

# Male Inmate Perspective on Reducing Recidivism Rates Through Post-Incarceration Resources

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## ABSTRACT

*Most people who are incarcerated come from the community and ultimately will return to the community (Andress, Wildes, Rehtine, and Moritsugu, 2004). What are some unmet needs post-incarceration that could be addressed to reduce their risk of reoffending? This nonrandom pilot study investigates inmate perspectives regarding perceived access to resources post-incarceration that could reduce their recidivism, by surveying 102 male inmates at three Midwestern jails. It was hypothesized that male inmates would agree that accessible resources, treatment, and/or support services, post-incarceration would help reduce their recidivism. Major findings supported the hypothesis. The survey data was statistically analyzed using frequencies, means, and a reliability analysis. Implications for practitioners and future researchers were addressed.*

## Introduction

Most individuals who are incarcerated come from the community and eventually will return to the community (Andress, Wildes, Rehtine, and Moritsugu, 2004). The United States is seeing substantial growth in jail populations which has made incarceration a very common experience for many disadvantaged men (Western, 2002). The stigma attached to incarceration can often create barriers to resources that inmates need, post-incarceration, to prevent them from re-offending. These resources include but are not limited to regular and stable employment, education, treatment, and family related services. These post-incarceration services are important because without them former inmates may find themselves in secondary labor markets trying to earn livable wages to support themselves and their families. The authors reviewed the following literature to examine factors that may contribute to recidivism and what kind of resources could be provided to reduce recidivism. Inmates age 18 and older were surveyed regarding their perceived needs and attitudes toward treatments, and resources and which would be most helpful in reducing their recidivism rates.

## Literature Review

In researching what is effective in reducing recidivism rates the authors found very little research that focused on inmates' attitudes and perceived needs. Current

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research focuses on post-incarcerate employment, education, and/or therapy for inmates while under direct supervision of the court. Bayse, Allgood, and Van Wyk's (1991) research is helpful in pointing out the importance of family life education and how these programs can help reduce recidivism rates and improve family life. Family Life Education programs may change inmates attitudes and behaviors so they may function better within their families and society, post-incarceration (Uggen, 2000; Spohn, Piper, Martin, and Frenzel, 2001; Western, 2002).

Bayse et al. (1991) found that family life education plays an important role in curbing dysfunctional patterns within all families. Inmates who received education that helped mend and maintain their family relationships were less likely to re-offend. They also found that inmates who completed family life education courses, designed to promote ideal family functioning, scored significantly lower on post-tests designed to measure narcissism and they desired for their families to be more cohesive in the future. This study identified the importance of addressing the issue of narcissism, in the criminal personality, and how this could be a key factor in reducing recidivism, improving family relationships and functioning for both incarcerated individuals and their families.

The Uggen (2000) study suggested that employment may be a 'turning point' for criminal offenders; however, the tendency to engage in criminal activity increased when transitions to adult roles were made too early in the life-course. Uggen explained that, 'employment is critical in explaining desistance or cessation from crime' (530). It would be good practice to look for 'turning points' that deter criminal behavior and aid rehabilitation. In this study, job treatment considerably reduced older adult rates of recidivism.

Spohn et al. (2001) found that drug court participants had significantly lower levels of recidivism compared with felony drug offenders who had gone through traditional court mediation and sentencing. Completion of drug court is subject to completion of substance abuse treatment, full time employment for at least six months, and attending all scheduled court hearings. The purpose of this study was to find out if drug courts were effective in reducing recidivism rates. The research found that drug courts were effective forms of intervention.

Western (2002) suggested that incarceration effects wages and threatens economic opportunity. Lack of economic opportunity could often lead to unemployment and an increased likelihood of criminal activity, resulting in an absence in social attachments, often provided by regular employment. Economic opportunity was found to be helpful in distancing individuals from criminal activity. Western examined the effect incarceration had on wages and he saw incarceration as the 'turning point' that generated a continually increased 'spiral of disadvantages' (Western, 2002, p527). Western also looked at how incarceration often paved the way to 'secondary markets' and 'informal economies' by marginalizing post-incarcerated individuals from the mainstream economy. He also pointed out that, incarceration often directs former inmates into unsteady employment with very little wage mobility. Not only do former inmates have difficulty finding steady employment, due to the stigma surrounding them post incarceration, but also can expect to earn seven percent less than men of the same occupation.

The previous literature by Spohn et al. (2001) suggested that recidivism rates decreased when criminal offenders were offered education and rehabilitation opportunities while incarcerated or under direct supervision of the court. Recidivism rates are also decreased when gainful, steady employment was available post-incarceration. When comparing the current study with research findings, the gap the authors intend to fill examines the inmates' attitudes and perceptions of what resources could be made available to them, post-incarceration, to help them reduce their likelihood of re-offending and what resources they would utilize if given the opportunity. The authors hope to support the research findings of Spohn et al. (2001) that showed a combination of rehabilitation/therapy, employment, and support supervision of the court were effective in reducing rates of recidivism.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that supported this study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (Santrock, 2004). The Ecological Theory seeks to explain that environmental factors have a significant influence on individual behavior. The Ecological Theory supports the idea that changes in societal environment have a notable influence on individuals. It is important to construct environments that support individuals post-incarceration, so that we as a society can prevent multiple offenses and reduce recidivism rates and crime.

When Ecological Theory is applied to this study, the assumption can be made that availability of resources, treatment, and support services, post-incarceration, may indeed have a significant impact in declining the current rates of recidivism. Providing inmates with resources such as regular, stable employment keeps them out of 'informal economies' and 'secondary labor markets', where they are more vulnerable to re-offend. It would also be very beneficial to supply inmates with resources and education, provided by family educators, that empowers them to create healthier family environment, dynamic, functioning and cohesiveness. Ecological Theory supports the idea that resource availability would create a positive environmental support structure for post-incarcerated individuals and would be very effective in reducing recidivism rates.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to assess the needs of the inmates sampled. What resources would help them reduce their recidivism rates and if they would utilize these services, if they were made available? The sample was taken from three Midwestern jails. The authors hope this study will raise awareness of the need to research recidivism rates and post-incarceration resources, treatments, and services further. The central research question in this study was, 'What are male inmate attitudes and perspectives on post-incarceration resources? What post-incarceration resources and services do they feel would reduce recidivism rates?' The authors expected that the inmates' responses would reflect both a lack and a need for resources, treatment, and/or support services, post-incarceration. The researchers anticipated that inmates' attitudes would support the idea that increased availability of resources, treatment, and/or support services would reduce their recidivism rates. This hypothesis was based on the literature reviewed by the authors that supported the idea that resources like regular employment and education would help reduce recidivism

rates. This hypothesis is also supported by the Ecological Theory, which suggests environmental influences have a significant influence on behavior. Ecological Theory would also support the idea that positive environmental structures, such as access to resources for inmates, post-incarceration, would have a positive effect on reducing recidivism rates (Santrock, 2004).

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

The sites of this study were three Midwestern jails. The participant sample was 102 male inmates. There were 23 participants between the ages of 18-21, 18 between the ages of 22-25, 20 between the ages of 26-32, 14 between the ages of 33-39, 24 between the ages of 40-54, and three ages 55 or older. Of the 102 male inmates, seven had been incarcerated only once, 14 had been incarcerated twice, 12 had been incarcerated three times, nine had been incarcerated four times, and 60 had been incarcerated five or more times. In terms of marital status, 56 were single, nine were married, 16 were divorced, and 21 were cohabitating. The inmate's completed educational status ranged from 19 having completed some high school education, 30 had a high school diploma, 22 had completed either a GED or HSED, 19 had some post-secondary training, and 12 had completed a degree program of some type. The inmates were asked to describe their work histories before they were incarcerated and 14 reported being unemployed, 45 reported being consistently employed, and 43 reported being employed for short periods, with times of unemployment.

### ***Research Design***

The purpose of this survey research was to be able to generalize to a similar, larger population so that some inferences could be made about characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of this population (Babbie, 1990). We wanted to identify current attitudes regarding the access to resource needs from our sample populations and then be able to use that data to generalize about the larger inmate populations post-incarceration needs. The survey design type is best described as a cross-sectional study design in that it was used to capture knowledge, or attitudes, from a cross-section of the inmate population at one point in time. The form of data collection was self-administered questionnaires. The rationale for using this method was that it was the most efficient method to gather data directly from the jails due to the fast pace of the research course, convenience, low cost, and quick return of data. Our population was jail inmates; the sample was male inmates from three Midwestern jails. The study used a non-random purposive sample design, because the purpose was to obtain information from the jail population. We obtained our sample by contacting the three Jail Supervisors. The inmates were a vulnerable population to work with, and therefore precautions were taken to guarantee voluntary participation and human subject protection. The ethical protection of human subjects was ensured by completing the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) training; this study was approved by the IRB, after a full board review.

### ***Data Collection Instrument***

In order to address inmate attitudes regarding post-incarceration resources, a survey was designed. The survey included a cover letter with an implied consent form which

included a description of the study, definition of any terms not commonly know, risks and benefits, time commitment, confidentiality, voluntary participation, as well as instructions for completing the survey.

The survey consisted of five demographic questions relating to age, number of times incarcerated, marital status, completed educational level, and employment history before participants were incarcerated. Participants were then given 15 closed-ended statements based on a 5-point Likert scale which measured the intensity of the respondents' attitudes ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Questions were informed by our literature and theory regarding what factors may contribute to the high rates of recidivism seen in society. For sample questions, please refer to Appendix A.

The survey instrument has both face and content validity. Face validity refers to the logical connection the sampling instrument statements had to the concept and research question of this study. Because the statements and concepts addressed in the survey were literature-inspired, it was clear that these statements were connected to the larger societal problem of high rate of recidivism. Content validity refers to the instrument statement's coverage of the full range of concepts under the larger topic. These statements addressed a broad range of resources, treatment, and support services that may be helpful to inmates if offered post-incarceration and the perceived availability of these resources, treatment, and support services. To increase the validity, the survey was piloted to five undergraduate students and a Jail Program Director. Feedback indicated that the survey was clear and ready for distribution.

### ***Procedure***

To collect the data for this study, the researchers contacted three jail supervisors and inquired about surveying their inmate population between the dates of March 14, 2008 to March 28, 2008. The purposive sampling design led the researchers to three Midwestern jails to obtain participants. At each jail, the survey was administered slightly different, according to the specifications of the supervisor.

At the first location, one of the researchers met with the Director of Inmate Programming of the jail. The researcher administered the survey to voluntary participants, by reading the implied consent form and then exited the room to give participants privacy; however, the Programming Director stayed in the room with participants to supervise inmates while they were completing the survey. The Director of Inmate Programming did not offer participants any assistance other than helping them with reading comprehension. The completed surveys were put in an envelope and given directly to the researcher. The surveys were administered on March 14, 2008 in four classroom type settings. The first was a group of six participants, the second group was eight participants, the third group was three participants, and the fourth was 12 participants.

The second jail location was surveyed without the researchers present. Prior to surveying, the researchers reviewed survey administration procedures with the jail captain. To ensure participants' voluntary involvement and proper administration of the survey, the captain was given a detailed list of instructions to follow. During the hours the inmates were awake, each pod was given the opportunity to have the survey

administered. A deputy would ask the inmates as a group who would like to volunteer to take the survey. Those who wanted to take the survey were asked to sit together, one chair apart and the surveys were distributed. The implied consent was read to the participants by the deputy while they followed along. The participants were given as much privacy as possible while they completed the survey. The deputy was present only to help with reading comprehension and to supervise the participants. Completed surveys were then placed in an envelope. The envelope was then kept in a locked filing cabinet located in the jail supervisor's office until such time they could be collected by the researchers. The surveys were administered March 16, 2008 and overall had 44 participants surveyed.

The third jail location was also surveyed without the researchers present. Again, prior to surveying, the researchers reviewed survey administration procedures with the jail captain to ensure participant's voluntary involvement and proper administration of the survey. The captain was given a detailed list of instructions to ensure the survey procedure was followed in an appropriate manner. An announcement was made the morning of March 28, 2008 throughout all cell blocks asking for inmates' voluntary participation in the survey. Later, a supervising deputy from each cell block distributed the implied consent form to those inmates who chose to participate in the survey. The implied consent was then read to the inmates using the public address system on the block. The survey was then distributed and the participants were given fifteen minutes to complete the survey before it was collected and placed in a sealed envelope. The deputy was available for reading comprehension, but not to assist the participants in any other way. The envelope containing the completed surveys was then kept in a locked filing cabinet in the supervising deputy's office until it was collected by the researchers on March 31, 2008. There were a total of 47 participants from the third jail.

### ***Data Analysis Plan***

The data was first 'cleaned' and checked for any missing data. The 'cleaned' surveys were then 'coded' using acronyms for each variable. The first five statements on the survey were demographic variables: age, number of times incarcerated, marital status, education level completed, and description of work history before incarceration. Each survey statement was a dependent variable regarding the participants' attitudes toward each statement. Each dependent variable was given an acronym to identify it:

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Variable Statements</i>
ESFF	They would receive emotional support from family
FSFF	They would receive financial support from family
HSFF	They would receive housing support from family
IEMP	Incarceration record would not interfere with their employment post-incarceration
CEMP	Felt confident about find employment post-incarceration
OEMP	Better employment opportunities would reduce their likelihood of re-offending
FEMP	Felt confident about finding steady, full-time employment post-incarceration
FRCS	They would benefit from family and/or relationship counseling

MHS	They would benefit from mental health services post-incarceration
AODS	They would benefit from substance abuse services post-incarceration
HCSK	They would benefit from learning healthy communication skills
SMSK	They would benefit from learning how to cope with stress better
INCS	They would use appropriate and affordable counseling services post-incarceration
CSW	Having a caseworker, post-incarceration, would be beneficial
TRANP	A long-term transitional program, post-incarceration, would be beneficial.

To analyze the data, the data-analyzing computer program called *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)*, was used. The individual was used as our level of analysis. Given that we are not comparing groups, our data analysis included frequencies, correlations, and we conducted a Chronbach’s Alpha reliability analysis.

**Results**

The *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* was utilized to analyze the data that was collected. All of the variables were subjected to frequency distribution and a reliability analysis. Results indicated that there was no missing data. The table below illustrates the variation of responses given by the 102 participants surveyed:

<i>Variable Statement</i>	<i>SD</i> %	<i>D</i> %	<i>U</i> %	<i>A</i> %	<i>SA</i> %	<i>Mean</i>
They would receive emotional support from family	14.7%	6.9%	19.6%	21.6%	37.3%	3.5980
They would receive financial support from family	21.6%	16.7%	21.6%	18.6%	21.6%	3.0196
They would receive housing support from family	22.5%	9.8%	17.6%	21.6%	28.4%	3.2353
Incarceration record would not interfere with their employment post-incarceration	45.1%	19.6%	9.8%	12.7%	12.7%	2.2843
Felt confident about find employment post-incarceration	11.8%	14.7%	22.5%	24.5%	26.5%	3.3922
Better employment opportunities would reduce their likelihood of re-offending	7.8%	2.0%	11.8%	23.5%	54.9%	4.1569
Felt confident about finding steady, full-time employment post-incarceration	7.8%	21.6%	22.5%	23.5%	24.5%	3.3529
They would benefit from family and/or relationship counseling	15.7%	18.6%	24.5%	16.7%	24.5%	3.1275
They would benefit from mental health services post-incarceration	25.5%	18.6%	17.6%	16.7%	21.6%	2.9020
They would benefit from substance abuse services post-incarceration	26.5%	13.7%	19.6%	11.8%	28.4%	3.0196
They would benefit from learning healthy communication skills	17.6%	10.8%	20.6%	25.5%	25.5%	3.3039

They would benefit from learning how to cope with stress better	8.8%	7.8%	19.6%	33.3%	30.4%	3.6863
They would use appropriate and affordable counseling services post-incarceration	8.8%	22.5%	29.4%	15.7%	23.5%	3.2255
Having a caseworker, post-incarceration, would be beneficial	26.5%	11.8%	23.5%	19.6%	18.6	2.9216
A long-term transitional program, post-incarceration, would be beneficial.	16.7%	11.8%	20.6%	16.7%	34.3%	3.4020

A reliability analysis was run to indicate if our fifteen variables (*ESFF*, *FSFF*, *HSFF*, *IEMP*, *CEMP*, *OEMP*, *FEMP*, *FRCS*, *MHS*, *AODS*, *HCSK*, *SMSK*, *INCS*, *CWS*, and *TRANP*) were a reliable index to measure our major concept: attitudes regarding post-incarceration resources and how these resources might help reduce recidivism rates. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha; the analysis indicated an Alpha of 0.799. This value indicates that our survey statements were a reliable measure of the male inmate attitudes of post-incarceration resources and reducing recidivism rates through accessible post-incarceration resources.

The researchers received some qualitative comments which were analyzed and these themes will be discussed in the Discussion section.

## Discussion

Overall, a majority of the results supported this study's hypothesis that inmates would agree that accessible resources, treatment, and/or support services, post-incarceration would help reduce their recidivism. These findings are supported by the literature reviewed, which stated: equal opportunity and access to employment, family education addressing communication and stress management skills, counseling services, therapy and treatment programs all may be helpful in reducing recidivism rates (Bayse et al., 1991; Spohn et al., 2001; Uggen, 2002). The researchers grouped and discussed the following dependent variable results: family support, skills for healthy relationships, employment, mental health and substance abuse services, individual counseling, and transitional programming. These dependent variables will be discussed in terms of how they were supported by the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework that was used. The researchers will then address the limitations to the study, implications for practitioners, implications for future research, and concluding remarks.

A majority of participants believed they would receive emotional support from their families upon release from jail; a slightly lesser percentage responded positively that they would receive housing support from family upon release from jail. This is important because Bayse et al. (1991) found that inmates who could mend and maintain their family relationships were less likely to re-offend. Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Theory would agree that family support such as housing and emotional support, could create a more positive and supportive environment that is more conducive to the success of individuals (Santrock, 2004). Responses to financial

support from family upon release from jail were of little variance. Trends would be easier to identify if the researchers were able to compare responses to this statement based on age, number of times incarcerated, and perhaps by adding the socioeconomic status of family to the survey.

Interestingly, participants responded positively that they would benefit from learning healthy communication skills, and a high percentage responded they would benefit by learning how to better cope with stress. These responses are in contrast to a less positive response to the statement that participants would benefit from family or relationship counseling. The Bayse et al. (1991) study explains a key factor in criminal personality. Individuals with narcissistic tendencies tend to have poorer relationships and often try exploiting those they associate with, which increases their tendency to engage in criminal activity. Perhaps learning healthy communication skills and stress management on a personal scale supersedes the desire to maintain familial relationships because of the lack of empathy in the criminal personality. The Ecological Theory would support the idea that availability of resources would create a positive environmental support structure for post-incarcerated individuals and may help reduce recidivism (Santrock, 2004).

Participants strongly agreed that a record of incarceration would interfere with finding employment while others reported that they felt confident about finding employment post-incarceration. The researchers support this paradox using Western's (2002) work, suggesting it is not finding a job, but incarceration that directs former inmates into unsteady jobs with very little wage mobility, stability, or opportunity for advancement, this 'spiral of disadvantage' may increase the likelihood of criminal activity and recidivism (Western, 2002, p527). Uggen's (2000) study concludes steady employment as being critical in the cessation of crime for former inmates.

The stigma of incarceration affects a former inmates' ability to find employment, and often diminishes their confidence in regards to finding employment. Generally, less than half the participants felt confident about finding steady, full-time employment once released from jail. In the Ecological theory, regular, steady employment can be seen as a positive resource that has the capacity to create stability of positive resources through regular income (Santrock, 2004). The researchers perceive it is not only finding employment, but obtaining employment that will provide advancement opportunities and a livable wage to support former inmates and their families. These increased positive resources may keep former inmates out of informal economies characterized by criminal activity leading to recidivism.

An overwhelming number of reports were made by the inmates that they perceived, better employment opportunities would reduce their recidivism rates. The ability to find employment is dependent upon environmental and circumstantial factors requiring multi-dimensional, skill-building, and other job services. These services would give inmates the resources they need to become more marketable in the workplace and empower them to feel more confident when searching for employment.

Responses toward statements regarding willingness to utilize affordable counseling, mental health, and substance abuse services, and whether or not these services would

be helpful in reducing recidivism rates provided little support in this study; however, this was close to being mixed support. The researchers thought the negative reactions may have been a result of the stigma some may associate with mental health services. There was a noticeable pattern when looking at responses participants gave in relation to their age. It appeared that the younger generations' attitudes toward mental health services were slightly more accepting and positive; perhaps this is a result of fewer stigmas attached with these services today than in older generations.

The number of responses toward substance abuse services and whether inmates would benefit from them provided mixed support for this study. There were an equivalent number of responses for both 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree'. The researchers thought this may be related to inmates first having to recognize they have a substance abuse problem, before they can agree or disagree that they would benefit from substance abuse treatment. It is also important to note that inmates that may have had substance abuse problems prior to incarceration have been sober in jail, and may perceive they have already overcome their problem just through being sober.

Reactions toward caseworkers in this study showed mixed support as well. This may be due to negative perceptions some inmates have of caseworkers, while others may have more positive perceptions of caseworkers. It is very important to understand the need to build a strong working relationship between caseworker and client. Negative perceptions of caseworkers may be a consequence of the lack tools to build solid working relationships and healthy communication. The success of the client is based on mutual accountability, cooperation, and aligned and reasonable goals set by caseworker and client.

Half of our participants gave positive responses, in regards to how beneficial a long-term transitional program would be in reducing their recidivism rates. A transitional program that addresses the following: employment, education, housing, mental health, relationships, and substance abuse services would benefit inmates and reduce their recidivism rates. The researchers believe that inmates know that resources, treatment, and/or support services would help them; however, when the resources are listed separately different perceptions cause variation in responses. It is important to recognize that an inmate's negative perception may not be toward that particular services ability to help but may be whether or not they feel they have a personal need for that particular service. It is important to appreciate that when the inmates were asked if a transitional program that included all these services would be beneficial in reducing their recidivism rates, half agreed. However, when the statements inquired about services individually, more personal, individual responses were given. This could have been responsible for the variation in less support for individual services, yet more support for all services combined in a transitional program.

It's important to recognize while all the services covered in this research are beneficial. These services do not apply to all inmates; services and resources should be assessed and distributed based on individual need.

Qualitative comments were received that supported this study and the idea that a transitional program would be beneficial in reducing recidivism rates. One inmate told us that their jail 'would be best served in providing assistance to those seriously concerned in turning their lives around (see last question this page)' the 'see last

question' refers to the statement that asked if they would benefit from a long-term transitional program post-incarceration. Another comment made was, 'it would help if we had a place to go and some kind of work lined up but it's hard inside. We need help with stuff...' which is interesting because it seems that an individual being released from jail, having no place to go and no job would have a less structured and supportive environment than they had in jail. 'I believe that not having post-incarceration support and services like: employment, housing, education, mental health [services], substance abuse [treatment] etc is the number one reason for recidivism' wrote another inmate. In reference to counseling, an inmate stated, 'If counseling wasn't so expensive and hard to obtain for people on limited finances I...know it would bring down jail/prison population'. Lastly, the following comments are enough to leave ones ears ringing: 'Jail and prisons don't help non-violent criminals [they] only develop a great anger only making them worse upon release' and as one inmate said to one of the researchers while the surveys were being handed out '...you mean people really care about us?' It is important to pay attention to what these inmates are saying; they have experienced incarceration, they know what it is like; they know what works and what does not. If inmates think others do not care about them and jail does indeed make non-violent offenders angry, this should be enough to make one stop and think about the services we are providing and the services we probably should be providing these individuals.

### **Limitations**

The researchers had a small sample size to generalize and compare to the larger male jail population. The small sample taken from three Midwestern jails lacked diversity. Due to time constraints and the number of available inmates, the researchers were unable to randomize participants and thus did not do significance testing.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

The researchers' goals are to raise awareness, alarm professionals of post-incarceration needs, access to resources, treatment, and/or support services that could help reduce recidivism rates. The researchers hope that these findings will raise questions for practitioners and convey the need for transitional inmate programs that can be implemented to reduce recidivism rates. Lastly, the researchers would like to motivate professionals to develop, fund, and implement programs that will address the problem of high recidivism rates.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The researchers would recommend that the next step of research would be to use a larger, random, and more diverse sample to generalize to the larger male inmate population. We also recommend surveying female inmates and comparing gender differences in resource needs. Another suggestion would be to make more use of demographic variables and compare groups based on: age, number of time incarcerated, marital status, level of education completed prior to incarceration, and employment history prior to incarceration.

In future research it would be beneficial to study the following correlations:

- Age with the amount of family support perceived by the inmate
- Age and family and relationship counseling

- Age and stress management
- Age and mental health
- Number of times incarcerated and perceived family support
- Number of times incarcerated and perceived job availability
- Number of times incarcerated and age
- Number of times of incarcerated and utilization of mental health services
- Marital status and times incarcerated
- Marital status and perceived family support
- Marital status and relationship counseling
- Education and number of times incarcerated
- Education and availability to find employment
- Education and perceived utilization of counseling and skill building services
- Employment history and number of times incarcerated
- Employment history and perceived level of family support
- Employment history and communication skills
- Employment history and stress management

Using these demographic variables to compare groups may allow correlations to be drawn as to what resources may be more appropriate to the success of reducing recidivism, based on group trends. Uggen's (2000) work suggests steady employment for those past the age of 26 is more successful in reducing recidivism than for younger offenders.

The survey tested with a high degree of reliability; Alpha was .799. Upon reviewing the survey statements, the researchers would like to add statements inquiring about educational opportunities and continued education post-incarceration. We also suggest conducting qualitative interviews, either to supplement a larger quantitative study or alone to inform researchers of other resource options that may have been overlooked.

## **Conclusion**

The researchers hope to stress the reality that those who are incarcerated are from communities and will eventually return to their communities after they have been released. The researchers believe it is in the best interest of communities to provide inmates with post-incarceration resources that empower them to successfully transition back into their communities, and become valuable, productive, and contributing members of society (Andress, et al., 2004). This study aimed to fill the gap between previous research that focused less on inmate attitudes and more on observation. This research is valuable to family scholars because it takes inmates' attitudes into consideration and paves the way for programs that could be developed to give inmates tools necessary for reducing their recidivism rates. Lastly, it is important not to forget that environmental factors have a significant impact on individual behavior. Society has an obligation to construct an environment that is conducive to the success of all members (Santröck, 2004).

*'I believe that not having post-incarceration support and services like: employment, housing, education, mental health [services], substance abuse [treatment] etc is the number one reason for recidivism.'* (Anonymous Inmate)

## **Appendix 1: Questionnaire**

### **Implied Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research**

**Title:** Male Inmate Perspective on Reducing Recidivism Rates through Post-Incarceration Resources

#### **Investigators:**

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#### **Description:**

We are current students in HDFS 420: Family Research and Methodology course at UW-Stout, supervised by our Professor, Susan Wolfgram, Ph.D. As part of course requirements, we are doing a research study regarding inmates' perceived access to resources, post-incarceration, that may be helpful in reducing their recidivism rates. The purpose of our study is to identify key resources inmates feel would help them reduce their recidivism rates.

**Recidivism:** the tendency toward repetition of criminal activity.

recidivism. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Retrieved February 18, 2008, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/recidivism>

#### **Risks and Benefits:**

The risks of taking our survey are minimal, but participants may experience some discomfort in recalling events while responding to the survey statements. The participant can withdraw from taking the survey at any time. If support is needed, please contact [REDACTED]

The main benefit of taking the survey is that participants will allow us to gain knowledge of inmates' perceived resource needs post-incarceration. With this information we will better understand inmates' attitudes and needs when released from jail so that we can make others such as: family life educators, justice system social workers, law enforcement officials, corrective statements administrators, and policy makers, aware of the findings. As a result, together these practitioners may be able to design effective post-incarceration programs intended to reduce rates of recidivism and empower former inmates to become valuable members of society.

#### **Time Commitment:**

This survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes of your time.

#### **Confidentiality:**

Your name will not be included on any documents; each survey has a number only. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of the information that is obtained.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document.

**IRB Approval:**

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

This project has been reviewed by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46

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**Statement of Consent:**

By completing the following survey, I am agreeing to participate in the study entitled:

Male Inmate Attitudes Regarding Reducing Recidivism Rates through Accessible Post-incarceration Resources

**This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.**

**\*You must be 18 years old to participate in this survey**

No. \_\_\_\_

Male Inmate Perspective on Reducing Recidivism Rates through Post-Incarceration Resources

Age: \_\_\_\_18-21 \_\_\_\_22-25 \_\_\_\_26-32 \_\_\_\_33-39 \_\_\_\_40-54 \_\_\_\_55+

Number of times incarcerated: \_\_\_\_1 \_\_\_\_2 \_\_\_\_3 \_\_\_\_4 \_\_\_\_5+

Marital Status: \_\_\_\_Single \_\_\_\_Married \_\_\_\_Divorced \_\_\_\_Cohabiting (living with a partner, unmarried)

Education Level Completed: \_\_\_\_Some High School \_\_\_\_High School Diploma  
\_\_\_\_GED \_\_\_\_Some Post-secondary Training \_\_\_\_Completed Degree Program

Before I was incarcerated I would describe my work history as: \_\_\_\_Unemployed  
\_\_\_\_Consistently Employed \_\_\_\_Employed for Short Periods with Times of Unemployment

Please respond to the following statements by circling the number that **BEST** represents your attitudes regarding which resources would assist you when you are released from jail to prevent you from re-offending.

**Strongly Disagree-1 Disagree-2 Undecided-3 Agree-4 Strongly Agree-5**

I will receive emotional support from my family when I am released from jail.  
**1 2 3 4 5**

If needed, my family would provide financial support when I am released from jail.  
**1 2 3 4 5**

If needed, my family would provide housing support when I am released from jail.  
**1 2 3 4 5**

A record of incarceration will not interfere with my finding employment after being released from jail.  
**1 2 3 4 5**

**NEXT PAGE PLEASE**

I feel confident about finding employment after being released from jail.

1 2 3 4 5

Better employment opportunities would reduce my likelihood of re-offending.

1 2 3 4 5

I feel confident that I will find steady, full-time employment after being released from jail

1 2 3 4 5

I would benefit from family and/or relationship counseling services upon release from jail.

1 2 3 4 5

I would benefit from mental health services upon release from jail.

1 2 3 4 5

I would benefit from substance abuse services upon release from jail.

1 2 3 4 5

I would benefit from learning healthy communication skills.

1 2 3 4 5

I would benefit from learning how to cope with stress in a healthy way.

1 2 3 4 5

I would use appropriate and affordable counseling services to address my individual issues upon release from jail.

1 2 3 4 5

I would benefit from having a caseworker upon release from jail that would address my individual needs.

1 2 3 4 5

I would benefit from a long-term transitional program upon release from jail, addressing some or all of the following: employment, education, housing, mental health, relationship, and substance abuse services.

1 2 3 4 5

**\*Is there anything else that you would like us to know? If so, please add your comments on the back of this page.** \*Thank you so much for participating in our research study.

## **Appendix 2: Research Instructions**

### Instruction for Jail Staff Administering Research Survey

1. Staff will determine before survey is distributed which inmates will need assistance with reading; that assistance will be provided by staff.
2. Distribute survey to all participants.
3. Ask participants to refrain from turning over the survey until all participants have a survey.
4. Introduction of the survey will be read under DESCRIPTION on the front page of the survey.
5. The entire Implied Consent is read with the participants following along.
6. The voluntary completion of the survey is stressed as well as the confidentiality, both of which are clear on the Implied Consent.
7. Ask participants to refrain from beginning the survey until the entire implied consent form has been read to them.
8. Ask participants to complete the entire survey to the best of their ability. Participants are reminded at this time that staff is available to them if they should need assistance with reading comprehension.
9. Staff is clear where the surveys can be placed when completed.
10. Staff allows for as much privacy as possible so the survey may be completed to the best of participants' ability.
11. Staff collects all completed surveys that were placed in envelope and researchers will pick up at a designated time.

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