities in Cook County (Bostwick et al., 2012; IDOC, 2018). The seven communities are Austin, East Garfield Park, North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Auburn/Gresham West Englewood, and Roseland (SRWG, 2007; IDOC, 2018). The probation officers and parole agents work with offenders from these seven communities.

Payne and DeMichele (2011) noted there is a limited amount of research on how probation officers and parole agents perceived different sanctions, made decisions about the use of their morals and values while facing the practical realities of the criminal justice system. The probation officers and parole agents monitor offenders by workloads, which consist of, “home visits, verifying collateral contacts, receiving training, performing administrative tasks, drug tests, motivational interviewing, verifying employment, court appearances, substitute or back-up coverage, transferring offenders into the jurisdiction, transferring offenders out of the jurisdiction, presentencing investigations, and processing technical violations” (Payne & DeMichele, 2011, p. 34). Despite the increasing numbers of offenders under the care of probation and parole officers, it is difficult for officers to effectively manage the specific aspects of each workload (Payne & DeMichele, 2011).

### **Problem Statement**

The two most significant management problems prison leadership faces in the

U. S. is mass incarceration and high recidivism rates (Western & Muller, 2013). The United States has 5% of the world's population but has 25% of the world's prison population (Pfaff, 2016). The U.S. criminal justice system incarcerates over two million people, and each year community supervision manages more than 700,000 offenders released from incarceration (Kuziemko, 2013). According to BJS (2018) the first BJS study with a 9-year follow-up from 2005 to 2014, recidivism patterns for prisoners that included 30 states. The BJS study tracked 401,288 prisoners released in 2005, through 2014, and 68% of the released prisoners recidivated within 3 years, 79% recidivated within 6 years, and 83 within 9 years. Among the 401,288 prisoners released 77% of the drug offenders recidivated within 9 years.

The general problem that IDOC faced is high recidivism; a Midwestern state key stakeholders want probation officers and parole agents to reduce recidivism among offenders. However, IDOC lack support from the stakeholders. The specific IDOC problem is a Midwestern state key stakeholders, such as a Midwestern state government regulators, prison management, and a Midwestern state judges lack an understanding of institutional obstacles facing probation officers and parole agents. These obstacles interfere with their ability in managing offenders to reduce recidivism in a Midwestern state. The probation officers and parole agents 'decisions play a huge role in the success or failure of offenders.

Viewing this study through the lens of systems thinking may help address the problem of recidivism by supplying key decision-makers with a comprehensive understanding of institutional obstacles to reducing recidivism. In addressing IDOC,

problem key stakeholder can look at the whole picture of the interconnection with the criminal justice system through systems thinking. There is a limited amount of research available that addresses the relationship between the criminal justice system, government regulators, probation officers, and the parole agents managing offenders, caseloads, and workloads.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study is to identify the institutional obstacles that exist as probation officers and parole agents perceive them. Meadows (2008) connected three concepts needed for this study: the elements, the interconnections, and the purpose. “The elements of a system are often the easiest part to be notice, because many of them are visible, tangible things. The system may exhibit adaptive, dynamic goal-seeking, self-preserving, and sometimes evolutionary behavior” (Meadows, 2008, p.12). “The interconnection in systems operates through the flow of information that holds systems together and plays a great role in determining how they operate” (Meadows, 2008, p.14). “The Purpose is the least obvious part of the system, its function, or purpose is often the most crucial determinant of the systems’ behaviors” (Meadows, 2008, p.16). Systems thinking may help key stakeholders maximize the effectiveness of managerial support with the goal of helping probation officers and parole agents better manage offenders to reduce recidivism in a Midwestern state. The targeted population includes probation officers and parole agents in a Midwestern county. Key stakeholder groups such as governmental regulators, prison management, judges, ex-offenders, and probation



officers could benefit from existing literature and new studies about recidivism. The implications for positive social change will allow stakeholders to review, improve, or remove policies concerning institutional obstacles that impede probation officers and parole agents' efforts to reduce recidivism.

### **Research Questions**

The research question aims to identify existing institutional obstacles, the removal of which could allow probation officers and parole agents to manage offenders effectively to reduce recidivism in Illinois. Probation officers and parole agents have critical relations between the criminal justice system and offenders, and yet they do not have input regarding increasing demands related to their duties (White et al., 2015). It is useful to understand probation officers and parole agents' perspectives from a systems context, by aligning Meadows' three concepts which are the elements, the interconnection, and the purpose. Using these concepts may help address the high incidence of recidivism. The elements are Illinois government regulators, court judges, and IDOC or prison management. The interconnections are probation officers, parole agents, and ex-offenders. The purpose is having probation officers and parole agents manage ex-offenders effectively to reduce recidivism.

*RQ:* What are the lived experiences of probation officers and parole agents dealing with institutional obstacles, and the effects those obstacles have on their role in reducing recidivism?

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that grounds this descriptive phenomenological study is systems thinking. Meadows (2008) stated that a system must include three concepts: elements, interconnections, and a purpose. The system elements do not change much, or sometimes not at all but when the interconnections change it is totally altered, and effects the purpose or function of the system greatly. The stakeholders in this study are the element because they are the major part of the system that controls goal-seeking, evaluates behavior, and sets the foundation (Meadows, 2008). The probation officers, the parole agents, and the ex-offenders are the interconnections because information flows from them. They are responsible for producing the purpose. The purpose concept informs the decision-making of the probation officers and the parole agents, whose primary goals are to manage by helping ex-offenders in the reentry process in giving them what they need to reduce recidivism. Meadows' three concepts for systems thinking is a lens for the underlying contextual direction of this study. Systems thinking is a tool that allows leaders to tackle the increasing organizational complexities to help fix complex problems. (Davis, Dent, & Wharff (2015).

### **Systems Thinking Theory**

Bertalanffy (1969) noted that the term system was associated with mathematics, science, and technology. Bertalanffy (1950) stated that general systems theory is a discipline of mathematics and science; observing things that affect each other by investigating them independently or as wholes. Richmond (1994) noted that

general systems theory is not the same as systems thinking, even though they draw on similar systems and methodologies. As Richmond defined it, systems thinking is a way of thinking and learning biologically and scientifically. Richmond identified operational thinking or systems thinking as a way of thinking and learning how to have a deep understanding in observing the structure by looking at “what causes what” and seeing the whole picture (p. 117).

Cabrera et al. (2015) stated that there are four universal rules called distinctions, systems, relationships, and perspectives, which have two co-implicating elements. The distinctions are between things and ideas implying the existence of each other. The systems consist of parts and wholes, relationships are composed of actions and reactions, and perspectives consist of a point of view, and a view that is seen by others. Systems thinking can be baffling through different definitions; it is characterized by different disciplines, methods, and approaches. When the problem is more complex, it is evident that one cannot observe one part without observing the whole, and the interconnection of everything that is affiliated with the problem for each system (Cabrera et al., 2015). Meadows (2008) identified systems thinking as a “set of things, people, cells, molecules, or whatever interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time” (p. 2). It is a system that allows individuals the freedom to have logical reasoning to identify root causes of problems by managing and adapting their mindset to see new opportunities and the wide range of choices to achieve something. “A system must consist of three kinds of things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose” (Meadows, 2008, p.12).

Meadows' systems thinking theory is distinctly integrated into this study to align the research problem with the research question and purpose of the study.

Arnold and Wade (2015) noted that systems thinking was redefined in various ways. However, Arnold and Wade referenced (Meadows 2008) reasoning of systems thinking, stating it is a system of thinking about systems and includes Meadow' three concepts. Systems thinking has gained prominence in recent years. Scholars such as Arnold and Wade 2015; Flood 2010; Langstrand 2016) indicated that systems thinking is critical for the future as individuals who are responsible for decision-making should have an intense knowledge and understanding, building up whole pictures of phenomena.

Key stakeholders have the accountability and authority to influence changes in policies at the state as well as the federal level. State level government regulators receive their information from various agencies such as the judges and IDOC managers. They do not necessarily work with each other in identifying the common problem that affects all agencies together (Fabelo & Thompson, 2015). Probation officers report to the chief judge or the sentencing judge, and parole agents report to IDOC managers for parole.

### **Nature of the Study**

The research method is a qualitative descriptive phenomenological study design that encompasses in-depth face-to-face interviews with probation officers and parole agents in Chicago. Off-duty participants attended public meetings sponsored by reputable organizations that served ex-offenders in the seven communities in Chicago

out of the 77 communities and were willing to volunteer for the study. Probation officers and parole agents were interviewed about their perceptions of institutional obstacles and how Illinois government regulators, judges, and prison management could remove those institutional obstacles to reduce recidivism. The research design was chosen because it allows a deep understanding of probation officers and parole agents lived experiences, and of their perspectives regarding institutional obstacles, which includes how it affects recidivism through the systems thinking theory. Probation officers and parole agents are working closely with offenders who recidivate. They see the issues that limit them as well as why and what makes offenders recidivate. The interviews were done at participants' homes, in personal vehicles, or restaurants that permitted participants to express themselves freely. When participants are in a relaxed environment which they have chosen, they are more apt to disclose their perspectives.

### **Definitions**

*Adultification:* Forcing juveniles into adulthood with the same legislative court rulings as adults, or assuming the role of an adult but lacking the cognitive behavior development of adults (Bolin & Applegate, 2016).

*Caseload:* The number of offenders the probation officer or parole agent supervises (DeMichele, 2007).

*The Iron Law of prison population:* A term used by Clark and Austin to describe the total number of inmates behind bars, which is the result of the number of

individuals going to prison, and the length of time they stay in the prison (Clear & Austin, 2009).

*Jail:* A local facility that houses inmates awaiting trial or sentencing and those who have been sentenced for a short period, usually 1 year or less (BJS, 2012a).

*New offense parole violators:* Incarcerated ex-offenders who have committed new crimes (BJS, 2011).

*Parole:* Early release for criminal offenders who have shown they are capable of abiding by rules and regulations; failure to comply with the law results in incarceration to complete the offenders' time (BJS, 2011).

*Prison:* A facility that houses inmates after long-term sentencing in a state or federal institution (BJS, 2012 b).

*Probation:* Supervision for a period for criminal offenders after release into society (BJS, 2011).

*Returning citizens:* Ex-offenders who are reentering into society (Target Area Development Corp. <http://targetarea.org/criminal-justice>).

*Revocation of probation:* Ex-offenders who are in noncompliance or have violated the conditions of their probation with a technical violation; the judge revokes probation and the ex-offender is returned to prison or jail (Eno, Loudon, & Skeem 2013).

*Stakeholders:* Individuals, groups, or organizations that have a direct or indirect effect on an organization's outcomes (Spitzeck & Erik, 2010).

*System:* an interconnected set of elements that is a governing organized body to accomplish something (Meadows, 2008).

*Technical violations:* Violations against parole or mandatory supervised release agreements (BJS, 2011).

*Workload:* Refers to the amount of written work required by probation officers including court contracts, initial assessment reports, needs assessments, and probation reports (DeMichele, 2007).

### **Assumptions**

Several assumptions were made in this research study. It was assumed that some participants in the study shared their experiences and insights as probation officers and parole agents without fear. It is also assumed that the probation officers and parole agents were truthful in their responses and knew that they could terminate their participation at any time during the interviews with no consequence.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this descriptive phenomenological study is limited to understanding probation officers and parole agents' perspectives regarding institutional obstacles that impede their efforts to reduce recidivism. The conceptual framework is the systems thinking theory. The boundary that may constrain the data is that the study included only probation officers and parole agents who have supervised offenders in the seven communities where the majority of IDOC offenders come from in the Cook County area.

### **Limitations**

I am not interviewing offenders or ex-offenders, Illinois government regulators, prison administrators, Illinois judges, or other stakeholders such as watchdog groups, like the Target Area Development, John Howard Association of Illinois, and the Illinois Association for Criminal Justice (IACJ) established in Chicago, Illinois. There may be biases from some agents and officers, but if participants included ex-offenders and key stakeholders, their participation may have positively or negatively influenced the outcome of this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it attempts to address the high level of recidivism offenders consistently experience in the criminal justice system in Chicago, Illinois. The research contained in this study may fill the gap in the literature because there is a limited amount of scholarly literature about the high rate of recidivism in Illinois. There is a direct correlation between the high rate of recidivism of offenders, and the obstacles probation officers and parole agent's face while trying to manage their caseloads. Identifying institutional obstacles from probation officers and parole agents' perceptions may maximize the effectiveness of managerial support among stakeholders, in efforts to remove obstacles that prevent recidivism. In identifying institutional obstacles, systems thinking theory was used to provide data to key stakeholders. This data helps key stakeholders observe the interconnection between their decision-making and the reduction of recidivism.



The study may yield improvements in the criminal justice system that will help probation officers and parole agents manage offenders and ex-offenders efficiently and prevent them from recidivating. The study will also create opportunities for stakeholders to review, improve, or remove policies concerning institutional obstacles. Policymakers have the power to change legislation that could transform the lives of many ex-offenders and relieve pressure from probation officers and parole agents. According to the Bureau of justice assistance (2018), the Second Chance Act Statewide Recidivism Reduction (SRR) was developed to help “executive branch policymakers and state corrections departments plan and implement state-wide reforms to reduce recidivism” (para. 1). Illinois received the SRR planning grant in 2013, and since January 2018, Illinois has worked with trained parole agents to implement initiatives that impact successful reentry for offenders. Illinois has now created opportunities to help reduce recidivism for offenders beginning the reentry process.

### **Significance to Practice**

A potential contribution of the study is to advance managerial support to probation officers and parole agents. The Federal Interagency Reentry Council [FIGRC] (2016) was established under former President Obama’s administration with a mandate to promote rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. The FIGRC wanted to ensure a successful reentry process for offenders to become productive citizens in society. The belief was that ex-offenders had served their time and should not have to serve the rest

of their lives with additional punishment. The reentry process consisted of establishing offenders with assistance in housing, employment, education, and healthcare.

According to Starr (2014), the U.S. jurisdictions are adopting evidence-based sentencing (EBS) to encourage its use by sentencing judges. Evidence-based sentencing is a guide line that came from empirical research. The jurisdictions discourage judges to not look at the socioeconomic status or demographics of offenders but on the criminal conduct. Most offenders are poor and uneducated; they have received harsher sentencing. The EBS provides judges with risk scores for defendants with the determining variable being their conditions and criminal history. This is the hope for a new age of scientific guide in sentencing decisions that reduce recidivism.

### **Significance to Theory**

The results of this study may advance more research in all disciplines. It has the potential to contribute knowledge to the criminal justice system, in providing support for probation officers and parole agents, to help offenders reduce recidivism in Illinois and other states. Understanding this complex issue will help address the problem of recidivism by supplying key decision-makers with a comprehensive understanding of the cause and effect dynamic that institutional obstacles and recidivism create. Wallis (2013) noted that a political party creates its own policy, therefore that party's economic policy is a road map, depending on that party's understanding of the economy. Systems thinking is a tool that policymakers can use in

making informed decisions, because without relying on a reliable tool like systems thinking, some policymakers' policies may become divisive instead of constructive

### **Significance to Social Change**

Implications for positive social change include key stakeholders helping the criminal justice system reduce recidivism by removing institutional barriers, and improving institutional practices, policy reform, and rehabilitation programs. A limited amount of research is available that addresses probation and parole officers' attitudes toward the burdens of their caseloads and organizational goals. There is a need for more research on probation officers and parole agent's management structures, function, and the impact institutional obstacles have on probation officers, parole agents, and ex-offenders

### **Summary and Transition**

In Chapter 1, I highlighted the central focus of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study. The discussions in the introduction, problem statement, purpose of the study, nature of the study, the research questions, and the gap in the literature were outlined in the chapter. Chapter 2 includes the literature review that addresses the foundation of the conceptual framework in Chapter 1 and insight on the phenomena.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is designed to review the current literature in relation to the overarching management problem. The overarching management problem faced by probation officers and parole agents in Illinois is that institutional obstacles interfere with their ability to manage offenders effectively and reduce recidivism. Allowing managers to observe the managerial support system may help identify a full range of institutional obstacles that interfere with probation officers and parole agents' ability to do their jobs.

Cuaresma, Oberhofer, and Vincelette (2014) identified common institutional barriers, regardless of the type of institution or discipline such as institutional regulation, labor regulation, taxation, finance, infrastructure, crime, corruption, and law. Cuaresma et al, noted that the institutional environment has a significant effect on job creation, and institutional barriers affect the dynamics of the institutional environment. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2016) in January of 2016, Illinois had 151,800 adults were under the management of probation officers and parole agents. Probation officers and parole agents' jobs are intense with large numbers of offenders released from the prison system. Institutional obstacles play a large part in offenders' success or failure with recidivism.

Recidivism is a problem for Illinois government regulators, judges, and prison management because it places a financial burden on taxpayers by overcrowding prisons and threatens public safety, as well as dismantling families and communities. Most probation officers and parole agents' clientele are African Americans, and are

disproportionate in Illinois prison populations, especially in Chicago. Chicago is a part of Cook County, which has the largest prison population out of the 102 counties in Illinois (see Appendix H).

Institutional obstacles are identified within the literature that show the effects obstacles have on probation officers and parole agents, and how systems thinking underlies the concepts for this study.

Meadows (2008) stated that systems thinking reveals how all interconnected parties can solve problems. Even though systems are different parties “they are connected not just in one direction, but in many directions simultaneously” (p.5). A system must contain an element, interconnection and a function or purpose. A system can fit within another system and the same with the purpose. This study addresses systems thinking as one system with the three concepts, identifying the institutional obstacles that probation officers, parole agents, and offenders face. Illinois governmental regulators, prison management, judges, and IDOC are the elements that work in conjunction with the interconnection, creating the basis for the purpose of this study.

To solve or address the research problem, the literature review included factors contributing to institutional obstacles, key stakeholders, and prison management as they relate to the problem of recidivism, as well as prison labor and mass incarceration. Recidivism and the additional factors that contribute to it may be explained by systems thinking an approach that allows stakeholders to examine the institutional obstacles effects have on probation officers, parole agents, and their

clients. Some clients recidivate because of the lack of rehabilitation and cognitive-behavioral-based programs. Cognitive-behavioral-based programs focus on cognitive development by allowing offenders' mindsets to change. "Criminal thinking and criminal behavior are linked, and therefore, changing one's criminal thoughts is the first step to changing one's criminal behavior" (Antonio & Crossett, 2017, p. 515).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

My search of databases included EBSCOHost, ProQuest Central, Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, Social INDEX, PsycINFO, Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy, multidisciplinary databases, and government reports. There was not a large amount of literature addressing institutional obstacles to reducing recidivism in Illinois from the probation officer or parole agents' perspective. I accessed timely data from government reports and other sources included reliable books and personal communication. These are the keywords used in this study independently, or in combination with other words in my search of databases. The search included: *systems thinking, institutional obstacles, mass incarceration, jail, prison, race, ethnicity, recidivism, reentry, probation officers, parole agents, male African Americans, Blacks, Hispanic males, Whites, Caucasian males, offenders, repeated offenders, ex-offenders, juvenile, justice, criminal justice, criminal behavior, youth offenders, stakeholders, key stakeholders, decision-making, wholeness, three concepts, elements, interconnection, function, purpose, Chicago, Illinois, criminal justice system, Watchdog groups, Target Area Development, rehabilitation, cognitive-behavioral therapy, cognitive-behavioral-based programs, reintegration, qualitative, descriptive*

*phenomenological study, Illinois state governmental regulators, Illinois judges, prison management, disparities, reentry, family unification, communities, and neighborhoods.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

Systems thinking offers a lens for the complex problem. Meadows (2008) said that a system must have three concepts: (a) elements, (b) interconnection, and (c) the function, or purpose. “The elements of a system are often the easiest part to be noticed, because many of them are visible, tangible things. The system may exhibit adaptive, dynamic goal-seeking, self-preserving, and sometimes evolutionary behavior” (p.12). The foundation of a system is the stock because you can see, feel, and measure it at any time. The stock can change as a result of information that commands the direction of the flow (Meadows (2008). Stocks and flows are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. (Meadows, 2008). “The interconnection in systems operates through the flow of information that holds systems together and plays a great role in determining how they operate” (Meadows, 2008, p.14). “The Purpose is the least obvious part of the system, its function, or purpose is often the most crucial determinant of the systems’ behaviors” (Meadows, 2008, p.16). All three concepts influence each other. The stakeholders are the element in this study, because they are the major part of the system that controls goal-seeking, evaluates behavior, and sets the foundations, the policies for probation officers, parole agents, and ex-offenders. Probation officers, parole agents, and ex-offenders are the interconnections, because all three parties operate on the information given from stakeholders, and are responsible for producing the purpose. The purpose is having the probation officers, and the parole agents

manage offenders to make sure they have a successful reentry, thereby minimizing the possibility of recidivism. Conversely, Meadows (2008) noted that the “purpose is not necessarily spoken, written, or expressed explicitly, except through the operation of the system” (p. 14). Using Meadows’ three concepts allows key stakeholders who make decisions for probation officers and parole agents to understand and solve the phenomenon by recognizing the interconnected relationships between different entities that affect the criminal justice system.

### **Systems Thinking Theory**

Meadows (2008) stated that a system is a set of interconnected elements that produces its own pattern of behavior over time; it is coherently organized to achieve goals. Davis et al. (2015) identified systems thinking as a means to allow leadership to respond to growing complex issues facing organizations and allow leadership to move from the traditional bureaucratic model to an adaptive model. Systems thinking are diverse in its methods and are prominent in business management to solve stubborn and complex problems. According to Meadows (2008) systems need to be managed not only for productivity or stability but for resilience, the ability to recover from perturbation making sure these systems can restore and repair themselves. The loss of resilience takes some systems by surprise because the systems are paying attention to its own restorative power in enhancing the interconnection to accomplish its purpose.

Meissner and Ramasar (2015) have drawn a distinction between general systems theory and systems thinking, although they have similarities in their methods and approaches. To differentiate between the two, historical context will show how



systems thinking evolved from general systems theory. According to Bertalanffy (1972) systems approach (critical thinking), can be traced back to the sixth century B.C.E. with roots in the Socratic method of asking questions and incorporating an individual's presumptions in analyzing a chaotic world. Bertalanffy (1950) stated that the Greek philosopher Aristotle "learned to consider or find, in the experienced world, an order or kosmos which was intelligible and, hence, controllable by thought and rational action" (p. 407). Aristotle's world view of holistic and teleological notions indicated that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, which is the basic system problem. During Western science, his teleology was eliminated. Hence, the problems of the order and goal-directedness of the living system were ineffective and were not resolved (Bertalanffy, 1950).

Bertalanffy (1969) indicated that in the late 1920s as a scientist, he was involved in the mechanism-vitalism controversy of biology. His mechanistic procedures were to resolve the living organism into parts and partial processes, with the organism of an aggregate of cells as a system. He saw that a systems approach was necessary to maximize efficiency with minimal cost for complex networks and interactions. Bertalanffy continued the study of systems and used the term general system theory. Bertalanffy noted that general system theory "derived, from a general definition of a system as a complex of interacting components, concepts characteristic of organized wholes such as interaction, sum, mechanization, centralization, competition, finality, etc., and to apply them to concrete phenomena" (p. 91).

Bertalanffy has been credited with the term general system theory (Cabrera et al., 2015; Hobbs, 2015; Meissner & Ramasar, 2015).

The purpose of systems thinking was to improve the way systems worked (Richmond, 1994). This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study uses systems thinking to align with the scope of the research. Systems thinking is a tool used to interact with organizations, people, places, or things to achieve goals, gain a greater understanding of something defined by crucial factors, and develop viable solutions (Neumann, 2013). Senge (2006) stated that systems thinking is the main core of the development of organizational learning and creates desired results when there is a collective mindset. Senge said that mastering systems thinking means giving up the assumption that an individual is responsible for his or her problems. Instead, everyone shares the responsibility for problems generated by a system.

Cabrera et al. (2015) described structural constraints and systems thinking as looking at the element of relationships, the action, and reaction that enable individuals to appreciate and observe the consequences of their actions. Understanding relationships bring individuals to an awareness that harming others is harming themselves because individuals are part of a larger whole, with complex issues of interdependence that illustrate the pathology of relationship, action, and reaction. Understanding particular actions and the subsequent reaction proves to be a primary benefit of systems thinking.

Meadows (2008) asserted that systems are inherent in every facet of life because of the interconnection of things, organizations, or individuals. Organisms as

tiny as the cell rely upon the interconnection and interdependence of other living things. Relationship and interactions between organizations or individuals can at times prove complicated or problematic; the most visible part of the problem usually not found to be the essential elements of the system or problem.

Flood (2010) identified systems thinking as a thinking process that allows people to see the wholeness of our existence. It makes humans aware that we are not capable of knowing the whole, but it allows us to know in parts, and we do not know everything completely. He believes that the world is made up of systems that are emergent and interrelated through a phenomenon when observing a whole picture. Systems approach models are research tools used to explain a social phenomenon that helps inform and suggest which action to take to achieve a solution. Mathematically speaking, the whole is equal to the sum of its parts. Flood believes that a greater understanding of the parts increases our ability to solve problems when attempting to examine systems while looking at the big picture.

Checkland, 1985 (as cited in Flood, 2010, p. 273) identified the general model of the organized use of rational thought has helped management to understand the application of systems thinking by using the three elements, (a) It linked ideas in a framework. (b) It gives an approach of applying ideas in a methodology. (c) It identifies each application. Using these three elements will help managers think about systems from a perspective of parts to a whole, increasing the manager's ability to pinpoint and effectively solve problems. Meadows (2008) systems thinking theory helps identify systems using the three concepts, the elements, the interconnection, and

the function or the purpose. Meadows use a results-oriented approach that involves problem identification, analysis, and methodology and goal attainment. Meadows' understanding of systems thinking creates opportunities for managers to go beyond the surface in efforts to discover the less visible part of the problem. Using systems thinking will help key stakeholders who are Illinois government regulators, prison management, and Illinois judges to use the elements of systems thinking to look at the general problem facing probation officers and parole agents. Key stakeholders lack an understanding of institutional obstacles facing probation officers and parole agents that interfere with their ability in managing offenders to reduce recidivism in Illinois. Once key stakeholders identify institutional obstacles, they can use their influence to make informed decisions on policies to help probation officers and parole agents manage offenders to reduce recidivism.

Senge (2006) identified systems thinking as a discipline, where American managers who share a vision can look at systems from a perspective of the whole picture, to see every entity involved. Systems thinking is a shift of the mind observing interrelationships that pinpoint cause and effect, revealing the understanding of the whole process of change, and not merely a small part of the process. Senge (2006) stated that when complex situations arise, it is easy to refrain from taking on the responsibility of complex problems because individuals do not see how all parts work together. Literature on systems thinking indicates that stakeholders' managerial decisions often involve more stakeholders and produce unfairness in society (Valentinov, 2012). Neumann (2013) noted that it is easy to call anything that is

difficult complex, but that there is a difference between complex problems and complicated problems. Meadows (2008) stated that systems thinking reveals how all interconnected parties can solve problems.

Neumann (2013) explained complex problems are understandable given sufficient knowledge, and time with the right tools to predict the solutions, however, complicated problems are not entirely understood, and the behavior involved in them is not precisely predictable. He identified two rationales of human behavior, some people acting on rational thoughts, others on feelings. Feelings produce behavior that can be placed in two groups: integrating into the environment and adapting to changes, and according to Neumann (2013) change starts with leadership implementing both groups, integrating into the environment and adapting to changes.

Langstrand (2016) have established that systems thinking is a vital part in the field of management, it is the missing link in a successful organizational change process, and the profound effect on organizational behavior, which includes private and public organizations. However, there is a distinction between political leadership in public organizations, and administrative or bureaucratic leadership that makes it difficult to implement change with complex problems (Kuipers et al. (2014). The critical factor within the process of organizational change is leadership making change effective and allowing employees to take part in the transition. The bureaucratic leadership needs complete involvement from politicians and top management for transformation or reform to happen within an institution (Kuipers et al., 2014). Top management effects the success of change especially when transformation comes from

the top, it gives managerial support to help employees accept change (Kuipers et al., 2014; Xiaojun, (2017)). This type of managerial support will help probation officers and parole agents help manage offenders to transform their behavior to reduce recidivism.

**Creating a knowledge-sharing environment.** The knowledge-sharing environment gives each system a sense of belonging with a task driven process of complex problems and shares the same common goals. Systems thinking encompasses different patterns of interactions that are connected and influence each system (Senge, 2006). Senge (2006) has five disciplines of the learning organization, which are personal mastery, mental models, shared visions, and team learning. He declared that systems thinking is the fifth discipline of the learning organization, where individuals continue to develop their capacity to learn how to learn together for desirable results.

Senge (2006) noted that organizations that create an environment for employees to share their knowledge and experiences help promote success among workers when addressing two business skills: skills of reflection and skills of inquiry. Reflections skills allow one to think about the impact mental models have on management's performance. The inquiry skill questions the effectiveness of relationships on how well individuals work with others in stressful situations (Senge, 2006). Employees' skills can make or break a company, or their skills can increase productivity, profitability, and allow the company to achieve its goals.

Wang et al. (2014) noted that organizations must interact with employees to gain a deeper understanding of problems facing organizations through employees'

knowledge sharing, and the knowledge shapes the core of agencies' values. Senge (2006) argued that most organizations do not encourage the growth of their people to help build strong learning organizations, which afflicts organizations with complex problems. Senge (2006) stated that it is human nature to blame someone for complex problems. One reason why organizations' problems are not resolved is that their leaders isolate themselves from the knowledge that would identify their organizations as systems that can interconnect with other systems to receive feedback about complex problem (Senge, 2006).

Organizations are challenged to integrate new tools such as systems thinking, which would allow the criminal justice system, Illinois governmental regulators, and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to receive insight on intuitional obstacles that affect probation officers and parole agents' efforts toward reducing recidivism among offenders. Wang et al. (2014) stated that organizational decisions are dictated by social and cultural factors that incorporate the laws and rules of the organizations. Wang et al. (2014) noted that a considerable amount of research on social networks, and knowledge sharing in an integrated part of an organization has a competitive advantage.

**Management and knowledge sharing.** Massingham (2015) noted that knowledge is essential to humans' actions, especially in an organizational setting. The systems thinking perspective works well in private or large public agencies with knowledge sharing in distributing knowledge between organizational entities through knowledge management, which is a useful tool (Massingham, 2015). Management

must take charge of the movement of available knowledge from individuals who are within the organization. Senge (2006) stated that organizations learn from their employees who learn, and that without employees learning, the organization will suffer loss. Some organizational leaders are rethinking the concepts of applying systems thinking and knowledge sharing to their organization.

The access to knowledge is at our fingertip; technology has made information accessible, especially experienced knowledge. Xiaojun (2017) noted leadership that does not welcome knowledge from its employees and does not apply knowledge management fails to deliver expected benefits and achieve the initial set goals of the organization. Leadership plays an important role in the success and failure of an organization through knowledge, therefore obtaining knowledge from individuals within an organization can help define complex problems. Dalkir, (2005) made a statement that allows organization to take advantage of knowledge in different forms, people have more and faster access to information than at any time in history. He used the analogy of a climate-controlled building to discuss organizational cultures and how knowledge changes with variables within an organization. The thermostat has one setting throughout the building, and the climate control work well in some parts of the building. The climate control is not efficient in other areas. The independent factors that contribute to a change in the climates, maybe the number of individuals in the room, plants, and the arrangement of furniture, have an effect on the outcome. The same applies to the criminal justice system, stakeholders, and Illinois Department of Corrections with various factors contributes to recidivism.



Systems thinking aids leadership who are stakeholders to become resilient. Meadows defined resilience, for the purpose of systems thinking as the ability to bounce back into position after being stretched with complex challenges. Meadows (2008) noted that systems thinking involves more than the knowledge of one entity, it takes all entities to define solutions, and one organization cannot take the blame for complications. Meadows stated that a system could be nested within itself. The Illinois governmental regulators, the state criminal justice system, and the Illinois Department of Corrections are all systems that have separate goals, but they are nested together for some shared goals such as reducing recidivism (see Figure 1).

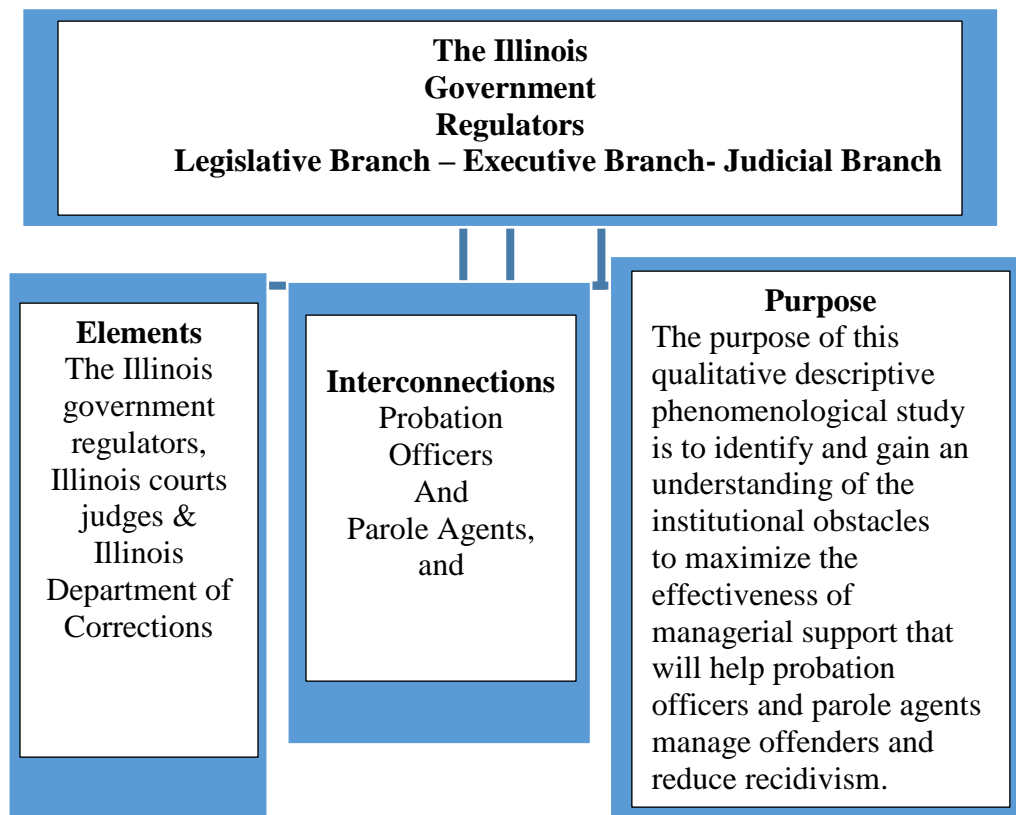


Figure 1. Concept maps

The Illinois government regulators are divided into three branches, Legislative Branch, Executive Branch, and the Judicial Branch. In this study, I used the words the Illinois government regulators, which are part of the elements along with the Illinois court judges, and the Illinois Department of Corrections. The interconnections, the interconnections are the probation officers, parole agents, and offenders. The information that comes from Illinois government regulators, the Illinois court judges, and the Illinois Department of Corrections goes to the probation officers, parole agents and offenders, which determines how they operate. The purpose is to produce the outcome or the behavior that the elements are expecting.

**Systems thinking and stakeholder relationships.** Meadows (2008) noted that a stock is the foundation of systems, and it changes over time through the inflows, which are the results of stock outflows. The changes that are produced over time from the systems' history correspond to the stock (Meadows, (2008). Even though Illinois governmental regulators, the criminal justice system, and the department of corrections are all systems, or stock, they are interrelated to each other. These key stakeholders' systems produce effects that have an impact on probation officers, parole agents and their clients who are offenders or ex-offenders. Each system has the same purpose, and that is reducing recidivism. The key stakeholders are the stock who are the Illinois governmental regulators, the criminal justice system, that includes judges and the Illinois Department of Corrections, have made policies, laws, and regulations, which are the inflows. The outflow includes the interference of institution obstacles

and how it affects probation officers and parole agents' ability to manage offenders and reducing recidivism (Figure 2).

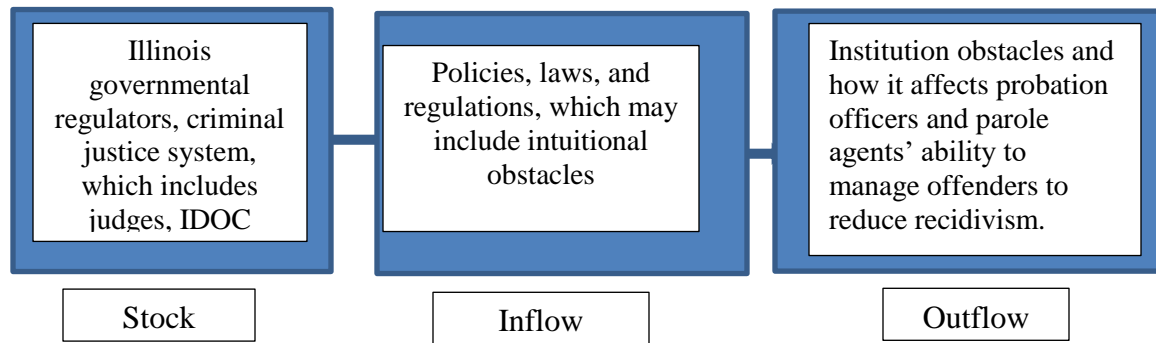


Figure 2. Systems relationships from stakeholders

Meadows (2008) expressed that stock grows, declines or stays within a certain range regardless of its environment. The stock is the behavior pattern that persists over time from a system that produces feedback. An example of how the stock grows, declines, or stays is seen in Figure 2 and explained here. The Illinois governmental regulators and the state criminal justice system, which includes judges and the Illinois Department of Corrections, are the stock; they are all interconnected to serve the public. Some of the ways they serve are by creating laws and policies, which are the inflows; by maintaining public safety; and by allowing probation officers and parole agents to manage offenders to become productive citizens and to reduce recidivism, these are the outflows. In observing the flows from the stock of key stakeholders, there is an indication that the stock needs to change the inflow, which is the need for policy reforms.

The ineffective results from the outflow, represent the probation officers and parole agents are managing offenders with a high incidence of recidivism in Illinois is

a sign ineffectiveness. A feedback loop develops when changes in the stock are being affected by the flows regardless whether in or out as illustrated in Figure 3. The feedback loop identifies where an adjustment or a change is needed (Meadows, 2008). Meadows (2008) stated that systems need to be managed for productivity, stability, resilience, and the ability to recover to restore or repair themselves (Figure 3).

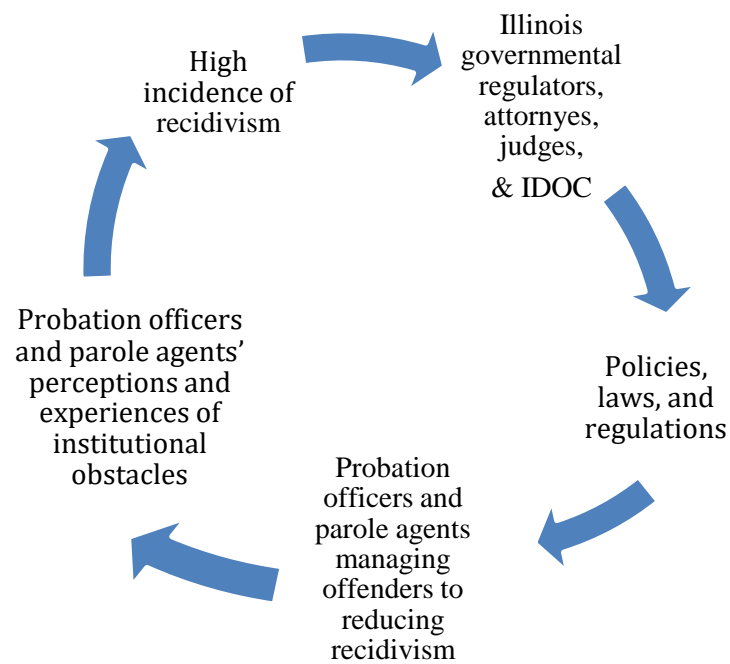


Figure 3. Feedback Process

Senge (2006) identified systems thinking as having variables that are organized in a circle or loop of cause-effect relationships, which he calls a feedback process. The feedback process is a reciprocal flow of influence, meaning that part of a system do not exert influence in only one direction but rather exchanges influences in multiple directions (Senge, 2006). The Illinois government regulators, criminal justice system, attorneys, judges, and department of corrections operate in a continuous process

involving policies, laws, and regulations, which in turn affect probation officers and parole agents' ability manage offenders in ways that will reduce recidivism.

Collaboration provides opportunities for two or more agencies to merge resources and accomplish levels of enforcement that no single agency would be able to achieve separately (Jain, 2015). Within the past 15 years, scholars, legislators, and criminal justice practitioners have agreed that real reform may only come if leaders consider criminal justice as a system (Oleson, 2014). The holistic view of the criminal justice system has proven to be ineffective when organizations policies have a negative impact on the recidivism rate, and agencies lack commitment to address issues (Oleson, 2014).

Flood (2010) stated that systems thinking is based on the concept that everything is interconnected, which in turn helps one see the whole picture. Flood considered systems thinking as looking at a whole picture as a single phenomenon to help solve problems, and adding that "natural sciences assume that all phenomena are real systems" (p. 270), that are interrelated. Systems thinking allows managers to observe other entities with the same problem, which interconnect institutions as parts of a whole picture (Flood, 2010).

**Change theories.** Systems thinking provides a framework to see how to make effective change within a variety of methods and approaches (Senge, 2006). Change may be obstacles depending on how the problem is resolved. Meadows (2008) noted that when the root cause of the problem is not addressed and solved, it will reappear if a change is not presented. Lewin (1947) argued that change is inevitable; change

theory identifies three chronological stages of change: unfreeze, change, and refreeze. Lewin noted that for an organization to change, it must challenge the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that define it. In the unfreeze phase, there is recognition that change is needed, and the current processes of systems are not working. Senge (2006) believed that change comes when managers take hold of the organization's vision and include others in building a learning environment when working together. As key stakeholders produce laws such as policies and regulations they can address the institutional obstacles indicated from the probation officers and parole agents' perceptions as some of the root causes that help increase the high incidence of recidivism in Illinois with change management.

**Change management.** Kuipers et al. (2014) stated that change management is a crucial part of public administration and the private sector because change starts with management. Ungureanu (2014) noted that change management requires understanding information, showing empathy, encouraging creativity, and having the ability to apply knowledge from theoretical models. There are three areas of change in public organizations: first, sub-system (structures areas that connect to the organization), second, organization (transformational within the organization, the whole system change), and third sector (specific boundaries within the organization (Kuipers et al., 2014). Applying change in this study with key stakeholders begins with organization strategies and the structure that allows stakeholders to observe the needs of probation officers and parole agents as well as their clients. In observing the

structure, stakeholders may identify how institutional obstacles have affected recidivism in Illinois.

**Contingency theory and change.** Battilana and Casciaro (2012) stated that organizational change must be well thought-out, and leadership should look at the political environment of the organization. Kuipers et al. (2014) noted a distinction among political leadership in a public organization on the one hand, and private leadership in private organizations on the other, that they address issues differently. In a system of government, leadership needs involvement from politicians and top management in private collaborators for transformation or reform to happen (Kuipers et al., 2014). When transformation comes from the top down, it gives managerial support to help probation officers and parole agents manage offenders to transform their behavior. Lutzell, Johnson, Clear, Latessa, and Risdon (2012) disclosed that policymakers should have the same expectation of accountability for their behaviors as offenders are accountable for their behaviors.

Oleson (2014) cited studies by Austin and Irwin, Travis, Clear, Drucker, and the Pew Center on the States, to show that the U. S. criminal justice policy is ineffective in rehabilitating offenders, which causes high recidivism rates. Some key stakeholders are not knowledgeable about other functions involved with long-term effects from their decisions. There are a few stakeholders who collaborated to advance their knowledge on the topic, and some are only concerned about their objectives (Oleson, 2014). Battilana and Casciaro (2012) developed contingency theory for the

structure of organization networks and adopting changes, which are a part of working with teams to produce solutions for organizational problems.

Contingency theory is a tool that key stakeholders to develop programs from the information of probation officers and parole agents to help offender's live productive lives. The theory applies to management leading effectively to solve problems, and there is no wrong or right way to manage. Managers must understand their influences and human values (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). When changes take place, individual training is required, and roles revamped. Without this process, organizations develop barriers that create other problems (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Systems thinking presents a change in a holistic and methodical approach to help with complex problems.

Davis, Dent, and Wharff (2015) used systems thinking as a methodical approach for community colleges in educating undergraduate students. Due to the increase in complexity with high demand of skilled labor forces in the marketplace and technological innovation globally. Davis et al. (2015) noted that systems thinking offers leaders insight on growing organizational complexities, and allow leadership to adapt model best suited for today's organizations, when looking at them as a whole and not independently. Davis et al. (2015) stated that the field of healthcare adopted systems thinking to examine and improve organizational performance. Higher education has embraced systems thinking to frame complex problems as patterns with interconnection to get at underlying causality.



Davis et al. (2015) study showed stakeholders demanded accountability from community college leaders to manage and adapt to a changing demographic of students with new models of leadership in a complex environment. Systems thinking provided valuable information to community college leaders, by allowing organizational interventions and experiencing creative innovative systems with a new generation of students that lack the support from the college. Davis et al.'s example viewed systems as wholes rather than individual elements, which allowed leadership to observe the interconnections and interdependencies of all components within systems by identifying the underling patterns of the problems. In this study, systems thinking functions in the same manner, identifying the underlying problems by looking at Illinois governmental regulators, prosecuting attorneys, judges, and the IDOC to look for patterns that contributes to recidivism. The intent was to examine how institutional obstacles impacted recidivism rates and their effect on probation officers, parole agents, and offenders.

### **Institutional Obstacles and Management Decisions**

It is problematic for probation officers and parole agents (community supervision personnel) to achieve successful outcomes with offenders in rehabilitation and social support to reduce recidivism (Lutzel et al., 2012). Using the qualitative descriptive phenomenological method to study the lived work experiences of the perspectives of Illinois probation officers and parole agents concerning institutional obstacles will allow a thorough understanding of factors that hinder them from managing offenders effectively and reducing recidivism. Lutzel et al. (2012) argued

that we live in an era in which supervision personnel are responsible for resolving the conflict between the political emphasis on punitive approaches and the goal of effectively achieving offenders' reintegration through a complex process.

Lutzel et al. (2012) stated that community supervision personnel face barriers that affect their workers' productivity. Community supervision personnel, including probation officers and parole agents, are often torn between basing decisions recommendations on their experiences, on the one hand, and responding to political strategies that are traditionally based on punishment over rehabilitation, on the other (Lutzel et al., 2012). Meadows's three concepts for systems thinking is a lens for key stakeholders to examine the interconnections of the Criminal Justice Systems as a whole. The relationship each department has affected the outcome of the complex problem of the high incidents of recidivism, and the effects institutional obstacles have on probation officers parole agents, and offenders. Identifying institutional obstacles from probation officers and parole agents' perceptions may maximize the effectiveness of managerial support among stakeholders to remove obstacles to reducing recidivism, and fill a gap in the literature.

Lewis, Lewis, and Garby (2013) showed that within the past two decades, from the 1990s through the 2000s, community supervision personnel have become increasingly vulnerable to traumatic experiences in communities they serve. Lewis et al. (2013) noted that probation officers' jobs have changed in the 21 century from monitoring offenders' compliance with court orders to becoming more personally involved in changing the offenders' behavioral process. Lewis et al. noted that change

in officers' roles includes close relationships with offenders' loved ones. The revised role "exposed the officers to varying aspects of trauma as they read police reports, interview victims, and assess offenders' criminal and social histories" (p. 68). Systems thinking is a platform that allows leaders to respond to complex problems by identifying other leaders with the same problems who are the decision-makers to help resolve problems. (Davis et al. (2015).

Community supervision is not working effectively because each probation and parole officer's caseload consists of hundreds of offenders, and it is difficult to enforce each offenders' various supervision conditions. The community supervision personnel involvement is vital in decision-making that affects their ability to serve ex-offenders and does not include sufficient time to keep up with the workload. This creates unnecessary stress of uncertain retirement benefits, ineffective mileage reimbursement, and the lack of political and managerial support. Probation officers and parole agents have expressed a desire for supportive programs for offenders that emphasized rehabilitation approaches that reinforce positive behavior from offenders because they are vital to the success of the offender and their families (Miller et al., 2014; Sabet et al., 2013).

Another issue, probation officers, and parole agents handle the surveillance and monitoring offenders in hostile conditions by threatening offenders with incarceration to deter recidivism (Miller et al., 2014). Probation officers and parole agents are limited in their resources and communication in the criminal appellate process with offenders' regardless of whether there is proof that the offender is innocent (Webb, 2015). Scholars have investigated 200 appellate cases of convicted persons who were

exonerated, and found that the “justice system is structured to ignore uncertainty about the factual culpability of a person who has been convicted, but to presume uncertainty about the factual innocence of a person who has been acquitted” (Webb, 2015, p. 1900). Webb (2015) noted that probation officers and parole agents are under enormous amount of stress when it comes to offenders who are seeking wrongful conviction claims, and the lack of the availability for offenders to process claims.

### **Stakeholders of This Study**

In the probation and parole systems some stakeholders are decision-makers of the institutional obstacles. Stakeholders are individuals or groups who have a vested interest in organizational decisions (Spitzeck & Erik, 2010). The two main components of stakeholders’ governances are (a) power and (b) the capacity with isolated issues that affects the operation of the decision process. Scholars have different theories on who stakeholders are, and what their influences are (Mahasi et al., 2013). There are five stakeholder groups considered in this study: Illinois governmental regulators, prison management, Illinois judges, probation officers and parole agents, and offenders. Within the stakeholders’ groups are external and internal stakeholders. The external stakeholders of IDOC include Illinois governmental regulators, criminal lawyers, prosecutors, the Juvenile Justice System, Council of State Governments Justice Center, Vera Institute of Justice, and the Parole Reform Program.

Other stakeholders are watchdog groups like the Target Area Development, John Howard Association of Illinois, and the Illinois Association for Criminal Justice (IACJ) established in Chicago, Illinois. The Pew Center and the Sentencing Project

Research, advocacy for reform, are in Washington, D.C. The Illinois Department of Correction's mission is to enhance public safety and have supervised correctional facilities for individuals who have violated the public with criminal offenses (IDOC, 2010). The offenders have constitutional rights to have effective programs to help them develop successfully and reenter communities upon release. The mission statement places the responsibility upon prison management to improve offenders' successful reentry.

### **Prison Management**

Prison management lack programs that are effective to reduce institutional obstacles and recidivism. Eisenberg (2016) stated that prison management had founded policy failures with mass incarceration, but some of those who staff, manage, and those who operated prisons have resisted the prison reform efforts, especially those who operate private prisons. Due to the large number of inmates, state and federal government have contracted with private prisons. The private prison industry grew over 1600% between 1990 and 2009 (Eisenberg, 2016).

Probation and parole officers have seen policy failures with the administrative procedures for violations, and have seen a significant number of offenders sent back to prison on violations than those who have committed new crimes (Eisenberg, 2016). Eisenberg (2016) indicated that stakeholders who are judges, policymakers, and prosecutors might influence the institutional design reforms, and have recognized the warning sign to see the need to favor the decarceration era of prison reform. The

success of prison reform efforts may depend on changing financial incentives and the prison industry cultural (Eisenberg, 2016).

The Illinois Department of Corrections has worked with parole agents to maintain public safety and help parolees to have a successful re-entry into society (IDOC, 2015). The U.S. government has allowed each state to facilitate their own correctional facilities. The U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder's speech to the public, he asserted that the state or local levels of prison management are best qualified to address their own prisons issues (Holder proposes changes, 2013).

#### **Institutional Obstacles Related to Policies, Procedures, and Positions.**

Scholars and policy makers agree that institutional obstacles enable the productivity of institution from being effective, and barriers bring on complex issues (Mathias et al., 2015). Mathias et al. (2015) stated that when leadership identifies and remove barriers, leadership can effectively improve the direction of social policies. Rubach, Bradley III, and Kluck (2015) noted that institutional obstacles prevent the productivity of entrepreneurs and government agencies. Rubach et al. (2015) identified nine factors that affect productivity among entrepreneurs and government agencies. The factors are, entrepreneurial finance, government policy, government entrepreneurship programs, entrepreneurship education, research and development transfers, commercial and legal infrastructure, market dynamics, market openness, and physical infrastructure (p. 130).

The U.S government has struggled with high correctional budgets, public finance, government policy, government correctional programs, resources for development and

rehabilitation (Beerli & Navot, 2014). Eisenberg (2016) noted that each branch of government is trying to reduce the prison population and identify obstacles that affect policy reform. The U.S. government is under scrutiny from the prison industry stakeholders with political voices to resist efforts of closing prisons and reform sentences.

In Illinois, the prison industry opposed ex-governor Quinn's order to close Tamms Supermax prison in Illinois (Eisenberg, 2016). The influences of prison industry stakeholders sometimes overlap the interests of businesses, community groups, legislators, other government workers and institutional obstacles that effect probation officers and parole agents' clients in reducing recidivism (Eisenberg, 2016). Probation and parole officers' policies, procedures, and positions are monitored regularly. Probation and Parole Bureau Standard Operating Procedures (PAPBSOP), (2012) noted that Probation and Parole Bureau Supervisory Staff conduct audits on active offenders' cases regularly to ensure that employee case management performance comply with the standards, procedures and statutory requirements. The supervisors audit the offender files on a quarterly basis with a minimum of two case records per officer per quarter with a minimum of eight annually (para. 4). Officers who have a permanent status and are new to their position, have a minimum of four case records per quarter per officer. The same applies to probationary officers (PAPBSOP, 2012).

Probation officers and parole agents have somewhat different policies, procedures, and positions, but in some states probation and parole officers do the same

job. In 2015, Illinois Courts Administrative Office Divisions - Probation Services (ICAODPS) established several workgroups, and a special focus group that included probation and court services officers, and supervisors along with juvenile detention personnel to design and implement training events to receive knowledge and feedback on programming, policies, standards development, and other initiatives (ICAODPS) (2015). Part of the probation mission of the Circuit Court of Cook County is to:

Depend not only upon one another but upon vital partnerships with the judiciary, neighborhoods, and other criminal justice agencies and service provider -our responsibility it to educate these groups about probation, to learn from them and involve them in our activities.

(CCOCC, 2017, para. 2).

The Illinois Department of Corrections Parole Police Compliance Checks, (IDOCPPCC, 2017) noted that parole agents address public safety and work with the community on numerous of programs to help inmate's reentry process to reduce recidivism.

Parole provides a series of resources and graduated sanctions in a community based setting to reduce recidivism. Part of this program involves the use of Halfway Back residential programs, Day Reporting Centers, localized drug assessments and counseling referrals and an extensive network of job training and placement programs (IDOCPPCC, 2017, para. 1).



Mass incarceration is the most striking policy failure for the past forty years and with the new decarceration era, identifying institutional obstacles may help remove barriers and create policy reform to help probation officers and parole agents reduce recidivism. Eisenberg (2016) noted that first crucial step is having stakeholders accomplish the goal of prison reform.

### **Mass Incarceration and Recidivism**

Understanding how systems thinking relates to who offenders or prisoners are, along with probation officers and parole agents are essential in understanding why the obstacles affect recidivism. Mass incarceration has a direct effect on recidivism in the U.S. with recidivism rate ranging from 60% to 72% within three years of inmates being released from prison (Jung et al., 2010; Reisig et al., 2007). Over 95% of inmates incarcerated were serving more than one-year sentences (Martin, 2011).

Western and Muller (2013) credited Garland with having coined the phrase mass imprisonment, which had two meanings: a pervasively large number incarcerated that surpassed the historical normal rate of incarceration, and incarceration that was extensive in the sentencing of individuals from one social group. The Federal Sentencing Guidelines increased inmates' prison terms, which contributed to the mass imprisonment, and these factors have affected parole agents' job (Western & Muller, 2013). Clear and Austin (2009) stated that mass incarceration was an important element in the United States that needs urgent attention. Starr (2014) noted that incarceration and recidivism may be reduced by the information judges have on the effect of the defendants' criminal backgrounds, and the defendants' risks of

recidivating with the sentencing decisions, which falls into the hands of probation officers and parole agents.

Clear and Austin (2009) argued that policymakers historically have not spent sufficient time proposing policies for incarcerated offenders and their reentry into the community. When key stakeholders understand how institutional obstacles interfere with probation officers and parole agents' ability to manage offenders and help reduce recidivism the reentry process may be more efficient. Policymakers need to understand the incarceration experience and its effect on reentry and recidivism in order to produce effective laws (Jung, 2011). In 2013, the prison population under the care of probation officers and parole agents remained stable with a rate of 5.4% for probationers; the rate for parolees was 9% (USDJOPBJS, 2014).

Mackenzie et al. (1995) researched incarceration experiences in eight states between the years 1989 and 1991, Illinois, Texas, Georgia, Florida, New York Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Louisiana. They described a program in which offenders were under strict control and subject to hard labor, military drill, and physical training; they were also involved in a ceremony for recognition upon successful completions. The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a difference between those who completed the program and those who recidivated (Mackenzie et al., 1995). The findings of those inmates who were in the programs with the military drills were in Illinois, New York, and Louisiana, recidivism was lower for those who graduated from the military style boot camp.

Mackenzie et al. (1995) argued that this was because these states devoted three or more hours a day to therapeutic activities. Illinois' offenders had a 100% success rate in completing boot camp. Illinois had an effective boot camp, but incarcerated offenders who are on probation that have substance abuse issues were 53% more likely to recidivate after boot camp, and many states reduce their substance abuse program. Georgia boot camp offenders were less successful than any other states, however their parolees and probationers had a higher success rate in reducing recidivism than those in boot camp (Mackenzie et al., 1995). Inmates who participate in therapeutic communities programs are more likely to have successful reentry and a reduction in drug use, than those who are not exposed to therapeutic communities programs, and their recidivism rate is higher (Mitchell, MacKenzie, & Wilson, (2012).

Mackenzie et al. (1995) noted that legislators and prison management continue to implement programs for the boot camp population. The initial population consisted of young male offenders with nonviolent convictions who qualified for the program. Boot camp came into existence in 1938 for two reasons: first, to reduce recidivism among young men, and second, to develop a military discipline process that reduced incarceration and correctional state spending (Mackenzie et al., 1995).

**Prison population.** U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2018) noted that the United States prison population at the end of the year in 2016 was 6,613,500 with 1 in 38 adults under correctional supervision in the correctional population. Due to former President Obama concern for high rates of incarceration and recidivism the numbers are decreasing, he issued a

Presidential Memorandum on Federal Interagency Reentry to help ex-offenders with job opportunities (B. Obama, personal communication, September 20, 2016). The prison population numbers have decreased of about 62,700 less than at the beginning of 2016 (BJS, 2018).

Illinois probation offices and parole agents managed 153,400 offenders in 2014, and each year Illinois Department of Corrections release large numbers of parolees (IDOC, 2015). The manager of the IDOC Planning and Research Unit addressed the 2009 parole population by showing the total was 36,936 who exited prisons, 21,454 were African American, and 11,002 recidivated within 3 years with a recidivism rate of 51.3% among African American. The Caucasians who exited were 10,953, and 4,771 recidivate within three years with a recidivism rate of 43.6%; Hispanic who exited were 4,389, and 1,564 recidivated within 3 years with a recidivism rate of 35.6%. Others were 140 who exited and 54 recidivated within three years with a recidivism rate of 38.06% (S. Karr, personal communication, November 7, 2013). Revealing each year shows that Illinois probation offices and parole agents managed large numbers of offenders confirms the need for this study.

Illinois' recidivism rate has fluctuated, and addressing the purpose of this phenomenological study may give an understanding from probation officers and parole agents' work experiences of the institutional obstacles on why recidivism rate has fluctuated. In 2010, the recidivism rate was 51.1% compared to 47% in 2011 (IDOC, 2011). The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority [ICJIA] (2012) founded young African American men recidivate more than other races and Adult

Redeploy Illinois (ARI) have incentives to promote community - based programs. “Adult Redeploy Illinois is a state initiative to reduce the number of non-violent offenders entering prison. ARI provides financial incentives to local jurisdictions (counties or judicial circuits) to increase community-based supervision and services that are proven to reduce recidivism as safe alternatives to incarceration” (ICJIA, 2012, para 4.)

**Watchdog groups and research centers.** Watchdog groups and research centers are a form of stakeholders, and they are vital in addressing criminal justice in Illinois, because they bring some awareness to key stakeholders. The Pew Research Center on the State 2011 noted that leaders of community watchdog groups such as John Howard Association of Illinois, and Illinois Association for Criminal Justice are demanding answers from Illinois government and prison management regarding the high incarceration rate and the high number of those who recidivate. The Pew Research Center on the State (2011) study showed that 95% of U.S. inmates released returned to communities without employment, education, family support, or stable living conditions. The same individuals have an additional problem, a stigma that labels them as ex-offenders. The watchdog group Target Area Development used programs to deter crime, such as Ceasefire, a crime prevention program with a clergy base that hires ex-offenders to work with newly released ex-offenders to help establish them in the community with employment and housing.

Former Illinois Governor Pat Quinn and former Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections Salvador Tony Godinez worked toward solutions to reduce

the disparity in male African Americans' (versus other groups) recidivating within the department (IDOC, 2011). Probation officers' experiences are valuable when it comes to considering ways to reduce recidivism. The interpretation of probation officers' responses will help management examine institutional obstacles that limit probation officers' effectiveness in improving ex-offenders' rehabilitation success. Some studies in this literature review indicated that ex-offenders' rehabilitation programs are needed, and race has an effect on the decision-making process. Race and the lack of rehabilitation programs are major issues in the criminal justice system with offenders. The United States correctional facilities are disproportionate with African Americans and African Americans juveniles (Leiber et al., 2016). Some of the juveniles continue to recidivate adults. Miller and Khey (2017) indicated that one in every two offender recidivates, and when reentry programs are properly funded, it has a reduction on recidivism.

Leiber, Peck, and Beaudry-Cyr (2016) stated that recent studies revealed race and gender influence the decision-making process on court outcomes with minority youth in the juvenile justice system. Caucasian female probation officers were more lenient with Caucasian offenders, especially female offenders, and Caucasian male probation officers were more lenient with males than females (Leiber et al., 2016). Both Caucasian male and female probation officers, as well as Caucasian female judges, gave African American juvenile males' harsher sentences and African American juvenile females had more lenient sentences (Leiber et al., 2016). Caucasian

male judges gave African American juvenile males had harsher sentences and African Americans juvenile females more lenient sentences (Leiber et al., 2016).

Leiber et al. (2016) argued that African American males are racially profiled and viewed as aggressive, dangerous, sexual, and lacking responsibility. Leiber et al. noted that Caucasian and African American males and females were not viewed the same in the decision-making process for court cases even when the backgrounds, ages, and arrest frequencies were the same. Leiber et al. noted that a 20-year study from a juvenile court in Iowa examined how race and gender influenced case outcomes. The studies have shown that minority youth often experienced disadvantage outcome compared to Caucasians males; African American male youth are viewed as dangerous, less amenable to treatment and are referred to juvenile court (Leiber et al., 2016). The female offender may have more biases with circumstance than male offenders (Leiber et al., 2016).

In 2011, Illinois state government implemented a task force to work with judges and probation officers involved with the arraignment process to establish the reasons behind racial disparities and to find solutions to address the disparities (Jones, 2012). Judge Wilkinson, serving on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, acknowledged that there are discrepancies in criminal justice and law enforcement systems and that of African Americans are arrested four times more often for marijuana offense than Caucasians (Wilkinson, 2014).

**Examining the criminal justice system.** Wilkinson (2014) stated that scholars have focused on how the criminal justice system has failed and have ignored what is

good about the system. Wilkinson (2014) noted that a thriving society could not have great communities and safe environments for its people without a strong criminal justice system. The American criminal justice system intention was to protect the innocent and convict the guilty (Wilkinson, 2014).

Wilkinson (2014) stated that the problem of race and criminal justice would not be resolved with an overhaul of the system because the effects of the problems resonate deeply. “To cast ceaseless blame on America’s criminal justice system is to ignore the enormity of the problems it has been asked to solve” (p, 1170). The criminal justice system has not reached its goal of race neutrality, and it takes communities having constructive debates to help racial issues. The debates are with community supervision professionals such as police officers, probation officers and parole agents, and key stakeholders to make effective decisions on criminal justice reform (Wilkinson, 2014).

Opperman (2014) proposed that new paradigms must revise and change how inmates are engaged while in prison, by prison management to create real opportunity for rehabilitation and reduce the likelihood of recidivism after release. Milovanovic (2015) used the field of quantum holography with criminology, law, and transformative justice to change inmates’ treatment in a quest for viable solutions. Milovanovic used the term *restorative justice* in developing a holistic approach that integrates agency and structure for newly released offenders. Under the leadership of probation officers, probation agencies are requiring probation officers to help ex-offenders change their behavior by allowing inmates to become employed pre-and



post-release from prison as well as through cognitive development treatment (DeMichele, 2007).

**Mass incarceration and Education.** Curtis et al. (2013) noted that the more educated offenders are, the less likely they are to recidivate, and the more educated individuals are, the less likely they to be incarcerated. Scholars have argued education is one of the major factors in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western 2011; Linton, 2013; Western & Muller, 2013). Higher education and its relationship to recidivism have been a controversial topic for years with state and local governments. (Petersilia, 2003. as cited in Hall [Correctional Education and Recidivism: Toward a Tool for Reduction], 2015, (p. 6) said that “societal forces, such as lawmakers and politicians, often combat the goals of correctional education by arguing that inmates should not be given access to education when society is obligated to pay for their education.” This is known as the principle of least eligibility. Hall (2015) noted that correctional education is a direct link in reducing recidivism. Western and Wildeman (2009) found that individuals born in 1950 or earlier are less likely to be incarcerated, and those born later than 1950 have a 60 to 70% chance of being incarcerated. Education men were less likely to be incarcerated regardless of race. Caucasian men born during the 1950s were likely to have some form of education. Caucasian men 30 and older were twice as likely to have a bachelor’s degree than African American men, and African American men were 50% more likely to go into the military (Western & Wildeman, 2009).

In 1987, the financial commitment to education was \$33.3 billion; it increased to \$50.3 billion in 1997, in 2007 to \$82.7 billion, and by 2008 to \$88.8 billion (State Higher Education FFY, 2012). The lack of support for prison education increase recidivism (Linton, 2013). In 2009, 2010, and 2011, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) as well as 31 states, provided \$87.4 billion of funding to support higher education (State Higher Education FFY, 2012). In 2012, the funding decreased to \$81.2 billion, and many students suffered from a lack of funding (State Higher Education FFY, 2012).

Davis et al. (2013) stated that RAND Corporation researchers had reviewed the scientific literature on the effectiveness of correctional education programs and found that education and vocational training programs for inmates reduced recidivism. The finding revealed that \$1 investment in educating inmates reduce incarceration cost by \$4 to \$5 within the first three years of inmates release, and inmates who participate in the program reduces their change of recidivism by 43% (Davis et al., 2013). Educating inmates cost \$1,400 to \$1,744 per inmate, whereas every inmate that recidivated cost taxpayers \$8,700 to \$9,700 (Davis, 2013). The program that was most common and effective for inmates were the general education development (GED) certificate, which is equivalent to a high school diploma (Davis et al., 2013). In 2015, the state of Illinois educational appropriations per student have grown to 32.5 % more than any other state, and Illinois institutions have declined to 12.3% per student, driven by the state action to address underfunding state pension programs (State Higher Education FFY,

2015). Illinois government has not produce a fiscal year budget for July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016, and therefore, higher education has not received any state funding.

**OVAE and prison education funding.** Education program in prison is a driving force for the successful reentry of ex-offenders into communities (Linton, 2014). The education program is the foundation of the federal Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) and has been an effective solution for prison management for the past 10 years. The OVAE released a program in August 2013 to correctional facilities called the Reentry Education Model Supporting Education and Career Advancement for Low-Skilled Individuals in Corrections. Linton (2014) stated that the original reentry process for ex-offenders (returning citizen) has three phases. The first phase is preparing inmates for their release from prison, the second phase is transitioning of inmates leaving prison and returning to the community, and the third phase is establishing inmates with social services throughout the communities. Linton (2014) argued that these three phases lack support and training. Several scholars' research revealed many inmates were unable to complete an educational program before releasing into communities due to limited slots for education. The government has limited funds for educational programs in prisons. The OVAE monitored the President's 2014 proposed a budget and looked for an additional \$3 million investment to keep OVAE programs in correctional facilities (Linton, 2014).

Curtis et al. (2013) studied two medium-security prisons in central Alabama and examined 155 prisoners' vocational education and their work history to see if there were correlations with recidivism. The inmates' education and employment history had

a profound effect on prisoners in the reentry process. Professionals in the area of rehabilitation have limited their attention to inmates, and the reentry process, but the increased numbers have made professionals turn their attention to observe the prison population, which has increased by 700% (Curtis et al., 2013).

Curtis et al. (2013) stated that the lack of funds for training and education would cause inmates to recidivism and threaten public safety of which, both would remain an epidemic for the United States. The corrections spending went from \$9 billion in 1982 to \$44 billion in 1997, to \$65 billion in 2005 adding up to a 722% increase over a 23-year span. Curtis et al. found that 9 out of 10 prisoners and ex-offenders specified that their chances of being productive were limited due to the lack of appropriate programs that were in place. Without vocational training, ex-offenders are candidates to recidivate without vocational training.

**Beyond vocational training for inmates.** McKinney and Cotronea (2011) studied correctional education program using self-determination theory and found that the primary objective for education and professional practices has been to transition ex-offenders back into their communities. There were two elements in the study to identify inmates' learning behavior: self-determination theory to motivate students in their prison setting to learn course materials, and building individual autonomy in learning. The education and professional practices integrated lessons managing money, budgeting, nutrition/eating habits, and locating/maintaining housing.

The goal of the educational study was to teach ex-offenders how to live within a limited budget and make wiser choices. McKinney and Cotronea (2011) found that

some inmates did not complete their training, which was critical to their success in reentry and avoiding recidivism. When inmates drafted their own nutrition course, the teachers received much feedback from inmates, which was successful, but could have been better (McKinney & Cotronea, 2011). Some states mandated inmates to complete special programs, such as receiving their GED before they were eligible for parole or work release (McKinney & Cotronea, 2011).

**GED certificates.** The IDOC (2011) allowed 24,442 inmates to receive their general education development (GED) certificate, vocational training with certificate, and associate degrees through a program called Statewide Partnership to Increase Safety (SPISE). Harlow, Jenkins, and Steurer (2010) reported on a National Assessment of Adult Literacy piloted a study on the effectiveness measured how inmates who obtained their GED in or out of prison with college courses with the Department of Education between 1992 and 2003. The study included 1,200 federal and state prisoners, whereas 1,800 adults were not incarcerated (the general population). Based on this data, Harlow et al. reported that the academic performance of inmates was 57% better than that of their counterparts in the general population.

Harlow et al. (2010) observed that among the factors involved in helping inmates pass the GED, 78% said motivation was a factor, 54% credited time to study material, 15% said peer support, and 12% cited their maturity as a factor. One of the requirements for prisoners were to answer the question of why they wanted to go to college, 92%, said to achieve career goals and self-satisfaction, 84% wanted intellectual stimulation, and 74% wanted employment when released. Many scholars

and government regulators have agreed it is more cost efficient to rehabilitate and educate low-risk offenders than to incarcerate them (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012).

Educational inequality influences mass incarceration as well as recidivism (Western & Muller, 2013). Some prison programs have affected people of color more than others (Western & Muller, 2013). Caucasian men who are high school dropouts under the age of 35 accounted for 12% of the incarceration rate in 2008 (Western & Muller, 2013). African American men who were of the same age and high school dropouts accounted for 35% of the incarceration rate, and Hispanic men of the same age accounted for 7% of the dropout rate. In 2009, the incarceration rate of Caucasian males who were high school dropouts increased to 28%. African American males are disproportionate, and Illinois is desperately looking for solutions (Illinois Oversight Board, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 2012). Scholars has agreed in the literature review in this study that the lack of education and job training are some of the major issues, why offenders recidivate (Curtis et al., 2013).

Foucault helped transform the U.S. prisons system through a power system and job training. However, he looked at different discipline techniques using technology, and he approved of prison labor to help train, educate, and rehabilitate inmates (Sargiacomo, 2009). Sargiacomo stated that Foucault's philosophy of correctional training was disciplinary power, which is similar to the training of soldiers in the seventeenth century. The goal was to offer workshops at the lowest cost with maximum social power. Prisons fail to produce anti-criminal behavior, and promote

the organization of delinquents by sustaining future criminal partnerships (Sargiacomo, 2009).

Recidivism is encouraged by some offenders' conditions when freed into the society because of homelessness and medical benefits (Pew Research Center on the State, 2011). Foucault believed that the behavior of inmates' changes through training that prepare them for society, which will reducing recidivism (Sargiacomo, 2009). Based on Foucault's behavior processes, offenders must develop better judgment, making crime less attractive. Foucault's recommendation for change included prison labor for inmates to provide retribution for offenders' crimes, a reduction in the detention of prisoners, and the hiring and training of knowledgeable staff (Sargiacomo, 2009).

**Prison labor.** Rubin (2015) proposed that understanding U.S. prison history may unveil solutions previously overlooked in helping to reduce recidivism. In the late 1700s, Philadelphia and New York City were innovators for prisons in the United States with the reform of putting inmates to work. The reform came when social elites deemed that inhumane punishment for inmates was not productive, but prison labor was productive regarding financing prisons, helping businesses with labor, and rehabilitating prisoners.

The major concern probation officers have, is finding employment for ex-offenders after their release from prison. Nelson, Deess, and Allen (2011) acknowledged that most ex-offenders would rather have jobs than to engage in illegal activities. Nally, Lockwood, Ho, and Knutson (2014) did a five-year follow-up study

on 6,561 ex-offenders to identify the interrelationship of recidivism and employment after the economic recession of 2008. Nally et al. declared that scholars have found offenders released from prison are illiterate and lack interpersonal skills and job skills. The researchers found lack of employment was the major indicator of recidivism among ex-offenders. The researchers indicated that 35% of the 6,561 ex-offenders did not have a high school diploma; they concluded that education played a part of the hiring process regardless of criminal history. The educated offenders were less likely to recidivate than the uneducated offenders (Nally et al., 2014). Prisoners who labored in prison learned skills they could use upon release from prison (U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, 2011).

Hopper (2013) revealed the benefits of the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) that helped reduce recidivism, lower correctional spending, compensate crime victims, and support inmate families. Since its inception, the PIECP has generated \$368.2 million in gross wages. Hopper (2013) stated, “If working a prison job has even a relatively small impact on recidivism, the social benefits could be enormous” (p. 214). Michel Foucault’ ideas about transforming the U.S. prisons system has influenced the establishment of the PIECP to give offenders an opportunity to learn skills for employment, once released, or to become entrepreneurs. This was a benefit for probation officers and parole agents, because there were a severe lack of jobs for their clients, and it has put their clients on a competitive edge because of the job training.



The U.S. Congress established the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) in 1979 under the Justice System Improvement Act of 1979 (U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance [USDOJBOJA], 2010). The PIECP allows employers to hire inmates with on the job training, who volunteered to work outside prisons. Inmates earned wages and room and board and paid taxes (USDOJBJA, 2010). The U.S. Department of Justice (2012) assured that the Bureau of Justice Assistance Program gives inmates an opportunity to develop workforce skills and the potential for rehabilitation. One benefit of the PIECP is that it gives prison management evidence of effectiveness with some populations and provides cost reductions (USDOJBJA, 2012).

The PIECP helps inmates by providing rehabilitation programs, marketable job skills and partial repayment for restitution to victims for the harm sustained (USDOJBJA, 2012). As of June 1995, 36 states have received their certifications for the PIECP, and Illinois legislators had not endorsed the program. Five more states received certifications for the PIECP in 2012 but, again, Illinois was not among them. Illinois does have other programs such as the adult redeploy program, which gives financial incentives to counties and judicial circuits to develop evidence-based rehabilitation in communities.

**Mass incarceration – sentencing and drug crimes.** Western and Wildeman (2009) noted that in the 1990s mass incarceration was a result of two issues, sentencing policies, and a punitive approach to drug crimes. Incarceration rose while crime decreased, and some scholars even suggested the mass incarceration related to

the civil rights movement (Haney López, 2010). Western and Muller (2013) argued that male African Americans went to prison in the 1990s due to inequality in wages, unemployment, drugs, and the crime bill, which was the primary cause of mass incarceration as well as recidivism. Farley (2016) noted that President Bill Clinton 1994, Crime Bill included \$8.7 billion for state prison construction; and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The Crime Bill required convicted offenders to serve 85% of their time and have contributed to the increase of mass incarceration.

Watchdog groups made their voices known about mass incarceration and legislators started to review policies that affected offenders. Western and Muller (2013) said that the federal government provided funding through the Second Chance Act for states to help ex-offenders reenter communities and offer social services, which encouraged employment in order to reduce crime. In 2005, almost three-quarters of a million inmates were released from prisons, and 10 million inmates were released from jail returned to communities with high unemployment rates, and over 51% recidivated within three years (Martin, 2011). A lack of job skills and a criminal record made it difficult for ex-offenders to compete in the job market, disrupted family ties, and led to health problems (Western & Muller, 2013).

Western and Muller (2013) noted in their findings, that young and early middle- age African American and Hispanic men who have dropped out of high school are imprisoned with longer sentences than their white counterparts due to judicial bias. Becky Pettit calls these offenders invisible me. MacKenzie (2013) proposed that U.S.

correctional policies of deterrence, incapacitation, and control have damaged offenders and communities. Kuziemko (2013) stated that keeping offenders in prison costs over \$60 billion annually. Klingele (2013) argued that community supervision managing offenders is a cost-saving alternative to incarceration and is 15 times less than incarceration.

**Mass incarceration and the new race.** Seigel (2014) argued that mass incarceration has produced a new race, a *convict race*, which affects every incarcerated person regardless of background. The convict race faces some of the same struggles African Americans have with their criminal history and has problems securing housing, employment, and food assistance (Seigel, 2014). Caucasian men do not bear the stigma associated with a criminal record in the same manner as male African Americans (Winnick & Bodkin, 2009). However, the convict stigma for male African Americans supersedes their personal identity if they have a criminal record (Winnick & Bodkin, 2009).

Activists have challenged law-makers in the mass incarceration era to change policies that affect ex-offenders' employment, low self-esteem, race, and class in America (Seigel, 2014). (Seigel, 2014) noted that inmates are treated like animals; therefore, some inmates suffer from low self-esteem. Peter, Hochstetler, DeLisis, and Kuo (2015) stated that many offenders do not complete their rehabilitation treatment and those who do have a lower recidivism rate, which helps parole agents manage their success. Some of the factors for offenders not completing their rehabilitation treatments, are poor use of time, associating with criminal minded friends, emotional

and psychological distress (DeLisis, & Kuo, 2015). The parole agents who manage younger males have a higher risk of failure that leads to recidivism, because of the incompleteness of treatment. Younger males require more intensive rehabilitating programs.

Díaz (2011) stated that United States immigration laws have contributed to high incarceration and recidivism, especially for immigrants of color. Clear and Austin (2009) noted that the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in prisons and jails. The U.S. has more than two million individuals incarcerated, which is five to 12 times higher than Japan and Western Europe (Clear & Austin, (2009). Jung (2011) stated that the incarceration rate drastically increased in federal and state prisons from 1935 to the mid-1970s, from 110 in every 100,000 to 500 in every 100,000 during 2005.

**U.S. and state legislation and recidivism.** The Illinois Crime Reduction Act of 2009 [CRA] (2009) includes an assessment system for efficient programming in Illinois Department of Corrections to reduce recidivism. This study may help assist legislators in promoting the CRA law because it may offer solutions to the problem of reducing recidivism and identifying institutional obstacles. In addition, it will help probation officers, and parole agents to reduce their caseloads and workloads. Illinois is taking a lead in trying to reduce the recidivism rate of returning citizens on probation and parole. United States Congressman Danny K. Davis of Illinois, Congressman Chris Cannon of Utah, Senator Joseph R. Biden, and many others sponsored the Second Chance Act (H.R.1593 and S.1060) (McMillion, 2007). The

Second Chance Act had bipartisan support, and it was a significant step by the federal government to reduce the recidivism rate among ex-offenders.

The Second Chance Act (H.R. 1593 and S. 1060) is the amendment of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (McMillion, 2007). The enforcement of the act applied to both adults and juveniles. The act focused on family reunification, jobs education, job training, treatment for substance abuse, as well as services for mental health. The U.S. Attorney General's office gave a grant to any state that implemented mentoring reentry programs to help reduce recidivism. Washington D.C. legislators created legislation to provide pilot programs designed to reduce recidivism rates by helping ex-offenders reenter their communities. The pilot programs saved taxpayers millions of dollars (McMillion, 2007).

In 2013, Illinois State Senator Patricia Van Pelt, along with a host of other senators and state representatives, sponsored Senate Bill 1659, which gave employers a tax credit for wages of \$1,500 for eligible ex-offenders (Illinois 98<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Bill Status of SB1659, 2013). The bill stated employers must hire ex-offenders released from prison in the past three years. Jung et al. (2010) identified a need for more research in the area of policymakers and practitioners helping to reduce recidivism. Senate Bill 1659 passed and was sign into law. Probation officers, and parole agents are benefiting from this law, because it is helping their clients to become employed and to become a productive citizen, which help to reduce recidivism.

Hill (2015) asserted that many correctional policies fail offenders and increase recidivism. Consequently, much of what leaders care about does not affect the

population that needs to change (Maurer, 2015). Identifying barriers that prevent probation officers from managing the success of ex-offenders may help Illinois leadership develop solutions for restructuring programs for offenders in the Illinois Department of Corrections and reduce recidivism.

**Drug crimes – prosecution and recidivism.** Drug crimes, especially petty drug crimes, have been the primary reason poor offenders to recidivate. From the 1980s through the 1990s, there were few social programs and drug addiction facilities that helped men in impoverished neighborhoods (Scherlen, 2012). The United States government was not successful in fighting its war on drugs. Scherlen stated there is a small amount of research on policy terminations. The term *policy termination* refers to dysfunctional programs that are not useful, and need an adjustment or to terminate entirely (Scherlen, 2012). President Obama ordered some dysfunctional programs to be changed or removed (Personal communication, September 20, 2016). In 2009, 63% of Americans believed the war on drugs policy had failed. Scherlen (2012) declared that legislators ought to revisit the war on drugs policies.

Drugs are problematic for everyone in society, it has a damaging effect on the offenders as well as those who supervise them, which are the probation officers and parole agents. The stress that probation officers and parole agents encounter is overwhelming with caseloads from drug offenders who need treatment, but it's not available for them. It is the responsibility of the probation officers and parole agents to monitor and develop their clients with their behavior (Giovannoni et al., 2015). The U.S. attorneys agreed that the answer to drug problems is treatment and rehabilitation,

not incarceration. Scholars have indicated that the lack of drug treatments is a barrier for probation officers, parole agents, and offenders. U.S. lawyers push incarceration because of political pressure. Patrick (2010) stated that if the President of the United States “allocated his rhetoric” (p. 819) annually, law enforcement would have sentenced 38,000 additional offenders for drug offenses. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) increased its activities due to drug crimes. Treatment and rehabilitation were not a priority for DEA prosecutors (Murphy, 2010). U.S. attorneys acknowledged that treatment and rehabilitation are major ways to repair the drug problems to reduce recidivism. (Murphy, 2010)

**The Fair Sentencing Act.** President Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act H. R. 2316 into law on August 3, 2010. The purpose of the Fair Sentencing Act was to decrease the mandatory minimum sentence for possession of small amounts of crack cocaine (The Library of Congress, 2011). The Fair Sentencing Act aims to help address the disparity among minority users about powder cocaine. The Fair Sentencing Act increased the penalties for major traffickers of large shipments of cocaine and allowed cocaine offenders who possessed tiny amounts to having their sentences reduced. Reducing the sentencing for offenders who have minimal amounts of cocaine may reduce recidivism. The Fair Sentencing Act H. R. 2316 reduced the sentences of 20,905 prisoners, and the reduction of the retroactive sentencing could save the government and taxpayers over \$2.2 billion (The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, 2015).

In 1977, a new law for violent crimes, Class X felony, passed which did not allow probation for those inmates but required convicted inmates to serve their

determined sentences (IDOC, 2012). Inmates with drug crimes were major causes of the explosion in prison growth all over the U.S., especially in Illinois. Clear and Austin (2009) state that legislators have not been able to determine the right policies to reduce the high rate of incarceration and recidivism. Clear and Austin noted that many assumed the crime rate is higher than what is being reported, and the legislators fail to look at the *Iron Law*. The Iron Law refers to the total number of prisoners detained and the length of sentence time for inmates. The number of individuals who were convicted and served less than a year between 1970 through 2003 was 200,000, this number grew to 1.4 million (Haney López, 2010).

### **Recidivism - Factors - Financial Support and Cognitive Development**

Opperman (2014) showed that recidivism is on the rise due to a lack of financial support. Opperman noted that leadership has not focused on the rehabilitation of prisoners, and has failed at successfully reentering ex-offenders into the communities. Society is growing globally, and what happens to one culture may have a boomerang effect, affecting all cultures eventually. This boomerang effect, and global impact, creates a sense of urgency to concurrently address recidivism and revamp U.S. prisons. Understanding the purpose of U.S. prisons may help key stakeholders identify barriers and pinpoint how to reduce recidivism.

It is critical for Illinois state regulators and Illinois Department of Corrections, prison managers to provide full disclosure of any decisions regarding long and short-term goals that may affect probation officers and parole agents as well as recidivism. Doh and Quigley (2014) indicated that achieving organizational goals the leadership



and stakeholders must look at the overall goals of the organization because these goals affect the organizational outcomes. Stakeholders may look at the actual and possible states of the problems, which can be obtained from the perspectives of probation officers and parole agents.

Taxman and Rudes (2013) noted that lack of consistency regarding expectations of offender's changes constantly with drug court judges because they do not response to all negative behavior among offenders. The criminal justice systems and probation officers use punishment as a tool in developing obedience among offenders; however, probation officers use incentives for behavior change in their clients, whereas stakeholders disapprove and see incentives as being too soft on offenders (Taxman & Rudes, 2013). Taxman and Rudes (2013) noted that probation officers and parole agents have a problem among offenders with revocation or failure rates of non-compliance with program requirements; also, there are major issues with changing ex-offenders' behavior.

Moran and Jewkes (2014) showed that prison managers who concentrate on a curriculum of education, training skills, and rehabilitation programs that include cognitive development help offenders make successful reentry and reduce recidivism. Cognitive development and other strategies developed through the rehabilitation process in correctional facilities are vital in helping offenders make a conscious decision to take responsibility to change their behaviors (Simourd et al., 2015). Recognizing the offenders' behaviors as manifestations of cognitive development may help probation officers identify strategic programs that could be applied in managing

offenders to reduce recidivism, and may inform what stakeholders can do to remove institutional obstacles from the institutional standpoint.

**Recidivism and Juveniles.** Bolin and Applegate (2016) stated that probation and parole agents had many challenges with juvenile receiving inadequate attention from the states with policies that tried them in adult courts unfairly. Some of the juveniles are sentenced as adult, and they recidivate as adults. The juvenile court remains unchanged until recent years, and has not provided the protection as well as the rehabilitation needed (Bolin & Applegate, 2016). Probation and parole agents viewed some juveniles were “blameless, and the root cause of crime was from disorganized society and inadequate parenting” (p. 322). Bolin and Applegate (2016) noted that scholars and probation officers and parole agents are aware that juvenile male offenders face many identity crises and are not mentally developed depending on age, gender, and race as their adult counterparts.

Probation officers and parole agents see offenders’ needs first-hand and have the responsibility to help make sure offenders enter their communities successfully. Probation officers and parole agents need the managerial support from key stakeholders in removing institutional obstacles and helping them to manage offenders to reduce recidivism in the state of Illinois. Some offenders lived with love ones in public housing before their incarceration; once they have a criminal record, they are excluded from public housing and often become homeless and separated from their families (Pew Research Center on the State, 2011).

Many ex-offenders do not have a permanent residence, and without housing, they cannot obtain federal food assistance (Katzen, 2011). Ex-offenders cannot get a professional license even though they have formal training in school in some states, including barber licenses, nurse assistant, some jobs at retail and food chains (Pew Research Center on the State, 2011). Mathias, Lux, Crook, Autry, and Zaretzki (2015) noted that institutions may enable employees from becoming productive with challenges and obstacles. In addition, financial regulations can produce an environment that promotes ineffective policies and present major obstacles.

Bolin and Applegate (2016) stated that probation officers and parole agents' goal is to change offenders' behavior through a helping relationship and help from superiors. Kroner and Yessine (2013) studied the cognitive behaviors of ex-offenders through intervention programs in supervised communities to look for factors that contributed to recidivism. They found that offenders may change through behavioral cognitive awareness, which reduces recidivism by 53% to 70% (Kroner & Yessine, 2013).

All humans including ex-offenders have basic needs regardless of creed, race, color, age, or gender. The Pew Research Center on the State (2011) stated that laws exist that limit attainment for ex-offenders of two of these basic needs: housing and employment. Juvenile probation officers and parole agents tend to prioritize treatment over punishment procedures, welfare over control, and officers focus on the juvenile offenders rather than offense characteristics due to offenders' environment to reduce recidivism (Bolin & Applegate, 2016).

Yi-Ju, Enright, and Eli Yi-Liang (2016) studied 7,339 individuals between ages 15 and 38, on how family affects individual development and self-esteem. Yi-Ju, et al. showed that family plays a large part in individuals' personal development. Self-esteem and a sense of mastery are major parts of individuals' psychological well-being, which includes income, education, marriage, and parenthood (Yi-Ju et al., 2016). Lack of family participation breeds hopelessness, which opens the door to the cycle of recidivism (Yi-Ju et al., 2016). Probation officers and parole agents work not only with the offenders, but also with the offenders' families, and officers seek rehabilitation over punishment, (Bolin & Applegate (2016). There is a need for the right rehabilitation behaviors programs, which are vital for offenders' reentry. Scholars have agreed that appropriate intervention from the criminal justice system reduces crime and recidivism (Kroner & Yessine, 2013). Most probation officers and parole agents want their clients to enter into a program where there are cognitive behaviors being implemented (Giovannoni et al., 2015).

### **Recidivism in Illinois.**

The 28,478 offenders released from IDOC under the management of parole agents 60% of those offenders will recidivate within 3 years (IDOC, 2015). Male African American ex-offenders comprise the majority of parole officers' workloads and caseloads. Yamatani and Spjeldnes (2011) studied the effects of collaboration with inmates on post-release transitional services over a three-year period. Yamatani and Spjeldnes indicated that rehabilitation with community social services helps reduce recidivism among all racial groups regardless of racial disparity.

Schlesinger (2011) stated that 7 million Americans were connected in some way to the judicial system by incarceration, probation, or parole. Schlesinger compared the total number to people who live in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, San Francisco, California, Seattle, Washington, New Orleans, Louisiana, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Detroit, Michigan, and Baltimore Maryland, to those who are under the judicial system. Patterson, (2015) stated that U.S criminal justice policies in the 1980's to 1990s were extensive on the social structural that influence the decisions to incarcerate offenders (see appendix D).

Illinois' crime rate dropped by 23% from 2008 to 2013, the state's incarceration rate increased by 7% during those years (Pew Charitable Trust, 2014). Kuziemko (2013) noted that more than two million people are incarcerated in U.S. prisons, and community corrections officers manage thousands that are released every year which are added to their caseloads. A limited amount of research is available that addresses the community corrections officers' attitudes on the correlation of the burdens of workload and organization goals. Lutze<sup>1</sup>, Johnson, Clear, Latessa, and Risdon (2012), indicated that ex-offenders' success or failure regarding reintegration through rehabilitation falls on the shoulders of probation officers and parole agents. The perspectives of probation officers and parole agents on managing ex-offenders on reducing recidivism will aid in decision-making, increase probation officers and parole agents' efficiency, and effectiveness.

Mackenzie (2013) contended the historical changes in correctional policies and rehabilitation helped prevent offenders from committing new crimes. From 1930

through 2010, the policies and rehabilitation processes have been ineffective and have led to an increase in incarceration and a high rate of recidivism. The increase was not due to an increase in crime but rather to policy changes. Mackenzie (2013) stated that research conducted by Dr. McCord followed Cabot's initial research on the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study from 5 years of age to 12 years of age in the 1930s with 650 boys to observe deviant behavior using teacher assessments (Mackenzie, 2013). The study concluded that early treatment in life to stop bad habits would lead to a successful life rather than criminal activity (Mackenzie, 2013).

McCord's research followed each boy 30 years later and found boys who were not participants in the program were better off than the participants in the treatment groups. The researcher surmised the boys became dependent on the counselors, the counselor-imposed lifestyle after the program was over, and the boys were not able to maintain the middle-class lifestyle and values (Mackenzie, 2013). The participants fared worse than their counterparts who had not participated in the program. Some members who were diagnosed with mental illness in the treatment group who experienced alcoholism and stress-related disease died early and committed serious crimes. The rehabilitation programs implemented as a reaction to the social chaos in the 1960s and the 1970s. Researchers, policy makers, and prison administrators realized the changes in policies and procedures may have harmed offenders and communities. Policies and dysfunctional programs that do not work and contribute to young offenders recidivating on a frequency basis through their adult life. Probation officers

and parole agents are affected by the outcome of the policies and dysfunctional programs, which adds to institution obstacles.

**Transformations and Rehabilitation.** Recently, controversy among scholars about what works with rehabilitation programs revealed major paradigm changes including a need for cognitive transformations, changes in criminal thinking; and criminogenic behaviors, understanding people, problem solving, and social interactions, all of which will allow offenders to take responsibility for their behavior and attitudes (Mackenzie, 2013). Simourd, Olver, and Brandenburg (2015) indicated that the concept of criminal thinking proposed over 50 years ago involved offenders' reasoning to justify committing crimes. Simourd et al. (2015) examined 113 male inmates in a criminal attitude treatment program (CAP) in Alaska Department of Corrections (ADOC) and found that participants involved in therapeutic activities had a 10% lower recidivism rate than non-participants. The rehabilitation program with Risk, Need, and Responsivity can be effective, and those offenders who are at a higher risk need services that are more intensive (Simourd et al., 2015). Simourd et al. (2015) stated that the treatments were associated with a 30% reduction in future criminal behavior.

### **Recidivism and Personal Behavior Change**

Simourd et al. (2015) argued that cognitive development and other strategies are developed through the rehabilitation process in correctional facilities are vital in helping offenders make a conscious decision, and to take responsibility to change their behaviors; without the offenders' consciousness as part of the cognitive development

rehabilitation process, recidivism will continue. Simourd et al. (2015) noted that rehabilitation strategies should start as soon as the offenders enter correctional facilities. When it is time for the release of the offenders, the changes, combined with the other factors, may prevent harm from coming to society (Simourd et al., 2015).

Heck (2014) indicated that over 45,000 state and federal laws that restrict ex-offenders from participating in social, political, and civic lifestyles within their communities, 54% of offenders have juvenile children. The criminal justice system goal is to avoid recidivism through rehabilitation, but the reentry process has not been effective in terms of ex-offenders supporting themselves. Incarceration has a long-lasting effect on the economy with taxpayers contributing \$65 billion a year toward the correctional budget. In addition, Heck noted everyone must take responsibility in avoiding recidivism including prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, and offenders themselves.

A study by Hercules (2013) found that many young black offenders and ex-offenders do not fully understand how their behaviors are self-destructive and destroy communities. Hercules had served seven years in a British correctional facility, but his behavior and mindset did not change during a subsequent of incarcerations. Hercules stated that in order to reduce recidivism, *social deprivation mindset* must be a part of the rehabilitation efforts, a discovery that resulted from his doctoral studies. Hercules (2013) promoted the term Social Deprivation Mindset (SDM). Hercules argued that ex-offenders' behavior can change for the better or worse with a social deprivation



mindset incorporated into the rehabilitation process within a correctional facility and after their release through community programs.

For the past 40 years, researchers have studied the effectiveness of rehabilitation treatment. Peters, Hochstetler, DeLisi, and Kuo (2015) studied 1,270 parolees from Iowa Department of Corrections' database in 2010 to assess the parolees' completion of alcohol and drug treatment regarding their parole success. Treatment was an option to some parolees. Most correctional facilities do not assign offenders to programs, but allocation comes by availability and need. The researchers found offenders who completed the treatment had a better chance of not recidivating (Peters et al., 2015).

Rezansoff, Moniruzzaman, Clark, and Somers (2015) found that drug treatment courts in Canada and the U.S., with the help of community health treatment and social services, aided in crime reduction. The areas addressed included: "veterans, families and juveniles, offenders with co-morbid mental and substance use disorders, individuals arrested for driving 'under the influence' or repeated 'driving while intoxicated' and Aboriginal tribal drug courts (also known as Healing to Wellness Courts)" (p. 2). Rezansoff et al. (2015) reported that with the right structures, drug treatment court reduced recidivism significantly by allowing offenders to acknowledge their positions in an offense. Rezansoff et al. give example of how to reduce recidivism with the proper structures.

## **Recidivism and Health Issues**

Scholars have found that health problems contribute to prison recidivism. Ramaswamy and Freudenberg (2010) reported the needs of more than 2 million incarcerated men with health issues were not addressed, due to the lack of funding. Scholars have determined that some offenders who have health issues recidivate to receive food, shelter, and medical attention; even though all of their medical needs are not met, however, they do receive some medical attention. Inmates who are probationers or parolee are released to probation officers or parole agents, who are responsible for finding assistance for offenders who have health issues. The high levels of stress caused by health issues and by being incarcerated, can promote criminal activities in some offenders. Patterson (2010) reported that Tuberculosis, HIV, hepatitis B virus, and hepatitis C virus were widespread in the U.S. prison environment. Patterson (2010) indicated that many inmates' contracted diseases before incarceration and some contract diseases within the prison environment, which limits the lifespan of some inmates, usually healthcare treatment are available for inmates for depending on the state budget.

Eno Loudon and Skeem (2013) found that inmates with mental disorders recidivate more than inmates without mental disorders. Inmates with mental illness are more likely to violate their probation by not complying with the rules of probation officers, for example by missing treatments (Eno Loudon and Skeem, 2013). Eno Loudon and Skeem (2013) found within a six-month period that only 4.8% of the

parolee with mental disorders committed new crimes, compared to non-mental disorder parolees at 23.1%.

Morgan et al. (2012) noted that the decisions clinicians and legislators make regarding health services for inmates affect the outcome of criminal recidivism. Probation officers and parole agents have a difficult time managing offenders given the lack of resources and rehabilitation programs, especially offenders with mental disorders. Maulik, Mendelson, and Tandon (2011) proposed that legislators, as well as public and mental health officials, should investigate the quality of mental health services offered in correctional facilities.

Eno Louden and Skeem (2013) stated that there are two primary reasons mental disorder offenders recidivate. The first, offenders who commit new crimes may return to prison, and the second, offenders violate the rules of community supervision, which is a technical violation. Most mental disorder offenders are incarcerated due to technical violation (Eno Louden & Skeem, 2013). Eno Louden and Skeem (2013) noted that 85% of mental disorder offenders are under the care of probation officers and can be incarcerated for technical violations.

Some offenders do not have the financial means to travel to probation officers and parole agents' offices, which can cause a technical violation for not being present when assigned (Eno Louden & Skeem, 2013). Most offenders with mental disorders do not have the financing to purchase medication. The recidivism rate for mental health disorder offenders is 70% (Eno Louden & Skeem, 2013). Community

supervision decisions have direct effects on the recidivism rate, especially with offenders who have mental disorders (Eno Louden & Skeem, 2013).

### **Recidivism and Family Support**

Family support is vital for offenders to begin the emotional healing process, and the relationship of connecting to other humans who care (Bell & Cornwell, 2015). Probation officers and parole agents have seen a lower rate of recidivism among ex-offenders whose family supports them (Bolin & Applegate (2016). Inmates who have family ties developed a positive mental health, experience less recidivism, and are more likely to receive employment after their release from prison. Kroner and Yessine (2013) stated that family relationships are therapeutic for criminal offenders because communication is a significant part of facing responsibility and addressing antisocial attitudes. Some fathers who are ex-offenders want to support their families, and they are looking for an opportunity to have a second chance at life (Western & Wildeman, 2009). Parole agents' clients are deprived of housing, food assistance, health care, and many jobs, regardless of whether they are qualified or not; this deprivation contributed to recidivism (Pew Research Center on the State, 2011).

Yiyoon (2012) noted that nearly 41% of all children born in the U.S in 2010 were born to unwed parents, and the majority of these children have incarcerated fathers. Legislators in various states have deliberated ways to induce fathers to support their children, including making child welfare and food stamps contingent on this support (Harris, 2011). In 1975, Congress enacted the federal-state child support program for the purpose of decreasing the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

(TANF) program and reducing poverty among children by having fathers pay child support (Harris, 2011). The federal government mandated compliance with the child support program; non-compliant states would lose their funds for TANF (Harris, 2011). Harris (2011) stated that in 1975 child poverty was 17%, and increased by 20% during the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. In early 2000, poverty among children decreased by 16% but rose by 20% by 2009. Harris (2011) argued that this showed that the program failed to accomplish its objective.

### **Recidivism and Family Reunification**

Communication with family is a vital element in helping reduce recidivism. Phone calls and letters are the primary forms of contact (Gold & Sturr, 2006). Some loved ones cannot afford to accept calls, and because of the cost, many inmates rarely communicate with family and friends. The lack of family reunification may lead to ex-offenders returning to prison. Travis et al. (2003) noted that the inmates whose families supported them through letters, visits, and phone calls were less likely to recidivate. Incarceration affects families and communities; many single mothers and grandparents are raising children without fathers. Many inmates' families live in poverty and cannot afford to receive phone calls, which limits an inmate's communication with loved ones. The lack of family participation breeds hopelessness, which opens the door for the cycle of recidivism (Pew Research Center on the State, 2011).

## **Recidivism Studies and Parole and Probation**

In Illinois, some ex-offenders recidivate by violating their parole or probation, their supervised probation officer or their parole agent will write a technical violations for the ex-offender to return to prison and some have committed new crimes.

Recidivism refers to the sentencing of ex-offenders by a judge in the criminal justice system for the conviction of new crimes or technical violations (Illinois Prisoner Review Board, 2012). Legislators and prison management measure the effectiveness of programs for inmates and ex-offenders outside the correctional facilities by the recidivism rates (Illinois Prisoner Review Board, 2012). The term *paroled* applies to inmates released from prison by the parole board with conditions that they adhere to specific rules or risk incarceration (Illinois Prisoner Review Board, 2012).

Within the last 30 years, many states have abolished the parole board system that allowed inmates to have an early release before completion of the sentence (Kuziemko, 2013). Parole agents and probation officers now absorb the responsibilities that once fell on parole boards. For instance, 729,295 offenders were released from prison in 2009 and 146,696 released by the administration of the parole board. Early release lowers prison costs, increases allocated space in prison and provided offenders with incentives to rehabilitate themselves. Kuziemko (2013) noted that some believe early release and parole will jeopardize public safety, increase the prison population by as much as 10%, and increase recidivism. Many states, such as Georgia, have adopted policy reform whereby convicted inmates serve up to or at least 90% of their time depending on the crime (USDJOJPBJS, 2015a). These policy

reforms and the concurrent lack of resources and rehabilitation programs make it difficult for probation officers and parole agents to manage ex-offenders (Kuziemko, 2013).

Archambeau (2011) stated that Augustus coined the term *probation* that has been applied in the U.S. model of community corrections. Probation officers and parole agents are also known as, community supervision officers work in close collaboration with offenders and their families and help offenders with behavior change. Probation officers and parole agents oversee offenders' drug tests and electronic monitoring and provide resources for substance abuse counseling, job training, and other rehabilitation aids (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

Probation officers and parole agents contact offenders by phone, and have a regular home or office visits, or visit offenders at their place of employment. Ex-offenders who were sentenced and not incarcerated were under the care of probation officers.

Ex-offenders cannot have any technical violations (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). If ex-offenders violate the terms of their probations (technical violations), are sent to prison. Ex-offenders are required to adhere to specific rules and supervision conditions, which may involve payment of court costs, fines, and fees (USDJOJPBJS, 2015a). Failure to comply with any conditions can result in incarceration. Probation officers ensure that ex-offenders are not threats to the community and help with the ex-offenders' rehabilitation services and resources. Probation officers are responsible for writing ex-offenders' treatment plans and

progress reports and have direct contact with judges (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

Probation management strategies play an essential role in the actions of ex-offenders and probation officers in the juvenile justice system. Andretta et al. (2014) examined a management strategy used by probation officers regarding juvenile offenders and found that three types of probation practices assessment profiles were used: (a) compliance, (b) therapeutic, and (c) intensive. The assessment showed that probation officers with compliance profiles primarily employed deterrence and confrontation strategies and, less frequently, behavioral, counseling, and restorative strategies. Probation officers with therapeutic profiles used more behavioral and counseling strategies with less deterrence and confrontation strategies. Probation officers with intensive profiles used a wide mix of probation approaches.

Misdemeanor courts have changed the institutional and political settings for misdemeanor arrests for drug offenders within the past 30 years (Kohler-Hausmann, 2014). Probation officers and parole agents manage many of the misdemeanor offenders, and there is a deep concern about the lack of attention placed on questioning the offenders' guilt in misdemeanor courts (Kohler-Hausmann, 2014). Kohler-Hausmann (2014) coined the term the *managerial model*, which manages people over time through engagement with the criminal justice system. The misdemeanor courts rely on the supervision of the managerial model (Kohler-Hausmann, 2014). The managerial model supports the community supervision for low-risk offenders with misdemeanors and reevaluating the imposing one-size-fits-all punishment to reduce



recidivism (Kohler-Hausmann, 2014). Some low-risk adult offenders with misdemeanors started out as a delinquent adolescent, with drug problems (Grunwald et al., 2010).

### **Recidivism and Child Abuse**

Ryan, Williams, and Courtney (2013) associated child abuse and neglect with the high risk of adolescent recidivism in Washington State. White, Aalsma, Holloway, Adams, and Salyers (2015) stated that probation officers have a large responsibility to work with and manage juveniles, which leads to burnouts due to work related stress and the number of caseloads and workloads. Ryan et al. (2013) noted that juveniles with a history of ongoing neglect during the adolescence stages have a devastating effect on adolescents' development, and are trajectories for the juvenile justice system. The average age was 15, and the majority was males. Of the 19,833 youth, 13,923 had no record of neglect in the child welfare system in Washington State. However, 3,900 of those had one recorded history of child abuse and neglect but did not have an open case during their arrest and 2,010 had an open child abuse and neglect case with the child arrested.

The youths who were involved in the study and had an active family support system were not involved in the child welfare system, and did well in school, also were more likely not to become future offenders (Ryan et al., 2013). Family support made a difference even with those juveniles on probation, and these children had fewer behavioral problems in schools. A large proportion of juvenile offenders involved in the child welfare system often recidivated. At the time of juveniles'

arrests, one-third had an open case of child abuse and neglect. Over 67 % of the juveniles recidivated before turning 18 years old. Ryan, Williams, and Courtney (2013) used the term *neglect* to refer to the lack of responsibility on the part of a caregiver to provide appropriate care and financial needs to a person. Ryan et al. (2013) noted that the term *neglect* was used throughout the literature among scholars that have similar findings, which are reported in recent studies.

Child abuse and neglect has increased the involvement of juvenile recidivism (Ryan et al., 2013). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011) defined neglect as the failure on the part of the caregiver to provide basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, medical care) and financial responsibility for a child with proper safety and supervision at all times. Arrest rates for young male African Americans and Hispanic youth are more frequent than other ethnicities even with controlled support (Ryan et al., 2013). In the United States, child neglect was present in 78% of reported allegations, compared with 18% for physical abuse. The other charges reported involved sexual abuse (10%) and psychological/emotional maltreatment 8% (Ryan et al., 2013).

**Recidivism studies – Adults.** Some scholars have not considered ex-offenders' moods and situations that trigger recidivism, which may help key stakeholder identify effective programs to assist probation officers and parole agents with managing offenders. Kroner and Yessine (2013) stated that how offenders spend their time in prison makes indications of inmates' behavior and reduce recidivism before it occurs. (Kroner and Yessine noted that offenders' behavior can change with

cognitive behavior interventions, but what triggered the change in offenders is unknown.

In 2011, Pew Research Center on the State (2011) and the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) did a state-by-state comprehensive survey on recidivism from 1999-2004. Pew/ASCA asked each state to report on three years of offenders released and returned to from prison in 1999-2004. In 1999, 33 states provided data, and in 2004, 41 states provided data. Illinois provided some data as required, but due to changes in administrations and policies, the remaining data were not submitted. Their findings showed that 45.4% of ex-offenders recidivated within three years in 1994 and 43.3% in 2004. Between 1999 and 2004, recidivism for new crimes rose by 11.9% and technical violations dropped by 17.7%. When comparing the data the states with the highest recidivism rate in 1999 was Utah, with 65.8%, and Oklahoma had the lowest recidivism rate with 24.1%. The states with the highest recidivism rate in 2004 were Minnesota, with 61.2%; Oregon had the lowest rate with 22.8%. Illinois data were limited, and the finding did not include Illinois within the state-by-state comprehensive study on recidivism.

**Recidivism studies – in-prison and post-release programs.** Henrichson and Delaney (2012) argued that states could substantially reduce their prison budget by reducing the inmate population and operating expenditures. Scholars have shown high numbers of ex-offenders recidivated by breaking their community-based supervision administrative rules for offenders who failed their drug tests, as well as other technical

violations (Bostwick, Boulger, & Powers, 2012; Eno Louden & Skeem, 2013; Klingele, 2013; Steiner, Makarios, Travis, & Meade, 2011; Taxman & Rudes, 2013).

Some states have adopted the Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) program, and Illinois is one of those states. When offenders violate their community-based supervision administrative rules, incarceration is the penalty. State governments are offering financial incentives for correctional facilities that reduce recidivism. The HOPE program has helped reduce the rate of reoffending, and the number of positive drug tests by more than 50% (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012).

Many states rely on reentry studies to provide rehabilitation programs. Miller (2014) asserted that most reentry studies have ignored post-release programs focused solely on programs within the prison setting with the recidivism rate to measure the success of those programs. Miller argued that affiliated gang members need the most attention and will benefit most from the rehabilitation programs.

**Earned Good Conduct Credit program.** One in-prison program that has garnered some attention is the Earned Good Conduct Credit program, which refers to time earned (IDOC, 2011). Inmates receive half a day credit that goes toward their sentencing by participating in programs such as drug treatment programs, Illinois Correctional Industries programs, and educational programs like GED classes. Programs are limited to prisoners with a Class X or those who have not committed violent crimes. Once offenders are under the care of a probation officers or parole

agents they can have their time reduce by going to school to obtain their GED, and the officers or agent can request a reduction in the offenders' time.

**Summit of Hope.** Illinois has 102 counties and Cook County has the largest number of parolees (IDOC, 2011). From 1980 to 2000, the IDOC released large numbers of prisoners (ranging from 170, 000 to over 600,000) into Illinois communities (Reisig et al., 2007). To combat recidivism, IDOC recently developed a community-based program called the Summit of Hope (IDOC, 2011). It provided various services to parolees and ex-offenders to assist them in reentry into the community.

**Adult Redeploy Illinois.** In 2010, under former Governor Quinn's administration, \$2 million was allocated from the General Revenue Fund (GRF) for a 90-day span for stakeholders to implement a plan for Adult Redeploy Illinois (IDOC, 2010, pp.10-42). The program consisted of two non-competitive planning grants with the GRF and the ARRA. The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority allotted \$4 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds for planning grants, the pilot site, and implementing grants. The Adult Redeploy Illinois contributes to this study by allowing probation officers and parole agents to work with community-based organizations that are funded by the GRF and the ARRA to offer help with reentry for their clients.

### **The Gap in the Literature**

This study is designed to address the research gap of institutional obstacles as perceived by probation and parole offices in Illinois to reduce recidivism as shown in

this literature review. The specific gaps are improving race relations, support from management, cognitive development rehabilitation, and funding. Scholars have not addressed the probation officers and parole agents' attitudes toward the burden of institutional obstacles, within the criminal justice system. Lewis, Lewis, and Garby (2013) stated there is a small amount of research that involved probation officers and parole agents' workload and caseloads.

Much of the existing research has focused on punishment over prevention of recidivism. Additionally, there is a need for more research on probation officers and parole agents (Payne & DeMichele, 2011) because of the growing number of offenders that are under their care and their influence. Miller, Copeland, and Sullivan (2014) specified that further research should involve the input of communities, police officers, and probation officers and parole agents, and should address the support needed regarding finances, programming, and other resources aimed ultimately at reducing the correctional budget.

Hogan et al. (2012) noted that cognitive therapy for offenders and reforming offenders' behavior would help correctional management outcome with offenders. The findings from Moran and Jewkes (2014) study with prison management concentrate on education and training with cognitive development helps offenders make successful reentry and reduce recidivism. Linton (2014) found that education is a driving force in reducing recidivism. Many scholars have proposed the need for further research in the area of recidivism among African American men specifically because of their disproportionate rates of incarceration, and the affects their high rates of recidivism

have on society. Martin (2011) recommended that legislators create a policy that provides ex-offenders with financial literacy training and financial support to help reduce recidivism.

This study includes clarification from the point of view of probation officers and parole agents whose goals are to help their clients successfully reintegrate into society. Each community supervisor and ex-offender faces many obstacles transitioning into society. Probation officers and parole agents should have access to resources to help their clients with education, employment, and access to home ownership with financial literacy programs (Martin, 2011). Hall, Harger, and Stansel (2015) stated in the U.S one out of every 34 adults is under correctional supervision. In 2014, probation officers and parole agents supervised 1 in 52 U.S. adults, and the prison population was 1,561,500 (BJS, 2015b). Without corrective measures, and proper support for probation officers and parole agents the prison population will continue to increase. There are studies that concentrate on probation and parole agents support from stakeholders to reduce recidivism. White DiVento (2011) and Jung (2011) recommended additional studies about ex-offenders regarding their success in staying out of prison.

The body of knowledge from the findings in this study may help key stakeholders remove or reduce institutional obstacles, and help probation officers and parole agents improve offenders' rehabilitation success. Previous studies have shown that offenders can succeed when they are encouraged to change behavior, and when policy reforms help offenders' live productive lives, and promote community

confidence and acceptance. Results of this study will aid key stakeholders by providing valuable knowledge regarding probation officers and parole agents' roles in the daily execution of these policies. Potentially, the role of probation officers and parole agents in the community may help ex-offenders stay out of jail or prison with the right rehabilitation programs. The implications for positive social change include identifying institutional barriers to the effectiveness of probation officers and parole agents and suggesting opportunities to improve practices, policies, and programs to reduce recidivism.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature has information about the probation officers and parole agents' roles, institutional obstacles, their effect and recidivism seen through the lens of systems thinking. Also, scholars view factors that contribute to recidivism. The rate of successful reentry to society for prisoner continues to erode because the root causes have not been addressed. The information gleaned from this descriptive phenomenological study can help enhance changes made by key stakeholders in Illinois on institutional obstacles. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology, participants' selection logic, the instrumentation, data analysis plan and the issues of trustworthiness.



### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study is to identify which institutional obstacles exist as Illinois probation officers and parole agents perceive them. Due to the watchdog persistency, and former President Obama's concern to reduce mass incarceration and recidivism, the U. S has entered a decarceration era. Eisenberg (2016) indicated that the number of inmates is decreasing. On January 1, 2016, there were 4,586,900 adults under probation officers and parole agents' supervision, the number decreased by 1.1%; the probation population has decreased by 1.4%, and the parole population had increased by 0.5%. According to BJS (2018), there was an estimation of 4,537,100 adults as of December 31, 2016, under supervision of the probation officers and parole agents. Even though the probation population has slightly decreased, there is a huge demand placed on probation officers. There is a demand for hiring more probation officers and parole agents to supervise the high number of offenders, which creates barriers for probation officers, parole agents and their clients.

In 2014 the Illinois prison population was 48,921, in 2015, it was 47,165, and in 2016 the Illinois prison population decreased to 44,817. While the yearly decrease in the prison population established a pattern, the high incidence of recidivism remained a problem. Illinois, parole population in 2016 was 27,794, and 68% of the parolees will recidivate within three years. The high recidivism rate within such a short period of time puts pressure on the involved stakeholders to create an effective plan to further decrease the extremely high rate of recidivism in Illinois.

The alignment of Meadows' three concepts of systems thinking, which are elements, interconnection, and purpose will help key stakeholders identify the relationships between the Illinois government regulators, prison management, Illinois judges, and the effect that each component has on each other. The decisions made by the stakeholders using Meadows system will help probation officers and parole agents better manage their clients. In addition, stakeholders may increase rehabilitation programs that will provide opportunities for offenders to make a positive contribution to their families, communities, and society.

In this chapter I discuss the underlying method and design. This chapter also contains the foundation for the research design. I have incorporated the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, and instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness. Finally, ethical procedures that relate to the completion of the study are examined.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study uses the qualitative tradition. The focus of the research question is to identify institutional obstacles that limit how probation officers and parole agents manage offenders effectively to reduce recidivism in Illinois. Probation officers and parole agents are critical to the relationship between the criminal justice system and offenders, and yet they do not have input regarding increased demands in conjunction with their job duties (White et al., 2015). It is useful to understand probation officers and parole agents' perspectives using a systems context, a system that links the three

concepts of Meadows, and the steps taken to address the high incidence of recidivism in Illinois.

*RQ:* What are the lived experiences of probation officers and parole agents dealing with institutional obstacles and the effects institutional obstacles have on their role in reducing recidivism?

Dumay and Cai (2015) stated that research methodology should not drive the research question, but the research question should drive the methodology. After careful analysis of alternative methodologies, and observing information about the phenomenon it was difficult to determine the appropriate development for the study. Before choosing a qualitative descriptive phenomenological method, I thought about a case study until I directed my attention to Dumay and Cai statement, the research question should drive the methodology. My research question was addressing what are the lived experiences of probation officers and parole agents dealing with institutional obstacles, therefore, I knew case study was not the right approach. Also, my research question started with what and not how or why.

Yin (2014) stated that a case study is preferred when the main research questions are how or why did something happen. After choosing a case study, the next step is defining what case you are studying. Yin (2014) said, “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16).

Koivu and Damman (2015) stated there is a unique characteristic in quantitative and qualitative approaches, both shares similar tools, which are sharing ontological and epistemological assumptions about the phenomena. The quantitative method is variable oriented, and the goal is a prediction, and the qualitative method is meaning oriented, and the goal has a deeper understanding. According to Koivu and Damman the “quantitative emulation, the experimental template is seen as the gold standard, though researchers acknowledge that some questions cannot be answered using these techniques alone” (p. 2619). However, using the mixed method may complement the quantitative method in helping to understand some data that the qualitative method displays. This does not mean that the qualitative method is not less important than the quantitative method.

In my case, quantitative research would not address my research question because I needed to know and understand probation officers and parole agents lived experiences. Whereas, in quantitative research, I did not have to examine any relationship between independent or dependent variables. Also, I did not have a hypothesis in my study. My research question started with a question stating what, not how much. I did not have surveys or data with numbers.

Among qualitative approaches, I first considered doing an ethnography study. Bamkin, Maynard, and Goulding (2016) stated that conducting an ethnography study requires at least a year to ensure that the researcher is familiar with participants’ culture and there is a trust built and elimination of bias by means of interrogative coding and reflexive notes. Ethnography was not an option in my case, due to the

extensive fieldwork and time that would be required to become familiar with participants' social interactions. Bamkin et al. (2016) noted that ethnography methods require researchers to participate with participants in their everyday context in order to understand their world and social interactions.

The qualitative descriptive phenomenological study allows me to understand and explore the work experiences of probation officers and parole agents, as well as their perceptions of institutional obstacles, with rich in-depth interviews.

The phenomenological approach works best because it allows the researchers to understand lived work experiences of 11 probation officers and parole agents. These officers and agents have two or more years of first hand in experiencing any institutional obstacles with them or their clients in reducing recidivism. The in-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews did seek a comprehensive understanding of institutional obstacles. There three techniques that I used to gain data from interviews, observations, and archives. My attempt to explore the institutional obstacles that exist and how those impediments affect probation officers and parole agents was dependent upon this data. How probation officers and parole agents managed their clients was important as key stakeholders were informed of the obstacles and the need for change. Key stakeholders were in a position to gain insight into complex and sensitive issues from the institutional obstacles that contribute to recidivism, and offer solutions to reduce said recidivism.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I have applied Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) four strategies of phenomenology bracketing, mentally assessing, and preparing the data to be generated and transformed without biases. The four strategies help to identify potential biases. The first strategy targeted the preparation of conducting a phenomenological study by identifying the researcher preconceived notions and knowledge that have potential influences by putting them aside through-out the research. The second strategy aids the researcher in deciding the scope of the literature review by asking the question, “Do we understand the topic enough that we can justify the research proposal while maintaining our curiosity in this area?” “Once we can answer yes to this question, we can suspend the literature review” (Chan et al., 2013, p. 4). The third strategy targeted the preparation for data collection using face-to-face interviews. The fourth strategy targeted the approach and procedures for data analysis that enhanced the trustworthiness of the study.

My role as a researcher is an observer of participants. Yin (2014) stated that the researcher’s goal in qualitative research is to reveal a deep understanding of the phenomenon and generalize theories without extrapolating probabilities. Warwick-Booth (2014) noted that the experiences of the researcher in interviewing the participants may add rich descriptions with an in-depth exploration and understanding of the situation. The role of a researcher is to keep the interest of the participants prioritized and not the researcher’s personal interest (Englander, 2012).

A potential source of bias is my preexisting personal and professional relationship with some of the participants. Kalayci and Serra-Garcia (2016) noted that strong biases are produced when there are complex environments such as an environment where an individual has to make financial decisions with choices that affect life-threatening issues. However, some complex environments lead to mistakes in the decision-making process. I volunteer for an organization that works with Illinois state governmental regulators, prison management, Illinois judges, probation officers and parole agents, and ex-offenders. I have relatives employed by the criminal justice system in Illinois. My volunteer work and my relationship with relatives are a potential source of bias as it relates to the nature of this study.

Kalayci, Tufford, and Newman (2010) noted that the researcher might become emotionally challenged by the research topic, and that bracketing out preconceptions can help keep biases from affecting the results. Bracketing is a method used by researchers to mitigate unacknowledged and potentially damaging effects of their own preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010). I have used Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) bracketing process to suspend my personal experiences by sorting out pre-existing thoughts and beliefs about the issue under study. Other ethical issues that may be applicable are power differentials and their justification because the participant knows that their superiors are giving me access to interviews. To address these issues, I have reiterated to the participants that their information is anonymous, and that their superiors are not privy to the data.

## **Methodology**

The structure of this methodology section is aligned with the research question, the literature review, and the methodology approach, which is a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach. It displays the strengths and the weaknesses of this approach as well as other approaches. I proceed in the descriptive phenomenological method with the participants lived experience. This section includes Participant Selection Logic, Instrumentation, Content Expert Review, Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, Data Collection, and the Data Analysis Plan.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The participants are probation officers and parole agents who are from seven communities in Cook County First Municipal District, and from an organization that works with probation officers and parole agents that serve these communities. To justify the sampling strategy, I targeted a county where probation officers/parole agents manage the most clients. There are 102 counties in Illinois, and the offenders in the study primarily reside in 16 of these counties, but the majority of the offenders live in the seven communities in Cook County (Bostwick et al., 2012; IDOC, 2018). The Illinois qualifications for probation officers and parole agents became effective in 2006 (IDOCMSCS, 2017). Illinois probation officers and parole agents are required to have a bachelor's degree in law enforcement or the behavioral or social sciences, and an eight-week training and academic course, with a valid driver's license and firearm owner's identification card (IDOCMSCS, 2017).



Blumenfeld-Jones (2016) noted that too much emphasis on trying to get participants to share may cause them to hide information. I allowed the participants to choose a relaxed environment so they could respond freely to my open-ended questions. Dworkin (2012) stated that some qualitative research scholars avoid the topic of how many participants are needed to meet the saturation requirement, but many researchers suggest that saturation starts at anywhere from 5 to 50 participants. As I conducted the in-depth face-to-face interviews with 10 open-ended questions, I looked for saturation to see if there was sufficient data drawn from the interviews. Data saturation may be met with the 10 to 12 participants having had the same experiences or similar experiences. Diether (2016) noted that 10 to 12 participants in qualitative research may prove to be sufficient to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Most scholars agreed the theoretical saturation usually occurs between 10 and 30 interviews (Rowlands et al., 2015).

The probation officers and parole agents who had over two years of service were the participants in this study, and they were knowledgeable of institutional obstacles. All participants were off-duty and have attended public meetings sponsored by reputable organizations that serve ex-offenders in the seven communities in Chicago. I approached the probation officers and parole agents after the sessions, to inquire about their willingness to participate in the study. The probation officers and parole agents who usually attend these meetings but were absent, were referred by co-workers who were at the meetings. The participants gave me their contact information. I contacted participants by phone or email. I informed the 11 participants of the

eligibility requirements during the selection process. In order for participants to volunteer, it was important for the participants to know the nature of the study (DeFeo, 2013). Finding the right participants was also crucial for this study (Englander, 2012). Englander (2012) noted the researchers' question to themselves, "Do you have the experience that I am looking for?" when looking at participant selection. This question should be in the mind of the researcher (p. 19).

According to Yin (2014) there are five sensitive protection areas that the researcher should be aware of when interviewing participants. The first is gaining informed consent from all persons who may take part in the study by informing them of the nature of your study, and formally soliciting their volunteerism in participating in the study is the first area. The second is protecting those who participate in the study from any harm, including avoiding the use of any deception in the study. The third is protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those who participate will not be unwittingly put in any undesirable position, such as receiving requests to participate in some future study conducted by you or anyone else. The fourth is taking special precautions to protect vulnerable groups, such as children. The fifth is selecting participants equitably, so that no group of people is unfairly included or excluded from the research (p. 78-79).

Consent forms were signed and obtained prior to beginning the interviews; the form is in (see Appendix C). The interview protocol helps nurture people in telling their experiences and helps the researcher to stay on track in addressing the right questions throughout the interview process (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Selecting

participants is a critical preliminary step in data collection for qualitative studies (Englander, 2012). Participants were notified in advance via email about their confidentiality agreement and that interviews will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information. The probation officers and parole agents are male and female. Each participant chose a safe location for the interview. DeFeo (2013) noted that a purposive sampling approach selects participants who have the richest information about the phenomenon. Since purposive sampling opens the door for bias, bracketing was used to ensure no biases were involved in the participant selection.

### **Instrumentation**

I chose the qualitative descriptive phenomenological method as the most effective in collecting data to address my research question. I was the instrument, and my data collection tools included a questionnaire consisting of 10 open-ended questions, observation notes, interview protocol, audio recording, organizational policy information, and related public information. The organizational policy information is archived data found in government documents related to the topic, public records, procedure manuals, position descriptions, personal communication requested, government agencies such as policies and legislation, and other government literature. I gathered data obtained from the research questions and the object under investigation, which are institutional obstacles as perceived by probation officers and parole agents to reducing recidivism in Illinois. Correctional data on prison population were gathered from various Illinois DOC 27 Correctional Centers and Illinois

Department of Corrections' Planning and Research Unit. The other sources of information are from the literature review when interviewing the participants.

Skiba and William (2014) noted that when a gap exists, to obtain an accurate understanding of a phenomenon, it is productive to explore the participant's experience for data collection. To identify the data collection, I used the interviews protocol; it reminded to obtain the information that I needed to collect and to build a comfortable environment for participants to share their experiences. The interview question was aimed specifically for probation officers and parole agents who have experienced institutional obstacles, to identify those obstacles in their feedback in the data analysis process. The interview timeframe lasted a half hour, and the interviews were coded and thematically arranged to answer the research questions.

Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggested that successful interviews start with the researcher using the correct protocol, including an opening and closing message. The opening statement allows the participants to feel comfortable with the interviewer. Moustakas (1994) stated that the interview protocol offers a thick and rich description of the individual's conscious experiences, and helps resist the urge to include personal bias, but offers a deeper meaning or understanding of the data to interpret it.

Some preliminary meetings with participants may be required prior to the interview, which may take place on a phone conference (Englander, 2012). The preliminary meeting presents an opportunity to help establish trust, review ethical considerations, and review some research questions. Having preliminary meetings allows participants to ponder their experiences and allows the researcher to obtain a

richer description during the actual interview (Englander, 2012). To establish sufficiency of data collection, I had some preliminary meetings with structured interviews to guide the conversation about the phenomenon. Also, I consulted five content experts who were probation officers and parole agents for at least 10 years. The content experts were not a part of the study. However, they provided feedback concerning the interview questions to confirm that my research queries were applicable. The questions appear in (Appendix B).

### **Content Expert Review**

The five content experts had 10 years of experience as probation officers and parole agents, one of the five worked in both positions. Their comprehensive knowledge and expertise helped to establish the interview questions. The five content experts were selected from referrals from other probation officers and parole agents who were not a part of this study. The five content experts were contacted by phone conferences to verify the interview questions in (see Appendix C). Also, the content experts were not involved as part of the 11 participants in this study.

Englander (2012) stated that it is important to identify the phenomenon of the investigation and not the people describing the phenomenon with all their inherent complexity. As I interviewed the participants my focus was not on them, but on the object of investigation. Englander (2012) noted that human intuitions are always present but that the interviewer must continue to focus on the phenomenon under investigation, and the questions should meet the criteria of the study. It is important for the interviewer to remember to adhere to what is going on in the interviewee

relationship as well as focusing on the research questions (Englander, 2012). The results of the interviews may help corroborate specific findings that were established through the literature, and provide insights related to the research focus on potential institutional obstacles to managing ex-offenders effectively and reducing recidivism. Yin (2014) noted that government and private organization records can be used in conjunction with other sources of information in a qualitative study.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The data collected are interviews from probation officers, who work in the Cook County First Municipal District, and the parole agents from the Illinois Department of Corrections. The probation officers and parole agents were off-duty and had attended public meetings sponsored by organizations that serve ex-offenders in the seven communities in Chicago. I approached the off-duty probation officers and parole agents as public citizens after the public meetings to inquire if they were willing to participate in the study, indicating there was no form of monetary compensation. The interviews were conducted in English.

The frequency of the events to collect the data depended on participant availability. The participants and the researcher determined the location and time for interviews. I observed the participants' time availability constraints. I did not want the interviews to be shortened, rushed, or ended prematurely because I did not want to have the respondent burdened for lack of time.

I used digital audio equipment to record all interviews and make a transcript of each interview. I used a notepad to record field notes in the form of reflections from

each interview during and after the interview. The field notes helped guide the research process to establish the validity of the study.

Englander (2012) indicated that qualitative data collection is done to draw personal information from the lived experience of an individual, which the researcher seeks to complete. This includes a description of the rich experiences and the nuances of the depth of the interviews. The participants' criteria for this study were probation officers and parole agents that met the 730 ILCS 111/12 criteria and supervised offenders for at least two years. The study involved minimal risk to participants, and the probability of harm or discomfort in this research was not greater than the everyday encounters in daily activities during the interviews.

I did not anticipate causing participants any physical or psychological stress. I asked each participant how he/she wanted me to follow-up on giving them information about the questions, once the data was analyzed. Participants have been allowed to elaborate freely on any further suggestions on the transcripts for member checking. A link for easy accessibility has been created for the return of the transcripts. The participants have received thank you cards for their participation.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The objective of this descriptive phenomenological study in the data analysis is to identify the institutional obstacles that exist, as probation officers and parole agents perceive them, based on face-to-face interviews with ten questions. Englander (2012) stated that interviews are the most important part of the study. Phenomenological research starts with the acknowledgment that the researcher needs to know and

understand the phenomenon from the lived experience of the participants to discover its meaning. Interviews are the major source of collecting information and understanding the lived experience of the participants. To obtain a deeper understanding, I asked myself a few questions; how do I select participants for this phenomenological study? How can I answer the research question in describing the phenomenon? How can I implement decisions about the phenomenon?

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) identified two types of qualitative data analysis: categorical strategies and contextualizing strategies. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) noted that categorical strategies involve looking at narrative data piece-by-piece and rearranging data into categories that facilitate comparison. This allows the researcher to have a better understanding of the research question. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) explained that contextualizing strategies interpret the narrative data in the context of a coherent, whole text that includes interconnection among statements, events, etc. The techniques involve looking for patterns across the interconnected narratives and focus on the wholeness of the experience rather than solely on its objects or parts.

Qualitative data can be presented visually, organized by themes that emerge from qualitative data analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The display may be used to summarize information from categorical or contextualizing strategies or as a separate data analysis scheme (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This descriptive phenomenological study uses categorical strategies because dissecting the data allows the researcher to compare patterns across categories. Since qualitative data can present a challenge when it comes to placing the raw data in categories to generate themes, I



have used a data analysis software. Bazeley and Jackson (2015) noted that software should follow the research method and not the other way around.

Hilal and Alabri (2013) noted that NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software program that may improve the quality of the research, and its use has significant advantages for coding. After looking at the concept of data analysis software, I have used NVivo for analyzing the data of this study. NVivo helped me to identify and represent the unit of analysis and place the data into categories and themes. Bazeley and Jackson (2015), along with Hilal and Alabri (2013), describe five tasks that NVivo supplies to manage data.

I used NVivo to help me identify themes from the interviews, organizing confusing data documents, observation, policies/procedures, interview transcripts from the participants, and published documents. To avoid discrepant cases with documents, I am using government documents because there is a limited amount of scholarly literature on the topic. The common themes were identified by 40% of the respondents. Unanticipated participant answers are difficult to categorize, but Fărcaș (2017) noted that a significant percentage was about a quarter of the respondents to indicate specific categories.

Referring to the analysis of data from interviews, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) noted six steps that determine the trustworthiness of qualitative data. My study used five of the six: triangulation techniques, thick descriptions, persistent observation, member checking, and reflexive journal of field notes during the interviews. In addition, I have triangulated the collection of relevant artifacts from published

government documents. Jack and Raturi (2006) noted that the use of triangulation gives appropriate strategies for identifying the phenomenon, and the researcher can make informed choices within the study. Englander (2012) stated, “It is important to understand that if certain passages are unclear, it is not justifiable, later on in the analysis, to start making theoretical interpretations to make such passages appear clearer” (p. 33). If in the process of analyzing data, a lack of clarity or uncertainty arises, the researcher can ask for clarity and ask the participants for another interview (Englander, 2012).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

I have reviewed my data to maintain its reliability and its trustworthiness. To solidify the validity of the study, the appropriate strategies will establish credibility with triangulation techniques, peer review journals, thick descriptions, persistent observation, and reflexive journal of field notes during the interviews. The triangulation is the convergence of data collected from different sources, to determine the consistency of a finding. The peer review journals have come from the literature review. The thick descriptions are from the rich experiences of the participants with in-depth interviews, and I observed and noted the behavior of participants during the interview. I was careful not to bring in my own bias throughout the research process with my reflexive journals.

Questions were answered on a volunteer basis, and if the questions caused discomfort, participants were under no obligation to answer. Participants had consent forms to review with the online interview confidentiality agreement

procedures/consent form in advance to keep trustworthiness, before the signing of their agreement on the day of the interview and the recording. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) declared that trustworthiness is a global concept for qualitative research introduced by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 as a substitute for quantitative validity issues. Lincoln and Guba introduced four other criteria to solidify the quality of data from qualitative methods, which were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Teddlie and Tashakkori identified six steps to determine the trustworthiness of qualitative data. The first steps are: prolonged engagement, with researchers developing a relationship and learning the culture of the participants to build trust and avoid misinformation. The second step is persistent observation, allowing the researcher to identify aspects that are relevant to the research question within the social scene. The third step is use of triangulation techniques, which includes interviews, observations, methods (quantitative or qualitative), where investigators aid the qualitative researcher in interpreting the representation of events with the participants differently as alternative realities. The fourth step is member checking, a strategy which members are asked to verify the validity of the researcher interpretation of the phenomena that was gained from the participants' perceptions to determine the researcher's credibility. The fifth step is a thick descriptions, which offer interpretations that become evidence of transferability with conclusions drawn from the study. The sixth step is creation of a reflexive journal in which the researcher records information about him or herself in terms of self as instrument and the research method (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 213).

Among the six steps Teddlie and Tashakkori identified, this study incorporated five of the steps: triangulation techniques, Thick descriptions, persistent observation, member checking, and reflexive journal of field notes during the interviews.

Trochim and Donnelly (2007) noted that “research is less about getting at the truth than it is about researching meaningful conclusions, deeper understanding, and useful results” (p. 148). Qualitative research may be judged by using four criteria of validity (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). This descriptive phenomenological study used the four important criteria of validity, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

Trochim and Donnelly (2007) stated that credibility of qualitative research requires making sure that the results of understanding the object of investigation from the participants’ perceptions are believable, because participants are the only ones able to confirm the results of the study. Recordings and transcripts in the NVivo software have organized data to show the research findings. It is easier to view the data for credibility. Other documents in the literature review, including peer-reviewed journals and government reports, provide evidence that aligns with the research questions to show the validity of information that it is credible or believable. Once the data were carefully analyzed, the results were sent via e-mail to the participants.

Working with the participants on data quality is an important technique in a descriptive phenomenological study. Participants were asked to review the data for validity and to elaborate freely on further suggestions. The participants were able to

return the information with a link for easy accessibility. The data collected from probation officers and parole agents was examined along with observation, policies, and procedures and other data from the literature review to identify the institutional obstacles faced by probation officers and parole agents that limit their ability to manage ex-offenders to help reduce recidivism.

### **Transferability**

Trochim and Donnelly (2007) stated that transferability is the generalizing or transferring results from qualitative research to other settings. By accurately recording data, the researcher makes it possible for other researchers to use that data in other settings and have confidence in the results. The participants in my study were chosen by purposive sample, and five content experts with at least ten years of experience helped establish the questions for the interview. The labeling and grouping process of coding gave comprehensive overviews of the participants' perspectives. I have ensured the validity of data by providing rich and thick descriptions of the results using direct quotes from participants. Anyone observing this study can translate the data to other research disciplines.

### **Dependability**

To ensure the reliability of this research, combined data was collected and evaluated. Reliability is based on assumption that the research is accurate and can be repeated (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). Recording the data accurately help other researchers to follow or duplicate this study and have similar results depending on time. Trochim and Donnelly (2007) stated that a researcher can observe the same thing

twice, but the measurements or observations will differ to some degree. Trochim and Donnelly (2007) stated that “the ancient Greek Democritus argued that we can never step into the same river twice because the river is constantly changing” (p.149).

Transcripts have been compared for accurate coding and detailed field notes have been kept. The identity of each participant has been kept confidential.

### **Confirmability**

Trochim and Donnelly (2007) stated that confirmability refers to how another researcher can validate the results. The validation is based on participants’ responses without the researcher’s biases. The strategy I have used for confirmability to validate my findings are comparing data and analyzing data from observations during interviews and policies/procedures.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The treatments of the human participants who are probation officers and parole agents have been protected for their interests as well as their welfare. The participants were at a low level of risk. I obtained approval from the IRB before any evaluation or interviews took place.

The ethical assurance of recruitment for probation officers and parole agents resulted from public meetings sponsored by reputable organizations that serve ex-offenders selected for the study in Chicago, Illinois and chosen by the researcher. The participant’s personal information has been kept confidential, and no names will be used in any reports or publications. The probation officers and parole agents work for governmental agencies that expect ethical assurance in their profession. As a

researcher, I interviewed the participants as a public citizen. The participants' names and personal information are confidential and will not be published in any publication.

Participants were informed that their answers in this study have the potential to be published in ProQuest. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, verbally or written communication, and if they have withdrawn their answers have not been included in the study. The consent forms include the procedures and contact information, with a procedure and process to replace participants who chose to withdrawers from the study. The archives will be stored electronically, and the original notes and consent forms will be stored in a locked metal file cabinet for at least five years by Walden University's protocols to protect the confidentiality of participants and manage the destruction of the material.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 provided the descriptive phenomenological method and design in addressing the problem of high recidivism rates of offenders, and the institutional obstacles Illinois probation officers and parole agents' face. The study opens the door for social change in Illinois. Chapter 3 also provided a description of how the data will be collected. The instruments, data analysis procedures, and techniques reveal the validity of the study. Lastly, Chapter 3 included information about trustworthiness, which is key to qualitative research. Within trustworthiness are four elements discussed in this chapter: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The results from the study will be in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study is to identify institutional obstacles that exist as Illinois probation officers and parole agents perceive them. To understand how institutional obstacles have affected this group, data analysis was designed in this phenomenological study to inquire about the lived experiences of probation officers and parole agents to help answer the research question.

*RQ:* What are the lived experiences of probation officers and parole agents dealing with institutional obstacles and the effects institutional obstacles have on their role in reducing recidivism?

The information from the study may be used by policymakers to determine whether institutional policies may need to be updated and allow probation officers and parole agents to manage offenders more effectively, resulting in the reduction of recidivism in Illinois. I used purposive sampling as an approach in selecting participants who had rich information that best served the research objective. The targeted population includes probation officers and parole agents in Chicago, Illinois.

This chapter includes data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results based on the methodology outlined in Chapter 3. The coding process was done with NVivo 11 software to assist in organizing and analyzing data. Also, the NVivo software will help to identify patterns for categories and themes.



### **Setting**

The study was conducted using in-depth interviews with 11 participants, based on their lived experience of institutional obstacles. Although a face-to-face interview was the initial option, due to unanticipated issues with a few participants, and for their convenience, I conducted three interviews via conference call at the request of participants. Those participants were informed about the digital recording, which was in the consent form before the interview. The consent form was sent and signed by email.

### **Demographics**

The participants were of different racial and gender backgrounds. Their educational level and work experiences varied along with their employment status. Each participant had at least 2 years of experiences to establish thick rich descriptions of their lived experiences of the phenomenon. There were five males and six females, a total of 11 participants. All participants were off-duty and had attended public meetings sponsored by an organization that managed clients in Chicago, Illinois. In selecting the participants in this descriptive phenomenological research. Englander (2012) noted that the researcher must ask themselves the question, “Do you have the experiences that I am looking for?” (p. 20). The demographics of male and female probation officers and parole agents are displayed with their years of service from the NVivo case classifications in Table 1.

Table 1

*Gender and Years of Service for Probation Officers and Parole Agents*

Participants by Letters	Gender	Years of Service
A	Male	17
B	Female	28
C	Male	20
D	Female	34
E	Female	17
F	Female	2 ½
G	Female	17
H	Female	25
I	Male	3
J	Male	18
K	Male	18

**Data Collection**

Each participant chose a safe location for the interview. I used purposive sampling that relied on my judgment in selecting the participants. To ensure that I did not involve biases, I used Chan, Fung, and Chien's method on bracketing in the interview process, making sure that I transcribed each of the 11 participants' narratives correctly. I suspended any interpretation or experiences about this study, and to keep an open mind to receive knowledge from the participants. I indicated in the data collection section of Chapter 3 that I would send participants invitations via email, but not all participants received them because some of the participants I spoke to face-to-face, and they informed me that they will participate. Those participants did not want me to send them an invitation. However, I sent invitations via email to those

participants who requested them and required more information about the study. The participants were also notified about the confidentiality agreement. All participants knew about the research study from the consent form before the interviews. I rephrased the interview questions for those participants who needed clarity regarding the questions. The data collected were from one-on-one interviews with five probation officers from Cook County First Municipal District and six parole agents from the IDOC. The participants were interviewed according to their availability and their requested location.

The interview questions were developed to capture the participants' lived experiences related to of their role as either a probation officer or parole agent. The interviews were 30 minutes; I allotted additional time for comments from participants for verification purpose to complete their answers. Participants elaborated freely. I did not want the interviews to be shortened, rushed, or end prematurely.

The consent form informed the participants about their agreement to allow digital audio equipment to be used to record each interview, as well as complete of transcripts from the interviews. Field notes taken during the interviews were also used to help establish the validity of the study. As I conducted the in-depth interviews, there were 10 open-ended questions, with additional probing questions (see Appendix B) when more information was needed.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process included the findings from 11 participants. All participant responses were beneficial in identifying themes and categories that were

common among probation officers and parole agents to generate information that may have the potential to identify institutional obstacles to reducing recidivism. The interview questions used during the interview were developed to elicit answers that directly responded to the research question.

Validity is important in phenomenology research. Within this descriptive phenomenology method, I integrated Chan et al.'s method of bracketing to demonstrate the validity of the study, which included four strategies. To implement the four strategies, I dismissed my knowledge and biases by making an entry into a journal when preconceived notions entered my thought patterns while interviews were taking place, and during the transcription of the interviews. This was done to have an open mind, and to understand the phenomenon by receiving unexpected knowledge from each participant's perceptions.

The first strategy targeted the preparation of conducting a phenomenological study by identifying the researcher preconceived notions and knowledge that have potential influences and putting them aside through-out the research. I took reflexive notes from my thoughts, and my experiences that may affect the research process. The reflexive notes help identify potential biases. The second strategy aids the researcher in deciding the scope of the literature review, "Do we understand the topic enough that we can justify the research proposal while maintaining our curiosity in this area?" "Once we can answer yes to this question, we can suspend the literature review" (Chan et al., 2013). I maintained my curiosity, and I accepted the knowledge and allowed the participants to express themselves freely. The third strategy targeted the preparation

for data collection using the face-to-face interviews. My main focus was to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences. To achieve rich description, I asked the scheduled interview questions (see Appendix B). The fourth strategy targeted the approach and procedures for data analysis that enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. I ensured the answers from participants by interpreting and transcribed correctly. I allowed the participants to rectify and ensure that there is no misinterpretation of the data.

Bazeley and Jackson (2015) noted that NVivo coding and queries allow the researcher to think deeply about the qualitative data for further analysis. To get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, I emphasized to the participants the importance of answering the interview questions from their lived experiences. Hila and Alabri (2013) stated that qualitative data are text-based and the foundation of analyzing the data is the coding process. In this process the researcher can assign multiple codes to the same text.

During the process of transcribing the narrative from the digital recording, of which some of the narratives was not clear, therefore, I reassessed my field notes for clarity and called the participants for accuracy. I transcribed the data from the interviews into a Microsoft Word document. Then, I reviewed the narratives piece-by-piece from the transcripts. I did not include any narratives that did not relate to the lived experiences of the participants. The remaining data, I imported into NVivo 11 software as nodes. The nodes stored the document for references to allow the coding process.

I established the codes, categories, and themes through the coding process in NVivo. The codes were certain parts of the data that I wanted coded to reference a specific piece of narrative, which I directed NVivo to put into a particular node. Through the coding process, the next step was the sources section, and I labeled this section Interviews, starting with the alphabets A through K. The participants are not necessarily in chronological order to ensure the anonymity of the participants who may know each other and share information. The narrative from the interviews helps developed the categories and themes. There are two types of qualitative data analysis: categorical strategies and contextualizing strategies (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). I used the categorical strategy in this study with NVivo software, which allowed me to interrupt the narrative and arranged into categories to have a deeper understanding of the research question.

The comparison of probation officers and parole agents had the same or similar responses to the interview questions, except for Interview Questions 7 & 8, IQ7. What was it like to experience dealing with major issues offenders face transitioning back into the community? IQ8. What is it like to experience ex-offenders who were incarcerated for a longer length of time as related to their programs to become acclimated back into society? Instead of being incarcerated probationers are sentenced to probation, and some stay in jail on average from two months to over a year awaiting their trial, conviction, or sentencing. BJS (2018) estimated that in 2016, 65% of jail inmates are held in jail awaiting their trial, conviction, or sentencing. Participant H stated:

Probation as a whole was not restricted. So, it's almost like they were on an honor system in a sense because you couldn't be with them twenty-four hours a day. If they did something at some point, you'd find out about it.

Some probationers continue to recidivate, and probation officers help their clients to transition with their needs. I used the participants' answer from the interview questions, and their responses I assigned multiple codes to the same phrases that I placed into NVivo software, which stored the references. The coded descriptive references from NVivo, I attached them into nodes, which allowed the identification of the themes from each participant (see Appendix I). Table 2 illustrates the 10 interview questions, with a sample of the participants' responses.

Table 2

*Interview Questions with Participants' Responses*

Interview Questions	Participants' Responses
<p>IQ1. What are the lived experiences of probation and parole officers dealing with institutional obstacles, and the effect the institutional obstacles have on their role in reducing recidivism?</p>	<p>It frustrates me when the staff does not have the proper knowledge for the job, and they don't give us the proper equipment for the job, but yet they hold us accountable (PK).</p> <p>My experience with management, they go by a textbook that can give you all kind of things that don't work. What management has on paper is not relevant in real life (PG).</p> <p>One of the big obstacles we have is our administration staff. I have seen a lot of administrations that comes from other entities within law enforcement, and I hate to bring up the race card, but it's a fact racism exists (PC).</p>

- IQ2. How often does the state check social agencies' files for accuracy and effectiveness? Most of the agencies that I know go through a very stringent process to get a contract with the IL Dept. of Corrections. I've seen agencies that provide some services, but really there is no accountability as to how effective they are (PA).
- IQ3. Describe your experience related to the effectiveness of house monitors. House monitoring is a pain for me, the equipment is old, it goes off of one person's ankle to another, and there is no update machinery (PF).
- IQ4. Describe the nature or the essence of the experience of your caseload and workload numbers? As an officer my work schedule pretty much modifies itself with the 100-125 caseloads, you have to get the police report, run police reports, see offenders, talk to judges. We need more people. The caseloads are increasing but there is no time for agents, yet agents are responsible for seeing everyone on their caseloads (PD).
- IQ5. Can you describe elements of the experience you had improving work hours when working with offenders? I balance my time, some parolees are shot or died there are certain steps; you have to take in a time frame, and you have to take care of that. When the parolees are coming home you have 72 hours that you have to see them, if they need movement or on an ankle bracelet; you have to put in their time to leave home (PF)..
- IQ6. Can you describe elements of your experience of applying your knowledge to recommend alternatives for offenders in the effort to reduce recidivism? I would make them take some classes dealing with criminology, cognitive development, and not blaming everyone else for being in the system. Computer classes, and goals. It's cheaper to pay me, one person to supervise 104 people than to incarcerate them (PA).
- IQ7. What was it like to experience dealing with major issues offenders face transitioning back into the community? If the state gives over-time, then I would have more time to find out what programs are available, it is needed, and to take more time with parolees. Some are struggling with life, no food, no job or housing. Some of the parolees have never finished high school; then you have to find a place that will take them in. Probation as a whole was not really restricted. As far as I'm concerned, it's difficult for me because you want to give hope. The stigma is always there for black people and it's always harder (PF).
- IQ8. What is it like to experience ex-offenders who were incarcerated for a longer length of time as related to their The longest-term parolee I've ever seen did 31 years. He went in at 17yrs old and got out when he was 48 years old. It's almost like seeing a child being born. They are so in awe of the world they once knew before



program to become acclimated back into society?

incarceration. They are really motivated to live the rest of their lives doing something good. Now, it's on management and myself to provide programs for him but they are limited (PA).

IQ10. What is your experience dealing with offender's employment status?

It depends on the person. I have seen a guy make a huge blunder in life, and now he's a convicted felon, you can see the desire for change, and they make it happen. That's the exception to the rule. It's difficult for me when stakeholders are not working with offenders, the education system is so poor that even if you get through it, you are not equipped for a career or job. Now, I have to try to prepare offenders for reentry without education (PC & I).

In Figure 4, NVivo nodes analyzed the codes, and generate the words and phrases spoken often from the participants' narrative that can from the interviews, which developed the coding query from the nodes and put the words in the Word Cloud, which confirmed the categories and themes in a word image from the NVivo Word Frequency Query.



questions represents the participants' responses to each theme (see Appendix I). Some participants may have referenced to different theme more than once. However, NVivo only records participants as one number, regardless of the number each participant referred to a theme. The 13 themes came from under the comprehensible categories, which evolved from the participants' narratives (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Participants' Responses, Themes, and Interview Questions*

Categories	Themes	Interview Questions
Money	1. Unrealistic expectation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7,
	2. Technical violation	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9,
	3. Laws	1, 3, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10
	4. Jobs	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
	5. Funding Cut	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
	6. Education	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,
	7. Caseloads	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Substance Abuse & programs 9, 10	8. Drugs and Alcohol Treatment	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,
	9. Mental Illness	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10,
	10. Lack of Community Programs	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Administration System	11. Racism	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10
	12. Lack of Knowledge From Management	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9
	13. Authority not Backing-up the Parole Agents & Probation Officers	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10

*Note.* The 11 participants identified three categories during the interviews, where the 13 themes derived from the participants' responses.

The coding process and the flexibility of utilizing the techniques of NVivo have helped to develop the categories and themes from the participants, including

transcribing narrative using as coding process. The coded references from the participant's quotes help formed nodes. The nodes stored the code text that analyzed the words most frequently used, which identified the 13 themes. There are 11 participants, 5 are probation officers, and six are parole agents. I used NVivo numerical data to demonstrate the figures in Table 4. Table 4 identifies the participant's responses to the themes. The column header is labeled themes, probation officers, parole agents, sources, reference, and the percentage. The theme column is the specific theme name by the participants. The probation officers and the parole agents' columns identify participants by the number of references to the theme. The Source column is the number of participants that addressed that specific themes. The reference column is the number each time the participants addressed a specific theme. Lastly, the percentage is the total number of participants that believed a particular theme was an institutional obstacle. The results from the analysis codes and the participants' quotes in NVivo helped answer the research question in developing the themes, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*NVivo Analysis of Themes and Participants' References*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Probation Officers</b>	<b>Parole Agents</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Unrealistic expectation</b>	4	5	9	20	81%
<b>Technical violation</b>	4	4	8	8	72%
3		5	8	24	72%
(Laws	5	4	9	23	81%
<b>Lack of Knowledge From Management</b>	3	5	8	10	72%
<b>Lack of Community Programs</b>	5	6	11	45	100%
<b>Jobs</b>	5	6	11	28	100%
<b>Funding Cut</b>	5	4	9	26	81%
<b>Education</b>	4	5	9	22	81%
<b>Drugs and Alcohol Treatment</b>	5	5	10	24	90%
<b>Caseloads</b>	5	6	11	14	100%
<b>Authority not Backing-up the Parole Agents &amp; Probation Officers</b>	4	6	10	25	90%

*Note.* The 11 participants identified and referenced 13 themes during the interview sessions.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

This section describes the validity of the study using qualitative methods. It allows the reader to trust the findings, ensuring they are credible. There are four headings that are displayed in this section, Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability. Each section identifies the criterion for its purpose.

**Credibility**

NVivo is qualitative research software, with the acceptance from a wide range of disciplines that helps researcher gain a deeper understanding of the problem when analyzing data by creating graphs, and charts to demonstrating relationships (Englander, 2012). My credibility was validated by using NVivo 11. This software provided opportunities for data interpretation through chart analyzation, data output and development of themes, and data interpretation in analyzing charts. I used member checking for the validity of the interpretation of participants' comments, to track the thick descriptions of their lived experiences as probation officers and parole agents. There were no significant changes except a few words. Using these approaches allowed the participants to have a valuable voice in the study. The other strategies from triangulation techniques used for the credibility of this study were incorporating various journals, government sources, and a reflective journal of field notes during the interviews as needed. After carefully analyzing the data, the results were sent via e-mail or by a phone conference to the participants to confirm the accuracy of their narrative.

**Transferability**

Trochim and Donnelly (2007) stated that transferability is the generalizing or transferring of results from qualitative research to other settings. Recording the data accurately allows researchers to duplicate this study in other settings and disciplines with confidence that the results will be similar. To obtain this process I used five content experts with ten years of experiences employed as probation officers or parole

agents to help establish the interview questions. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling, providing rich and thick descriptions. The direct quotes from participants helped with the validity of the answers.

### **Dependability**

Having researched the results and accurately recording the transcripts from the interview questions, I coded the data to identify each participant narrative. I used this process for consistency to allow other researchers to repeat the process and receive similar results. Trochim and Donnelly (2007) stated that a researcher could observe the same thing twice, but the measurements or observations will differ to some degree.

### **Confirmability**

To establish the point of conformation I used an audio digital recorder, and compared field notes when transcribing the participants' narrative. I imported the transcripts into NVivo 11 to help identify the themes. Bazeley and Jackson (2015) noted that NVivo enhances the research coding process. The narratives from the 11 participants validated the findings without any biases from the researcher. NVivo is a software for reducing the manual tasks of coding and highlighting transcripts, which help eliminate mistakes. The software is used to allow the researcher to recognize themes and draw conclusions (Hilal & Alabri, 2013).

## **Results**

The 13 themes identified by the participants related to the overarching research question, and I gained a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of probation officers and parole agents' perception of institutional obstacles. The research question

and the focus questions from the participants (as seen in Appendix B) have identified existing institutional obstacles, and the effect the institutional obstacles have on the role of probation officers and parole agents in managing their clients to reduce recidivism in Illinois. Christensen et al. (2017) stated that the phenomenological method seeks to express the meaning of the experienced phenomena, “to go to the things themselves instead of measuring them” (P. 113).

The 11 participants in this study emphasized the importance of their lived experiences in their role as probation officers or parole agents in identifying what institutional obstacles exist in working with stakeholders and their clients to reduce recidivism. Englander (2012) noted the primary data collections are interviews for qualitative research. I used 10 in-depth interview questions to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The participants’ responses from the interview questions were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo 11 to establish the categories, and to develop the 13 themes.

Five of the 11 participants are males identified by the letters: A, C, I, J and K. The female participants are identified by the letters: B, D, E, F, G, and H. The probation officers’ letters are: B, D, G, H, and I. The parole agents’ letters are: A, C, E, F, J, and K. The numbers under each theme represent the numbers of references each participant commented on for that specific theme.

### **Theme 1: Unrealistic Expectations**

The theme unrealistic expectation, 9 (81%) includes the raw number, and the percentage of participants who agreed that management gave probation officers and



parole agents' unrealistic expectations, and therefore, officers and agents were not able to effectively perform their job in managing their clients to reduce recidivism. The overall total of women who are probation officers and parole agents had a stronger voice. The women spoke and referenced unrealistic expectations more than men.

According to PA, "I am directly responsible for their recidivism to a certain degree and their adjustment and successful completion of parole." The officers and agents must help supply the needs of their probationers or parolees. Participant I noted the court expected probation officers to sit and talk to offenders in the area they are not trained in, unlicensed counselor. This needs to be someone in the psychology area that is trained in criminal justice (PI). The following statements are from the participants to support Theme 1, unrealistic expectations.

I believe that there is an unrealistic expectation of the bean counter and the numbers of people versus the reality on the street. There are no jobs to the extent that I can send a parolee to be able to take care of his children, pay his child' support and make a living wage. The requirements for getting off parole early are, not having any infractions, do 50% of your time and be gainfully employed or have some form of education. You must be able to take care of yourself (PA).

"I've been told by a Deputy Chief before, leave your vest in the car. He said, it looks intimidating. The shooting around here, I say I'm not going in like that." My experience with management, they go by a textbook that can give you all kind of things that don't work. What management has on paper is not relevant

in real life. Sometimes you must invite people to the roundtable. We never get invited. You are going off your assumptions. If I always work in Bellwood, Hillside, and Westchester, that don't have violence like the west side. I can't put together a program or anything, or structure anything for the Westside. That's apples and oranges (PC).

### **Theme2: Technical Violation**

The overall total number of participants that referenced technical violations were 8 (72%), which included the raw number and percentage that indicated there are problems with the structure of technical violations of monitoring offenders. One of the forms of monitoring offenders is the electronic monitor (EM) or house arrest. Participant A noted that it is the highest level of supervision we have on parolees. Participant C stated that "when I say this guy needs to be on house arrest because he keeps doing this and that, so I need to lock him down, so I can see him, and they denied it." Some of the probation officers and parole agents indicated that 60% to 70% of the offenders who are on electronic monitoring have a mental disorder, they have a higher violation rate. The statements are from the participants to support Theme 2. Technical violation.

The electronic monitoring for house arrest has a 6-hour window before I find out the offender has left the house, I won't find out until the next day; I should know within a 2-hour window. Violation of house arrest can cause an automatic warrant. We must do a diversion interview which involves cuffing the parolee to determine what they have or have not

done as I speak to them. Then call my commander to explain the story.

Nine out of ten times it's not worth going back to prison (PA).

It's rough working with offenders that agree to the program when they are in jail. Once they get out and they find out they are confined to their homes, then they're not willing to participate. I had some clients, they'll take that thing and put it on the dog (PG).

“When offenders don't go to the programs that are mandatory, that's a violation that I must write-up” (PI).

### **Theme 3: Racism**

The theme Racism, 8 (72%) included the raw number and percentage of the participants who agreed that some parts of management were racist when it comes to African American probation officers or parole agents and their African American male clients. The standards are different, and management expects officers and agents to perform their jobs with an unequal playing field (PC & PB). The 8 participants commented on racism 23 times. The participants have expressed their concerns about racial disparities. The statements are quotes from the participants to support theme 3, which is racism:

One of the big obstacles we have is our administration staff. I have seen a lot of administration that comes from other entities within law enforcement, and I hate to bring up the race card, but it's a fact racism exists (PC).

I have noticed in the courts there is a lot of racism. One individual that comes out may get a different bond, but the second or third person may have done the same thing. I'll look at the paperwork, and one is a different color from the other, and they get different bonds. One is higher; one is lower, how can I explain that to my clients? (PB).

I saw far fewer Caucasian parolees than African Americans. Statistics show that we are incarcerated at a much higher rate, even though, as minorities, we do not commit the majority of crimes. It's how the judge swings the gavel. The Police Department (P.D) can determine if you go into the system, it bothers me to see injustice (PA).

#### **Theme 4: Mental Illnesses**

Nine (81%), which included the raw number and percentage of the participants who thought the theme mental illness was an institutional obstacle. They agreed that management, including legislators, should reopen the mental hospitals and have a special section with trained therapists and psychologists with some background knowledge about probation officers and parole agents to help these offenders. The 81% commented on mental illness 13 times. Most offenders with mental disorders do not have the financing to purchase medication. Participants G indicated the "government isn't willing to put money into that system. Because it's a system of poor people, I'm going out on a limb here and say seventy-five percent of people that are in the system are mentally ill." Probation officers and parole agents agreed that the

criminal justice system should train them to identify mental illness (PI, PF, PA, & PB).

The statements are quotes from the participants to support the theme of mental illness:

Some of my parolees that are schizophrenic, can harm themselves and someone else. The mental hospitals were closed, it increases recidivism, and it has increased my responsibilities. I have seen the need for mental health resources with my parolees, 60% of parolees now have some form of mental illness, and the state is not addressing this issue. “We don’t have programs set-up to help these men and women; it’s a hurtful thing” (PF).

The person in charge of the Cook County Jail is a Ph.D. Psychiatrist/Psychologist. Sheriff Darden will tell you it’s the biggest mental health facility in the country. The majority of inmates in Cook County have mental health issues. I see the reality of this statement (PA). For me, keeping recidivism down is helping most of our inmates who are mentally ill. Once they get out, due to Rauner closing all the mental health institutions, they don’t have the funds, nor the jobs (PB).

### **Theme 5: Laws**

The theme, laws were referenced by 9 (81%), which included the raw number and percentage of participants who agreed that some current laws have prevented probation officers and parole agents from managing their clients effectively. Summarizing (PA, PD & PE) statements, some laws have opened doors for offenders to recidivate. The 81% commented on the laws 23 times, believing that some laws are

institutional barriers. The statements are quotes from the participants to support theme 5, which is laws. “Legislators can write legislation to aid offenders. Most of them don’t care us about or the offenders” (PD).

A law was passed last January by Rauner that all parolees, once released, will be given a voucher for a state ID. That is not happening for my parolees. Sometimes I come out of my pocket to help them. I’m glad we are heading in the right direction with the legalization of marijuana. We assess their deficiencies coming in. We do a better job of assessing what led them to commit these types of crimes (PA).

From my experience management wants to do a blanket policy that will be a general policy and procedure of what should be done. You must look at culture, and what works for offenders (PG).

#### **Theme 6: Lack of Knowledge from Management**

The participants referenced the theme lack of knowledge from management 8 (72%), these numbers indicating the raw number of percentage. They agreed that management lacks knowledge when it pertains to probation officers and parole agents’ responsibility, especially working with offenders from the seven identified communities. The seven communities are Austin, East Garfield Park, North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Auburn/Gresham West Englewood, and Roseland. The lack of knowledge from management brings about unwarranted stress and anxiety and allows offenders to recidivate (PC, PF& PJ). The 72% of the participants commented on the lack of knowledge from management 10 times. The overall totals of men and women

who are probation officers and parole agent have an equal voice on the lack of knowledge from management. Participant C felt strongly about management operating within the guidelines of regulations. He noted the rules and regulations are what he would change, it says one thing, but you have people saying, “I know what that says but do what I told you. And when it’s convenient, they tell you to do things against this” (PC). The statements are quotes from the participants to support theme 5, lack of knowledge from management.

“It frustrates me when the staff does not have the proper knowledge for the job, and they don't give us the proper equipment for the job, but yet they hold us accountable” (PK).

“In my personal opinion, to keep recidivism down, we need more people that are really educated in this line of work” (PB).

When you have people that come from other walks of life in law enforcement and don't understand the process, it affects how I do my job.

They put those people over a law enforcement Department then, they take the law enforcement part out of it, and they implement other stuff (PC).

Management does not take into consideration what agents and our parolees must do. Some cannot go into the certain neighborhoods because they can be killed. I have seen how it has kept the morale down, it's very hard, especially when you are working in a very dangerous environment (PF).

### **Theme 7: Lack of Community Programs**

This theme, lack of community programs emerged with an overwhelming

narrative from both probation officers and parole agents. The raw number and percentage regarding the lack of community programs is 11 (100%). The 11 participants referenced the lack of community programs as a significant institutional obstacle 45 times, agreeing that stakeholders have discounted many programs. Participant D “stated that we may not have resources, but some of us reached out to our churches and other people for help with programs for our clients.” The probation officers and parole agents are helping offenders with the reentry process to reduce recidivism. The following statements are quotes from the participants to support the theme lack of community programs.

I think it’s not enough community programs to service the clients, and so once they are on probation or parole and they are ordered to go to a substance abuse program that will be based upon us immediately getting them into a substance abuse program, however the programs are overcrowded and there is a waiting process (PG).

If they don’t have the training, give them the training. Give them the tools to succeed, you make my job harder. One thing I try to do is network with all of the resource areas, whether it is in my area or another area or program (PC).

One thing that I find is that there are not enough services to meet the need of the offender. I believe that the institution recognizes that these things are needed. But I don’t think that the resources are there to pay for them (PH).



“Training is needed before they leave prison and after, I try to make sure there are more resources and address it with the commander” (PJ).

“I’m a parole agent, so I have a guideline with certain things, I can’t go in doing my own thing. If I want programs, then I must have my own program for returning citizens” (PE).

### **Theme 8: Jobs**

One hundred percent of the 11 participants that includes the raw number and percentage commented on the theme jobs 23 times. They agreed that the lack of jobs affect probation officers and parole agents’ responsibility, especially working with offenders in the seven identified communities. The seven communities are Austin, East Garfield Park, North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Auburn/Gresham West Englewood, and Roseland. Most offenders who sold drugs resorted to selling for their livelihood and to support their family. This opens the door for offenders to recidivate (PF, PA & PJ). Every probation officer and parole agent had a strong voice and concerns about the lack of jobs. All the participants expressed the difficulties of managing offenders in writing their reports, stating that their clients have looked relentlessly for jobs; and depending on their backgrounds, they may not get a job. However, there are programs that hire ex-offenders, such as the U-Turn program, and the Summit of Hope program. Referrals to these programs depend on the offenders’ background. The statements are quotes from the participants to support theme 8, jobs. “For my parolees, jobs are a problem, it’s very difficult for them to find employment” (PE). “Employment was a frustrating issue for me, and difficult for my home detention

guys because you had to have an interview set-up. I'm not going to give you a window to look for jobs. I had rules to follow" (PI).

I have guys that say I'm really actively looking for jobs, and they say that they have mouths to feed; they have kids, and you say the only thing they offer over here is \$6 an hour. When people get frustrated with stuff like that, then they go back to the streets because it's easier, it's what they know (PA).

It depends on the jobs, if it's a temporary job it may be easier, but permanent jobs are difficult, that's a problem because companies don't want the background (PJ).

CTA has a program called the Second Chance. I've gone and talked with one of the facilitators for about an hour and a half. And I asked exactly what are you looking for? Who qualifies for this? They can't have a violent background (PC).

### **Theme 9: Funding Cut**

9 (81%) of the participants commented on funding cuts 26 times. These participants agreed that funding cuts affect every facet of probation officers and parole agents' job, endangering their lives with faulty equipment, especially in unsafe neighborhoods (PK, PF & PI). Funding cuts bring about unwarranted stress and anxiety for officers, agents, and their clients. Funding cuts open doors for offenders to recidivate (PI & PF).

Participant A said, the lack of funding has affected the recidivism rate which is now at 48% because of diversions. It's the way we do parole now, because we were not doing case management. When I first started, the recidivism rate was 75%. We've realized like Preckwinkle "you're filling my county with low hanging fruit. It's costing us money and creating an unsafe environment." Stop arresting people for one joint of marijuana, give them a ticket. When you strip a community of resources, what's going to come is crime. That's not just relative to African Americans. That's any culture. If you strip a man of his ability to feed himself or his family what's he going to turn to? Survival is a necessity, so you are going to do those things (PA).

The overall totals of women who are probation officers and parole agents have a stronger voice on Funding Cuts than men. The statements are quotes from the participants to support the Theme Funding Cuts.

"It's difficult for me to work effectively because the state has cut the funds to help men and women who are returning to society from the prison system" (PF).

"Our jobs must be better funded, to make it more manageable, and pay more money because you are doing house checks in the middle of the night for pennies. The guys you're monitoring are making more than you" (PI).

### **Theme 10: Education**

The theme education, 9 (81%) included the raw number and percentage

of the participants who agreed that the lack of educational programs for offenders affected probation officers and parole agents' performance in managing offenders (PE & PA). The 81% of the participants commented on the lack of education 22 times. The participants agreed that education leads to jobs, and their comments were, "some of our clients cannot read or write, which requires more time, from officers and agents; we are not reimbursed for our time" (PE, PA, PF & PK). The lack of educational programs also brings about unwarranted stress and anxiety for the officers and agents, and open doors for the offenders to recidivate (PE, PA, and PK). Several of the participants noted that education and job training was cut, it is no longer offered to all inmates. Those who take advantage of obtaining their GED, if it's available, will decrease their parole by 90 days (PA, PE & PK). The following statements are quotes from the participants to support the theme education.

The changing of the prison system some years ago where education and job training was no longer offered affected offenders and probation officers and parole agents alike. So, it has affected my job as a parole agent because offenders come with no education and leave with no education. I see some of them over and over again. It's disheartening because education leads to jobs. We have a couple of programs that are pretty good, but it's just not enough based on the number that we incarcerate and put on parole. It's difficult for me when stakeholders are not working with offenders, the education system is so poor that even if you get through it, you are not equipped or prepared for a career or job. Now I must prepare offenders for

reentry without education (PA).

“Management does not give offenders the resources to survive, and it puts pressure on me with my parolees. Many men and women don’t know how to read or write. They don’t have basic education and jobs” (PF).

### **Theme 11: Drug and Alcohol Treatment**

The theme drug and alcohol treatment is a critical theme in this study because the lack of drug and alcohol treatment for offenders assigned to probation officers and parole agents in this study is a major contributor to the high rate of recidivism. From the coded references, 10 (90%) include the raw number and percentage of participants who commented 24 times on the theme. The participants agreed that the lack of drug and alcohol treatment for offenders is a major obstacle. Probation officers and parole agents’ performance in managing offenders has been negatively affected (PI & PF). It brings about unwarranted stress and anxiety for officers and agents, it also allows offenders to recidivate (PI, PA, and PK). “Our jobs as officers and agents are to make sure clients who have backgrounds in drugs and alcohols attend drug and alcohol treatment programs. However, there is a waiting process. Most of our clients have drug and alcohol problems” (PI, PF, and PG). The following statements are quotes from the participants to support the theme lack of drug and alcohol treatment. A lot of programs that offered drug treatment programs experienced funding cuts over the years, making it difficult to manage offenders who need treatment. (PA). “Many of my parolees have drug problems that haven’t been addressed, and it’s hard to refer individuals for drug treatment assessment” (PE).

“Most of the parolees, 60-70%, are nonviolent drug offenders” (PA).

“The number one problem is drugs and alcohol. I tell my clients you cannot go around old friends or a relationship that’s not helpful to you. Management needs to work with us and have more drug and alcohol facilities” (PI).

### **Theme 12: Caseloads**

The theme caseloads emerged with an overwhelming response from both probation officers and parole agents. The raw number and percentage of 11 (100%) reflect the unanimous responses of the participants in the study. The participants agreed that caseloads are problematic and are an institutional obstacle. Caseloads affect every area of probation officers and parole agents’ role in working with management and their clients. The participants indicated they need more paid time to work with their clients. The caseloads are increasing, but there is no overtime time for officers and agents, according to participants. The caseloads average 100 to 200 clients. However, officers and agents are still responsible for doing the same job with a heavy caseload without any overtime. In the process of community supervision officers and agents must build relationships with clients’ families, and with community agencies who provide supportive services to their clients.

According to Participant F, diversion is part of my job. Diversion is when staff goes to a police department to get a warrant because the parolee has violated their parole. An example the agent cannot find a parolee or has not seen the parolee within 45 to 90 days and request a warrant for their arrest. Ninety percent of the time they are on drugs. After two or three times of doing this, the

parolee needs to go back to prison because it's a violation. The state is paying for them to be in a drug program. This is done after you have tried everything to find this person and everything you discover is true. Then you must call the morgue, the hospital, call the family member and the jails (PF).

The following statements are quotes from the participants to support theme 12, caseloads.

"My caseload is 104, some agents' caseloads are 135 people, and others are 160 people. If we don't see the number of people in a months' time, then we are being written-up or suspended" (PF).

"I think management can lower our supervision number by adding more probation officers. My caseloads were 100, I had high-risk offenders. If you had a misdemeanor, they could have over 200 offenders" (PI).

"I average between 80 and 90 people, depending on the area. Management needs to hire more people. One parole agent should have thirty people. That's more realistic to effective case management. To hire more people, that's a budget issue" (PE).

"My caseload is about 120, in the beginning it was 200 to 220, I have to check their records, make sure they're not getting picked up and not telling me" (PD).

### **Theme 13: Authority Not Backing up Parole Agents or Probation Officers**

The theme, authority not backing up parole agents or probation officers emerged with an overwhelming narrative from both probation officers and parole agents by 10 (90%). This is the raw number from the percentage of the participants who agreed with this theme. The overall totals of men and women who are probation

officers and parole agents have an equal voice on authority not backing up parole agents and probation officers with 25 references to the theme. Some of the participants discussed their frustration with management not supporting the right thing, abiding by the rules and regulations. If you are an individual who will speak up for yourself or see some things need to change with the parolees, favoritism is shown, and management will single you out as a target (PA, PF, PE, PD, and PK). The parole agents or probation officers have some problems with management about their clients' documentation. According to participants C and A, offenders must have documentation, and most of them don't have it because they've been locked up. The only documentation they have is their release paperwork from prison. Most places will not take the paperwork, they are stuck trying to get a link or medical card. Stuck trying to get anything. So, there's frustration from the family, frustration from the client. Even with probation, because it's a mark on you. It can stop you from getting a job. The following statements are quotes from the participants to support the theme authority not backing up probation officers or parole agents. "We need more people who are inclined to what's going on in the institution and have a passion for it" (PB). "A problem I have is the current management does not work very well as far as working with agents to assure or address the problems that agents have and properly address the parolees needs" (PE).

The commander, a lot of times, will stand behind me. Because they answer to the Deputy Chief which answers to the Chief and the Deputy Chief, usually it's that person that does not support them. No discipline from



authority for the parolee, they are not accountable. What I have experienced is authority that does not back up the parole agents, they don't want the guys going back to jail" (PA). "I always tell guys, especially when they first come out, if you're doing the right thing, I will support you 100%. I don't care if my Chief says something to you or me, I got your back" (PC).

### **Summary**

Institutional obstacles in the Criminal Justice System and the Illinois Department of Corrections have a direct correlation on recidivism, and on probation officers and parole agent's role in managing their clients. Probation officers and parole agents voiced lived experiences with institutional obstacles that have put unnecessary pressures on them and their clients to attempt to reduce recidivism. Some institutional obstacles have forced offenders to revert to a life of crime. Maslow's hierarchy stresses the necessity of shelter, food, and clothing. Many of the offenders experiencing reentry lack the basic necessities for revival. Their need to support children and families exacerbates the critical need for resources.

The findings from each of the 11 participants' perception on identifying institutional obstacles and its effects on them and their clients addressed and answered the overarching research question. The probation officers' experiences were very similar to parole agents. However, each participant's experiences were unique although probation officers and parole agents shared the same descriptions that identified the 13 themes that they believed constitute institutional obstacles.

Chapter 5 contains an evaluation of the findings from the research and the data discussed in Chapter 4. Included in Chapter 5 are limitations, recommendations for further studies, and some point in literature review. Also, Chapter 5 contains the answer to the research question about the effects institutional obstacles have on probation officers, parole agents, and ex-offenders in reducing recidivism. Included are the implications for positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to identify what institutional obstacles exist, as probation officers and parole agents perceive them, to reduce recidivism in Illinois. To identify these institutional obstacles, I incorporated in-depth interviews with 10 open-ended questions from 11 probation officers and parole agents in Cook County, Illinois. There are 102 counties in Illinois, and offenders reside mainly in 16 of these counties, but over 50% of the offenders in the IDOC come from seven communities in Chicago (Bostwick et al., 2012; IDOC, 2015; IDOC, 2018). The seven communities are Austin, East Garfield Park, North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Auburn/Gresham West Englewood, and Roseland (CSRC, 2007; IDOC, 2018). Curtis et al. (2013) stated that the U.S. incarceration rate increased by 700% between 1970 and 2005 in United States, with one out of every 100 residents incarcerated in 2008. The end of 2014, seven out of 10 people in the prison population were under community supervision (Teague, 2016).

The United States government, the state of Illinois and the IDOC are looking for ways to decrease the number of incarcerations and recidivism. Eisenberg (2016) stated that because of mass incarceration in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, a decarceration era has emerged in 2010 that involves probation officers and parole agents managing offenders to reduce recidivism. The decarceration era has caused probation officers and parole agents to have an increase in their caseloads due to more offenders being released from jails and prisons. Many of the participants noted that the state has put more responsibility on them because it is cheaper for the state to pay probation officers

and parole agents, than to incarcerate inmates, plus the state does not have to pay for the inmate's medical expenses. The probation officers and parole agents have critical relations between the criminal justice system, the IDOC, and the ex-offenders. The BJS (2018) estimated that 4,537,100 adults were under the supervision of probation officers and parole agents in the United States as of December 31, 2016. These supervised adults rely upon the work shouldered by probation officers and parole agents in Illinois.

This study is significant because Illinois probation officers and parole agents who were interviewed in this study indicated that they have a difficult time managing their clients with reintegration into their communities and preventing overall recidivism. Ninety percent of the participants indicated the difficulties they face in managing their clients due to institutional obstacles. The results of this study will allow probation officers and parole agents to identify 13 themes related to institutional obstacles. These 13 institutional obstacles will be targeted to help maximize the effectiveness of managerial support among stakeholders, to reevaluate policies or remove some of the obstacles, allowing probation officers and parole agents to help their clients reduce recidivism.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

After a thorough review of the literature, and addressing the research question, the findings in this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study documented that probation officers and parole agents agreed that institutional obstacles exist. The 11 participants emphasized the importance of their lived experiences and this has allowed

me to have a deeper understanding of their roles as probation officers and parole agents encountering institutional obstacles.

There were five probation officers, of whom participants B, D, G, and H were females, while participant I was a male. There were 6 parole agents, of whom E and F were females, and A, C, J, and K, were males. There were 13 themes the participants considered as institutional obstacles were: unrealistic expectations, technical violations, racism, mental illness, laws, lack of knowledge from management, lack of community programs, jobs, funding cuts, education, drugs and alcohol treatment, and authority not backing up parole agents and probation officers. The participants could not answer one interview question without identifying and attaching another theme to the answer. The results from the interview questions demonstrate the application of systems thinking theory. Systems thinking involves gaining a better understanding of something that is related to a complex phenomenon proving that everything within a system is related. This is true with probation officers, parole agents, and ex-offenders who are interrelated to key stakeholders. Those key stakeholders are Illinois government regulators, judges, prison management, prosecutors, and attorneys, whose decisions affect the outcome of IDOC.

Systems thinking can help key stakeholders manage, adapt and view the big picture, while focusing on smaller parts within the system to reduce or remove institutional obstacles. Institutional obstacles have changed the dynamics for probation officers and parole agents' performance in managing ex-offenders. Officers and agents need support from key stakeholders to accomplish the goal of aiding ex-offenders to

successfully reenter society. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study is to identify what institutional obstacles exist as probation officers and parole agents perceive them.

### **Theme 1: Unrealistic Expectation**

Nine (81%) of participants agreed that management gave probation officers and parole agents' unrealistic expectations, therefore, officers and agents were not able to effectively perform their job in managing their clients to reduce recidivism. The female participants were the majority in identifying with the theme unrealistic expectations. In the 1980s many states have abolished the parole board system that allowed inmates to have an early release before completion of their sentence (Kuziemko, 2013). Illinois has a prisoner review board, which is separate from the IDOC, and the members are appointed by the governor. Parole agents and probation officers now absorb the responsibilities that once fell on parole boards. The participants agreed that stakeholders are not helping them obtain what they need to help their clients. The reduction in the prison population depends on probation officers and parole agents to foster successful reentry.

Probation officers and parole agents are responsible for resolving the conflict between the political emphasis on punitive approaches and the goal of effectively achieving offenders' reintegration (Lutz et al., 2012). An example of conflict happens when a probation officer or a parole agent makes a decision, giving an offender a technical violation which means the offender may return to prison for violating their parole. The key stakeholder's goal is having officers and agents work with ex-

offenders to have a successful reentry into their communities. Participant I stated, “Many offenders did not have need money to pay for the class or to take public transportation, because the state cut funding for the drug treatment program.” Offenders need money for to gets to and from drug and alcohol treatments. If the courts order a client to go to a drug program, they must pay to get into the program. If they do not go it will call for a technical violation this creates a conundrum for probation officers and parole agents who must then decide if the defender will received a technical violation, and possibly return to prison.

## **Theme 2: Technical Violation**

The overall total number of participants that referenced Technical Violations were 8 (72%), which included the raw number and percentage that indicated there are problems with the issuance of technical violations while monitoring offenders. The women probation officers and parole agents had strongly agreed on the theme technical violations, indicating that management did not support them with the violations. Each of the participants referenced technical violation once. If ex-offenders violate the terms of their probation (technical violations), they are sent back to prison. Ex-offenders are required to adhere to specific rules and supervision conditions, which may involve payment of court costs, fines, and fees (USDJOJPBJS, 2015a). Participant I stated “If the courts order a client to go to a drug program, they must pay to get into the program.” It was hard, the ability to get to a place. It should call for a technical violation. Eisenberg (2016) stated that technical violations have increased the prison population within the past four decades, and some scholars have coined the

phrase back-end-sentencing which has grown at a faster pace than the rate of incarceration. Eno Loudon and Skeem (2013) noted that 85% of mentally disordered offenders are under the care of probation officers and can be incarcerated for technical violations.

### **Theme 3: Racism**

Eight (72%) of the participants agreed that some parts of management were racist when it comes to African American probation officers or parole agents and their African American male clients. Participant A stated, “I saw fewer Caucasian parolees than African Americans. Statistics show that African Americans are incarcerated at a much higher rate. Even though as minorities we do not commit the majority of crimes. It’s how the judge swings the gavel” (PA). The overall total of men and women who are probation officers and parole agents have an equal voice about racism. Participant D was outspoken about racism with seven references, and participant A had 4 references about racism. Eisenberg (2016) indicated that black males are disproportionate and have the highest rate of incarceration, which has led to mass incarceration. One in 9 black men was in prison, and 1 out of 3 has done prison time (Eisenberg, 2016). The participants have expressed their concerns about racial disparities. African Americans are 12% of the U.S. population but are 40% of the state and federal prison population (Kilgore, 2012).

The Adult Redeploy and the Illinois Oversight Board, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (2012) stated that “Illinois is facing a corrections crisis in which innovative solutions are desperately needed” (p. 3), with large numbers of male



African Americans incarcerated and recidivating. The data from this study will consider the feedback from a stakeholder analysis from Illinois state governmental regulators, the leadership of prison management, and the input of probation officers and ex-offenders. Illinois has 12.8 million residents; 14.8% are African Americans according to the United States Census (2011). Over 5.7 million Illinois residents have a criminal history record including being on probation or parole (USDOJOJPBJS, 2012). According to participant B:

We noticed in the courts there is a lot of racism. One individual that comes out may get a different bond. But the second or third person may have done the same thing. We've looked at the paperwork. One is a different color from the other. And they get different bonds. One is higher; one is lower.

White defendants who have committed the same crime with the same background and the same charges as black defendants will not face the same sentencing as the black defendants (Rehavi & Starr, 2012). Studies show that African American men are six to eight times more likely to be incarcerated and to recidivate than other ethnicities. Hispanics are almost four times more likely to be incarcerated and to recidivate than Caucasian men (Applegate, 2014). Caucasian males with the same criminal background and the same age who have committed the same crime as an African American male will not go to jail as quickly as an African American male (Hofer, 2012). According to Leiber et al. (2016), African Americans males are racially profiled and viewed as aggressive, dangerous, sexual, and lacking responsibility. Leiber et al. noted that Caucasian and African American males and females were not

viewed the same in the decision-making process for court cases even when the background, age, and arrest frequencies were the same. In 2011, Illinois state government implemented a task force to work with judges and probation officers involved with the arraignment process to establish the reasons behind racial disparities and to find solutions to address the disparities (Jones, 2012).

Judge Wilkinson, who serves on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, acknowledged that there are discrepancies in criminal justice and law enforcement systems and that African Americans are four times more likely to be arrested for marijuana than Caucasians (Wilkinson, 2014). According to Wilkinson, the criminal justice system “has failed to win the trust and confidence of many in the African-American community” (p. 1169).

#### **Theme 4: Mental Illness**

Nine (81%) of the participants thought that the Theme Mental Illness was an institutional obstacle. They agreed that management, including legislators, should reopen the mental hospitals and have a special section with trained therapist and psychologist with some background knowledge about probation officers and parole agents to help these offenders. The overall total of women who are probation officers and parole agents agreed more on mental illness than men. The 81% commented on mental illness as an obstacle 22 times. Participant B referenced mental illness 6 times.

Participant B indicated that inmates have mental illnesses, for me keeping recidivism down is major, the majority of our inmates that come are mentally ill. Once they get out, due to Rauner closing all of the mental

health institutions, they don't have the money nor the jobs to get medication.

Participant F stated that "I have seen the need for mental health resources, 60% of parolees now have some form of mental illness, and the state is not addressing this issue. The state has failed to give these individuals needed medication." To validate the participant's consensus regarding the need for medication, experts have confirmed the concern documented by the majority of this study's participants.

Eno Loudon and Skeem (2013) noted that 85% of mentally disordered offenders are under the care of probation officers for technical violations. Most offenders with mental disorders do not have the financing to purchase medication. The recidivism rate for mental health disorder offenders is 70% (Eno Loudon & Skeem, 2013).

### **Theme 5: Laws**

This theme was referenced by 9 (81%) of the participants who agreed that some current laws have affected probation officers and parole agents, impacting their ability to complete assigned tasks, and manage their clients effectively. Summarizing (PA, PD & PE) statements, some laws have opened doors for offenders to recidivate, which is part of probation officers and parole agents' responsibility to decrease the rate of recidivism. The 81% commented on the laws being an obstacle 23 times, believing that some laws are institutional barriers. The overall totals of women who are probation officers and parole agents agreed more on the laws than men. Participant A referenced laws 9 times and participant D referenced it 5 times. Some laws affected

how probation officers and parole agents do their jobs, such as the Three Strikes Law. It carries a mandatory life sentence for the third offense (Eisenberg, 2016).

The focus on top-down dictates that in the criminal justice system ignores the full range of actors and incentives that comprise the industry and obscures principal-agent problems that may hinder implementation of law and policy reforms in both public and private sectors (Eisenberg, 2016). Participant G stated, “I was on the policy and procedure committee. We wanted to blanket policy that will be a general policy and procedure of what should be done. There are some laws that protect probation officers and our problems.”

“The Probation Officers Protection Act was adopted to help protect federal probation officers police them power in the arrest of probationers and offenders who violate their condition” (Tester, 2017 para. 2).

#### **Theme 6: Lack of Knowledge from Management**

The participants referred to the theme lack of knowledge from management by 8 (72%). They agreed that management lacks knowledge when it pertains to probation officers and parole agents’ responsibility, especially working with offenders in the seven identified communities. The seven communities are Austin, East Garfield Park, North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Auburn/Gresham West Englewood, and Roseland. The lack of knowledge from management brings about unwarranted stress and anxiety and allows offenders to recidivate (PC, PF& PJ). Seventy-two percent of the participants commented on the lack of knowledge from management 10 times. The overall total of men and women who are probation officers and parole agents shared

the same perspective on the lack of knowledge from management. Participant C felt strongly about how management operates with the regulations.

### **Theme 7: Lack of community programs**

This theme emerged with an overwhelming narrative from both probation officers and parole agents by 11 (100%). These numbers include the raw number and percentage about the lack of community programs. The 11 participants referenced the lack of community programs as a significant institutional obstacle 45 times, and agreed that stakeholders have stopped many programs. Participant 9 referenced this theme 9 times, participant G referenced this theme 7 times, and participants D and K referenced the lack of community programs 5 times. Participant G stated that “I think it’s not enough community programs to service the clients.” Participant D said, “I believe a great percentage of people recidivate because of the lack of support and care.” The U.S. government has decreased funds for rehabilitation programs that once helped probation officers/parole agents manage their clients and reduce recidivism. All participants agreed that cognitive behavioral rehabilitation programs are needed to reduce recidivism. Hercules is an ex-offender who changed his life and became a scholar. Hercules (2013) agreed that cognitive behavioral programs are a key factor in ex-offenders changing their mindsets and their life circumstances. Payne and DeMichele (2011) have argued that the lack of attention to cognitive behavioral aspects in rehabilitation programs is related to a rapid rise in recidivism among clients of probation officers and parole agents. This lack of attention contributes to

institutional obstacles that increase violations and revocations (Payne & DeMichele, 2011).

Former President Obama stated that his administration had enhanced public safety, lowered the incarceration rate with pathways to success instead of pipelines to prison. The former President implemented effective rehabilitation programs that worked to reduce recidivism, and reinvested in resources in communities and crime prevention services (B. Obama, personal communication, September 2016). The U.S. Congress established the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) in 1979 under the Justice System Improvement Act of 1979 (U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance [USDOJBOJA], 2010). The PIECP helps inmates by providing rehabilitation programs, marketable job skills and partial repayment of restitution to victims for the harm sustained (USDOJBJA, 2012). As of June 1995, 36 states have received their certification for the PIECP, and Illinois legislators had not endorsed the program. Illinois, as of July 2018, has not been certified under PIECP (USDOJBJA, 2018).

### **Theme 8: Jobs**

One hundred percent of the 11 participants agreed that the lack of jobs affect probation officers and parole agents' ability to effectively manage their clients, especially working with offenders in the Cook County seven communities. There are 102 counties in Illinois, and offenders reside mainly in 16 of these counties, but most of the offenders live in the seven communities in Cook County managed by probation officers and parole agents. The seven communities are Austin, East Garfield Park,

North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Auburn/Gresham West Englewood, and Roseland. Most offenders who sold drugs resorted to selling drugs for their livelihood and to support their family. This opens the door for offenders to recidivate (PF, PA & PJ). Every probation officer and parole agent voiced strong concern about the lack of jobs. Participant A referenced the lack of jobs 7 times. All of the participants spoke about the difficulty of managing offenders when writing their reports, stating that their clients have looked relentlessly for jobs, and depending on their backgrounds they may not get a job. However, there are programs that hire ex-offenders, such as the U-Turn program and the Summit of Hope program. Referrals to these programs depend on the offenders' background. Baur et al. (2018) noted that over 600 ex-offenders are released each year, and approximately 95% are seeking employment. The negative stigmatic stereotype and the discrimination that is placed on the majority of offenders will cause many to remain unemployed or underemployed 5 five years after being released from prison.

Many grassroots organizations have demanded that the government ban the box identifying ex-offenders on applications, to help offenders who seek to rebuild their lives. *Ban the box* refers to the check box on employment applications that asks whether the candidate has a prior criminal conviction (Baur et al., 2018). An international civil rights movement to band the box began in 2004, and that has impacted government, public and private hiring practices (Baur et al., 2018). Baur et al. (2018) stated that former President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum on April 29, 2016 creating the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, to ensure a fair

opportunity for ex-offenders applying for government jobs. Employers who adopt the ban the box policies are not required to hire ex-offenders, but they should use discretion in selecting qualified candidates.

### **Theme 9: Funding Cuts**

Nine (81%) of the participants commented on the theme funding cuts 26 times. These participants agreed that funding cuts affect every facet of probation officers and parole agents' lives, by endangering their lives with faulty equipment, especially in unsafe neighborhoods (PK, PF & PI). Participant G referenced funding cuts 5 times, the total number of participants referenced this theme 26 times. The women who participated in the study were outspoken about funding cuts. Funding cuts bring about unwarranted stress and anxiety for officers, agents, and their clients. Funding cuts opens doors for offenders to recidivate (PI & PF). Green-Jackson (2015) noted that former Illinois Governor Rauner proposed a 2015 budget increase for correctional spending for over \$1.4 billion, due to the 25 adult corrections facilities and prisons that are overcrowded. The prisons were designed to house 32,075 inmates, but prisons were housing 48,227 inmates, and most of the budget will go to hiring staff for the IDOC facilities. Sixty million dollars was spent on overtime payments for prison guards.

Neal (2018) stated that President Trump, 2018 budget request of \$27.7 billion for the department of justice represented a \$1.1 billion dollar decrease from 2017. President Trump's budget will eliminate about \$700 million in funds for outdated programs, and eliminate \$210 million from the budget for State Criminal Alien



Assistance Programs. Some of President Trump's previous statements called for longer prison sentences on drug convictions.

### **Theme 10: Education**

Nine (81%) of the participants agreed that the lack of educational programs for offenders had affected probation officers and parole agents' performance in managing offenders (PE & PA). The 81% of the participants commented on the lack of education 22 times. The overall total of women who are probation officers and parole agents shared a different perspective than men on education. Participant A referenced education 9 times. The participants agreed that "education leads to jobs, some of our clients cannot read or write, which requires more time from officers and agents; we are not reimbursed for our time" (PE, PA, and PF & PK). Gould (2018) stated that reducing recidivism saves taxpayers, promotes community safety, and helps the offender to transform if education is given a priority. The 9 participants agreed the value of education helps their clients receive jobs faster, especially for those who are learning to read and write:

I had one guy that was illiterate, and when I sent him to a program I contacted them myself. I say this guy is this age, just to let you know he's illiterate. So, when he shows up don't just give him paper work, read it to him and I need somebody to help him get to that level so when his kids are talking about homework, he won't feel stupid (PC).

Starr (2014) noted that incarceration and recidivism may be reduced by judges considering the defendants' criminal backgrounds and the defendants' risk of

recidivating. Eventually, the offenders will fall into the hands of probation officers or parole agents to help them with their educational programs. It is vital for key stakeholders to support educational programs to reduce recidivism. Offenders who are educated are less likely to be incarcerated (Curtis et al., 2013).

### **Theme 11: Drug and Alcohol Treatment**

This theme is a massive problem for probation officers and parole agents' clients in this study. From the coded references, 10 (90%) of the participants commented 24 times on the theme. The participants agreed that the lack of drug and alcohol treatment for offenders is a major obstacle, and this obstacle has negatively affected probation officers and parole agents' performance in managing offenders (PI & PF). It also brings about unwarranted stress and anxiety for officers and agents, it allows offenders to recidivate (PI, PA, and PK). Officers and agents are to make sure those clients who have backgrounds in drugs and alcohol attends drug and alcohol treatment programs. Once offenders are on probation or parole they are ordered to go to a substance abuse program, where they are usually put on a waiting list. Participant A referenced this theme 6 times stating, "Most of our clients have drug and alcohol problems" (PI, PF, and PG). Linden, et al. (2017) stated that in 2016, more than half of American prison and jail population were addicted to opioids, with an estimation of 42,000 dying from opioid overdoses. Each year the opioid epidemic has increased in prison and when the inmates are released, some have contracted various diseases, such as hepatitis C and HIV.

**Theme 12: Caseloads**

The response from probation officers and parole agents for this theme was unanimous, with 11 (100%) reflecting the raw number and percentage of officers and agents whose lived experiences resonated with the theme. The participants agreed that caseloads are problematic and are an institutional obstacle. Caseloads affect every area of probation officers and parole agents' role in case management with their clients. Each of the participants indicated the need for more paid time to work with their clients. The caseloads are increasing, but there is not enough time for officers and agents, according to participants to meet the demands their caseloads require of them. The caseloads average from 100 to 200 cases. However, officers and agents are still responsible for doing the same job with a heavy caseload without any overtime. In the process of community supervision, officers and agents must build relationships with clients' families and with community agencies. Sabet et al. (2013) argued that community supervision is not working effectively because each probation officers and parole agents' caseload consists of hundreds of offenders, and it is difficult to enforce each offenders' various supervision conditions.

**Theme 13: Authority Not Backing Up Parole Agents and Probation Officers**

The narrative from this theme had overwhelming responses from probation officers and parole agents by 10 (90%). This statistic includes the raw number and percentage of the participants in the study. The overall total of men and women who are probation officers and parole agents shared the same perspective on authority that does not back them up with 25 references to the theme. Participant C referenced this

theme 7 times. Some of the participants discussed their frustration with management not supporting the right thing, and not abiding by the rules and regulations. If you are an individual who will speak up for yourself or see some things need to change with the parolees, favoritism is shown, and management will single you out as a target (PA, PF, PE, PD, and PK). The parole agents and probation officers had some problems with management about their clients' documentation. According to participants C and A, offenders must have documentation, and most of them don't have documentation because they've been locked up. The only documentation they have is their release paperwork from prison. Most places won't take the paperwork and offenders are frustration trying to get a link or medical card. So, there's frustration from the family, frustration from the client. Probation can sometimes become an obstacle because it's a mark on you. It can stop you from getting a job.

Opperman (2014) noted that leadership has not focused on the rehabilitation of prisoners, and has failed at successfully reentering ex-offenders into the communities. This boomerang effect, and global impact, creates a sense of urgency to concurrently address recidivism and revamp U.S. prisons. Understanding the purpose of U.S. prisons may help key stakeholders identify barriers and pinpoint how to reduce recidivism. One of the purposes of U.S. prisons for inmates was to rehabilitate them with training skills. It is critical for Illinois state regulators, the Illinois Department of Corrections and prison managers to provide full disclosure of any decisions regarding long and short-term goals that may affect the decision-making ability of probation officers and parole agents in their effort to reduce recidivism.

Meadows (2008) stated that a system must include three concepts: the elements, interconnections and a purpose; and that systems thinking is an interrelated element that is structured to achieve complex problems. Davis et al. (2015) identified systems thinking as a catalyst that allows leadership to respond to the growing complex issues facing organizations, and allows leadership to move from the traditional bureaucratic model to an adaptive model. As key stakeholders address the 13 themes identified by the participants as institutional obstacles and views the complex problems through the lens of systems thinking, some of the solutions needed to reduce recidivism may be achieved by using new models of leadership.

Systems thinking it is not a theme, however, it helped to identify the themes with the participants' responses. It is the conceptual framework of this study in identifying the relationship each government agency has to the criminal justice system. Within the past 15 years, scholars, legislators, and criminal justice practitioners have agreed that real reform may only come if leaders consider the criminal justice as a system (Oleson, 2014). This study has broadened extended knowledge in every discipline, and systems thinking shows that the various departments are interconnected to the decisions made by stakeholders. Systems thinking is prominent in business management and is used by organizations such as the American Journal of Public Health. Managers in these and other fields have used systems thinking to solve stubborn complex problems (SSAIC, 2014; Davis et al., 2015).

As probation officers and parole agents work with their clients, they are affected by the corresponding systems as well. Maslow's theory of hierarchical needs

is applicable in this study to help key stakeholders in reducing recidivism. All humans have some level of physiological, safety, love-relationship, self-respect, and self-actualization needs regardless of creed, race, color, age, and gender (Maslow, 1970).

Participant A stated that:

When you strip a community of resources, what's going to come in is crime. That's not just relative to African Americans. That's any culture. If you strip a man of his ability to feed himself or his family what's he going to turn to is survival, it's a necessity, and so you are going to do those things (PA).

Ex-offenders have the same basic needs: food, water, shelter, and clothing. According to the findings some laws limit probation officers and parole agents' clients from participating in some programs that offer, food, housing and employment. Participant F stated that "I do a lot of community-based work for my parolees, and some call me crying because they were able to get free food, clothing, and jobs." The participants agreed that stakeholders must acknowledge the problems, and the obstacles that exist in the roles of probation officer or a parole agent.

Observing the findings and applying the systems thinking theory in this study has allowed me to have a deeper understanding of the effect institutional obstacles have on probation officers, parole agents, and the ex-offenders. Davis, Dent and Wharff (2015) viewed systems thinking as leadership approaching changes by looking at wholes and not individual components, by observing the interconnections and the

interdependencies of each agent within systems to identify patterns, and to understand the root cause of existing problems.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on the probation officers and parole agents' perceptions of institutional obstacles in managing offenders as they affect recidivism among Illinois ex-offenders. I am not interviewing ex-offenders, or key stakeholders who are Illinois government regulators, prison administration, Illinois judges, or other stakeholders such as watchdog groups. Some other limitations like the research questions IQ7 & IQ8, did not totally address probation officers' clients, but it did address parole agents' clients. I consulted with five content experts on the interview questions, who were not involved as participants. Four of the five content experts were parole agents, and the fifth expert, worked in both areas as a probation officer and parole agent. Another limitation was not having enough diversity as it related to gender and ethnicity. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) indicated that dependability is where you can compare the process of the human instrument to yield consistent result with themes. I had five probation officers and six parole agents in executing this study. It would have been beneficial to have an even number with the same gender. The last limitation dealt with ethnicity. Most of the participants were African American with the exception of one Caucasian male.

### **Recommendations**

Looking at the findings, and the literature that grounds this study, there is potential to extend the scope of this study as it relates to women probation officers and

parole agents. Women probation officers and parole agents had different perspective in identifying themes that are considered institutional obstacles in the findings of this study. In the literature review, Olson and Escobar (2010) noted during 2006 to 2007, women increased in the prison population with a recidivism rate of 61% and men had a 70% recidivism rate. For further research to advance the body of knowledge from this study, I recommend a qualitative case study of women probation officers and parole agents in the criminal justice system. In this study, women probation officers and parole agents were very outspoken, and in some cases, shared a different perspective than their male counterpart when identifying institutional obstacles that lead to recidivism of offenders. Women in the criminal justice system are growing at a faster rate than men, and many agencies are identifying gender responses in the decision making the process for public policy goals (NIC, 2015).

The results indicated that some of the themes were identified in the literature review, such as racism in the criminal justice system. Leiber et al. (2016) indicated within the criminal justice system that racism exists, Caucasian male and female probation officers, as well as Caucasian female judges, gave African American juvenile males' harsher sentences than African American female. Some of the juveniles were sentenced as adults. However, Caucasian juveniles, male and female, had lenient sentences (Leiber et al., 2016). In this study I had five probation officers and six parole agents. The majority of the participants were African American with the exception of one Caucasian male. It is advantageous to have an even number of participants with the same gender for both groups. Other ethnicities can be included in



the study to validate the assertion of racism. These factors help to address the theme of racism as an institutional obstacle. Many scholars have proposed the need for further research related to recidivism among African American men, specifically because of their disproportionate rates of incarceration and the affects it has on high rates of recidivism. Further research may validate theories about the effect racism plays in management in other professions and disciplines in society.

### **Implications**

The body of knowledge from the findings in this study provides valuable knowledge to key stakeholders to reevaluate policies, reduce, or remove institutional obstacles to help probation officers and parole agents in the daily execution of their roles. These policies may improve offenders' rehabilitation success for reentry. Previous studies have shown that offenders can succeed when they are encouraged to change their behavior, and policy reforms help offenders live productive lives and promote community confidence and acceptance. The role of probation officers and parole agents in the seven communities identified earlier in this study may help ex-offenders stay out of jail and prison with the right rehabilitation programs. The initial concept of this study was to obtain interviews from the participants who are probation officers and parole agents, documenting their perceptions of institutional obstacles that reduce recidivism rates in Illinois. Table 5 shows the IDOC (2018) prison and parole population for the fiscal year of June 30, 2017.

Table 5.

*Prison and Parole Population on June 30, 2017*

Race	Prison Number	Percentages	Parole Number	Percentages
Black	24,194	56.2%	15,341	59.1%
White	13,158	30.5%	7,847	30.2%
Hispanic	5,450	12.7%	2,649	10.2%
Asian	172	0.4%	74	0.3%
American Indian	57	0.1%	29	0.1%
Unknown	44	0.1%	34	0.1%
Total	43,075	100%	25,974	100%

Eisenberg (2016) stated that a decarceration era has emerged that involves probation officers and parole agents taking on more responsibility in managing offenders to reduce recidivism. Schaefer and Williamson (2018) noted that probation officers and parole agents monitor offenders by assuming new roles, informing the law and serving as therapeutic agents. One hundred percent of the participants concurred that they operate as law enforcers and a counselor to their clients with electronic monitoring (EM). EM is one-way probation officers and parole agents monitor offenders, but there is a demand for more of probation officers and parole agents' time. However, the additional time comes without the compensation; it increases the caseload and workloads. Participant F indicated that management is not allowing or giving overtime, so agents can have more time to try to reach out to parolees, to help them meet their needs. Yet agents are still responsible for doing the same job with a

heavy caseload without any overtime. Participant A noted that “house arrest or EM offenders can’t leave the house unless I approve it. Your house becomes your cell unless I give you movement to go outside. That can last from 30-120 days up to the duration of their parole.”

The traditional work of probation officers and parole agents are regulating offenders’ activities as well as using corrective interventions to allow them to become productive citizens with behavior changes (Scheafer & Williamson, 2018). However, participants are placing more emphasis on behavior changes for their clients, and that cognitive behavioral programs are needed. The lack of cognitive behavioral programs for offenders has put an obstruction in the way of probation and parole officers managing their clients to reduce recidivism. Participant G stated that:

I had a fifteen-year-old who committed an adult crime. What am I supposed to do with him? How am I supposed to help change his behavior? We don’t have those programs. If they haven’t had the proper behavior modification method behind bars, even if it’s IDOC or Cook County Jail, or if they haven’t had something to change their mindset and people to talk to, other than another inmate, they are going to commit new crimes.

Hercules (2013) promoted the term “*social deprivation mindset*.” Hercules believed, to reduce recidivism, *social deprivation mindset* should be part of the rehabilitation effort. He added that young black offenders do not fully understand how their self-destructive behaviors destroy communities. Participant C strongly believes in the need for training related to behavior modification and development. He adds

I see more of the lack of self-respect and trends. So, if I'm ignorant and you look up to me, then you want to be ignorant too. All you're doing is teaching somebody else to be ignorant. If you have all these people around you that are ignorant, that's your way of life (PC).

Participant E stated that "a lot of these guys are getting arrested for new charges, and there are a lot of guns in the communities."

Probation officers (POs and parole agents (PAs) identified the institutional obstacles by 13 themes from their perspective to reduce recidivism in Illinois. The literature reflects some of the 13 themes, such as education, jobs, funding cuts, programs, mental illness, and drugs, and alcohol treatment that are vital in assisting probation officers and parole agents in managing their clients to reduce recidivism. However, there are four themes with new insight that contribute to the body of knowledge which is, unrealistic expectation, lack of knowledge from management, authority not backing-up the parole agents and probation officers, and racism. Racism in the criminal justice system is a known factor, but the issue is not being addressed. The unique part of this study is racism among probation officers and parole agents from management. African American probation officers and parole agents are fighting a double war, supervising some violent ex-offenders, and experiencing racial discrimination from management, which affects their lives as well as their job performance.

The other themes are, technical violations, laws, caseloads. Each theme interconnects to each other, the themes are interdependent, with one theme affecting

the other. The interconnections of systems thinking operates through physical flows, and information flows, information flows are harder to detect until it triggers an action point, which identifies the purpose.

The second group of themes is extremely vital because not only do they affect offenders, as the other themes, they have a direct effect on probation officers and parole agents in their job performance. The theme unrealistic expectation threatens the safety of participants C and K had incidents that happen to them. I've been told by a Deputy Chief before, "Leave your vest in the car. Did you say leave my vest in the car? They are shooting around here! He said, It looks intimidating" (PC). Participant K stated,

We need better cars that work, we have older cars in District 1, whereas District 2, has the newer car. Probation officers and parole agents in District 1, supervise over 50% of IDOC probationers and parolees. More attention is needed to address the equipment issues. It makes it difficult for agents, because there is a lack of resources, and we have to help find recourses for parolees. My work car broke down in front of a client's house. Some of the institutional obstacles are putting probation officers and parole agents' lives at risk.

Some of the probation officers and parole agents live in some of the same communities as their clients. Observing the structural process from the participants' responses identifies a lack of employee satisfaction, and it is vital that stakeholders hear their cry for help. The participants' responses can be a practical model for future

development in all systems related to the criminal justice system, starting with legislators changing policies and laws.

The themes technical violations, the lack of knowledge from management, racism, caseloads, and authority does not back-up the parole agents and probation officers work hand in hand. The literature review validated some of the themes in this study, and the 13 themes may extend the knowledge to other disciplines. The knowledge may be applied in business practices to deter the lack of support that probation officers and parole agents receive from management. The participant A and C addressed this issue on the violation of house arrest that can cause an automatic warrant. “We must do a diversion interview which involves cuffing the offenders to determine what they have or have not done. I’m not going to cuff you after I’ve talked to you because that’s giving you time to think” (PA).

Participant C, I might call another agent and say will you go with me to deal with this warrant. So, we go to this guys’ house and say he violated his house arrest, blatantly he was out all night, so we put the cuffs on him. The guy is high; he has heroin in his system, so we called the commander and put him on speaker phone, the commander says “are you going to do right this time? He “says yes, I will. Well, we will let you go.” Now, it’s a joke. And this might happen 3, 4, 5, or 6 times. We are in danger because we have cuffed this guy and our hands are by our guns because we don’t know who’s in the house, and the administration is not concerned.

Participant C stated,

Sometimes you must invite people to the roundtable. We never get invited. I had a great Commander; he asks us “how do you feel and what do you think?” That’s far and few in between. How do you know what I do when you never walked in my shoes?

There were some encounters I face.

Someone can’t tell someone in administration in District one how to conduct things when they work in District 3. If I always work in Bellwood, Hillside, and Westchester, that don’t have violence like the West side of Chicago. I can’t put together a program or anything or structure anything for the West side. That’s apples and oranges. The participants indicated that District 1 has fewer resources than any other District (PC).

The theme of racism is apparent to probation officer and parole agents in District 1. However, more studies are needed, and action taken to address racism in all areas of the Criminal Justice System. Eighty-one percent of the participants agreed that racism exists on both sides of the fence, with the African American ex-offenders and with probation officers and parole agents. According to 81% of the participants, the African American probation officers and parole agents experience different treatment than their Caucasian counterparts in the same District and in different Districts.

The theme laws affect how POs and PAs perform their duties with their caseloads, and how the laws affect their clients. Heck (2014) indicated that over

45,000 state and federal laws restrict ex-offenders from participating in social, political, and civic lifestyles within their communities. Participant D stated,

They decided they didn't want to help African Americans or people they consider low standard in the seven counties where the most crime is. Then they started targeting by putting drugs and guns in the community so that these Negroes can kill each other off. It's a lot of reasons why things are happening the way they are happening.

Grassroots watchdog organizations have demanded the Illinois government decrease the incarceration/recidivism rate and help ex-offenders (returning citizens) to be productive in their communities. Illinois Department of Corrections has instituted several programs, such as; The Parole Reentry Group, The Summit of Hope, Community Support Advisory Councils (CSACs) that help foster safety and offer housing programs and supportive services.

The results from this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study is transforming when applied to the implications for positive social change, including five attributes that, if implemented, may produce a social change in Illinois. For change to be successful and have a positive outcome, key stakeholders, probation officers and parole agents must be open to implementing different strategies.

The first attribute allows probation officers and parole agents to be part of the decision-making process and invites them to participate in conversation relating to their expertise. It is important for stakeholders to know the history and purpose of prison. It is important to know the prison history because that history set a precedent



for key stakeholders to follow. The original purpose of the prison system was to reform offenders by rehabilitating and providing training skills offenders could use in society. Local businesses could then contribute to a reduction in the incarceration rate.

The second attribute allows cognitive development programs with educational programs for rehabilitation to be implemented during the initial stages of incarceration. Probation officers and parole agents would then follow-up insure implication. Researchers have shown that incarceration is not always the best solution, and that cognitive-based programs are more effective than incarceration (Miller, Miller, Djoric, & Patton, 2015). Scholars are now putting emphasis on the history of correctional education and prison reform that was established by Thomas Mott Osborne. In 1913 Osborne helped prisoners to form the Auburn Prison Mutual Welfare League, which was a success in prison reform (Gerthring, 2018). Osborne's prison reform can be applied to prison reform today.

The third attribute allows a community-based program that coordinates the communities, ex-offenders, police officers, and all stakeholders to address the 13 themes. The findings lend support for these resources to identify and develop offenders' talents and skills in prison and outside of prison. These programs would also teach skill sets in marketing, finance, and management for offenders to become entrepreneurs and small business owners. The resources can come through government budgets, government agencies, and philanthropist. This assistance helps offenders who want to become entrepreneurs once they are released. This will increase family unification. Family support is vital for offenders to begin the emotional healing

process, and the relationship of connecting to other humans who care (Bell & Cornwell, 2015). Inmates who have family ties develop a positive mental health, experience less recidivism, and are more likely to receive employment after their release from prison.

Stakeholders can make changes by demanding more funding from the government. “Corporations can help fund programs, without the assurance of monetary benefits. Corporations such as McDonalds can give coffee to an organization, some organizations can offer office space, etc.” (PI). Miller, Copeland, and Sullivan (2014) stated that programs not only address traditional rehabilitation approaches, but should also involve the input of communities, police officers, probation officers, and address the support needed regarding finances and programming.

The fourth attribute is to open mental hospitals again and have probation officers and parole agents who are trained to complete college courses to become certified and provide mental health services for offenders. This would be their only role. A mental health facility can be designated for offenders’ psychological health. According to Morgan et al. (2012) psychiatric rehabilitation has proven to be effective in reducing recidivism among mentally ill offenders. Inmates with mental illness are over-represented in the criminal justice system.

The fifth attribute is racism. We live in a race-sensitive society, and Institutional racism must be addressed. However, studies have limited their analyses in understanding and exploring race and its effects in the criminal justice system. Haskins

and Lee (2016) stated that you cannot start a conversation on mass incarceration, policing, or the criminal justice system without speaking about African Americans, who are arrested and convicted of more crimes than Caucasians, people who have identical records. The criminal Justice systems need to identify inequities in sentencing policies and lack of opportunity for rehabilitation. Racial disparities inequity has been clearly identified by probation officers and parole agents as an institutional obstacles. Probation officers and parole agents are bombarded with racial issues that affect their clients and in their employment with management on a daily basis. The impact racism has on probation officers, parole agents, and offenders, including African American families are devastating. Systemic affects relationships, business, the economy, and offenders reentering society. Institution racism creates and fosters racial inequalities and racial inequities in the criminal justice system.

African Americans are not the only people affected by racism, there are other minority groups that face racism in the criminal justice system. One thing is for certain, anything that happens to one race will eventually happen to all races. Racism is prevalent in every field, in all disciplines in academics, the political arena, media, management, and in government. Within these entities you will find some form of racism among African Americans. To combat racism in the criminal justice system, the first thing is to acknowledge that racism exist, regardless of how it may affect one's morals or previous understanding. The second is seeing ourselves from the other person perspective, dismissing the thought that is does not matter, and accepting each other in today's culture and society. Thirdly, to achieve unity, working through

adversity, listening first, and then acting afterward, and motivating people to find a way to succeed in life. This will help stakeholders learn collaboratively. We have more things in common than the things that divide us.

### **Conclusions**

Probation officers and parole agents identified 13 themes that they deemed as institutional obstacles that have affected them and their clients in their job performance. According to the participants' lived experiences, the institutional obstacles in Illinois have caused the lack of the effectiveness of managerial support among stakeholders. Illinois had an estimation of 2,720,546 residents in 2016 and 151,800 of those residents were under the management of probation officers and parole agents (BJS, 2018).

The Systems thinking theory addressed and answered the research question by the probation officers and parole agents' responses from the interview questions. The 13 themes that were identified to help key stakeholders reevaluate or reform policies and remove some or all of the existing obstacles may prove to be effective. This would help probation officers and parole agents become more effective in managing ex-offenders through rehabilitation programs.

The original purpose of the prison system was to reform offenders by rehabilitating and providing training skills that were used in local business to reduce incarceration. Today probation officers and parole agents are charged with helping their clients become acclimated to society by providing rehabilitation and educational programs. However, funds allocated by the state budget no longer support the

programs for offenders. Institutional obstacles which affect probation officers and parole agents' clients continue to hinder reform efforts, thereby increasing recidivism. It is always more productive to educate than to incarcerate, and to rehabilitate those who are incarcerated to reduce recidivism.

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## Appendix A: Probation Officers and Parole Agents - Demographic

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this research is to identify and gain an understanding of the institutional obstacles to maximize the effectiveness of managerial support that will help probation officers and parole agents manage ex-offenders and reduce recidivism. While probation officers and parole agents face many obvious institutional obstacles such as tight budgets and high caseloads, this study will seek to secure probation officers and parole agents' perspectives to identify a full range of institutional obstacles regarding structures, resources, processes, and culture to provide a complete view of the issue.

The knowledge from the study will provide key stakeholders with valuable knowledge on managing caseloads, workloads, structures, resources, processes, culture, and funding decisions. The key stakeholders are Illinois governmental regulators, prison management, and Illinois judges. After reading and understanding the consent form, all interviews will be recorded. Interviews are a half hour; at any time during the process you can withdraw or refuse to answer any questions.

What is your ethnicity?

- A. \_\_\_ African American
- B. \_\_\_ Caucasian
- C. \_\_\_ Hispanic or Latino
- D. \_\_\_ American Indian /Alaskan/ Hawaiian
- E. \_\_\_ Other

How long have you been employed as a probation officer or parole agents?

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol – Probation Officers and Parole Agents

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this descriptive phenomenological study. The U.S. incarceration rate is the highest in the world (Western & Muller, 2013). The U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2015) stated that in 2014, 1 out of 52 adults in the U.S. was under community supervision, probation, or parole. Probation officers and parole agents were responsible for approximately five of the seven million adults under correctional control (DeMichele, 2007).

### *Research Alignment Matrix*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Conceptual Framework/Literature</b>	<b>Focus Questions</b>	<b>Probe Questions</b>
What are the experiences of probation and parole agents dealing with institutional obstacles, and the effect the institutional obstacles have on their role in reducing recidivism?	<p>The conceptual framework used in this study identifies the institutional obstacles that exist with probation officers and parole agents managing offenders, and how key stakeholders can help to reduce recidivism. This is done through the lens of systems thinking. Mathias et al. (2015) noted that the demands and the decisions of society and policy makers have disincentivized institutions with obstacles that affect incarceration policies.</p> <p>Systems thinking is distinctly integrated into the study to align with the research problem, the research question and the purpose of the study, with Meadows (2008) three</p>		

*(continue)*

	<p>concepts: the Elements, Interconnections, and the Purpose.</p>		
	<p>The <i>Elements</i> - The element is the noticeable part of a system, which are the visible and tangible things (Meadows, 2008).</p> <p>When the problem is more complex key stakeholders who are responsible for decision-making should have a deeper knowledge of tackling complex problems. Key stakeholders are the elements.</p>	<p>IQ1. What are the experiences of probation and officers dealing with institutional obstacles, and the effect the institutional obstacles have on their role in reducing recidivism?</p>	<p>How have obstacles affected your performances as a probation and parole officer on your job?</p>
	<p>The <i>Purpose</i> - is the goal of the operation, it is not necessarily visible or expressed in writing, but is generally expected (Meadows, 2008).</p> <p>Maksić (2016) noted that the local governments implement specific policies that influence their state environment, including government agencies.</p>	<p>IQ2. How often does the state check social agencies files for accuracy and effectiveness?</p>	<p>How can your agency help improve the accuracy and effectiveness for offenders?</p>
	<p>The <i>Interconnections</i> - are the relationships that are associated and bond the elements together (Meadows, 2008).</p> <p>Probation officers and parole agents oversee offenders' drug tests and electronic monitoring and provide resources for substance abuse counseling, job training, and other rehabilitation</p>	<p>IQ3. Describe your experience related to the effectiveness of house monitors.</p>	<p>How can your knowledge help manage offenders and be integrated throughout the agency?</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(continue)</i></p>

	<p>aids (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).          Knowledge-sharing environment.          Organizations that create an environment for employees to share their knowledge and experiences help promote success among workers. The interconnections are probation and parole officer (agents) and offenders.</p>		
	<p>The <i>Elements</i> - the noticeable part of a system, the <i>Interconnections</i> – the relationships, and the <i>Purpose</i> - the goal of the operation.</p> <p>(2011) and Laurin (2015) noted that probation officers have a difficult time completing their duties due to financial constraints, evidenced by higher caseloads and workloads.</p> <p>Using Meadows’ three concepts, elements, interconnections and the purpose in systems thinking as a tool, may help management improve probation officers and parole agents’ caseloads to reduce recidivism.</p>	<p>IQ4. Describe the nature or the essence of the experience of your caseload and workload numbers?</p>	<p>How could you modify and improve your work schedule?</p>
	<p>The <i>Elements</i> - the noticeable part of a system, the <i>Interconnections</i> – the relationships, and the <i>Purpose</i> - the goal of the operation.</p>	<p>IQ5. Can you describe elements of the experience you have had improving work hours when</p>	<p>What changes can be made with obstacles to help offenders.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(continue)</i></p>

	<p>Budget cuts and the retirement of baby boomers force probation officers to increase their workloads (Obal &amp; Kunz, 2013).</p> <p>Identifying problems and improving the way systems work in approaching change is vital when looking at the interconnections and the purpose.</p>	<p>working with offenders?</p>	
	<p>The <i>Interconnections</i> - are the relationships that are associated and bond the elements together (Meadows, 2008).</p> <p>Wang et al. (2014) noted that organizations must interact with employees to gain a deeper understanding of problems facing organizations through employees' knowledge sharing, and the knowledge shapes the core of agencies' values.</p> <p>Integrate decision-making may work to bring about change and prevention of recidivism among offenders.</p> <p>Meadows' concepts of interconnections are essential to help offenders reduce recidivism.</p>	<p>IQ6. Can you describe elements of the experience of applying your knowledge to recommend alternatives for offenders in the effort to reduce recidivism</p>	<p>What are the alternatives?</p>
	<p>The <i>Elements</i> - the noticeable part of a system, the <i>Interconnections</i> – the relationships, and the <i>Purpose</i> - the goal of the operation.</p>	<p>IQ7. What was it like to experience dealing with major issues offenders face</p>	<p>How do you motivate offenders to have innovative ideas?</p> <p>(continue)</p>

	<p>Illinois is reducing the correctional budget by increasing community supervision and training offenders to achieve success with productive work habits and securing employment for reentry (IDOC, 2016).</p> <p>Using Meadows’ three concepts, elements, interconnections and the purpose of systems thinking as a tool to interact with key stakeholders may help stakeholders achieve the same goals of reducing recidivism.</p>	<p>transitioning back into the community?</p>	
	<p>The <i>Interconnections</i> - are the relationships that are associated and bond the elements together (Meadows, 2008).</p> <p>Over 95% of inmates incarcerated were serving more than one-year sentences (Martin, 2011).</p> <p>Offenders must take the responsibility of their complex problems with the help of the interconnections of probation officers and parole agents giving them the knowledge and resources that are needed.</p>	<p>IQ8. What is it like to experience ex-offenders who were incarcerated for a longer length of time as related to their program to become acclimated back into society?</p>	<p>Human behavior is a complex issue, with rational thoughts and are motivated by feelings, how can you help offenders with policies and procedures to change behavior?</p>
	<p>The <i>Elements</i> - the noticeable part of a system, the <i>Interconnections</i> – the</p>	<p>IQ9. If you had an opportunity to change some of</p>	<p>Are all of the policies clear, (continue)</p>



<p>relationships, and the <i>Purpose</i> - the goal of the operation.</p> <p>Probation and parole officers' decisions play an enormous part of incarceration and re-incarcerating offenders for revocations for technical violations within three years (Starr, 2014).</p> <p>Transformation starts with the organization structures, and other parties involved within the organization. Using Meadows' three concepts, elements, interconnections, and the purpose of systems thinking as a tool may bring about a social change.</p>	<p>your decisions would you, and what would you change?</p>	<p>do you understand the information, showing empathy, encouraging creativity, and having the ability to apply your knowledge?</p>
<p>The <i>Elements</i> - the noticeable part of a system, the <i>Interconnections</i> – the relationships, and the <i>Purpose</i> - the goal of the operation.</p> <p>The Pew Research Center on the State (2011) study showed that 95% of U.S. inmates released returned to communities without employment, education, family support, or stable living conditions.</p> <p>Understanding Meadows' elements, the interconnections and the purpose of system thinking may help Illinois criminal justice system implement procedures and policies to</p>	<p>IQ10. What is your experience dealing with offender's employment status?</p>	<p>How can key stakeholders implement change?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(continue)</p>

	help probation officers and parole agents reduce recidivism.		
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*Note.* The research alignment matrix shows the alignment between the methodology, conceptual framework and the research question.

#### Closing Statement

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your answers were recorded and once the data are transcribed, you will have a chance to look over the transcripts to see if you would like to add something more. Your confidentiality is of the utmost importance; your answers will not be shared outside of this study. Your answers will help produce a social change resulting in greater public safety, policy reforms, lowered expenditures, increased family ties, and possibly producing employment for offenders.

## Appendix C: IDOC Recidivism Rate from 1989 and 1999

Recidivism Rates			
Fiscal Year 1989 Exits			
<i>Offense Profile</i>	<i>Number of Exits</i>	<i>Number Returned in 3 Years</i>	<i>3-Year Recidivism Rate</i>
<i>Offense Type</i>			
Person	2,913	1,250	42.9%
Property	4,848	2,576	53.1%
Drug	1,168	423	36.2%
Sex	733	242	33.0%
Other	182	79	43.4%
<i>Holding Class</i>			
Murder	126	23	18.3%
Class X	1,525	592	38.8%
Class 1	1,336	591	44.2%
Class 2	3,195	1,698	53.1%
Class 3	2,353	1,078	45.8%
Class 4	1,304	587	45.0%
Other	5	1	20.0%
<i>Committing County</i>			
Cook	5,847	2,831	48.4%
Collar	883	376	42.6%
Downstate	3,114	1,363	43.8%
<i>Age at Exit</i>			
Under 21	904	552	61.1%
21 to 25	2,932	1,527	52.1%
26 to 30	2,400	1,112	46.3%

(continue)

			246
31 to 35	1,640	694	42.3%
36 to 55	1,813	647	35.7%
56 and Older	120	28	23.3%
Unknown	35	10	28.6%
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	9,236	4,360	47.2%
Female	608	210	34.5%
<i>Race</i>			
Black	5,633	3,028	53.8%
White	3,404	1,251	36.8%
Hispanic	760	276	36.3%
Other	47	15	31.9%
<i>Type of Readmission</i>			
New Sentence	9,844	2,584	26.2%
Technical Violation	9,844	1,986	20.2%
<i>Time in Community before Readmission</i>			
One Year or Less	9,844	2,053	20.9%
Two Years or Less	9,844	3,851	39.1%
Three Years or Less	9,844	4,570	46.4%
<i>Total</i>	9,844	4,570	46.4%

*Note.* The attachment has recidivism rate profiles for every exit year going back to FY89. Every case record had a follow-up period of exactly three years in determining these statistics. Please note that you have been provided a considerable amount of recidivism data by the Illinois Department of Corrections' Planning and Research Unit which should be appropriately referenced and/or sourced.

Recidivism Rates  
Fiscal Year 1999 Exits

<i>Offense Profile</i>	<i>Number of Exits</i>	<i>Number Returned in 3 Years</i>	<i>3-Year Recidivism Rate</i>
<i>Offense Type</i>			
Person	5,575	2,403	43.1%
Property	7,841	4,311	55.0%
Drug	9,561	4,396	46.0%
Sex	1,279	636	49.7%
Other	384	162	42.2%
<i>Holding Class</i>			
Murder	274	69	25.2%
Class X	2,392	1,051	43.9%
Class 1	4,211	2,001	47.5%
Class 2	6,891	3,716	53.9%
Class 3	4,879	2,333	47.8%
Class 4	5,990	2,737	45.7%
Other	3	1	33.3%
<i>Committing County</i>			
Cook	14,792	7,448	50.4%
Collar	2,697	1,131	41.9%
Downstate	7,151	3,329	46.6%
<i>Age at Exit</i>			
Under 21	2,635	1,444	54.8%
21 to 25	5,150	2,435	47.3%
26 to 30	4,901	2,454	50.1%
31 to 35	4,353	2,265	52.0%
36 to 55	7,295	3,240	44.4%
56 and Older	294	67	22.8%

Unknown	12	3	25.0%
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	22,220	10,892	49.0%
Female	2,420	1,016	42.0%
<i>Race</i>			
Black	16,244	8,606	53.0%
White	6,329	2,616	41.3%
Hispanic	2,012	662	32.9%
Other	55	24	43.6%
<i>Type of Readmission</i>			
New Sentence	24,640	7,819	31.7%
Technical Violation	24,640	4,089	16.6%
<i>Time in Community before Readmission</i>			
One Year or Less	24,640	5,218	21.2%
Two Years or Less	24,640	9,671	39.2%
Three Years or Less	24,640	11,908	48.3%
<i>Total</i>	24,640	11,908	48.3%

## Appendix D: IDOC Parole Population on June 30, 2015

*IDOC Parole Population on June 30, 2015.*

Residence County	Number	Percent	Residence County	Number	Percent	Residence County	Number	Percent
Adams	180	0.6%	Hardin	9	0.0%	Morgan	54	0.2%
Alexander	17	0.1%	Henderson	12	0.0%	Moultrie	20	0.1%
Bond	27	0.1%	Henry	74	0.3%	Ogle	58	0.2%
Boone	62	0.2%	Iroquois	35	0.1%	Peoria	598	2.1%
Brown	6	0.0%	Jackson	104	0.4%	Perry	31	0.1%
Bureau	60	0.2%	Jasper	10	0.0%	Piatt	17	0.1%
Calhoun	9	0.0%	Jefferson	104	0.4%	Pike	37	0.1%
Carroll	18	0.1%	Jersey	27	0.1%	Pope	6	0.0%
Cass	24	0.1%	Jo Daviess	13	0.0%	Pulaski	25	0.1%
Champaign	444	1.6%	Johnson	116	0.1%	Putnam	3	0.0%
Christian	53	0.2%	Kane	610	2.1%	Randolph	60	0.2%
Clark	32	0.1%	Kankakee	316	1.1%	Richland	42	0.1%
Clay	26	0.1%	Kendall	105	0.4%	Rock Island	197	0.7%
Clinton	27	0.1%	Knox	98	0.3%	St. Clair	516	1.8%
Coles	108	0.4%	Lake	738	2.6%	Saline	55	0.2%
Cook	15,573	54.7%	LaSalle	223	0.8%	Sangamon	541	1.9%
Crawford	38	0.1%	Lawrence	39	0.1%	Schuyler	288	1.0%
Cumberland	12	0.1%	Lee	50	0.2%	Scott	3	0.0%
DeKalb	102	0.4%	Livingston	34	0.2%	Shelby	34	0.1%
DeWitt	33	0.1%	Logan	59	0.2%	Stark	6	0.0%
Douglass	29	0.1%						

DuPage	556	McDonough	29	Stephenson	143
2.0%		0.1%		0.5%	
Edgar	29	McHenry	184	Tazewell	222
0.1%		0.6%		0.8%	
Edwards	14	McLean	258	Union	38
0.0%		0.9%		0.1%	
Effingham	36	Macon	547	Vermilion	175
Fayette	56	1.9%		.6%	
0.2%		Macoupin	56	Wabash	19
Ford	23	0.2%		0.1%	
0.1%		Madison	534	Warren	27
Franklin	87	1.9%		0.1%	
.3%		Marion	133	Washington	16
Fulton	50	0.5%		0.1%	
0.2%		Marshall	21	Wayne	19
Gallatin	10	0.1%		0.1%	
.0%		Mason	39	White	46
Greene	18	0.1%		0.2%	
0.1%		Massac	38	Whiteside	126
Grundy	46	0.1%		0.4%	
0.1%		Menard	13	Will	1,064
Hamilton	7	0.0%		3.7%	
0.0%		Mercer	10	Williamson	145
Hancock	21	0.0%		0.5%	
0.1%		Monroe	18	Winnebago	1,059
		0.1%		3.7%	
		Montgomery	83	Woodford	30
		0.3%		0.1%	
				Out of State	66
				0.2%	
				Missing	200
				0.7%	
				Total	28,478
				100.0%	

*Note.* Illinois has 102 counties, and Cook County had the largest parole population in fiscal year 2015, which consisted of 15,573 parolees managed by parole and probation officers.



## Appendix E: Invitation – Probation Officers

Dear [name of probation officer]:

My name is Gertha Lusby; I am a doctoral student at Walden University conducting a research study. The purpose of this research is to identify what institutional obstacles exist, as probation officers perceive them, to reducing recidivism in Illinois. You are being asked to participate because your work location is one of seven communities in Chicago which is targeted for this study, which is part of Cook County First Municipal District. As an officer, you have been working for at least two years with newly released parolees, as well as those released from prison within the past five years.

The study entails a one-on-one interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes from your perspective regarding institutional obstacles that may exist, or hindering your ability to the reduce recidivism of offenders on your caseload. Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. The participants' personal information will be confidential, and no names will be used in any reports or publications.

If you are interested in the study, please call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX to schedule a time, location, and date for the interview.

Thank you for your time,

Gertha Lusby

## Appendix F: Invitation – Parole Agents

Dear [name of parole officer]:

My name is Gertha Lusby; I am a doctoral student at Walden University conducting a research study. The purpose of this research is to identify what institutional obstacles exist, as parole agents perceive them, to reducing recidivism in Illinois. You are being asked to participate because your work location is one of seven communities in Chicago which is targeted for this study, As an agent, you must work in Chicago, Illinois, as a parole officer, and have supervised offenders for at least two years with newly released parolees, as well as those released from prison within the past five years.

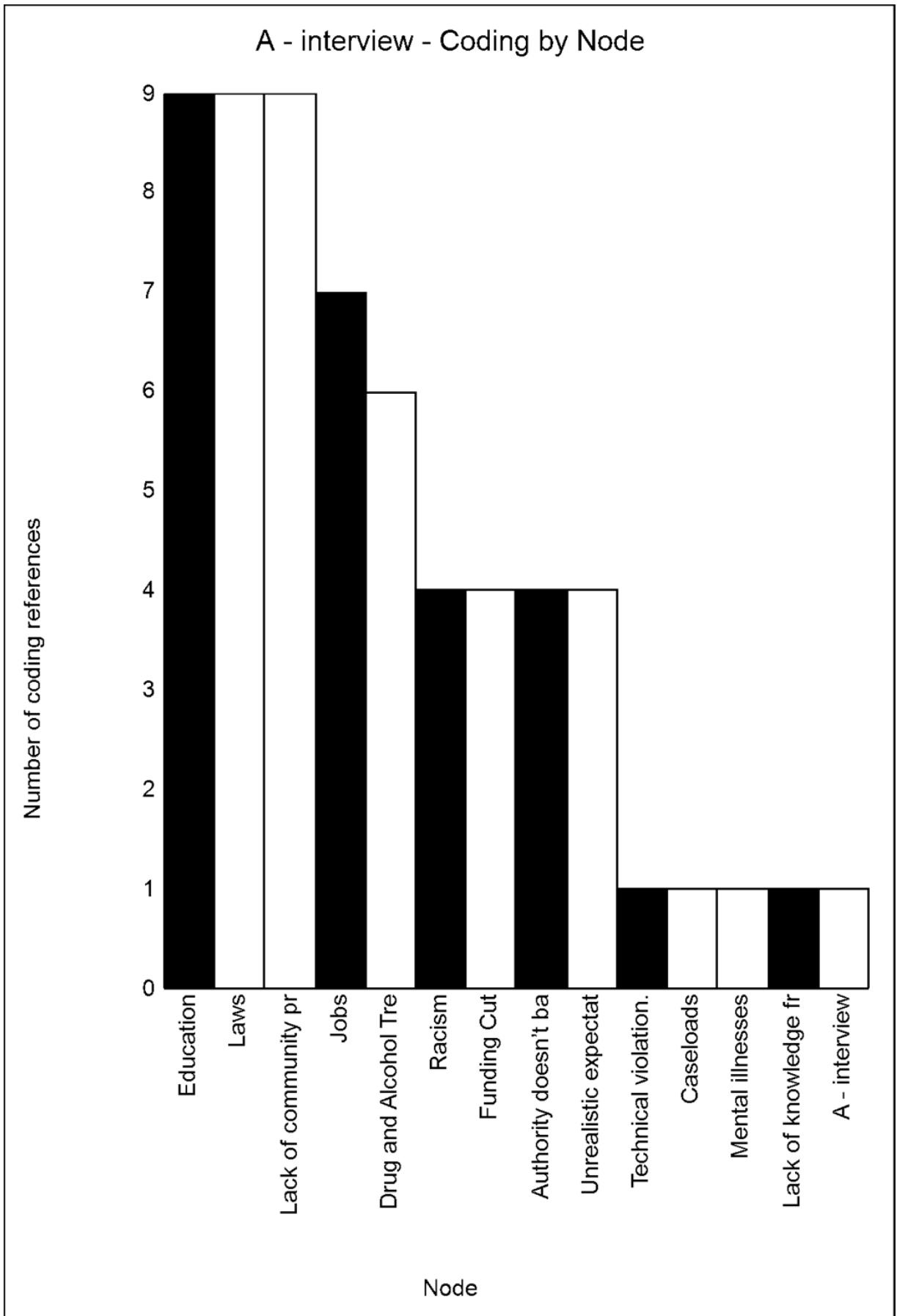
The study entails a one-on-one interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes from your perspective regarding institutional obstacles that may exist, or hindering your ability to the reduce recidivism of offenders on your caseload. Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. The participants' personal information will be confidential, and no names will be used in any reports or publications.

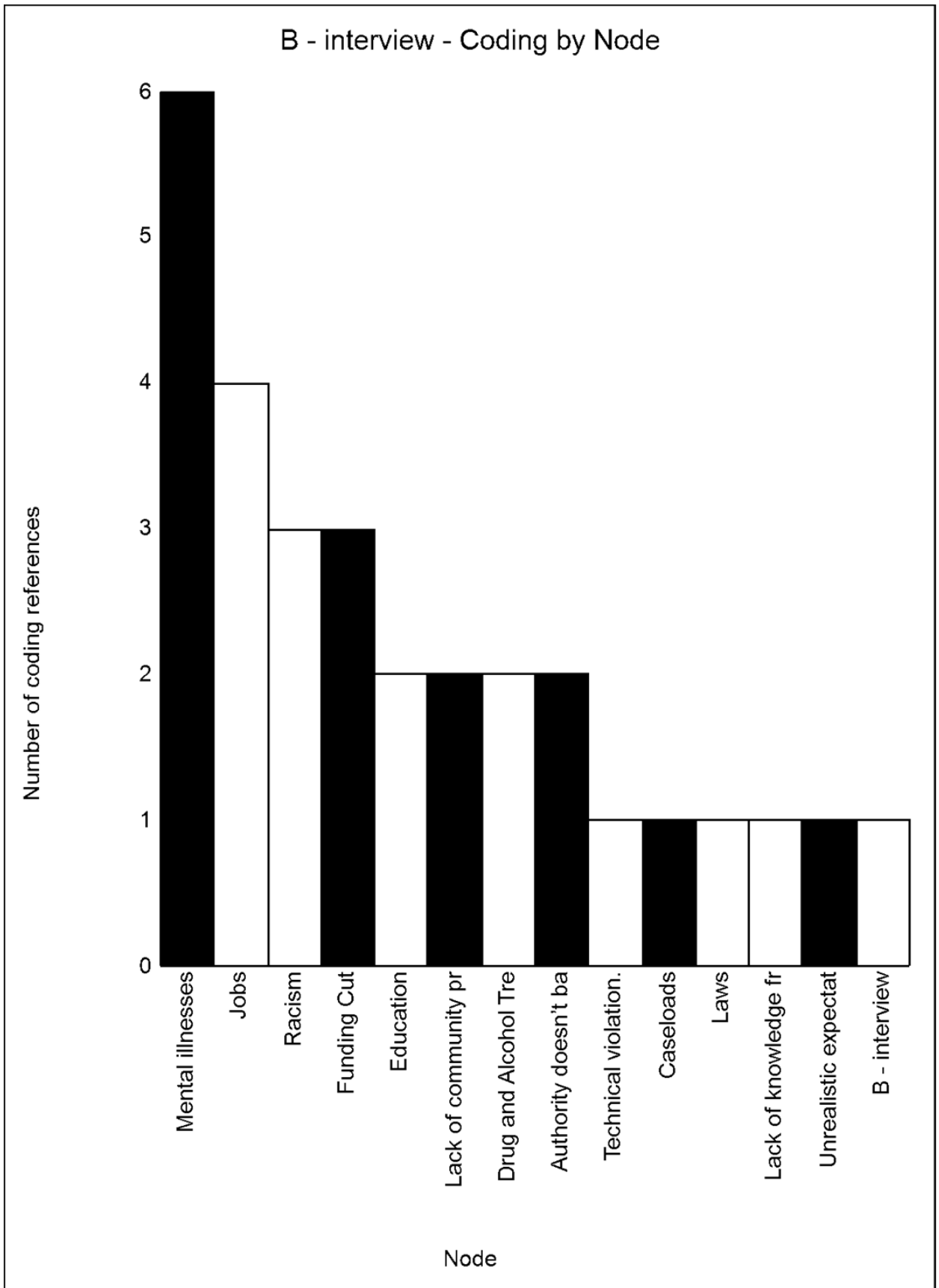
If you are interested in the study, please call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX to schedule a time, location, and date for the interview.

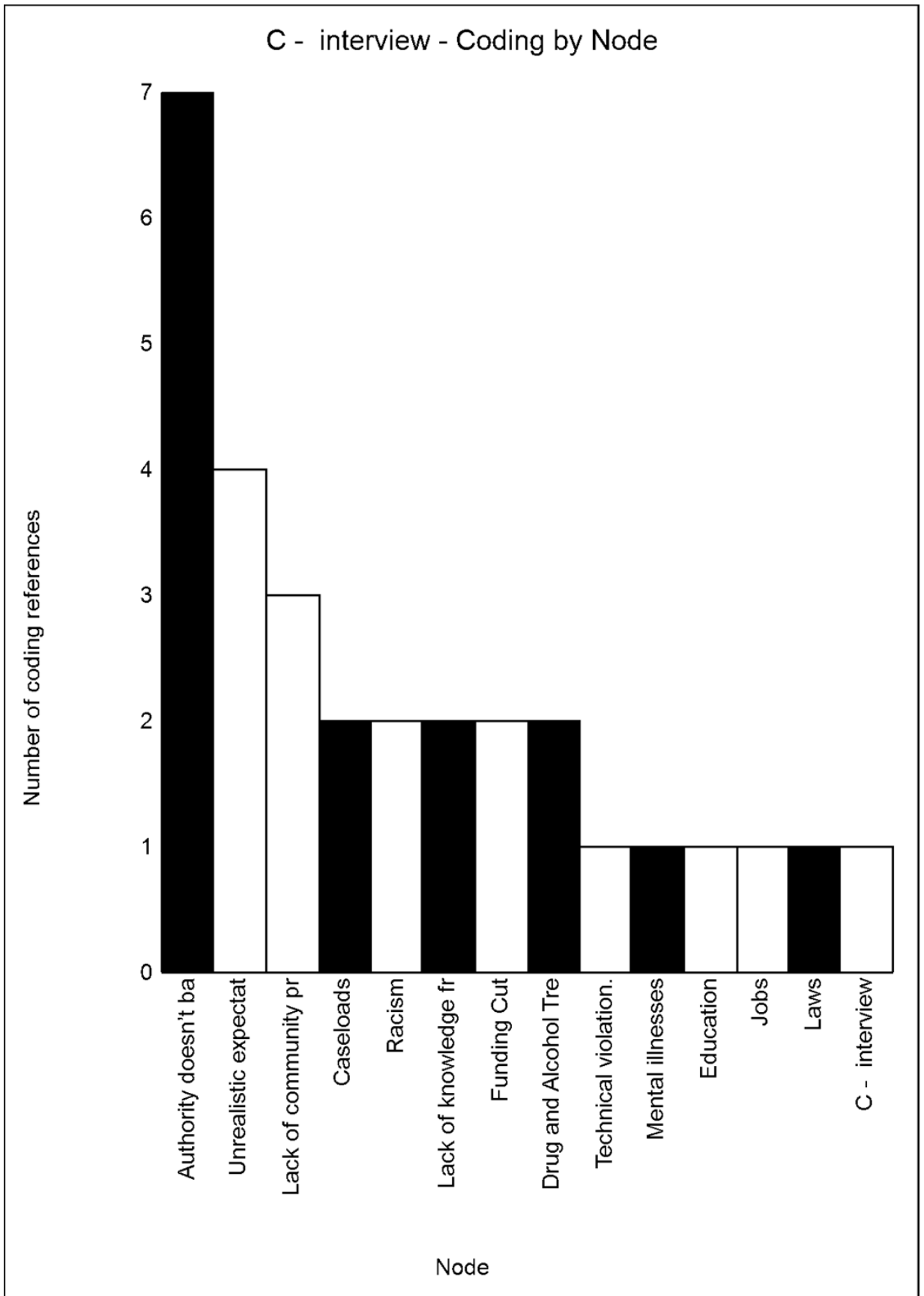
Thank you for your time,

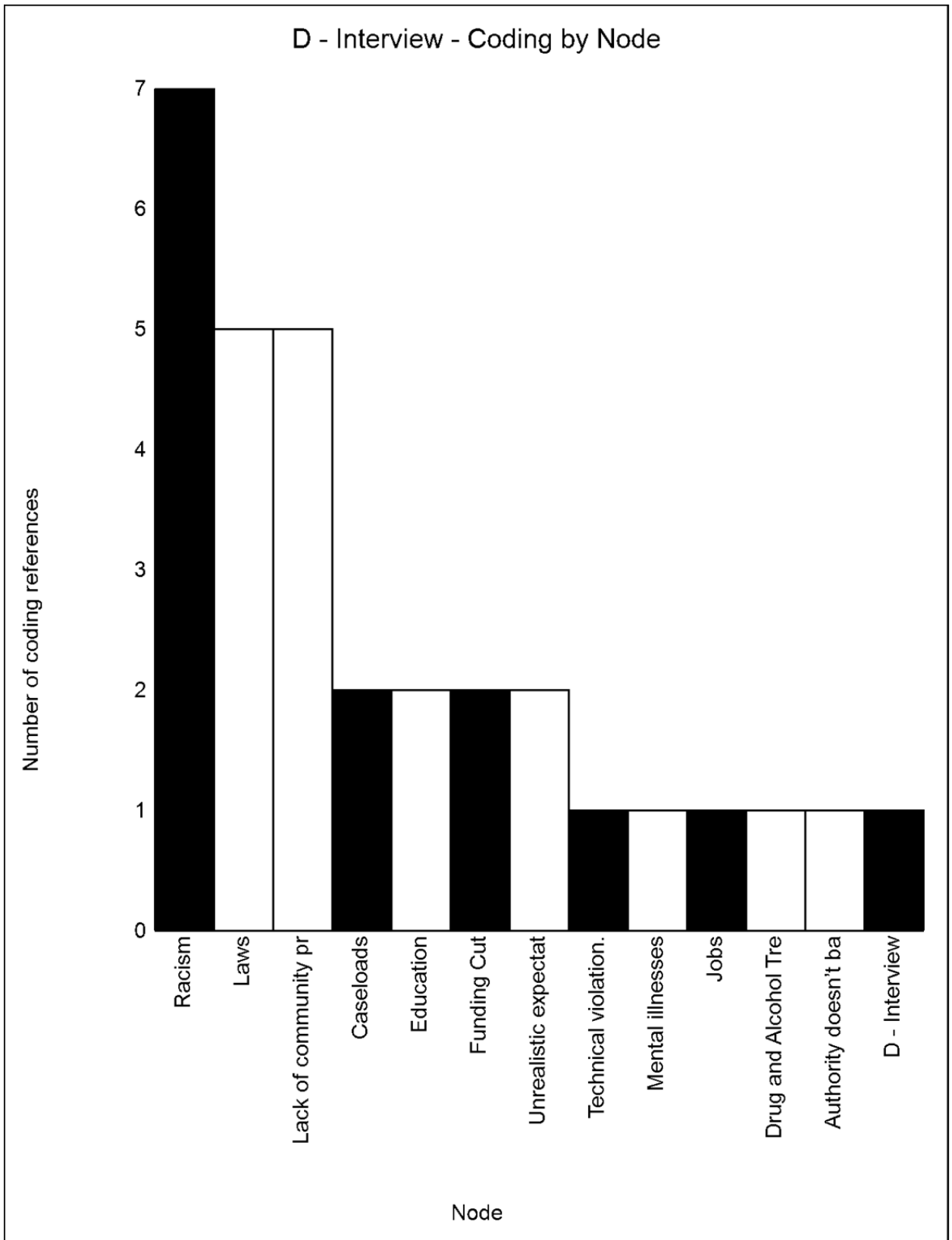
Gertha Lusby

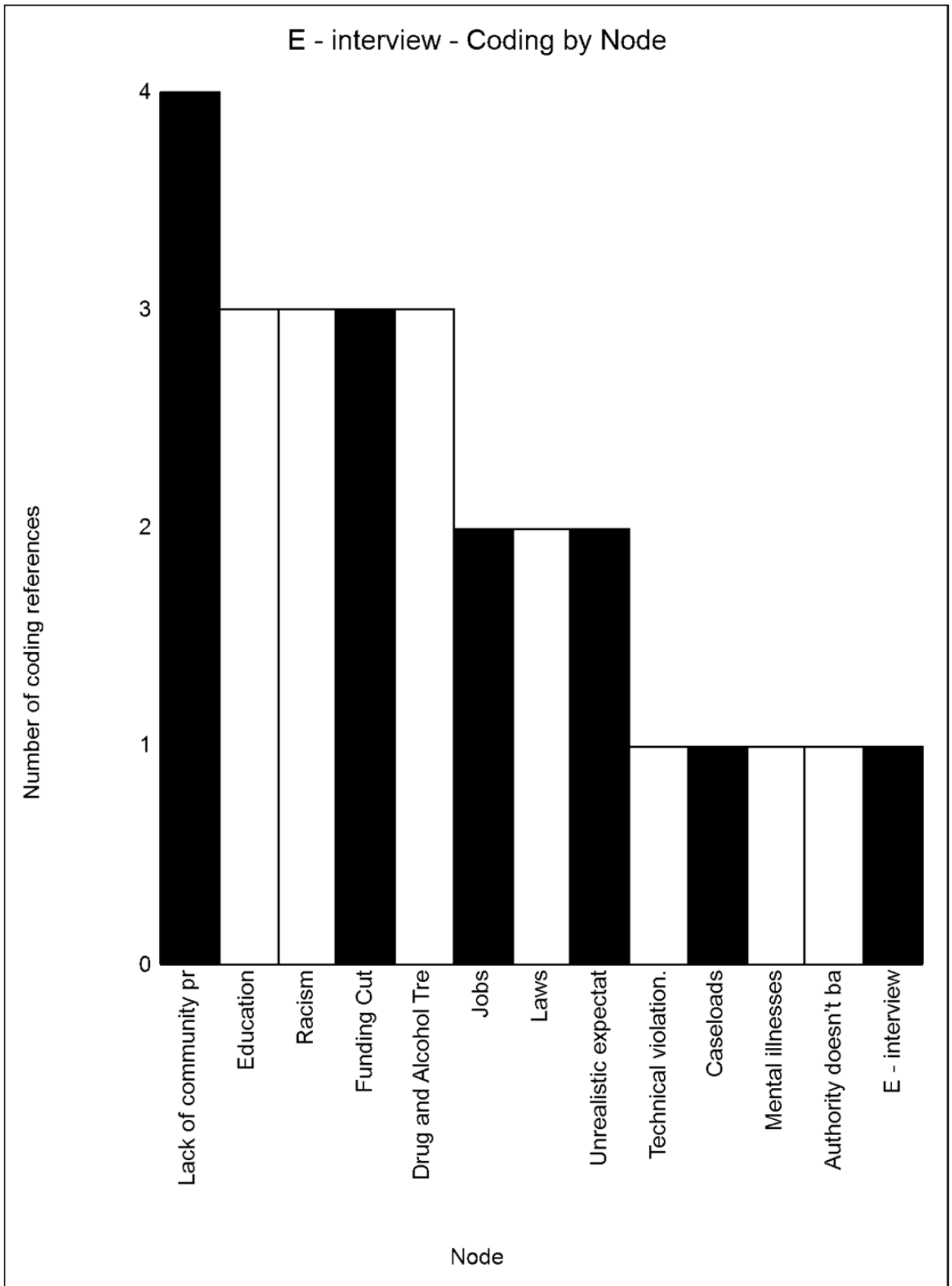
Appendix G: Coding by Nodes to Identify Themes



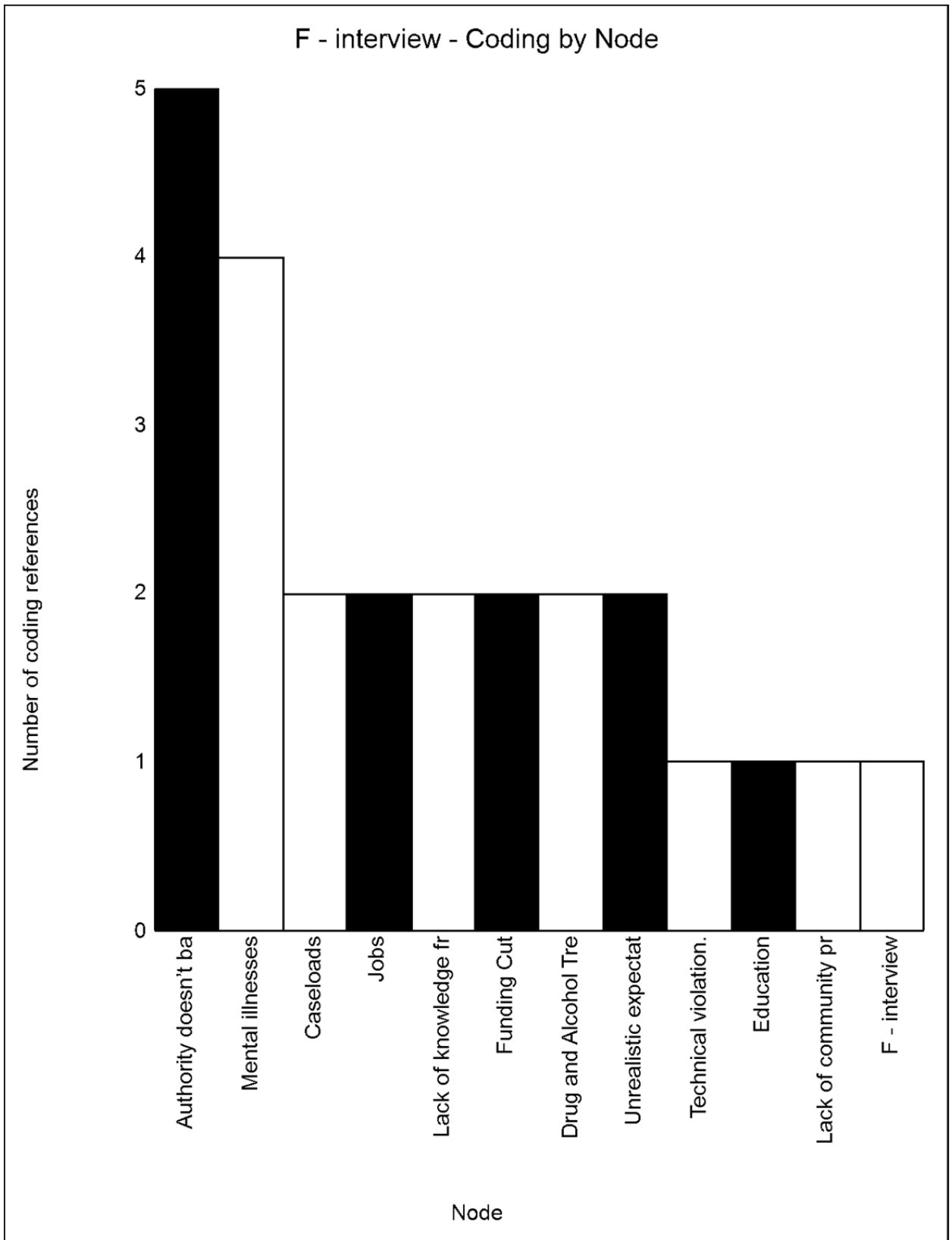


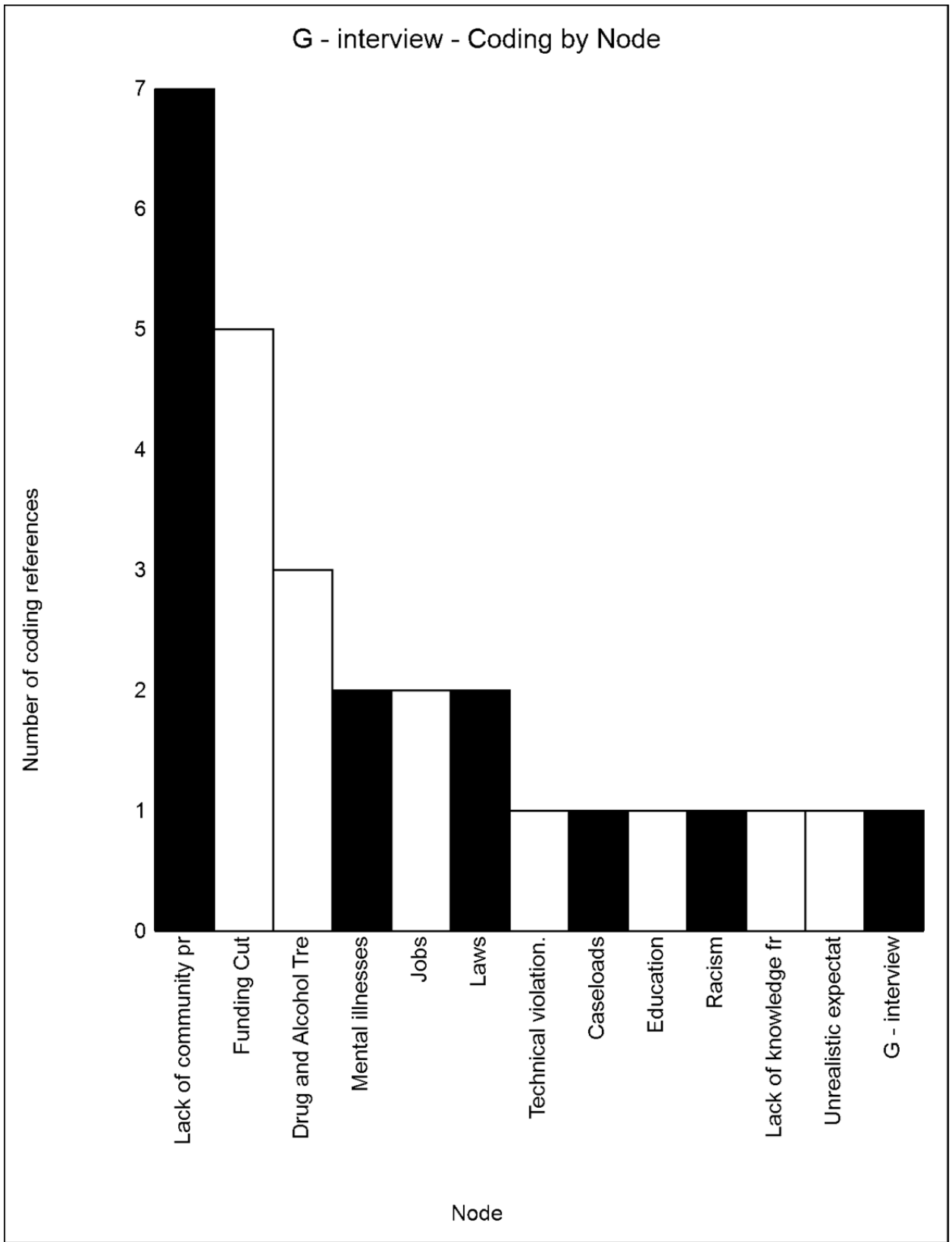


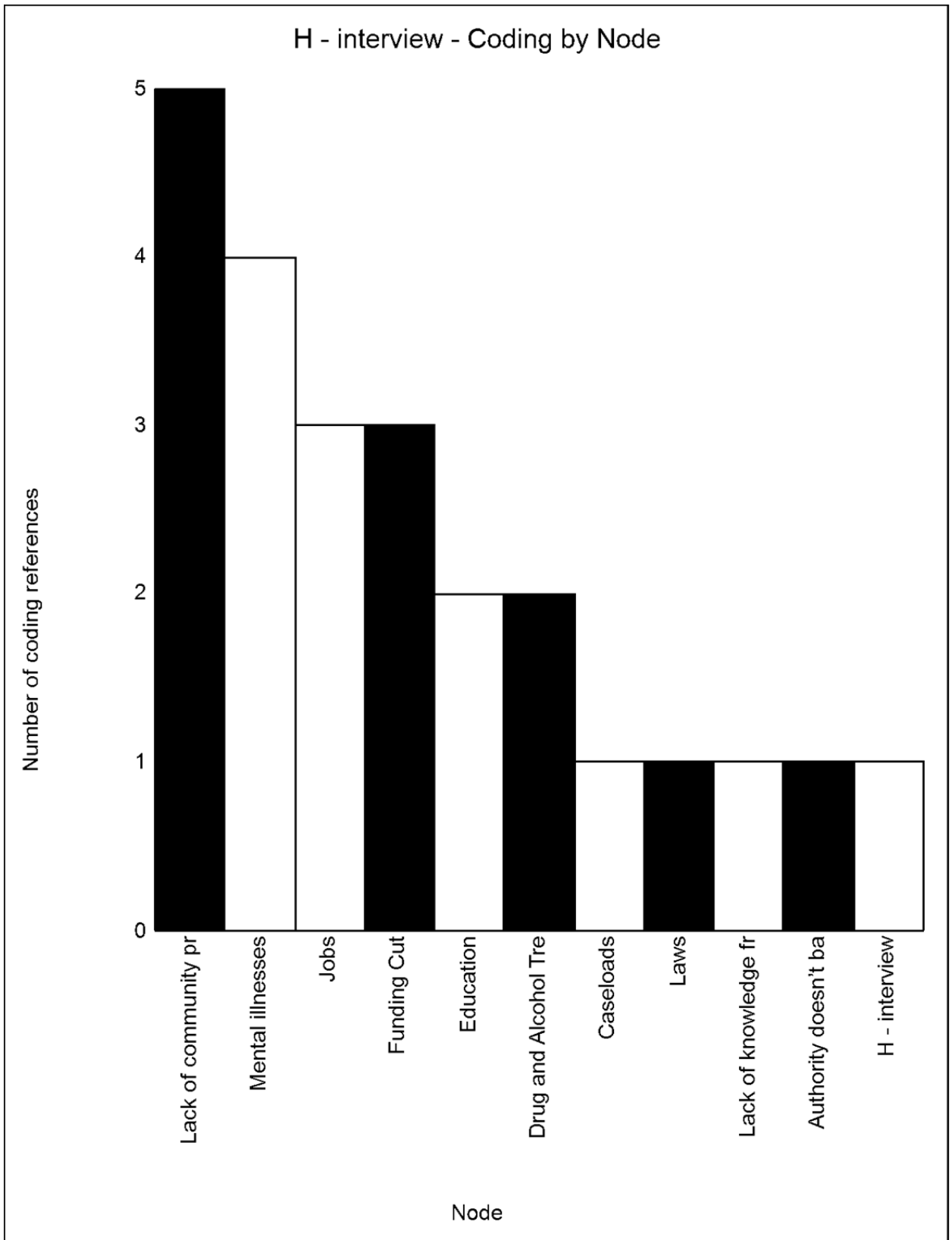


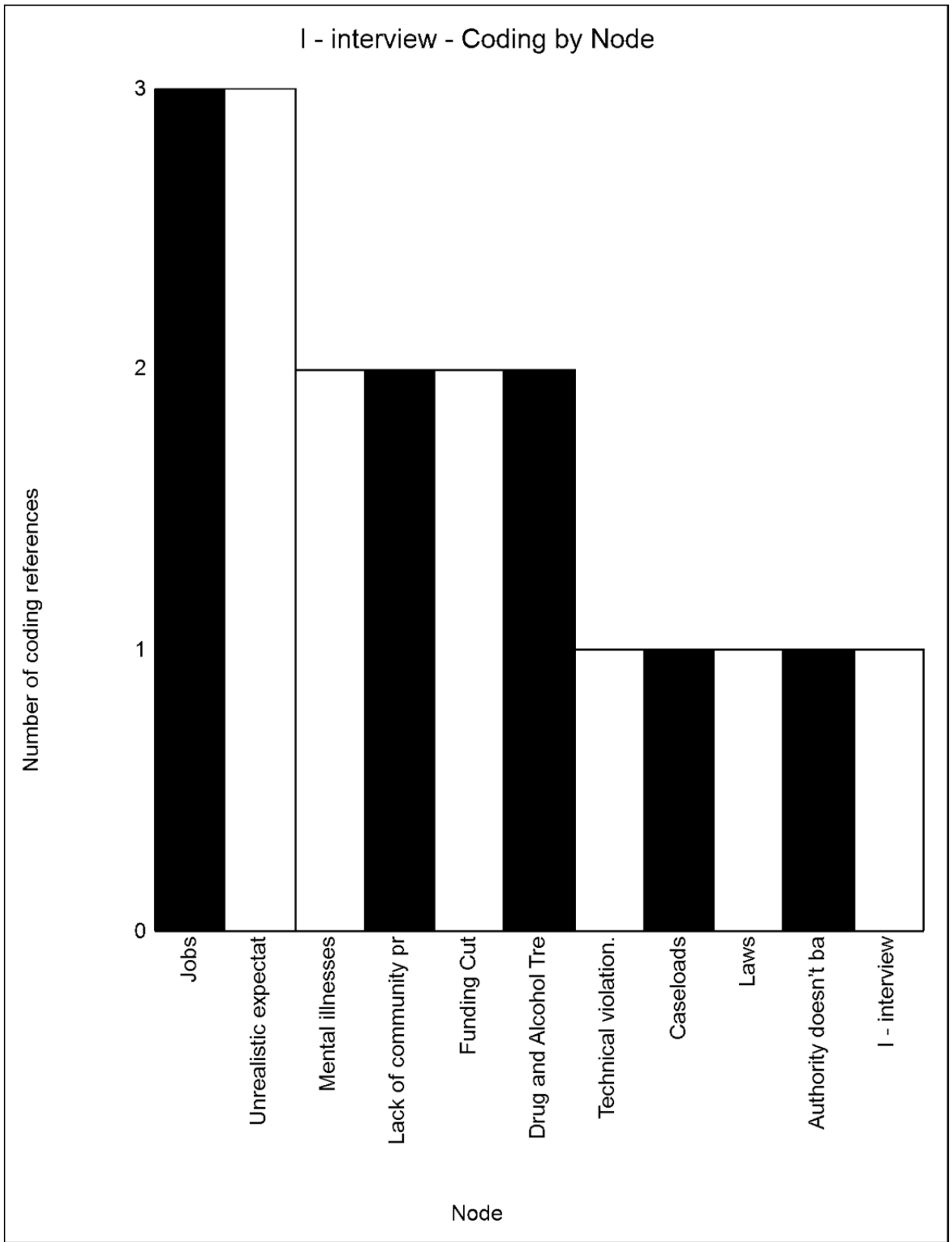


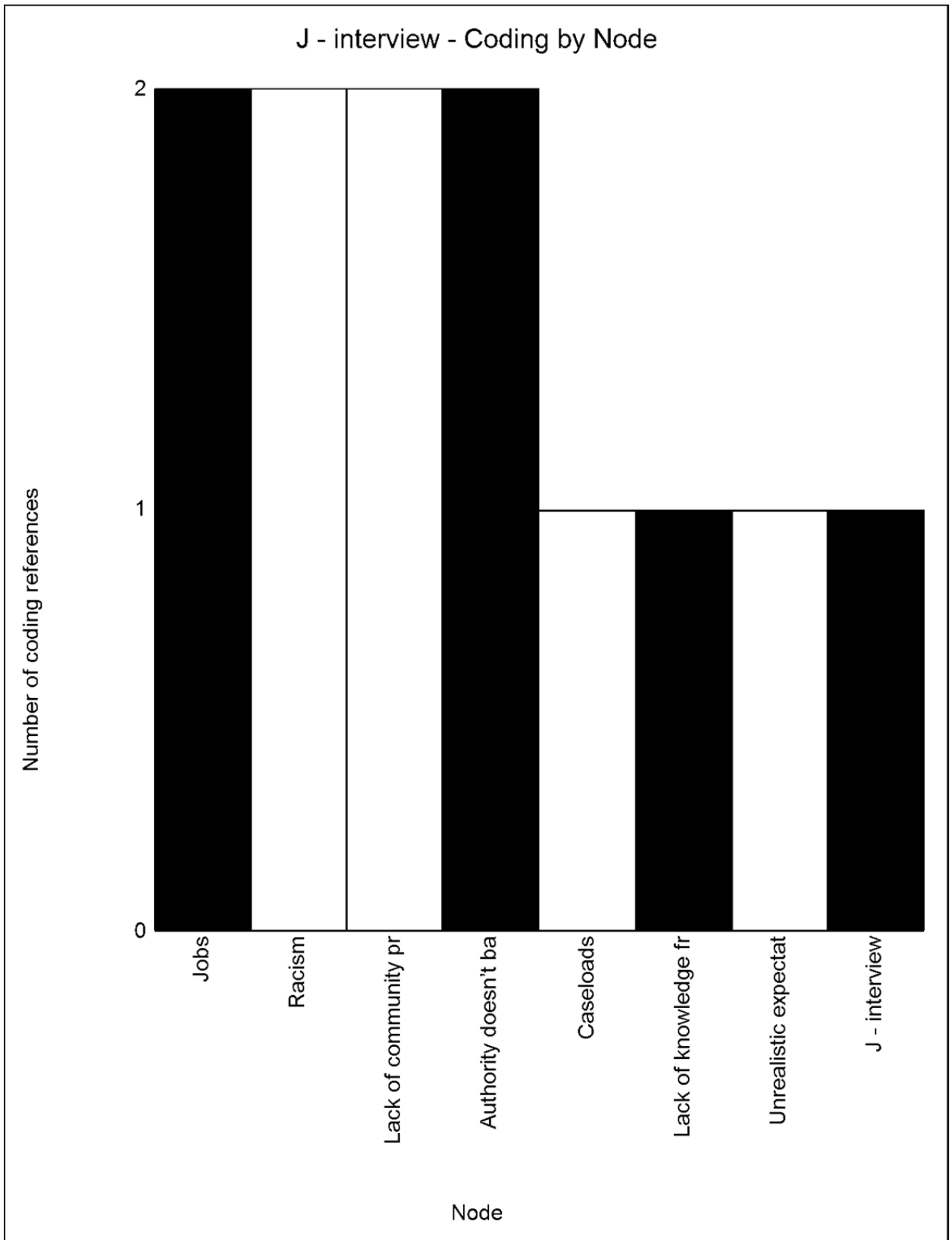


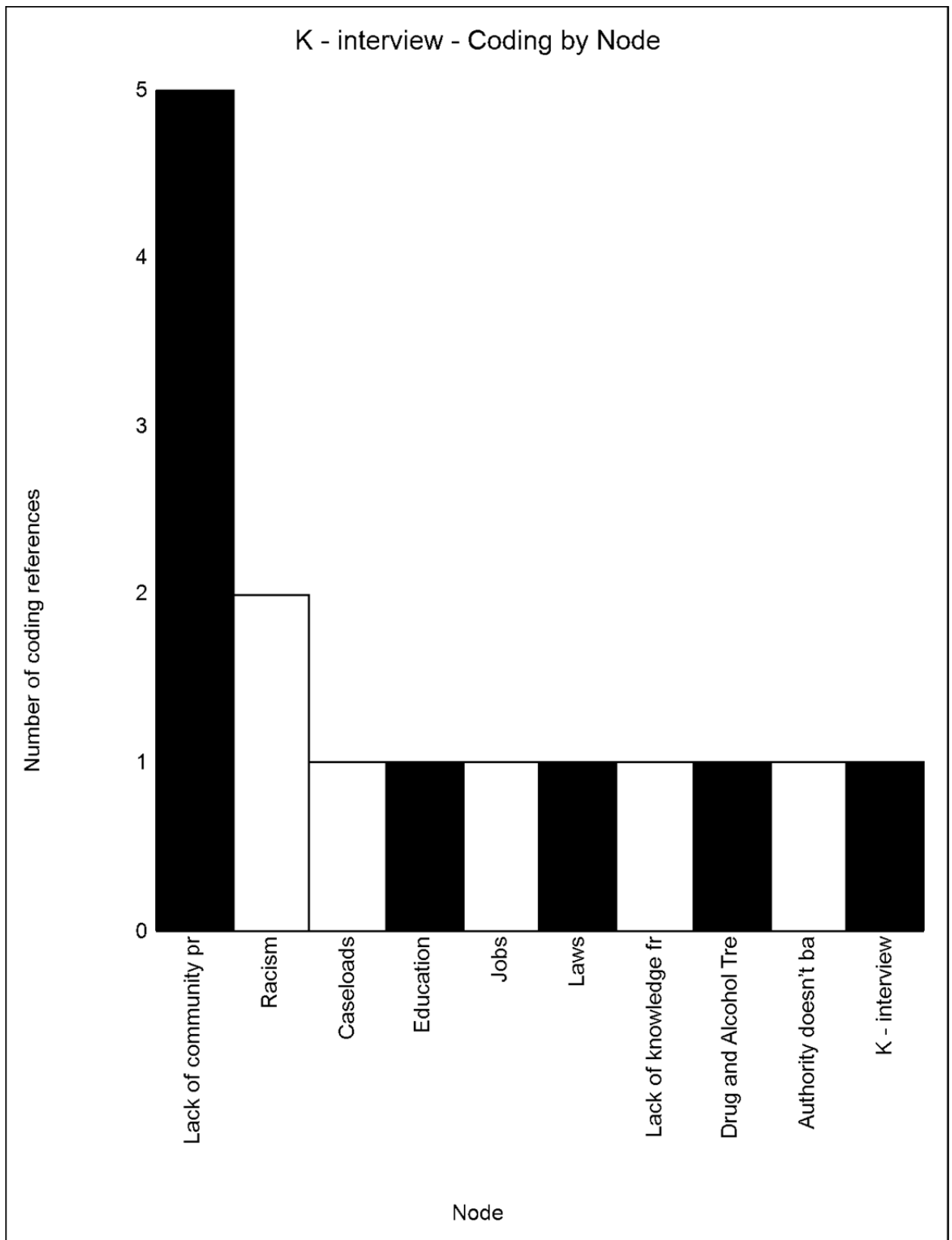












## Appendix H: IDOC Prison Population by County

Prison Population on June 30, 2017			Parole Population on June 30, 2017	
County of Residence	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Adams	371	0.9%	175	0.7%
Alexander	44	0.1%	17	0.1%
Bond	76	0.2%	39	0.2%
Boone	211	0.5%	39	0.3%
Brown	8	0.0%	2	0.0%
Bureau	96	0.2%	38	0.1%
Calhoun	24	0.1%	4	0.0%
Carroll	23	0.1%	22	0.1%
Cass	22	0.1%	25	0.1%
Champaign	969	2.2%	366	1.4%
Christian	117	0.3%	38	0.1%
Clark	66	0.2%	28	0.1%
Clay	77	0.2%	27	0.1%
Clinton	115	0.3%	16	0.1%
Coles	239	0.6%	92	0.4%
Cook	20,724	48.1%	13,863	53.4%
Crawford	98	0.2%	43	0.2%
Cumberland	22	0.1%	8	0.0%
DeKalb	187	0.4%	80	0.3%
DeWitt	58	0.1% <sup>2</sup>	8	0.1%
Douglas	61	0.1%	22	0.1%
DuPage	1,182	2.7%	567	2.2%
Edgar	82	0.2%	30	0.1%
Edwards	38	0.1	11	0.0%
Effingham	104	0.2%	40	0.2%
Fayette	116	0.3%	54	0.2%
Ford	39	0.1%	16	0.1%
Franklin	209	0.5%	81	0.3%
Fulton	71	0.2%	44	0.2%
Gallatin	14	0.0%	13	0.1%
Greene	30	0.1%	28	0.1%
Grundy	86	0.2%	57	0.2%
Hamilton	59	0.1%	16	0.1%
Hancock	58	0.1%	17	0.1%
Hardin	18	0.0%	11	0.0%
Henderson	13	0.0%	7	0.0%
Henry	230	0.5%	65	0.3%

Iroquois	75	0.2%	36	0.1%
Jackson	258	0.6%	106	0.4%
Jasper	17	0.0%	14	0.1%
Jefferson	13	0.5%	78	0.3%
Jersey	85	0.2%	29	0.1%
Jo Daviess	19	0.0%	17	0.1%
Johnson	36	0.1%	14	0.1%
Kane	1,080	2.5%	456	1.8%
Kankakee	358	0.8%	267	1.0%
Kendall	183	0.4%	82	0.3%
Knox	201	0.5%	110	0.4%
Lake	1,118	2.6%	578	2.2%
LaSalle	451	1.0%	228	0.9%
Lawrence	77	0.2%	50	0.2%
Lee	84	0.2%	51	0.2%
Livingston	162	0.4%	48	0.2%
Logan	167	0.4%	64	0.2%
McDonough	72	0.2%	33	0.1%
McHenry	267	0.6%	179	0.7%
McLean	852	2.0%	284	1.1%
Macon	939	2.2%	527	2.0%
Macoupin	135	0.3%	66	0.3%
Madison	988	2.3%	417	1.6%
Marion	214	0.5%	124	0.5%
Marshall	22	0.1%	16	0.1%
Mason	97	0.2%	54	0.2%
Massac	62	0.1%	33	0.1%
Menard	27	0.1%	18	0.1%
Mercer	41	0.1%	12	0.0%
Monroe	29	0.1%	12	0.0%
Montgomery	156	0.4%	57	0.2%
Morgan	144	0.3%	62	0.2%
Moultrie	30	0.1%	19	0.1%
Ogle	94	0.2%	45	0.2%
Peoria	1,097	2.5%	547	2.1%
Perry	49	0.1%	24	0.1%
Piatt	22	0.1%	14	0.1%
Pike	85	0.2%	33	0.1%
Pope	22	0.1%	5	0.0%
Pulaski	18	0.0%	20	0.1%
Putnam	10	0.0%	8	0.0%
Randolph	100	0.2%	49	0.2%
Richland	49	0.1%	35	0.1%
Rock Island	365	0.8%	211	0.8%
St. Clair	968	2.2%	454	1.7%
Saline	183	0.4%	80	0.3%
Sangamon	834	1.9%	633	2.4%

*(table continue)*



Schuyler	30	0.1%	141	0.5%
Scott	5	0.0%	6	0.0%
Shelby	64	0.1%	28	0.1%
Stark	7	0.0%	4	0.0%
Stephenson	166	0.4%	129	0.5%
Tazewell	354	0.8%	200	0.8%
Union	89	0.2%	34	0.1%
Vermillion	433	1.0%	209	0.8%
Wabash	58	0.1%	20	0.1%
Warren	38	0.1%	11	0.0%
Washington	26	0.1%	6	0.0%
Wayne	47	0.1%	20	0.1%
White	113	0.3%	41	0.2%
Whiteside	219	0.5%	118	0.5%
Will	1,339	3.1%	887	3.4%
Williamson	150	0.3%	128	0.5%
Winnebago	1,238	2.9%	985	3.8%
Woodford	146	0.3%	21	0.1%
Out of State	41	0.1%	56	0.2%
Missing Values			568	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,075</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>25,974</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

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