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# Violent Offenders and Assaults on Staff Members

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**Nova Southeastern University**  
**College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences**  
**Department of Justice and Human Services**

Violent Offenders and Assaults on Staff Members

by

Lisa Long


A Dissertation Presented to the  
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education School of Criminal Justice  
of Nova Southeastern University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**


Nova Southeastern University


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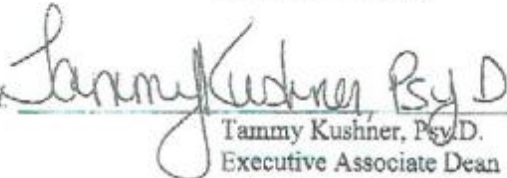
Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Lisa Long, under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the School of Criminal Justice, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education, and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Nova Southeastern University.

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## **Abstract**

Violent Offenders and Assaults on Staff Members. Lisa Long, 2019: Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Fischler College of Education, School of Criminal Justice Department. Descriptors: Violence, violent offenders, violent inmates, corrections, prisons, assaults, correction officers, staff members.

Prison facilities are an integral part of the criminal justice system. Prisons are meant to provide punishment, deterrence and rehabilitation for inmates that are serving time. Prisons across the country are understaffed due to many reasons. It is important for staff members to be trained on how to keep themselves and inmates safe when they are behind the walls of these facilities. Staff members are in positions of authority and often require inmates to comply to their requests or demands in order to maintain a safe environment. In most situations, inmates that are committing violent infractions have been diagnosed with mental illness. Oftentimes, these inmates are also violent offenders. This study determines whether violent offenders were more likely, during a six-year period in North Carolina adult male facilities, to commit infractions against staff members than their nonviolent counterparts. An in-depth descriptive statistics analysis was conducted. Infraction data was divided into commissions by violent offenders and nonviolent offenders. The results indicated that violent offenders were more likely to commit infractions against staff members during the study period. There were also other independent variables identified as possibly being strong indicators as to whether an inmate would commit an infraction against a staff member, such as race and time incarcerated. The results will be provided to North Carolina Department of Public Safety in order to make recommendations regarding correctional officer training procedures in dealing with violent offenders.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Nature of Research Problem**

Staff members in prisons are charged with a daunting task of safeguarding individuals who dwell behind the walls of prisons. This not only includes inmates, but also other staff members and administrators employed by the prison system. While there are inmate rules and infraction punishments in place, inmates are not going to always abide by the rules that are in place within that facility. Some of these violations include staff members being assaulted by inmates. In 2016, four correctional officers at a North Carolina prison were hospitalized. Three inmates at Lanesboro Correctional Institute in Polkton, NC attacked the staff members with a broom handle. Those inmates inflicted a gruesome attack on those officers. At this location, there are 630 staff members, compared to the 1,850 inmates.

In April 2017, a horrific attack was carried out in the Bertie Correctional Facility in Windsor, NC. An inmate who had been incarcerated for 13 years attacked and killed a unit sergeant. The inmate set a fire in a trash can. When the sergeant responded, he attacked her from behind, dousing her with boiling hot water and subsequently beating her with the fire extinguisher she brought in to fight the fire. Prior to this incident, the inmate had minimal reported infractions. He was serving a life sentence for first degree murder. Multiple reports have indicated that this unit was severely understaffed during this attack (Off & Alexander, 2017).

In October 2017, an “escape-gone-wrong” plot resulted in the death of two prison employees at Pasquotank Correctional Institution in Pasquotank County, NC. Four inmates were charged with first degree murder after brutally attacking and killing prison



employees. These inmates were working at the facility's sewing plant. They used the tools in the plant, such as hammers and scissors, to attack the prison workers. Two of the four inmates had previous infractions during their incarceration (Alexander & Off, 2017).

In 2013, a nationwide research study of assaults on staff members in prisons, fatal and nonfatal, was conducted. The study examined data from 2011, which showed that corrections officers experienced 254 work-related injuries per 10,000 full-time employees due to assaults and violent acts (Konda, Tiesman, Reichard, & Hartley, 2013). Lahm (2009) indicates that there is a national trend of increasing numbers of staff members in prisons being assaulted due to the increase in inmate populations as well as extended lengths of mandatory sentences.

Staff members must feel safe and secure in their location in order to effectively perform their daily job duties. The somewhat uncontrollable stressors that are associated with working in a prison, such as shift work or poor facility conditions, are those that staff members have to learn to adapt to and overcome. Dealing with unruly and noncompliant inmates, or harboring fears of possibly being assaulted by an inmate, are also real stressors that correctional officers must face. It is imperative that administrators equip their staff members with knowledge, skills and abilities to potentially be able to mitigate any unfavorable encounter that may occur.

Another uncontrollable stressor may be the fact that prisons are oftentimes understaffed. In prisons across the country, the number of inmates outweighs the number of staff members supervising them. Correctional officers do not spend as much time training as law enforcement officers do. North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) only requires correctional officers to undergo 160 hours of training in order to

be a certified correctional officer. Whereas, law enforcement officers in North Carolina are required to undergo 616 hours or 16 weeks of basic law enforcement training.

Example topics covered in the correctional officer training include: Employee Relations, Prison Operations, Psychomotor Skills, and Prison Culture. These individuals are tasked with maintaining the basic order and custody of inmates.

Understanding that in most situations, correctional officers may be understaffed and undertrained to engage in a less than favorable encounter with an inmate, these individuals should be provided with tools and skills above and beyond the basic required training to maintain order and compliance from inmates. They must also have an understanding of the inmates they are being charged to protect on a daily basis. This understanding should include the inmates' propensity to commit an aggressive infraction. It is possible that inmates who have committed violent crimes that have landed them in their current facility may be more likely than a nonviolent offender to commit an infraction against a staff member.

In previous research, Sorensen, Vigen, Woods, & Williams (2015) discussed a general violence perspective. This perspective assumes that individuals who engage in violent behavior are generally prone to violent behavior. The assumption is also that violent individuals are likely to assault other individuals if the appropriate stimulus or opportunity is presented (Sorensen et al., 2015). One could argue that the appropriate stimulus or opportunity could easily be a correctional setting where an inmate is incarcerated and forced to abide by laws, rules, and commands of corrections officers or other staff members.

The overall purpose of this study is to identify whether or not violent male offenders commit more infractions against staff members than nonviolent male offenders. Darwin's work examined the greater proneness of males to commit physical acts of aggression (Archer, 2009). When an individual commits violent acts, there is an intentional action to commit harm against someone (Felson & Messner, 1996). If there is a possibility that violent offenders are more likely to commit an infraction against a staff member in an adult male correctional facility, the administration and staff need to be made aware of this potential added danger.

While an extensive amount of research exists regarding violent offenders and their behaviors against other inmates while incarcerated, there is a limited amount of research showing that violent offenders are likely to commit aggressive infractions against staff members. There is also an extensive amount of research that links mental illness and substance abuse to the commission of violent offenses of inmates, prior to them being incarcerated. This research study determines whether there is actually a link between the crime committed in order to be incarcerated and the inmate's behavior that has already occurred while they are incarcerated. Hypothetically, violent inmates will be more likely to commit an act of aggression against a staff member while they are incarcerated than a nonviolent inmate.

### **Background and Significance**

An extensive amount of research exists in the field of corrections and assaults within correctional settings. The majority of that research is focused on assaults that occur between inmates. There is a lack of research regarding assaults on staff members by inmates (Lahm, 2009). The relationship between inmates and correctional officers is

one that warrants additional study due to the nature of the relationship itself. The correctional officer inflicts authority over an involuntary client, the inmate (Lahm, 2009). On average, correctional facilities spend approximately \$1,000 per incident in response to acts of violent misconduct by inmates (Griffin & Hepburn, 2006). The findings of this study will provide information to the North Carolina Department of Public Safety that will potentially mitigate some of those risks as well as those financial burdens.

For most inmates, the only interpersonal contact they have, besides other inmates, is with correctional officers. In order for correctional officers to reduce the likelihood that they will become a victim of an offender, they must understand the nature of their authority and the implications that their treatment of that offender may have. In studies regarding interpersonal violence, it is posited that an individual that holds strong feelings of emotion are likely to increase their actions that may be deemed as being high risk (Felson & Messner, 1996). Oftentimes, interpersonal interactions that produce strong emotional responses by inmates may result in a violent encounter because the inmate may have a reduced ability to care about future consequences they may encounter for their actions (Felson & Messner, 1996). In situations where staff members are having an interpersonal interaction with an inmate, they must be aware that a high level of emotional involvement may increase the likelihood that an inmate could act in a less favorable manner.

Most research that has been conducted on assaults on staff members in prisons has been done in regards to the offender himself, i.e. his age, race, or his mental health history (Lahm, 2009). There is also an extensive amount of research that has been conducted on the physical conditions of institutions and its direct impact on staff/inmate

relations (Konda et al., 2013). There is a lack of research on assaults on staff members as it directly correlates to the crime that the inmate committed in order to be incarcerated.

Based on the paucity of research relating assaults on staff to the types of crimes the assaulting inmates are incarcerated for, this study is of particular importance. This study was feasible in nature, was very economical and studied secondary data that had already been compiled by professionals working at the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (Crossman, 2018). The researcher will present the findings to NCDPS along with recommendations, suggestions, and implications. All aspects of the study were easily and conveniently completed.

### **Barriers, Issues, and Limitations**

There are barriers and issues that exist with this study. The initial research proposal was to measure the perceived level of procedural justice amongst adult male inmates within North Carolina Correctional Facilities. Then, those results would be correlated with the number of assaults on staff members that had occurred within each facility. North Carolina Department of Public Safety's prison administration would not allow the researcher to conduct a survey of the inmates. NCDPS cited staff shortages and lack of generalizability with the survey as reasons not to allow the research to occur. They did, however, agree to allow access to secondary data for analysis.

There was also a limitation presented in that the researcher had to rely on the validity of the data that was entered in the Offender Population Unified System (OPUS) records management system regarding assaults on staff members. The researcher only had information regarding the assaults (or infractions) that were reported and actually

entered as an incident report. It is possible that assaults or infractions may have occurred and were not reported.

One last limitation is that the study of the secondary data was longitudinal. The study analyzed infraction data that occurred over a six-year period within prisons across the state of North Carolina. During those six years, there could have been events that occurred that may have had an effect on the number of infractions within a certain facility. There may have been structural changes, administrative changes, or personnel changes that represented reasoning behind why infractions against staff members may have occurred.

### **Definition of Terms**

Assault on Staff: Infractions inflicted by an inmate on a staff member. These infractions could include any of the following, as defined by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Inmate Discipline Handbook:

A3: Commit an assault on a staff member with a weapon or any other means likely to produce injury, such as hitting, kicking, pushing, and pulling, and throwing objects.

A9: Commit an assault on a staff member by throwing liquids, (including but not limited to urine and feces) or spitting on a staff member.

A11: Commit an assault on a staff member with intent to commit any sexual act.

There are also three Class B offenses against staff:

B8: Interfere with a staff member in the performance of his or her duties

B13: Instigate or provoke an assault on a staff member

B20: Commit an assault on a staff member in a manner unlikely to produce injury.

Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR): The FBI's Crime Reporting Program

Violent Crime: As defined by the Uniform Crime Report, violent crimes are offenses which involve force or threat of force

UCR Violent Crimes: Murder or non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault

OPUS: Offender Population Unified System. Relational database management system used to store information

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

In order to develop a fundamental baseline of violent offender research that has already been conducted, the researcher examined scholarly journal articles that were written and peer reviewed. These articles provided findings from research studies conducted to discuss the general violence perspective, why violent offenders commit acts of violence, other reasons that violent infractions are committed, and other types of assaults that are committed within correctional settings. There was also a need for a greater understanding of methods already being utilized in correctional settings to gain compliance and control. Electronic database searches of the Methodist University Davis Memorial Library 'Onesearch' tool were conducted utilizing keywords such as, violent offenders, violent inmates, assaults in prisons, assaults on staff, corrections, and correctional punishments. The most recent and relevant articles were selected.

Over the past two decades there has been an increased amount of research conducted regarding assaults in prisons. An important aspect for prison administrators to begin to understand is why violent inmates offend while in prison and to attempt to establish proactive measures to reduce the amount of infractions involving staff members that are occurring (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016). While administration can focus on proactive strategies such as increasing inmates' participation in prison activities and creating structured routines, those measures may only be effective if a greater understanding exists of the inmate and their propensity to commit a (violent) infraction.

Research shows that there are multiple indicators that may predict that an inmate will commit a violent infraction while incarcerated. Some would argue that male



aggression will increase with age, while others will argue that an inmate who has a history of substance abuse and mental health is more likely to commit a violent infraction while incarcerated (Archer, 2009; Felson, Silver, Remster, 2012). While all of those confounding factors are certainly viable options to determine whether or not a violent inmate will commit a violent infraction, the purpose of this study will determine whether an inmate who has committed a violent offense is more likely to commit a (violent) infraction against a staff member than an inmate who has committed a nonviolent offense. The researcher will compare two groups of individuals who have committed (violent) infractions. This study differs from most studies in that the primary focus will be whether the inmate committed an infraction against a staff member, not another inmate.

While the primary focus of this researcher is the actions and behaviors of inmates while incarcerated, it is also important to note research has shown if inmates are treated fairly and respectfully while they are incarcerated, this may potentially lead to a higher level of compliance with the law once they are released as well (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016). While fair and just treatment of inmates leads to rule-following and compliance while incarcerated, this treatment is known to increase levels of legitimacy. If the inmate feels that the penal system at large is legitimate, their level of respect and compliance for the system will increase. The implications of post-release are imperative to note as they ultimately affect recidivism rates as well as funding and overcrowding in prisons (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016). So, while the hypothesis of this study is that violent inmates are more likely to commit assaults on staff members than nonviolent inmates, inmate fair treatment will transcend all inmates, regardless of the crime they have

committed. Ultimately, the implications of fair treatment extend well beyond the time of sentence for the inmate.

### **General Violence Perspective**

Often a predisposition to commit violent acts will yield the possibility that an individual will be likely to commit subsequent violent acts. Research indicates, in certain circumstances, an individual's past criminal record will be more indicative of subsequent acts of violence. Felson and Lane (2010) conducted research regarding intimate partner violence and found that it is likely for men and women who attack their partners to have just as much of a predisposition to commit violent acts as individuals who attack other individuals, not their partners. This would indicate that the predisposition for violence is prevalent in individuals who commit violent acts, regardless of the intended target of the violence. Felson and Lane also concluded that there were other factors, in addition to the previous commission of a violent act, that may create a considerable concern that an individual may commit a subsequent violent act. These factors include, but are not limited to, previous substance abuse, being intoxicated during an incident, and being abused as a child or as an adult (Felson and Lane, 2010).

Felson also collaborated with Messner on additional intimate partner violence research to conclude that individuals who commit violent acts do so with intentional action (Felson & Messner, 1996). They argue that individuals who commit violent acts intend to do harm to their victims and that they value the harm that is inflicted. They make another important point to consider when correctional staff members are dealing with violent offenders. Oftentimes, these individuals are actually making their decisions to commit violent acts based on a quick and possibly careless decision, not because of an

involuntary reaction or reflex that has occurred (Felson & Messner, 1996). This would indicate that individuals that commit violent acts are doing so because they are making conscious decisions to do so, which should create concern for correctional staff members.

Having said that, it is also important to understand that even though the offender may make a decision to commit this violent act, the desired outcome isn't always to harm the victim. In most instances, actions have multiple outcomes (Felson & Messner, 1996). However, if an inmate has a propensity to lean toward angry aggression, they will value harm as an outcome of the violent act (Felson & Messner, 1996). This value is derived from a response to frustration or some other aversive stimuli. This alone should be enough to cause concern with individuals charged with maintaining a safe and violence-free space within prisons. If individuals are placed in situations while confined that cause them to feel frustrated or without control, the result could be the commission of a violent act. The good news, however, is that even though they may commit the violent act, they do fear being punished by an individual in a position of authority (Felson & Messner, 1996). Within the prison system, there are clear guidelines about who is in positions of authority, what actions are not tolerated, and the punishment that will be implemented if those acts are committed. Felson and Messner (1996) feel encouraged that having such systems in place should limit the acts of violence that are actually committed.

The researcher has chosen to study male inmates only. There are theoretical schools of thought that are founded on the basis that there are differences amongst physical aggression between the different sexes. Archer (2009) argues that male aggression is a component of a sexually selected adaptive complex. Simply put, due to the roles that males play in society and in life, they have a higher likelihood to be

aggressive. In males, that aggression is also intended to be harmful. This behavior is mirrored in animals and is prominent in mammals, period. Archer's argument is that male mammals (animals and humans alike) are more competitive and aggressive. There are instances in which male subjects are known to challenge other men and risk injury to themselves to prove their masculinity. Archer (2009) also argues that aggression in males will increase as they continue to age. This is a particularly interesting concept, as this study will focus on adult males. If what Archer posits is correct, incarcerated adult males should be at the peak of their need and desire to commit acts of aggression or violence.

Additional research exists positing that there may be a direct correlation between violent offenders and the propensity to commit violence while incarcerated. Cunningham, Sorensen, Vigen, and Woods (2011) conducted a study to determine whether there was a direct link between violent offenders and assaultive behavior while in prison. The study examined individuals who have been sentenced to death for a capital murder, however, they were released from death row and moved to the general population where they are serving their life sentence. The researchers also intended to develop an actuarial scale to classify inmates by the level of risk they present to other staff members and inmates.

The researchers studied the file folders of 111 Texas inmates over a 20-year period (1989-2008). It is important to note that the inmates studied included 29 inmates released from death row based on the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roper v. Simmons* (2005). This decision indicates that those inmates were juveniles when they were sentenced to death. The researchers examined things such as level of education, prior

criminal history, date sentenced to death, date released from death row, and number of violence-related misconduct incidents against other inmates, staff members, or institutional security. They examined the misconduct reports from both time periods: while they were on death row and after they had been released. It was important that the researchers could study the period of time post-release, as it removed the heightened level of security on death row (Cunningham et al., 2011).

The research found that age had a strong negative association with violent rule infractions. That is, the older the inmate got, the less likely they were to commit an infraction. They also found that normal or high intelligence was negatively associated with violent misconduct. There was a positive correlation between a prior arrest for a violent crime and the potential for a violent infraction. The use of a weapon during their capital offense was negatively correlated with the commission of violent misconduct (Cunningham et al., 2011).

Another research study was conducted to examine the likelihood of an inmate who had committed intimate partner homicide to commit a serious or violent infraction while incarcerated. The study examined this phenomenon from two theoretical lenses, one being the feminist perspective and the other being the general violence perspective (Sorensen et al., 2015).

The researchers selected 189 of 600 male inmates incarcerated for murdering their intimate partner. They also created a comparison group, using inmates incarcerated for committing a homicide during a home invasion. There were 132 inmates in this group. For both groups, data was extracted from their “travel cards” or inmate files. This data

included information about their backgrounds, offenses, IQ scores, previous offenses, demographics, and infractions (Sorensen et al., 2015).

Overall, the researchers found that the inmates who committed intimate partner homicide were better behaved in prison than inmates who committed a homicide during a home invasion. This finding lends credibility to the feminist perspective, which states that the male offender murders the partner simply because he has access to her and she is female. Having said that, results also found that continued violent offending in a prison environment was similar in both groups. This finding is more in line with the general violence perspective, that the offender will commit a violent act regardless of his surroundings or individuals he is in close proximity to (Sorensen et al., 2015).

There is a field of research that attempts to lend even further credence to the general violence perspective. The neurodevelopmental perspective offers that there are early health risk factors that may predicate a male becoming a persistent violent offender. Raine (2018) posits that male violence can be complexly explained by analyzing some early childhood patterns that serve as determinants as to whether an individual will be a chronic violent offender as an adult. Raine argues that males perpetrate a large majority of violent acts in society. The male brain is more susceptible to the effects of some early adverse conditions, which include but are not limited to, complications during birth, prenatal smoking and alcohol exposure, poor nutrition, lead exposure, and a traumatic brain injury. Raine argues that these negative impacts or influences on the developing male brain will in turn produce a small amount of aggressive male children and ultimately violent and aggressive adults. These influences may occur during gestation or even during the early infant stages of the male, thus not allowing the individual to have

any control or choice over their predicted outcome. In Raine's small study group he found there are strong correlations between chronic adult male violence and the neural maldevelopment of the male brain, which were indicators studied by examining prenatal and early postnatal factors.

Additionally, there have been studies that indicate inmates who resort to committing violent or aggressive infractions while incarcerated do so because they themselves have been a victim of violence. A longitudinal study of Swiss youth indicated that individuals who had been victims of violence in their past had a higher propensity to commit violent acts or acts of aggression (Averdijk, Van Gelder, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2016). This study postulates that once an individual is placed in a situation in which they are a victim of a violent act, they become more aware of perceived benefits of violent perpetration. One would hope if an individual was a victim of a violent act, this would raise their awareness and encourage them to remove themselves from particular actions or situations, hopefully allowing them not to be victimized again. Contrarily, this research indicates that being victimized negatively influences the individual's decision-making. Oftentimes, this decision-making will lead the individual to perpetrate violence themselves instead of weighing the cost or benefit of not doing so (Averdijk et al., 2016).

### **Alternatives to General Violence Perspective**

While it is clear that the argument can be presented that individuals predisposed to violence and violent activity are more likely to commit violent acts, there are other factors that may contribute to an inmate's propensity to commit violence while incarcerated. Felson, Silver, and Remster (2012) offer one alternative. With the deinstitutionalization of individuals with mental health illnesses, prisons and jails have

seen an increase in inmates suffering from some sort of mental health disorder. A longitudinal study of more than 16,000 inmates at state and federal correctional facilities was conducted to see what types of mental health disorders affected certain types of behaviors among inmates. The findings indicated that while inmates dealing with some sort of mental health disorder committed infractions, they tended to commit more non-aggressive infractions or violent infractions against themselves, such as refusing to come out of their cell, setting fire in their cell and intentionally injuring themselves (Felson et al., 2012). The inmates may lack self-control; however, they will be more likely to commit deviant acts in general, not specifically violent acts. While there is an increase in inmates with mental health disorders, this doesn't mean that these individuals are going to be the ones committing violent infractions against staff members.

Wood and Buttaro (2013) also hypothesize that inmates suffering from some sort of dual diagnosis are more likely to commit an infraction against a staff member. Not only are they more likely to commit an infraction against a staff member, they are also at a higher risk to be assaulted by others while they are incarcerated. Wood and Buttaro specifically studied over 12,000 inmates suffering from a severe psychiatric disorder and a substance abuse disorder. Their research found multiple interesting facts that may be directly related to individuals' decisions to commit infractions while incarcerated. They found that inmates who had committed violent offenses prior to being incarcerated were more likely to be violent while incarcerated. They also found that inmates diagnosed with a serious mental illness were more likely to commit a disciplinary infraction than inmates not diagnosed with a serious mental illness. Wood and Buttaro posit that this can be primarily attributed to the fact that individuals diagnosed with a serious mental illness



have a diminished capacity to comply with rules. They lack sufficient impulse control as well as possess minimal decision-making abilities (Wood & Buttaro, 2013).

Their study also found that more than half of the inmates who were victims of assaults while incarcerated were also guilty of inflicting an assault while incarcerated. Ultimately, Wood and Buttaro (2013) postulate that in order to reduce or mitigate these violent attacks (whether on the inmate or against the inmate), prison-based treatment programs must focus on treating dually diagnosed individuals, specifically focusing on mental health and substance abuse.

There are also situational characteristics that may cause an individual to commit violent acts while they are incarcerated. Inmates at eleven Spanish prisons were studied over a period of ten months. The results of the study indicated that having a violent conviction was not a significant predictor of violent behavior (Arbach-Lucioni, Martinez-Garcia, & Andres-Pueyo, 2012). In fact, the study found that more accurate predictors were drug and alcohol problems, poor response to treatment and pro-criminal attitudes were more likely to be accurate indicators that an inmate would commit violent behavior while incarcerated (Arbach-Lucioni et al., 2012). There is also evidence that previous traumatic experiences may produce violent behaviors while inmates are incarcerated. While Byrd and Davis (2009) studied female inmates, the results are still telling, as females who endured some sort of physical abuse prior to their incarceration were highly likely to engage in violent behavior while incarcerated.

Unfortunately, inmates may also become victims of violence while they are incarcerated. Wooldredge and Steiner (2016) posit that if an individual becomes a victim of violence while incarcerated, this increases his chance of committing a violent act while

incarcerated. They also posit that he may lose respect for individuals in positions of authority and rebel against them as well (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016). The feeling is that if an inmate becomes a victim while incarcerated, the officials within the prison did not do their job to protect them from being victimized. This is an important concept for prison officials to understand because of the implications once the inmate is released back into society. This feeling of disdain toward individuals in positions of legal authority may very well bleed over into the inmate's life once they are free again, thus increasing recidivism rates and the offender's likelihood to reoffend.

Wooldredge and Steiner (2016) recommend controlling inmate's activities in order to reduce or mitigate their chance of becoming a victim of a violent act while incarcerated. Following this protocol will, in turn, theoretically protect staff members as well. If the chance of the offender being a victim of violence is removed, the chance of them committing a violent act should be reduced; whether it is another inmate or a staff member. Wooldredge and Steiner argue that if inmates spend less time participating in organized activities, they are more likely to become a victim of a violent act. Their study results found that inmates who spent more time participating in recreational activities or working jobs were less likely to become a victim of a violent attack while incarcerated. This will, as a result, reduce the number of violent attacks that occur because inmates will not be victimized, ready to retaliate, or less likely to follow rules from those in positions of authority.

Gang affiliation while incarcerated may also increase the chances that an inmate will commit a violent or aggressive infraction against a staff member while incarcerated. Griffin and Hepburn (2006) conducted a study of more than 2,000 inmates in a state

prison in the southwestern part of the United States. Results of this study indicated that inmates who committed a violent infraction could attribute that behavior to gang affiliation rather than their age or their prior criminal history. While it is possible that inmates who have some sort of gang affiliation may also have a history of violent offenses, the results of this study indicate that their gang ties are more of an indicator for their future violent behavior than previous behavior.

Other attributes that may contribute to inmates committing violent acts, particularly against staff members, may be their level of elevated anger prior to being incarcerated or even a negative relationship that somehow developed with a staff member (Klatt, Hagl, Bergmann, Baier, 2016; DeLisi et al., 2010). There are many other factors that could contribute to an inmate committing a violent act against a staff member. This study will determine whether inmates serving time for committing violent crimes have a greater likelihood to commit an infraction against a staff member than those who have committed nonviolent crimes.

### **Corrections Use of Force and “Supermax”**

While the likelihood of a violent offender to commit an infraction against a staff member is the primary focus of this research study, it is also important to examine the history of assaults and assaultive behaviors within prisons and correctional settings. By law, correctional staff members are permitted to use force in many circumstances (Martin, 2006). If the staff member deems it necessary to utilize force in an instance where they are protecting themselves, preventing a crime or escape, or maintaining safety and security of other staff members, they have the legal right to do so (Martin, 2006). Having said that, use of force is NOT prohibited in an instance where prison staff is

attempting to control or punish an inmate (Martin, 2006). All levels of corporal punishment are illegal in prisons. In 1968, *Jackson vs. Bishop* banned whipping prisoners, as it was deemed not to be decent or humane (Martin, 2006). Other methods of corporal punishment have been implemented, to include, but not limited to rubber bullets, pepper spray, restraint devices and restraint chairs. Research shows that use of force is not the most efficient way to gain compliance from inmates.

Another option being utilized to gain compliance and control of inmates in order to reduce or mitigate violence behind bars is the implementation of so called “supermax” units. “Supermax” units are essentially prisons within prisons. Particular inmates are deemed as being disruptive or violent and they are thought to cause a threat to other inmates and staff (Briggs, Sundt, & Castellano, 2003). Extreme architectural designs and surveillance technologies are utilized to maintain control of inmates being housed in these units. When they are transported, shackles and handcuffs are used to maintain control (Briggs et al., 2003). These conditions have been shown to create an enormous amount of deprivation for inmates while exerting control over them.

While these units are continually being utilized across the country, there has been no significant indication that the conditions reduce inmate-on-inmate violence (Briggs et al., 2003). There are no indications that “supermax” units reduce inmate-on-staff assaults either (Briggs et al., 2003).

Contrary to use of force and “supermax” units, prisons in England and Wales have begun utilizing a different form of institutional power. Instead of utilizing direct command and control and coercion when trying to gain compliance from inmates, a new form of “soft-power” has been implemented (Crewe, 2011). “Soft-power” allows the

corrections officer to exhibit less of an authoritarian disposition while focusing on developing a more relaxed and harmonious environment. The idea is that by creating a more decent and stable environment, inmates will be more cooperative and compliant as well as focusing on rehabilitating themselves prior to being released back into society (Crewe, 2011).

Research and trends also indicate that among juvenile offenders, providing a more procedurally just encounter and environment will shape their view and perceptions of the criminal justice system. A procedurally just encounter means those in positions of authority treat offenders with respect and give them a voice. Greene, Spritt, Madon and Jung (2010) examined juveniles' experiences within the court system. They wanted to know if being treated fairly and with respect by individuals within the court system would reduce the likelihood that the juveniles would indicate their overall experience was horrific. Their findings showed that regardless of the chaos occurring in the courtroom, as long as the juveniles felt they were treated fairly by court authorities, they indicated their experience was satisfactory (Greene et al., 2010).

While there are other forms of control in place within prisons, research findings continue to show that treating individuals fairly and with respect will continue to yield compliance and respect for the officials in authority. The old adage, "you catch more bees with honey" appears to hold true, in most instances, when it comes to gaining compliance and reducing or eliminating violence within correctional settings.

### **Corrections Reformation of Control**

As shown with the aforementioned research, a transition or shift is occurring within prisons, in relation to how force is exerted and inmates are being treated. There

has also been an extensive amount of research regarding inmates and correctional staff and their opinions regarding sexual assaults within prisons. In fact, for years this type of assault was a primary concern for the types of assaults that were most frequently occurring in prisons, prior to the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA) (D. Struckman-Johnson, C. Struckman-Johnson, Kruse, Gross & Summers, 2013). While incarcerated, inmates feel that if they were given sexual outlets to release that would reduce or eliminate sexual assaults. Staff members feel that an increase in security and more staff members would reduce or eliminate sexual assaults (D. Struckman-Johnson et al., 2013).

Just as with violent assaults, prison administration must take a stand when it comes to reducing and eliminating sexual assaults in prisons. PREA was implemented in 2003. It is important to understand the views of the administration regarding this act to understand the climate of the culture of administration within prisons. In certain circumstances, legislation may indicate administrative staff is not capable of maintaining order and control within their facilities. As one may expect, a study conducted by Moster and Jeglic (2009) regarding the attitudes of wardens since the implementation of PREA indicates that the majority do not even feel that they have an issue with sexual assaults within their facility. While these wardens indicated that they have already implemented policies at their institution that are in compliance with PREA regulations, they feel that an increased amount of supervision may continue to reduce sexual assaults (Moster & Jeglic, 2009).

While the issue of sexual assaults doesn't appear to be as much of a concern as in years past, prison administrators must still take into consideration that gaining

compliance and reducing and mitigating infractions committed by inmates is of the utmost importance when attempting to ensure safety behind prison walls. Corrections officers and staff in positions of authority, along with prison administration, need to understand that utilizing brute force and control is not recommended (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016). Some would posit that when force is utilized that “consensual authority has failed” (p. 128). It is highly recommended that officials preserve the dignity and respect of the inmates they are working with. Creating a culture where respectful treatment is the priority among prison staff will promote compliance to prison rules, which will in turn encourage order and safety among inmates while in confinement (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016).

Prison administrators and staff members understand the tenets behind procedural justice. Encouraging prison staff to treat inmates with respect, be neutral and unbiased, and give them a voice, will increase the likelihood that inmates will comply to rules, hence reducing the number of infractions that occur within a prison setting. The policies and procedures in place to govern the daily operations of the correctional facility should mirror the tenets of the procedural justice theory. Tyler (2010) recommends that jails and prisons develop written policies that are in accordance with procedural justice tenets. This development will potentially reduce negative implications of incarceration. The hope is inmates will gain a sense of self-worth and empowerment and begin to learn and develop knowledge, skills, and abilities while incarcerated so they can enhance their chances of having success in life once they are released (Tyler, 2010). Tyler also posits that procedural justice and fair treatment will overshadow some of the other dismal concepts of prisonization that are crippling to inmates, while incarcerated and post-

release. Treating them fairly and with respect will potentially reduce violence and misconduct while incarcerated and also reduce their chances of recidivating (Tyler, 2010).

Research also indicates that corrections officers are not the only ones who should be focused on treating inmates fairly. Community corrections officers, or probation/parole officers, also have a responsibility to treat their offenders with respect and neutrality. The unfortunate reality is that offenders oftentimes reoffend, and end up back in prison. If they have had a bad experience with their community corrections officer, this could have serious implications upon their return to prison. The community corrections officer should attempt to reduce the amount of “legal cynicism” that may exist with their offender (Wright & Gifford, 2017). While some offenders may have negative views and opinions of the criminal justice system, a positive encounter with a community corrections officer may have an everlasting positive affect on that offender. The most efficient way to reduce or eliminate this cynicism is for the community corrections officer to treat the offender fairly and with respect (Wright & Gifford, 2017).

### **Implications for Corrections Staff Members**

Working in a prison environment can be extremely stressful for individuals who are charged with doing so. The researcher intends to provide corrections staff with empirical data that may assist in reducing the likelihood that they will become a victim of an assault by an inmate. Harboring this extreme fear creates multiple issues on multiple levels for corrections staff. These issues include, but are not limited to, on the job-related stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and burnout among prison staff members.



Boudoukha, Altintas, Rusinek Hauwel, and Hautekeete (2013) attempted to examine inmate-to-staff violent relations and the implications for such stressors. A random sample of French correctional employees was conducted. A total of 240 staff members took a self-reported questionnaire measuring their levels of burnout, stress, posttraumatic stress, victimization, and demographics. Of the individuals surveyed, 97% had already experienced an inmate assault, 93% had been confronted with another type of traumatic event, and 97% had experienced indirect victimization (Boudoukha et al., 2013).

Respondents were given the IES-R, Impact of Event Stress Scale-Revised (measures PTSD symptoms). They were also given the MBI, Maslach Burnout Inventory (measures emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment). Respondents were also given a stress questionnaire and a victimization index (inmates-to-staff assault questionnaire) (Boudoukha et al., 2013). Results of this study indicate that there is a high correlation between burnout and posttraumatic stress. They also found that violent interactions with inmates lead to all types of trauma. The majority of the employees were suffering from some sort of PTSD. They found that the most likely prison worker to experience PTSD was the one who had high levels of emotional exhaustion, high levels of intrusion, avoidance, and hyperactivity (Boudoukha et al., 2013).

Most research regarding assaults in prisons has been conducted regarding inmate-to-inmate assaults. There is a real shortcoming of research that involves inmate-to-staff assaults.

Lahm (2009) decided to use a multi-level model to predict the likelihood of inmate-on-staff assault in prison. Lahm used a self-report survey instead of incident reports to measure the level of assaults on staff members. Information about the inmates was collected from 30 prisons in three different states. A total of 1,054 inmates were surveyed. The researcher also collected data about the prisons of the state department of corrections. The inmates were randomly selected and must have been incarcerated for at least six months. The inmates were asked to self-report a lot of data, such as whether they have served time for a prior offense, the length of their sentence, the amount of time they have served, the number of visits they have received from family members, and level of anger, aggression and hostility (Lahm, 2009).

The research found that age and levels of aggression had a strong effect on whether or not an inmate would commit an assault on a staff member. The research also found that the chances of an inmate committing an assault on a staff member increase as the inmate nears the end of their sentence. The researcher did not find any significance in race, current violent offenses, or prior violent offenses, and the chance of the inmate committing an assault on a staff member. It is important to note that due to the restraints of the segregation unit, some of the most violent offenders weren't able to participate in the study (Lahm, 2009).

While levels of aggression are important, it could also be that prison conditions create a greater propensity for inmates to commit assaults on staff members. Lee-Williams and Porter (2016) examined whether or not there is a relationship between the conditions in jails and whether or not inmates will commit a violent assault or infraction.

This research also examined gangs versus lone-wolves and the structural and environmental conditions of jails.

The study is an analysis of secondary data. The researchers took cross-sectional data from the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Annual Survey of Jails. A survey was mailed to jails. They only surveyed jails that had at least one documented instance of inmate violence toward correctional staff. There were a total of 567 jails. They were asked specifically if inmates had assaulted staff members. They also asked that a numeric value of the assaults be recorded (Lee-Williams & Porter, 2016).

The results indicated that race was related to the inmate assaults on staff. The fact that the jails with an unbalanced racial composition had higher rates of assaults on staff members was the direct relation to race. A more distinct connection was found between overcrowded jails and the number of assaults on staff members (Lee-Williams & Porter, 2016).

The research indicates that there are several stressors involved with working in a prison. There are not really any firm and solid indicators that will provide an accurate risk assessment for a staff member working in a prison. They deal with various offenders from various backgrounds. In order to ensure that they are reducing their likelihood of becoming a victim of an assault by an inmate, each staff member should exhibit the tenets of procedural justice in their day-to-day job duties. Treating the inmates with respect and dignity will likely allow the staff member to gain compliance and reduce the chance that they may become a victim of an assault by an inmate.

As the research shows, there may be multiple explanations for why an inmate may commit a violent infraction while incarcerated. More importantly, there is greater controversy as to why an inmate commits a violent or aggressive infraction against a staff member while incarcerated. The literature also indicates that there may be a need for enhancements in techniques utilized by corrections officers to gain compliance with inmates and mitigate the opportunities for infractions to be committed. This study will attempt to offer an idea as to whether North Carolina male inmates who are incarcerated for a violent offense are more likely to commit an infraction against a staff member than an inmate incarcerated for a nonviolent offense.

### **Summary**

Currently, an extensive amount of research exists examining assaults in prisons. There is an abundance of information regarding inmates assaulting other inmates, as well as inmates being assaulted by staff members. The majority of research typically attributes these assaults to mental illness or conditions within prisons. There is also existing research examining whether inmates with a history of violence or violent offending are the primary perpetrators of attacks in correctional facilities. The purpose of this research study was to determine whether violent offenders in North Carolina adult male prisons are more likely to commit assaults against staff members than nonviolent offenders.

An in-depth descriptive statistical analysis of secondary data was conducted to determine whether there is a difference between the average number of assaults committed by violent offenders and nonviolent offenders. Based on the theoretical framework of the general violence perspective, the implication is that the number of

assaults should be higher in violent offenders than in nonviolent offenders. Furthermore, the study examined other independent factors such as age, race, level of education, and length of incarceration at the time an infraction was committed to determine if there are any other variables that may be attributed to infractions committed against staff members by inmates in North Carolina adult male prison facilities.

Correctional staff safety is a paramount concern for prison administrators across the country. This study may provide empirical data that indicates a need for treating, housing, and placing violent and nonviolent offenders differently. The general violence perspective argues that there are individuals who are generally prone to violence (Sorensen et al., 2015). Because of this, if these individuals are exposed to particular stimuli or opportunities, they are likely to, again, commit an act of violence. If in fact, historical secondary data shows that violent offenders have committed more infractions against staff members than nonviolent offenders, administrators within the North Carolina Department of Corrections can make paramount decisions regarding future staff safety measures, as well as inmate safety measures.

If, in fact, violent offenders are more likely to commit infractions against staff members, the researcher will provide recommendations for future staff training as well as inmate housing, programs, and activities. Included in the recommendations will be a discussion of the theoretical framework of procedural justice. This discussion will be beneficial for staff members dealing with violent and nonviolent offenders alike. The theoretical framework behind procedural justice is for an individual in a position of authority to be able to gain compliance based on their treatment of the individual they encounter. This study will not only provide results regarding the type of offender that is

more likely to commit an infraction against a staff member, but will also provide indicators for future recommendations regarding the treatment of inmates by correctional officers. Correctional staff should do their best to ensure inmates are being treated with respect and given a voice. If staff make a practice of being more procedurally just, the likelihood that infractions will be committed will be reduced. This reduction will likely lead to an overall safe and secure institution for inmates and staff members.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The objective of this research study was to determine whether or not violent offenders are more likely than nonviolent offenders to commit an assault on a staff member within a correctional facility.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

#### **Research Question 1**

**RQ1:** Do violent inmates commit infractions involving aggression against staff members?

**H1:** Violent inmates are more likely than nonviolent inmates to commit infractions involving aggression against staff members.

Based on the previous research regarding the general violence perspective, and the notion that individuals who commit acts of violence are prone to continue to commit those acts, one can posit that violent inmates are likely to commit infractions involving aggression against staff members. The researcher is stating that inmates who commit violent crimes are more likely to commit violent infractions against staff members than nonviolent inmates. The independent variable, violent crime, was examined in relation with the dependent variable of the infractions that were committed against staff members. The group of violent offenders who committed infractions was compared to the group of nonviolent offenders who committed infractions. An in-depth analysis of the descriptive statistics of the two groups was conducted. The measures of central tendency and variance were compared.

#### **Research Question 2**

**RQ2:** Do nonviolent inmates commit infractions involving aggression against staff members?

**H2:** Nonviolent inmates are less likely than violent inmates to commit infractions involving aggression against staff members.

While research indicates that there are various factors that may determine whether or not an inmate commits an aggressive infraction against a staff member, the purpose of this study was to determine whether or not violent criminals are more likely to do so than nonviolent criminals. Based on the tenets of the general violence perspective, one would hypothesize that nonviolent criminals are less likely to commit infractions involving aggression against staff members. Again, the offenders who have committed infractions against staff members were divided into two groups, distinguished by the independent variable of violent criminal or nonviolent criminal. An in-depth analysis of the descriptive statistics of the two groups was conducted. The measures of central tendency and variance were compared.

### **Research Question 3**

**RQ3:** Do other factors such as time incarcerated, race, age, or level of education have any bearing on whether or not an inmate commits an infraction involving aggression against a staff member?

**H3:** Other factors exist that may be related to whether or not an inmate will commit an infraction involving aggression against a staff member.

Research indicates that there are other independent variables that may serve as primary factors as to whether or not an inmate will commit an infraction of aggression against a staff member. These additional factors are contrary to the general violence



perspective. Cross-tabulations were conducted to determine whether any additional independent variables are indicators for inmates to commit an infraction.

### **Variables**

The primary independent variable for this study was the type of crime committed by the inmate. The independent variable was represented as either a violent or nonviolent crime, not the specific crime that occurred. The crimes were broken down as defined by the UCR. There were other independent variables presented in the report provided by NCDPS. Those other independent variables were: age, number of days incarcerated at the time of the incident, level of education obtained (at the time of the incident), and race. The dependent variable was the infractions committed by the inmates.

In order to accurately determine whether the hypotheses hold true for adult male correctional facilities across the state of North Carolina, the researcher analyzed secondary data provided by the NCDPS. NCDPS Adult Male Corrections consists of inmates incarcerated for multiple offenses. There are 54 adult male state prisons and one female state prison in North Carolina. Currently, there are 37,016 inmates being housed in these prisons (North Carolina Department of Public Safety, n.d.). As of June 13, 2018, 34,037 of those inmates were males (North Carolina Department of Public Safety, n.d.). The secondary data analyzed was infraction data from all 54 adult male facilities across the state. The infraction data only included the categories below that are also included within the NCDPS Inmate Discipline Handbook. Those infractions were directly related to assaults on staff members. It is likely when an incident occurs within a correctional facility that an inmate may commit more than one of these categorized infractions at one

time. The intent of this study was to count each specific infraction that occurred during an incident.

A3: Commit an assault on a staff member with a weapon or any other means likely to produce injury, such as hitting, kicking, pushing, and pulling or throwing objects

A9: Commit an assault on a staff member by throwing liquids, (including but not limited to urine and feces) or spitting on a staff member

A11: Commit an assault on a staff member with intent to commit any sexual act

There are also three Class B offenses against staff:

B8: Interfere with a staff member in the performance of his or her duties

B13: Instigate or provoke an assault on a staff member

B20: Commit an assault on a staff member in a manner unlikely to produce injury

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were inmates who committed infractions between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2017. The inmate data was de-identified to protect the anonymity of the inmate. Each inmate who committed an infraction was assigned a dummy identifier for the purpose of this research study. All of the adult male facilities within the state of North Carolina were studied. The facilities represent a range of custody levels, from close to minimum. The secondary data provided included 100% of infractions that were committed over the identified time period within North Carolina adult male correctional facilities. The infractions were those reported and recorded in the OPUS records management system.

## **Instruments**

The instrument utilized for this study was the report of secondary data provided by the NCDPS. The report was constructed by a research analyst housed in the NCDPS headquarters building located in Raleigh, NC. The secondary data was pulled from the OPUS. NCDPS utilizes this system because it operates on a shared data approach. By doing so, this drastically eliminates the chance that conflicting data exists in the database.

NCDPS employees collect and enter all data into the relational database management system. There is no limit to the amount of information and number of occurrences that can be added into OPUS. The data is also presented in an online and real-time format throughout the entire organization. This eliminates data delays and all information should be up-to-date and current without any lags in time.

## **Procedures**

The study was a quantitative longitudinal secondary data analysis research design. The ultimate goal was to provide training recommendations for prison staff members, based on the findings. The purpose of the analysis was to determine whether or not violent offenders are more likely to commit aggressive infractions against staff members while incarcerated. The researcher requested a secondary data report from a research analyst within NCDPS. The request for data included the following information: all infractions committed that are coded by the previously mentioned codes within the NCDPS inmate conduct handbook. The request also included: age, number of years incarcerated at the time of the incident, level of education obtained (at the time of the incident), race, crime committed (for this incarceration), facility, and the date and time the infraction occurred.

After the information was obtained, the researcher then divided the infractions committed into two categories: violent and nonviolent offenders. Those groups were defined by the crimes specified in the UCR system. The FBI UCR Crime in the United States definition of violent crimes (United States Department of Justice-Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011) are murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. The FBI UCR Crime in the United States definition of nonviolent crimes are burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. Arson will also be handled in the same way as defined by the FBI UCR Crime in the United States definition, as a nonviolent property crime. Any drug related offenses were defined and coded as nonviolent crimes (United States Department of Justice-Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011).

Once each group was established, the average number of infractions committed by each group was compared. Cross-tabulations with other independent variables were performed in order to provide additional data and information regarding whether there were other factors--such as race, time incarcerated, or level of education--that had an overwhelming presence in relation to the offenders who committed infractions against staff members

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher conducted an in-depth descriptive statistics review of each of the sample groups, based on the independent variable of violent or nonviolent crime. The descriptive statistical analysis allowed the researcher to conduct a quantitative data analysis of the measures of central tendency and the dispersions of each of the sample groups. There was no guarantee that the number of infractions included in each group

would be the same. The information was collected over a six-year period of time. The descriptive statistics were studied for each group (nonviolent and violent offenders) for each year contained in the study. The mean, median, and mode for each sample group were compared to determine whether the research hypotheses were supported or not. The researcher also calculated z-scores for each year contained in the study due to the dispersion of the data. These were calculated in order to standardize the data.

Due to the fact that the sample groups were very heterogeneous, the most reliable statistical analysis was a descriptive statistics comparison between the two categorical independent variable groups. The two groups consisted of the infractions committed by an inmate who either committed a violent or nonviolent offense in order to be incarcerated. The first two research hypotheses were proven or disproven by this analysis.

The third research hypothesis was answered based on the results of the cross-tabulations conducted showing the number of infractions committed and the following characteristics of the offender: race, age, level of education, and days incarcerated at the time of the infraction. This data was analyzed to create potential hypotheses for future research projects.

The researcher entered all data collected from the OPUS report into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 23 (SPSS). The report data was manually imported into SPSS for the data analysis to occur. The data was re-verified to ensure that there were no errors in the data entry process. The first research question, “do violent inmates commit infractions involving aggression against staff members?” was presented as the two groups of infractions. The measures of central tendency for each group was reported and

compared. The second research question, “do nonviolent inmates commit infractions involving aggression against staff members?” was presented in the same manner. Measures of dispersion amongst the two sample groups was reported to answer the first and second research question. The third research question, “do other factors such as time incarcerated, race, age, or level of education have any bearing on whether or not an inmate commits an infraction involving aggression against a staff member?” was answered by conducting cross-tabulations within each of the respective sample groups and adding each independent variable. This information provided important data such as whether young or old offenders are more likely to commit infractions, or those who have spent more time incarcerated are more likely to commit infractions. It also shows whether or not there is a disparity among races in regard to those who commit infractions. This data will be provided to NCDPS for training recommendations.

### **Limitations**

A major limitation of this study was the fact that it was a secondary data analysis. The intent of the original research design was to survey inmates to determine how they felt they are being treated by correctional officers. These perceived levels of how they are being treated were then going to be correlated with the number of assaults that are committed at each facility. That research protocol was denied by NCDPS. The findings from the secondary data analysis will still be useful when NCDPS is considering risk assessments as well as staff training in regard to dealing with violent offenders.

An additional limitation is that this study relied strictly on the information that was reported and recorded in OPUS. If infractions occurred and were not reported, that information was not accounted for in this study. The researcher relied solely upon the

staff members' ability to input infraction data correctly and in a timely matter. The researcher also relied on the fact that NCDPS did not redact any infraction data from the secondary data report prior to sending it.

While these identified limitations may have presented potential areas of concern for the execution of this study, the researcher firmly believes that the information collected and analyzed will be beneficial to the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. A part of revamping a curriculum of instruction is understanding potential pitfalls or conversely potential positives that need to be built upon. NCDPS administration needs to know which group is more likely to commit an infraction so they can ensure that they are providing staff members with proper training to keep themselves safe in any encounter with inmates.

### **Summary**

As the trends of overcrowded and understaffed prison settings continue to plague North Carolina state correctional institutions, it is important to conduct research that can potentially assist staff members in maintaining order and safety within their facilities. Practically speaking, this study examined whether violent inmates are more dangerous than nonviolent, in regard to the prison setting.

The results of this research study will present staff and administration of the NCDPS adult corrections with an empirical examination regarding whether violent or nonviolent offenders are more likely to commit an aggressive infraction against staff members within adult male correctional facilities. With incidents occurring in North Carolina prisons like the previously mentioned ones in Pasquotank and Bertie, the prison administrators need to know if there is a disparity between these two groups of inmates in

what they are capable of doing once they are incarcerated. They need to understand whether their previous conviction type is any indicator as to what type of behavior they will exhibit while behind bars.

The results of this study will also augment a restructuring that has already occurred with the NCDPS correctional officer training curriculum. NCDPS Secretary Erik Hooks has implemented a new initiative meant to encourage a safe work environment and better prepare prison employees for work in such a demanding setting (Bennett-Bellamy, 2018). This new initiative includes revamping the correctional officer basic training course. The revamping will focus on learning objectives such as: improved safety, security, officer retention, and overall job satisfaction (Bennett-Bellamy, 2018). The results of this study will provide helpful data that can be utilized during the instruction of the revamped curriculum. Some of the new topics that are being taught are: leadership, diversity, effective communications, team-building, and ethics (Bennett-Bellamy, 2018). The results of this study can be easily implemented into course materials regarding effective communication techniques.

Overall, this chapter discusses the primary procedures that took place during this research study. The participants were adult male prisoners at North Carolina state facilities who committed infractions from January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2017. A secondary data analysis was conducted on this infraction data to determine whether violent or nonviolent offenders were more likely to commit infractions against staff members. The data was entered into SPSS and the findings of the study were analyzed and written. The results of this study will also be shared with NCDPS along with recommendations, suggestions, and implications.



## Chapter 4: Results

The following chapter presents the results found by conducting a secondary data analysis of information obtained by the researcher. A report of all infractions, coded as previously mentioned, that occurred between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2017 in all North Carolina adult male facilities was received by the researcher from Linda Mitterling, Director of Administrative Analysis of Re-Entry Programs and Services. The report was exported from OPUS into an excel data format in order for the researcher to conduct analysis on the information. The report contained a total of 1,717 infraction records. Upon further treatment of the data, 277 of those infractions were removed from the study data. Two hundred fifty-two of those infractions were committed by individuals incarcerated for being habitual felons. Based on the definition provided by North Carolina General Statute Chapter 14 Article 2A, an individual incarcerated for the charge of habitual felon is any person who has been convicted of or pled guilty to three felony offenses in any federal court or state court in the United States (North Carolina General Assembly, n.d.). There is no distinction made regarding those felonies. In other words, an inmate could have committed a violent offense or a nonviolent offense in order to ultimately be incarcerated as a habitual felon. Therefore, infractions committed by habitual felons were removed from the data. There were 25 infractions committed by inmates where the offense committed was not listed. Those 25 infractions were removed as well. A total of 1,440 infractions were examined in the secondary data analysis.

The first research question examined in this study is “do violent inmates commit infractions involving aggression against staff members?” The research hypothesis theorized for this question is: violent inmates are more likely than nonviolent inmates to

commit infractions involving aggression against staff members ( $RH_1: \bar{X}_v > \bar{X}_n$ ). The second research question to be examined in this study is “do nonviolent inmates commit infractions involving aggression against staff members?” The research hypothesis theorized for this question is: nonviolent inmates are less likely than violent inmates to commit infractions involving aggression against staff members ( $RH_2: \bar{X}_n < \bar{X}_v$ ). The results for both of these research hypotheses will now be discussed. A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted of the data. The measures of central tendency and dispersion were examined. There will also be a discussion of z-scores for each sample group, due to the variance that exists within the two sample groups.

In order to determine whether violent inmates are more likely to commit an infraction against a staff member, the entire sample of infractions was broken into two groups, infractions committed by inmates who committed a violent offense and infractions committed by an inmate who committed a nonviolent offense. There were six years represented within the infraction data. The number of infractions was broken down for each year: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017, respectively. The average number of infractions committed each year by each sample group was calculated. The median and the mode (to indicate the most frequent type of infraction that occurred) were also calculated. The standard deviation and the range were also calculated to show the dispersion among each group. Then, z-scores were calculated for each sample group (nonviolent and violent). The z-scores for the number of infractions committed each year were calculated. A z-score standardizes each score to facilitate the interpretation of each yearly infraction. Z-scores have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. If the z-

score is a positive number, this shows that the count is above the average. If the z-score is a negative number, this shows that the count is below the average.

When the total number of infractions studied ( $n=1,440$ ) was broken into the two independent sample groups, there were 870 infractions committed by inmates who had committed a violent offense. There were 570 infractions committed by inmates who had committed a nonviolent offense. This shows that 60% of infractions committed during the study period were committed by violent inmates while 40% of the infractions were committed by nonviolent inmates. The year in which the most infractions occurred was 2016. There were 299 overall infractions committed in 2016. Of those 299, the raw number of infractions committed by violent offenders was 188 and the z-score was 1.37. The raw number of infractions committed by nonviolent offenders was 111 and the z-score was .95. Both z-scores indicate that the number of infractions for each group of offenders was above the overall average. 2017 was not far behind with a total of 292 infractions committed. Of those 292, the raw number of infractions committed by violent offenders was 182 and the z-score was 1.18. The raw number of infractions committed by nonviolent offenders was 110 and the z-score was .89. In 2015, there were a total of 242 total infractions. Of those 242, the raw number of infractions committed by violent offenders was 134 and the z-score was -.35. The raw number of infractions committed by nonviolent offenders was 108 and the z-score was .77. In 2013, the total number of infractions committed was 212. The raw number of infractions committed by violent offenders was 124 with a z-score of -.67. The raw number of infractions committed by nonviolent offenders was 81 and the z-score was -.41. In 2012, the overall number of infractions committed against staff members was 196. The raw number of infractions

committed by violent offenders was 124 with a z-score of  $-.67$ . The raw number of infractions committed by nonviolent offenders was 72 with a z-score of  $-1.36$ .

The most frequent type of infraction committed overall was the offense coded, B20: commit an assault on a staff member in a manner unlikely to produce injury. There were a total of 1,287 infractions under this code committed throughout the entire study period. This equates to an average of 214 infractions per year in which an inmate committed an assault on a staff member in a manner unlikely to produce injury. The description of this infraction would indicate that this category may be commonly used by staff members to penalize inmates for unruly behavior. The infraction definition stated that the assault is unlikely to produce an injury. However, the inmate is committing an act that is against prison policy. The commission of these infractions, even though they may not produce an injury, are still hazardous and potentially dangerous for staff members. They must be taken seriously, especially since this was the most common type of infraction committed. The infraction indicates that inmates are not following rules. Not following rules may be a precipice to committing a more dangerous infraction.

The next most frequent occurring infraction was the offense coded, A11: Commit an assault on a staff member with intent to commit any sexual act. There were a total of 119 infractions under this code committed throughout the entire study period. This equates to an average of 20 infractions per year in which an inmate committed an assault on a staff member with the intent to commit any sexual act. The final type of infraction committed against staff members during the study period was the offense coded, B13: Instigate or provoke an assault on a staff member. During the study period, there were 34

of these infractions committed. This equates to an average of six infractions in which an inmate instigated or provoked an assault on a staff member per year.

The overall average number of infractions committed each year was 240. The average number of infractions committed by violent inmates was 145 per year. The average number of infractions committed by nonviolent inmates was 95 per year. This indicates that on average, 60% of infractions are committed by violent inmates, whereas 40% of infractions are committed by nonviolent inmates. The percentages for the averages are congruent with the averages of the raw numbers. Violent inmates commit 20% more infractions, on average, than nonviolent inmates. The median number of assaults committed overall per year was 115. For the violent offenders, the median number of offenses committed each year was 129. For the nonviolent offenders, the median number of offenses committed each year was 98. This represents the midpoint of the frequency distribution for each of the sample groups. Due to the fact that the means and medians for each group are not equal, one can assess that the distributions of the scores are not normal, hence the calculation of the z-scores. The standard deviation for the violent offenders was 31.46. This standard deviation indicates that each data point within the sample group is 31.46 points away from the average. The standard deviation for the nonviolent offenders was 16.88. This standard deviation indicates that each data point with the sample group is 16.88 points away from the average. These standard deviations indicate that there is a reasonable amount of variation among the scores in each group when they are being compared to the mean. The z-scores were calculated for each group in order to standardize the scores so each year can be interpreted individually. For the violent sample group, four of the six years studied yielded a total number of

infractions below the average number of infractions per year, while only two years were above average. For the nonviolent sample group, three of the six years that were studied yielded a total number of infractions below the average number of infractions per year, while three years were above the average. The implication of these results will be discussed further in chapter five. The table represents the averages per year of infractions committed by each sample study group. The table also shows the z-scores for each year. (See Figures 1-4 in Appendix for additional information).

Table

Year	<i>Infractions Committed by Year</i>		Z-score	Violent	Z-score
	Overall Infractions	Nonviolent			
2012	196	72	-1.36	124	-.67
2013	212	88	-.41	124	-.67
2014	199	81	-.83	118	-.86
2015	242	108	.77	134	-.35
2016	299	111	.95	188	1.37
2017	292	110	.89	182	1.18
<hr/>					
N=1440					
Average/Year	240	95		145	
Standard Deviation	42	16.87		31.46	

The third research question examined “whether there are other pertinent relationships that exist among other independent variables within the data that give an inmate a higher propensity to commit an infraction against a staff member?” Do other factors such as time incarcerated, race, age, or level of education have any bearing on whether or not an inmate commits an infraction involving aggression against a staff member? A non-directional research hypothesis will be examined in relation to research

question three: “other factors exist that may be related to whether or not an inmate will commit an infraction involving aggression against a staff member.”

The race of the inmate for each infraction committed was recorded. Of all infractions committed ( $n=1,440$ ), Black inmates committed 1,088 of them. Of the 870 overall infractions committed by violent inmates, 705 of those infractions were committed by Black inmates. Of the 570 overall infractions committed by nonviolent inmates, 383 were committed by Black inmates. These numbers indicate that of the infractions committed by Black inmates, 65% of them were committed by violent offenders and 35% were committed by nonviolent offenders.

A more in-depth examination of each infraction type and the race of the offender that committed it shows that Black inmates were more likely to receive the most common infraction type of B20. Of the 1,287 B20 infractions, Black inmates committed 948 of them. White inmates committed 253 of them. Inmates categorized as Other committed 47 of them and Indian inmates committed 35 of them. These results and the implications of this particular finding will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Of all infractions committed ( $n=1,440$ ), White inmates committed 260 of them. Of the 870 overall infractions committed by violent inmates, 117 of those infractions were committed by White inmates. Of the 570 overall infractions committed by nonviolent inmates, 143 were committed by White inmates. These numbers indicate that of the infractions committed by White inmates, 58% of them were committed by nonviolent offenders and 45% were committed by violent offenders.

Other reported races were Asian, Indian, and Other. These categories only accounted for 92 of the overall infractions that were committed ( $n=1,440$ ). The other

reported races combined for a total of 44 of the infractions committed by nonviolent offenders. The other reported races combined for a total of 48 infractions committed by violent offenders. (See Figure 5 and 6 in the Appendix for additional information.)

The inmates' education level at the time of each infraction being committed was also reported. Individuals with a high school diploma committed 283 of the overall infractions recorded ( $n=1,440$ ). Of those 283 infractions, 164 were committed by violent offenders and 119 were committed by nonviolent offenders. These numbers indicate that of the inmates who had a high school diploma, 58% of the infractions committed were committed by violent offenders, while 42% of the infractions committed were committed by nonviolent offenders.

Inmates with an 11<sup>th</sup> grade education were responsible for committing 368 of the overall infractions reported ( $n=1,440$ ). Of those 368 reported infractions, 212 were committed by violent offenders and 156 were committed by nonviolent offenders. These numbers indicate that of the inmates who had an 11<sup>th</sup> grade education, 58% of the infractions committed were committed by violent offenders, while 42% of the infractions were committed by nonviolent offenders.

There was also a group of inmates committing a substantial amount of infractions who had a 10<sup>th</sup> grade education. Those inmates were responsible for 318 of the overall infractions committed ( $n=1440$ ). Of those reported infractions, 189 were committed by violent offenders while 129 were committed by nonviolent offenders. This equates to 59% of infractions being committed by a violent offender and 41% of the infractions being committed by a nonviolent offender.



Inmates with a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education were responsible for 262 of the overall infractions reported ( $n=1,440$ ). Of those infractions, 168 were committed by violent offenders and 94 were committed by nonviolent offenders. This results in 64% of the infractions being committed by a violent offender and 36% of the infractions being committed by a nonviolent offender.

The last group of inmates who presented significant numbers in relation to education level and infractions committed were inmates with an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. Of the overall number of infractions committed ( $n=1,440$ ), 151 were committed by inmates who had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. Of those infractions committed, 98 were committed by violent offenders and 53 were committed by nonviolent offenders. This results in 65% of the infractions being committed by a violent offender and 35% of the infractions being committed by a nonviolent offender.

It is important to note that of all infractions committed, there was only one infraction reported in which an inmate had some college education. The inmate that committed that infraction was, in fact, a violent inmate. There were only 56 infractions committed by inmates who had less than an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. The lowest level of education attained by an inmate who committed an infraction was 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. (See Figure 7 in the Appendix for additional information.)

One additional independent variable studied was the average number of days an inmate had served (during their current sentence) at the time of the infraction. The overall average number of days served for all of the infractions committed was 1,244 days. When broken down into the sample groups, the violent inmates who committed infractions had spent on average 1,703 days in prison at the time of the commission of the

infraction. Contrarily, the nonviolent inmates who committed infractions had spent on average 543 days in prison at the time of the commission of the infraction. (See Figure 8 in the Appendix for additional information.) While there appears to be a distinct difference between the sample groups in regard to the amount of time they had been incarcerated when they committed an infraction, the average age of inmates appears to be more homogenous. The average age of the overall infraction commission was 31 years old. The average age of both groups of violent and nonviolent offenders was also 31 years old.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Valuable information can be obtained by carefully examining trends be present in infractions that have occurred against staff members in correctional facilities. While the purpose of this research study was to determine whether or not violent offenders were more likely to commit infractions against staff members than their nonviolent counterparts, some of the other independent variables presented some concerning results that will need to be examined further in additional research proposals. Ultimately, the descriptive statistical analysis of the secondary infraction data for the NCDPS adult male correctional facilities indicates that more infractions were committed by violent offenders than nonviolent offenders. The study period was broken into six respective years from 2012-2017. Each year, comparing raw numbers, violent offenders committed more infractions against staff members than nonviolent offenders.

While other independent variables such as race, age, education level, and amount of time incarcerated when the infraction occurred were also studied, race of the inmate committing the infraction presented the most disparate result. Overall, Black inmates were more likely to commit infractions than any other incarcerated race. Not only were Black inmates more likely to commit an infraction overall, more of them were violent offenders than nonviolent offenders. There were no immediate concerns in regard to the age of the offenders, whether they were violent or nonviolent, as the average age for both was the same. Many of the inmates that committed an infraction, whether violent or nonviolent, had an 11<sup>th</sup> grade education. There was only one inmate who committed an infraction who had any college education. That one inmate committed a violent offense.

Another particularly concerning independent variable that will require further discussion and examination is the potential effect that length of stay has on an inmate committing an infraction against a staff member. Results indicated that the violent offenders who committed infractions had spent, on average, more days in prison at the time of the incident than nonviolent offenders. While there may be various explanations as to why this disparity exists, it is important to discuss this finding further.

### **Violent and Nonviolent**

The results of the first two research questions and hypotheses can be discussed concurrently, as they are the converse argument of one another. The first research hypothesis indicates that violent offenders are more likely than nonviolent offenders to commit an infraction against a staff member while incarcerated. The second research hypothesis indicates that nonviolent offenders are less likely than violent offenders to commit an infraction against a staff member while incarcerated. The total number of infractions committed were broken down by year for the entire study period. Then the infractions were broken down into committed by inmates with a history of violent offenses and those with a history of nonviolent offenses. In 2016, there were a total of 299 infractions committed against staff members. This study year saw the largest number of overall infractions. That year, 188 infractions were committed by violent offenders. In 2012, the fewest number of infractions were committed, with a total of 196 overall infractions. Of those 196, 124 were committed by violent offenders while 72 were committed by nonviolent offenders.

During each of the study years, when comparing the raw numbers, violent offenders committed more infractions against staff members than nonviolent offenders.

Since there was a standard deviation of 16.87 amongst the values of the yearly averages for nonviolent offenders and a standard deviation of 31.46 among the values of the yearly averages for the violent offenders, z-scores were calculated for each group. Calculating z-scores standardizes the scores by setting each mean to zero and the standard deviation to one. The results of the z-scores for the nonviolent offenders indicate that the totals for three of the study years fell below the average number of infractions committed. The totals for the other three years fell above the average number of infractions committed. The raw average number of nonviolent infractions committed per year was 95. Five of the study years for nonviolent infractions fall between  $-1/+1$  standard deviation from the mean, when interpreting the z-scores. Only one study year fell more than  $-1$  standard deviation from the mean. This indicates that 95% of the raw scores are within  $-1.5/+1.5$  standard deviation from the mean. One can infer that yearly averages of infractions committed by nonviolent offenders is a reliable result.

The results of the z-scores for the violent offenders indicate that the totals for four of the study years fell below the average number of infractions committed. The totals for two years fell above the average number of infractions committed. The raw average number of violent infractions committed per year was 145. Four of the study years for violent infractions fell between  $-1/+1$  standard deviation from the mean. Two years fell more than  $+1$  standard deviation from the mean, when interpreting the z-scores. Those two years had a z-score of 1.37 and 1.18. This indicates that two of the study years had raw totals well above the average. Ultimately, the raw numbers of infractions indicate that more infractions against staff members were committed by violent offenders than nonviolent offenders. Therefore, the first two research hypotheses are supported.

Of the violent offenders, the most common violent offense committed by the offender was robbery with a dangerous weapon. There were 214 infractions by an offender who had committed robbery with a dangerous weapon. The next most common was second degree murder. There were 115 infractions by an offender who had committed second degree murder. It is important to mention that 61 of the infractions were committed by an inmate incarcerated for first degree murder, while 27 were committed by an inmate incarcerated for manslaughter. Previous research conducted regarding the general violence perspective indicates that certain males possess a strong propensity to commit violent acts. Felson and Lane (2010) concluded that regardless of an individual's target of violence, they will engage in acts of aggression if they have committed an act of violence in the past. Of the 870 infractions committed by violent offenders, almost half of those (417) can be classified as either a robbery or a homicide. Felson and Messner (1996) concluded that oftentimes when inmates decide to commit an act of violence, they typically do so based on a quick and careless decision. They often do not take the time to weigh the effects of the decision, nor do they consider the potential outcomes related to those decisions. They make quick and careless decisions at the moment. This finding is congruently matched with the fact that 115 infractions were committed by inmates convicted of second degree murder. In North Carolina, the difference between first degree and second degree murder is the element of premeditation. Someone can be convicted of second degree murder if they intentionally kill someone, however, they don't premeditate the crime. That quick and careless decision to kill someone in the heat of the moment or situation can precipitate further violence that may be committed by an individual.

The results can also potentially be explained by Raine's (2018) research involving the neurodevelopmental perspective. Raine found that certain factors which may occur in early childhood, or even while in utero, may have a drastic impact on the brain development of male infants and toddlers. These factors may lead to a life of violence. While additional individualistic testing would have to be conducted on the inmates who actually committed the infractions to know for sure if early health risk factors such as prenatal smoking and drinking and poor nutrition played a part in their decisions to commit infractions against staff members while incarcerated, one can infer that the theory could be a plausible explanation.

### **Race**

Research question and hypothesis three stated other factors may exist may be related to whether or not an inmate will commit an infraction against a staff member. One of those factors examined during the secondary data analysis of infraction data was the race of the offender. Of the 1,440 infractions committed during the study period, 1,088 of them were committed by Black offenders. That is 76% of the total number of infractions. Possibly even more concerning, of those 1,088 infractions committed, 705 were committed by violent offenders. Only 383 were committed by nonviolent offenders. These results would indicate that a Black inmate is more likely to commit an infraction against a staff member than an inmate of any other race.

While it is clear that violent Black inmates were more likely to commit an infraction than their other counterparts, it's important to point out the type of infraction that Black inmates were likely to commit. The most common type of infraction committed overall was B20: commit an assault on a staff member in a manner unlikely to

produce injury. Of the 1,287 B20 infractions committed, 948 of them were committed by Black inmates. North Carolina Department of Public Safety Adult Corrections officials should thoroughly examine the disparities in this particular infraction code. As the result indicated, the B20 infraction is the most common of all offenses. It is possible that an overuse of this infraction is occurring to gain compliance and control over inmates. Prison employees have discretion to counsel inmates to prevent or mitigate misbehavior, instead of immediately giving them an infraction. Additional policies and de-escalation training should be implemented empowering staff members to verbally redirect the inmate behavior instead of immediately resorting to an infraction, namely B20.

During the study period, White inmates committed only 260 of the total number of infractions. Of those 260, 117 were violent offenders and 143 were nonviolent offenders. These numbers indicate that even if a White offender commits an infraction against a staff member, it is more likely to be a nonviolent offender than a violent offender. If this research study were to control for the race of the offender, research hypothesis two would be founded and research hypothesis one would be unfounded.

Another important piece of information to consider when examining the results of race is the actual racial breakdown of the inmates in the North Carolina state facilities during the study period. In 2012, 56% of the prison population was Black and 36% was White (North Carolina Department of Public Safety, 2013). In 2013, 55% of the prison population was Black and 37% was White (North Carolina Department of Public Safety, 2014). In 2014, 54% was Black and 38% was White (North Carolina Department of Public Safety, 2015). In 2015, 53% was Black and 39% was White (North Carolina Department of Public Safety, 2016). In 2016, 53% was Black and 39% was White (North



Carolina Department of Public Safety, 2017). In 2017, 52% was Black and 40% was White (North Carolina Department of Public Safety, 2018). While the numbers show a slow and steady increase in the White prison population and a slow and steady decrease in the Black prison population, the difference between the percentage of Black offenders who committed infractions compared to the percentage of the overall prison population is disparate. On average, 54% of the prison population is Black, while 76% of the inmates who committed infractions are Black.

Additional research exists that indicates race may be a strong predictor as to whether an inmate will commit an infraction while incarcerated. Lahm (2009) indicated that there are instances where institutions with a greater non-White population had a higher rate of inmate-on-staff assaults with weapons. Additionally, particular studies have also concluded that Black inmates are more likely to engage in prison violence than their White counterparts (Lahm, 2009). The findings of this research study add to the existing body of research that Black inmates tend to have a higher propensity to commit infractions while incarcerated. Based on the results from this independent variable alone, research hypothesis three is supported in that race appears to be a strong indicator as to whether or not an offender will commit an infraction against a staff member.

### **Level of Education**

The next independent variable examined was the education level of the inmate at the time the infraction was committed. Oftentimes, attaining a higher education level is directly correlated with community stability and intelligence. Cunningham et al. (2011) found that level of education had an inverse relationship with assaultive prison misconduct. In other words, their research indicated that the lower the level of education

an inmate had, the higher the likelihood that they would commit some sort of assault while incarcerated (Cunningham et al., 2011). The data analysis indicates a slight positive skew in the level of education completed by inmates who committed infractions against staff members. There was one infraction recorded that did not record the education level of the inmate. Therefore, the sample of infractions for the inmate education level was 1,439. The overall average level of education for all of the infractions committed was 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The average education level of both offender groups was also 10<sup>th</sup> grade. However, of all infractions, inmates with an 11<sup>th</sup> grade education committed the greatest number. They committed 368 with 212 of those being violent offenders and 156 of those being nonviolent offenders.

During the years of the study period, 76% of all inmates in North Carolina prisoners had between a 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade education (North Carolina Department of Public Safety, 2018). The overall inmate education level indicates that 23% of all inmates had some college experience. Based on the fact that only one inmate who committed an infraction had any type of college experience this could be a slight indicator that education level may be inversely related to whether or not an inmate will commit an infraction against a staff member. Additional research needs to be conducted examining specific inmates and their education levels.

### **Time Served and Age**

Previous research exists indicating that the longer an inmate stays in prison, the higher their chances are of committing a violent infraction while incarcerated. Lahm (2009) conducted a study concentrating on multiple independent variables. While examining time served, she found not only were violent offenders more likely to commit

a violent infraction while incarcerated, but those offenders had a longer time served than their nonviolent counterparts. There are various explanations for this disparity, primarily, violent offenders receive longer sentences for their crimes than nonviolent offenders.

In this study population, the overall average number of days served by all inmates who committed an infraction was 1,244 (3.4 years). Of the infractions committed by violent offenders, the average number of days served at the time of the infraction was 1,703 (4.6 years). Of the infractions committed by nonviolent offenders, the average number of days served at the time of the infraction was 543 (1.5 years). While sentence length may be a strong indicator as to why the time served is longer, one can still infer that the length of time served may have an impact on whether or not an individual commits an infraction against a staff member while they are incarcerated.

There are stressors that may be present in inmates who have served a longer sentence. There is a greater propensity for them to experience the effects of prisonization. Prisonization has historically been characterized as explaining an individual's criminal behavior based on their experiences while incarcerated (Shlosberg, Ho, & Mandery, 2018). Donald Clemmer studied a prison community in the 1940s and concluded that incarcerated inmates are persistently engaging in and mirroring the norms of antisocial subculture from other inmates (Shlosberg et al., 2018). These learning situations reduce the chances of inmates exhibiting pro-social behaviors. The longer they are exposed to the antisocial environment, the greater their chances are of experiencing prisonization (Shlosberg et al., 2018). So, while inmates who have committed violent offenses in order to be incarcerated will presumably serve a longer sentence than an inmate that has committed a nonviolent offense, it can also be posited that an inmate who

spends more time in prison will be more likely to commit an infraction against a staff member.

The final independent variable that was captured in the secondary data analysis was the age of the offender at the time of the infraction. The average age of the offender for the overall count of infractions, the nonviolent offenders and the violent offenders, was 31 years of age. There were no significant differences found in either of the study groups. Archer (2009) posited that males' tendencies to commit violent and aggressive acts increase with their age. As males get older, they begin to internalize their masculine traits and understand what it means to be dominant and sometimes aggressive in particular situations (Archer, 2009). According to the results of Archer's (2009) research, males' involvement in violent crimes and same-sex homicides is at its highest between the ages of 18 and 30 years old.

### **Conclusions and Summary**

The descriptive statistical analysis of secondary infraction data provides some very telling information for NCDPS. Previous research has been conducted in multiple studies that examines assaults that occur among inmates. There is an extensive body of research that exists that examines staff members' sexual assaults on inmates. Many studies conducted regarding inmates and assaults on staff members do not look specifically or solely at the type of crime the inmate has committed and their propensity to commit an infraction. The results of this study clearly indicate that inmates who have committed a violent offense in order to be incarcerated committed more infractions against staff members than offenders who committed nonviolent crimes. The benefits of

the methodology used for this research is that it examined a study period of trends that occurred over a six-year period. The data was already collected and the infractions had already occurred.

The general violence perspective postulates that individuals who engage in violent behavior are prone to violent behavior. It is clear from the results of this study that in the case of adult male inmates incarcerated in North Carolina prisons who have committed infractions against staff members, this theory holds true. Prison administrators must understand the implications and safety concerns that arise from these results. Corrections staff members must be properly trained in order to reduce or mitigate the chances of being assaulted when working directly with violent inmates. One recommendation is to encourage and implement the use of the tenets of the procedural justice theory when training correctional staff. There are four primary attributes of the procedural justice theory: trustworthiness, respectful treatment, neutrality, and voice. Trustworthiness is how the inmate views the staff member. Respect is the staff member/correctional officer treating the inmate with professionalism and respect. Neutrality is the staff member's ability to perform his or her duties without bias. Voice is the inmate being able to share their side of the story (Goodman-Delahunty, Verbrugge, Sowemimo-Coker, Kingsford, & Taitz, 2014).

Procedural justice is an emerging evidence-based practice that is meant to improve relations between a figure of authority and an individual they encounter (Goodman-Delahunty et al., 2014). That improvement is oftentimes viewed as simply being compliant to an order or request. There is a focus on interpersonal dynamics and the specific interaction that occurs, not so much the outcome of the encounter (Goodman-

Delahunty et al., 2014). Encouraging staff members to buy into this theory and practice it on a daily basis could assist in reducing the overall number of infractions occurring in prisons. As the numbers indicate, there was a steady and slow increase in the number of infractions that occurred during the study period. In order to ensure that staff members and inmates alike remain safe while behind prison walls, some changes need to be implemented.

Additionally, an area of concern based on the results of this study, should be the disparity in the race of the inmates committing infractions against staff members. Black inmates are more likely than any other race incarcerated to commit an infraction against a staff member. While the raw numbers show there are more Black inmates incarcerated in North Carolina prisons than any other race, the number of Black inmates who are responsible for the infractions committed is disproportionate. While the tenets of procedural justice may certainly assist in gaining compliance among Black inmates, there appears to be a greater problem in existence. Additional research needs to be conducted, on a qualitative level, to attempt to identify some of the root causes of this disparity. Focus groups and structured interviews should be conducted with inmates to determine their levels of satisfaction with how they are being treated by staff members in North Carolina adult male prison facilities. This qualitative research should examine whether or not Black inmates are committing infractions at a higher rate as a means of retaliatory acts based on how they are being treated by staff members. Structured interview questions can be tailored to determine whether or not Black inmates feel that they are being treated with respect and treated fairly in relation to how their White counterparts are being treated. The findings from this study are telling in regard to the racial disparity.

These interviews and focus groups will also need to establish why White inmates who are committing infractions are more likely to be nonviolent offenders. Until these additional studies can be conducted, prison administrators must be aware of this disparity. While training staff members, additional sensitivity training can be implemented.

Additionally, inmate programs should be implemented that have a particular focus on inmate identity and culture. When creating programs that address inmate substance abuse issues or violent and anger control issues, these programs should center around empowering inmates to express their anger in healthy and constructive ways (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2005). Oftentimes, male inmates who display hyper levels of violence and aggression may lack a sense of self-efficacy or even possess a sense of self-entitlement (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2005). Prison administrators and program developers should consider creating violence prevention groups that allow inmates to constructively self-examine the root causes of their displaced anger.

Moreover, inmate programming that encourages pro-social behaviors such as relationship building and non-confrontational conflict resolution should be implemented in North Carolina adult correctional facilities. There is a particular program that currently exists in a state prison in Connecticut that is mirrored after a German model. This program encourages healthy relationships and interactions between inmates and staff members. They can be seen playing board games with one another or participating in lip sync battles against one another. The T.R.U.E. (Truthful, Respectful, Understanding and Elevating) program also allows inmates to take advantage of yoga studios built within cells in the facility and receive emotional family visits. In its two years of existence, this program has not reported a single infraction against staff member. It has not reported a

single incident or fight between inmates. The program is rehabilitative in nature and addresses some of the root causes that incarcerated men are dealing with (Whitaker, 2019). One key component of the program is using inmates that are serving life sentences as mentors. Not only are these inmates serving as role models to the inmates in the program, they are also finding a sense of purpose for themselves by serving others. North Carolina could certainly benefit by implementing a program similar to the T.R.U.E program.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this research was that a secondary data analysis was conducted. The researcher had to rely on data compiled by NCDPS. There is a possibility that there were infractions that were not reported. There was also a heavy reliance on the level of expertise and professionalism of the NCDPS employees who provided the final data product. The researcher had no way of validating the information contained in the data report was 100% accurate. The assumption is made that the data is accurate and complete. The analysis was conducted on the data provided. The upside of the secondary data analysis was that the researcher was able to spend the majority of the time analyzing the data, not actually collecting the data.

Based on the fact that a secondary data analysis was conducted, there is a high degree of internal validity present in the data examined. There is strong evidence that being a violent offender may cause an inmate to commit an infraction against a staff member once they are incarcerated. An extraneous variable that was identified was whether or not the overall prison population simply consisted of more violent offenders, hence causing the majority of the infractions against staff members to be committed by



violent offenders. Contrarily, throughout the six-year study period, four of the five most frequent crimes committed by inmates entering prisons were nonviolent crimes. The top five crimes for inmates entering prison were drug possession (nonviolent), breaking and entering (nonviolent), larceny (nonviolent), DWI (nonviolent), and assault (violent). The majority of the male prison population in North Carolina is incarcerated for nonviolent offenses. Another indicator there is a high degree of validity present in this study is the temporal antecedence. Based on the methodology of the study, the commission of the violent or nonviolent crime occurred prior to the infraction being committed. The inmate had already committed the crime prior to being involved in the infraction being study or measured.

The external validity is not as strong as the internal validity, simply because a secondary data analysis was conducted. This study only examined data provided based on the requirements listed in the methodology. While these results cannot be generalized across other prison populations, the study itself can be duplicated with other populations. The same type of data could be collected from another state and the same secondary analysis of descriptive statistics could be conducted. The results may differ from what was found in this study, but the methodology can be the same.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Future Research**

These findings indicate that violent offenders in male prisons present a particular safety concern to staff members. There is also an implication that Black offenders pose a more severe threat to staff members than any other race within prisons. Understanding that the adult male prison population in North Carolina is predominantly Black, presents unique and exceptional challenges for prison staff and administrators. Not only is there a

need to address violent offenders and their propensity to continue to perpetuate violence while they are incarcerated, there is a greater need to address the racial disparity that exists among inmates committing these acts. An even greater societal concern is reducing the number of Black males who are incarcerated.

The results of this study lay a valid foundation for additional research to be conducted in regard to assaults on staff members in prisons. Future research should include the custody level of the prison. In North Carolina, there are close, medium, and minimum security level adult male prisons. A subsequent study would see if a correlation exists with the level of custody and the number of infractions committed against a staff member at a particular facility. There is a greater likelihood for more violent offenders to be housed in close security level facilities. However, these facilities tend to have more inmate restrictions in place and more staff supervising inmates' actions. The study should examine whether those added protections included in close security facilities create more opportunities for inmates to assault staff members, or whether it reduces the number of infractions committed by inmates.

An additional study should also be conducted examining the staff-to-inmate ratios in facilities to see if more staff will reduce or mitigate the number of infractions against staff members. Currently, overall, North Carolina prisons are understaffed. There are continual staff shortages and high turnover rates among staff members working in prisons. One could postulate that increasing the number of staff members/corrections officers within a facility should reduce the number of assaults that occur. This could, conversely, cause the number of infractions to increase if the number of individuals to assault increases.

Subsequent research should also address specific crimes that are committed by offenders to see if there is a direct correlation with the commission of that particular crime and their propensity to commit an infraction. This study indicated that of those violent offenders who committed an infraction, the most common crime they committed was robbery with a dangerous weapon. Manslaughter and homicide also comprised a large amount of the violent offenders. Identifying whether committing a particular violent crime increases the chance of an inmate committing an infraction could provide pertinent data to administrators and staff members alike when determining how and where to house them.

Finally, a study should be conducted examining the gender of the staff member assaulted. This study examined male inmates. It did not, however, study the gender of the staff member assaulted. Research indicates that there are gendered socialization patterns in the United States (Bierie, 2012). These patterns yield particular imbalances of power in gender relations in certain circumstances. While there should not be a difference in the inmate's interaction with a female or male staff member, it is highly likely that a difference exists. According to Bierie (2012), prison workers sometimes use informal rules when deploying authority in situations dealing with inmates. Oftentimes, that deployment of authority differs between males and females. Additional qualitative research should examine females and males and their interactions with inmates in situations that require them to deploy authority over the inmate. An examination of the inmates' response to each gender should be analyzed, as well as the techniques deployed by each staff member. The findings of this research could allow for the creation of

situations in which staff members can collaborate and share with each other best practices in handling violent inmates.

The safety of staff members working in the North Carolina prisons is of the utmost importance. These women and men put their lives on the line every day when they step through those doors and they lock behind them. Inmates are incarcerated as a consequence of a commission of a criminal act. Prison staff members are placed behind bars with inmates every day. Prison administrators must deem the safety of their staff members to be of paramount importance. Understanding the big picture of what is occurring within these facilities and creating courses of action to address concerns that have been raised with this research study should be a high priority.

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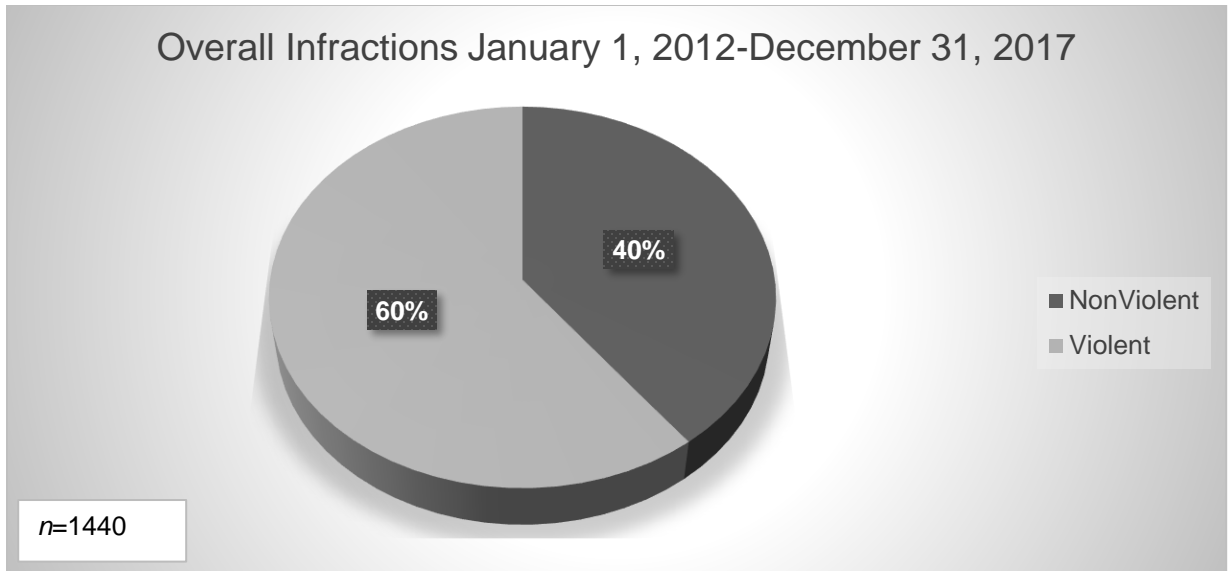
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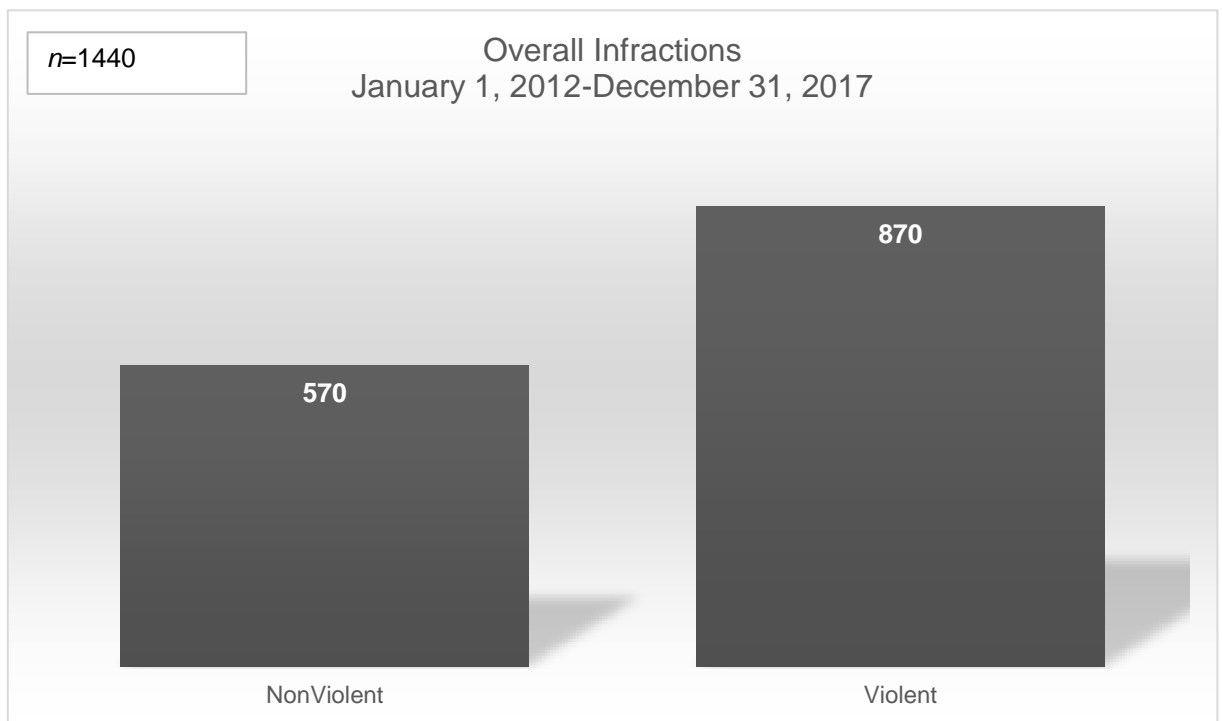
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Appendix

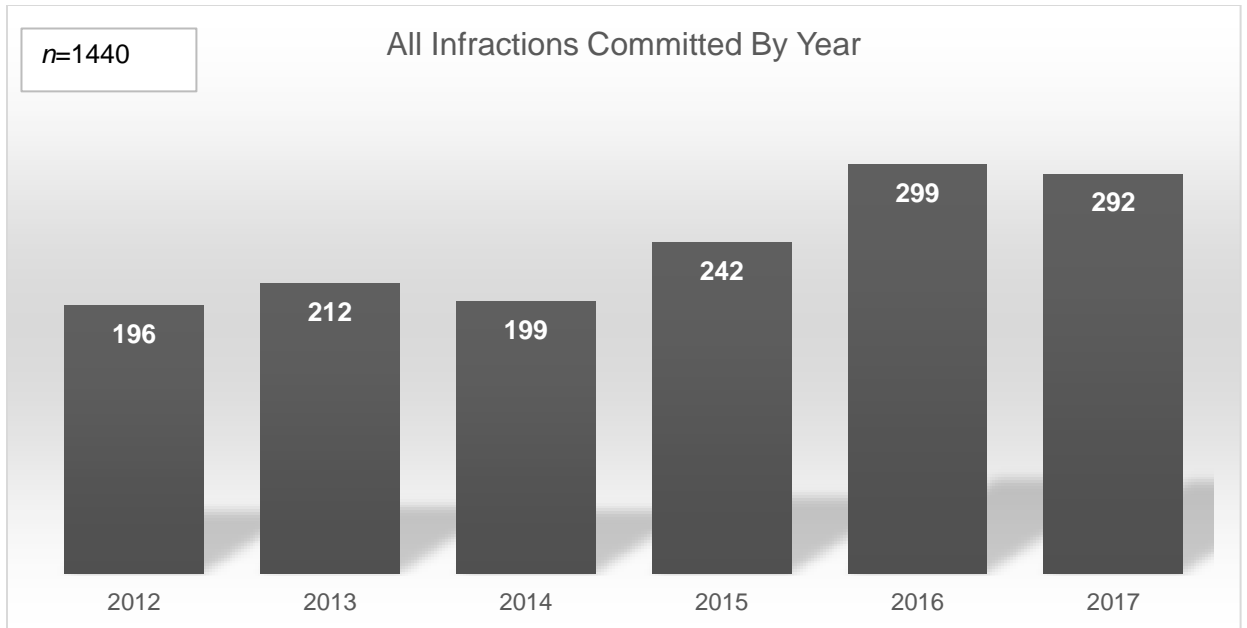
Figures



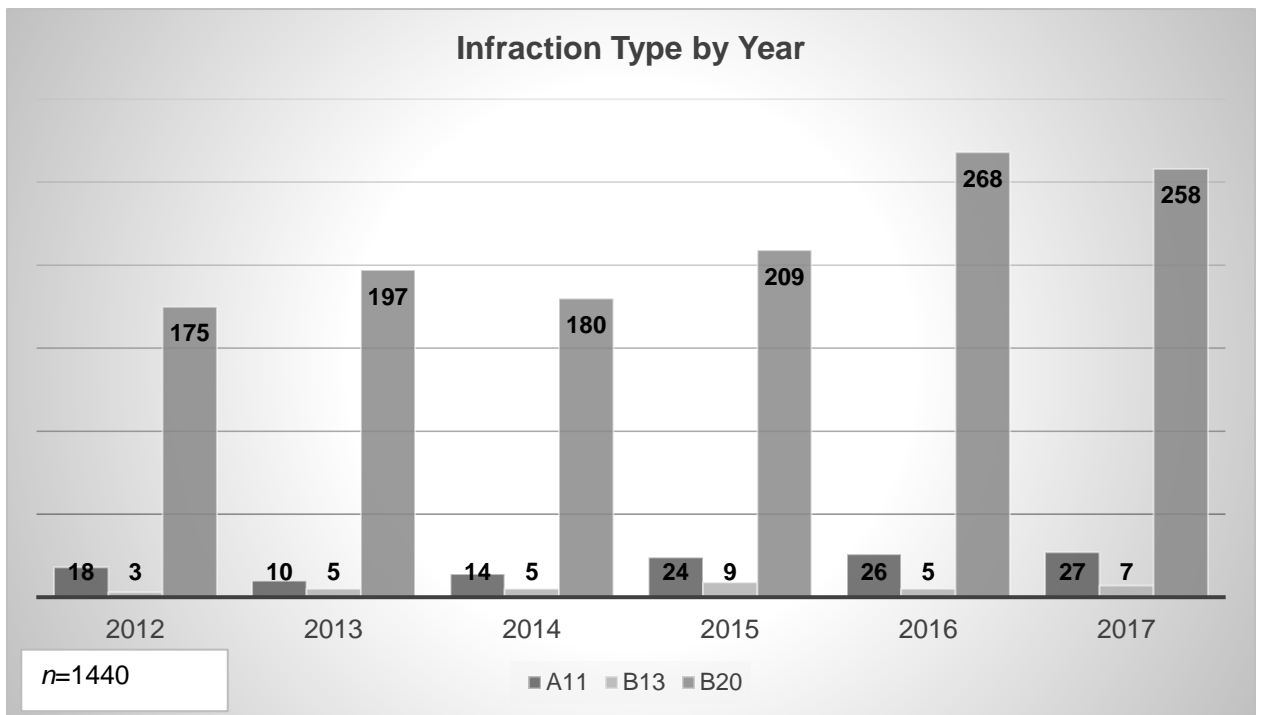
*Figure 1.* Overall infraction percentages. This figure shows the percentage of nonviolent and violent infractions committed during the study period.



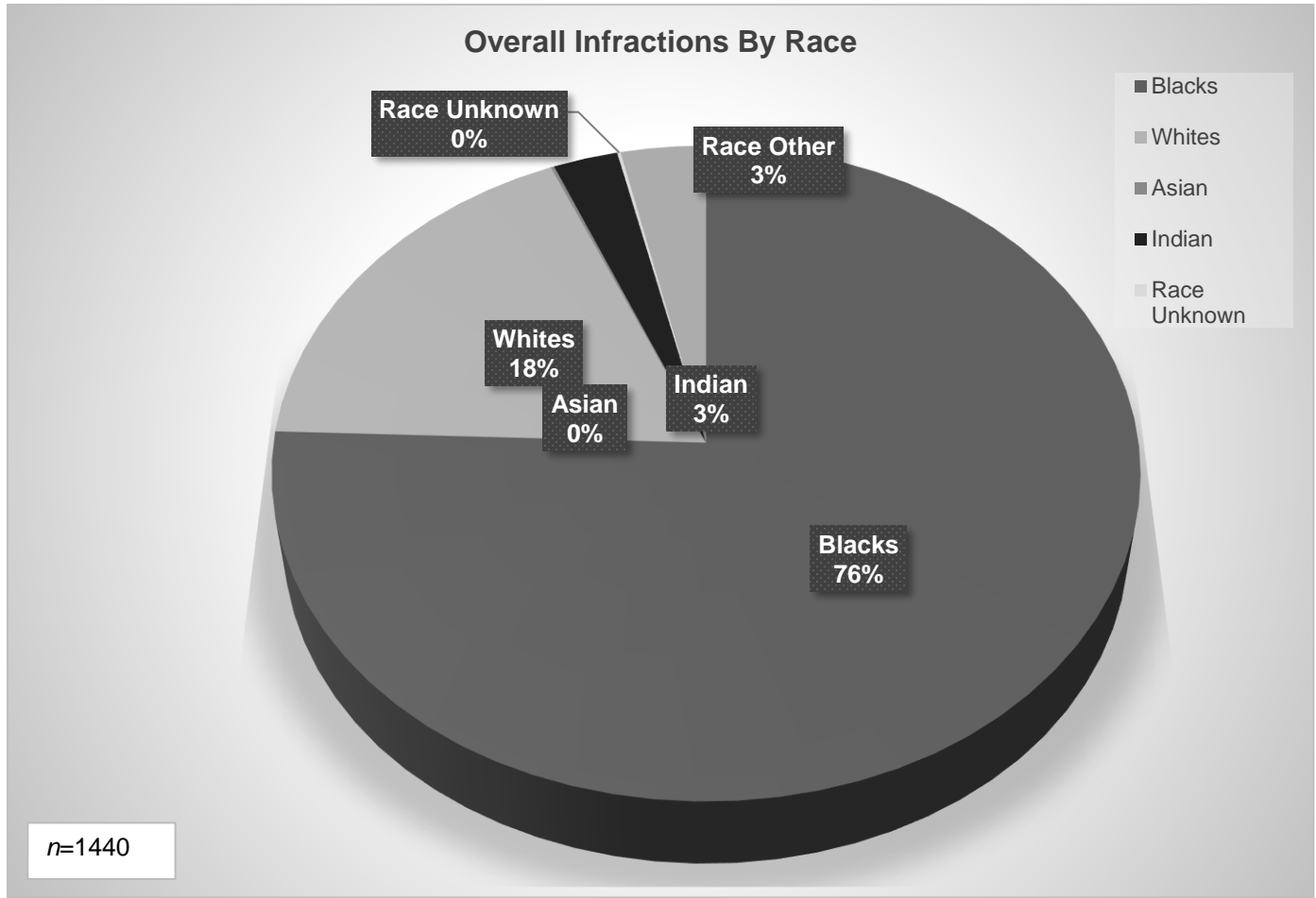
*Figure 2.* Overall infraction raw numbers. This figure shows the raw numbers of each nonviolent and violent infraction committed during the study period.



*Figure 3.* All infractions committed by year. This figure shows the raw number of infractions committed each year during the study period.



*Figure 4.* Infraction type by year. This figure shows the raw numbers for each type of reported infraction by year.



*Figure 5.* Overall infractions committed by race. This figure shows the percentage of infractions committed by each race.

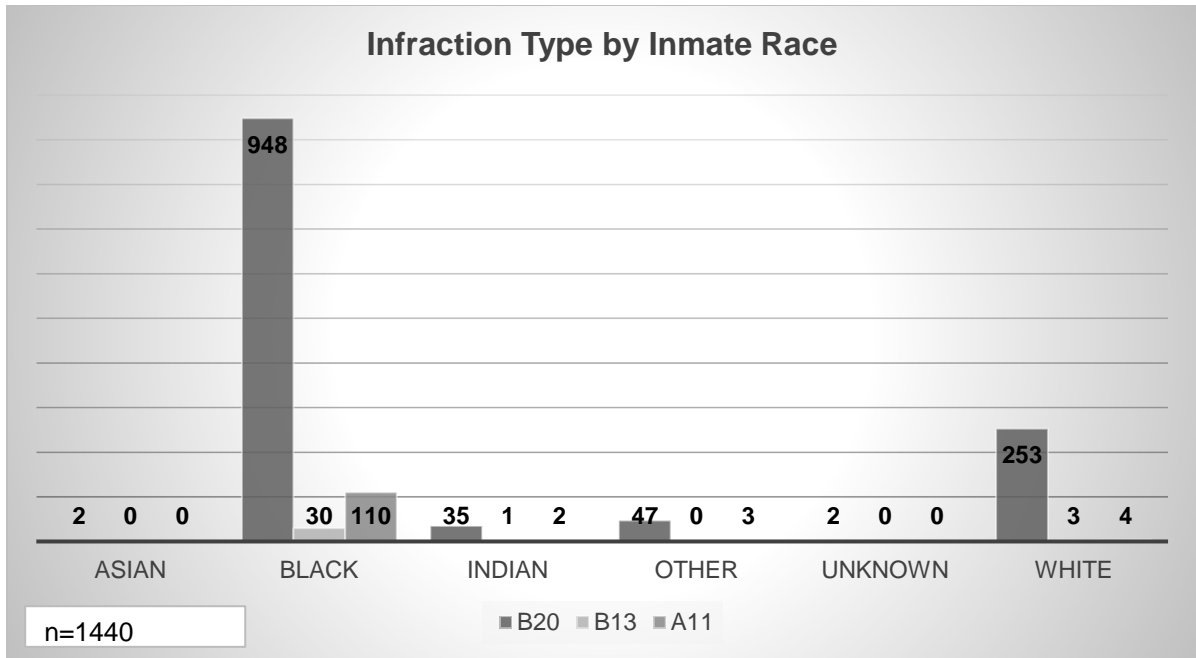


Figure 6. Overall infractions broken down into infraction type and race. This figure shows which race committed each type of infraction.

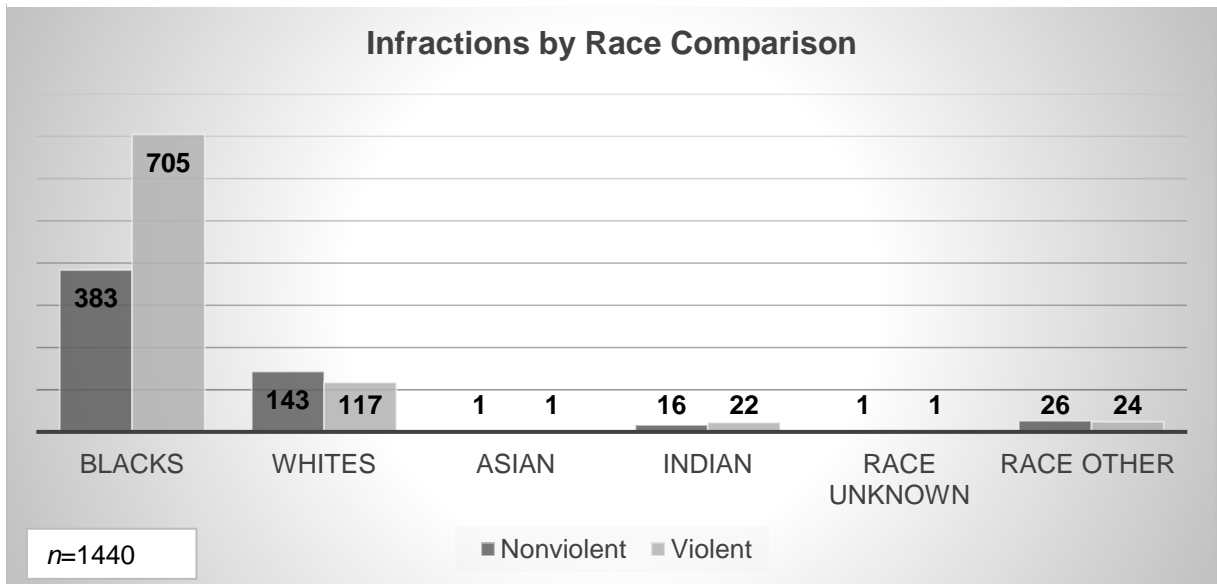
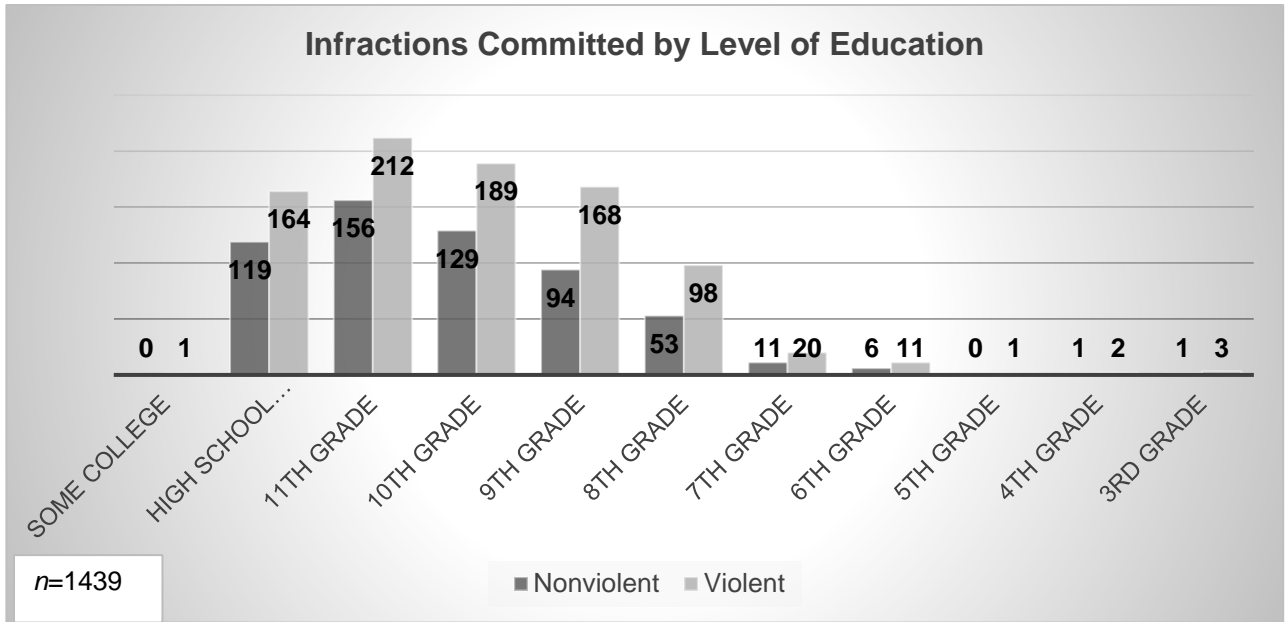
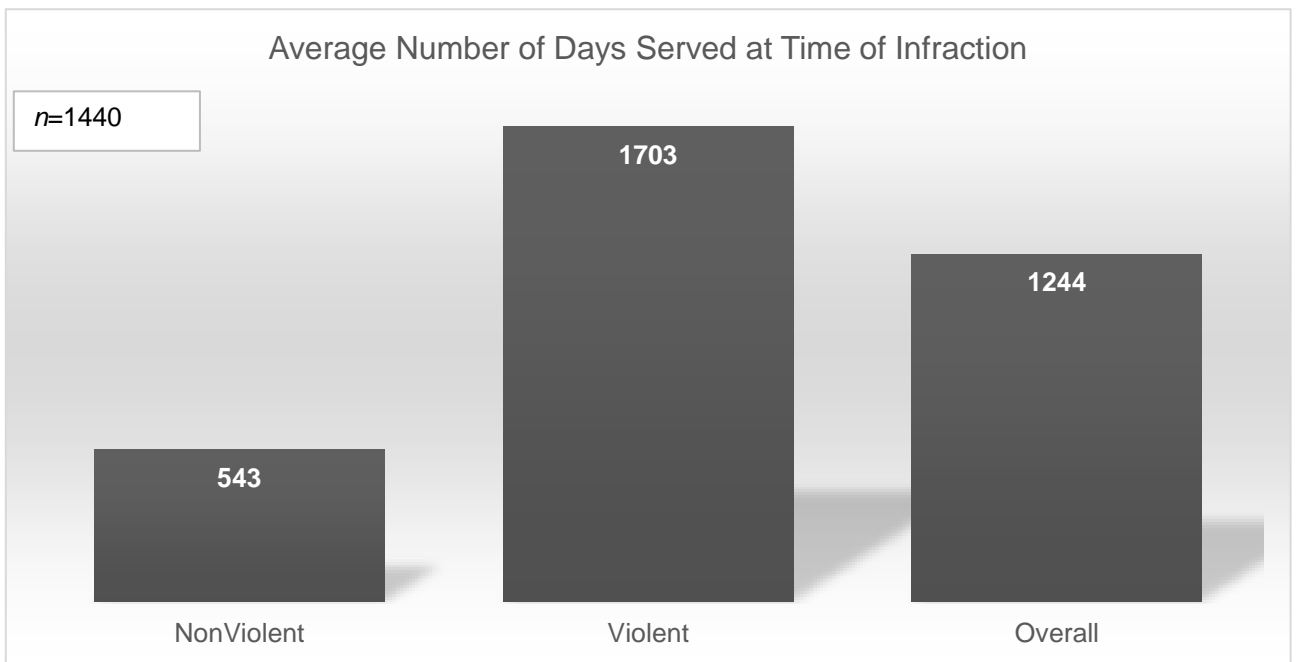


Figure 7. Infractions by race and type of offender. This figure shows the raw number of infractions committed by each race as well as also showing nonviolent and violent comparison.



*Figure 8.* Infractions committed by level of education. This figure shows the raw number of infractions committed by level of education completed by the inmate. It also compares the nonviolent to the violent offenders.



*Figure 9.* Average number of days served at time of infraction. This figure shows the average number of days the inmate had served of their current sentence when the infraction took place. It is broken into nonviolent and violent offenders.