

THE IMPACT OF A FELON'S OVERALL WELL-BEING ON EDUCATION,
EMPLOYMENT, AND RECIDIVISM

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2019

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Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2019

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between the self-reported mental well-being of a felon concerning their educational choices, employment opportunities, and recidivism. The study is a correlational quantitative study that used a multiple regression to analyze the data. Data were examined from visitors to the North Carolina Employment Security Commission. The data were collected from the convenience sample of 106 unemployed or underemployed felons seeking employment and/or training. The study found that there was no statistical significance between the self-reported mental well-being of a felon and their employment choices or recidivism. A significant regression equation was found with a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported mental well-being of a felon and their level of education. Suggestions for future research include participants' seeking treatment at a mental health facility and investigating the impact of marital status.

Keywords: education, employment, felons, recidivism, well-being, collateral consequences

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my maternal grandparents and paternal grandfather who are no longer in my physical presence but continue to drive my faith and determination.

Dad, I am sorry that I was unable to complete this manuscript in your lifetime. I know you wished nothing but the best for me and that you are proud of all of my accomplishments in life. I am so proud to have inherited the willpower to continue reaching for the stars from you! Thank you for sharing your love of family and learning with me.

Thank you to my mom who has always believed in me. Your never-ending wisdom and hard work ethic push me to be the best mother and person that I can be.

I dedicate this entire journey to my Aunt Sandra (my second mother); thank you for encouraging me to be more than I thought, and I appreciate the life-long love of learning you helped to instill in me. Although you pushed me to start but moved to your heavenly home before I began, I have felt you there during those long nights.

Thanks to my paternal grandmother who encouraged me through each step of the way and always reminded me that God has something great in store for me.

I would like to dedicate this accomplishment to my husband for allowing me to spend countless hours toward the completion of this paper. There were many hours I spent working on this

educational project that could have been spent with you. I appreciate your support and willingness to allow me to achieve one of my life goals.

To my son, I dedicate the words on each page and pray that this accomplishment shows you that with perseverance and through faith, you can do anything God calls you to do, despite the obstacles of life.

To the rest of my family, each of you have contributed in your own unique way to make this dissertation a reality. Thanks to my friends and colleagues who have helped and encouraged me throughout this journey. Praises to my God almighty for providing me the strength to overcome the storm I weathered on this journey!

Acknowledgments

First, I have to thank God for all of his blessings. This dissertation was written during some of the hardest times in my life. God carried me through the lowest moments of my life. It is from Him that I draw my strength and inspiration. His many blessings have made a way for this accomplishment and I pray that my work only glorifies him. “For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. all glory to him forever!” (Romans 11:36, NIV). This study serves as a personal proclamation to the living God that I serve. The Lord placed many people in perfect situations to encourage, support, motivate, and most importantly love me through the challenge that will ultimately glorify Jesus as I continue to serve wherever he leads.

I extend a sincere thanks to my Motivator, Dr. Barthlow, who inserted herself in my study exactly when I needed help. I was out of gas and did not have the motivation to push myself until you took the time to challenge me. I thank you for your personal mission and for your time and expertise. I am grateful and will pass this forward someday! Thank you to Dr. Ford and Dr. McCray for challenging me throughout the process and teaching me what being a scholar is all about. Thank you for your patience, wisdom, and personal influence in my life.

I would like to thank my family, who has supported me from the beginning as I worked on my paper that turned out to be a book!

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List of Abbreviations

General Education Degree (GED)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

North Carolina Department of Employment Security (DES)

Warwick-Edinburg Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter begins with a review of the background of the prison system and the self-efficacy theory of behavioral change that guides this study. The history of, stigma, education, employment, recidivism are also covered in this chapter.

Background

Becoming employed after attending school or learning a trade is the prescribed method of being recognized as a thriving member of society (Campbell, 2014; Dailey, 2016; Luczak & Younkin, 2012). While many people follow the prescribed method, a minority population seeks the alternative illegal methods which lead them to incarceration. The prison population in the United States has grown 700% since 1970 (Hendrichson & Delaney, 2012). The purpose of prison, as classified by Stella, Haguha, and Sequeira (2012), is to provide the social function of punishing criminals while correcting their deviant behavior. The time that one individual spends incarcerated depends on the severity of the crime committed. Upon an individual's release from prison, difficulty returning to society occurs (Pyne, 2015; Stella et al., 2012). The difficulties of reentering society stretch out past the time spent behind bars and into everyday life.

History

The exact origin of the prison system in the United States has been traced by historians to penal slavery during the antiquity period that occurred prior to the Middle Ages (Weiss, 1987). Penal slavery, enslaving prisoners to do manual labor, evolved into prisons and workhouses during the colonial period. Those accused of a crime were detained in prisons while awaiting trial. Imprisonment was rarely assigned as long-term punishment and workhouses were reserved for paupers and beggars. Prisons and jails served as detention centers for those awaiting trial and

a prisoner was released after the court session was completed (Barnes,1921). The prison system has advanced into a rehabilitation unit for individuals breaking laws. Durham (1989) identified the opening of the first official facility using incarceration to punish serious crimes in 1773. There were a limited number of state prisons in the 1800s. States held contractual agreements with one another, and one state would house the prisoners of another state. An increase in the assigning of imprisonment as a punishment for breaking the rules of society led to the building of individual state prisons beginning in the 1890s (Conley, 1981). The numbers of those in prison continues to grow. The use of prisons has dramatically increased over the past 40 years as an agent to combat crime.

Stigma

Participation in society is challenging for all individuals released from prison but becomes even more difficult once a stigma of felon is assigned to an individual. A stigma places a label of inferiority on an individual, based only on a particular circumstance in their life (Ahmed & Ahmad, 2015). Actions leading to incarceration are the circumstances that assign the stigma label of felon to a formerly incarcerated individual. Removing individuals who have broken the law from everyday activities in society and placing them in institutions with other deviants excludes them as members of society (Barnes, 1921). The prisoners carry an everlasting impression of their incarceration; once released back into society, the title of felon becomes a definite label (Owens & Smith, 2012). A negative label impacts the felon's membership in society upon reentry, as felons are seen as threats to social order and as a member of an alienated group (Owens & Smith, 2012), thus resulting in prejudice and banishment from society as noted by Stella et al. (2012).

A stigma has a far-reaching impact on all aspects of life. The stigma associated with

being a felon is not easily removed once placed. It is present no matter how felons attempt to change. Numerous barriers are imposed with the stigma that is assigned to those with a criminal record (Hlavka, Wheelock, & Cossyleon, 2015). Disenfranchisement laws were created as a barrier to separate felons from individuals of the general population who had never served time in prison. Stern (2015) identified felon disenfranchisement as a mechanism that states used to deny an individual their rights due to previous felony convictions. These laws include some of the collateral damages that come with a felony conviction. Felons are prohibited from participating in civic activities such as voting, serving on a jury, and receiving public assistance (e.g. public housing, food stamps, Medicaid, etc.; Hlavka et al., 2015; Katbi, 2014; Mears, Cochran, Siennick, & Bales, 2012; Mitchell, 2015). Although only seven of the 50 states continue to strictly enforce disenfranchisement voting, the United States as a whole continues to maintain more disenfranchisement laws than European nations. Felons are also victims of exclusionary laws in addition to the disenfranchisement laws (McCahon, 2015; Owens & Smith, 2012). Felons are excluded from receiving higher education grants or some occupational licenses (Owens & Smith, 2012). As a result of the disenfranchisement laws, individuals feel ostracized by society and often return to the same illegal activities (Hlavka et al., 2015). Their return to illegal behavior leads to recidivism.

Education

One of the greatest strains that offenders must face is an academic disadvantage over those never incarcerated (Ramakers, Van Wilsem, & Apel, 2012). On average, a two-year educational gap exists between offenders and non-offenders (Katsiyannis, Thompson, Barrett, & Kingree, 2013). This educational gap puts felons at a disadvantage regarding employment choices. Seeking higher education post incarceration also creates an obstacle for felons. With

every step in the process of seeking higher education, felons contemplate disclosing their criminal history (Halkovic & Greene, 2015).

Employment

Seeking employment post incarceration places a stupendous amount of tension on a felon. States often ban felons from employment that requires interaction with children or vulnerable adults in health and safety areas (Hlavka et al., 2015). Compared with members of the general population, felons have academic deficits that limit employment opportunities, even without a criminal record (Ramakers et al., 2012). This disadvantage limits their abilities to obtain gainful employment. Skilled jobs with good pay require some education beyond high school in today's society. Special funding has been provided by the federal government to support prisoner reentry programs yet only a few studies have focused on employment (Valentine & Redcross, 2015).

Recidivism

Hall (2015) reported that incarceration of repeat offenders, commonly known as recidivism, is a growing problem in America. Good behavior of an inmate has been seen as a sign of readiness for early release and has been rewarded with parole since 1870. To date those indicators of good behavior also forage the revolving door to the prison (Campbell, 2014). Felons find themselves unable to reenter society and meet the demands as an actively engaged citizen. Felons' post-release characteristics are usually defined as poor, illiterate, socially inadequate, and unemployed (Nally, Lockwood, Ho, & Knutson, 2014). These characteristics limit the employment options of a felon and make them unqualified for well-paying, salaried jobs. Many individuals find themselves returning to their previous environment and participating in the same activities that brought about their incarceration. The stigma then forces

the individual to find alternative ways to fit in to society and make an attempt to be successful in the world (Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey, & Bryers, 2007).

Theory

In 1977, Albert Bandura developed the self-efficacy theory of behavioral change. The theory states that the perceived self-efficacy affects the activities, settings, and behaviors that people choose, as well as the how long the individual will persist despite obstacles and unfavorable experiences that they encounter (Bandura, 1977a). Ultimately, an individual may not perform a task based off his or her perception of a negative outcome.

There are four major sources of the beliefs that are associated with self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977a). Each source has a powerful impact on the self-efficacy beliefs of an individual. The most influential aspect of efficacy is performance accomplishments because they are based on successful past experiences. Observing the success of other individuals are the vicarious experiences connected to self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion is the confidence gained from words of affirmation spoken by others. Lastly, individuals judge their anxiety and stress levels using their emotional arousal. It is safe to say that nearly all individuals have some behavioral areas where they lack confidence in their abilities (Betz & Hackett, 2006). Criminal self-efficacy has a significant impact on criminal activity. Their self-efficacy and confidence drive their ability to participate in challenging activities despite past arrest and/or incarceration (Brezina & Topalli, 2012).

Problem Statement

There has been an increase in the American prison population. More incarcerated individuals lead to a more widespread problem post release. In the United States, the numbers

are increasing each year with a 4% increase in the number of prisoners between 2012 and 2013 based on the 2013 Bureau of Justice Statistics (Glaze & Kaeble, 2013). The specific problem is that those who are released from prison are returning to prison at an alarming rate because they have not been properly prepared for reentry into society. Therefore, more emphasis needs to be placed on individual programs that are designed to combat recidivism. There are 1.2 million incarcerated individuals in America (Pettus-Davis, Lacasse, Renn, & Motley, 2018). The rise in incarceration rates over the past 40 years has brought about the need for more research on recidivism, family stability, and employment (Brown, 2019).

North Carolina legislators attempted to combat increased criminal activity by writing more severe criminal laws than any other state (Welty, 2014). However, these severe laws created a new problem—overcrowding in prisons—and early release was prescribed to alleviate the problem. In the United States, about 600,000 men are released from prison each year and with the highest recidivism rates, 75% return to prison within five years, according to Pettus-Davis et al. (2018). There are many challenges for a released felon. Recidivism is encouraged by restriction policies that limit options and support of felons, forcing them back into the criminal activities with which they are familiar (Miller, Mondesir, Stater, & Schwartz, 2014).

In an effort to reduce high levels of recidivism, increased attention has been placed on the challenges facing former prisoners (Pettus-Davis et al., 2018). Previous studies have investigated the impact of imprisonment on employment (Ramakers et al., 2012). Starnes (2014) found that criminal background checks are more convenient, and employers are using them as discriminating factors towards felons. Some studies have shown that there is a need to reduce recidivism (Campbell, 2014). Other studies have shown that post-release support reduces recidivism (Wikoff, Linhorst, & Morani, 2012). To date very little is being done to assist felons

after their release.

Characteristic strengths interventions that increase well-being or personal achievement through the identification and development of strengths have been in use for over 60 years (Kidger et al., 2015). Additionally, characteristic strength interventions help to bring about change in an individual, but there are no current studies addressing how an intervention could be successful in reducing recidivism.

Pogrebin, West-Smith, and Unnithan (2014) revealed recidivism as a specific problem and proposed further research to reduce one of the largest problems in society. Visher and Travis (2011) identified the need for continued support of research and evaluation of reentry strategies that offer promise by resulting in the lowest rates of recidivism of felons. A study completed by Maschi, Morgen, Westcott, Viola, and Koskinen (2014) recognized that the need for future research should include studies that examine the influence of employment, well-being, and reduced recidivism. The problem is that there is a gap in the literature regarding the self-reported mental well-being of a felon on their educational choices, employment options, and recidivism.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this correlational, non-experiment, quantitative study is to address the gap in the current literature by examining the relationship, if any, of the self-reported mental well-being of a felon on their educational choices, employment opportunities, and recidivism. The felons in this study are male and female felons seeking job training or jobs in the southwestern region of North Carolina. The criteria variable for this study is the mental well-being, self-reported by a felon. The predictor variables for this study are educational choices, employment opportunities, and recidivism. Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed (2008) defined mental well-

being as the psychological functioning of a person that includes maintaining a sense of autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, life-satisfaction and ability to develop and maintain mutually benefiting relationships. Recidivism is defined as a time between the release and re-arrest or reconviction of an individual (Munyo & Rossi, 2015). Reentry has emerged as a critical issue over the last decade, due to the affect it has on families, communities, state and local government, and social service providers (Visher & Travis, 2011). This study provides data to guide the creation of support programs (i.e., educational, employment, or mental health) for felons before their reentry into society. The development of programs will help to identify a felon's strengths and increase educational awareness to prepare them for the community and in turn reduce recidivism. There are several areas related to programs for felons that need examination, including the influence of one's employment (Maschi et al., 2014) and decreasing the number of people who leave prison and commit another crime (Campbell, 2014). For instance, Quinlan, Swain, and Vella-Brodrick (2012) explored whether identifying and developing one's strengths can reliably increase well-being or promote other desirable outcomes.

Significance of the Study

Although it is known that efforts to improve post-incarceration employment will reduce criminal behavior, there has been little done to address this matter (Ramakers et al., 2012). Variables such as criminal thinking could be changed if proper information, techniques, and guidance are provided to an individual. Studies have shown that the area of greatest need rests among felons, yet very little has been provided to assist changing the variables for felons during incarceration or post release (Walters, 2015). Visher and Travis (2011) recognized the need for transitional and supportive services that are unavailable in many of the communities where felons return. The predictor variables of educational choices, employment opportunities, and

recidivism are limited due to the stigma of being a felon.

Little information on the types of effective employment services for felons has been found (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Batastini, Bolanos, Morgan, and Mitchell (2017) recommended future studies look at education and/or training for felons, as well as training for potential employers to improve employment rates of felons. The meanings attached to experience of incarceration are influenced by self-efficacy beliefs (Brezina & Topalli, 2012). The impact of a felon's attitudes toward reentry and education on recidivism rates has been studied. The need to examine other components of a felon's life should be examined in future studies (Scott, 2016).

The current study is significant because it focuses on the gap that still exists regarding ways to improve effective services for post-incarceration employment to reduce recidivism. Kidger et al. (2015) found that a poorer well-being is associated with stress or dissatisfaction with work and suggested that future studies explore this association as well as ways to alleviate the stress through educational programs in society. Studies have shown that recidivism may be reduced by educating felons. Tackling the social and psychological needs during and post incarceration has also been revealed as a way to reduce recidivism (Scott, 2016). Mental well-being may have a negative impact on post-release employment of a felon. Duwe and Clark (2017) provided a suggestion for future studies to include measures relating to mental health on the impact of a felon's employment. Learning about the impact of a felon's mental well-being on their educational level, employment choice, and recidivism rates from this study contributes to the literature and fills this gap.

Research Question

RQ: How accurately can a felon's self-reported mental well-being be predicted from a linear combination of educational level, employment choice, and recidivism?

Definitions

The definitions listed below were used for this study:

1. *Felony* – Felony is defined as any crime punishable by more than a year in prison or death (Sigler, 2014).
2. *Stigma* – Stigma is defined as a label of inferiority placed on an individual, based only on a particular circumstance in his or her life (Ahmed & Ahmad, 2015).
3. *Recidivism* – Recidivism is defined as more than two arrest and convictions (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001).
4. *Well-Being* – Well-being or mental health is the ability to contribute to the community, cope with the stress of life, release one's potential, and work productively (Davies, Knuiman, & Rosenberg, 2016).
5. *Mental Well-Being* –The psychological functioning of a person that includes maintaining a sense of autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, life-satisfaction and ability to develop and maintain mutually benefiting relationships (Stewart-Brown & Janmohamed, 2008).
6. *Disenfranchisement Laws* – Laws that restrict an individual who has been incarcerated from participating in civil, political, and social rights, duties, and/or services (Meredith & Morse, 2015; Owens & Smith, 2012).
7. *Correctional Education* – Literacy, academic, job/life skills, vocational and college courses offered to offenders in all state-owned correctional facilities (Scott, 2016).

8. *Reentry* – Process of community reentry for a person confined in a jail or prison (Scott, 2016).
9. *Ban the Box* – Policy that prohibits employers from asking about criminal records on the initial application (Uggen & Stewart, 2015).
10. *Collateral Consequences* – Civil punishments, rather than criminal punishments, that felon offenders face after they serve their criminal sentence (McCahon, 2016).
11. *Mass Incarceration* – The systematic and disproportionate imprisonment of particular groups of the population (Jewkes, 2014).
12. *Learning Disabilities* – Heterogeneous disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and mathematical abilities (Koo, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Two is to review the current literature on education (early and post-conviction), reentry, recidivism, employment, social connections, and well-being of felons. This exposes the gap in the literature on the relationship of the mental well-being of felons and their educational choices, employment opportunities, and recidivism.

Theoretical Framework

Self-efficacy refers to the judgment of an individual about their own ability to accomplish a task or activity (Choi et al., 2001). The basis of the self-efficacy theory is that a person can know the result of a task but will not perform it if they do not believe that they can successfully perform it (Bandura, 1977a). Behavioral choices are impacted by self-efficacy through the extent of effort and psychological functioning (Bandura, 1977b). There are four sources of the self-efficacy beliefs: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977a).

The first source, performance accomplishments, of the self-efficacy theory as explained by Choi et al. (2001) is predictive of the likelihood that an individual would be more successful performing a task if she or he holds a positive perception of her or his ability to perform such a task. It is safe to say that nearly all individuals have some behavioral areas where they lack confidence in their abilities (Betz & Hackett, 2006). This leads to the second source, a vicarious experience, which is dictated as having an influence on another's self-efficacy. One's self-efficacy may be weakened by successful or unsuccessful completion of a task, that may not be a direct reflection of the individual's true capabilities (Bandura, 1977a).

Bandura (1997) noted that the influence of the third source, verbal persuasion, as well as

physiological and affective states, are "most believable when they are only moderately beyond what individuals can do at the time" (p. 105). Bandura also posited that efficacy beliefs could be altered by enhancing one's physical status, decreasing stress levels and negative emotional tendencies, as well as correcting misinterpretations of bodily states. This is evidenced in the fourth source, emotional arousal. It is efficacy expectancies or self-efficacy beliefs (one's beliefs about his ability) that influence a person's behavior, choices, motivation, perseverance, job satisfaction, willingness to face challenges, whether or not one will even attempt to complete the task, and the effort that a person will put forth while performing the task (Bandura, 1977a; Bandura & Adams, 1977; Sherer & Adams, 1983; Taylor & Betz, 1983; Tipton & Worthington, 1984).

Theorists and researchers have linked low self-esteem to other constructs, generally focusing on the links between low self-esteem and pathologies such as depression. Self-efficacy has been classified as an item that positively correlates with health (Gregersen, Vincent-Hoper, & Nienhaus, 2014). Recently, low self-esteem has begun to be associated with more general concepts such as emotional lability (a tendency for strong emotions to occur in both directions positive and negative) and low internal locus of control (a generalized belief that the self is not in control of what happens). Self-efficacy has been associated with numerous psychological constructs such as self-concept, self-esteem, depression, test anxiety, and assertiveness (Choi et al., 2001). A strong self-efficacy for a challenging activity generally coincides with less psychological and physiological strain than a weak self-efficacy (van Seggelen-Damen & van Dam, 2016). In order to understand the various psychological and educational outcomes, Choi et al. (2001) urged researchers to align self-efficacy with the activity associated with it. Luczak and Younkin (2012) found that individuals learn what beliefs are important through the

association of a particular group. The more participation in a group, the greater the chance of adoption of important beliefs. Exercising personal control in a situation exists when the individual has confidence in taking advantage of the opportunity for personal control (Gregersen et al., 2014).

Related Literature

The end of the 19th century brought about the reform of the criminal justice system as an early version of what is known today in England and the United States (Binder & Weisberg, 2013). During that time, parts of the United States completely abolished or limited capital and corporal punishment, along with mutilation of those incarcerated, birthing rehabilitative punishment as a replacement (Kleinfeld, 2016). Prior to rehabilitative punishment completed in prisons, crimes were not conceived as personal damage and individuals sought revenge against the offender. Binder and Weisberg (2013) discussed crime as breaches of political loyalty to the Lord in medieval times and the early days of modern law. The strongest manifestation of governmental power is demonstrated through punishment (Binder & Weisberg, 2013). Public punishment, which was a substitute for revenge, was replaced by the prison system.

Victor Hugo told the fictional story of Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables*. Jean made an unsuccessful attempt to find redemption in society after he had finished a 19-year prison sentence for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his starving nephew. Jean's attempt to reenter society was not prosperous because he was not reformed after his time in prison. Society's rejection of Jean was the cause of his unsuccessful attempt despite Jean's desire to be a productive citizen. This story is all too real in the lives of individuals who have completed their time in prison but have trouble reintegrating into society. Smith (2015) acknowledged that the United States has more incarcerated individuals than any other industrialized country. The

Corrections Department makes up the fifth largest category in the federal budget (Seiter, 2014). Incarcerated individuals released from prison return and spend a substantial amount of their life incarcerated at one time or another (Raphael, 2011). Visher and Travis (2011) identified studies that were conducted to determine the characteristics of those that are released back into society. However, the results yielded that there are no specific characteristics of those released from prison. This makes it difficult to identify who will be released from prison and return again.

Early Education

Academics skills play a major role in the success of individuals in society once they reach adulthood. Success in early education has a positive impact; however, the success is not the same for all children. Tuominen et al. (2014) noted that risk factors for adjustment problems, antisocial, and criminal behavior have been linked to poor academic achievement in the areas of reading, spelling, and math. The risk of reading difficulties is greater for African American children and is often coupled with alienation from their teacher (Chaney, 2014). A correlation has been found between the relationship a student has with his or her teacher, the level of academics, and criminal activity of the student. A positive connection between a teacher and a student yields more positive academic success for the student and little to no criminal activity. Decreased academic achievement is often coupled with a long-term increase in emotional stress that occurs naturally during middle school and results in higher involvement in criminal activity. Classroom misbehavior and contact with the criminal justice system are results of severed connections with teachers during the middle school years (Scott, 2016). Higher education is often the bridge leading to participation in society. No matter the career choice, some form of higher education is required to excel throughout the career. Therefore, higher education is seen as the primary mode of the transition from youth to adulthood (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). An

interruption in the transition to adulthood, such as leaving school and going to prison, alters the life course.

The school environment also plays an important part in the success of an individual prior to adulthood. In this case, the topic of safety in schools has been on the rise, resulting in changes to current practices to keep students safe during the school day. Some practices designed to encourage safe schools have in turn created problems (Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012). The enforcement of the zero-tolerance policy in primary and secondary schools requires automatic punishment of a student no matter what the circumstances of the situation may be (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). A change has occurred in the discipline procedures in the school system. The change introduces students that commit offences at school to law enforcement in lieu of the principal. This practice introduces students to the criminal justice system much earlier than when offences were handled within the school building and has come to be known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Nance, 2016).

The zero-tolerance policy united with the school-to-prison pipeline initiative has prompted much attention to the actions taken in schools (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015; Gonzalez, 2012; Halkovic, 2014; Langberg & Fedders, 2013). However, the policies designed to protect students and keep them safe have brought about a latent consequence for many of the same students it was created to shield. School code violations previously handled by the principal are referred directly to the police, prematurely introducing students to the justice system (Gonsoulin et al., 2012).

A violation historically seen as a day in another classroom location in the school building is now assigned the punishment of suspension. This punishment severity leads to a rise in unsupervised time during the school day. Suspension from school may result in increased

involvement in juvenile or criminal courts due to reduced supervision during suspension and more opportunities to commit crime as a result of the lack of supervision (Langberg & Fedders, 2013). Due to the additional chances for participation in criminal activities leading to punishment administered by the criminal justice system, students are criminalized before they even enter the workforce (Kilgore, 2013).

Among the prison population, educational attainment is extremely low (Curtis, Derzis, Shippen, Musgrove, & Brigman, 2013; Fella & Gallipoli, 2014; Valentine & Redcross, 2015). The highest rates of incarceration are found among high school dropouts (Scott, 2016). In general, the academic skills of dropouts have been found to be low. The weak foundational skills of the dropouts may be the cause of some dropouts leaving school without a diploma. Learning to read in the first few years of school is essential to future success. Not learning to read during this critical time in academics significantly increases the chances of poor academic performance throughout the remainder of a student's academic career (Chaney, 2014). Reading skills are not the only educational deficits that impact the academic career of a student. The inability to master the basics of reading and math is found in students with a learning disability. The foundational basic skills impaired by a reading and/or math learning disability do not magically disappear with age (Koo, 2015). Skill deficits may also occur in the area of working memory, information processing, or just poor reading and impact most work and normal daily situations in adulthood (Tuominen et al., 2014).

Weak pre-academic skills are generally found in children that come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Scott, 2016). Each year there are approximately 1.2 million students who leave school never to return. The exit from school creates the label of high school dropout that will follow the student throughout his or her life (Anderson, 2014). Young Black

men hold the highest dropout record, with 35% of them being unable to complete high school due to incarceration (Halkovic, 2014). High school diplomas are held by 88% of the general population based on the Current Population Survey (CPS) administered in 2015 (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Illiteracy rates among adult prisoners are nearly five times the national average. Also, the rate of functionally illiterate adult prisoners is double the national average of illiteracy (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012).

The school-to-prison pipeline has emerged as a significant factor to the incarceration of African American males (Scott, 2016). The lower the amount of education attained by men, the higher the chances are of serving prison time. The most represented group in the category of incarceration is minority men with very low levels of education (Raphael, 2011). The incarceration rates are up to four times higher for individuals who did not complete high school over those who went on to attend college (Halkovic, 2014). Incarcerated men generally are more poorly educated and score lower on standardized tests than incarcerated women (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011). Inmates that have less than a high school education make up 58% of the population in prisons (Chaney, 2014).

The level of education significantly decreases the rate of recidivism for felons as it rises (Lockwood & Nally, 2016). The transition to adulthood begins with graduation from high school. The most frequent choices that follow high school graduation are to attend an institution of higher education, join the military, or enter the workforce. Minority men lacking strong academic backgrounds search for alternative means to survive in society. For minority men, higher education and military service are more likely to be substituted with incarceration as they transition to adulthood (Hagan & Foster, 2012). Research shows that there is a reduction in recidivism as a result of increased education (Hall, 2015). Education provides a more positive

outcome on life for individuals post their release from prison.

Low levels of education and vocational skills are linked to a poor reintegration into society that nourishes a pattern of recidivism within three years (Scott, 2016). The reading and writing skills are significantly lower for those incarcerated than those who are not incarcerated (Chappel & Shippen, 2013). Studies have revealed that there is an inverse relation of recidivism and educational attainment among felons (Manger, Eikeland, & Asbjornsen, 2013).

Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

Legally, discrimination based on gender, race, and ethnicity is punishable by law. The label of felon, however, supersedes the law and allows discrimination against women and minorities who have been incarcerated (Ross, Jones, Lenza, & Richards, 2016). Discrimination does not take a break when it comes to dealing with those participating in criminal activities; it only multiples with every label. Racial disparities of imprisonment have continued as incarceration rates have risen (Wheelock, 2011).

Persistence of racial disparities among those incarcerated prove to be a concern for many reasons (Brown, Bell, & Patterson, 2016). Although the population of prisoners has reversed from 70% White midcentury to nearly 70% Black and Hispanic at present, the patterns of criminal activity for these ethnicities have not greatly altered (Wills, 2014). Politics play a large role in the perpetuation of social exclusion of African Americans and preserve the racial disparity found among prisoners. The War on Drugs was initiated in the early 1980s to attack crack cocaine, traditionally found in low-income minority neighborhoods, despite the increased use of powder cocaine in the late 1970s by Whites of all social classes. Half of the prisoners in the United States were African American by the end of the 1980s although this group represented only 12% of the general population. The same facts were mirrored in the United

Kingdom during the 1980s. An increase in the prison population by Whites at 48%, Asians at 73%, and 138% for Blacks was documented between 1993 and 2003 (Jewkes, 2014).

The incarceration of African American men occurs six and a half times more than non-Hispanic men. Incarceration is three times greater for African American women than for Caucasian women (Wheelock, 2011). Incarceration brings about many broad implications for subsequent life chances for men. The repercussions range from employment, daily life to include family and friends, as well as engagement in civic responsibilities (Turney, Wildeman, & Schnittker, 2012).

Education is one life chance that is impacted by incarceration. In a study conducted by Curtis et al. (2013), African American men exhibited a gap in reading skills and performed 1.5 grade levels below the mean of all other races. Caucasian men demonstrated grade level performance of almost three years above the mean of all races combined. Additionally, incarceration causes the health of felons to take a different turn. African American men that have been incarcerated have lower rates of mortality than African American men who have never been incarcerated (Schnittker, Massoglia, & Uggen, 2011). Females share a different story. The incarceration rates are similar for African American women as well. Among female felons, there are no significant differences between the educational attainment of African Americans and Caucasians (Lee, Bank, Cause, McBeath, & Newell, 2015).

Incarceration

The United States is home to less than 5% of the world's population yet incarcerates 25% of the world's prison population (Morris, 2015). Blankenship, del Rio Gonzalez, Keene, Groves and Rosenberg (2018) found that the United States incarcerates more people than any other country with 2, 217, 000 imprisoned. Despite the rapidly growing number of inmates in the

United States, there is little information on life once in prison. Social life within the prison walls has been well researched in many countries. However, in the United States, very little published research exists (Rafedzi & Abrizah, 2016). Violence between inmates is frequent inside the walls of prison, due to the fact that prison life requires readiness for action, whether voluntary or involuntary. The violence is possible due to the social hierarchy that exists within the prison. An inmate is informed of the inner social structure of the prison within the first few days. Some inmates become victims of physical injury while other inmates become the victimizers. The psychological hurt endured during incarceration continues after release (Brown et al., 2016; Wills, 2014). The environment within the prison does not present a positive alternative to a lifestyle of crime. Although prison removes the prisoner from society so that the opportunities to commit offenses in society are no longer available, it places the prisoner in association with other offenders (Clark, 2016). The prison environment is often referred to as “hell” or “hellish” in poetic or creative writing as well as in many autobiographies of prisoners. The look of a poorly ventilated dungeon is often the setting for visual media depicting prisons (Jewkes, 2014). Ethnic groups build spaces, within society, to interact with other cultural and ethnic communities in a positive manner. This change within the prison walls and suspicion and mistrust take root in the fear of others (Wills, 2014).

Prisons are not all created equally. The funding source may be public or private funds. Public prisons are often in rural areas that award the residents of that area with employment. Private industries gain a two-for-one deal by funding the operation of the prison in exchange for profits from their own commercial interests (Knott, 2012). The rising needs of the government to provide prisons for the growing number of inmates in prisons were met by the private industry stepping in to operate some prisons (Seiter, 2014).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of mental health on living in a total institution such as a prison. Although the focus of the studies differs, the stress of prison has an impact on the remainder of a felon's life (Schnittker, Massoglia, & Uggen, 2012). Incarceration brings about separation from children, but concern for children still remains. An attempt to provide support is made by many incarcerated fathers who were active members of their children's lives prior to incarceration (Turney et al., 2012). The inability to provide for their family is an additional obstacle that incarceration adds to the challenges that felons face. The impact of a felon's incarceration depends on the many challenges that await the felon upon release (Turney et al., 2012). Incarceration may have a positive impact on communities' and families' health by removing violent spouses and parents. A non-violent felon's incarceration may also promote independence and a sharp approach to managing the household, especially for women (Schnittker et al., 2011).

Reentry

Reentry is classified as all of the activities and programs that assist the reintegration of a felon back into society (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). The first day of incarceration is the beginning of a felon's reentry (Garrett, 2017). A prisoner's exit from incarceration is termed *prisoner reentry* and may be as simple as the transition from prison to the community (Western, Braga, Davis, & Sirois, 2015).

During the reentry process, it is quickly learned that a felon is far from free once released from incarceration (Keena & Simmons, 2015). An array of factors such as low educational levels, lack of vocational skills, substance abuse dependency, emotional disturbance, unrealistic positive or negative self-concept, and homelessness impede successful reentry. The factors that impede successful reentry mount with multiple challenges that felons face after release make for

a tough return to society. Re-offending, unemployment, lack of transportation, substance abuse, homelessness, custody battles, poor social network, and restitution are just a few of the challenges that felons face after leaving prison (Curtis et al., 2013).

Prison life makes successful reentry into society very difficult (Clark, 2016). Transition from prison to home is a dynamic social process that presents many challenges (Scott, 2016). The challenges awaiting felons upon their release are the ultimate determinants of the effects of their incarceration (Turney et al., 2012). Conviction may yield resentment towards the judicial system, and this spills over into their reentry process (Binnal, 2014). Some challenges prior to incarceration such as lacking education and employment continue to provide a hurdle when reentering society post incarceration (Curtis et al., 2013). Poor mental and physical health along with alcohol and drug misuse are also some disadvantages of felons (Visher and Travis, 2011).

Felons are not a homogenous group and do not fit into any one stereotype. The transition of a felon from prison back into the community varies as well. The transition is even more challenging due to the societal pressure that exists. Offenders reentering society receive the message that they will forever be beneath their community even after fulfilling their debt to society (Kleinfeld, 2016). The societal impact of the stigma of being a felon is coupled with legal provisions that ban felons from jobs and professions as well as enormous obstacles to benefits offered by the state (Kilgore, 2013). The criminal justice system is instrumental in sending this message of devaluation, as identified by Kleinfeld (2016). As a result, felons develop a distrust for the government, lack participation in community groups, and are not involved in the voting process (McCahon, 2016). A criminal label has become sticky and virtually impossible to remove (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). The profile of a felon is often plagued with a lack of education, little skills, and poor or gapped employment history (O'Reilly, 2014).

They also face additional disadvantages such as terminated parental rights, untreated addictions, and mental health issues (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013) and have disabilities or an unrealistic self-concept (Curtis et al., 2013). The loss of such rights and privileges impede the reentry of felons into society (Christie, 2014).

Culture shock is caused by the economic and social hardships experienced upon reentry into society (Miller et al., 2014). Those individuals most affected are those with poor education, low job skills, and fringe family connections (O'Reilly, 2014). Felons must face the obstacles of reoffending, unemployment, lack of transportation, homelessness, substance abuse, the loss of custody of their child(ren), little or no social network, legal fees, all topped with the social stigma of being a felon (Curtis et al., 2013). Family reconnection and/or reunion with a spouse appears to be a buffer to increase the likelihood of successful reentry (Stahler et al., 2013). As a result of the rising numbers of incarcerated individuals being released, the issues faced by the individuals reentering society have become a topic of research (Ramakers, Apel, Nieuwbeerta, Dirkzwager, & Van Wilsem, 2014). Men have reported education, job training, and employment as their highest needs after their release from prison. The needs for transitional and health-related services of various kinds have also been expressed as needs post release. While women have articulated a demand for the same post-release needs, there is a greater need for health services among women (Visher & Travis, 2011).

A crucial component of reentry success is education (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012). Reentering society is strongly correlated to education as a key component (Scott, 2016). Education, especially college education, is a necessity for successful reentry in today's labor market (Scott, 2016). Entering the labor market successfully is an obstacle that is the most challenging after being released (Lockwood & Nally, 2016). Some felons have difficulty finding

work, and those that do find work struggle with adjusting or committing to work (Scott, 2016).

Evidence has been provided that successful reentry is the result of one factor: education (Curtis et al., 2013). Prior criminal convictions leave individuals handicapped with the inability to challenge injustices to them (Scott, 2016). However, the attraction to illegal behavior is decreased by efforts to improve felons' success in the labor market and give them the capacity to earn a livable wage (Ramakers et al., 2014). Employer discrimination, based solely on their criminal record, is yet another challenge that felons must face (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Access to criminal records has become easily available with the introduction of the Internet (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). Landlords, employers, and even curious friends have access to criminal records with the click of a button.

Disenfranchisement

A criminal record brings about a stigma that all felons face upon their reentrance into society (Ray, Grommon, & Rydberg, 2016). Despite the expansion of civil rights awarded to a particular group, women and minorities, as seen throughout history, the civil liberties and freedoms of felons are contracted with time (Wilson, Owens, & Davis, 2015). The roots of disenfranchisement of felons can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome where losing deeply coveted political rights was equivalent to losing honor and one's position in society at that time (Christie, 2014; Grady, 2012). The philosophy behind the disenfranchisement of felons is that felons have broken the invisible social contract between them and society. As a result, they are stripped of their ability to fully participate in society as they did before (Ruth, Matusitz, & Simi, 2017). This type of civil death has evolved into what is now known as collateral consequences associated with a felony conviction (Christie, 2014). The laws of disenfranchisement persist as a rapid and significant area of policy changes (Burch, 2012).

With the desire to regulate the behavior of felons, legislative and executive officials project a tough appearance by producing exclusionary policies that deny civil entitlements during and after completion of sentences (Wilson et al., 2015). Laws and policy continue to lag behind despite evidence that the majority of felons will eventually abstain from crime (Uggen & Stewart, 2015).

In the past voting was seen as a privilege rather than a right, and as Black men and women received the right to vote, felons continued to be ignored (Grady, 2012). In states that allow felons to vote, there is low voter turnout from the felon population. However, felons report that regaining the right to vote symbolizes that the same rights and privileges of any other citizen apply to the felon (Sigler, 2014). The right to serve on a jury is restricted in two major ways: the possibility to serve after full completion of their sentence or the elimination of chances of serving as a juror once labeled as a felon varies by state (Binnal, 2014; Wheelock, 2011). Felons are also restricted from holding a public office (Wilson et. al., 2015).

Collateral consequences hinder a felon's engagement and participation in social institutions by making it a crime for him or her to engage in everyday activities (Tyler & Brockmann, 2017). Uggen and Stewart (2015) identified limits on occupational licensure (the public sector with children, the elderly, or individuals with disabilities, law, real estate, air transportation, and racetracks), eligibility of public assistance to include welfare benefits, housing, Section 8 vouchers, food stamps (Dillard & Nielson, 2015), gun rights, in addition to voting rights as civil punishments known as collateral consequences of conviction. Many felons are unable to move forward in their lives due to the restrictions placed on them and return to a life of criminal behavior (Morris, 2015).

Christie (2014) found that states continue to allow race to determine the severity of the

collateral consequence policies for felons. Racial discrimination and government abuse are unavoidably inherent when it comes to the formerly incarcerated (Binder & Weisberg, 2013). An African American male is the associated image of a criminal and shapes decisions of the laws and punishment associated with a crime. Wilson et. al. (2015) examined several studies that revealed a negative relationship between the perception of African Americans and the support towards policies for criminal justice and social welfare. Urban planning has also been observed as a support that is seen to assist with successful reentry of African Americans (Wilson et al., 2015). This is evidenced by the higher rates of incarceration for African American men than any other race and/or ethnicity (Lawson, 2013; Scott, 2016). The same disparity applies to recidivism rates of African American men. States that have high rates of voter disenfranchisement have the lowest rates of African American male voters (Ruth et al., 2017). Convicted felons are more likely to be banned from voting in states boasting a large minority prison population than those with smaller minority populations (Christie, 2014). It is estimated that if the current trend continues, in the states with the most restrictive laws, about 40% of African American males of the next generation will lose their right to vote (Ruth et al., 2017). Arguments have been made that collateral consequences serve as additional post-incarceration punishments while others argue they are civil disabilities and not criminal punishments (Christie, 2014).

The cost of crime is largely obvious in monetary amounts as well as human costs. Therefore, it is significant to look at the benefits of the policies currently in place (Fella & Gallipoli, 2014). Inevitably, there is a push to repeal the laws put in place to hinder the involvement of felons in society. In addition to repealing the laws, felons believe that elected leaders could provide incentives to potential employers in order to help them find jobs as they

attempt to reintegrate into society (McCahon, 2016). Changes in current policies would affect gainful employment for felons post their release from prison (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012).

Recidivism

The enforcement of punishment after committing a crime has resulted in a decrease of dangerous people on the streets. However, it has disrupted social solidarity and created a permanent group of underclass individuals who struggle to pick themselves up after serving their sentence (Kleinfeld, 2016). Good behavior of an inmate has been seen as a sign of readiness for reentry into society and has been rewarded with parole since 1870. To date those indicators also feed the revolving door to the prison (Campbell, 2014). Felons commit crimes at rates far higher than members of the general population (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Studies have found that about half of those released from prison return within three years (Bowman & Travis, 2012; Cullen, Jonson, & Nagin, 2011; Koschmann & Peterson, 2013; Larson, 2015; Pettus-Davis et al., 2018; Skardhamar & Telle, 2012; Stahler et al., 2013). African American males are seven times more likely to be imprisoned than Caucasians and to return within three years (Scott, 2016). This has become a costly cycle and has increasingly taken a toll on families, communities, as well as city and state budgets (Curtis et al., 2013; Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). Disenfranchisement plays a role in increased recidivism rates due to the restrictions placed on felons once they return to their communities. Sigler (2014) noted that the more restrictions placed on a felon to prevent participation in legitimate occupations and other activities of the community, the less opportunities present throughout the community for felons to remain law abiding citizens upon their release from prison.

Many programs have been created to combat the high rates of recidivism. Successful programs to date have included intensive community supervision paired with a mandatory

treatment programs individually tailored for each individual. Supervision-centered programs that require supervision or surveillance have been found to have only a limited reduction in recidivism. Programs such as boot camps, electronic monitoring, or life skills education have revealed no impact on recidivism (Visher & Travis, 2011). Correctional boot camps consist of discipline and rigid structures of time, conduct, and daily activities (Rocque, Bierie, & MacKenzie, 2011). Electronic monitoring may also be known as electronically monitored home detention (EMHD). It is used for felons who have committed various offenses and are under partial release, probation, or parole (Roy, 2013).

Punishment was designed to be prosocial, the reverse to the antisocial crime; however, it has morphed into its own enemy (Kleinfeld, 2016). Reincarceration is indicative of poor reintegration of prisoners (Scott, 2016). A criminal history places an ineradicable stain despite completion of a felon's debt to society (Morris, 2015). Returning home to the same criminal social networks has also been shown to increase the likelihood of recidivism (Stahler et al., 2013). There are adverse effects of failed reentry that extend beyond inmates and impact their relationship with their children under the age of 18 years old (Raphael, 2011). Recidivism and harmful behavior increase when a weak educational background is paired with few employment opportunities (Manger et al., 2013). Recidivism rates are believed to be lowered with employment rehabilitation initiatives in place to ease the transition from prison to employment (Skardhamar & Telle, 2012). A 10%–20% reduction in recidivism rates has been found to be most successful with in-prison and jail drug treatment programs paired with a community component (Visher & Travis, 2011). Rates of recidivism are reduced with employment due to the receipt of a legitimate income requiring less incentive to use crime in order to obtain money or goods (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Evidence of successful reintegration into the

community as law abiding citizens making a living by pursuing noncriminal activities is documented with low recidivism (Koo, 2015).

Post-Incarceration Education

Education in the correctional facility spans over 200 years dating back to 1789 (Scott, 2016). The philosophy behind correctional education and prison reform, at that time, was to reform the prisons as well as the prisoners (Behan, 2014). The early years of correctional education were focused on behavior change and Bible reading. As one of the few positive outcomes of prison life, education offered during a prison sentence provides many prisoners with a purposeful activity and may activate a prisoner's untapped potential for learning (Clark, 2016).

Education has long been advocated as a key element in the course of transformation and change in individuals (Behan, 2014). Felons obtaining a general education degree (GED) while incarcerated have less recidivism rates than those who had not (Scott, 2016). Higher education has been directly linked to a sustainable income via employment, greater support networks, and social mobility (Halkovic, 2014). Scott (2016) found that adult basic education as well as postsecondary education was related to a positive employment post-release and negatively to future criminal activity.

The British have a long history of partnership between universities and prisons that is currently on the decline while partnerships in the United States are increasing (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016). The programs are offered at community colleges which are situated in many local communities and offer academic and vocational programs not offered at universities. The mission of many community colleges is to serve the greater community by offering open access to locals (Brewster, 2015). Community colleges prove their mission and extend their programs to inmates while in prison. This is an important role in preparing inmates for employment after

their release. The ideology that drives the practice of offering college in prison is that a better education increases the likelihood of finding work upon release. Thus, felons lead productive lives and avoid returning to prison (Knott, 2012). Therefore, an increasing focus has been directed towards correctional educational opportunities (Scott, 2016). An online learning program known as ALISON (Advance Learning Interactive System Online) originated in 2007; it was designed for populations that have not had many educational opportunities and has approximately one million users. The program allows users to be more competitive in the workforce by offering free basic study skills, IT skills, and/or customer skills for the jobs that are available to them upon return to society. Internet access and a computer, Smartphone, or tablet are the only requirements for access to the program (Morris, 2015).

Some studies have shown that recidivism is reduced with education (Halkovic, 2014), while other studies have shown education has little impact on recidivism (Scott, 2016). Limitations such as mental health issues, violent propensities, type of criminal activity, or extreme substance abuse have been found to be characteristics of individuals that will not benefit from educational opportunities offered while incarcerated (Knott, 2012). Koo (2015) found that an estimated 30% to 50% of inmates have a learning disability. Correctional education is not designed to work with inmates who have learning disabilities, even though the education that is provided to inmates in prison has been well supported and considered an important tool for rehabilitation (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012).

The motivation to participate in correctional education varies as much as the types of programs offered within prisons. A new sense of self, molding a new identity, or even maintaining social identity has been found as motivation by some individuals. Other prisoners shared preparing for a productive life after their release, filling time, escaping from the prison

routine and a personal transformation as motivation for participating in correctional education (Behan, 2014). Participation in educational programs while incarcerated varies. The availability of the education programs in prison has a great impact on participation (Visher & Travis, 2011). Educational attainment and the eligibility to participate in education programs among inmates have been shown to be effective predictors of recidivism (Knott, 2012).

Although less than 2% of Pell Grant funds went to prisoners, opponents believed that those funds were depriving law-abiding students of their education (Scott, 2016). This led to the movement to prevent prisoners from receiving federal money to support their educational efforts while incarcerated. The ability of a felon to receive a Pell Grant was rescinded and later followed by the inability to receive financial aid post release as well (Scott, 2016). The elimination of the money excluded prisoners from mass education and half of the prison colleges were closed. As a result of the exclusion of prisoners from higher education, more than 350 correctional education programs were closed (Larson, 2015). This resulted in less education during incarceration. As a solution to the drop-in education offered in prison, Chappell and Shippen (2013) addressed the issues that the use of technology in correctional education programs would solve: meeting the various needs of inmates and filling the void of understaffed prison schools. Correctional education includes, but may not be limited to, adult basic education, adult secondary education, postsecondary education, vocational education, as well as certification programs (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012). The recent surge of prisoners has brought about the need for more educational opportunities and the necessity to restore Pell Grant eligibility for higher educational attainment of felons (Mallory, 2015).

Strong evidence exists that a reduction in recidivism and the likelihood of employment post release increase with education (Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012). The more

educated a felon, the less likely their return to prison (Curtis et al., 2013). A study acknowledged by Chappell and Shippen (2013) revealed that incarcerated students made greater academic gains individually than they would have in the group instruction format. Prisons that require prisoners to attend school/vocational training increase personal capital of the individual upon release (Rocque et al., 2011).

The population most likely to be incarcerated includes those earning lower incomes, having low educational rates, and minority men. This is also the population most likely to benefit from education within the prison system (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012). Classroom participation, post release, may be a problem for formerly incarcerated individuals due to their fear of being wrong and their conceived thoughts of presenting a strong image that was required during incarceration (Miller et al., 2014). This is a problem because the instructor may see them as uninvolved.

College while in prison and even after prison bears a positive impact on the felons as well as their children (Halkovic, 2014). Men are more likely to pursue college degrees after their release from prison than women are (Ross et al., 2016). The education received drastically changed the dynamics of the family. The receipt of higher education and stable employment with higher pay allows a felon the opportunity to care for his or her family, break the cycle of poverty, and refrain from returning to prison. Lockwood et al. (2012) disclosed that the successful implementation of correctional education is measured by the rate of recidivism and employability upon release.

Transitional job programs are found to increase post-incarceration employment (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Additionally, evidence exists that suggests education received in prison fails to translate into successful employment due to the lack of participation and program

completion by incarcerated individuals (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012). The transitional job programs provide promise when supplemented with job search assistance, case management, or wrap around services from organizers and members of the community (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Knott (2012) identified a prison in California that allowed nonviolent inmates to complete their GED or training in a vocational area as an alternative to completing the remainder of their prison sentence. Improved employment outcomes are a result of completing educational program while incarcerated, thus reducing recidivism of those individuals that fully participated before release (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). A drawback to the transitional jobs program is that the participants were not trained for specific occupations while participating in the program (Valentine & Redcross, 2015).

Continued education after their release is an additional barrier to felons. This may be due to the lack of financial resources in addition to personal financial responsibilities (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012). The least desirable demographic for higher education institutions is a felon, due to the assumption that he or she is a liability to the institution (Knott, 2012). The increased use of criminal background checks, coupled with the prohibition of hiring felons or granting federal funding, has proved to be a hurdle for felons to gain college education or even be hired by universities (Ross et al., 2016).

Employment

A legitimate job is essential to secure a decent living in society. However, felons are at a great disadvantage due to their lack of the proper skills and training (Thomas, 2012). The skills and training desired by potential employers are characteristics that felons lacked prior to being incarcerated (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Employment is the most important factor to ensure a successful return to society (Ray et al., 2016). Employment is seen as the major “routine

activity” of adulthood; it is the obvious starting point for felons (Bushway & Apel, 2012). A key role in determining desistance from crime is played by securing employment (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). Stable employment provides felons with the ability to meet their basic needs with income, reestablish their role within society, adopt a positive image of themselves, and ultimately reduce their risk of participating in criminal behaviors (Ray et al., 2016). Skardhamar and Telle (2012) acknowledged that there are several major obstacles for felons entering the labor market. Felons are unattractive for many types of jobs due to the stigma that they carry upon release (O’Reilly, 2014). Many felons struggle to openly express the truth about their record or to conceal it from potential employers (Ross et al., 2016). “Ban the Box,” a policy to prohibit employers from asking about criminal records on initial employment applications, was initiated to relieve some of the pressure on felons to express their record (Uggen & Stewart, 2015).

Men are at a severe disadvantage in the labor market due to their incarceration (Geller et al., 2011). Human capital deficits such as low levels of education, low cognitive skills, and poor work history make it difficult to gain employment (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Whites are more likely than Blacks to use social capital and rely on marketable skills to gain employment (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012). Efforts to obtain and maintain employment are even more challenging for females post release, because they are often unemployed prior to their incarceration. If employment is achieved, they work fewer hours while earning less than their male equivalents (Lee et al., 2015).

Time spent in prison may hinder a felon’s ability to find work, resulting in the inability to add additional work experience to his or her resume as well as eroding current job skills and social ties (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). A strong correlation was found between an attachment

to employment and recidivism rates: the rates of recidivism decrease with employment (Skardhamar & Telle, 2012). While some felons are able to secure jobs through family relationships or previous employers, the same is not true for others. Employment avenues may be closed or extremely difficult for felons upon their release from prison (O'Reilly, 2014). A number of public universities are not allowed, per rules of the state, to employ a felon as staff or faculty (Ross et al., 2016). Steady employment puts distance between current and past behavior and helps to provide an avenue for economic growth (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). A stigma is placed on felons and is evident in the hiring practices of employers (Ramakers et al., 2014).

One major barrier to accessing employment is employer discrimination (O'Reilly, 2014). The stigma of incarceration carries over into perspective employers (Geller et al., 2011). Employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders with a criminal record, creating a significant barrier to employment post release (Lockwood & Nally, 2016). A criminal record is more likely to impact men than any other group. Male felons are less likely to receive callbacks and earn less money when they do become employed (Turney et al., 2012). Many of the employers are unwilling to hire felons because they have a general distrust for those with a criminal record (Ray et al., 2016). Employers are reluctant to hire African American men in the service sector, which is a majority of the work available to low-skilled workers (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Employment discrimination is experienced by African Americans more than any other group. This requires them to rely on marketable skills provided by vocational education rather than a liberal arts degree to overcome the barriers (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012). A felony record significantly decreased the number of positive employer callbacks (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). Surveys and audit studies consistently show that employers discriminate against felons (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Anti-discriminating laws have been adopted by some states as

they have implemented “ban the box.” This law requires that job applications no longer ask about a criminal record (Whistler, 2013). Ultimately, felons are unable to meet the demands of a variety of jobs due to their lack of up-to-date job skills and/or education (Lockwood & Nally, 2016).

Seeking employment after their release is a key component to reducing recidivism and promoting successful re-entry into society for felons (Skardhamar & Telle, 2012). Felons seek employment after their release, yet approximately 50% remain unemployed up to a year after their release (Hickes, Pager, & Strader, 2018). Barriers to acquiring employment may be low self-esteem, a lack of education and training, inadequate housing arrangements, and/or financial difficulties, topped with employment discrimination (O’Reilly, 2014). A downfall to seeking employment is the high technology skills required for positions, out of reach for felons (Ray et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2015) found that minority females felons are significantly less likely to have employment than Caucasian females. That said, Lockwood and Nally (2016) revealed that an important factor to a felon obtaining post-release employment was his or her level of formal education. Ultimately, felons are unable to meet the demands of a variety of jobs due to their lack of up-to-date job skills and/or education (Lockwood & Nally, 2016). Job placement and/or training programs offered by some prisons may facilitate post-release connections with economic institutions (Rocque et al., 2011).

Social Connections

A prominent part of the reformation process of a felon is the social bonds and connections that are essential for a successful transition away from crime (Rocque et al., 2011). Felons are often viewed as social isolates upon their release from incarceration, yet their presence is embedded in the everyday social life of those who desire to shun them. Felons return

from incarceration to resume their social roles as neighbors, relationship partners, and parents (Schnittker et al., 2011). Social connections and bonds are tightly woven in all communities especially those of low income. Individuals in these communities are stereotyped with labels of thugs, gangsters, or bad kids and result in criminalized behaviors to meet the expectations of the labels (Smith, 2015).

The impact that prison has on social reintegration varies by institution and the types of programs that they offer (Rocque et al., 2011). Community programs have been created to enhance many social groups in low income areas with the hopes of deterring crime. However, the same is not true for felons (Ross et al., 2016). The loss of social roles is evidenced by incarceration-related stress (Turney et al., 2012). Social connections among friends and families are weakened with prison time (Raphael, 2011). Turney and Goodsell (2018) noted that incarcerated men contribute less to the household, extending hardships on the mother. The most critical support to felons, both men and women, upon their release is provided by their family members (Visher & Travis, 2011). Incarceration limits the individual's parenting capacity and puts a strain on family relationships. The bond between the parents and their children is weakened, especially fathers. Less than one third of children of incarcerated fathers see their fathers on a regular basis. This pattern continues after the father's release (Geller et al., 2011).

Social reintegration is a task that felons are charged with upon their release from prison. The first obligation of a felon is to attempt to establish membership into the free society in which they once were a member. Additionally, felons must reestablish former relationships, make new relationships, and even learn new social roles (Western et al., 2015). The stigma of incarceration may have a stronger impact on the family members of a felon than on the felon themselves. The family members face many of the same stigmas associated with being a felon, although the crime

was committed by their family member (Schnittker et al., 2011). The rates of marital separation and divorce are increased substantially with incarceration (Turney et al., 2012).

Social networks are important when coping with the stigma associated with being a felon (Ray et al., 2016). Due to exclusionary laws, the social networks of a felon may be compromised. The limited economic opportunities and life chances create burdens that are placed on spouses, significant others, and family members. The possibility of offering accommodations to a felon would result in eviction from public housing (Kilgore, 2013).

Among the number of incarcerated individuals, the demographics are disproportionate. As of 2008 the Pew Center on the States found that men outnumber women and African Americans outnumber Caucasians (Curtis et al., 2013). Hispanics fall second in line and also outnumber Caucasians (Lee et al., 2015). A disproportionate number of African American women are incarcerated in the United States (Lee et al., 2015). Female felons are more likely to be involved with males who participate in criminal activity (Lee et al., 2015).

Arguments have been made that neighborhood characteristics have an influence on criminal behavior (Stahler et al., 2013). A major role in the choice for risky behavior is environmental opportunity (Rolison, Hanoch, & Gummerum, 2013). Some studies have found no direct neighborhood influences between characteristics of the offender and the neighborhood environment while others have found that the neighborhood has a strong effect on recidivism rates (Stahler et al., 2013). Reentering the neighborhood with disadvantages raises the likelihood of recidivism within one year while a more affluent neighborhood rich in resources does not (Stahler et al., 2013). The location of the neighborhood affects a felon's accessibility to institutional resources as well as personal networks (Stahler, et al., 2013). Felons are driven to criminal activity to earn money to survive in society due to economic necessity (Kilgore, 2013).

Personal connections that provide access to employment opportunities are less likely among minority groups (Ray et al., 2016). Female felons value their role in the family upon reentry to society (Lee et al., 2015). Even if felons do have access to social networks, they are less likely to utilize their networks while searching for a job (Ray et al., 2016).

Social networks reduce conventional opportunities for employment because they usually consist of individuals that are currently or previously involved in crime (Ray et al., 2016). Criminal activity decreases as a result of employment, due to a reduction in the amount of time spent associating with others involved in crime (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). African Americans working low-wage jobs are more hesitant to be a reference for their family or friends, fearing it may hurt their own reputation (Ray et al., 2016). Although felons lack influential contacts that may help them to secure a job, they are hesitant to actually seek the assistance of those they do have (Ray et al., 2016).

Economic Well-Being/Connections with Children

Incarceration not only breaks up families, but it separates children from their parent(s) (Ross et al., 2016). While reintegration and reentry are some of the biggest challenges faced by felons, many legal barriers also impede a smooth return to society, often including the regaining of parental custody (Wheelock, 2011). Incarceration has been found to fuel the highest levels of inequality among those from disadvantaged populations (Geller et al., 2011). Although men are less likely to bear the daily child rearing responsibilities compared with women, their absence from the family is felt (Ross et al., 2016). Families suffer from the loss of the father's earnings due to his incarceration (Geller et al., 2011).

Geller et al. (2011) found that parental incarceration significantly brings about economic strain as well as physical strain. Turney et al. (2012) identified that children's aggression and

delinquency are increased with the incarceration of their father. Children of incarcerated women have a higher occurrence of behavioral health problems and are more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system themselves (Goshin, Byrne, & Henninger, 2013). The boom in incarceration has contributed to an economic disadvantage that transmits from one generation to the next, due to the reduced financial support that fathers are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated (Geller et al., 2011).

Well-Being

Well-being has shown to have a positive effect on survival and future health (Spittlehouse, Vierck, Pearson, & Joyce, 2014). Well-being includes positive and negative judgements so that the pleasure of the positive outweighs the pain of the negative (Rickard & Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Feelings of alienation from society have frequently been expressed by felons (McCahon, 2016). An improved mental well-being has been recognized as important due to the fact that it is an indicator of progress in society (Haver, Akerjordet, Caputi, & Magee, 2015). Literacy in childhood continues into adulthood and is associated with enhanced well-being (Chaney, 2014). Higher educational attainment in childhood and adolescence has been associated with mental well-being (Clarke et al., 2011). Education during incarceration provides meaning and is vital for well-being while incarcerated (Clark, 2016). The willingness to take risks is more apparent in felons than members of the general population and that opportunity to commit crime is a key factor in criminal behavior (Rolison et al., 2013). Since the dramatic rise in incarceration rates, the negative consequences of life chances and health have been documented (Schnittker et al., 2012). Poor health increases with incarceration (Schnittker et al., 2011). Parenting and mental health are impaired due to incarceration (Turnkey & Godsell, 2018).

A multigenerational public health problem has surfaced over the past three decades as a

result of the rise in incarceration rates (Goshin et al., 2013). Returning back to society does not leave individuals untouched by the effects of being imprisoned (O'Reilly, 2014). Stress of the transition from prison back to society may impair mental health issues, trigger a relapse of previous devious activities, and lead to slow societal reintegration (Western et al., 2015).

Mental and emotional scars are evidence of the trauma suffered from the acclimation to prison and being out of touch with society (Miller et al., 2014). Family members of felons may also experience stress associated with the felon stigma (Schnittker et al., 2011). Many of the health consequences of incarceration have recently been unveiled. Associations have been found between hypertension, functional limitations, infections, stress-related diseases, mood disorders, as well as poor self-rated health (Turney et al., 2012). Rolison et al. (2013) identified that felons are more likely to participate in risk-taking behaviors due to reduced sensitivity.

Incarceration brings about new social structures and roles during the redefinition of a person's identity while in prison and leads to reduced sensitivity after incarceration (Wills, 2014). The primary concerns of felons, exposed by McCahon (2016), were survival during incarceration and being reunited with family post incarceration.

A survey conducted by Brezina and Topalli (2012) found that about half of persistent criminal offenders do not view themselves as failures. Ray et al. (2016) found that felons internalize the stigma of being a felon and had low expectations for a callback from potential employers. Correctional education should not only address academic and vocational improvements but also promote positive self-image (Thomas, 2012).

Mental well-being has a large impact on an individual. Coping skills may be negatively impacted after being in prison. However, Billington (2011) studied a therapeutic reading program for prisoners developed in the United Kingdom to improve coping skills while

incarcerated. The attitude that supports the program is that development of self-expression, confidence, tolerance, and peer support result from discussion about serious life-issues, all prompted by reading a challenging book. Poor self-esteem, mental health problems along with financial burdens, and substance abuse exacerbate issues of poor education in addition to other problems that felons face (O'Reilly, 2014).

Mental well-being carries a great deal of weight within an individual as they move through society. Felons often hope to repair their reputation by adopting a self-reliant approach to their reintegration. This is known as defensive individualism (Ray et al., 2016). However, their self-reliance is obstructed by exclusionary laws as well as disenfranchisement laws that send a clear message to felons that they are no longer able to maintain the rights and benefits of citizenship (McCahon, 2016). Research indicates that felons need to engage in social and mental activities in order to abstain from participating in future criminal activities (McCahon, 2016). Positive coping strategies are strongly associated with positive social relationships (Ray et al., 2016).

Summary

The past 20 years have resulted in an explosion of growth in the number of incarcerated adults in correctional institutions (Scott, 2016). This demands attention to expand to the impact of mass incarceration on the post imprisonment life of those released, their families, and communities (Dillard & Nielsen, 2015; O'Reilly, 2014; Ramakers et al., 2014). An association has been found between mental well-being and higher educational attainment in childhood. Despite how they are defined or classified, strengths, positive attributes, or developmental assets are now understood to act as protective factors or buffers for youth to prevent their involvement in the criminal justice system (Burrow, O'Dell, & Hill, 2010; Scales, 1999), as well as positive

support for overall individual well-being of the youth (Govindji & Linley, 2007).

Additionally, mental well-being has also been associated with better occupational functioning in adulthood (Clarke et al., 2011). Educational opportunities within prisons have been acknowledged as desirable but are not under consideration for policy makers (Scott, 2016). Education for inmates with learning disabilities and addressing ways to manage their extra challenges will help them to maintain employment, successful reentry into the community, and to provide for their families (Koo, 2015).

A reform movement known as “Ban the Box” has emerged to reduce discrimination based on a criminal record (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). Becoming educated academically or with a trade, does not guarantee the transformation into a law-abiding citizen (Thomas, 2012); however, it does give hope for a transformation that would not occur without the educational opportunity.

O’Reilly (2014) noted that expectations in which individuals released from prison will successfully reintegrate into society and lead a crime-free life without support are unrealistic expectations. Plans for reentry, transitional cash assistance and jobs, and workforce development have been identified as alternative models to aid felons with transition back into society (Raphael, 2011). Koschmann and Peterson (2013) discussed another alternative approach that required focusing on the visible effects of recidivism, suggesting a communication perspective as a way to increase successful reentry. Prison time should be used for assimilation back into the society and could best be achieved with life on the inside resembling life on the outside as much as possible, including connections with the local community as if the prisoners were current members of the community through education, medical services, clergy, and vocational trainers (Larson, 2015). Returning felons to society without equipping or assisting them with the skills

they need is one component of the reentry process. Therefore, strategies are necessary to reduce the result from employers and society associated with the stigma of being a felon (Ray et al., 2016). Some states have examined the possibility of revising sentencing and developing drug and mental health courts that provide treatment rather than assigning prison time (Larson, 2015). The emergence of incarceration as a powerful force that drives and shapes social inequalities also reveals the means to reduce the influence incarceration has on health (Schnittker et al., 2011). Criminal thinking, educational attainment, prior work experience, and access to social capital affect the employability of a felon in some way (Duwe & Clark, 2017).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine if a predictive relationship exists between a felon's self-reported education level, employment choices, and recidivism and their well-being as measured by Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS). A multiple regression analysis was used to assess the criterion variable (self-reported mental well-being score) to the predictor variables (education level, employment choice, and recidivism), to determine if a relationship exists. This chapter begins with a rationale for the design. A description of the participants and setting, procedure, instrumentation, and data analysis follows the research question and null hypothesis.

Design

A quantitative, non-experimental, correlational design was selected to assess the predictive relationship between mental well-being, as self-reported, of felons, located in the southwestern region of North Carolina, and their educational levels, their employment options, and recidivism. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) advised that research data aimed at determining relationships between the criterion and predictor variables is appropriately analyzed with regression. The criterion variable, mental well-being scores self-reported by felons, was measured by the WEMWBS. The predictor variables were also self-reported by the participants. A correlational research design was selected for its ability to discover relationships between variables (Gall et al., 2007). An advantage of correlational designs over causal-comparative designs is that information regarding the degree of the relationship between variables is gained (Gall et al., 2007). In this study, mental well-being covered two perspectives: (a) the experience of happiness and life satisfaction subjectively, and (b) psychological functioning, self-

development, autonomy, self-acceptance, and competence (Taggart, Stewart-Brown, & Parkinson, 2016). The World Health Organization (2018) describes mental well-being as a fundamental component of overall health that encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Research Question

The research question was derived from the problem and purpose statements. This study has one research question which evaluates the predictive relationship between self-reported mental well-being of a felon and his or her education level, employment choices, and recidivism. This research question has a corresponding null hypothesis.

RQ: How accurately can a felon's self-reported mental well-being be predicted from a linear combination of educational level, employment choice, and recidivism?

Hypothesis

The study has a corresponding null hypothesis for the research question.

H₀: There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between a felon's self-reported mental well-being as measured by Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale and the linear combination of educational level, employment choice, and recidivism.

Participants and Setting

A convenience sample of 105 English-speaking unemployed or underemployed felons seeking employment and/or training through the North Carolina Employment Security Commission (DES) office located in the southwestern region of North Carolina in 2018 were used for this study. Selecting a group of sample participants that are reasonably homogeneous to the population is important. Otherwise, the differences of the participants may overshadow any causal relationships between variables (Gall et al., 2007). The participants of this convenience

sample represented the population of felons seeking employment and/or training through DES in the southwestern region of North Carolina.

The participants were invited to participate in the study during their visit to the DES office to seek employment and/or training in the southwestern region of North Carolina. The DES office was the setting for the study, and the office was used to select participants in order to meet the research goals of revealing felons seeking employment and/or training.

The convenience sample of 105 exceeded the minimum required for a medium effect size for this study. The data of six participants was missing and not used to report the findings. According to Warner (2013) the sample size was calculated as: $N > 50 + 8k$ with k being the number of predictor variables. In this case, $N > 50 + 8(3)$

$$N > 74$$

Therefore, 75 participants were needed for a medium effect size with statistical power of .7 at the .05 alpha level. The sample size exceeded the minimum. Felons living within the area and seeking employment and/or training assistance were used in this sample. The sample included a total of 57 males and 44 females. The average age of the participants in this sample was between the ages of 33 and 37, and the ages ranged from 18 to over 62.

Instrumentation

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was the only instrument used in this study along with socio-demographic variables. At first, the Affectometer 2 was developed in New Zealand to measure well-being in 1980. The Affectometer 2 appealed to those working in mental health in the UK because it had a range of positive items and covered the mental health in both the eudemonic and hedonic aspects. Happiness, feeling good about life, enjoyment, pleasure, and pain avoidance are all embraced from the hedonic belief. The

eudemonic belief focuses on potential, self-realization, and functioning (Haver et al., 2015). Due to the limitations of the Affectometer 2, a new scale was needed to comprise a wide range of mental well-being attributes (Tennant et al., 2007).

As a result of the limitations to the Affectometer 2, Warwick and Edinburg Universities were commissioned, in 2006, to develop the WEMWBS as a tool to assess mental well-being. The WEMWBS was initially developed as a suitable measure of the mental well-being of adults in the UK. The WEMWBS measures mental well-being from the hedonic and eudemonic aspects. Significant for human growth and success, hedonic and eudemonic, are the two areas that are regarded as covering an individual's mental well-being (Clarke et al., 2011; Haver et al., 2015; Taggart et al., 2013).

The Cronbach's alpha is .92 for the WEMWBS when used with English-speaking participants. Focus groups, student, and general population samples were used for validation. Validity was constructed using correlations between the WEMWBS, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), World Health Organization Well-being 5 questionnaire (WHO-5) using Spearman's correlation coefficients in samples taken (Taggart et al., 2013).

There are 14 positively worded items that comprise the WEMWBS. Each item is broken down into five Likert-type responses. The responses include "None of the time"; "Rarely"; "Some of the time"; "Often"; and "All of the time." The WEMWBS has scores that range from 14–70, with a high level of mental well-being indicated from a high score on the scale.

The WEMWBS has been used in several studies (Clarke et al., 2011; Davies et al., 2015; Stewart-Brown, 2013; Stewart-Brown et al., 2009, 2011; Tennant et al., 2007). It may be administered as a questionnaire and takes about five minutes to complete. Permission to use the WEMWBS was obtained for the study (see Appendix A).

Procedures

The first step of this study was to secure approval through the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB), see Appendix B. The researcher then contacted several local and state agencies associated with felons, post release, as the second step of this study. The contact person for the DES in the southwestern region agreed to allow their patrons the opportunity to participate in the study.

A form that including a brief explanation of the study was provided to each participant. Consent to participate in the study was indicated by placing a check mark after reading the form. The informed consent form included the fact that there was no identifying information used and that all information will be kept in a secure location for three years and then destroyed.

The demographic questionnaire and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale were distributed by the researcher to each participant interested in the services of the DES office. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale was funded by the Scottish Executive National Programme for improving mental health and well-being, commissioned by NHS Health Scotland, developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh, and is jointly owned by NHS Health Scotland, the University of Warwick, and the University of Edinburgh. Permission and registration were granted by the Warwick Medical School for use of the WEMWBS prior to administration (see Appendix A).

The demographic questionnaire and the WEMWBS were administered during the participants' visit to the DES office participating in the study, until the desired number of participants (100) was reached. All data collected from the participants were stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. Following privacy guidelines, the key to the cabinet is kept in a locked drawer to which only the researcher holds the only key. The statistical program,

SPSS, was used for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the WEMWBS was the focus of this study. One multiple linear regression was used to examine the predictability of a relationship between a felon's self-reported mental well-being as being determined by the WEMWBS and his or her educational level, employment choice, and recidivism. Multiple linear regression is ideal in assessing the linear relationship and strength between predictor variables and the criterion variable (Green & Salkind, 2010). Gall et al. (2007) stated that multiple linear regression provides versatility and yields significant information on relationships among variables. Multiple regression was appropriate for this study as the criterion variable is a continuous value and the predictor variables are a combination of categorical and continuous variables (Gall et al., 2007).

Data Screening and Assumptions of Multiple Regression

The researcher transcribed the information provided by the participants (age, education, recidivism, parent's education) and their WEMWBS score into a table which was imported into SPSS. A file in SPSS 22.0 was created to enter data in order to perform data analyses. The data were screened for missing information and outliers using box-and-whisker plots. Demographic information was reported using frequency and percentage distributions as well as descriptive statistics reporting the mean, standard deviation, and the interval or ratio minimum and maximum scores, such as the amount of education completed, and reporting frequencies and percentages for categorical variables, such as gender and age, for this study. The data were screened for extreme outliers. SPSS was used to create a visual of the outcome, charts, tables, and histograms.

Data were screened for unusual scores, missing scores, and inconsistencies. Six participants did not have values for all variables, so those were eliminated from the sample. No extreme outliers were observed in a boxplot of each categorical variable. However, some participants indicated more than one employment choice. In order to not violate the assumption of independent observation, those participants' employment choice was coded as "14" which is "more than one choice."

The assumption of independent observations was assessed using Durbin-Watson statistic and was found to be tenable. The assumptions of linearity between well-being and the continuous variable (education) was checked using a scatter plot and found to be tenable. The same scatterplot was used to assess the assumption of homoscedasticity and was also tenable.

The assumption of multicollinearity was assessed by determining the correlations between the variables and was found tenable. Each of the plots and correlations referred to in this chapter are provided in Chapter Four.

Analysis of demographic information is presented in Chapter Four. Findings reported in Chapter Four include the following: descriptive statistics (M , SD), number (N), degrees of freedom (df), R and R^2 , and F value (F). Additionally, significance level (p), B , beta, and $SE B$, and the regression equation are reported. Alpha level was set at .05 for the research study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

A multiple regression was run to determine if a predictive relationship exists between the self-reported mental well-being of a felon, measured by the WEMBEMS, and his or her educational level, employment choice, and recidivism. The research question was analyzed. There was a normal distribution among the 99 participants. Demographics and the highest level of education acquired by the parents of the respondents are included in the analysis.

Research Question

RQ: How accurately can a felon's self-reported mental well-being be predicted from a linear combination of educational level, employment choice, and recidivism?

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between a felon's self-reported mental well-being, as measured by Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, and the linear combination of educational level, employment choice, and recidivism.

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 99 participants were included in this study (originally 106 agreed to participate; however, the data from seven participants were excluded as they did not complete the survey). The participants selected an age range to report their age. Each age range was assigned a code and entered into SPSS as a dummy code (See Figure 1). For example, if a participant's age fell between 18 and 22, he or she would select "1." The following lists the dummy codes and their corresponding age ranges: 1 (18–22), 2 (23–27), 3 (28–32), 4 (33–37), 5 (38–42), 6 (43–47), 7 (48–52), 8 (53–57), 9 (58–62), 10 (62+). The median age was 33–37 years old as was the mode. The respondents were over the age of 18 with a mean (+SD) age between 33 and 37. Twenty

percent of the respondents were between the ages of 33 and 37. Figure 2 shows that 41.9% of the respondents were female and 54.3% were male. A high school diploma was held by 35.6% of the respondents followed by 22.8% of the respondents with at least one year of college (See Figure 3). Additionally, Figure 4 shows that the majority of the parents of the respondents hold a high school diploma. Table 1 displays the mean and standard deviation of the predictor variable (mental well-being).

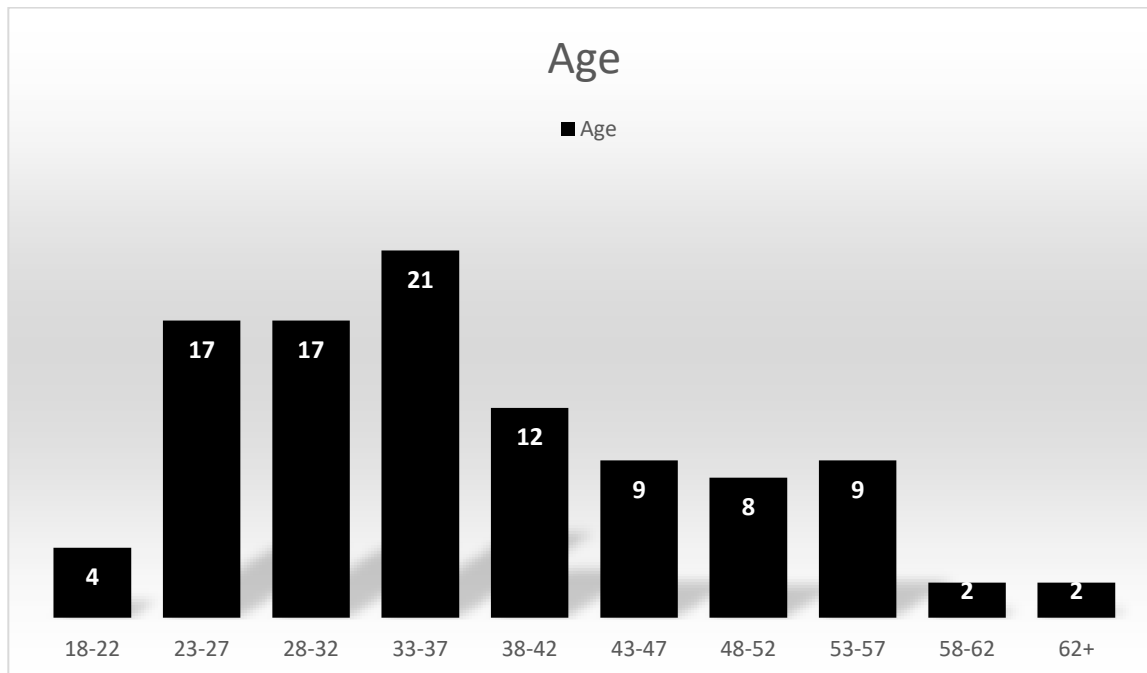


Figure 1. Frequency of participants' age

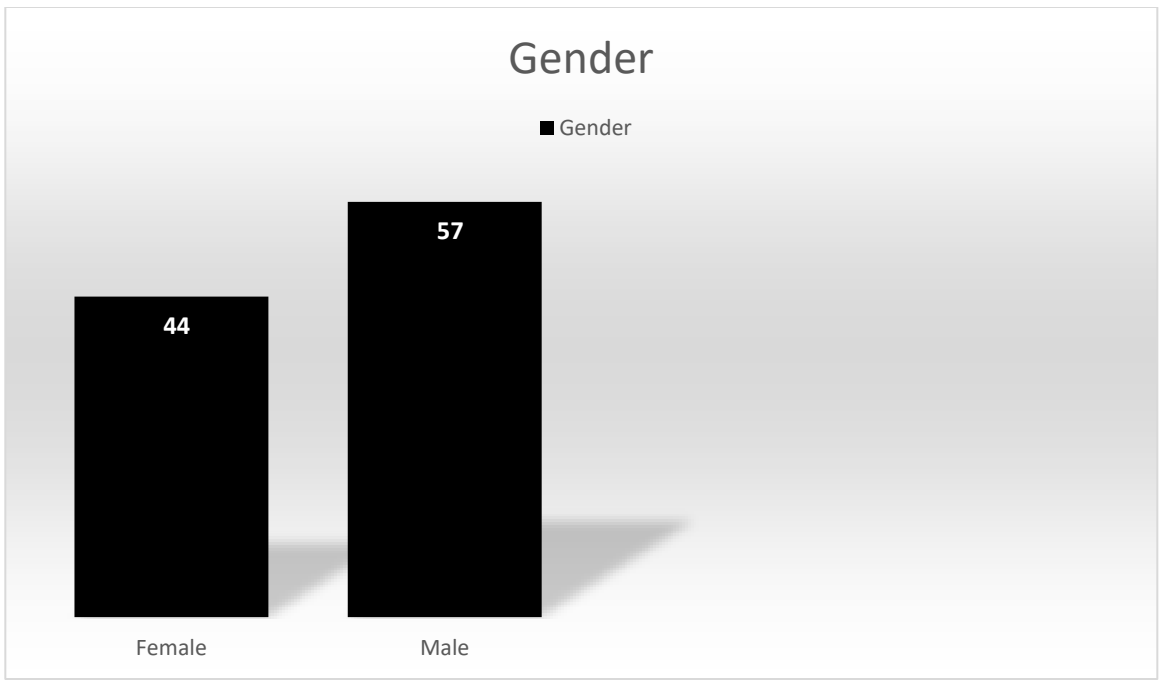


Figure 2. Gender of participants

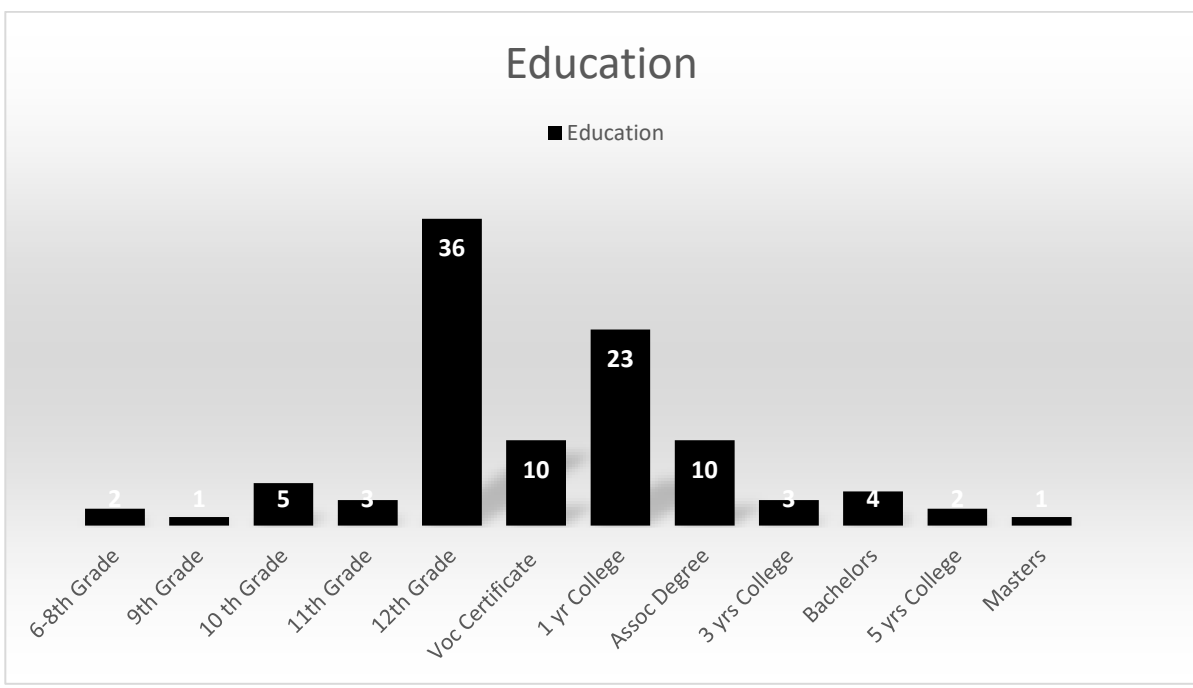


Figure 3. Education of participants

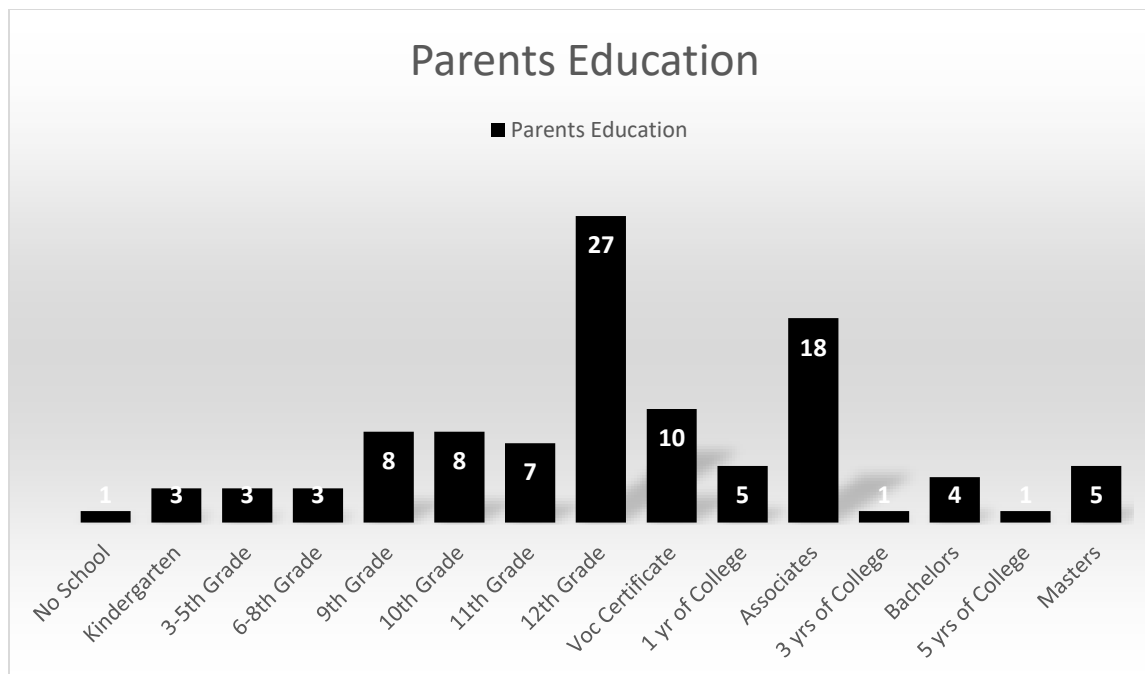


Figure 4. Education of parents of participants

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Predictor Variable

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mental Well-Being	99	56.91 ^a	10.37

^aScores range from 0–70

Results

Data were screened for unusual scores, missing scores, and inconsistencies. Six participants did not have values for all variables, so those were eliminated from the sample. No extreme outliers were observed in a boxplot of each categorical variable. Some participants indicated more than one employment choice. In order to not violate the assumption of independent observation, those participants' employment choice was coded as "14" which is "more than one choice" (see Figure 5).

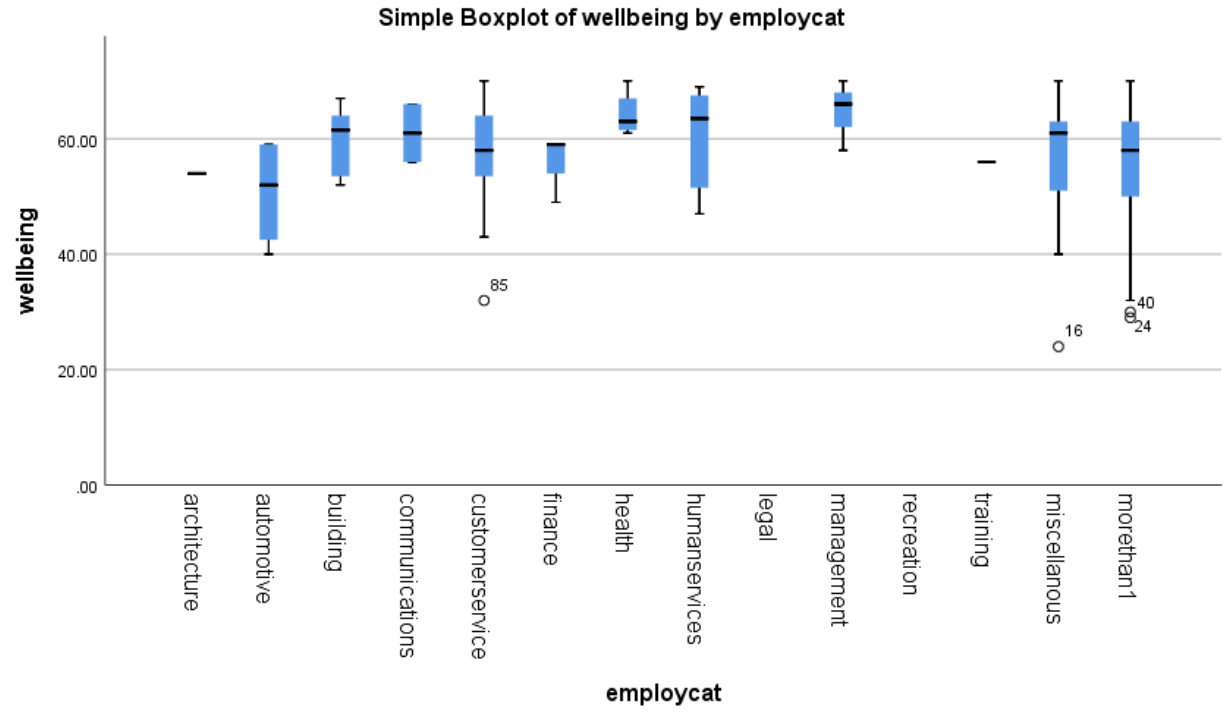


Figure 5. Box-and-whisker plots of well-being and employment categories.

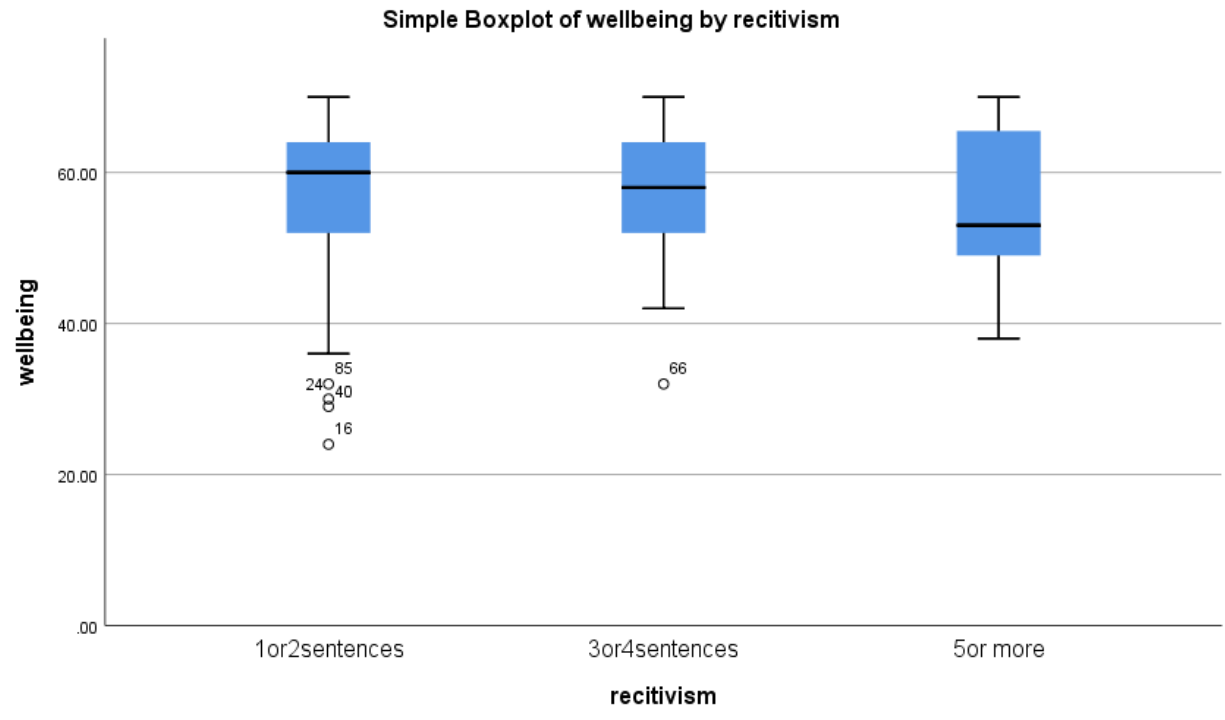


Figure 6. Box-and-whisker plots of well-being and recidivism.

Warner (2013) stated that for multiple regression, the criterion variable must be continuous, and the predictor variables may be categorical or continuous. The variables of this study met these criteria. The assumption of independent observations was met by the design of this study. Each observation in each variable is independent of others.

The assumption of linearity between dependent variable (well-being) and continuous variable (education) is tenable as seen in Figure 7.

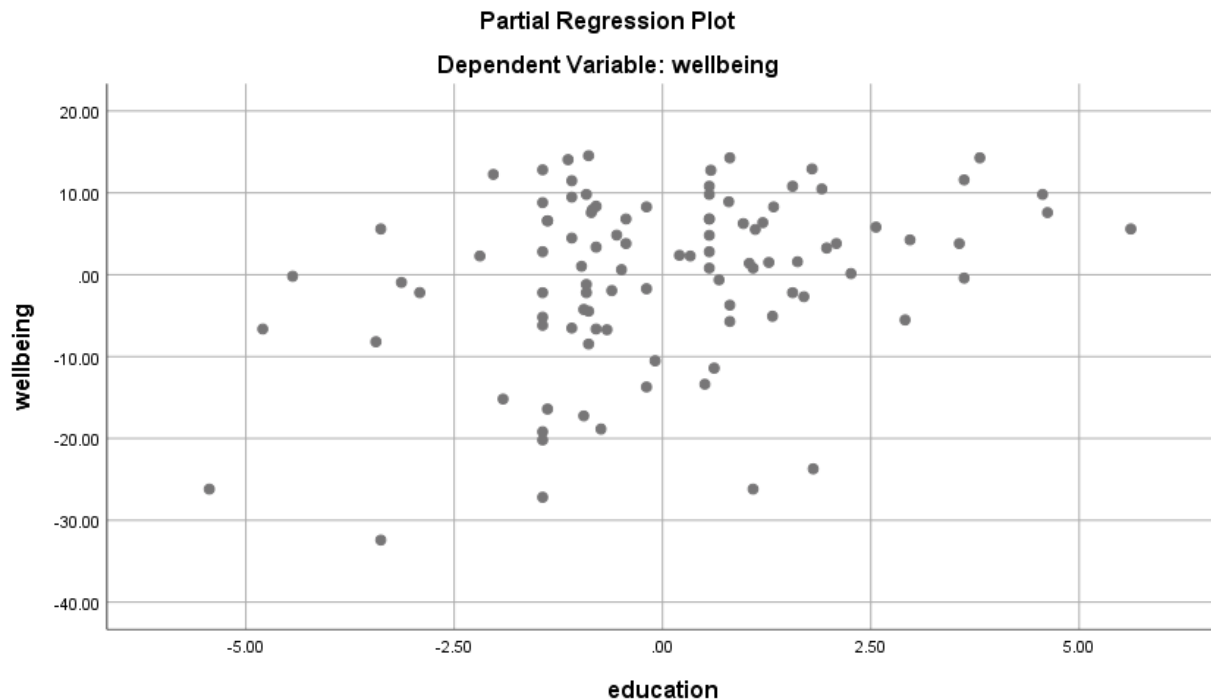


Figure 7. Scatter plot of mental well-being vs. education. The scatterplot indicates a linear positive relationship between well-being and educational level.

The assumption of homoscedasticity was deemed tenable by visual inspection of Figure 7, as the scatter plot has a cigar-like shape. Warner (2013) defines multicollinearity as “the degree of intercorrelation among predictor variables” (refer to Table 2). Since none of the correlations are greater than 0.7, the assumption of multicollinearity is tenable. Assumption of

linearity between dependent variable, which is well-being, and education, the continuous variable, is tenable as seen in the scatter plot in Figure 7.

Table 2

Correlations

		Well-being	Employment	Education	Recidivism
Pearson Correlation	Well-being	1.000	-.096	.307	-.032
	Employment	-.096	1.000	.127	.034
	Education	.307	.127	1.000	-.073
	Recidivism	-.032	.034	-.073	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Well-being		.171	.001	.376
	Employment	.171		.105	.368
	Education	.001	.105		.235
	Recidivism	.376	.368	.235	
<i>N</i>	Well-being	99	99	99	99
	Employment	99	99	99	99
	Education	99	99	99	99
	Recidivism	99	99	99	99

The assumption of normal distribution was confirmed by inspection of the histogram in Figure 8. The distribution shows a nearly normal curve; therefore, the assumption of normality is tenable.

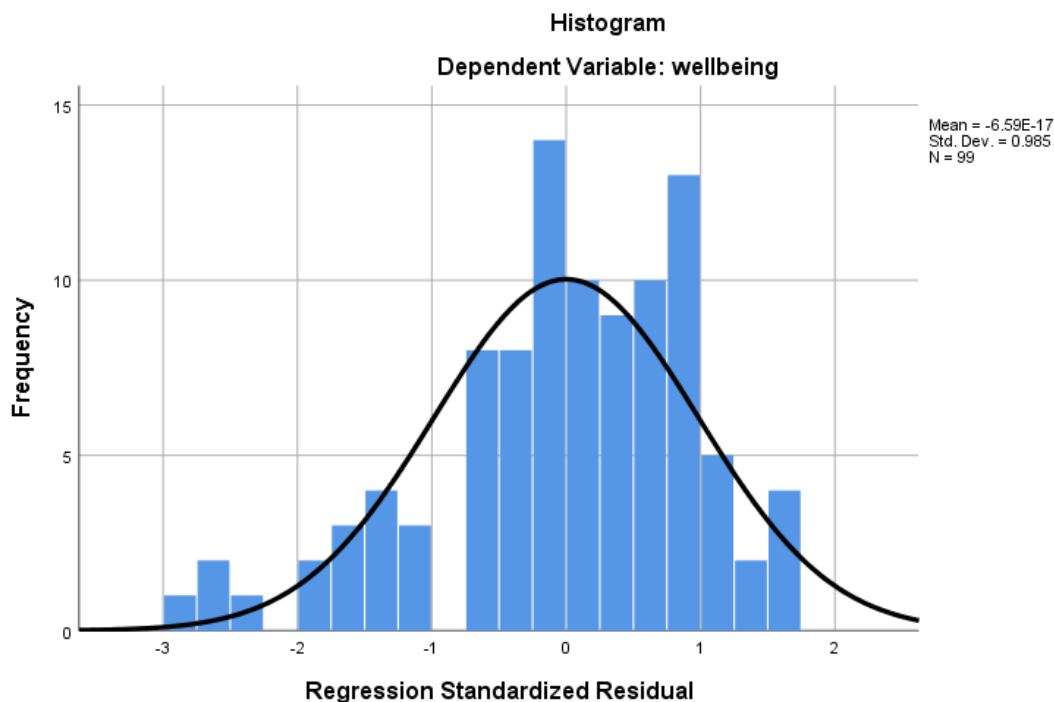


Figure 8. Histogram of well-being scores.

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant predictive relationship between a felon's self-reported mental well-being, as measured by Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, and the linear combination of educational level, employment choice, and recidivism. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict mental well-being scores based on a felon's educational level, employment choice, and recidivism.

Table 3

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	1192.170	3	397.390	4.039	.009 ^b
	Residual	9348.011	95	98.400		
	Total	10540.182	98			

^aDependent variable: well-being

^bPredictors: (constant), recidivism, employment, education

A significant regression equation was found ($F(3, 95) = 4.039$), $p < .05$, with $R^2 = .113$, adjusted $R^2 = .085$, indicating that all educational level, employment choice, and recidivism accounted for 8.5% of the mental well-being of a felon in this study (See Tables 3 and 4). The researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

Table 4

Model Summary^b

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>SE</i> of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.336 ^a	.133	.085	9.91968	2.156

^aPredictors: (constant), recidivism, employment, education

^bDependent variable: well-being

The regression equation for predicting the test score is, $Y = 44.880 + (-.0320 X_{\text{employment cat}} + 1.679 X_{\text{education}} + (-.059 X_{\text{recidivism}})$. Only one variable (education) added statistically significantly to the prediction, $p < .05$. Regression coefficients and standard errors can be found in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Stand. Coeff.	<i>t</i>	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for <i>B</i>		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>				lower bound	upper bound	zero order	partial	part	tolerance	VIF	
1(Constant)	44.880	5.524		8.124	.000	33.912	55.847						
Employment	-.320	.227	-.138	-1.411	.161	-.770	.130	-.096	-.143	.136	.982	1.018	
Education	1.679	.506	.325	3.32175	.001	.675	2.683	.307	.323	.321	.978	1.023	
Recidivism	-.059	1.591	-.004	-.037	.971	-3.217	3.099	-.032	-.004	.993	1.007		

Note. Dependent variable is well-being.

A summary of the multiple regression analysis is found in Table 6.

Table 6

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	B	SE_B	β
Intercept	44.880	5.524	
Employment	-.320	.227	-.138
Education	1.679	.506	.325
Recidivism	-.059	1.591	-.004*

Note. * $p=05$; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE_B = Standard error of the coefficient; β = standardized coefficient

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study gathered quantitative data to address a gap in the literature by exploring the predictability of the self-reported mental well-being of a felon and their educational level, employment choice, and recidivism. This chapter discusses the findings within the data and examines the limitations presented within this study. The chapter also sets forth recommendations for future research. The implications of this study impact felons, their family members, business owners, and educational leaders focusing on recidivism.

Discussion

This correlational, non-experimental, quantitative study scrutinizes if there is a predictive relationship between a felon's self-reported mental well-being and his or her educational level, employment choice, and recidivism rate. Addressing the gap in current literature on these factors was the purpose of this study. The felons in this study were male and female felons seeking training and/or jobs in the southwestern region of North Carolina. The variables for this study were educational level, employment choice, and recidivism. Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed (2008) defined mental well-being as the psychological functioning of a person that includes maintaining a sense of autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, life-satisfaction and ability to develop and maintain mutually benefiting relationships. Recidivism is defined as a time between the release and re-arrest or reconviction of an individual (Munyo & Rossi, 2015). Reentry has emerged as a critical issue, over the last decade, due to the affect it has on families, communities, state and local government, and social service providers (Visher & Travis, 2011).

This study found that there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The scores of a felon's self-reported mental well-being can be predicted by a combination of the predictor

variables: educational level, employment choices, and recidivism. The null hypothesis was rejected: the relationship between a felon's mental well-being, his or her educational level, employment choices, and recidivism is significant. As noted in Table 2, a strong predictor of mental well-being was education. The more education individuals held, the higher their self-reported mental well-being score. Employment was also a predictor of self-reported mental well-being. Participants seeking employment in building, health care, customer service, and management reported a higher mental well-being score. The correlation between recidivism and mental well-being was negative. This reveals a lower mental well-being score aligned with more sentences served, showing that as a felon's recidivism rate increased as his or her mental well-being decreased.

Education

In this present study, education was the strongest predictor of the three predictor variables on mental well-being. These findings affirm the findings of previous studies. An individual's course of action, coping behaviors, and achievements are projected heavily by his or her self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). The participants had a higher well-being score consistent with their achievement of higher education. At least 60% of current inmates are illiterate (Tyler & Brockmann, 2017). Leary (2018) discovered that the engagement and performance of inmates was hindered by their lack of academic skills. Roth, Asbjornsen, and Manger (2016) identified academic self-efficacy as an essential component to academic success and an explanation on how individuals with the identical knowledge and skills achieve differently. Although educational attainment in America has increased since 1980, the number of incarcerated individuals with less than a high school diploma has also increased (Tyler & Brockmann, 2017). Roth, Westrheim, Jones, and Manger (2017) examined academic self-efficacy and academic

motives as predictors for participation in education while in prison. Their study found that prisoners with higher self-efficacy scores for self-regulated learning were more likely to participate in prison education. This study revealed that the educational level of a felon was very similar to the educational level of his or her parents'. This connection between the parent's education and the felon's education shows the generational advantage of education. Although education does not prevent involvement in criminal activity, higher educational attainment does increase mental well-being. This supports the findings of this study and is evidence that by addressing educational attainment, recidivism rates may be decreased.

Employment

The results of this study did not reveal a significant prediction between employment and well-being score. This is in contrast with other studies on education and mental well-being. A link between a felon's employment difficulties in the labor market after incarceration is well known. Brown (2019) examined the long-term effects of incarceration on earnings, noting that building an income is more difficult right after release, and illegal means are sought as a secondary source of income. However, in this study among certain employment types (building, customer service, health, human services, and management) there is a higher correlation with mental well-being than among the other categories. Lee et al. (2017) uncovered that cognition plays a key role in academic and/or vocational engagement. The most significant categories require training, which supports the findings that more education results in a higher well-being score. Training, skills useful for a particular occupation or industry, and prior education are positively correlated; hence, training is not compensation for deficient human capital (Filippetti, Guy, & Iammarino, 2019). Therefore, in this study any trend may have been lost in the body of the data. Brown (2019) discussed the likelihood of illegal income sought, as supplemental or

sole income, by the lowest-skilled and lowest-educated felons immediately after their release.

Recidivism

This study found that the lower the well-being score, the higher the rate of recidivism. These findings are consistent with several previous studies. Tyler and Brockmann (2017) noted that there are overlapping characteristics for individuals, independent of their involvement in the criminal justice system. If individuals do not think highly of themselves, they are more likely to engage in risky behaviors. Being a member of a vulnerable group and lacking skills and knowledge, released prisoners experience a higher risk of exclusion from the labor market (Roth et al., 2016). This study helps to illustrate the importance of understanding the stigma an individual receives after being incarcerated. This study also explains some of the multiple challenges in society, associated with the stigma of being a felon, that reinforce the recidivism cycle rates of felons. Brown (2019) found that felons with better success in the job market, compared to those who gain low paying employment or remain unemployed, do not reenter prison. Reflecting on reentrance into society and maintaining successful employment yield a positive image. Smith, Cornacchione, Morash, Kashy, and Cobbina (2016) acknowledged that recidivism rates are predicted with a low self-efficacy. This study revealed felons with a lower self-reported self-efficacy corresponded with higher recidivism rates.

Theory

This study sought to examine the self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy as defined by Bandura (1986) is “people’s judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required and designated types of performances” (p. 391). Self-evaluation can be a positive tool, but it may also be the enemy of an individual. A felon’s decision to commit a crime is based off his or her own judgement on the ability to succeed on legal tasks. Successful

mastery of a task enhances self-efficacy just as self-efficacy is damaged by failure of a task (Roth et al., 2016). Education and training are keys to mastery of some tasks. Continued employment generally is improved by training (Filippetti et al., 2019). Income gained through illegal means is easier than legal means for some felons. Brown (2019) recognized that gaining employment with a feasible wage represents a widespread barrier for felons that is overshadowed by finding enough work to earn an annual income. An individual with high self-efficacy in one area is more likely to attempt a new task while those with a low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid it (Roth et al., 2016). Compared with the general public, inmates are between four and six times more likely to report a cognitive disability, including Down's syndrome, autism, dementia, learning and intellectual disabilities (Tyler and Brockmann, 2017). This study provides evidence that more emphasis should be placed on mental well-being. Woldgabreal, Day, and Ward (2016) stated that more attention on psychological resources during community-based supervision may provide a safeguard against recidivism of a felon. The more positive thoughts individuals have about themselves, the more likely they are to partake in tasks in which they are successful and the less likely they are to return to prison.

Machin, Adkins, Crosby, Farrell, and Mirabito (2019) revealed self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-compassion improvements effectively increased well-being. This study provides data to guide the creation of support programs (i.e., educational, employment, or mental health) for felons before their reentry into society to help alleviate some of the estimated cost for operation of the prison system. The cost to operate the North Carolina prison system was almost \$1.2 billion for 2018–2019, which is approximately 5% of the state's rough total operating budget of \$23 billion (Walker, 2019). Roth et al. (2017) found that there is no difference between prisoners' and the general population's desire to select activities they find motivating and/or

have confidence in completing while avoiding those that are more challenging. The development of programs will help to identify the strengths of a felon and increase educational awareness in preparation for integration into the community and in turn reduce recidivism. There are several areas related to programs for felons that need examination: the influence of one's employment (Maschi et al., 2014) and decreasing the number of people who leave prison and commit another crime (Campbell, 2014). Hence, interest in determining if identifying and developing one's strengths can reliably increase well-being or promote other desirable outcomes has been explored (Quinlan et al., 2012).

Implications

The body of knowledge on mental well-being, education, employment, and recidivism increased with the self-reported mental well-being of a felon from this research study. Results indicated that a felon's self-reported mental well-being has a linear relationship with his or her educational level at the statistical level. The results of this study revealed that the higher the educational level of the felon, the higher the well-being score. Therefore, the more education a felon has, the better they feel about their mental well-being. Leary (2018) shared that there is little to no data on felons in educational programs, but what is known is that those entering programs are at high risk for attrition due to their high rates of illiteracy, low-income economic status, and learning/mental/emotional/behavioral disorders. Developing programs to increase the education of a felon, while incarcerated or upon release, might help to raise their mental well-being. Brown (2019) noted an increase in the number of incarcerated minorities with low skills and no attachment to the labor market.

Although not statistically significant, a relationship between a felon's self-reported mental well-being and their employment choice was discovered. Additionally, a negative non-

statistical relationship between self-reported mental well-being and their recidivism rate was revealed. The researcher feels that the relationships between the self-reported mental well-being of a felon and his or her employment choices and recidivism are impactful despite not being statistically significant in this study. Employment and recidivism are both choices made by felons.

The researcher believes that choices made in life divulge more of how felons feel about themselves and provide great insight for future studies, especially when studied with educational level. An essential component to academic success is self-efficacy, and better education is likely to contribute to successful reintegration (Roth et al., 2016). Ephesians 4:22–24 states, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (New International Version). This is supportive of this study because it is the prior knowledge and experiences that fuel the desire to take on and complete new tasks. Future investigations of felons using the same instrument may yield similar results and be beneficial to helping identify a relationship between the variables.

Limitations

All research suffers limitations and there is no exception with this study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2015). The limitations for this study include gathering information from felons that are seeking employment in a location that is open to the public rather than just those who have a felony record. The results of this study are not a generalization of the entire population of felons because it only included English speaking felons seeking employment that could read independently. The location where the data were collected is not as diverse as the state of North

Carolina. Race, socioeconomic status, and childhood environment were not included in this study. Consequently, the findings of this study should not be generalized to the entire population. The search for a predictive relationship among the variables and the lack of variable manipulation shaped a predictive correlational design for this research (Gall, et al., 2007). While correlational research can suggest that there is a relationship between two variables, it cannot prove that one variable causes a change in another variable because correlation does not equal causation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future recommendations for this research include the following:

1. Identifying populations of individuals that seek treatment at a mental health agency rather than or in addition to individuals seeking employment and/or educational assistance. Mental health agencies and the criminal justice system seek to satisfy the same goals of medication compliance and recidivism reduction for persons with mental illness (Alarid & Rubin, 2018).
2. Including marital status of the felons is also a future recommendation. Economic hardship, family dynamics, and emotional well-being are affected by incarceration (Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014). Cohabitation and marriage are disrupted by incarceration (Apel, 2016).
3. A relationship with a felon's children should be examined in future research. Strains on family life alter the life course of offspring, with maternal incarceration having the most impact (Turney & Lanuza, 2017). Intergenerational parenting skills can be traced with research. Parental

incarceration has a lasting impact on children of incarcerated men and/or women, including their civic engagement (Lee et al., 2014).

4. Reviewing race and ethnicity and the neighborhoods in which felons reside would be beneficial in future studies. Disadvantaged minority felons, their family, and their communities are the most impacted by imprisonment. The neighborhoods in which racial and ethnic minority felons live are poorer and more disadvantaged than those of their White counterparts (Massoglia, Firebaugh, & Warner, 2013).
5. This study would be beneficial as a qualitative study including questions to discuss social integration (sense of community determined by a connection with the neighborhood, safety, trust, and solidarity), future goals, and social networks. Community integration is challenging for felons once released (Moore et al., 2018).
6. Using the role accumulation theory (self-identification and a connection with people around an individual increase emotional gratification) as a framework.
7. The length of incarceration on the mental well-being of a felon. Collateral consequences of mass incarceration affect individuals in many areas of their lives (Adams, 2018).
8. Completing the survey in another area of the state or even in another state with a larger sample would also be an idea for future research.
9. Collecting data from employed felons in lieu of restricting data collection to those not employed or seeking training for employment.

10. Narrowing the employment categories would be beneficial to determine if a relationship between employment and mental well-being exists.

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APPENDIX A: Permission to Use WEMWBS

Thank you for completing this registration. You now have permission to use WEMWBS in the manner detailed in your submission.

Question: Name:

Answer:

Shandrika McNair-Williams

Question: Email address:

Answer:

sMcNair-Williams6@liberty.edu

Question: Institution/Organization

Answer:

Liberty University

Question: Name:

Answer:

Question: Email address:

Answer:

Question: Institution/Organization

Answer:

Question: Type of Study

Answer:

Survey (WEMWBS completed once only)

Question: Description of proposed project:

(For translations, please state the language concerned)

Answer:

The demographic questionnaire and the WEMWBS will be administered during a visit to the employment security office, until the desired number of participants (100) has been reached.

Question: Description of participants

Answer:

The anticipated participants will be all felons living in the southwestern region of North Carolina seeking employment and/or training through the employment security office.

Question: Location

Answer:

NC

Question: Gender

Answer:

Males and Females

Question: Ages

Answer:

18-99

Question: Approximate Start Date

Answer:

06/06/2017

Question: WEMWBS version

Answer:

14 items

Question: Expected number of people to be studied

Answer:

100

Question: Other information as relevant

Answer:

Question: Are you willing for us to share top level details of your research

Answer:

Yes

Thank you for completing this registration. You now have permission to use WEMWBS in the manner detailed in your submission. The 14 item and 7 item scale, user guides and other information can be found on the website. Best wishes WEMWBS team

APPENDIX B: IRB Approval Letter

Dear Shandrika McNair-Williams,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:

(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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