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Perceptions of Ex-Offenders Futures from the Viewpoint of Ex-Offenders, Mentors, and Employers

A Collaborative Dissertation with The Wise Group

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Abstract

Justice policy in Scotland is undergoing a massive reform where it seeks to fundamentally change its approach to offender management. This collaborative dissertation highlights the perspectives and advice of individuals with first-hand experience about what helps or hinders an ex-offender during their transition from short-term prison life to desistance, why certain social services may or may not alleviate problems that result in offending behaviour, and how policy can develop to reduce the disconnection between the needs of individuals in the justice sector and the demands placed on politicians. Nine face-to-face interviews were conducted with individuals from the collaborating organisation, The Wise Group. As it was found, the views of the participants, many of whom are themselves former offenders, illustrated a sector with both strengths and considerable flaws. Furthermore, findings indicate that multiple challenges and barriers halt progress and create an enduring label that limits the ex-offender's future.

Key words: public policy, Scotland, mentor support, short-term sentence, desistance, criminal justice

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I am more than my mistakes, a phrase commonly echoed by offenders, symbolises the marginalisation and social exclusion experienced by individuals with criminal records. Offenders in Scotland face a myriad of stigmas that degrade self-worth by labelling them as flawed individuals (Young and Powell, 2015) and creates the belief that they are destined for a future where prospects are menial and deviance is prevalent (Maruna, 2001). The Scottish Government has moved towards a comprehensive approach in writing criminal justice policy, however, rarely have offenders and those directly engaged with them been asked for their perception of the identified needs, what promotes desistance nor why they began to desist from crime. By bringing awareness to the issue with the best available knowledge, policymakers can possibly make well-informed, effective decisions.

The theories and usage of reconviction, recidivism, and desistance aim to determine justice programme effectiveness and understand *how* and *why* an individual commences or ceases offending. However, all three forms are conceptually distinct and elaborate on different components of the overall criminal justice rehabilitation (Clarke and Dawson, 1999; Falshaw *et al.*, 2003; McNeill, 2012). Various studies employ either some or all of these forms to determine the effect of stigmatisation (Young and Powell, 2015), evaluate the performance of community-based offender management (Wilson *et al.*, 2007), and how offenders cease offending (Maruna, 2001). By merging these theories with literature related to impacting factors, the gap between theory/literature and the reality of the situation can be bridged to foster an internal identity change.

Some categorise offending behaviour as the symptom of a fundamental flaw in justice policy and society. They argue that background factors such as education, social exclusion and addiction (Katz, 1988) with adverse childhood experiences lead to negative behaviour (Baglivio *et al.*, 2015) and violence (Holligan and Deuchar, 2015). By increasing levels of hope and self-esteem, offenders are capable of overcoming their adverse past (LeBel *et al.*, 2008), however, they first have to resolve other obstacles. One main obstacle is drug and alcohol addiction. Scott and Codd (2010) emphasise that vulnerable individuals turn to drugs to escape environmental stressors which ultimately leads to imprisonment due to their substance abuse. Generally, addiction is treated as a justice problem, however, some academics argue that its better served as a health issue (Chandler *et al.*, 2009).

Additionally, support and supervision are significant factors as mentors provide guidance to enable successful reintegration (Koschmann and Peterson, 2013). By sharing similar backgrounds (such as offending history) creates purpose, hope and belief (Schinkel and Whyte, 2012). Similar studies highlighted deeper relationships caused by shared characteristics as strongly effective in reducing crime and recidivism (Schinkel and Whyte, 2012; LeBel *et al.*, 2015).

The current situation for offender management in Scotland is exemplified by its strategy to introduce impactful changes to policy. Although there are indications of end goals, they do not fully meet the needs of offenders. The recently introduced Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill and changes to the Presumption Against Short-Term Sentences are aimed at reducing gaps while resolving offender needs. However, the Scottish Government must find a balance between public safety and justice reform.

Proceeding from this, the rationale and aim of this dissertation is to explore the advice and views of ex-offenders, mentors, and employers to understand what helps and hinders individuals in their journey towards desistance while presenting changes that the criminal justice system and other agencies can do to mitigate the problem. With support from the collaborating organisation, The Wise Group, this research identifies and summarises why certain factors considerably impact desistance. For this qualitative study with nine face-to-face interviews, the following research questions are considered:

- What factors influence and impact both the positive and negative behaviours in an offender and how do they contribute towards a transformational life change?
- How can Scottish policy effectively change to provide realistic support on an ex-offender's journey towards desistance?

This dissertation is structured in the following way: Chapter 2 will attempt to describe the current state of knowledge by examining differences between three conceptually distinct terms, analyse and justify the reason behind certain factors being critical for an offender's journey, and outline current Scottish policies and programmes. After, Chapter 3 presents the research methods used in this study alongside the participant recruitment process, data analysis, research reflexivity and any limitations. Chapter 4 will expand the findings from the nine interviews while illustrating their

linkage to current knowledge. Finally, Chapter 5 will conclude by drawing the conclusions while including implications for future research and policy creation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Understanding what leads an individual to commence or cease criminal behaviour is a complex process, involving various stakeholders, trying to pursue their own agenda and *solve* the issue in their preferred method. In recent decades, a vast number of changes have happened in the criminal justice sector both in academic research and policy. As Maruna (2001) outlined, almost everyone who becomes a criminal eventually 'goes straight' and refrains from criminal behaviour. Formalised processes that adapt to the needs of policy makers overshadow and at times are incompatible to the needs of those most affected: offenders. Moreover, conflicting views, such as protecting the public and allowing the offender to move on with their life, creates intricacies when finding a balance between both. Within this, the 'what works' debate is still broad with little agreement between differing parties, however, many infer that a personal approach with emotional support and encouragement champions balanced behaviour (Barry, 2000).

In this chapter, the role of both academic literature and Scottish policy will be summarised using the literature on desistance, factors that influence or reduce offending and policy impact. First, the chapter will outline the theoretical differences between recidivism, reconviction and desistance while specifying strengths and/or weaknesses. Next, it will describe different factors that influence or discourage offending behaviour while highlighting examples. Finally, it will look at current and future Scottish policy while fitting in the mentorship programme with the Wise Group and organisations who strive for positive changes.

2.2 Reconviction, Recidivism and Desistance

Considerable research on recidivism, reconviction, and desistance has concentrated on finding a solution to change the offender so as to reduce reoffending behaviour while contributing to the public good. For example, there have been numerous studies evaluating the effectiveness of community-based risk management of offenders (Wilson *et al.*, 2007); the impact and consequences of imprisonment (Decker *et al.*, 2015); the effects of stigmatisation on employment (Benson *et al.*, 2011; Young and Powell, 2015); and the role of self-perception when engaging in rehabilitative practices with offenders (Visher and O'Connell, 2012). These authors present compelling theories which could influence reconviction. However, Clarke and Dawson (1999)

assert that without a suitable measure of effectiveness, the validity and reliability of a justice programme is impacted. Traditionally, criminal justice research measure reconviction or reoffending to determine programme success (Clarke and Dawson, 1999; McNeill, 2012). For example, a recent study in Ontario, Canada evaluated the effectiveness of a community-based offender management through the measurement of reconviction or lack thereof (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). However, Clarke and Dawson (1999) and McNeill (2012) claim this to be irrevocably flawed. Reconviction, a relatively easy data set to collect, is the outcome measure of a recorded offence with a successful prosecution of a perceived behaviour that occurs during a specific timeframe (Farrall, 2002; Friendship *et al.*, 2002; McNeill, 2012). Therefore, a straightforward view could define success as the absence of a reconviction and failure if it occurs. This measurement of failure or success is a widely used indicator of the effectiveness of treatments with a focus on the treatment itself rather than the individuals specific response (Creamer and Williams, 1996). An example of this approach is apparent in probation practices where reconviction prediction is being compared to actual reconviction rates to determine the effectiveness of various probation teams and projects (Wilkinson, 1994). A more current example is the usage of the Risk Matrix 2000 with male sex offenders in England, Wales, and Scotland (Grubin, 2011). However, there is a danger in oversimplifying purposes and functions of programmes and policies within the justice system (Garland, 1990) where there is a considerable lack of agreement of what counts as an indicator of success or failure (Hood and Sparks, 1970). Furthermore, reconviction does not consider offensive behaviours that are not discovered nor offences that are reported but not convicted. This shows that sole reliance on reconviction is not a good proxy for measuring success.

Recidivism, reoffending, and reconviction all differ. Recidivism is a vague concept describing the reoccurrence of a previous pattern of criminal behaviour and reoffending occurs with or without discovery. (Maltz, 1984). By solely relying on any of these three conceptually distinct terms, a false-positive result can occur. Falshaw et al. (2003) linked the three as such: recidivism is a broad concept that incorporates reoffending and reconviction. Although recidivism is a better measurement, it is still flawed. Both Hudson (1977) and Maltz (1984) outline it as an ambiguous concept with a set of muddy definitions that cause programmes to be accepted or rejected based on meanings that differ between individuals. In his book, Maltz (1984) expands on this reasoning by linking recidivism and correctional effectiveness; if a programme is

evaluated using recidivism (failure), it implies that the offenders need correcting but, this in turn creates a subtle bias for evaluators who focus their attention on the offenders failure without consideration of the successes nor societal failures that led to an offence. By only recording failures, agencies are unable to determine effectiveness, which often leads to inadequate measurements. For example, you cannot determine the effectiveness of a hospital by measuring the rate of patient discharge from emergency care. Success is never straightforward and should be determined based on positive accomplishments rather than the absence of failures.

In recent literature, the assorted definitions of recidivism have determined the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of parole supervision. Ostermann et al. (2015) and MacKenzie (2006) observed the difficulties created by the usage of diverse definitions of recidivism to determine conclusions of research and individual research studies. Furthermore, the study conducted by Ostermann et al. (2015) highlighted that ambiguous operationalizations of recidivism impacted the conclusion of parole supervision by creating different recidivism rates for one time period. In summary, the effectiveness of parole supervision was directly influence by the selected recidivism rate. This example highlights the flaws and inaccuracies of sole reliance on recidivism as a measurement of success. However, this is not to say that all uses of recidivism are inaccurate; if used in conjunction with other measures of effectiveness, it explains how different policies influence criminal justice (Maltz, 1984). Various studies employ recidivism rates in conjunction with other data sources to determine a variety of offender characteristics within justice programmes (Maguire *et al.*, 1988; Falshaw *et al.*, 2003; Daly *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, recidivism plays a role in evaluating correctional programmes, goals and what works, however, it lacks the capability to provide an answer to the 'black box' question of why a programme works (Lin, 2000; Listwan *et al.*, 2003; Bosker *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the transition to desistance-focused research provides a legitimate topic for understanding why things work (Farrall and Maruna, 2004). This next section highlights why desistance is a better determinant for effectiveness and progress.

The concept of desistance is nothing new. Since the 1930s, researchers have studied how internally led reform creates a life free of offending behaviour. Glueck and Glueck's (1937) research presented the conclusion where aging (maturation) impacts the natural tendency for improved behaviour and generates value for individualised justice and a unique prescription to achieve sustained desistance. Each individual shares

a singular life situation, offending, yet, their particular personal histories influence their actions. Therefore, desistance research, with the influence of offender perspectives, constructs an understanding of how and why programmes work (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). They also add that a desister is an individual who has a voluntarily sustained absence from crime with a long-term commitment to complying with the law. This personalised approach contrasts the more quantitative approach that is used in measuring reconviction and recidivism rates, however, this is not to say that quantitative data is not helpful. On the contrary, it provides the impact of interventions on conviction/incarceration rates (McNeill, 2003).

Maruna (2001) found that ex-offenders who desist share a common psychosocial structure, the belief that they control their future, whereas others conclude their fate includes criminal behaviour. This focus on internal factors contradicts the view that holds external factors as a causation for desistance. Laub and Sampson (2003) argued that informal social controls (marriage, peers, employment and community groups) as well as formal agencies (police and prisons) greatly influence an individual's criminal career during their life. However, for many individuals, both internal and external factors influence their criminal behaviour and desistance. These factors can present themselves as obstacles (for example: drug addiction, homelessness, family troubles, and depression) during an individual's pursuit of desistance (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). In addition, Maruna and Farrall (2004) noted that to further understand desistance, it is helpful to distinguish the difference between primary and secondary desistance. Primary desistance can be described as a short-term offence-free period, whereas secondary desistance is a self-identity change whereas an offender reforms and assumes the role of non-offender. Recently, McNeill (2016) postulates a third concept, *tertiary* desistance, whereas the individual's sense of belonging to a community begins to shift. Furthermore, following Maruna (2001) and Farrall (2002), McNeill (2003) noted that reasons for desistance reside within various elements (Figure 1) where practitioners should engage in outlining the different interfaces on a case-by-case basis 'to learn more from offenders about what persuades them to desist and… the support that they need' (2003, p. 160) to capture the 'internal changes in self-identity and the processes which foster such changes' (Farrall and Calverley, 2006, p. 78). In

short, we must embark on a process to understand the existential perspective; the internal identity change offenders and the processes that lead to it.
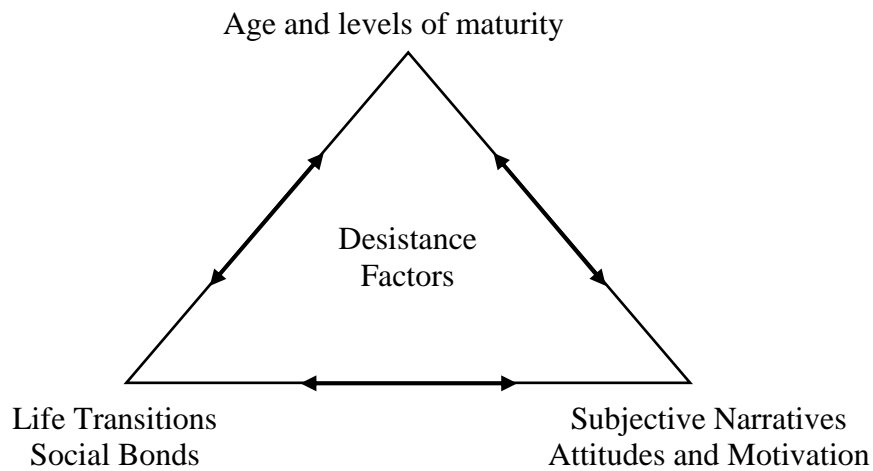
Age and levels of maturity

Desistance
Factors

Life Transitions
Social Bonds

Subjective Narratives
Attitudes and Motivation

Figure 1: Constructing Desistance
Source: McNeill (2003)

2.3 Factors Influencing Desistance

By understanding the conceptually distinct measures (recidivism, reoffending and desistance), research can seek to identify best practices and what works. Evidence-based research is useful in answering this question, however, it does not answer the how and why rehabilitation works for some ex-offenders and fails with others (Maruna, 2001). The merging of desistance theories and literature with reality, academics, policymakers, and service providers can bridge the gap to provide practical assistance to offenders. Nevertheless, desistance and offending are complex situations, symptoms of a wider, fundamental flaw in the system. The following section will outline several factors that impact offending behaviour. They will include stigma and emotional conditions, addiction, rehabilitation, benefits, employability and mentorship.

2.3.1 The Internal Self: From Stigma to Identity

To successfully maintain desistance, ex-offenders need to make sense of their lives whereby they develop a coherent, pro-social identity of themselves to account for and understand their criminal pasts and why that is no longer their lifestyle. However, external stigma with an internalised sense of shame causes offenders to believe they are doomed to deviance (Maruna, 2001). Additionally, as explained by Katz (1988), background factors such as child abuse, low educational attainment, stigma, addictions and long-term criminal behaviour creates persistent offending. Adverse childhood

experiences (emotional, physical, sexual, and substance abuse, physical and emotional neglect, and domestic violence) were associated with a higher risk for criminal behaviour (Smith and Thornberry, 1995; Baglivio *et al.*, 2015, 2016; Levenson *et al.*, 2016; Perez *et al.*, 2016). A recent study of male youths in Scotland links these experiences with violence (Holligan and Deuchar, 2015).

In addition to adverse childhood experiences, stigma is another obstacle that offenders face when attempting to reintegrate into society. Stigma, as defined by Goffman (1963), is an attribute that socially discredits an individual by classifying them as undesirable and tainted. The prevalence and negative association of incarceration has influenced how society views ex-offenders (Pager and Quillian, 2005; Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010). This social phenomenon (Link and Phelan, 2001) is critical and unique to ex-offenders whereby the public perceives it as a result of a character flaw (Young and Powell, 2015). However, not all research shares the same conclusion. Benson *et al.* (2011) contradicts the negative influence of stigma by demonstrating how ex-offenders view stigma as a non-influencing factor in their reintegration. This study presents positive internal factors as a determinant for desistance.

Britain's Home Office commissioned a study to identify factors that led to desistance after imprisonment (Burnett, 1992). Ten years later, a follow-up study was conducted by Burnett and Maruna (2004) which augmented the results by confirming that hope and optimism are predictors of long-term successful outcomes. An additional extension of this hypothesis confirmed that with hope, ex-offenders are able to overcome disappointments after incarceration (LeBel *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, Maruna (2001) noted that desisting offenders held an optimistic control over their lives with strong beliefs about their self-worth. This cognitive self-change 'enables the offender to seize back pride and reassume a law-respecting, other-respecting and self-respecting identity' (Braithwaite and Mugford, 1994).

2.3.2 Handling Addiction

The prison environment is neither supportive nor conducive for prisoners that wish to abstain from using drugs; taking them is a form of sanctuary from an overwhelming environment (Swann and James, 1998) and it has been argued that many of the most vulnerable individuals in society end up incarcerated due to substance abuse (Scott and Codd, 2010). Despite the highly structured, controlled environment of a prison, drug use still occurs due to their delivery through visitors, supplies, prison officers and mail

(Simpler and Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005; Scott and Codd, 2010) and once released, addicted individuals will experience multiple stressors (stigma, housing, employment, the environment, supervisory requirements and family) which increase the likelihood of relapse (Chandler *et al.*, 2009). Society responds to drug usage in a negative manner where public perception of drug users is worse than mental health (Corrigan *et al.*, 2009) and that drug use is a highly stigmatised condition (World Health Organisation, 2001). A recent study found that incarceration did nothing to help prisoners with their substance abuse and that imprisonment was more likely to do harm rather that create positive changes for those where usage had become unmanageable (Ramsay *et al.*, 2005). This finding continued to support the prior statement by Swann and James (1998).

Thus, rather than focusing on imprisonment as a form of crime reduction and a tool to reduce drug usage, the focus should shift to offering support as a way of recovery and ultimately becoming drug-free. Generally, the division between crime and addiction has been dictated by bureaucrats (Maruna, 2001). Within her analysis of the British Drug Policy, Duke (2013) highlighted the shifts in policy and practice between the Conservative government, Labour government and the Coalition government. She found that depending on the era, the drug problem was framed in specific ways and policy shifted between two points, criminalisation of drug policy (link between drugs and crime) and a more holistic approach that emphasised recovery in the community. This holistic approach continues to be a theme for policy makers and researchers in the UK where they tie the theories of desistance with the recovery movement (Best *et al.*, 2017) due to desistance being a study of abstaining from certain behaviours (specifically related to offending) (Maruna, 2001). Changing social networks and developing hope are two ideas that desistance and recovery share (Best *et al.*, 2017) with motivation, as perceived by offenders, is a key component in abstaining from drugs (Gideon, 2010). Bahr *et al.* (2012) reviewed numerous studies and found several different types of drug treatment programs (cognitive-behavioural therapy, drug courts, therapeutic communities and pharmacological drugs such as methadone) as effective tools for changing attitudes. While these programmes have proven results, another perspective highlights addiction is a brain disorder that impacts different brain regions and requires medical treatment (Leshner, 1997, 2001; Chandler *et al.*, 2009; Volkow *et al.*, 2016). In sum, it could be concluded that treating and rehabilitating addicted

offenders is complex and requires input from both health and justice to decrease substance abuse and the associated criminal behaviour.

2.3.3 Imprisonment as a Form of Rehabilitation

Research has highlighted the benefits of educational programmes in prisons; they promote positive behaviour and allow offenders, who lack both formal education and skills, the opportunity to learn (Biswalo, 2011; Rosário *et al.*, 2016). This supports the growing trend of including education and other services to facilitate re-integration. However, obstacles such as funding, facilities and hesitant instructors limit the potential and availability of such programmes (Meyer *et al.*, 2016). Both Roberts (1989) and Gendron and Cavan (1990) found that the inclusion of a training system in prison improved behaviour, self-image, public perception, and work ethic in the inmates. Recent, innovative programmes work to continue these positive changes.

In recent years, Portugal began to offer inmates the ability to complete the nine grades in their education system which provided the opportunity to learn skills, increase both employability and self-esteem, alter the perception of the world around them, and motivate their children to view education as a priority (Rosário *et al.*, 2016). While these findings are limited to a specific culture, they could provide an insight into how educational programmes affect an inmate's relationship with themselves, their family and society. A second example is the education policy in Swaziland. This system targeted reform through the usage of methodological and practical approaches to increase vocational and work-related skills, emotional counselling, and guidance towards adjusting to freedom (Biswalo, 2011). The programmes provided offenders with the tools to improve their lives, however, it was also found that without public value reform (changing public perception and stigmas related to offenders), any gains from these programmes were nullified. Public value is a legitimate idea that has societal support due to its recognised value (Moore, 2014). However, altering public value can be both daunting and complicated and must also be radical to shift the social interpretation and dissociate individuals from the current stigma. Secondary to the findings, Biswalo (2011) elaborated on the expressed desire of inmates to learn self-employment skills to commence personal, income-generating projects. A final example comes from the state of Mississippi in the US. In addition to traditional methods of education (reading and writing), the state offered an entrepreneurship programme where valuable skills (problem-solving, critical thinking and *selling yourself*) boosted

the confidence and self-worth of inmates (Keena and Simmons, 2015). The findings from this study support Cheryl L. Meyer *et al.'s* (2016) observation where an increase in assertiveness, confidence, self-acceptance, and self-awareness decreases re-entry obstacles and could lead to a life of desistance.

The improvements that these programmes provide do have a major limitation that hinders their widespread usage. As all countries, cities, states, etc. are constrained by budgetary decisions, politicians must essentially determine which governmental programmes are maintained and which are retired. Maruna (2001) states that current funding policies fail to provide the needed long-term support for ex-offenders. Many programmes that target the reintegration of ex-offenders compete with others for 12-month contracts and unfortunately, they tend to disappear as quickly as they were created. Without a permanent commitment and investment to community-based reintegration, it is nearly impossible to provide the continuity that ex-offenders need as they face this life changing stage. Scotland though merits closer attention due to the devolution of criminal justice and the penal system, yet, even with this benefit, they maintain one of the highest homicide rates with a reputation for being violent (McAra, 2008). Although this raises concerns, steps are being taken to change the criminal justice system and how it utilises prison sentences. The Scottish Office affirms that imprisonment should only be used for the most serious offenders and take steps toward to usage of community service (McIvor, 1996). This perspective has the potential to impact negativity by changing behaviour that links organised crime and gang activity to violence. Implementing educational/self-esteem programmes, self-employment skills courses and community service for those with short sentences can disrupt the current system and bring about change that is both needed and required to impact offenders, yet, politicians must understand that for transformation to be lasting, funding is required.

2.3.4 Support and Supervision

Within the supervisory role, there are two main distinctions: community supervision which consists of probation officers or anyone that falls within the realm of the public sector and the mentor/peer support role. Bonta et al. (2008) found that probation officers spent too much time focusing on the needs of policymakers and completing other tasks related to their roles versus dedicating time on criminogenic needs such as substance abuse, emotional problems, and employment. This relationship is evident in the

comparison between Scotland and England/Wales where practitioners in England and Wales focused on a target-driven approach emphasised during Thatcherism that directly contrasts the holistic approach utilised in Scotland (Barry, 2000; Burnett and McNeill, 2005). This approach creates a relationship where the mentor becomes a guide, provides support, and makes the experience unique. In their study, Sykes et al. (2014) highlights the link between mentorship and the increase in self-control. Additionally, the case study analysis by Koschmann and Peterson (2013) suggests that a mentor creates various roles to enable successful reintegration. However, without reflection and understanding of the individual differences, the mentoring approach is not for everyone (McCluskey *et al.*, 2004). Yet, many offenders find this relationship helpful during the process of transforming themselves into an ex-offender. For example, research shows that having someone in whom they can confide (Barry, 2013), shares a similar background (Schinkel and Whyte, 2012; LeBel *et al.*, 2015), and creates a sense of purpose (Jackson, 2001; Maruna, 2001) gives hope and belief that the behaviour and person can change.

Two recent studies reflect the importance of similar lived experiences with an individualised approach – namely, the Routes out of Prison (Schinkel and Whyte, 2012) and Wounded Healer (LeBel *et al.*, 2015) – provide strong evidence of its effectiveness in reducing crime and recidivism. The Routes out of Prison, aimed at offenders in the Glasgow area, used Life Coaches, many of whom are former offenders, to support the resettlement of clients back into the community. The Wounded Healer study contributes to the literature through the notion that by having shared characteristics with a recently released offender, a "wounded healer" is able to create a deeper relationship with the potential to transform someone that was once part of the problem into an individual who resists crime. Additionally, many offenders have expressed a desire to be mentored by former ex-offenders (Richie, 2001). This reworking of an offending history creates a source of wisdom and an interest in helping others (LeBel, 2007), provides non-judgemental support (Schinkel and Whyte, 2012), and helps other stigmatised individuals through the reintegration process (Maruna, 2001).

The evidence presents mentorship programmes as a tool to create positive resettlement through shared history, however, upper management or policy creates restricting limitations such as time. Many offenders still need follow-through assistance and someone on their side to provide motivation as they continue their journey (Maruna, 2001). Within the Routes out of Prison programme, Life Coaches expressed

a need for flexibility due to the 'complex and differing needs of the clientele… [since they] take on a variety of roles: sign-poster, advocate, role model, and, at times, the main source of practical and emotional support' (Schinkel and Whyte, 2012, p. 367). The direction of the literature supports the rationale that mentorship builds and fosters a lasting relationship that potentially leads to desistance and with flexibility for prolonged contact, the effectiveness is likely to increase.

2.3.5 Employability

Researchers and those who directly work with ex-offenders both argue and agree that the negative employer attitude and subsequent stigma towards offenders creates a barrier during their job search. Yet, several studies have theorised that employers are willing to hire ex-offenders. For example, Giguere and Dundes's (2002) study indicated that more than half of their employer participants were willing to hire ex-offenders. A more recent study conducted by Atkin and Armstrong found similar results where more than half 'of the respondents agreed or totally agreed that they were willing to hire an ex-offender' (2013, p. 81). However, it is important to not overlook contradicting studies where it was found that although an employer expressed a willingness to hire an ex-offender, the practicality of the situation revealed that an offender would be overlooked if they applied to an open position (Pager and Quillian, 2005). Therefore, it could be theorised that willingness does not guarantee actual behaviour.

Upon release from prison, the search for legitimate employment is a daunting, yet important aspect of re-entry. Much of the criminological research proposes that an inverse relationship exists between crime and employment, suggesting that ex-offenders who obtain gainful employment are at a reduced risk for recidivism (Laub and Sampson, 2003), however, researchers propose that although employment does decrease the likelihood of re-offending, it only increases the time between offences and without supplemental interventions, such as mental support, former offenders will eventually reoffend (Tripodi *et al.*, 2010; Weaver, 2015). Furthermore, numerous barriers exist that prevent individuals with a criminal history to obtain employment such as employer bias and stigma (Graffam *et al.*, 2008; Varghese *et al.*, 2010; Decker *et al.*, 2015; Young and Powell, 2015), 'limited job skills or low levels of motivation' (Atkin and Armstrong, 2013, p. 72) and perceived flaws such as a lack of trust and honesty (Kurlychek *et al.*, 2007). In fact, even when hired, bias and stigmatisation continues to exist as one participant in the Routes out of Prison expressed: '[management] feel that

they can actually treat us like ex-offenders' (Schinkel and Whyte, 2012, p. 364). Because of this bias, many suggest that the process or overall access to a criminal background needs modification.

The rapid advancement of technology has allowed for an increased demand for easily accessible background checks (Blumstein and Nakamura, 2009). Many employers use background checks to assess the character, yet, even when the individual has led a clean life, the records have lingering effects or collateral consequences such as restrictions on the type of profession (Travis, 2002). In response to this, different groups have drawn attention to a relatively new movement, "ban the box," which refers to the removal of the criminal history checkbox on employment applications and delays any queries into prior convictions (Smith, 2014; Baur *et al.*, 2018). Although this does not remove the criminal record, it creates a fair chance for an applicant to be considered based on their skills, strengths and experience (Solinas-Saunders and Stacer, 2015; Vuolo *et al.*, 2017). In the UK, over 100 employers took the step and have signed up to Ban the Box (Business in the Community, 2017). In addition to this promising and important effort, a full range of changes must be made to policy to support ex-offender's successful integration. As found in several 'time to redemption' studies, after 7 to 10 years has elapsed without any conviction or arrest, an ex-offender's criminal history is no longer valuable when predicting a future offense (Weaver, 2018). Therefore, policy must evolve to support both the needs of an employer while understanding that mistakes can be made, but they should not define an entire life.

2.4 Scottish Policy

Currently, the nationalist Scottish Government is seeking to transform the Justice sector by fundamentally changing its approach to offender management. Recent statistics display a drop in custodial sentences by 8% with sentences of three to five months comprising of 35% of all custodial sentences (Scottish Government, 2018) and an average annual cost per prisoner for 2017-2018 of £35,293 excluding capital charges (Scottish Prison Service, 2018). After the passage of the Scotland Act 1998, policy changes related to devolved matters such as criminal justice were aimed at reducing reoffending by creating holistic approaches (McAra, 2008; Barry, 2013). However, not all matters impacting criminal behaviour were devolved; matters such as drug policy are still reserved for the UK parliament. The next sections will highlight both current

and future Scottish justice policy, elaborate on public social partnerships and programmes designed to influence desistance.

2.4.1 Current and Future Scottish Policy

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, originally enacted in 1974, was designed to assist offenders who were not reconvicted for a specified period of time. However, this act does not create rehabilitation opportunities, rather it created a scheme that specifies when an individual's record is concealed. This act though created confusion for those with convictions (Fletcher *et al.*, 2012). Following this, the Scottish Government is attempting to modernise the 1974 Act with the Management of Offenders Bill 2018. The proposal includes reducing the time period in which an individual will have to disclose convictions.

The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, created the foundation for the presumption against short-term prison sentences (three months or less) in favour of community sentences to reduce the number of prisoners. In 2015, the Scottish government held a consultation to determine whether to strengthen the presumption against short-term sentences with results indicating a strong support for an increase beyond three months (Scottish Government, 2016).

Due to social security being a reserved matter, the Welfare Reform Act 2012 impacted Scotland and created a new social security benefit to help eligible individuals with living costs. However, after its introduction, it has faced a myriad of criticisms such as an excessively long waiting period, left claimants worse off, and increased risk of eviction and homelessness (Butler, 2018).

2.4.2 New Routes/Mentorship Programme

Initiatives such as the New Routes programme, a Public Social Partnership (PSP), provides practical one-to-one mentoring to help individuals address practical or personal problems. This specific partnership is delivered by The Wise Group along with Sacro, APEX, and Turning Point Scotland, the Scottish Prison Service and other organisations (Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum, no date). This PSP is funded through the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund which was created by the Scottish Government to focus of preventative spending (Scottish Government, 2014). This Scotland wide programme utilises peer mentors, many of whom share similar experiences with their customers, to provide motivation and self-esteem and navigate

life outside of prison to ensure the best possible opportunities to remain free of criminal activity.

2.4.3 Release Scotland

Release Scotland, a relatively recent body, aims to highlight the employability potential of individuals with criminal convictions. By engaging with the network, employers will better understand the recruitment benefits of hiring ex-offenders, create supportive work environments, and expand their pool of potential candidates (Gates, 2018). Furthermore, they aspire to help Scotland become better, safer, and successful with a growing economy (Release Scotland, 2017).

2.5 Conclusion

The literature suggests that a multitude of factors impacts desistance, yet, the willingness to find what works aims to foster empathy a create second changes for those with criminal records. By understanding the differences between reconviction, recidivism and desistance, policymakers, academics, and third sector organisations can create well-informed decisions and programmes to satisfy both the needs of the publics and offenders. Yet, progress has the potential to be limited due to affecting factors and elements such as negative stigma within the social context, a lack of social services to combat addiction, and reserved matters limiting effective policy. Recent and future advancements in Scottish policy though is aimed at a radical shift in offender management to hopefully enhance the lives of offenders. By acknowledging ownership of the issue, Scotland can impact the return of offenders to the community as functioning members of society. The next chapter will discuss the research methods used in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the operational framework of the research will be described. As outlined in the Literature Review chapter, there is a wide variety of both theoretical and practical reasons that lead an individual to offending behaviour. Initiatives between the Scottish government and third sector organisations has led to the creation of various programmes and collaborations. Combining this and the literature review, the objective of the research was to understand from a personal perspective how both policy and literature impact an ex-offender's future while understanding the unique challenges they face. Therefore, the following two questions will be explored in this study:

Research Questions:
- What factors influence and impact both the positive and negative behaviours in an offender and how do they contribute towards a transformational life change?
- How can Scottish policy effectively change to provide realistic support on an ex-offender's journey towards desistance?

This research involves nine semi-structured, individual face-to-face interviews with individuals who have personal insight into the journey of offenders. The participants come from a variety of backgrounds with overlapping characteristics: six are ex-offenders, eight are mentors, and one is an employer. This variety allows the research to gain a wide-range of perspectives. The value of this study is to provide a practical, personal, and realistic perspective of the hurdles ex-offenders face and findings may be used to create further research to understand the experiences of ex-offenders and how both policy and societal judging takes away freedom and normality.

The following sections will comprise of the research design, both data collection and the selection of participants, data analysis method, as well as additional considerations such as ethics, limitations and my own reflexivity.

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative research and semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate form to gather information from the different groups of individuals. This was due to qualitative research allowing the researcher to explore the world through the

eyes of the participants (Bryman, 2016) and semi-structured interviews allow a general set of questions while using participant responses to bring new information (Lichtman, 2014). This freedom allows interviewees to tell the researcher what is important and relevant and at the same time creates a possibility for follow-up questions to further expand responses and gather in-depth details. Considering the goal of the study, this was regarded to be a strong point whereas structured interviews create standardised information without details nor elaboration (Lichtman, 2014) and is in effect a 'verbally administered questionnaire' (Gillham, 2005, p. 80).

Bryman (2016) offers a widely used assumption that qualitative research provides a more natural approach to how the world operates while uncovering different phenomena. Furthermore, it is used to understand and explore the meanings that individuals assign to a specific social problem (Creswell, 2014). This stance allows the researcher to empower the participants to provide their own individual meaning to an issue which fits with this study.

It has also been suggested that researchers choose qualitative interviewing because the ontological position assumes that people's views and interpretations are meaningful when exploring the properties of reality (Mason, 2002). However, this method does have limitations; it is dependent upon the participants capacity to effectively verbalise and contextualise their experiences. Yet, if the researcher does not treat the findings as a reflection of existing understandings and instead perceives them as outcomes of the interactions between individuals, they can understand the situation and not predict it.

3.3 Data Collection

Interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis due to the nature of the topic and to maintain privacy. Participants were provided with the opportunity to speak freely about their feelings and thoughts, yet the direction was guided by the researcher to limit deviation. Prior to the interviews, the researchers prepared specific questions, but at the same time, the semi-structured nature allows for the flexibility to obtain clarification and significant expansion on an answer. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. This allowed the interviewer to focus on what is being said and provides a more thorough, repeated examination of participant responses (Bryman, 2016). The transcript notation was adapted from Schinkel (2014) (see Appendix 1), and

the following considerations were taken: indication of unintelligible responses, correction of grammatical omissions through the usage of square brackets and verbal 'tics' were removed.

The collaborating organisation provided statistics that are collected at the initial meeting between the mentor and offender, where the offender identifies their needs and goals. The improved situation data is collected at the end of their participation with the programme. This data is relevant to the study because it provides a broad overview of perceived needs and the rate of improvement.

3.4 Selection of Participants

With the support and assistance of The Wise Group, participants were selected from a pre-determined list based on specific characteristics (mentor and offender status). This process was chosen to provide a wide variety of accounts with examples of impacting factors. Their position allowed for the elaboration of customer (The Wise Group labels ex-offenders as customers) experiences with an understanding of current Scottish policy and procedures.

However, this selection could provide limitations (expanded in Section 3.8) as the experiences are described could lack intimate first-hand details. Yet, since the goal is to interpret versus generalisation, this sample can provide sufficient data to answer the research question and aims of the study (Lichtman, 2014). Thus, although there are limitations to participant selection, the collected data is able to provide detailed descriptions of impacting factors with elaboration on needed changes.

3.5 Research Process

Interviews were conducted between 23rd of July and 15th of August 2018 at The Wise Groups facility. This location was selected for the safety of both the researcher and participants. Furthermore, this provided a natural setting and allowed for the usage of private areas (meeting rooms) to conduct interviews. However, not all interviews were conducted in private rooms as some mentors were open about their experiences and chose to hold the interview in a semi-private nook.

After explaining the purpose and scope of the research, each participant was provided with the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form and the researcher obtained consent to conduct the interviews. The duration varied between approximately

30 minutes to 70 minutes and was audio recorded. Participants were aware that they could terminate the interview at any time. No interviews were terminated; however, one interview was interrupted due to a phone call. All participants were eager to share their perceptions including both personal and observed experiences and were free to ask questions at any time during the interview.

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis takes the approach where rich and descriptive data is moved into a form of explanation. For this research, thematic analysis was selected because it allows for the identification of themes related to the research focus without being theoretically bound (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2016). By reading and rereading transcripts, important information about the data is able to be captured and categorised into themes and subthemes (Bryman, 2016).

For this study, recordings were listened to while reading and rereading to determine tonal emphasis on specific sections while identifying the main themes (topics that recurred again and again). Specifically, during analysis, themes were noted on each page and once all readings were complete, the noted themes would be conglomerated into wider thematic categories. This provided broad, overall themes with sub-themes as needed.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee for the University of Glasgow. This research was considered to be both high and low risk. This classification was determined on the following factors: the topic included both sensitive and personal themes and adults with a criminal record were interviewed. However, not all participants were ex-offenders which led to a dual selection of risk. In addition, this study did not fall within the PVG scheme and therefore clearance was not required.

Considering the risk classification, issues such as health, safety, and emotional and psychological distress were carefully prearranged to do no harm to both researcher and participants. By following the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, personal research data was destroyed once data analysis and findings were complete. Also, to further protect anonymity, any identifying instances were removed (see Section 3.3).

As previously mentioned, participants were provided the Consent Form along with the Plain Language Statement.

3.8 Research Limitations

As mentioned in Section 3.4, the selection of participant may be regarded as limitation to this research. The personal experiences from the ex-offenders could differ from recently released individuals due to being desisters for at least 5 to 10 years. Furthermore, their role as a mentor could potentially influence responses when responding to questions related to their past. While the presentation of results from recently released individuals could be more interesting, the participants are able to provide a more thorough elaboration on Scottish policy.

An additional limitation is the lack of interviewed employers. The research was going to include perspectives from employers who hired ex-offenders and those who did not. However, as interviews were conducted, it became apparent that although employment is an important factor, other factors must be resolved first before the individual can commence job searching. Therefore, to maintain focus on the factors that impact desistance, only one employer was interviewed.

3.9 Reflexivity

Social Research is influenced by many factors including researcher reflexivity. In general, reflexivity is an explicit self-consciousness about the social researcher's methods, values, biases and social and political positions in relation to the study and how they influence or implicate both the design and execution (Lichtman, 2014; Bryman, 2016). Research cannot be value-free and therefore the researcher must elaborate on their own expectations and biases to forewarn readers how findings might be influenced. Thus, the following points are my own reflexivity of the study and topic.

As a non-native Glaswegian, I was aware that my inability to understand some intricacies of the accent could influence data. One interview was impacted by this, and thus, the quality of data was affected.

Traditionally, the interviewing process is seen as a power relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Vähäsantanen and Saarinen, 2013). Within this, differences and power inequalities can occur, and researchers utilise different strategies to overcome them such as self-disclosure, the act of sharing ideas, attitudes or

experiences to prompt reciprocal talk in relation to sensitive matters (Abell *et al.*, 2006; Vähäsantanen and Saarinen, 2013). For this research, one instance of self-disclosure occurred; during an interview, I disclosed my own experience of dealing with addiction and how I managed it. The interviewee was openly interested in hearing how my struggles at the time compared with his own and after this exchange, responses became more forthcoming and candid.

A final factor that could potentially impact this study is my own perception of ex-offenders and their prior offending behaviour. At one point, I viewed offenders in a negative manner, however, a friend changed that perception by being both open and honest about their own offending behaviour. This challenged my interpretation of what constitutes an ex-offender. While I now consider myself to be open to understanding others and not judging based on the past, I must be aware of my prior thoughts and not let them cloud any interaction.

Out of all the applied social sciences, criminology has the most challenging relationship to power due to the categorisation, stigmatisation and classification of criminals by a multitude of individuals (Lumsden and Winter, 2014). Thus, the researcher must be reflexive when working with those individuals, especially when *powerful* participants are involved, hence the requirement to be open and honest of any implications.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter described the research methods in the study of policy influence and perception on the future of an ex-offender. The qualitative study involved semi-structured, face-to-face interviews which allowed the researcher to collect data by understanding their lived experiences. Participant selection was done through the assistance of the collaborating organisation, The Wise Group. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the removal of identifying instances, data was secured, and personal information was destroyed; no identification is possible through the presented quotes. Some may regard the participant selection a limitation, however, the data collected is viable to understand the perceptions. This next chapter will present the findings alongside the current literature discussion.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the nine semi-structured, qualitative interviews for the research on the perceptions of an ex-offender's future in Scotland and the impact both mentorship and policy have on desistance (see Chapter 3: Methodology). Seven main themes and their sub-themes were identified, outlined, and analysed from the nine conducted interviews. Below, these themes are presented and discussed along with their relation to the literature review (see Chapter 2: Literature Review).

4.1 Mentorship

Participants recognised the importance of mentorship on ex-offenders (also known as customers) and their transition from prison to the community. They agreed on the positive aspects of mentorship: support, coaching to improve life chances, provide opportunities, and pointing them in the right direction. Each mentor approached the mentor/customer relationship differently based on their own background and experience. Some chose to link their shared experiences, as highlighted in the Wounded Healer study (LeBel *et al.*, 2015), with their mentor role. The rationale for this was summarised by one ex-offender participant:

> *"I want to help people who are in the same situation as I was once in, and to let them see that you can change… I just think it's really, really important that people like myself are employed to work with these kinds of people because… going back to like when I was in and out of prison and offending, there was no mentors and no through care support, there was nothing like that. It was just you were in and then you were out."*

However, not all who were ex-offenders agreed; some selectively chose when to disclose their own criminal background due to the potential of customers not trusting their mentor or consciously using that knowledge against them. Furthermore, they disagreed on how mentorship would have affected them during their criminal years. One participant emphasised that if they had been provided with a similar opportunity, the past 15 to 20 years of their life would have been dramatically different. Yet, the following was expressed during a discussion related to mentorship, and when pressed, they expanded:

> *"I think [mentorship is] a really good thing… [Interviewer: if it had been offered, would you have said yes?] I don't think so, I don't think so. [Why?] I*

don't know… I thought about that before. I don't know, maybe the last sentence, [but] before, never. Maybe the last one, I might have… it might have been different if somebody was there to guide me... but I'm not too sure. I think I had to find that stuff out for myself."

Whilst each mentor chose to approach the relationship from a different perspective, the goals set for each customer were comparable. These expectations were based on a generic baseline assessment of needs which consisted of employment, training and education, housing, drugs and alcohol addiction, mental health, attitude and behaviour, relationships, and physical health, of which they were graded on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest. Furthermore, an action plan was established with timely evaluations to determine progress before discharge from the year-long programme. This quantitative measurement is valuable to present a numerical result; however, it does not encompass all goals. Participants referred to additional goals set by the customer which could include managing and resolving trauma experienced as a child, visiting their children and not facing death again.

Whatever the goal, mentors are required to first build trust. Without trust nor an established relationship, customers, once released from prison, might refrain from continued engagement and eventually the mentor would lose them. One participant recalled a moment when a guarded customer eventually began to talk honestly about their problems:

"One guy I was working with… was quite guarded, giving one-word answers and I just didn't see how this is going to work, but… [I] started to break down the barriers and actually once I got to know him, he had had a lot of adverse childhood experiences and it kinda helped me to understand [him] a bit better… when you break down the barriers, that's the biggest achievement because they don't speak to anyone about how they are feeling and just keep everything bottled up… managing to build the relationship with that guy has been a really big achievement… and has made big changes."

Consistent with Maruna's (2001) and McNeill's (2012) theory of the aetiology of desistance from crime, recognising what led an individual to criminal behaviour is the first advancement towards a reformed life. When asked about their experience of accomplishing trust, they agreed and stressed the importance of honesty, consistency, and integrity for the service to work. Additionally, they expressed that by being

yourself, showing empathy and not giving up, put customers at ease and helped build the relationship. While some customers are open, others have dealt…

> *"...with agencies in the past and they've been let down, and so they're a wee bit guarded… [but] when you approach them quite honestly and say: look, whatever you put in, you'll get out. If you don't put anything in you won't get anything out. Cause that's how it works."*

This reflects on the importance of building a relationship where the ex-offender can have a confidant (Barry, 2013). Furthermore, interviews highlighted the need to motivate customers to continue their progress towards a clean life. Many would review the journey while highlighting the changes they have successfully implemented while others would draw on their own experience to explain how they made it work. Positive changes such as attitude and behaviour were reported when offenders were willing to listen, learn, and engage yet, the motivational push wasn't for everyone:

> *"When they are in prison they've got so many big plans for when they get released… and then as soon as they get back into the community it just all changes because they are thrown back into [the] environment they've just came from, so it can be hard to [keep] them motivated sometimes."*

Persistency and the commitment to give ex-offenders opportunities were driving forces that caused mentors to constantly push their customers towards reform. Yet, as the above participant mentioned, if the individual returns to that environment, some falter and return to their old habits:

> *"As much as you're there and you will walk alongside them the whole way, you can't do it for them."*

While there are many positives in the overall mentorship theme, it has certain negatives. Traditionally, mentors and customers are provided with one year to work together towards desistance, however, situations arise that complicate matters. Some customers return to prison, others stop engaging or their journey is still in progress. Participants reflected on their own experiences with certain clients and wished for the flexibility to extend services for those where it was needed.

These findings correspond with much of the literature outlined in Chapter 2 in the Mentorship section. As Barry (2000) argued, the holistic approach to the mentor relationship helps the ex-offender resolve personal challenges and transition to a responsible member of society. However, creating a bond takes time, but some take longer than others, and without the ability or flexibility to adapt, mentoring will not be

able to create these positive changes in all individuals. Thus, the central explanation here concerns the ability or capability of creating lasting change in offenders in a set time period.

The next sections will highlight key themes from both the interviews and the identified needs during initial meetings held with the customers. The below table (Table 1) compares identified needs and the number of customers (out of 2,399 total customers) who reported a desire to improve.

Needs Identified	Number	Percentage of Total
Housing	1440	60%
Attitude and Behaviour	899	37%
Drugs and Alcohol	1284	54%
Employment	2073	86%
Mental Health	1131	47%
Physical Health	642	27%
Relationship	742	31%
Training and Education	1729	72%

Table 1: Identified Needs of Customers during Initial Transition into Programme

Not all needs will be highlighted in the order they appear on the table, nor were they all discussed. As outlined in Chapter 3: Methodology, this data was provided by the collaborating organisation and outlines the customers perceived needs.

4.2 Drugs, Alcohol and Addiction

All participants attested addiction to drugs and alcohol as a major contributing factor of offending behaviour. However, the provided figures portray a different, perceived value from the viewpoint of the customer. Out of 2,399 customers, only 1,284 (approximately 54%) reported Drugs and Alcohol as a desired need to resolve. From those customers, only 473 (~37%) were able to improve their situation. Out of all identified needs, this factor had the lowest rate of improvement which indicates a failure in the system or a lack of desire to change detrimental habits. One participant who was very critical of current drug and alcohol policy related to offered services said:

"The standard of treatments [are] going down. It's about numbers, it's getting more people on the books, ticking the boxes, getting the database up, but nobody's really getting any [treatment], the addicts and the alcoholics aren't

getting good quality recovery… I think that has to be addressed, but again that's money isn't it?"

The comment implies that MPs and MSPs are more concerned about the numbers than actually providing a valuable service. Another participant elaborated on a customer experience when linking to an addiction service:

"I was working with a guy that was in [a Scottish prison] and he had been using heroin as he went in, got clean in prison, but then when he was coming out, he was like: 'I know I'm going to use again when I'm outside…' He really wanted to get on methadone, so he went to the addiction services and they said they wouldn't put him on it because he had a clean urine sample. He was basically told if he provided two dirty urine samples they would put him on methadone… he ended up going and using heroin and once that happened, that was it, he was back into full-blown addiction… it was just a bit of a shame…"

Many felt that as a consequence of the current policy focus, not enough is being done to provide support. They encourage their customers to stay away from bad company and get involved with local addiction groups to fill their time with beneficial activities. However, some customers, on the other hand, struggle with peer pressure, the widespread availability of drugs and alcohol in accommodation such as hostels and family members who consume alcohol or use drugs. This highlights the need to take a comprehensive approach to tackling addiction.

While they shared views related to drug policy, there was not a unifying answer on the question of behaviour or factors that influenced addiction. There were similarities, such as issues in youth, but the differences depended upon each individuals story. One ex-offender shared his story:

"I went into a children's home and started smoking dope [in my teens]… and then taking downers like Temazepam and Valium… my drug abuse just kinda progressed through every drug until it got to heroin and it just took over. That just took over my whole life… I was addicted to heroin for [15+ years]. Aye, so once I found heroin there was nothing else that really mattered."

In addition, other responses suggested that their customers turned to drugs and alcohol as an escape from home/care system or a coping mechanism for grief and abuse. Furthermore, a respondent added that addiction was so powerful, not even the threat of losing their kids halted the drug usage which potentially links to one participant's personal belief that addiction is a health issue. Despite the struggles of addiction, it can

be overcome, yet, it will be a constant struggle. In one interview, where I disclosed my own personal story of alcohol abuse, the participant shared their constant struggle:

> *See, that's the difference between you and me. You can do that, you've got that ability where you can do that and stop. I've no got that. I've no got that filter. Once I pick it up, that's me, I'm off and running. I used to find it strange at first. See, when I got clean and then I met my [prior partner]. I'd be in [their] house and I would see in the fridge a bottle of wine with a wee bit out of it. That was strange for me, I'd be like how the fu... how can you do that... I would have tanned that full bottle.*

This experience highlights the dangers of addiction, the lifetime of struggles, and the feeling of desperation that causes many individuals to turn to both drugs and alcohol to numb the pain, emotion, and memory. These findings echoed the idea that an overwhelming environment leads to abuse (Swann and James, 1998) and without a proper support mechanism, incarceration will not change the situation (Ramsay *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, if MPs are resolute in fostering abstinence, policy must evolve to fit the needs of today's society while linking in desistance and resist being dictated by bureaucracy.

4.3 Housing

An additional, main factor that influences a lifestyle change is housing. From the provided statistics, approximately 60% (1,440 out of 2,399 customers) identified with this need, with a high rate of improvement; more than three-fourths (78% or 1,128) of the customers were able to progress their situation. Although positive, this dataset is flawed because the process of securing housing is not evaluated. MSPs who use this data to create or change housing policy miss key factors. The current housing situation was explained by multiple participants; once released from prison, those who were not residing with family or friends would have to present homeless. They found the process time-consuming and especially "*soul destroying*" when denied accommodation due to lack of space. One participant described these locations as terrible situations where customers mix back into prior social circles:

> *"A lot of them want to get into accommodation but, then there's no accommodation there... [or] they get offered... these places with people who are taking drugs again, and they're going to get offered it. That is the hardest*

part of it, and if they're really not ready to give it up then they won't, so it's not going to matter what I do. If they're not ready, then they're going to go and take drugs again."

This comment was widely shared by participants with many expressing a need for change as some customers eventually decided to sleep rough. Further expansion highlighted Glasgow's housing situation:

"Glasgow has a big problem with housing, so a lot of the time, if you go to [homeless housing centre] and you're there and register homeless, a lot of people will be told… there is nothing. If they are vulnerable and can't get their point across, they will end up leaving and just sleeping rough"

The commitment and the need for additional housing was found among the majority of participants. On paper, this factor could be reported as a success, however, lived experiences paint a different picture; a system that cannot handle the need nor provide a safe and stable environment for the most vulnerable members of society.

4.4 Stigma and Attitude

Attitude and behaviour are difficult to measure and challenging to accept when change must happen. The statistics show a relatively low number (899 or approximately 37%) of customers who identify this need, yet, this factor has the highest rate of improvement (810 or approximately 90%). While it is not measured, stigma both influences and impacts attitude and behaviour, thus, by understanding this relationship, mentors can create the catalyst for change.

Stigma

The majority of participants named stigma as one the most significant problems for offenders when navigating life and attempting to create a better path. Here, they mentioned that public services staff can inadvertently stigmatise offenders because they are not realising nor understanding why people offend. When asked about these experiences, two participants referred to examples where customers were being treated "*like a bit of dirt*" without regard for dignity nor respect. This was further expanded by one participant:

"[you] feel judged… so what's the point of working with them, that's attitude of people… I've not been in any kind of trouble for say about 10 years now and when

I'm going for jobs, I'm mortified obviously because [of my record] … How do we move forward? It's like… we are 10 years down the line and I'm still paying for that. It's like, when is the label removed from me being an ex-offender?"

The ex-offenders also shared experiences when others would treat them with contempt and claim that their criminal records were grounds for treating them as untrustworthy individuals. This finding supports the conclusions expressed by Young and Powell (2015) and Maruna (2001) where negative perception creates an internalised sense of shame. Once you have this negative label, it's very difficult to shed, it holds people back and is a constant reminder of a past that continues to plant a seed of doubt:

"When you first go into prison… your given a number and they'll tell you: every time you come back, your number will be the same. It is a constant, so you never have to worry about that. That will always be your number. So, the subliminal message is: I will expect you to come back. It starts as early as that. You're worth nothing, you're not going to amount to anything. This is your life."

One common expressed theme was the need for understanding that a vast majority of perpetrators have, at some point, been a victim and this issue led them to crime. As stated in Section 4.2, many offenders have experienced adverse situations in their youth which causes addition and from that, society stigmatises them without understanding their pain. Therefore, one participant proposed:

"People aren't born criminals. They aren't born bad. No one is born bad; life gets in the way and life has turns and twists that take you to certain areas. So, we cannot judge people. We have to understand that they got to where they got for whatever reason. If we can unpick what that reason is and help them with it, then they will be in a position to start changing."

Everybody deserves a second chance, or even a third chance. All participants wished that society would cease judging someone based on their past when you don't know their story and understand that mistakes can happen. Everybody is entitled to move on with their life.

Attitude

Attitude, often the result of experiences and upbringing, is the inclination to respond negatively or positively towards a certain situation, individual or idea. For the ex-offender, attitude plays a vital role. It is their journey and by changing their attitude, they can progress towards permanent desistance. As highlighted previously, the root

cause creates the attitude shift, society breaks them down and lowers self-worth, drugs to mask the trauma leads to addiction which leads to offending and the cycle continues as they get sent and subsequently released back into the same environment. Many agree that adverse childhood experiences lead to offending behaviour which directly supports the findings by Baglivio *et al.* (2015). One participant linked root cause of offending with adverse childhood experiences:

> *"A lot of them are victims as well, of maybe sexual abuse, or beaten up by their parents or they've been in care, so I think more of an understanding about the root causes and why a person becomes an offender… before just throwing [them] in prison and then expecting them to come out and survive in the world… they have had quite chaotic lifestyles… and I think it is just build-up of what they have been through when they were younger"*

It was agreed that this lifestyle leads to vulnerability and many felt their customers were just trying to survive their youth years. Furthermore, some cited their own experiences and believed that the thirteen to fifteen-year-old range is extremely critical in teaching right from wrong and some linked traumatic events in that time frame to feelings of self-loathing and a desire to commit suicide.

The past though, does not have to define their future. Many mentors motivate their customers with the power of example, kind words to build hope, and empowering them by giving them choices when their past was excessively institutionalised, and choices were rare. This self-esteem boost overcomes the negativity of others who say: you will never do anything with your life, nor amount to anything. One example of a self-esteem boost was shared:

> *"one [customer] that I got whose teeth are really bad and it affects [them], I went to the dentist with [them] you know, just went and said come on we'll go to the dentist they'll help you. So, [they're getting their] teeth fixed and that alone, you'll look at it, and you'll see that's what you need when you're feeling lonely… So, if it's that wee small thing that might give you a bit of confidence back, great, do it."*

The commitment and passion to boost self-esteem, confidence and self-worth greatly helps the ex-offender on their journey. The participants viewed this encouragement and empowerment as vital in changing the attitude of their customers. By changing the attitude and self-perception, customers feel worthy and their motivation to transform greatly increases.

Clarity towards Desistance

Many claimed that the aha moment is the catalyst for the attitude to change. Some of them described moments where the thought process evolved with desires to "*get clean, sober, and get a job*" and turn their life around. Furthermore, some linked the halting of financial support from family as a motivating factor and "*wee lightbulb moment.*" One participant elaborated on a rock bottom moment:

> "*See, maybe you have been working with someone, and they will end up back in prison. Then you will go up and see them and they will be like: oh god. They are almost ashamed to see you and they will be like: I can't, I can't do this anymore. But, I think for each individual [it's] different because… it will depend [on] when they hit complete Rock Bottom.*"

Another participant shared their personal experience with reaching that moment and deciding it was time to change:

> "*I had a number of attempts at trying to get my act together… I was sleeping rough, I was sleeping under [a bridge in Scotland]. I was sleeping rough under there and just wanted to kinda die. That's where I was at. Wanted to die… When I was under that bridge, it was like: I cannot do this anymore… What do I need to do here? So, I had to obviously start working through stuff, through my past. That's what I've done.*"

This moment of clarity allows offenders to reach that point in life where they want to change and start the path towards desistance. Participants agreed that there will be bumps along the road, but if offenders maintain the will to be better, the past does not have to stay in the present or be part of their future lives.

4.5 Employment

Most participants would agree that employment is generally an end goal; customers have trauma and addictions that must be dealt with first before the search for employment. A criminal record is challenging to overcome; they face multiple barriers and the stigmatisation that individuals with convictions are untrustworthy (Kurlychek *et al.*, 2007). As the literature highlighted (see Section 2.3.6), the increase in available of background checks impedes employment; participants find that many employers do

not provide offenders with opportunities nor risk assessments with a trial period. This can lead to disheartening moments:

> *"I was actively seeking employment and I was applying for jobs, but I wasn't getting any luck… I never had any qualifications… [and] it always comes back to my criminal convictions. It always comes back to that kind of stuff… I was fortunate enough to work [with a Scottish Organisation], so they got a chance to see what I was like as an employee… [but] because of my previous convictions… I had to leave… It was hard. That was my first ever job… I struggled trying to get a job after that."*

Similar moments were echoed by multiple participants. Many though take the advice from their mentors and continue to persevere; one day, someone will give them that chance. However, others are more pessimistic and suggest that some employers look at two similar applications and if one has a conviction, they are certain "*that's going in the shredder.*" This viewpoint though is not unfounded as it supports the practicality of many situations when offenders apply for employment (Pager and Quillian, 2005). One participant shared a rebuttal for those employers who do not employ ex-offenders:

> *"I think they should try to lose their fear of hiring ex-offenders. I think it's a fear and an ignorance that causes this problem… You have to see the individual, not what their history was… Employers need to understand they're missing out on talent… We've got this Brexit thing going on and it's going to cause a labour shortage… How do employers expect to fill that gap when they are already precluding a huge percentage of the population because they've got criminal records? That makes no sense... Those ex-offenders that I [work with] work harder, smarter, longer…"*

This comment directly supports the findings of Baur *et al.* (2018) who claim that ex-offenders have the potential to be exceptional employees. Although employment struggles exist, participants named labouring jobs, such as construction, an opportunity for ex-offenders to obtain income in a legal way. Many of the customers go into construction because they have the CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) Card and they do not have to disclose their criminal record. Furthermore, in construction, they are only concerned with your physical capability to complete the job and if done well, they keep on the payroll.

Although this one opportunity for gainful employment, some participants have highlighted that MSPs can change policy to provide more opportunity. This was

emphasised by one annoyed participant who stated that council authorities will not hire ex-offenders, not even for janitorial positions. Furthermore, some added the creation of trial weeks would allow employers to consider an applicant before offering full-time employment. Overall, the situation has improved for some, but it could do a lot better so that individuals who want to be productive members of society are not held back by their conviction.

4.6 Policy

Writing policy is a complex process, and many participants consider certain, current policies ineffective. Civil Servants and policymakers who have never experienced the situations faced by offenders are inadequate when attempting to write effective polices because they do not understand how their policies affect the people they are writing about. MSPs should observe and think differently:

> *"Maybe actually come out and see what it's like in the real world... They're making decisions based on some evidence they get from other people who aren't actually out there working, or actually out there speaking and dealing with it all. Get in touch with real life... It's not black and white... Go and see what it's like for somebody, see how hard it is..."*

Practical policy allows for the delivery of effective services and obtaining the transition from prison into the community without reoffending. Furthermore, by focusing on rehabilitation and understanding root causes, it would make a massive difference instead of sentencing someone to prison. Policy has to provide the opportunity to create the transformational change which in turn will reduce prison population and the cost. Through this, society benefits and becomes safer.

For change to happen, other factors also need support or modification. One participant mentioned the need for social worker support; many are led by policy and procedure which does not create an environment conducive for proactive action and instead causes a *"horrendous"* workload. While this point was shared, most participants expressed a desire to modify the mentorship programme. Currently, mentors work with customers for one year, yet for some, that is not enough time:

> *"You're bonding with somebody and they're starting to share the stuff with you and then it's like.... That's all were funded for, we're only funded to work with*

them for twelve months… You feel as if you're just getting to know them and

then it's: I'm leaving you now."

Multiple participants expressed the desire for flexibility; the opportunity to extend a few extra months to reach the end of the journey. They understand the limits of funding, however, if the Scottish Government wants a programme to be effective, they must be willing to fund it. Participants further added a wish to see funding increase for families affected by imprisonment, mental health, addictions, and youth programmes in schools.

Disclosure

The most frequent answer for needed policy change was the disclosure system as many felt the constant requirement to disclose convictions held individuals back by creating a permanent label. This is especially detrimental for those who have been clean for over twenty years, yet, they still face that barrier. If policymakers consider disclosure from an alternative perspective, they would understand:

"Disclosures are a big barrier because more and more employers seem to be asking for disclosures. It will say on job applications: have you got any convictions in the last 10 years? So, I think if after a certain period of time they've not offended again, and they are trying to better themselves, it would be good if it wasn't so easily accessible anymore because it's holding them back and giving them a label."

Of course, not all convictions should cease being disclosed. Participants agreed that serious convictions such as child abuse should remain for a lengthy time frame. However, offences that were done when you *"were young and stupid"* should be 'hidden' from society.

For convictions that must remain, participants were asked for their thoughts related to Release Scotland or employers leading by example. Many viewed this as a positive for offenders, however, some argued that for Release Scotland to be effective, it would be a lengthy timeframe. The concept was well received, but there were concerns regarding its execution and impact. Furthermore, it was added that:

"The Scottish government could play a huge role… to try and get people to think differently about recruitment and individuals with conviction. However, unless Scottish government start[s] to employ people with convictions and say: this works, you can't tell other people to do it, unless you do it yourself and tell the story of the successes"

The disclosure process will require changes and consultation from different stakeholders, yet, there was a general, positive consensus that MSPs can do more for offenders and this barrier.

Excess Prison and Mentoring

Many participants contend that prison sentences are being overused, especially for individuals with mental health issues. Also, short-term prison sentences, six months or less, ruins their lives, especially when they look for employment. Prison is not the answer, "*it doesn't work. It's just a revolving door*" that does not solve anything:

> *"I think from my point of view I think that they are too quick to give someone a criminal conviction… it would be good if they would link in with services like ours. If they get arrested, instead of giving them a custodial sentence, [you say:] you need to work with this organisation for a year… Once they start getting into that cycle, it is so hard for them to get out of it.*

When questioned about an alternative to incarceration, many said that services similar to the mentorship programme should be used, especially with young individuals. Participants understood funding constraints but felt that it would be more economical to sentence an offender to a community sentence with the requirement to complete certain tasks with an organisation versus a prison sentence. To summarise the findings of this subtheme, one participant stated this:

> *"We're hoping [that] here in Scotland the minimum sentence is going to be 12 months. Do away with the 3 months, 6 months; that's just a waste of everybody's time, a waste of money. The [offenders] we're working with get 3 or 4-month sentences and… they're no going to change. They're in and out like yo-yos, whereas if they had a 12 months minimum sentence… we could have a system where the judge would say: ok, I'm not going to send you to prison, but you have to… sign up… get a mentor and buy into the program… if you don't then you go to prison."*

4.7 Benefits

The benefits system was highlighted by most participants as a key area needing improvement. It was described as a difficult to negotiate mess. Claims are setup by phone, many times with the mentor's phone, and take a painfully long time (sometimes

weeks). Furthermore, many felt that Universal Credits was problematic to begin with and do not understand how the government can say: *"it's the best thing since sliced bread."* This process was summed up by one participant:

> *"It's a pain, just takes too long. They're coming out of prison… they've got no money. So, if you've got somebody who [has] no money, they're going to do what they can to get [money]… This process, it's draining, and it takes so long to get through at the centre. There's got to be a better way… If they know somebody's been released, the benefits claim should be able to be done in the prison a couple of days before..."*

Other respondents emphasised the lack of communication between the services; many will have an addiction worker, mental health worker, social worker, housing worker, and mentor. This absence of continuity causes services to contradict one another, and the subsequent stress leads many individuals to prefer prison in order to avoid dealing with everything. In addition, it was found that if a customer went to addiction services but also had a mental health issue, addiction would send them to mental health and vice versa; neither service was taking responsibility. Thus, many concluded the need to simplify benefits.

In order to claim benefits, claimants must have a bank account. However, opening an account is a tough, massive task for most offenders because many do not have IDs. Some of the customers spent weeks obtaining first an ID to subsequently open account to arrange benefits. To understand the complexity and challenges of banking, one participant assessed it in the following way:

> *"Bank accounts is one of the biggest issues that we have got because, most of the guys don't have ID. So, when they are coming out of prison to claim benefits, they need to have a bank account that they can put money into. Most of them don't have a bank account and trying to get one without any ID is a bit of a nightmare because… they can't set up the benefits so that is a big issue."*

This highlights the complexity in navigating benefits while emphasising the need for process modification and simplification. As stated by participants, there has to be a better way.

4.8 Conclusion

Although Scottish government and third sector organisations are working towards continued desistance with offenders, the need for this research was justified by the necessity for additional policy changes. As it appears, changes within Scottish policy are happening, however, not at the desired rate.

The thorough and comprehensive responses provided by the participants confirms the necessity for policy to evolve and support the transitional changes of offenders. Participants elaborated on different factors that impact desistance which included mentorship, drug and alcohol addition, housing, stigma, employment, Scottish policy and benefits. All emphasised the need for a comprehensive modification to policy not only related to imprisonment and imposed sentences, but also to how the young people of Scotland are disenfranchised when they require support in handling traumatic experiences, peer pressure, and addiction. They speak broadly on the need for a cultural shift to reduce the stigmatisation that negatively impacts offenders and the time needed to educate employers that individuals with a criminal record can make excellent employees given the opportunity. Many critical insights urge changes to promptly happen to incite desistance.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Although the literature in criminology is substantial, especially relating to theories and studies that measure the impact of factors on criminal behaviour, the academic research related to first-hand advice remains limited. Therefore, by exploring lived experiences and placing participants in the role of policymaker, this study is interesting as Scotland embarks on a journey to establish strong and effective policy, reform disclosures, and influence public perception.

The research questions for this study examined how a wide-range of factors including addictions, childhood experiences, mentorship, and benefits positively and negatively impacts criminal behaviour and how Scottish policy can influence them to encourage desistance. It became apparent with the nine face-to-face interviews that quick-fix solutions do not exist; fundamental changes must first happen to find solutions for individuals who are socially and economically disengaged.

Drawing from the literature review and the data acquired from the interviews, the following findings were formulated. When dealing with ex-offenders, those who describe them as careless with low aspirations do not understand their reality nor personal situation. These issues cannot be wholly dealt with by using incarceration as a form of rehabilitation. The bleak view of their future is soundly based on the life chances of people like them. The insight shared by one participant exemplifies this:

> *"Throwing [them] in prison and then expecting them to come out and survive in the world… they have had quite chaotic lifestyles…"*

Participants invoke the need for understanding and awareness of the real world of ex-offenders through observation or active consultations before writing policy.

This is not to say that all findings were bleak. Positive aspects such as mentorship, attitude change and successful attainment of goals builds self-esteem and a sense of hope in the individual. Additionally, recent Scottish Government initiatives such as the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill and proposed changes to the Presumption Against Short-Term Sentences takes responsibility and ownership of problems with the goal of improving the lives of ex-offenders in Scotland who are currently marginalised when it relates to employment and opportunities.

The research further highlights the call for flexibility to tailor needs to meet those of the individual. There needs to be more choices and better services to overcome deeply impactful factors such as addiction and adverse childhood experiences. Yet,

without collusion between different areas of the public sector, the Scottish Government will struggle to create a comprehensive solution; an understanding of the multi-dimensional complexity of offending behaviour needs to first happen.

As for the implications for further research, this study could be expanded to include recently released offenders, more mentors, and representatives from the business sector to elaborate on needs, limitations and doubts. This additional research could result in more precise recommendations for the Scottish government to advance policy and create a better Scotland.

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Appendix 1: Transcript Notation

As outlined in Section 3.3, the following transcript notation was adapted from Schinkel (2014):

(.)	pause
(???)	unintelligible
…	sentence break
[laughs]	non-verbal expressions
[location]	generic labels for specific locations, names, customers and any other identifying instance to protect anonymity or addition of words to resolve grammatical errors