

## CHAPTER ONE

# Introduction

### PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDEBOOK

Over the years, the three of us have been actively involved in research with offenders and the people who attempt to control them through the correctional system. This means we often talk to offenders and others in the system and think about their lives. While many criminologists study offenders, offending, and its consequences, fewer actually journey into the correctional world. Indeed, this is not something that researchers are actively encouraged to do in some academic realms. Beyond our traditional doctoral studies, we received no formal training to prepare us for the exciting and challenging experiences associated with encountering correctional populations. Yet, along the way, we have learned for ourselves many valuable—and sometimes painful—lessons. Sometimes we learned them through trial and error, and other times we learned from researchers more experienced than we were. These are the kind of lessons that are generally absent from textbooks and graduate-level

courses—the kind of lessons (or stories) that are often shared among scholars after hours over coffee or cocktails.

Our motivation for sharing these lessons in this book is to help equip people with the knowledge we have accumulated in our combined sixty-plus years of experience. We hope this book will encourage more people to do this kind of research by making it more approachable with fewer headaches. This book is particularly ideal for (1) scholars who are just beginning to conduct research with correctional populations, such as graduate students, faculty, and researchers, and (2) practitioners in correctional institutions interested in partnering with researchers to conduct research within their agencies or institutions. The book also is ideal as a supplemental text in graduate courses (e.g., general research methods, program evaluation, or corrections).

IMPORTANCE OF DOING RESEARCH  
WITH CORRECTIONAL POPULATIONS  
AND AGENCIES

For those interested in understanding offenders and reducing crime (e.g., politicians, academicians, and practitioners), studying the sources of the problem—the offenders and the ways we currently attempt to change their lives—often sounds logical and practical. Yet despite the massive correctional population, it can be extremely challenging (yet critically important) to access both offenders and the correctional agencies that monitor them. The following excerpt by John Hepburn (2013, 2) perfectly highlights what it is like to “get dirty” with original data collection with correctional populations:

Primary data collection requires that we leave the relatively sanitized and disinfected environment of the university and the clean routines of our offices to enter into the world of those we study. Through primary data collection, we glimpse the setting of our research, hear the sounds of the prisons, inhale the smells of the jails, observe the passing of rule violators and rule enforcers alike. We observe everyday activities, we “feel” the levels of tension, mistrust, and hostility, and we gain insights into the complexities of the relationships within the organization and among its personnel. We celebrate the fact that we emerge from the correctional agency or police department with both the data we sought and a greater knowledge and understanding of the working and living conditions of those we are studying.

So, *how* does one do this kind of research?

This book takes a practical “nuts and bolts” approach to explaining how to do research with correctional populations while recognizing that there are substantial differences across correctional facilities and populations. The approaches we use in various situations and encounters are by no means exhaustive of the many appropriate and successful routes to navigating research in the correctional world. Rather, they are examples of the lessons we have learned personally as we have navigated our research projects in correctional environments over the years. Moreover, following the advice we outline in this book will certainly not guarantee that readers experience the same outcomes, challenges, and enjoyment we have over the years. As readers undoubtedly have experienced firsthand already, the real world is riddled with infinite surprises. Working with correctional populations is like most things in life: it is an adventure best enjoyed along the way, not just at the finish line.

PREVALENCE OF PEOPLE UNDER  
CORRECTIONAL CONTROL

A large number of people are under supervision within the correctional system, making this an important group of people for criminologists to study. At last count, nearly *seven million people* were incarcerated or under community supervision in the United States (Kaeble et al. 2015). Before talking about the nuts and bolts of doing field research in corrections, we discuss what statistics show about the different population groups that those interested in corrections might study.

*Jails and the Jail Population*

Jails incarcerate people in the “short term,” meaning usually less than one year. Jails are often transient places because the average length of time people spend in jails is twenty-three days (Minton et al. 2015). There are approximately 3,000 local jails, a dozen federal jails, and 80 jails in Indian Country (Minton 2011). Jails incarcerate people who have been convicted of a crime and who are serving a short-term sentence as well as people who are not convicted (70 percent). Of the jail inmates who have been convicted, 22 percent are there for violent crime, 25 percent for property crime, 23 percent for drug crime, and 30 percent for public order offenses (Prison Policy Initiative 2016).

At last count, local jails in the United States admitted *12 million* people over the course of one year, with an average daily population of three quarters of a million people (Minton et al. 2015). Nearly another 10,000 American Indians and Alaskan Natives were incarcerated in jails in Indian Country (Minton 2011). The majority of local jail inmates are adults age eighteen

or older (99 percent). The juvenile population (under eighteen years old) within adult jails is very small (1 percent) and has been significantly decreasing since 1999. Of the juveniles who are incarcerated in jails, most are held while charged as adults (84 percent). The majority of jail inmates are men (86 percent), although the number of women in jails has been increasing since 1999. In terms of race, jails incarcerate 47 percent whites, 34 percent blacks, 16 percent Hispanics, 1 percent American Indians, and 2 percent other races (Minton et al. 2015).

### *Prisons and the Prison Population*

Prisons incarcerate people on more of a long-term basis, meaning typically longer than one year—and sometimes for a lifetime. The average amount of time prison inmates are incarcerated is 38.5 months (Adams et al. 2010). Prisons are operated by each state, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the U.S. military, and private companies. There are 1,821 prisons in the United States, 23 percent of which are private. Most are state-run, with the remaining 6 percent federal (Stephan 2008).

As of the end of 2014, there were more than 1.5 million people incarcerated in state and federal prisons, mostly in public prisons (91 percent). Of the men in prison, 37 percent were black, 32 percent white, and 22 percent Hispanic. Imprisonment differs greatly based on race, with 2.7 percent of all black males, 1.1 percent of all Hispanic males, and 0.5 percent of all white males in prison. A similar pattern appears for race for women as for men. The number of people in prisons has been decreasing slightly each year since 2007, and the changes since that year resulted in an overall 0.3 percent decrease over the time period (Kaebler et al. 2015). Rates of imprisonment vary greatly by state, and they have

also decreased over the last decade. At last known count, 54 percent of people in prison in 2014 were serving time for violent offenses, 19.3 percent for property offenses, 15.7 percent for drug offenses, and 11 percent for public order offenders (e.g., weapons law violations and driving under the influence). About 8 percent of state and federal prison inmates were veterans, of which 99 percent were male (Bronson, Carson, and Noonan 2015).

### *Parole and Probation Population*

The probation population is the largest group of people under correctional control. At the end of 2014, about 70 percent of the people under correctional control were supervised in the community, meaning on probation (56 percent) or parole. Since 2007 the overall number of offenders supervised in the community decreased due to declining numbers on probation, despite the increase in the number of people on parole. In 2014, there were about 4.7 million supervised offenders in the community (Kaebler et al. 2015). People on probation (75 percent) and parole (88 percent) were more likely to be male. Comparing probation to parole, there were more whites (54 percent vs. 43 percent, respectively) than blacks (30 percent vs. 38 percent), Hispanics (14 percent vs. 17 percent) or others (2 percent for both groups). In terms of offenses, probationers and parolees committed violent offenses (19 percent vs. 29 percent), property offenses (29 percent vs. 22 percent), and drug crimes (25 percent vs. 32 percent) (Herberman and Bonczar 2014).

### *Juvenile Facilities and Population*

Although jails and prisons often have more common characteristics generally in terms of structure and design, juvenile correc-

tional facilities vary widely in design, style, size, staff, and program offerings. About 51 percent of facilities are public and the other 49 percent are operated by either nonprofit or for-profit organizations (about 12 percent are for-profit). As of 2012, there were about 2,547 juvenile facilities, housing 57,190 offenders under the age of twenty-one on the day of data collection.<sup>1</sup> Most of these youths are in placements that screen them for educational, substance abuse, and mental health needs (Sickmund and Puzanchera 2014), which may be important sources of existing data for researchers.

Instead of “jail” or “prison,” juvenile facilities are often collectively called “residential placement” and can include halls, detention centers, reception and diagnostic centers, shelters, group homes, ranches or wilderness camps, training schools, and residential treatment facilities (Hockenberry, Sickmund, and Sladky 2015). Juvenile institutions also vary in terms of their level of security. For example, while most lock youths in their rooms at least part of the day, often at night, a small percentage of institutions do not secure youths in the areas where they sleep, even at night. Moreover, while some facilities (about one-quarter) have security features that resemble adult correctional institutions (e.g., fences and razor wire), others do not even lock doors and have no fences (e.g., about 80 percent of group homes).

It is important to remember that, like adult offenders, more juvenile offenders (54 percent, in 2013) are sentenced to probation

1. Depending on the state, juvenile institutions can house youths beyond the age of 18, as long as they were sentenced as juveniles. For example, the upper age over which juvenile courts can maintain jurisdiction for disposition in California, Hawaii, New Jersey, and Tennessee is 24. In contrast, in seven states, 18 years of age is the upper limit. In Mississippi, the upper age is 19, and in 31 states and Washington, DC, the upper age is 20. Florida and Vermont allow juveniles to be held until 21 while Kansas puts the upper age at 22. Still a few other states allow jurisdiction to continue until the disposition is complete (Sickmund and Puzanchera 2014).

than facilities (Hockenberry and Puzzanchera 2015). This means that focusing only on institutionalized youths ignores more than half of the juvenile correctional population. Although the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is currently funding the Census of Juvenile Probation Offices in order to learn more about juvenile probation, there is actually little current national information on probation officers, the numbers of juveniles on probation, or the particulars of their sentences (see OJJDP 2016). Still, these youths are an important group of juvenile correctional clients, and they—along with their supervising agencies and officers—can provide a rich source of information for researchers.

### *Correctional Officers*

Nationally, jails employ nearly 200,000 correctional officers ( $n = 173,900$ ), of which most are male (71 percent; Minton et al. 2015). The last known count shows that federal and state prisons employed 295,261 officers, 10,769 administrators, 51,993 clerical/maintenance staff, 11,526 educational workers, 46,016 professional/technical employees, and an additional 29,489 other (unidentified) employees (Stephan, 2008). Correctional officers are often exposed to stressful situations given job demands and the risk of victimization. A recent study found that 36 percent of prison correctional officers felt tense or anxious while at work, although the vast majority of officers reported feeling “generally pretty calm on their shift” (Steiner and Wooldredge 2015, 809). Jail staff face similar situations. Jail staff report that the danger they experience on the job is moderately high (Lambert et al. 2004). The daily shift for correctional officers and inmates is structured in large part by daily routines. For example, each jail and prison typically



follows a predictable schedule with planned inmate counts, meals, recreation, religious services, counseling, and education services.<sup>2</sup> Of course, there also are a myriad of unplanned events that can and do arise in correctional institutions, including but not limited to physical altercations, injuries, shakedowns, and medical emergencies. Data collection and researcher's presence in jails must fit into the facility's planned and unplanned schedule of events because correctional institutions are highly structured environments that cannot easily change their daily routines to accommodate researchers. Yet, staff are often willing to make arrangements for researchers to collect data among inmates with minimal disruption to the typical daily events at the facility.

#### OUR EXPERIENCES CONDUCTING RESEARCH WITH CORRECTIONAL POPULATIONS

Before discussing the nuts and bolts of the lessons we have learned over the years, we thought it might be useful to give readers some background on our research endeavors that inform this work to provide some context regarding the tips we share.

Kathleen A. Fox is an associate professor at Arizona State University. Much of her research examines the victimization of offenders, especially among those who are incarcerated. She has personally interviewed prison inmates, read the details of prison inmates' crimes buried within their files, surveyed jail inmates across fourteen different jails, and examined the official records of

2. While many jails offer services for inmates, there are many challenges with service delivery in an institutional setting, especially one in which clients (inmates) are present for short periods of time. For example, programs and services in jails and prisons must have consistent agency and personnel support, strong evaluation designs, funding, and adequate time to execute (Tims and Leukfield 1992).

incarcerated juvenile gang members as they reentered their communities. She has lead teams of researchers and research assistants, received grant funding, gained access to correctional populations, and maintained positive relationships with correctional agencies. All of this occurred when she was an undergraduate student, doctoral student, and pretenure assistant professor at a Research I university. Her experience underscores the point that while collecting original data is very time consuming, it also can be compatible with (even complementary to) the constraints of one's other demanding career goals, including the race toward tenure.

Jodi Lane has been a professor at the University of Florida since 1999 and generally studies fear of crime and other attitudes toward the justice system and juvenile corrections. She has worked on two major grant-funded research projects studying juvenile correctional populations, as well as a number of other unfunded projects involving offenders and justice system personnel. Most recently, she was a principal investigator on an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) project designed to evaluate the implementation of faith-based programming in juvenile correctional facilities (2004–2008). She also was a researcher on the RAND Corporation study of the South Oxnard Challenge Project in the late 1990s, using experimental methods to evaluate a multi-agency approach to serving youth on probation. While in graduate school during the early to mid-1990s, she was a project researcher on the federally funded evaluation of the Orange County (California) Gang Incident Tracking System, working with twenty-two police agencies to collect gang data. In addition, she has supervised and collaborated with multiple graduate students on projects involving correctional populations and staff, especially those in jails, work release, and on probation and parole.

Susan Turner is a professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). Trained as a social psychologist, she also serves as director of the Center for Evidence-Based Corrections. Turner worked at the RAND Corporation for over twenty years before she entered academia. Over her career, she has led a variety of research projects including studies on racial disparity, field experiments of private sector alternatives for serious juvenile offenders, work release, day fines, and a fourteen-site randomized design evaluation of intensive supervision probation with nearly two thousand offenders. Turner's areas of expertise include the design and implementation of randomized field experiments and research collaborations with state and local justice agencies. At UCI, she has assisted the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in the development and validation of a risk assessment tool as well as evaluations of targeted parole programs. She is also involved with a number of organizations evaluating the impact of Arts in Corrections programs on correctional institutions and offenders.

#### HOW THIS GUIDEBOOK IS ORGANIZED

Following this introductory chapter, this book is organized into four substantive chapters. Chapter 2, "Gaining Access to and Building Rapport with Correctional Populations," presents tips for (a) identifying who grants access to correctional populations, (b) how to ask for permission to access correctional populations, (b) typical steps needed to obtain permission, (c) when to obtain access in conjunction with other research tasks, (d) convincing staff members to buy in to the research, (e) convincing the target population to participate, and (f) improving participation

rates among offenders, correctional staff, and families of juvenile clients.

The third chapter, “The Types of Correctional Data That Can Be Collected,” describes (a) existing major national data sources, (b) using existing correctional administrative data, (c) pros and cons of collecting your own data (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations), (d) program evaluation, (e) collaborating with agencies for hybrid data collection, (f) how to measure recidivism, and (g) data analysis skills needed for different types of data gathering.

The fourth chapter, “Informed Consent Process and Research Ethics,” focuses on (a) institutional review board approval for different types of data gathering, (b) how to avoid harm to client participants, correctional staff, and researchers, (c) safety of the research team inside correctional facilities, (d) balancing participant benefits with researcher safety, (e) what to do if an inmate touches you, (f) what to do if you are accidentally locked inside a dorm alone with inmates, (g) safety when researching community samples, (h) how to avoid coercion of participants, (i) how to protect participants’ identities, (j) parental consent/assent: gaining permission and maintaining access to conduct research on juvenile correctional populations, (k) deception and disclosure, (e.g., ethics of deception, incomplete disclosure as an alternative to deception, and disclosing to participants other information related to the research), (l) ethics when reporting research findings, and (m) advice for applying for approval from university and correctional institutional review boards.

The fifth chapter, “Logistics of Doing Research with Correctional Populations,” discusses general tips for conducting research with clients and staff, many of which cut across many correctional populations (probation and parole, juvenile facilities, jails, and

prisons). Highlights of this chapter include: (a) preparing and training researchers to collect data from correctional populations, (b) appropriate attire for men and women, (c) questions to discuss with correctional staff prior to data collection, (d) what to do when offenders ask inappropriate questions or behave inappropriately, (e) education level and literacy of offenders, (f) accommodating offenders' education levels, (g) research with non-English-speaking participants, (h) correctional populations with special needs, (i) piloting the data collection instruments, (j) time-consuming setbacks and the importance of researcher flexibility, (k) importance of record keeping, (l) traveling to correctional facilities and populations, (m) where to conduct the research, and (n) other things to consider (e.g., minimizing exposure to communicable diseases, using the bathroom inside a correctional facility, making small talk, reporting unprofessional behavior, researchers coping with stress, and preventing participants from becoming distressed by the research). This chapter also contains special features on example interview questions for selecting research assistants, back translation and correctional settings, and researchers' gender, race/ethnicity, age, and sexuality.

Throughout this guidebook, we deliberately use the word *participant* where possible to refer to participating correctional populations (e.g., correctional staff or offenders). Where it is inappropriate to say *participant*, we use the word *offender* when speaking generally about a variety of correctional populations (e.g., inmates, probationers, parolees), particularly in chapters that pertain to all correctional populations. Other terms are used in places and chapters that focus on more specific types of correctional populations. For example, the word *inmate* is used when specifically discussing jail and prison inmates, *juvenile* is used to refer to children in juvenile facilities, and *probationers*

and *parolees* are used to identify those under correctional control in the community. We realize that different groups may prefer different terminology in some cases, but we do not use these terms to imply value judgments. Rather, we use them so that the cadence of the manuscript can vary and be more interesting.