The Role of Psychology in Reducing Non-Violent Recidivism and its’ Implications for Positive Social Change

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Abstract

This paper will try to answer the question “Why does the United States have such high recidivism rates for non-violent offenders and, how with the help of psychology it can be reduced?” This paper will be breaking down this problem into three distinct parts. First, to understand why recidivism is such a re-occurring issue within our society, social factors and offender factors will be examined. Identifying social factors and offender factors involved with recidivism rates will be accomplished by finding connections with education, employment, family relationships, societal and law enforcement relationships, impacts of peer and prison influences, mental illness, and personality traits that contribute in criminal re-laps behaviors. Second, with empirical and academic resources, this paper will focus on the impact of different psychological counseling methods, prediction tools, and their ability to change offender non-violent recidivism rates.

Third, this paper will then present an alternative perspective and determine its validity in solving this issue. With the research that has been shown within this paper, the overall conclusion suggests that society as a whole contributes to offender’s recidivism behavior more then originally thought. Also, with the help of prediction tools and targeted counseling techniques that meet offenders specific needs, these types of treatment programs contribute more to reducing recidivism rates rather then generalized court ordered counseling. Lastly, with the research presented in this paper, if society wants to see reductions within its criminal community, society must contribute to encouraging work, mental health programs, and reducing stigmas for criminal offenders.
The Role of Psychology in Reducing Non-Violent Recidivism and its’ Implications for Positive Social Change

The United States has been often been considered to have one of the world’s best law enforcement entities, while having some of the world’s best courts. The ideas of being “innocent until proven guilty” and “reasonable doubt” have been a core value within our justice system since the bill of rights was first drafted. However with only 5% of the world’s population, why does the U.S. have 25% of the world’s prison population (Hartney, 2006)? One possible reason is that many inmates are subject to recidivism. According to the National Institution of Justice (2008) website (nij.gov), “Recidivism is one of the most fundamental concepts in criminal justice. It refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime.” National Statistics on Recidivism indicate that at least two-thirds or 68 percent of parolees are subject to repeating crimes within three years after their initial releases. (National Institution of Justice, 2008)

This shows that repeat offenders unfortunately are part of the reason why many prisons are overcrowded, lack more efficient mental and drug programs due to funding, and cause tax payers high amounts every year. Overall, recidivism is not just considered to be one of the main issues for our nation’s law enforcement but is a rising issue for our nation’s mundane society as well. This issue has continually been debated and fought over for decades, with little action being done to resolve this growing threat. Today, society can still find our justice and law departments struggling with this problem because no one wants to fix it or the problem is too big to deal with. With that said, it’s important to understand that before this problem can be solved it must be understood.
Understanding the Problem

This paper will try to understand why our nation has such high recidivism rates for non-violent offenders and, how principles of psychology can help reduce it. This paper will break down this problem into three distinct parts. First, to understand why recidivism is such a re-occurring issue within our society, social factors and offender factors are examined. Social factors result in stereotyping influences, and environmental influences; while offender factors will describe criminals personality traits and characteristics. This is accomplished by identifying recidivism’s connection with education, employment, family relationships, societal and law enforcement relationships, impacts of peer and prison influences, and common personality traits that contribute to criminal re-laps behaviors.

Next, with empirical and academic resources, this paper focuses on the impact of different psychological counseling methods, as well as prediction tools, and their ability to change offender non-violent recidivism rates. At the same time, this paper presents an alternative perspective and determines its validity in solving this issue. Lastly, this paper helps to conclude if implementing mental health and prediction tools can effectively reduce recidivism rates, stable correctional populations, improve prison systems structures, and benefit society as a whole. Moving forward, the next section of this paper begins to identify how to solve recidivism rates by focusing on the importance of social factors in regards to recidivism.
Social Factors

Stereotyping and Stigmas

Stereotypes and stigmas play a big part in understanding how society treats offenders, the obstacles that society makes offenders face, contributes to their chances of relapsing back into offending behaviors. Stereotyping unfortunately is a constant presence within the law enforcement environment. Within the past ten years, scientific studies have concluded that stereotyping exists from the moment a crime occurs to the point of arrest and then conviction. For example, Pepinsky (1977) promoted the idea that how law enforcement documents and examines offender’s case files contributes in systematic and institutionalized stereotyping. How law enforcement interprets a disturbance call, documents offenders rap sheet, and incarceration term suggestions, are all subject to offender stereotyping.

Pepinsky (1997) has even supported the idea that stereotyping is actually increasing crime, due to (1) the simplification of official case information processed in deciding how to handle crimes, and (2) increasing power of the stereotyping model to predict decision outcomes. Pepinsky (1997) also suggests that law enforcement should be shown how to effectively arrest and convict criminals without using stereotypical demographic information; as well as look for more personal characteristics within offenders to determine there actions instead of grouping their actions with others with similar criminal histories. Stereotyping has put innocent people in jail and has even set guilty parties free. Researchers now must ask the question if stereotyping and predigest exists, where can it be found, and if it truly affect offenders after they are released from prison.
**Employment**

Entering the workforce and job hunting has become one of the main environments where past offenders have found society stigmas being attached to them and their pasts. Researchers Decker, Ortiz, Spohn, and Hedberg (2015) support this idea when they conducted a study involving offender’s employment opportunities once released from prison. Participants for this study consisted of some white offenders, but mostly, black and Hispanic offenders. Participants applied for over 500 jobs for face-to-face interviews and over 3,000 jobs were applied for on online databases.

The methodology consisting of each test using random assignment and both sets of analyses were completed using cross-classified random effects (CCRE) models. Contrary to researchers expectations, race, ethnicity, or prior prison record affected outcomes in the online application process. However, race, ethnicity and prison records did have significant effects in the face-to-face interview process, and the research found that the effect of a prison record was particularly strong for black participants. The odds of black participants receiving a favorable response were 21% lower than white applicants. Furthermore, those same employers responded more favorably to white applicants with criminal background than black participants with no criminal background; ultimately leading researchers to conclude that employers attached a stigma to black applicants regardless of their criminal background (Decker el at., 2015). Overall, researchers concluded that race, ethnicity and prior prison sentence remain important factors in success in gaining employment opportunities.

Another study that was conducted one year earlier, also tried to show that the stigma attached to offenders and their prison record reduces employment opportunities.
Researchers also compared participants with felony charges with prisoners who only had lower level convictions, to determine if felony crimes had more stigma attached to them then lower level crimes (Uggen, Vuolo, Lageson, Ruhland, & Whitham, 2014). The study consisted of young Black and White participants who applied for approximately 300 entry-level positions, with one member of each pair reporting a lower level disorderly conduct arrest that did not lead to a conviction.

Findings suggest employer callback rates about 4% lower for participants with felony charges than for the participants with lesser charges (Uggen et al., 2014).

Researchers concluded that employers use three mechanisms to account for the lesser stigma of misdemeanor arrests compared to felony convictions. These include: 1) greater employer discretion and authority in the former case; 2) the severity, nature, and timing of the offense; and 3) a deeply held presumption of innocence. In addition, personal contact and workplace diversity play important roles in the hiring process (Uggen et al., 2014).

The highlights of these study speak to employers and how they must be aware of the stereotypes they can create when working or hiring an ex-offender; and also provide them with the same unbiased relationship that is given to there other employees. In turn, both of these studies provide clear examples of the obstacles prisoners face once released from prison due to the fact that employers attach specific types of stigmas and stereotypes to them because of there past behaviors. This eventually causes many past offenders to fall back into criminal behavior because of their inabilitys to afford to live on their own.

For example Duwe (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of EMPLOY, a prisoner reentry employment program the program-examined recidivism and post-release
employment outcomes among 464 offenders released from Minnesota prisons for two years with demographical data collection. Results revealed that participating in EMPLOY reduced the ratio for recidivism by 32% to 63%. The findings further showed that EMPLOY increased the odds of gaining post-release employment by 72% (Duwe, 2015). Even though the EMPLOY program did not have a significant impact on hourly wage, the overall post-release wages for program participants were significantly higher because they worked a greater number of hours. In total this study shows that employment programs offered by prisons can reduce the likelihood of recidivism and provide past offenders with an opportunity to service outside of the prison system. With the evidence and research presented, there is a clear indication that employment obstacles have some effect in recidivism, but other influences, such as environmental influences play a role as well.

**Environmental Influences**

Environmental factors have also been known to play a big part in the development of personality traits within prisoners and therefore contribute to increased likelihood of repeat offending. In support of this idea Kupers (1996) surveyed male state prisoners responses to the harsh conditions within the correctional environment. Due to intense confinement conditions and prison overcrowding, the inmates experience in prison suffered severe stress response syndromes, decomposition, suicide, and other forms of psychological issues while incarcerated. It was also documented that inmates who suffered from repeated traumas as children and youths may be especially prone to these types of conditions (Kupers, 1996).
Additionally some of the participants responded to the stress of prison life with violent outbursts, by disobeying orders from correctional officers or attacking and hitting others. Research’s also found that the other participants tended to isolate themselves in their cells, refusing to go out into the yard or eat with other inmates. Some even threatened to commit harm to themselves or others. As this research suggests, the diminished mental health services and overcrowding in prison are considered one of the main effects in diminishment of psychological states with prisoners (Kupers, 1996). With that said, these types of prison conditions make it difficult for ex-offenders to safely adjust back into society. Eventually these conditions contribute in offenders relapsing back into the prison system because they cannot successfully adapt to any other type of environment.

Environmental factors do not only stem from prison experience, but also family and peer influence as well. In 2012 researchers estimated that almost nine million individuals cycle through 3,500 jails through the United States, and these high prison rates are partly the result of high offender recidivism rates (Spjeldnes, Jung, Maguire, & Yamatani, 2012). Ultimately, these lead researchers to design a Longitudinal study to observe positive family support and its impact in reducing patient recidivism. This Allegheny County prison study observed 301 eligible male inmates who enrolled and consented in the jail’s research. These particular males were also being released within 30 days from the prison, and the date for this study was based on multinomial logistic regression methods. After a 12-month post-release period 36.9% of participants showed lower recidivism rates and almost half of participants 54.5%, indicated high levels of perceived family social support (Spjeldnes et al., 2012). Findings suggested that positive
family social support was found to reduce the effect of factors known to predict higher recidivism rates.

This study also referred to other research focused on family support. They stated that similar study’s focusing on negative support could effect inmate rehabilitation as well. Many ex- inmates have been found to have relatives who are also in prison, socially or mentally unstable, or also are or were in criminal atmospheres (Spjeldnes et al., 2012). This in turn causes inmates to return to behaviors that led to their initial incarceration because of the lack of support they get from their families (Spjeldnes et al., 2012). This study also referred to a Visher and Lattimore (2007) study, which reported that 72% of prison inmates had family members with drug and alcohol problems as well. Also, 78% of the prisoners had family members who had been incarcerated; which concluded that some ex-inmates do receive negative or no family social support (Spjeldnes et al., 2012).

In addition, this study also came to other important conclusions regarding inmate substance abuse and mental health, indicating that even though family and community help was available, not all patients were successful in deterring from criminal activities. At the 30-day mark, 49 individuals (17.3%) reported that despite their efforts, they were unable to stop using drugs or alcohol (Spjeldnes et al., 2012). Lastly, researchers suggest that even though family support is available mental health factors as well as substance abuse factors can cancel out this positive support and increase offender’s likelihood of relapsing into criminal activity again.

This brings researchers to observe other offenders relationships on a macroscopic scale involving neighborhoods and communities. So far positive correlations of recidivism include prior convictions, substance abuse problems, low education levels,
unemployment, and high levels of parole supervision (Wallace, 2015). While there are still mass incarceration rates in prisons, many offenders are also being released and returning to their home communities. Wallece 2015 collected data on the impact that societies and communities have on offenders and their probability of relapsing into criminal activity again. Data that was collected on recidivism occurred in Chicago with a 2007–2011 American Community Survey. (Wallece, 2015)

The correlations of this study determined the probability of offender recidivism with three types of organizations important for ex-prisoners. These included; emergency assistance, employment, and education. Once the study’s completion, results showed that the reduction in the availability of the three types of organizations impacted offender recidivism rates. Losing one or more of the organizations increased neighborhood recidivism, especially in low-income neighborhoods. In turn, these results suggest that depending on the external resources ex-prisoners are exposed to in social environments, they will directly impact overall recidivism (Wallece, 2015). Researchers suggest that neighborhood based programs that aim to lower recidivism should not only work to increase these organizations in neighborhoods but stabilize them as well (Wallece, 2015).

With the research presented in this section, it is clear to see that society and environmental factors play a big part in offender recidivism rates. It is important to understand that the impact of environments, peer, and family relationships have on the rehabilitation process of offenders and many social dynamics are not aware of their influences on offenders lives and actions. It is of great significant for this information to become public knowledge, and with this knowledge the public must work towards reestablishing a better success rate for past offenders; and ultimately create a less
criminalized society as a result. However, to achieve a less criminalized society both the environment and the offenders themselves must work towards this goal. With the next section offender factors and obstacles will be identified and later determined as elements that impact recidivism.

**Offender Factors**

**Personality Traits**

Personality traits have been shown to be good prediction methods for identify the likelihood of offenders repeating crimes. Research regarding recidivism and its relationship with personality characteristics has been documented since the early 20th century however, many of the first major studies that contributed to recidivism in delinquent behavior came about in the 1970s. For example researchers Roberts, Erikson, Riddle, & Bacon (1974) looked at demographic and personality characteristics associated with recidivism in adolescent boys. Their research indicated that significantly higher rates of recidivism were found among the younger delinquents, delinquents with prior institutional experience, and delinquents who had previously run away from an institution. Overall, those who have lived in and out of the correctional system were more likely to repeat recidivism patterns, also recidivism in these young boys were also connected to impulse characteristics within certain male individuals (Roberts et al., 1974).

Jumping forward almost forty years we can still find similar results in other studies. One study conducted by Cuervo, Villanueva, González, Carrión, and Busquets (2015) aimed at identifying juvenile delinquent profiles with socio-demographic variables. One tool they used was the Youth Level of Case Management Inventory
Running Head: PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN REDUCING (YLS/CMI) of Hoge and Andrews (2002). Participants were 395 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 with a criminal record in the juvenile court. Results showed that in property-related offences inconstant parenting, attention spans, peer relationships, drug use, personal interests, and attitudes, believes, or values; were all important factors in participants likelihood of repeat offending (Cuervo et al., 2015).

Even though this study was produced in Spain, the researchers compared their juvenile defenders behaviors with European juvenile statistics as well. The study suggested that non-violent crimes were repeated more frequently then violent offences, and gender can play an important role in which types of crimes are committed (Cuervo, et al., 2015). For this particular study results showed that juvenile girls were more likely to commit crimes against persons, while juvenile boys committed more crimes against property.

**Mental Disabilities and Substance Abuse**

Despite the large population of mentally ill individuals within U.S. prisons, only a few studies have examined the relationship between serious mental illness and recidivism. Mental illness alone is a huge risk factor for recidivism. For example, in a long-term study, Silver, Cohen, and Spodak, (1989) found that 73% of 135 mentally ill inmates they documented were rearrested within 5 years after being released from prison. This was then compared a prisoner control group without mental illness (n = 127) with only 65% repeating criminal activity.

At the same time, criminal offenders who suffer from both mental health issues and substance abuse issues, without proper treatment, ultimately find themselves contributing in more criminal activates then others. Nelson, Belkin, LaPlante, Bosworth,
and Shaffer, (2015) supports this idea by comparing the effects of psychiatric disorders with DUI recidivism. Researchers found that DUI driving still accounts for more than 30% of car accidents and deaths around the country (Nelson et al., 2015). Even with this shocking statistic DUI driving has not decreased at all; which completed researchers to conduct a longitudinal study collected data and assessed psychiatric disorders of 743 repeat DUI offenders. After assessment, participants were sent to a DUI treatment program and for 5 years researchers tracked criminal record. Within the five years after the initial assessment 7.5% of participants re-offended with a DUI charge, and 33% of participants re-offended and were charged with other crimes (Nelson et al., 2015).

Findings suggest that psychological disorders contribute to participants re-offending and those with attention deficit disorder were the most likely to repeat motor vehicle and DUI offences. Researches Nelson et al., (2015) then conclude that drug and alcohol programs that solely focus on addiction recovery are ineffective in changing participant’s behaviors. In addition, treatment programs that focus on the underline mental health issues of its patients will likely see positive results in behavior; while substance abuse treatment programs create relationships that can ultimately lead a offender to better life styles (Nelson et al., 2015). Still, other external relationships, interactions and influences a parolee shares with their parole officers can also impact recidivism behavior. Ultimately suggesting that how offenders respond to their parole officers has also helped determine the success rates of offenders re integration within society.
Parole and Parolee Relationships

Parole and parolee relationships are important influences an offender has once released from prison. How offender choose to interact with their parole officer can impact every aspect of their process when integrating themselves back into society. Researchers Vidal, Oudekerk, Reppucci, and Woolard (2015) documented the effects of 140 female youth parolees and their relationships with their parole officers (PO).

Researchers also examined whether the characteristics of the parolees and the quality of the relationship was relate to participants recidivism probability. This study determined that when it came to parents who had low assistant in youths recovery process the relationship that the parolee had with the PO was of significant value in decreasing recidivism, however those who had high parental involvement and assistance tended to have lower quality relationships with POs and showed no significance in recidivism rates (Vidal et al., 2015).

Another study by Hoeve, McReynolds, and Wasserman (2014) showed the impact of POs and their relationships with juvenile offenders. All 361 juvenile offender youths were diagnosed with some type of disorder, while only some suffered from substance abuse disorder. Those with both a mental disorder and substance use disorder were compared in recidivism rates with juvenile offender who only had a mental disorder.

At the same time researchers Hoeve, McReynolds, and Wasserman (2014) also compared recidivism rates of all juvenile offender based on their relationship with their POs, and if that PO suggested a referral for them to see a mental health professional. Results indicated that substance disordered youths with service referrals had lower recidivism risk compared to counterparts without referrals. Also POs referrals lowered
the recidivism odds to approximately that for youths without a substance use disorder. These results indicated that providing juvenile offenders with systematic mental health assessment; and linking offenders with substance use disorder to mental health and substance use services help reduces recidivism risk.

**How to Change Recidivism Rates**

It is now clear that both offender factors and social factors play apart in recidivism rates, and how communities and offenders themselves react to those, relationships, stereotypes, stigmas, mental health issues, and experiences, determine their chances of returning to criminal activity. The question researchers must ask now is, how can the scientific community change and deduce non-violent recidivism rates. Two specific elements play a part in making this change a reality, these include prediction tools, and better mental health programs. Many of the studies discussed in this paper have used one or both of these elements to help identify offender’s chances of recidivism. When using prediction re-offending tools and positive counseling treatments, it may be possible to see a shift in recidivism rates in the long run. So far past and current research have shown that mental health factors, environmental factors, and social dynamics, play apart in offender recidivism.

**Prediction Tools**

Prediction tools for recidivism in offenders vary, and law enforcement has tried to implement and stop many different types of offenders with specific types of prediction tools. A Canadian research team Seto and Eke (2015) used a tool called (CPORT), the Child Pornography Offender Risk Tool. This tool predicted any sexual recidivism among adult male offenders with a conviction for child pornography offenses. (Seto and Eke,
2015) The CPORT was significantly associated with any sexual recidivism; with moderate predictive accuracy by using a 5 year follow up analysis of previously released sex offenders. The CPORT items was a collection of the offenders age, any prior criminal history, any contact sexual offending, any failure on conditional release, indication of sexual interest in child pornography material, if there was more boy than girl content in child pornography, and if there was more boy than girl content in other child depictions (Seto and Eke, 2015).

Results showed that 29% committed a new offense, and 11% committed a new sexual offense, with 3% committing a new contact sexual offense against a child and 9% committing a new child pornography offense. In turn, this study indicates that law enforcement has increased its use of statistical analysis tools to help identify the likely hood of repeat offender. However this is not the only type of tool that is used by law enforcement to predict relapse in offences.

Another study observed the likely hood of recidivism with offenders based on mental illness. Pflueger, Franke, Graf, and Hachtel (2015) analyzed 259 mentally ill offenders for 107 months and combined individuals’ criminal records. Researchers then documented risk factors for general criminal recidivism and classified re-offences by using a random forest approach. Overall, the study presented a new statistical approach to forensic-psychiatric risk-assessment, allowing experts to evaluate general risk of reoffending in mentally disordered individuals. This approach might serve not only for expert opinions in court, but also for risk management strategies and therapeutic interventions.
In Conclusion prediction tools can help identify recidivism before it occurs and can help therapeutic programs identify the risk factors that come with re-occurring offending behaviors. These prediction tools with the help of mental health programs can help create stronger programs to reduce recidivism rates and ultimately change how the criminal justice system handles offender’s experiences within and outside of prison.

**Mental Health Programs and Therapy**

Positive mental health programs have also contributed in changing offender behavior and reducing recidivism rates. However, some law enforcement entities find psychology and mental health treatment still a taboo subject, and many of offenders are uneducated in how mental health and treatment programs work. An Australian research team quoted a 1995 study indicating that mental health courts impact in reducing recidivism was inconclusive at best (Lim, & Day, 2014).

Almost 15 years later this Australian study tried to finally demonstrate that mental health programs do have a place in law enforcement, and ultimately make an impact in offenders lives. The very first court The Magistrates Court Diversion Program (MCDP) of South Australia was the first mental health court in the country and was developed in 1999 (Lim & Day, 2014). This program took 219 individuals (131 males, and 88 females), who committed various non-violent crimes, and collected demographic data on them for a 1-year study. There ages ranging from 18 to 65 years and spent six weeks to over a year in the program the researchers developed. Many of the participants suffered from some type of mental aliment, whether it was a mood disorder or schizophrenia; and also participated in drug and alcohol abuse or addiction (Lim & Day, 2014).
This program mainly focused on giving the participants an understanding of their mental illness, how to address their criminal behavior, and how to prepare for their legal process and reintegration within society. Data first showed that those who completed the program had more time in-between offences then non-completers. Overall out of the 175 participants who completed the program, only nine individuals were unsuccessful in refraining from repeating criminal activity. This indicated a completion rate of 75.8% (n = 166), and concluded that the program was successful in reducing recidivism rates with its participants (Lim & Day, 2014). This study, among others proves that focusing on not just the legal issues of the patients, but rather focusing on educating them on their mental and social struggles and how to adapt into society.

Since this study was published, many therapeutic programs have been known to help with reduction in offender recidivism for many decades, however one concurrent and effective therapy is family therapy. Cavanagh and Cauffman (2015) observed the relationships with incarnated males and their mothers. A total of 630 Mothers and sons were interviewed after the son’s first arrest and again 12 months later. Results indicate that sons’ attitudes and mothers’ attitudes predicted re-offending 12 months after the first offense. These findings provide evidence that mothers relationships with their sons determined the son’s attitudes toward the justice system, and researcher suggest that family context may influence youth probationary success. (Cavanagh & Cauffman, 2015)

Other types of studies have contributed in other ways, such as connecting recidivism to therapeutic environments and how it could change repeat offenders behavior. Wunderlich, Lozes, & Lewis (1974) used a short term group therapy program for adolescent drug abusers and their parents to try to reduce repeated drug violations with
the adolescents. This therapy program attempted to improve communication so that families would be better able to handle future conflicts. Recidivism data showed that when adolescent participants are compared with similar nondrug juvenile offenders who had no therapeutic influence. The program participants showed lower overall social recidivism in their behavior.

Another successful type of therapy is intervention or intense therapy. Vander Kooi (2015) documented a county intervention program for drug and alcohol offenders. This program has been in existence since 1996 as an alternative to formal intervention by the juvenile courts in Michigan. The program is a four-month long and focuses on education, decision-making, team building, and prevention as opposed to punishment and immersion in the system with hardened delinquents. This study explores the recidivism rates of the population that have been involved in the program. The result of this study indicates that the diversion process that is being utilized is successful.

In conclusion, specific therapeutic environments based on the offences of the incarcerated have been proven to help reduce recidivism. These studies, among others proves that focusing on not just the legal issues of the offenders, but rather focusing on educating them on their mental and social struggles and how adapting into society can reduce recidivism rates as a result. Furthermore, a person who suffers from an alcohol addiction should not just go to court ordered AA meetings, but rather be put through a mental screening processes to determine if there are any other mental ailments, and if identified should be brought to a clinical environment where the professionals will work to treat the mental health issues as well as the alcohol addiction. With that said, there are still those who are still skeptical of the mental health communities involvement within
the criminal justice system. The next section will focus on alternative studies and perspectives within the scientific community that find mental health programs a waste of tax payers and offenders time.

**Alternative perspectives**

Other scientific communities do not hold emphasis on mental health programs and prediction tools. In fact one study claims that there is no correlation between mental health, parole supervision, and recidivism rates. Researchers Matejkowski and Ostermann (2015) concluded that adults with serious mental illness (SMI) recidivated just as quickly or similarly to adults who do not have SMI. The current study also examined whether parole supervision can change the risk factors involved with SMI and recidivism. Findings indicate that SMI did not exhibit a significant effect on SMI offender recidivism when considering its relationship with parole supervision (Matejkowski & Ostermann, 2015). Specifically, they found no relationship between SMI and recidivism for parolees and a negative relationship between SMI and recidivism among currently incarcerated offenders.

Another point of view which has been growing with supporters, is the idea that some offenders adopt a criminal lifestyle, where they view the prison, not as a punishment but a more familiar and constant presence, where they are taken care of (Petersilia, 1990). For example, Petersilia (1990) collected data on nonviolent offenders following conviction. The offenders were then given the option of going to prison or returning to the community and participating in an intensive supervision program. Results indicated that one-third of the offenders opted for prison due to there positive views regarding prison life.
Crank and Brezina (2013) identified other offenders who choose to look at crime as a “career,” and view incarceration as an occupational hazard or calculated risk. Lastly, with calculated risks, come benefits vs. punishments. Most of the time, when charged with a crime, many offenders are punished for only a fraction of the criminal acts they participated in, therefore the rewards of money, drugs, power, etc. outweighs the risk and cost in their view. Overall these offenders believe that they are “beating/playing the system” and if they are only using prison programs and care to benefit themselves, Crank and Brezina (2013) could not help but ask if the correctional system can truly help these people deter from further criminal activity.

Lastly, other academic circles find that, traditional prison techniques are the best way to deter offenders from further criminal activity. For example, Suedfeld, and Roy (1975) found positive behavioral outcomes in troubled prisoners by exposing them to solitary confinement. Researchers defined solitary confinement as inmates having no contact with any other people and being confined to one room for 22 or 23 hours a day. To ensure significant changes and positive behaviors social and physical reinforces or rewards such as conversations, showers, and gifts of cigarettes and coffee, where given out to encourage the continuation of positive behaviors from the inmates. Results showed that isolation and limited environmental changes, coupled with a series of relief-producing events, had a significant effect on prisoner behavior over time.

This study as well as those mentioned previously supports the idea that rigorous prison treatments, and traditional behavioral methods should continue to be used. However, many other studies side against these views, due to the fact that these perspectives have been used for decades and little results deterring offenders from
repeating crimes have been shown. Perhaps it is time that, society gives treatment and prediction programs more support and see their overall influences on criminal behavior.

**Discussion**

Due to over crowding and lack of effective mental services, inmates adjust badly to prison and effects their behavior and lifestyle once released from prison. This results in high offenders recidivism rates and continues to produce increases in crime and mass incarceration rates within our country. Instead of trying to solve the big pictures, many within our criminal justice system and government look to blame only the offenders themselves, however research has shown that there might be more macroscopic causes at play.

The importance of this paper is rooted in the idea that to solve this country’s high recidivism rates, the problem must be fully understood. In addition, solving this problem society must realize that (1) social and offender factors play an important role in why offender recidivism reoccurs so frequently. (2) Predictions and targeted mental health programs are great indicators in identifying recidivism in offender and can be successful in lowering recidivism rates; as long as they are remodeled to focus on more of the mental disabilities of offenders, rather then the crimes they committed. (3) Lastly, many of the topics that have been discussed in this paper are backed up by many research articles and studies over the last 70 years; and if our society wants to see a change in recidivism rates; society itself must rethink their ideas of incarcerated individuals and there roles within society.

Also, our criminal justice system must reassess their treatment programs and focus on what the research is telling them. Providing more individualized therapy
programs, letting inmates be aware of the triggers involved with recidivism, and doing mandated therapy for longer periods of time could ultimately; reduce recidivism, reduce prison population, help current inmates adjust properly, and reduce overall crime as a result. These types of goals are extremely difficult to reach; however with slow adjustments overtime, this nation could live in a safer world. New crimes and criminals will always develop, but it is how society treats these individuals, which determines the future of our justice system.
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