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THE CORRELATION BETWEEN COUNTY EXPENDITURES AND AB109
RECIDIVISM: A CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Maya Crim
June 2020

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ABSTRACT

In response to a federal mandate, California passed Public Safety Realignment policies in 2011 to reduce its prison population. Popularly known as Assembly Bill 109 (AB109), these policies sought to reform the prison system on multiple fronts. One of these fronts is preventing recidivism among offenders. Most studies on recidivism look at individual factors or specific micro interventions. However, the aim of this research was to examine the relationship between external factors and recidivism rates across 55 California counties. Using Spearman's Correlation, this study tested the hypothesis that external factors such as county funding/expenditure, poverty level, and unemployment level monotonically correlate with recidivism rate at the statistically significant confidence interval. The findings of this research produced mixed results: the hypothesis was supported for county funding/expenditure, but not for poverty level and unemployment level. The implications of these findings for theory, research, and macro social work practice are discussed.

Keywords: AB109, Recidivism, Victim Blaming Theory, Systems Theory, Spearman's Correlation

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTIONS

Problem Formulation

Mass incarceration has been one of the biggest social problems in the United States, affecting millions of people, mainly those with minority backgrounds. Writing on behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice, statisticians Danielle Kaeble and Mary Cowhig reported that about 2.2 million adults were incarcerated in America's prisons and jails in 2016 (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018). However, the nation's adult correctional population (people in prisons, jails, on probation, and on parole) was estimated at 6.6 million for the same year (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018). Over the past few decades, community leaders and social justice advocates have pushed for prison reform at local, state, and federal levels.

In 2011, California found itself not only in a financial crisis but also with a supreme court mandate to reduce its prison population by about 40,000 prisoners (Lin, 2016). The overcrowding in California prisons had gotten to such high levels that the goal of the mandate was to bring the populations in facilities down to 137.5% of capacity (Lin, 2016). Assembly Bill 109, also known as "public safety realignment" or "realignment", was passed and signed into law in 2011 to address the mandate (Bird & Grattet, 2015). The bill called for felony offenders,

that were never convicted of serious crimes, to go to jail instead of prison and some offenders to be let out early and placed on probation (Lin, 2016). After AB109, additional laws were passed to meet the supreme court mandate of reducing prison overcrowding and also to save additional funds in the lingering financial crunch. The trend continued to be that corrections' management and authority would be passed from the state to local agencies (Bird & Grattet, 2015).

Subsequent bills and propositions supplementing AB109's deficiencies, such as AB116-8 and Proposition 47, years later, are all considered part of Realignment (Lombardo, 2018). The laws diverted individuals with less violent and dangerous charges from California state prisons to local jails and local supervision (probation) (Lombardo, 2018). For the purpose of this research, individuals directly impacted by these laws and diverted from prison to local supervision, were referred to as the "AB109 population".

Part of the Realignment policies intention was to add the number of evidence-based practice interventions to reduce costs by increasing the success rate of the newly released "realigned offenders" (Bird & Grattet, 2015) Each county in California was giving funds to create strategies and interventions to meet their Realignment goals (Bird & Grattet, 2015). This is the piece of these realignment policies that most concerns this research project; County funds and other County macro factors and their influence AB109 recidivism rates.

The policies have been an opportunity for California counties to develop and increase substitutions and interventions for incarceration for this diverted

population (Turner et al., 2015). At the same time, the policies overburdened county systems that are ill-equipped for the high needs and numbers of the displaced population (Lombardo, 2018). The first two years of realignment alone brought San Bernardino County 4,700 previously incarcerated individuals, approximately 1,200 more than projected (Scray-Brown, 2013). This left many of the county departments, from Probation to Behavioral Health, scrambling to meet the needs of the influx of new clients.

One of the main concerns with realignment has been the stress placed on local jurisdictions with the AB109 population (Lofstrom & Brandon, 2015). Offenders normally placed in prisons are now in local jails, which were not designed for long term residence or high needs offenders (Petrella, 2014). Once released from jail or diverted directly from prison to local communities, the AB109 population is under the supervision of the county's Department of Probation. The probation run Day Reporting Centers (DRCs) have now become the main establishments for the released offenders, particularly the AB109 population, to receive services in the County of San Bernardino (Turner et al., 2015). These DRCs and other innovations can become sources of rehabilitation or recidivism depending on the practices, strategies implemented, and funding allocations by probation and other local government departments.

Another major concern has been the lack of comprehensive data regarding realignment (Petrella, 2014). Recidivism and rearrests rates for this population have not been kept regularly by all counties or the rates differ

substantially (Lofstrom & Brandon, 2015). Hence, while rehabilitation based on evidence-based practice is becoming more common place, counties are not consistently collecting data to prove their effectiveness (Turner et al., 2015). Counties should be concerned with tracking measures of achievement for this underrepresented and underserved population and finding reliable data on their intervention methods as well as macro strategies such as spending for programs. County data should be collected and evaluated against other counties to increase the likelihoods of success (reduce recidivism) for the realigned offenders (Lofstrom & Brandon, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to determine the relationship between recidivism and macro-level factors such as funding/expenditures, poverty, and unemployment. Society has a tendency to blame people trapped in the criminal justice system, overlooking the systemic contribution to the problem. In other words, the American public generally looks at individual factors associated with recidivism; people see a “bad” person reoffending and getting back in the system. This study attempted to establish the correlation (if any) between recidivism and factors that are external to past offenders’ locus of control. In particular, this study sought to answer this question: Is there a relationship

between macro level factors (such as funding/expenditure, poverty, and unemployment) and recidivism across California?

Significance of Project to Social Work

This research is needed as the overall trend of prison downsizing goes national. California county strategies can be replicated or avoided by other states and counties depending on if effective strategies can be found (Lin, 2016). Jefferey Lin (2016) notes that even conservative government officials are now seeking interventions that work over those strategies that simply punish. This gives an amazing opportunity for researchers for set the tone for what recidivism reducing strategies look like in the future. There is a chance to stop trans-incarceration, or moving prisoners simply from prisons to jails, and reduce incarceration across the nation based on what effective strategies are being utilized in California counties (Lin, 2016). This research aims to fill the gaps of previous research on county Realignment strategies in hopes that the research can be applied to other similar counties nationwide. It should be a priority to find which of these strategies have been most successful so far and how to continue to improve these strategies

Realignment policies impact both micro and macro social work practice. While the consequences to social work macro practice are more obvious; the impact on social systems and state-wide policy changes, realignment also has

implications for micro practice. Clinicians have been expected to learn new criminal justice jargon and even use some of law enforcement's risk tools (Petrella, 2014). New assessment tools, combining social services and criminal justice worlds, were created to ensure the best interventions are used for each client individually (Turner et al., 2015). Interdisciplinary teams have been created between law enforcement and social service agencies in order to provide the most appropriate services to the realigned clients (Turner et al., 2015). In turn, a shift in how law enforcement interacts with this population on an individual level has also occurred (Turner et al., 2015, p. 29).

There are nearly four million people on probation in the United States (Wooditch et al., 2014). Minorities, those affected by mental illness, and those from lower socio-economic status are grossly overrepresented (Bird et al., 2017). One hundred and thirty-two offenders with mental illnesses were sent to San Bernardino alone in the first year of the policy reinforcement (Scray-Brown, 2013). Minorities are also overrepresented within the county. San Bernardino County's current goals for realignment are to reduce recidivism and hospitalization of medically fragile and homeless offenders as well as to decrease recidivism risks through education and job opportunities (Scray Brown, 2013). These goals align with social work values and social workers are daily impacted by the outcomes of realignment. For most counties, realignment not only affected the probation and correction departments but also the medical, mental health, homeless, and transitional assistance programs. Social workers

will also be impacted, on a macro level, by how these differing entities work together.

The social worker's code of ethics obligates professionals to be concerned with human wellbeing and the needs of all people, with focus on those who are vulnerable, oppressed, or living in poverty. It is also part of the social work generalist process that we evaluate macro systems in order to help such vulnerable populations. There is an opportunity for social workers to help create more realistic expectations for realigned offenders, in the hopes of lessening the severity of the impacts of incarceration on released individuals (Tang et al., 2014). It is the perspective of this research paper that social work ethics obligate social workers to analyze these trends and focus on effective interventions for these vulnerable populations in this vulnerable region of California. Finding effective interventions and macro strategies for such a high risk and diverse population will complicate social work practice. The factors that define this population are also the factors that mandate social workers be a part of the solution. It is essential that social workers concern themselves with what interventions the county is utilizing to reduce prison recidivism and increase overall success of the AB109 population.

Individuals within this population are supposed to be given opportunities to utilize interventions, such as substance use treatment, mental health treatment, or flash incarceration, as opposed new charges and jail time. For the purpose of

this research recidivism will refer to individuals sentenced to custody due to new charges.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the literary findings on the impact of Realignment laws and the AB109 population in California. Specifically, the impacts of the AB109 population on San Bernardino County agencies and strategies currently being implemented for the population will be discussed. This chapter will then discuss the gaps, conflicting findings, and methodology of the literature. Finally, this chapter covers the theories guiding the conceptualization of this research.

Literature Findings

Research shows that the impacts of realignment vary greatly in different counties (Bird et al., 2017). California's 58 counties inherently have differences from population to budgets to political leanings. On top of these fundamental differences were that counties were also allowed to use funds in different ways (Lin, 2016). Some used the monies to expand their law enforcement and increase jail capacity in anticipation of the influx of offenders to county level supervision (Lin, 2016). Other counties used the funds to increase evidence-based programing from evidence-based supervision techniques to community-

based alternatives to incarceration (Lin, 2016). These correctional and law enforcement agencies have shifted towards looking at how criminogenic needs relate to recidivism, including substance abuse, antisocial associations and employment, as well as what interventions can address these needs (Wooditch et al., 2014).

All counties experienced an increase to the probation caseload with the realigned offenders (Bird et al., 2017). There were those individuals of Post Release Community Supervision (PRCS) as well as those giving split sentences (Bird et al., 2017). Some evidence points that those stuck in local jails for longer sentences may be more impacted than those let on probation, however both populations return to jail after release more often than previous types of offenders. In fact, PRCS have the highest rates of all violations of probationers, and thus returns to jail (Bird et al., 2017). These numbers show that individuals sentenced under these new laws may be more challenging than previously typical probationers.

Literature findings on Realignment policies find that offenders subject to no probation at all had the best results (Bird et al., 2017). After two years of the policy's passing, rearrests rate remained over 70% and reconviction rates were well over 50%, both being higher than pre- Realignment (Bird et al., 2017). Also, those with straight sentences had lower recidivism than those with split sentences (Bird et al., 2017). Over-supervision has been found to be unhelpful overall to recidivism however public outcry over specific incidents prevent

Counties from considering alternatives to public supervision (Bird & Grattet, 2015). One such incident involved an AB109 released offender killing a Whittier police officer. Thus, probation assignment has been the solution determined under Realignment policies and it is the main strategy California is using to attempt to reduce prison overcrowding and recidivism. Overall, probation has been found to be less expensive than prison, jail, and parole for California (Bird et al., 2017). Counties now need to find ways to impact recidivism rates while continuing to save the state money.

Differences in California County Interventions and Strategies

Challenges of Realignment have not spread equally to counties and strategies to face these challenges have not been implemented the same across counties. Those counties with more services focused interventions did not see higher crime rates while changing incentives for offenders and lessening deterrence (Bird & Grattet, 2015). Jeffery Lin (2016) notes that some of the law enforcement strategies can lead to “trans incarceration” instead of de-incarceration. While there is an inherent shuffle of offenders from prisons to local jails in Realignment, the goal is to reduce incarceration overall, not simply fill up the jails. Thus, a services-oriented strategy may be more effective for counties in reducing overall incarceration and counties with high recidivism should consider sending more money on programs and services (Bird & Grattet, 2015).

Literature implies that some interventions, and thus certain macro factors, will be more effective than others in reducing recidivism (Tang et al., 2014).

Research into California County realignment strategies shows that rehab programs and some elements of other programs used or referred by probation work to reduce recidivism (Bird & Grattet, 2015). On the more law enforcement side of things, punishment for probation and parole violations should be make quick and definitive not necessarily severe to be most effective (Bird & Grattet, 2015). Many counties have begun to use “flash incarceration” as a penalty for probation violations (Bird & Grattet, 2015). Instead of revoking probation for the offender or giving them a new charge, the offender can be sentenced for 1-10 days in county jail (Bird et al., 2017). Reentry services and alternatives to custody were also found to be good for some of the realigned offender sub-populations (Bird & Grattet, 2015). Collected data shows that many agencies are looking at risk and needs assessments as ways for finding interventions for realigned offenders (Bird et al., 2017). Many counties have created or are utilizing probation Day Reporting Centers as resource hubs for realigned offenders. Research has found that probationers having access to multiple services makes a difference (Tang et al., 2014). Substance abuse treatment opportunities were also found to reduce abuse and crime (Tang et al., 2014)

San Bernardino County

There have been some opportunities to analyze and compare county strategies for Realignment. Twelve counties, including San Bernardino, volunteered to be a part of a multi county study that looks at their Community Corrections Partnership Plan (Board of State and Community Corrections, 2018).

This gives insight into some of the strategies that counties are implementing as well as their successes and challenges in reducing recidivism.

San Bernardino was projected to receive 3,513 new PRCS probationers in the first two years of Realignment policy, however they received 4,711 (Scray-Brown, 2013). This mass influx created new challenges for the county, on top of many challenges already being faced by the county such as a poor economy and high crime rate. San Bernardino seems to have taken a different financial strategy than most counties in the first year of Realignment. Spending in enforcement and services was most similar to San Diego county (Lin, 2016). Realignment spending was about 14% on enforcement spending and 9% on services spending (Lin, 2016). This shows about 3 times less spending than in Los Angeles and 4 times less than Riverside on law enforcement. San Bernardino attempted to increase its evidence-based risk and needs assessments, community partnerships and probation officer training (Scray-Brown, 2013).

San Bernardino enhanced its education, employment opportunities, substance abuse interventions, parenting classes, motivational interviewing training and Day Reporting Center use (Turner et al., 2015). The latest annual report lists that San Bernardino County offers this population recovery-oriented assessments and treatment planning, intensive case management and outpatient treatment, medical and psychiatric medication support, housing, and vocational skills (Board of State and Community Corrections, 2018).

Enforcement funds in San Bernardino went towards enhancing services in the Sheriff's Department for education, employment, added substance abuse interventions and partnered with other county agencies in order to have referrals for housing (Lowder et al., 2018).

Gaps in Research and Literature

Data

There are extensive gaps in research and literature on Realignment strategies and interventions. Much of this is due to how relatively new the concept is to California and thus the overall lack of data. Some gaps also have to do with lack of data collected on the realigned offender population since Realignment policies began. Also, methodology limitations are created due to the vast differences between California counties and the difficulties of comparing results between these unique local governments. Conflicting research on appropriate assessments and interventions for this population are also numerous.

The biggest gap in research referencing Realignment is the lack of data. More individual data of previous offenders is needed. Research needs to identify what interventions individuals were given, over what time period, those individual's criminal history and current outcome of interventions (Bird & Grattet, 2015). Some data on probation is extremely limited and it can be difficult to look

at particular sub populations, such as those who received split sentencing (Bird & Grattet, 2015). Nearly a decade after the original roll out of Realignment policies, data is still being collected and analyzed regarding this policy experiment in California. Bird and Grattet (2015) suggested that more time would be needed to see the long-term impacts of Realignment policy. Wooditch and associates (2014) believe that it can also be important to see how probationers and the previously incarcerated behave over time. These patterns may affect what we should expect of offenders and in what time frame or order (Bird & Grattet, 2015).

Methodology

Some of the current research methodology begs the question as to whether varying recidivism rates are due to changes in offender population, implementation of interventions, or other macro factors within the county. There is a necessity to find methods of research that can separate the difference between individual offender behavior and behavior resulting from law enforcement changes (Lin, 2016). For example, some recidivism rates could include flash incarceration. That could dramatically change the context of recidivism in that research. Overall, much of the current literature on Realignment has trouble separating the types of affected offenders and following behavioral trends after the offender is placed on probation.

Conflicting Intervention Findings

Part of the conflict in interventions has to do with the criminogenic needs' scales that many law enforcement agencies use to determine what interventions

should be used. Many agencies are using these risk-needs assessments to identify interventions for realigned offenders (Bird et al., 2017). These assessments often measure criminality but cannot predict actual criminal behavior (Tang et al., 2014). Also, research is still trying to figure out which criminogenic needs are more important to reducing recidivism (Tang, Taxman, Wooditch, 2014). For example, residing with a spouse decreases criminal behavior in men but living with a boyfriend actually increases drug dealing behavior in women (Wooditch et al., 2014). There is also conflicting evidence on employment. Wooditch and associates (2014) determined that the stability of employment may have a significant impact on recidivism. Simply checking “unemployed” or “employed” for an assessment tool would not determine the quality of employment and thus would not predict recidivism. Wooditch and associates (2014) also found that needs may change over time for an offender. Thus, changes may need to be made in how often realigned offenders are assessed and expectations for different time periods may be helpful.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Victim Blaming Theory

In modern social work, blaming the victim has become outdated or seen as one dimensional (Zur, 2008). The assumption someone is unemployed because they are lazy, for example, would be an oversimplification and victim

blaming lens of a macro issue (Ryan, 1976). Our legal system also differentiates people through such a distorted lens when assuming offenders simply offend, with no background context (Zur, 2008). Even when feeling the offender is to blame, counties should look deeper into the background context that create an offender in the first place or, in the case of this research, the factors that impact recidivism. Zur (2008) lists several factors of victimhood, the one that concerns this research the most is the environmental context as shown by the legal educational and political system. This aspect begs the question are recidivism rates high for the AB109 population due to their individual characteristics or larger environmental factors?

Systems Theory

This research project will also apply systems theory. Systems theory asserts that all systems are connected, related, and dependent on each other (Turner, 2017). This is particularly applicable to looking at how the various agencies of San Bernardino County (Behavioral Health, Probation, Public Health, etc.) work together meeting the influx of the AB109 population. Systems theory emphasizes that government policies and interventions can impact individual behavior (Turner, 2017). The theory will be applied to this research as the research aims at evaluating the systematic influences impacting the AB109 population. Realignment Policy in California create an opportunity for San Bernardino County agencies to change the way their systems work and work together in order to increase success among this at-risk population. Systems

theory is one way to conceptualize the changes made (interventions utilized) and the impacts of these changes on recidivism in the AB109 population.

Both the Victim Blaming Theory and the Systems Theory are fundamental frameworks in social. Grading them under Joseph and Macgowan's (2019) Theory Evaluation Scale (TES), these theories were found to be of excellent quality with a score of 35 and 36, respectively. The TES is an epistemological tool that measures the quality of social work theories through nine criteria. These are coherence, conceptual clarity, philosophical assumptions, connections to previous research, testability, empirical support, utility for practice, and human interaction with the environment (Joseph & Macgowan, 2019). Each criterion is graded on 1-5 point Likert-scale for a total of 45 points possible (Joseph & Macgowan, 2019).

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature and exposed its limitations regarding AB109. This chapter also focused on intervention strategies used by San Bernardino County on the AB109 population. Finally, this chapter provided a critical analysis of two key theoretical perspectives in social work: Victim Blaming Theory and Systems Theory, both of which were deemed excellent by the Theory Evaluation Scale.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter details the methodology of how this study was completed. This chapter covers several important subsections such as, the study design, the sampling methods, the data collection techniques, the protection of human subjects, the study variables, the study hypotheses, and the data analysis methods.

Study Design

This descriptive study used a cross-sectional design to investigate the possible correlation between macro factors and recidivism rates across the different counties in California. This quantitative research analyzed multiple cross-sections of recidivism rates collected over time. However, because the study itself was conducted at one point in time, the design cannot be considered longitudinal.

Sampling

In this study, the sample was made of AB109 populations in counties across California. Because the unit of analysis in this study was counties in California, the researcher could not obtain the demographic characteristics of the participants. The publicly available datasets used for this research (please see next section), lump-summed all formerly incarcerated people's information under a county variable. The researcher removed three counties that did not provide data; Placer, Tuolumne, Alpine. After eliminating these three counties, the final sample consisted of 55 counties (N = 55).

Data Collection and Instruments

This study used secondary data that are publicly accessible from various government websites. In particular, the researcher downloaded data from three main sites: the California Board of State and Community Corrections, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the California State Controllers' Office. The Board of State and Community Corrections has detailed monthly information about the status (sentencings and bookings) of offenders' subject to the realignment legislature, county by county. Census Bureau systematically records poverty and unemployment rates for states, counties, and municipalities. County expenditures and budget allocations for the AB109 population were also provided by most counties on the Board and State Community Corrections site as well as the State

Controller's website (California Board and State Community Corrections, 2018; California State Controller's Office, 2019).

Procedures

This research began by comparing recidivism rates of the AB109 population between all the counties that have provided data on the Board of State and Community Corrections website. Monthly recidivism surveys have been collecting data from each county about their AB109 recidivism rates since 2011. The researcher did the same for data available on the California State Controller's Office website for the variable related to county expenditures. Finally, the researcher had to painstakingly look for yearly data on poverty and unemployment. This was accomplished through multiple visits on Census Bureau sites.

Protection of Human Subjects

All public data have no identifying information. Therefore, this study poses no risks to the AB109 population, let alone the unit of analysis: counties. Despite this, however, the researcher was required to seek approval from the California State University Institutional Review Board. The request to conduct this study was granted during the Spring Quarter, 2019.

Study Variable

The dependent variable in this study was average county recidivism rate from 2011 to 2018. This variable assessed the rate of a county's AB109 population who obtained a new local charge after being diverted to county supervision. The dependent variable was continuous, but recoded ordinally with the following values: 1=very low recidivism rate, 2=low recidivism rate, 3=Moderate recidivism rate, 4=high recidivism rate, and 5=very high recidivism rate. The three independent variables or predictors in this research were macro variables that possibly influence AB109 recidivism: average unemployment rate from 2011 to 2018, average poverty rate from 2011-2018, and average county expenditure per capita from 2011-2018. All three predictors were continuous.

Study Hypothesis

For the purpose of this study, the research formulated the following null and alternative hypotheses:

H_0 = There is no statistically significant correlation between systemic factors—expenditure, poverty, and unemployment—and recidivism rate across counties in California

H_1 = There will be a statistically significant correlation between systemic factors—expenditure, poverty, and unemployment—and recidivism rate across counties in California.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the Spearman's (Rho) Correlation to test the study hypothesis. This test is a non-parametric procedure that aligns with (1) data that are not normally distributed (2) samples that are small, and (3) variables that are measure at the ordinal level. All three conditions were met in this study. The researcher ran the analysis, using the 26.0 version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Frequency Distributions of Dependent Variables

The figure below presents the frequency distributions for average county recidivism rates in California between 2011 and 2018. As highlighted in the figure, county recidivism varies from very low to very high. Approximately one-third of the counties reported very low recidivism rates. About 15 percent of them had dealt with low recidivism rates between this timeframe. Another 15 percent of the sample registered moderate recidivism rates. Roughly 10 percent of the counties had a high level of recidivism, and slightly over one-fifth of the counties reported a very high level of recidivism between 2011 and 2018.

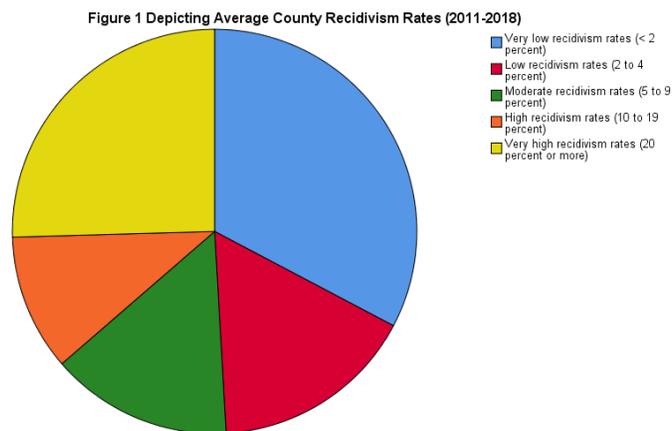


Figure 1. Depicting Average County Recidivism Rates (2011-2018)

Spearman's Correlation Results

Table 1 below reports the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient for average county recidivism level in relation to three independent variables: average county expenditure per capita, average county unemployment level, and average county poverty level. Based on the results in the table, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between county average expenditure per capita and average county recidivism level $r_s(53) = .47, p < .001$. This was moderate to large correlation between the two variables. This result demonstrated that the more counties spend per capita the lower the rates of recidivism. Further in Table 1, the coefficient of determination (r^2) was .22, indicating that average county expenditure per capita explains 22 percent in the variance of county recidivism level. In other words, this finding revealed a coefficient of alienation ($1 - r^2$) of .78, or 78 percent of unexplained variance in average county recidivism level.

Meanwhile, Table 2 also shows that the other two predictors (average county unemployment level and average county poverty level) had no statistically significant relationship with average county recidivism rates. The Spearman's rho correlation for average unemployment was .19 with $p = .188$. Average county poverty level generated a Spearman's rho correlation of .20, with $p = .892$.

The bottom line is that, overall, the study hypothesis is partially supported. There was enough evidence to suggest a statistically significant difference in recidivism rates among counties based on funding (county expenditure per capita). However, county recidivism level was not found to be correlated with county unemployment level and county poverty level.

Table 1. Spearman's Correlation results for recidivism as a function of county expenditure level, unemployment level, and poverty level (N = 55)

Variables	2-tailed α^*	r_s	r^2	$1 - r^2$
Average county expenditure per capita (2011-2018)	.000	-.465	.22	.78
Average county unemployment level (2011-2018)	.168	-.188		
County average poverty level (2011-2018)	.892	-.019		

*Alpha level ($p < .05$)

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The aim of this research was to establish relationships between external factors and recidivism rates across 55 California counties. This study is important considering the high rates of incarceration and recidivism that has plagued many states, including California. Using Spearman's Correlation, this study tested the hypothesis that external factors such as county expenditure, poverty level, and unemployment level monotonically correlate with recidivism rate at the statistically significant confidence interval. The findings of this research produced mixed results. The study hypothesis was proven for county expenditure, but not for poverty and unemployment level.

Consistency with Prior Research

Similar to prior research, this research has found that funding is an essential aspect to reducing recidivism in the AB109 population. The more the spending the less the level of recidivism. Counties were provided with different funding and spent the monies in different ways (Lin, 2016). As prior research has

insinuated, the expenditures themselves become aspects of the county's strategy with the AB109 population (Lin, 2016).

Prior research also highlights the importance of deeper and more consistent data from all counties (Turner et al, 2015). Three counties had to be left out of this research due to incomplete data provided to the Board of State and Community Corrections website. Not all counties provided consistent data to the AB109 Monthly Jail Survey, which was essential for determining recidivism rates for this research (Board of State and Community Corrections, 2019). This research had to determine recidivism rates for this population in the first place as they have not been consistently calculated in any prior research for each county. That data is essential in evaluating which interventions are successful in this population, and for this research, determining county differences in recidivism. Prior research also discusses the implications of researching recidivism in this population, such as implementing similar strategies in other places or with other populations (Lin, 2016).

Implications for Theory, Research, and Macro Social Work Practice

This research holds implications for both the Victim Blaming Theory and Systems Theory. The Victim Blaming Theory suggests that there are complex relationships between the exploited or oppressed and their environment (Ryan, 1976; Zur, 2008). The results of this research suggest that there may be a

number of factors contributing to recidivism, but at least one macro variable has a notable negative relationship to recidivism within the AB109 population. This also leads to further recognition of Systems Theory. Clearly, these offenders are not simply in a bubble of their own decisions, there are environmental factors that influence their options. A county's expenditure is an especially important factor. The findings in this study shows that there is a strong relationship in this systematic allocation of funds and individual recidivism outcomes.

The findings in this study contribute to the criminal justice literature by departing from prior research to look at recidivism from a macro perspective. Indeed, previous studies mostly investigated micro factors related to specific behavioral interventions (Wooditch et al, 2014) or individual factors that contribute to recidivism (Turner et al, 2015). Instead of performing a criminogenic assessment of recidivism, this research focused on the big picture, linking a macro variable to the issue (Turner et al, 2015). The strong negative correlation between county expenditure per capita and recidivism is a significant contribution to the literature

For social work macro practice, this research can be used for advocacy. This research shows that there is a real interaction between expenditure and recidivism. Social workers should be curious about identifying more relationships between macro variables and recidivism. Social workers should also do further research on the county expenditures to show the state that funding matters for this population and more funds need to be allocated to help re-entry for these

former offenders. This population is vulnerable and the social and financial costs of imprisonment and recidivism are high. Social workers should aim to make changes at the macro level to ensure this population is protected. Social workers should fight for efficient and impactful changes to the system in order to increase success with this population.

Limitations and Recommendations

There were several limitations to this research. For one, the sample size was small, at only 55 counties total. The study also used a nonparametric method for the analysis. While the most appropriate, the Spearman's Test in this study is not a strong method of data analysis.

It would be important for future research to get an analysis of the breakdown of county expenditures compared with one another. It would also be important to find out more individual characteristics of the AB109 population, for example looking at if certain subpopulations within AB109 are more susceptible to recidivism behaviors. More broadly, future research should be looking at external factors for recidivism, not just in California or just for the AB109 population.

Future research can build on the results in this study to look deeper for successful strategies and approaches at reducing recidivism in the AB109 population. As patterns between macro variables and recidivism are further

established, society can begin to disregard the victim blame mentality. Shifting from looking at offenders as the sole captains of their trajectories can help criminal justice stakeholders seek and implement systemic change.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A
DATA COLLECTION GUIDE

This research began by comparing recidivism rates of the AB109 population between all the county data provided by the AB109 Monthly Jail Survey on the Board of State and Community Corrections website from 2011 to 2018. Economic differences between the counties were accounted for, based on the expenditures from 2011 to 2018 on the State Controller’s Office website. Other macro factors, poverty and unemployment, were accounted for utilizing rates from 2011 to 2018 on the public census data website.

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