AN EXPLORATION OF RELIGION AND DESISTANCE FROM CRIME

By

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Abstract

Religious involvement is considered to provide an opportunity for a 'second chance' for individuals with offending histories, however, there has been limited research conducted in the area of religious involvement in this population. This thesis aimed to contribute to the literature base by exploring the impact of religion, and specifically the conversion to Christianity, on individuals with forensic histories. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the literature regarding the broader context of religion and crime. Chapter 2 presents a systematic review of the literature investigating whether involvement in religious programmes or practices impacts on recidivism rates, or on other factors which are associated with crime. The findings suggest that involvement in religious programmes and practices can reduce reoffending rates following release from prison. Chapter 3 presents an empirical study exploring the lived experiences of individuals with offending histories who had converted to Christianity, in order to gain insight into the role that religious beliefs play in their lives. Participants described their lives before they became Christians and spoke of the positive impact their new faith has on their lives, as well as the struggles they experience. Chapter 4 examines the psychometric properties of the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief-RCOPE; Pargament et al., 1998) in relation to religious coping in cultures and populations outside of the United States. The main findings are summarised in Chapter 5, alongside recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The rate of crime and re-offending in the UK and worldwide is cause for concern. In England and Wales, the prison population as of 17th February 2023 was 83,687, and is predicted to increase to 94,400 by March 2025, with further projected increases to between 93,100 and 106,300 by March 2027 (Ministry of Justice, 2023a). The most recent data released in regard to reoffending rates demonstrates that the overall proven reoffending rate for January to March 2021 was 24.3% (Ministry of Justice, 2023b), and in 2020 it was estimated that at least 18% of crimes were committed by recently released prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2020). With the average cost per prisoner in the United Kingdom in 2022 being £46,696 (Statista, 2023), there is clearly a financial impact of this rising trend. In addition, there are also social, economic, and psychological implications to offending that need to be considered (Hallett & Johnson, 2014). For instance, Reising et al. (2019) found that a fathers' criminality is related to poor offspring mental health, and Skinner and Farrington (2023) reported that offenders face an increased risk of health-related problems. Furthermore, those who are already considered to be socially disadvantaged (i.e., homeless, unemployed, poor educational background, family history of crime etc.) are overly represented in prisons (Newburn, 2016). On release from prison, these issues can remain or can even be exacerbated and form a revolving door back into the prison system (Padfield & Maruna, 2006).

Re-offending rates denote that prison does not necessarily have a deterrent effect on individuals (Nagin et al., 2009). As such, a question that is asked by practitioners and academics in the field of forensic psychology is "what works?" in reducing re-offending (McGuire, 2013), and an extensive amount of research has been undertaken to establish best practice in reducing reoffending (Barnett & Fitzalan-Howard, 2018). In the United Kingdom, the implementation of offending behaviour programmes that aim to address thinking skills

and attitudes have been promising, with findings suggesting that these programmes have reduced reconviction rates by around 4% (Ministry of Justice, 2023c). Furthermore, a review for the U.S. Department of Justice concluded that cognitive behavioural therapy programmes reduced recidivism by 20-30 percentage points (Duwe, 2017). Nevertheless, with a large percentage of the prison population being reconvicted following release, it is evident that more is needed to support individuals in their re-entry into the community to increase the likelihood that individuals will desist from crime. As such, protective factors (i.e., factors which decrease the likelihood of an offender reoffending) have received attention in the field. One such factor is religion and religiosity, which have long been considered as protective factors against criminal behaviour (Haviv et al., 2020), and is the subject of a growing body of research (Ronel & Ben Yair, 2018).

Religion and Rehabilitation

Regarding terminology, the terms religion and spirituality are used interchangeably throughout the literature. In general, religion refers to a belief in a faith system, and spirituality refers to the beliefs, values, goals, and purposes that the person is committed to (Paloutzian, 2005). Paloutzian and Park (2005) suggest that as a psychological function, the terms may be used interchangeably. As such, throughout this thesis, the terms religion and spirituality will both be used to discuss the concept of a faith-based belief system.

Religion is accessible to most people, provides a pro-social supportive network, and some religious groups support individuals with re-entry into the community after release from prison, including providing help with housing and employment (Mears et al., 2006). Religion and faith-based programmes have a notable presence in prison environments (Clear et al., 2000) and all prisoners have the rights and freedoms to practise their faith (National Offender Management Service, 2016). According to Sturge (2020), over half of the prison population

in England and Wales identify with a particular religion, thereby highlighting the importance that many prisoners may place on their faith.

In many criminal justice systems across the world, faith-based programmes are offered to those serving a prison sentence. Such programmes seek to encourage individuals who have offended to engage in repentance, participate in religious lifestyles, and to abandon criminality (Haviv et al., 2020). Christian values have historically had a heavy influence on models of incarceration (Clear & Sumter, 2002), particularly those of moral reform and forgiveness (Rostaing et al., 2015). In the early centuries, when the land was under Roman law, individuals who were caught perpetrating a crime would have been mutilated or killed. The early Christian church aimed to prevent such acts occurring, and the offenders were granted asylum in church. Following this, criminals were sent to imprisonment under church jurisdiction in place of other forms of punishment (Dammer, 2002), and prison chaplains were considered to be the first individuals concerned with the rehabilitation of offenders (Keuther, 1951).

Researchers have long been interested in the relationship between crime and religion (Tilley & Laycock, 2018), with mixed results in regard to the helpfulness of religion on desistance from crime. The first study investigating the relationship between religion and crime was conducted by Hirschi and Stark in 1969. In their study, a sample of 4,077 students entering the public junior and senior high schools in California completed a measure of delinquency and a measure of religiosity. The authors found that delinquency was unaffected by church attendance, and they concluded that religion does not have an impact on crime or recidivism. These findings have been supported by other researchers throughout the years (e.g., Benda & Corwyn, 1997; Giordano et al., 2008; Laub & Sampson, 2003), however, elsewhere in the literature, research has found that individuals who convert to a religion will

be less likely to commit a further offence (e.g., Jang & Johnson, 2010; Johnson et al., 1997; Johnson et al., 2000a; Kendler et al., 2003). To investigate this further, a large meta-analysis investigating the effect of religion on crime was conducted by Baier and Wright (2001). They reviewed papers published between 1969 and 1998 and concluded that religious beliefs and behaviours exert a moderate deterrent effect on criminal behaviour. Johnson and Jang (2010) also explored this further in their meta-analysis of 270 papers, in which 90% of papers demonstrated that religiosity was a significant deterrent against antisocial behaviour. Pirutinsky's (2014) findings also suggest that religion may increase self-control, which is associated with fewer criminal behaviours. Other benefits of religious involvement have been suggested. For instance, Roberts and Stacer (2016) explored the perspectives of offenders' participation in faith-based programmes and their opinions of re-entry. Their findings suggested that many of the participants interviewed viewed the faith-based interventions as an effective alternative to other methods of rehabilitation that they had attempted, and that they valued the aspect of a mentor. All of the participants reflected that their life was different after participation in the faith-based programme, particularly in relation to engaging in a pro-social life.

The Psychology of Religion

While the findings described above discuss an interesting phenomenon with promising outcomes, it is important to understand why people may adopt religious beliefs and practises. Frankl (1969) argued that the main goal in life is to find meaning and value, and this need overpowers that of the need for pleasure or power. Human beings seek meaning in all aspects of life, and they are inherently natural meaning makers, whether consciously or unconsciously (Paloutzian & Park, 2015). By making meanings, humans are able to evaluate the information around them to make sense of it in light of past experiences, memories, beliefs, values, and goals (Park, 2013b). Two interrelated concepts are at play when meaning

making. Firstly, meaning construction occurs when humans put pieces of information together to create a whole, concise meaning, even when stimuli may actually be in parts. It also occurs when we are able to make connections out of ambiguous information, and find coherence within information, even when it is unclear if it is present (Paloutzian & Park, 2015). According to the Meaning Making Model (MMM; Park, 2010), there are two main levels of meaning: global and situational meaning. Global meaning refers to the beliefs, valued goals, and feelings that inform one's understanding of the world, themselves, their sense of meaning and purpose, and their place in the world (Park & Kennedy, 2017). They are the schemas (i.e., cognitive patterns that inform one's interpretations based on past experiences), that people adopt to make sense of their experiences of the world (Rydz & Romaneczko, 2022; Silberman, 2005). Global meaning is linked to life satisfaction and overall wellbeing (Park, 2013a) and enables the ability to appraise situations that one encounters in life and influences the emotional and behavioural response (Park & Kennedy, 2017). Situational meaning refers to the frameworks that explain events, circumstances and situations that occur. Essentially, situational meaning refers to how the global meaning influences the way that one reacts to a situation (Park & Kennedy, 2017). The MMM (Park, 2010) assumes that wellbeing is negatively affected when events occur which violates one's global meaning. Meaning making then happens when one attempts to see the situation in a different way by reviewing the information and reforming one's beliefs in order to make sense of it (Park, 2013a).

Religion is considered as one way in which humans seek to make meaning (Park, 2013a). Religious beliefs can inform one's global meaning. For instance, their belief about whether God is either loving or wrathful will inform their core beliefs about whether human beings, including themselves, are inherently good and fair, or if they are sinful. They are likely to appraise their own worthiness to God and contemplate their own purpose in life

(Park, 2013a). It will also inform their beliefs about this world, as well as the potential next world (i.e., whether there is a heaven, or beliefs about reincarnation) (Slattery & Park, 2011). Religious meaning systems can support one's understanding of experiences; both the ordinary, and the extraordinary experiences. According to Park (2013a), global religious beliefs allow for concept driven processing, wherein people rely on their schemas (i.e., religious beliefs and expectations) to fill in the gaps of missing information within stimuli. A religious belief system may be a way of making meaning from traumatic or unjust experiences, which may trigger distress as a result of the disparity between one's appraised meaning of a traumatic event and their global beliefs (Park, 2013a). Following a stressful event, individuals can make meaning by reappraising the meaning of it by understanding it in a different way (i.e., by searching for the positive aspects of the event) (Resick et al., 2008). Alternatively, meaning can be made by changing the global beliefs or goals that were violated (Park, 2010). Such a change in global beliefs and goals can be understood in terms of religious conversion.

While the definition of religious conversion differs across the literature, it can generally be defined as "substantial changes in attitudes, thoughts, and self-understandings" as a result of new, or refreshed, religious beliefs (Maruna et al., 2006, p. 162). Paloutzian (2005) suggested that a new belief system, or the adoption of new religious practices occurs following an appraisal of one's current needs and the degree to which needs are being met by their current beliefs and practices. An appraisal of their current belief system or worldview is likely to occur following the person experiencing some doubt about their current belief system, or as a result of some pressure or motivation to change (Paloutzian, 2005). A person's appraisal will also consider whether the perceived alternatives of a new religion or belief system will be able to meet their needs more effectively, and they will consider the expected benefits of making a change. Should one's appraisal of a new belief system be

unfavourable, the individual is unlikely to change, or adopt new behaviours. Research suggests that midlevel personality functions change as a result of religious conversion (Paloutzian et al., 1999). This includes the attitudes and values that one has that guides them to act in certain ways, as well as specific goals or broader goals (i.e., to support others to convert to their religion). Global-level personality functions are also likely to change following conversion, including overall life purpose (i.e., to follow God's plan) and their self-identity. Therefore, Park (2013a) states that the individual is not responding to the options presented to them, but they are responding to the meaning that they make of the options.

Religious Conversion in Prison

As discussed above, conversion is often preceded by an experience that causes stress or tension (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). This can include depression, addictive behaviour, or a sense of sin, whereby turning to God is used as a method of resolving problems resulting from emotional distress and stress (Halama & Halamová, 2005). It is further suggested that conversions in prison are more likely where particularly harsh prison conditions are found (Robinson-Edwards & Kewley, 2018), and religion and spirituality are thought to provide an alternative method of adapting to and coping with the unnatural environment of a prison (Thomas & Zaitzow, 2006). Religious conversion in prison often involves the construction of a new self-identity, one that is non-criminal (van Nieuwkerk 2014). This process involves changing their worldview, and moving away from criminal associates (Maruna et al., 2006). In Goodwin's (2001) study investigating the process of religious conversion in prison, it was found that for some individuals, conversion began with the crisis of their imprisonment and turning to God to appeal for help. For others, they turned to religion to search for ways in which to interpret their crimes, questioning their life choices, and finding ways of searching for the meaning of life. Goodwin (2001) also found that some inmates did not purposely seek out religion. For example, some were introduced by other fellow inmates, whereas others

attended the chaplaincy in order to take advantage of certain privileges associated with attendance. Many inmates reported that they were evaluated in a positive way by the members of the chaplaincy, and felt accepted and valued by their group, which contrasted with their previous life experiences. A change in religious practice whilst in prison can demonstrate the re-evaluation of core values (Hermansen, 2014) and the desire to move away from a criminal lifestyle and identity (Wilkinson et al., 2021).

However, there may be an element of apprehension associated with religious conversion. Wilkinson et al. (2021) report that around 30% of Muslim prisoners in European prisons are individuals who have converted to Islam, and that converts to Islam have often been disproportionately associated with extremism (Moore et al., 2008). However, Wilkinson et al. (2021) found that despite the cynical views associated with conversion, the prisoners in their sample were less likely to choose to follow Islam in prison for privileges or protection. Rather, they observed Islam as a tool for emotional coping, for company of like-minded individuals, and for piety. They found that those who chose to observe Islamic practices in prison were adhering to the founding religious purposes of incarceration, such as rehabilitative commitment, repentance, and moral reform. Maruna et al. (2016) found similar benefits of conversion, reporting that religious conversion often achieves management of feelings of shame. They stated that despite the painful emotional experiences associated with prison (i.e., shame and questioning their sense of identity), all prisoners in their study described their time in prison as an opportunity or a gift from God, rather than as a period of personal crisis. They were able to describe their incarceration as God's plan, and as an opportunity to learn something about themselves. Maruna et al. (2006) proposed that conversion facilitates this change by supporting the creation of a new social identity, by providing the prisoner with purpose and meaning, and by empowering the prisoner by

making them an agent of God. It also provides them with a framework for forgiveness and allows a sense of control over their future that is mostly unknown (Maruna et al., 2006).

Aims of Thesis

Research suggests that religious conversion can provide an impressive 'second chance' for individuals with offending histories, however there is limited psychological research that has been conducted investigating the phenomenon of religious conversion in this population (Said & Butler, 2023). There is also a lack of research investigating whether individuals who have offended who do experience religious conversion continue to uphold a religious lifestyle post-release (Stansfield et al., 2017), and what meaning this has for them. As such, the overall aim of this thesis is to add to the literature base regarding the impact of religion, and specifically the conversion to Christianity, has on individuals with forensic histories.

More specifically, the aims of the theses are as follows:

- To provide a review of the current literature regarding the relationship between religious practises and programmes in prisons and recidivism rates post release.
- To explore the lived experiences of individuals with offending histories who have converted to Christianity, in order to gain a better understanding of the role that religious beliefs play in the lives of men with criminal backgrounds.
- To review a measure of positive and negative religious coping methods.

Thesis Structure

There are three main chapters within this thesis: a systematic literature review (Chapter 2); a research study using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) principles (Chapter 3); and a critical review of a psychometric measure (Chapter 4).

Chapter 2 aims to explore the relationship between religious programmes or practices while in custody, and desistance from crime post release. It aims to build on past reviews which investigated this relationship but focusing on an adult population. The review also aims to investigate whether involvement in religious programmes or practices impacts on recidivism rates, or on other factors which are associated with crime.

Chapter 3 explores the lived experiences and views of former perpetrators of crime who converted to Christianity in the UK. It aims to support the understanding of how conversion to the Christian faith may impact on the lives of individuals who have committed crimes, by gaining insight into the experiences of becoming a Christian and to explore how the individuals feel this has influenced them. It is thought that the findings of this study will provide insight for those working in the criminal justice system, and recommendations for future research will be made.

Chapter 4 provides a critical evaluation of the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE; Pargament et al., 1998), which supports the identification of the religious coping methods that people employ when dealing with life stressors. The Brief RCOPE is discussed in terms of its utility with individuals who have engaged in offending behaviour.

Chapter 5 draws together the findings of each chapter and discusses implications for practice and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN RELIGION AND DESISTANCE FROM CRIME:

A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Abstract

It has been suggested that religion is a protective factor against reoffending, however, empirical evidence has provided mixed results. This current review aims to explore the relationship between religious involvement whilst in custody, and reoffending rates post release. It further aims to examine the factors associated with this relationship in an adult population. This mixed methods review assessed the quality of twenty-two studies, published between 1998 and 2023, and utilised a narrative synthesis approach to analyse and present the findings. The findings of the review suggest that there is a significant inverse relationship between religion and crime, with higher levels of engagement resulting in greater reductions in recidivism. The findings suggest, however, that this effect may be time limited. The review also highlights the positive impact of factors which have been found to be associated with religion, such as prosocial communities, and the belief in a higher power. The strengths and weaknesses of the review are discussed, and recommendations are made for future research and practice.

Introduction

There are a number of theories of offending, explaining why some people are more likely to offend than others, and what drives people to commit crimes. Hirschi's (1969) social control theory differs from other criminological theories that hypothesise there must be some form of motivation in order to commit a crime, in that it postulates that all humans are born with an innate drive to act in aggressive and selfish ways that could lead to criminal behaviour (Pratt et al., 2011). Hirschi claimed the majority of the population are able to control these urges through the social bonds they make. He stated that these bonds are made to prosocial people, prosocial values, and prosocial institutions and that they provide a sense of conformity. According to Hirschi, these types of *attachments* to people, values, and institutions can lead individuals to defer from committing crimes, as they want to avoid disappointing those that they value, and to minimise the risk of losing these valuable bonds. Hirschi also reasoned that *commitment* to the things that people value in life (e.g., friendships, marriages, employment), enable them to desist from criminal activity for fear of losing these things in life that hold value for them. Another preventative strategy is *involvement*, in which Hirschi stated that people are less likely to engage in criminal activity when they are spending their time engaging in prosocial activities and involving themselves with prosocial groups. Finally, Hirschi hypothesised that individuals form *beliefs* about the value of engaging in prosocial behaviours that conform to the law, and that these prosocial attitudes can prevent people from committing crimes. Hirschi stated that these social bonds (i.e., attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs) help us to form morals and values, even when we are not conscious of them. However, individuals that do succumb to their natural urges and commit criminal acts, are less likely to have these bonds, and are therefore not controlled by them. Hirschi's (1969) work is considered influential, and regular empirical studies are conducted, finding support for this theory (Costello & Laub, 2020). When

considering Hirschi's (1969) social control theory and the importance of social bonds, it is worth exploring the role that religious involvement could play in preventing criminal offending. Religious institutions could be seen to encourage prosocial *attachments* and *beliefs*, as well as enhancing *involvement* and *commitment* to religious communities and society in general (Baier & Wright, 2001). Johnson et al. (2001) conducted a longitudinal study examining the social bonds with other Christians in a sample of adolescents. It was found that religiosity reduced levels of delinquency, and the authors argued that religion plays a role in shaping beliefs, which, in turn, decreased delinquency. Johnson et al. (2001) also found that adolescents who held religious beliefs were less likely to associate with delinquent peers.

A similar concept can be applied to the Rational Choice Theory of crime (Grasmick et al., 1991), which assumes that behaviours are carried out by an individual following a careful consideration of options in order to make a choice about which action would provide them with the outcome they desire (Sato, 2013). Grasmick et al. (1991) theorised that shame and embarrassment are likely to prevent religious individuals from committing crimes as this may result in a socially imposed punishment of losing the respect of significant others and causing *embarrassment* for the self and community. Grasmick et al. (1991) hypothesised that, in the long-term, this embarrassment could bring about personal serious consequences, such as breakdowns in valued relationships, and limited trust placed on an individual, or even restricted access to opportunities. The theory also suggests that *shame* acts as a self-imposed source of punishment when an individual acts against internalised norms (Grasmick & Bursik, 1990). Rational Choice Theory claims that individuals have a choice to make, and they do this by weighing up the costs and benefits of their actions (McCarthy, 2002). Individuals with high levels of spirituality or religious beliefs may experience greater

amounts of embarrassment and shame through acting in ways that go against their beliefs (Robertson et al., 2020).

Both theories outlined above have had mixed reviews from researchers (Costello & Laub, 2020; Spickard, 1998), but have no doubt been influential. A further, prominent (albeit dated) theoretical framework in the area of crime and religion is the Hellfire and Delinquency Hypothesis (Hirschi & Stark, 1969), which predicts that the fear of punishment in this life and in the afterlife (i.e., Hell) prevents individuals from committing antisocial acts. The hypothesis suggests that people who believe in this higher power (i.e., God), feel they are being judged for the choices they make in their life, and that the promise of an eternal reward (i.e., Heaven) promotes behaviour that is morally and socially acceptable (Baier & Wright, 2001). It is therefore suggested that religion (i.e., Christianity in the case of this particular theory) might support desistance from crime (O'Connor, 2004). However, when the authors of Hellfire and Delinquency (Hirschi & Stark, 1969) empirically tested the relationship, interestingly they found no significant relationship between religion and delinquency (Haviv et al., 2019). Stark et al. (1982) argued that belief alone was not enough, and that the individual's engagement in their moral community was imperative to seeing any of the protective benefits of religious involvement.

Religion in Rehabilitation

Faith-based programmes are generally considered to provide a low-cost solution to some of the problems faced by the criminal justice system (Hallett & Johnson, 2014). They can provide a structured form of rehabilitation, whilst also being largely funded by volunteers or religious organisations. Faith-based programmes are relatively cost-efficient when compared to the creation and facilitation of other rehabilitative programmes and services (O'Connor & Perryclear, 2002), and can increase access to social capital, which is linked to crime desistance (King & Furrow, 2004). Social capital refers to the "productive value of

social connections" (Scrivens & Smith, 2013, p. 9), and is a resource that can be used to achieve certain goals (Kay, 2022). Religious social capital can include accessing employment opportunities, group membership, sharing values, and social integration (Maselko et al., 2011; Savolainen, 2009). The desistance literature suggests that increasing one's social capital increases the chances of successfully maintaining desistance efforts (Farrall, 2011).

Findings of research regarding the effectiveness of faith-based interventions is mixed. As stated, Hirschi and Stark (1969) empirically tested the impact of religion on crime and found no association, however, other researchers have demonstrated promising findings. For example, Dodson et al. (2011) concluded that faith-based programmes do result in a reduction in levels of recidivism, and Schaefer et al.'s (2016) meta-analysis suggested that religious interventions produced a significant positive alteration to offender behaviours and values. Furthermore, Dye et al. (2014) examined the effects that religious engagement had on adjusting to the prison environment among a sample of females serving a life sentence. They found that adjustment to prison life was facilitated by a reduction in depression which was associated with engagement in religious activities. Religious engagement was linked to reductions in feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, and for giving hope to the participants. Similar findings were also demonstrated by Levitt and Loper (2009), who found that not only did religious support result in lower levels of depression, but that participants committed fewer institutional infractions and aggressive acts compared to those individuals who did not engage in religious activities. Johnson et al.'s (1997) findings suggest that greater levels of participation in such programmes resulted in fewer institutional infractions, compared to those with little to no engagement. Furthermore, Camp et al. (2008) found that engagement in faith-based programmes in prison reduced the probability of individuals engaging in serious forms of misconduct.

It is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the causality of religious participation in prison and recidivism outcomes. For example, individuals who engage with religious programmes may have prior religious beliefs, and as such, it is difficult to determine whether the effects are due to this. Furthermore, there are few randomised controlled trials conducted in this area, as well as a limited amount of follow-up studies, resulting in difficulties concluding how long the effects may last. However, with approximately three quarters of inmates attending some form of religious programme in their first year of prison in the USA (O'Connor & Duncan, 2011), and with 45% of the prison population in England and Wales being of the Christian faith (House of Commons, 2022) it is suggested that attention is paid to the potential impact of such programmes.

Past Reviews

A number of reviews of the literature on the topic of religion and crime have been conducted in order to summarise and collate findings of studies in this area. For instance, Kewley et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of twenty-one papers in order to investigate the role of faith-based community groups on desistance from crime in individuals convicted of sexual offending. It was found that in 76% of the papers reviewed, religious involvement was related to reduced recidivism, a decrease in antisocial behaviours whilst in prison, reduced substance use, reduced negative emotions, an increase in social bonds and opportunities, improved abilities to cope with life in prison, and assistance in forming positive identities. However, some papers within this review found either no relationships, or a mixed relationship between crime and religion, with some papers actually reporting a harmful relationship. Gonçalves et al. (2023) also explored the role of religiosity and spirituality in interpersonal violence. In their systematic review of 67 papers, and meta-analysis of 43 papers, results demonstrated that decreases in physical and sexual aggression were significantly associated with higher levels of religious and spiritual involvement.

However, this effect was not observed for domestic violence. Other reviews have focused on different religions (e.g., Islam; Mohammad & Banse, 2023) and other risk factors of crime (e.g., youth substance use; Yueng et al., 2009).

One of the most prominent of these reviews was a meta-analysis of sixty papers on the topic of the deterrent effects of religion on crime, conducted by Baier and Wright (2001). Their findings suggested that religious beliefs and behaviour exert a significant, moderate deterrent effect on criminal behaviour displayed by an individual. Additionally, studies with high religious selectivity (i.e., where participants were known church members) found that religion provided a greater deterrent effect on crime, compared to studies with lower religious selectivity. Greater deterrent effects in relation to non-victim crimes were also found. Finally, Baier and Wright (2001) found that stronger deterrent effects were evident when studies used small sample sizes and more racially diverse samples. The researchers concluded that reduced levels of delinquent behaviour were associated with involvement with religious groups and making a religious commitment outside of prison.

Similar findings were demonstrated in a systematic literature review published in 2000. Johnson et al. (2000a) reviewed the religiosity and delinquency literature from 1985 to 1997 and found that, of the forty studies examined, only one suggested that religiosity increased delinquency. Their findings also suggested that although religion is a major social institution, most studies in the criminology literature failed to include a measure of religiosity. In Johnson's (2011) later review of 272 papers published between 1944 and 2010, it was found that religion decreased the propensity for criminal behaviour. However, only 10% of the papers reviewed by Johnson examined adult offenders, with the remainder focusing on child and adolescents who had displayed delinquent behaviour.

Current Review

In spite of the above-mentioned reviews of the literature, there still remains uncertainty in regard to whether religious involvement can reduce recidivism rates in adult general offenders. Although some studies have found no relationship between religiosity and crime, more recent studies are demonstrating that religious involvement leads to a reduction in criminal activity (Ronel & Ben Yair, 2018). Furthermore, much of the research on this topic has focused on samples of adolescents, resulting in limited generalisation to the adult population (Morag & Teman, 2018). Additionally, there is a limited understanding of what makes the programmes effective (Mears et al., 2006). As such, it is felt that an up-to-date systematic review of the literature is required to investigate whether involvement in religious programmes or practices impacts on recidivism rates, or on other factors which are associated with crime.

The aim of this review is to systematically evaluate literature on the link between religion and desistance from crime. More specifically, the questions being addressed are as follows:

1. Does involvement in religious programmes/practices during prison have an impact on recidivism rates following release from prison?
2. What specific factors/elements of religious programmes or religiosity are related to desistance from crime?
3. What impact do offenders believe has been made on their lives as a result of their religious involvement?

Although the banner term of ‘religion’ is used, the current review will also include studies which investigate spirituality and desistance from crime. Spirituality may be related to religion in some cases but not in all; the terms religion and spirituality are felt to be different

concepts for some individuals (Arrey et al., 2016). In addition, some people may view themselves as having a faith in a higher power (most often associated with a specific religion) but not consider themselves to be religious per se (Nelson, 2009); as such, this term is also explored.

Method

Scoping Exercise

On 7th July 2020, an initial scoping exercise was conducted to assess whether there were sufficient articles to review in the area of interest. Searches were conducted on Web of Science and PsycInfo, using relevant keywords and phrases, such as, “crime”, “religion”, and “desist”. This initial search provided 1,126 hits on PsycInfo, and a further 208 on Web of Science.

The next step included investigating whether a systematic literature review had previously been conducted which addressed the questions outlined above. A Cochrane Library search was conducted on 7th July 2020, along with searches on Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, Campbell Collaboration Library for Systematic Reviews, and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which provided no hits. The search was repeated on 9th July 2023, which again presented no hits. However, a search on PsycInfo, Web of Science, Google and Google Scholar indicated that there were twelve literature reviews published in an area of similar interest, details of which can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Relevant Meta-Analyses and Systematic Literature Reviews

Researchers	Review Topic
Baier and Wright (2001)	The relationship between religion and crime.
Chitwood et al. (2008)	The relationship between religion and substance misuse.
Dodson et al. (2011)	The effectiveness of faith-based programmes on recidivism in both adult and adolescent populations.
Gonçalves et al. (2023)	The role of religion and spirituality in interpersonal violence.

Johnson et al. (2000a)	The relationship between religion and delinquency.
Johnson et al. (2002)	The relationship between religion and multiple outcomes, including delinquency.
Johnson (2011)	The relationship between religion and crime.
Kewley (2015)	The role of faith-based community groups on desistance from crime in individuals convicted of sexual offending.
Mohammad and Banse (2023)	The relationship between Muslim religiosity and juvenile delinquency.
Power (2014)	The impact of faith-based interventions on correctional outcomes.
Schaefer et al. (2016)	The effects of faith-based interventions on prisoner adjustment.
Yeung et al. (2009)	The relationship between religion and youth substance use.

The most relevant review in comparison to the current review question was conducted by Baier and Wright (2001), who conducted a meta-analysis reviewing 60 papers published between 1969 and 1998. Therefore, in order to provide an updated review of the literature regarding the relationship between religion and crime over approximately the last two decades, the current review will focus on literature published between 1998 and the beginning of 2023.

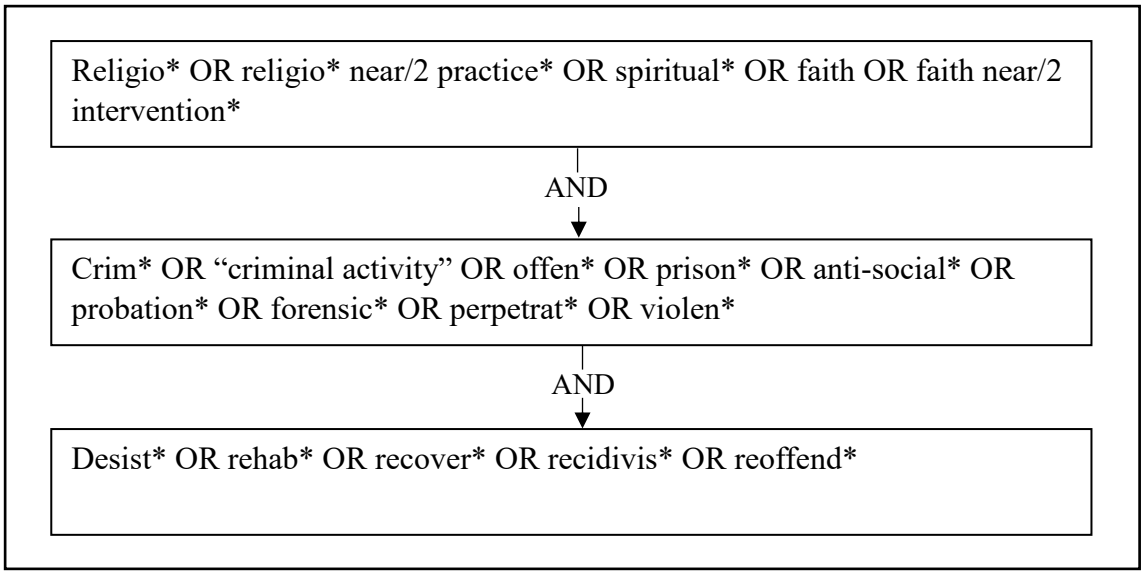
Search Strategy and Data Sources

Due to the large number of hits being produced on the initial database search, it was felt appropriate to filter the search, using more specific keywords and phrases. To do this, keywords and terms were developed by identifying key concepts from the review question

(religion or spirituality; crime or offending; and desistance), and synonyms were then produced by the researcher. A list of the final search terms can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Search Terms Used for the Database Searches



A search was conducted on 9th July 2023 using the above terms on the following electronic databases: OVID PsycINFO; Web of Science; ProQuest Social Science Premium Collection; and ProQuest Dissertation & Global Theses Global, accessed through the University of Birmingham Library Services website. These databases were identified following advice from a specialist librarian at the University of Birmingham. Government policy websites were also examined, which included: UK Ministry of Justice; NHS evidence; UK Department of Health; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) UK; and Public Health England. The exact search syntax and results for the database searches can be found in Appendix A. A manual search of the reference lists of all relevant articles was then conducted. All references were managed using the EndNote software.

Selection and Screening of References

In order to screen the papers identified in this review, a selection and screening tool was required. The SPIDER (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research type; Cooke et al., 2012) tool was identified for this purpose, and it was considered an appropriate tool due to its suitability in screening both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Cooke et al., 2012). The SPIDER tool, which applied the inclusion/exclusion criteria to this current review, can be found in Table 2. The selection and screening tool applied to the papers can be found in Appendix B.

A number of limits were applied using the SPIDER tool in order to meet the needs of the current review. The age of the sample was limited to those aged eighteen and over, due to existing literature reviews having been conducted with a sample of adolescents. Furthermore, the target sample in this review was prisoners or those involved in, or previously involved in, the criminal justice system. The papers within the review included individuals who have committed general or violent offending. Individuals who were substance users (where there was no relation to crime), or who were involved in terrorist offences were excluded from this review. Further, due to a systematic review having been conducted by Kewley (2015) investigating sexual offenders and religion, the decision was made to exclude papers where the sample were sex offenders. The SPIDER tool was adapted to include further limits, including the publication type, language, and the date of publication. Only peer-reviewed journals and doctoral level theses were considered for this review, due to the meaningful contribution that they would provide to the literature. Other grey literature, including government reports, were also included in the review. Due to the time and resources that would be required to translate papers, only papers published in the English language were included in the review. Additionally, due to a review conducted by Baier and Wright (2001)

reviewing the literature between 1969 and 1998, the decision was made to include only papers published after 1998 so as to not replicate the previous review.

Table 2

SPIDER Tool: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sample	Prisoners; ex-offenders; people involved in the criminal justice system; individuals on probation; individuals in secure services.	Substance users (not crime related); individuals involved in terrorist related crimes; individuals involved in sexual offences; children or adolescents.
Phenomenon of Interest	Religion (including spirituality and faith); general/violent crime; desistance.	Crime committed as a direct result of religious practices.
Design	Qualitative: Interviews; survey; questionnaires; focus groups. Quantitative: Psychometric test or questionnaire to assess religion and crime.	Non empirical data collection method used.
Evaluation	Qualitative: themes; views; experiences; attitudes; opinions. Quantitative: outcome measures from psychometric test or questionnaire.	Non-empirical data analysis method used.

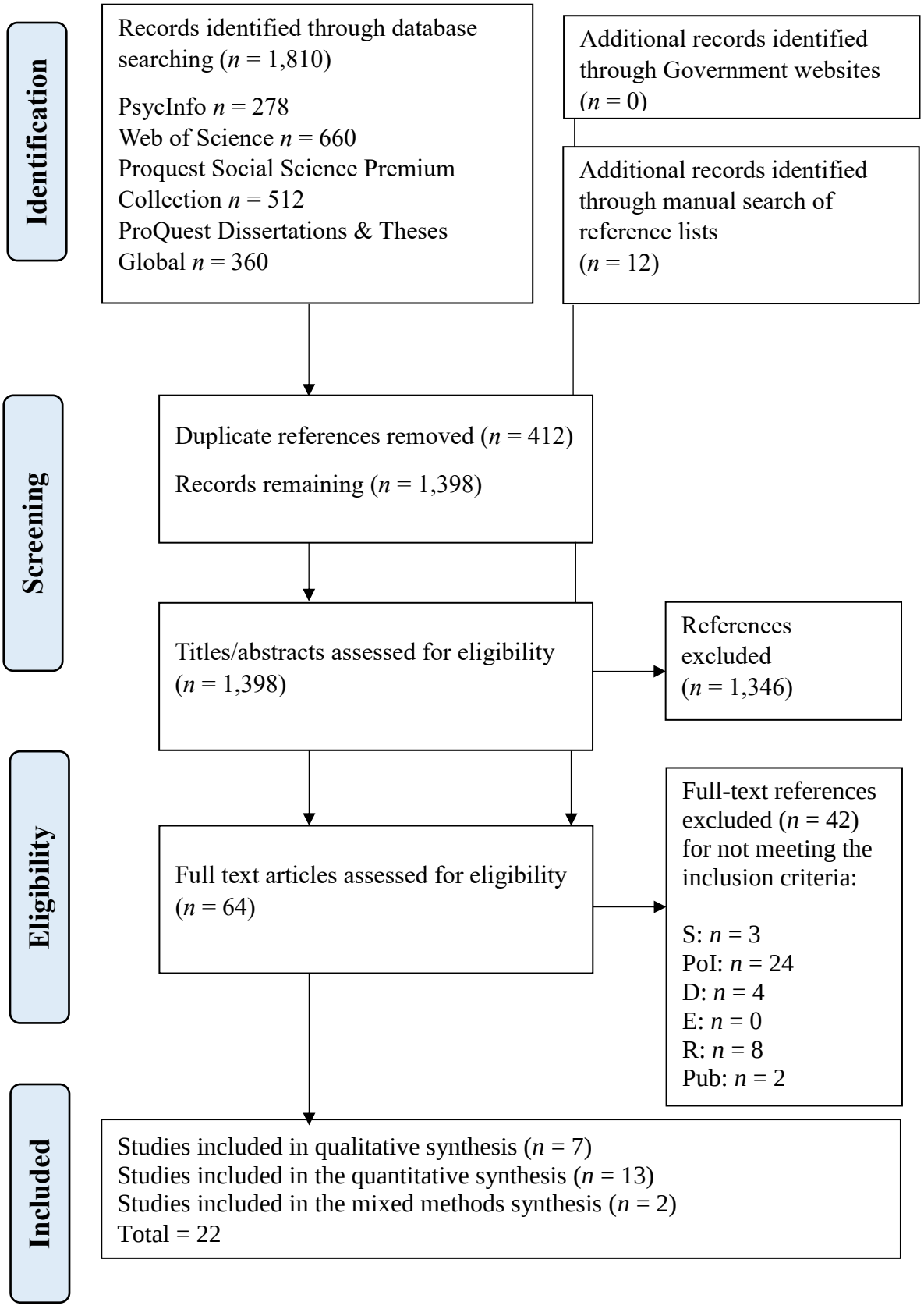
Research Type	Qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods	Narrative reviews; book chapters; editorials; commentaries; case studies; expert opinion papers; systematic or literature reviews and any secondary studies.
Publication Type	Published peer-reviewed; unpublished doctoral theses; government document.	Unpublished below doctorate level dissertation and theses; published un-reviewed.
Language	English.	Any other language.
Date Range	1998 – 13/02/2023	1997 and prior.

A total of 1,810 references were retrieved from the database searches. One thousand, three hundred and ninety-eight remained after duplicates were removed. The titles and abstracts of the papers remaining were reviewed by the researcher, and papers were eliminated where it was clear that it would not meet the inclusion criteria (n = 1,346), leaving a total of 64 papers with the papers from the manual search. These papers were then read in full, and the inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied. At this stage a further 42 were excluded, leaving 22 papers to be quality assessed.

A diagram of the selection and screening process is presented in Figure 2. The references that were excluded from the review following the application of the SPIDER tool criteria can be found in Appendix C.

Figure 2

Flow Diagram of the Selection and Screening Process



Quality Assessment of Included Studies

The final 22 papers that were deemed appropriate to include in the review were first quality assessed. To determine which quality assessment tool would provide an accurate assessment of the literature, it was necessary to establish the research design of the papers. Of the twenty-two papers, seven were qualitative, thirteen were quantitative, and two adopted mixed methods. Due to the difference in methodologies, it was considered appropriate to use two quality assessment tools.

To assess the quality of the qualitative papers, the Critical Appraisal Skills programme checklist for qualitative research (CASP, 2018) was chosen, as this is the most commonly used tool for appraising qualitative research (Dalton et al., 2017) and is considered a useful tool for novice researchers (Long et al., 2020). The CASP prompts the assessor to consider whether the research design was appropriate to meet the aims of the research. It also prompts the user to assess the quality of the paper regarding the reporting of sampling, data collection, reflexivity, ethical issues, data analysis, the reporting of findings, and the value of the research. A scoring guide is provided for the CASP, whereby a score of two is given for each assessment question if the condition was met, a score of one if it was partially met, and a score of zero if the condition was not met. In addition to this, a 'Can't Tell' score was given to conditions wherein there was insufficient information provided to be able to answer the question. A maximum of 22 points could be given to each paper, which was then converted into a percentage. This tool can be found in Appendix D.

In order to assess the quality of the quantitative papers, the Appraisal tool for Cross-Sectional studies (AXIS; Downes et al., 2016) was used. This was due to the majority of the quantitative papers being cross-sectional. The tool was reviewed for its applicability to assess papers that were not cross-sectional, and no adaptations were considered necessary. The assessment tool prompts the user to assess the quality of the paper based on the study design,

the reliability and validity of the measures used, the description of the results, the authors' discussion of the conclusions and limitations, and any potential biases. A maximum score of 20 could be given to each paper by adding the total of 'Yes' responses to each component of the assessment. The score was then converted into a percentage score. This tool can be found in Appendix E. A cut-off score of 50% was identified and was applied to the papers following quality assessment, with papers scoring below this cut-off being excluded from the final review. This score was chosen as anything below this score was deemed to have low methodological quality, which may result in there being difficulties in drawing conclusions from the findings. A higher score was not adopted, as papers that were between 50-60% were deemed valuable to the analysis of this review.

It is considered best practice to have a second researcher quality assess a sample of the papers included in systematic reviews (Belur et al., 2018) to ensure that a fair and accurate assessment of the quality is carried out and to reduce bias. As such, a Doctoral student supported as the role of a second-rater, and quality assessed 5 of the 22 studies (22.7%). Any differences in rating were resolved through discussion. Following the quality assessment stage, two papers were excluded from the review due to a low-quality score. The final quality assessment scores for each paper can be found in Appendix F and G.

Data Extraction

To enable the researcher to collect relevant information from each quality assessed study, data from the papers were input into a data extraction form (see Appendix H). The form had been specifically designed for the purposes of summarising data for this review. The form includes general information (i.e., the authors, the year of publication, and the country of study), study characteristics, participant characteristics, study results, conclusions, strengths and weaknesses, and the quality assessment score.

Data Synthesis and Analysis

The studies in this review varied in terms of their research aims and methodologies, and as such a meta-analysis would not be suitable (Popay et al., 2006). The most appropriate method of synthesising the data is a narrative synthesis, which involves collating the findings from the included studies and presenting them using text to summarise and explain the findings (Campbell et al., 2018).

Results

The studies in this review investigate of the association between religion (to include spirituality and faith) and desistance from crime. Table 3 presents a synthesis of the data, presenting the characteristics of the included studies, the measures used, the participants, a summary of the main findings, and the strengths and weaknesses of the studies.

Study Characteristics

Following the quality assessment of twenty-two papers, two studies were excluded on the basis of poor methodologies (i.e., scored less than 50% on the quality assessment), leaving twenty for inclusion in this review. Of these, 6 papers adopted a qualitative approach, 12 studies utilised a quantitative design, and 2 used a mixed methods design.

Of the twelve quantitative studies, four made use of valid psychometric measures. Bhutta et al. (2019) adapted the Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (Krauss et al., 2005). Said and Davidson (2021) used the Client Assessment Summary scale (CAS; Kressel & De Leon, 1997), and Giordano et al. (2008) adapted the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (Elliott et al., 1985). These are further explained in the 'Assessment Measures' section. Some quantitative studies in this review used data from departments of corrections or national datasets, in reference to engagement in religious programmes or practises and recidivism following release. Other studies utilised researcher-designed measures to collect information. Semi-structured interviews were used as the method of data collection in the five of the six qualitative studies. The other qualitative study used surveys with open ended questions.

Sixteen studies were conducted in the United States; nine using quantitative measures, five using qualitative, and two adopted a mixed method. One study was conducted in Pakistan, using a quantitative design, and two were conducted in Israel, one adopting a quantitative design, and one a qualitative approach. The remaining quantitative study in the

review was conducted in Brazil. No studies included in this review were conducted in the United Kingdom.

Table 3

Characteristics of the Included Studies

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
1. Armour, M. P., Sage, J., Rubin, A., & Windsor, L. C. (2005). USA **Score:** 13/22 59%	**Aims:** To examine how a faith-based programme (the Bridges to Life (BTL) project) facilitated change in recidivism rated, as reported by offenders, victims and facilitators following the (BTL) project. **Design:** Qualitative	The researchers designed a nine-item survey. Four questions used a 5-item Likert type scale and asked participants to rate their level of satisfaction with components of the programme. Three open-ended questions ask participants to describe what they received from the programme. Two open ended questions asked participants to describe what could be improved about the programme and	879 offenders, 90 volunteer victims, and 52 facilitators who voluntarily completed surveys between 2000 and 2004. Of offenders, 86% males and 14% females; mean age was 36 years old; 36% were white, 45% were black, and 19% were Hispanic. Of the crimes committed: 33% violent crimes, 30% drug offences, 26% burglary, theft and shoplifting, 4% white collar	An anonymous assessment survey was developed by BTL and administered by the executive director and regional coordinator at the end of each prison project. No information on response rate.	Thematic analysis	Themes derived: (1) Impact –Participants reported an increased awareness about the ripple effect of crime of others. (2) Caring – Refers to how offenders felt treated by the victims. Participants reported feeling accepted, that they belonged and were worth something, and that it was safe to express their feelings. (3) Self-knowledge – Refers to self-realisation and self-accountability. (4) Wanting more – Refers to desire for more time through longer sessions or longer programmes. Transformation – Refers to the quality of change experienced by offender	N/A (not the aim of the research)	**Strengths** - Appropriate research design. - Appropriate recruitment strategy. - Data collection method addressed the research issue. - Research value is discussed. **Weaknesses** - Potential researcher bias not discussed (however, the researchers did not meet the participants). - No discussion of ethical issues. - Findings limited to individuals who completed the programme evaluation. - Potential for social desirability bias in

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
		recommendations for future programme participants.	crimes (e.g. forgery) 7% DWI, 0.2% were other non-violent offences, 16% aggravated assault, 3% murder, 0.8% DWI with manslaughter, 5% multiple violent offences, 8% multiple non-violent offences. Information on the gender, age and race/ethnicity of the volunteers was not available.			participants. Participants described experiencing a spiritual awakening.		responses from participants. - A single researcher completed the analysis.
2. Bhutta, M. H., Wormith, J. S., & Zidenberg, A. M. (2019). Pakistan **Score:** 16/20 80%	**Aims:** To examine whether various dimensions of religiosity are related to recidivism in a sample of adult Pakistani probationers'	The researchers used a brief religiosity scale consisting of 14 items – Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory: Abridged (MRPI-A) – A brief religiosity scale	506 adult probationers released on probation during the year 2010, in the Lahore Division in the Punjab province of Pakistan. All considered low risk offenders.	Face-to-face interviews were conducted as part of other research. The MRPI-A was administered to all participants	T-tests; chi-squares; analyses of variance (ANOVA); Pearson's correlation; Stepwise logistic regression	8.7% of the sample recidivated during follow-up period. No difference in recidivism rates between Muslims and Christians; $t(504)=0.46$, $p=.65$. Small significant inverse relationship between religiosity and recidivism ($r=-.15$, $p=.001$).	Yes	**Strengths** - Appropriate study design. - Results explained sufficiently. - Theoretical and practical implications discussed. - Contributed to the literature base for a non-Western culture.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
	Design: Quantitative – Longitudinal	consisting of 14 items. Criminal recidivism was used as the outcome variable. This was defined as the violation of conditions of the probation order.	92.2% of participants were male, and 7.1% females. 93.9% Muslim, and 6.1% Christian. 56.9% lived in urban areas, and 43.1% in rural areas. 51.4% involved in drug-related offences; 26.9% theft; 11.5% carrying a weapon; and 10.3% miscellaneous offences. Mean age = 32.47 (SD=11.06). Range = 18 to 65 years.	during these interviews. Compliance was high (close to 100%). Data collection began early in the term of offender's probation (Jan to Feb 2011). Follow-up at end of 2011.		Statistically significant inverse correlations were found between reoffending and three religiosity factors (moral values, religious practices, and fundamental beliefs). Regression analysis suggested that the probability of reoffending was reduced when associated with an increase in scores of two religiosity factors (religious practices and religious-moral values). Other religiosity factors were not related to reoffending.		- Psychometric properties of the MRPI-A (which was adapted for this research) were discussed. **Weaknesses** - No information provided about non-responders. - Exploratory in nature with no hypotheses. - Limited generalisability to the wider population. - Small female sample. - Incarcerated individuals were excluded. - Single measure of recidivism used. - The abridged version of the MRPI had not been used before and therefore unknown psychometric qualities.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
3. Cannonier, C., Burke, M. G., & Mitchell, E. (2021). USA **Score:** 15/20 75%	**Aims:** To evaluate the effects of the "Men of Valor" (MOV) faith-based aftercare programme on the reduction of recidivism in former inmates. **Design:** Quantitative	The researchers obtained data from the Davidson County Sheriff's Office (DCSO) for men released from prison between 2000 and 2017. The researchers then accessed data from the MOV programme, which allowed the researchers to investigate the outcomes from the programme which began in 2009. Recidivism was the dependent variable, measured as the number of years returning to prison. The categorical variable was whether the person returned to prison within 1, 2, or 3 years. Covariates included age,	Sample size of 9,056; males only. Average age of 37 years (SD = 11.52). 60% Black; 38% White.	The data obtained allowed the researchers to compare two groups. Treatment Group = men who participated in the MOV programme while incarcerated or post prison release (aftercare). Control Group = random sample (based on age, race, and number of convictions) of male inmates who did not receive any MOV	Difference-in-difference (DID) analysis. Propensity score matching (PSM).	Findings suggest that the participants who completed *any* of the MOV programme were 15.8% - 19.2% less likely to return to prison, compared to control group. However, increases in recidivism (22.3% - 28%) were observed in the treatment group, compared to control group, when participants completed only 6 months of the MOV programme. This occurred even when with the control variables. When participants completed 12 months of the programme, they were 38% - 40.3% less likely to recidivate compared to the control group. Findings suggest that there were no significant changes in recidivism outcomes for Black individuals who received the programme. However, decreases in all	Yes	**Strengths** - Evaluates an aftercare programme delivered to former inmates. - Researchers consider cost of programme. - Appropriate study design. - Results explained sufficiently. **Weaknesses** - No information provided about non-responders. - Authors did not report limitations of the study. - The programme began in 1997, however data being analysed began in 2009. - Single measure of recidivism (which was the DV) used.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
		age at release, Hispanic ethnicity, race, number of arrests, type of prison facility, the amount of time served in prison, year of release, and reason for release.		services.		measures of recidivism were found for White participants (12.8% - 16.1%).		
4. Duncan, J., Stansfield, R., Hall, S., & O'Connor, T. (2018). USA; New Zealand **Score:** 16/20 80%	**Aims:** To determine the effects of female prisoners' engagement in humanistic, spiritual, and religious (HSR) programmes on recidivism. **Design:** Quantitative – Longitudinal.	Data collected on rearrests and reconvictions since their release from prison for women who entered prison in 2004. **DV's:** Recidivism (defined by re-arrest and likelihood of recidivism); HSR attendance, other programmes and work; assessed risk; demographic variables; spiritual assessment.	339 females who entered an Oregon prison in 2004. No information on age or ethnicity.	349 women who went to an Oregon prison in 2004, who served at least 1 full year in prison. On return in 2017, 339 women had spent at least one-year in the community post incarceration, and therefore were included in the study.	Mean, SD, range, ordered logistic regression, survival analysis.	A moderate association was found between the average monthly HSR attendance and lower recidivism. This was significant when controlling for the number of other programmes attended by the participants. Likelihood of recidivism was significantly lower for participants who attended for 4 or more hours per month compared to women who attended less than one hour per month. Survival analysis suggested there is a moderate association between high	Yes	**Strengths** - Appropriate study design. - Results explained sufficiently. - Contributed to the literature base for female prisoners. - Longitudinal design used to collect data on rearrest and reconvictions since release from prison. - Measure of recidivism clearly defined. **Weaknesses** - Limited demographic information regarding participants.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
						HSR attendance and reduction in reoffending.		- Potential for self-selection bias (i.e., voluntary participation in the HSR activities). - Poor generalisability to the wider population.
5. Duwe, G., & King, M. (2013). USA **Score:** 17/20 85%	**Aims:** To determine whether InnerChange (a faith-based correctional programme) impacted on recidivism. **Design:** Retrospective quasi-experimental design	**Dependent Variable** Recidivism defined as: - rearrest - reconviction - returning to prison for new sentence - revocation for a technical violation **Independent Variables** - Completers vs. non-completers. Individuals who completed were defined as offenders who successfully participated or had completed the 1st	13,484 male offenders. No information on age or ethnicity.	13,484 male offenders who were released from prisons in Minnesota between Aug 2003 and Dec 2009. Of these, 366 were participants who completed the InnerChange programme. The rest (*n* = 13,188) were those who were eligible for InnerChange but did not	Survival analysis models (Cox regression).	- Participants of InnerChange had lower rates of recidivism compared to nonparticipants. - The highest recidivism rates were found for InnerChange participants who dropped out. - Lower recidivism rates for participants of InnerChange who engaged with mentor in the community on release. - Significant decrease in hazard ratio for three recidivism measures (rearrest 26%, reconviction 35%, and reincarceration for new offence 40%) for InnerChange. However, no effect on technical violation revocation. - InnerChange was more	Yes	**Strengths** - Authors explained non-responders. - The programme is described sufficiently. - Measure of recidivism clearly defined. - PSM used to match programme attenders with non-attenders, which reduces selection bias. - Analysis method and results described sufficiently. - Implications for practice discussed. **Weaknesses** - Limited demographic information regarding

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
		two phases of the programme, at the time of release from prison. - Variables that might have an impact on recidivism		attend. Propensity Score Matching was used to match InnerChange participants with non-participants.		effective for drug offenders, Christians, prisoners with more prior convictions, and people placed on intensive supervised release. - InnerChange was less effective for ppts with higher LSI-R scores, minority offenders, and property offenders. **Mentoring Data** - 173 (47%) of InnerChange ppts met with a mentor in prison and/or community. Of these, 131 (76%; 36% of all InnerChange participants) continued to meet with a mentor in the community following release from prison. - Mentoring significantly reduced all 4 measures of recidivism.		participants. - Authors did not report on limitations of their study. - Did not include female inmates (however, the authors explained the rationale for this).
6. Giordano, P. C., Longmore, M. A., Schroeder, R. D., & Seffrin, P. M. (2008)	**Aims:** to explore whether 2 indices of religiosity predict the likelihood of stable desistance from crime,	**DV:** <u>Self-reported adult crime.</u> Participants completed a modified version of the Elliott et al (1985) self-reported	127 females; 127 males. Average age 16.3 years. 37.5% African American; 62.55 white youths.	The females recruited were made up of the whole population of a state prison in Ohio.	Life history narratives. 3 waves of interviews with delinquent youths	**Quantitative:** Results of 1995 data suggest significant inverse relationship between religiosity & criminal involvement over 12-month period prior to interview. Neither religiosity indices in	Yes	**Strengths** - Longitudinal design. - Appropriate design, using mixed methods to achieve the aims. - Both a male and female sample used.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
USA **Score:** Qual: 16/22 (75%) Quan: 18/20 (89%)	persistence, or a pattern of unstable offending across the 2 time periods (1995 and 2003). **Design:** Quantitative: Logistic regression. Qualitative: Longitudinal study.	delinquency scale at each wave (1995 and 2003). Each offence was assigned a seriousness weight <u>Offender Classification.</u> Classifying offenders as 'desisters', 'persisters', 'unstable' **IV:** <u>Religiosity.</u> Measured religiosity at 1st adult follow-up in 1995 using 2 single-item indicators: closeness to God and church attendance. <u>Social Network Characteristics</u>. Interviews	Adolescents residing in state-level juvenile correctional institutes in 1982. The respondents were subsequently interviewed in 1995 and again in 2003.	Males randomly selected from 3 state prisons for delinquent boys. 1st follow-up was completed in 1995, made up of 210 ppts (83%). 2nd follow-up conducted in 2003, made up of 152 of the 210 (72.4%) ppts from 1st follow-up. This wave made up of 49.3% males & 50.7% females. 34.5% minority sample. Mean age = 37.2.	interviewed over three time periods (as adolescents (1982), and two adult follow-up interviews (1995 and 2003). Interviews were conducted with those who expressed high levels of spirituality in 1995 (41 ppts) to discuss issues of spirituality and religious involvement.	1995 were related to increased odds of being a stable desister. A similar pattern is found for both males and females. Ethnic minority ppts less likely than white ppts to be in sustained desistence category. **Qualitative:** <u>Spirituality as a hook for change</u> - Religious involvement can provide a hook for change. - Reinforcement of prosocial actions in religious teachings. - Spirituality used for emotion-coping. - Religion may support prosocial relationship building. <u>Other factors that limit reach of spirituality as long-term hook for change</u> - The positive effects of spirituality may be limited due to an individual's social		**Weaknesses** - Little explanation of the qualitative analysis procedure. - Self-report delinquency scale used as DV, leading to the potential for bias. - Authors did not discuss their limitations. - Limited discussion on implications for practice.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
		conducted in 1995 in which participants reported on their intimate partner's and friend's involvement in crime. <u>Adult Social Bonds.</u> Revised version of the Marital Happiness measure. **Control Variables** Juvenile delinquency and sociodemographic characteristics.			Descriptive Statistics; Multinom-ial Logistic Regression; Thematic analysis.	networks and disadvantages neighbourhoods. - As individuals face stressors, they may rely on old coping strategies rather than more productive spiritual coping strategies. <u>Religious beliefs and experiences that may not be helpful to the desistance process</u> - Social nature of religion may mean that the church may not be able to support each individual in their desistance efforts. - The private nature of spirituality may mean that there is no challenge to an individual's private set of beliefs which may not be conducive to behaviour change. - The focus on evil forces may provide an individual with a ready explanation for continued antisocial behaviour. Additionally, this could also limit an		

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
						individual's focus on other issues such as employment or anger management. - Religious struggles or doubts could increase stress which may result in negative coping strategies.		
7. Hallett, M., & McCoy, J. S. (2015). USA **Score:** 12/22 54.5%	**Aims:** To explore the meanings of desistance for people who desist for religiously motivated reasons. To contrast these meaning with accounts of three theories of desistance. **Design:** Qualitative life history narratives.	Interviews with open-ended questions to gather life-histories, discussing their desistance from crime in relation to their religious faith.	25 male ex-offenders. Average age 47. 18 participants were White/Caucasian; 7 participants were African American. 16 non-denominational Protestants; 4 Catholic; 5 Southern Baptist. Average length of desistance was 8.7 years (desistance = no arrests or incarcerations for at least 2 years prior to the interview).	Snowball sampling carried out by church volunteers during prison visits and offender re-entry programming in a Florida city	Narratives reviewed and coded according to its "basic fit" with the three theories of desistance.	**Cognitive Transformation Theory** 56% of the narratives had all 4 elements of Cognitive Transformation present: - Openness to change - Exposure to hooks - Envisions replacement self - New view of deviant behaviour **Identity Theory** - "Feared self" identity had become a fully realised aspect of their lives. - Breaking ties with past associates whilst building new bonds to church members. - Religiously motivated desisters felt they depended on the support of church communities for their new	N/A (not the aim of the research)	**Strengths** - Appropriate research design. - Considered the meaning of desistance as described by the participants and compared to theories of desistance. - Authors collected data on Christian denomination. **Weaknesses** - Authors provided limited consideration for contribution of the research. - No discussion of strengths and limitations. - Due to phenomenological

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						identities. - Participants embraced their "feared selves" as a turning point and realisation of their "new selves", contrasting with Identity Theory. **Making Good** - Although participants achieved "making good" by not engaging in further criminal offending, they continued to describe themselves as "sinners". - Participants saw repentance and acknowledgement of their sinful natures as their best hope for desistance. - The desistance process is supported by personal agency and social support.		research design, findings are not generalisable.
8. Haviv, N., Weisburd, D., Hasisi, B., Shoham, E., & Wolfowicz, M. (2020). Israel	**Aims:** To compare effectiveness of 2 religious rehabilitation programmes in Israel Prison Service using	Recidivism using the rearrest measure.	57,764 male prisoners in the dataset. Of these participants, 6511 participated in the Torah Study Programme (TSP;	Data provided by Israel Prison Service on all criminal inmates residing in Israel who	Six PSM analyses were conducted. Chi Square. T-tests.	**1. TSP vs. non-participants** No difference in recidivism found. **2. TRP vs. non-participants** No difference in recidivism found.	Yes	**Strengths** - Appropriate study design. - Contributed to the literature for non-Western country.

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Score: 19/20 95%	Propensity Score Matching (PSM). **Design:** Quantitative. Longitudinal.		engagement in religious classes) only; 524 in the Torah Rehabilitation Programme (TRP; religious community-oriented life) only; and 1288 in both. Non-Jewish prisoners data removed for comparison group (N = 24,252). TSP group average age of 34.7 years. TRP group average age of 36.3 years. TSP and TRP group average age of 36.1 years. No ethnicity information provided.	were released from prison between 2004 and 2012.		**3. Ppts who moved from TSP to TRP vs. non-participants** Rate of rearrest significantly lower for group members compared to non-participants. **4. TRP (only) vs. TSP (only)** Rearrest among TRP ppts was lower than TSP's ppts. **5. Ppts who moved from TSP to TRP vs. TSP only** Rearrest for ppts who did both programmes significantly lower than ppts who did TSP only. **6. Ppts who moved from TRP to TRP vs. TRP only** No difference in recidivism found.		- Sufficient explanation of the methodology adopted. - Results clearly explained and discussed. - Large sample size. - PSM used to minimise bias and to match participants with appropriate control. **Weaknesses** - Survey data did not measure religiosity or motivation despite the levels of each required for the programmes. - Effect size should be interpreted with caution due to the potentially meaningful unobserved variables (motivation & religiosity), potentially impacting the sensitivity of the effect.

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9. Johnson, B. R. (2002) Brazil **Score:** 14/20 70%	**Aims:** To compare a prison that has adopted a faith-based approach (Humaita) and a prison that has adopted a vocational based approach (Braganca), to determine which is most likely to reduce recidivism. **Design:** Quantitative, longitudinal.	Three-year post-prison data from the population of prisoners released from Humaita and Braganca during 1996. Variables include offence type, sentence start date, release date, and rearrest date. Variables also include recidivism data (rearrest charge, number of rearrests, and disposition).	148 prisoners from Humaita. 247 prisoners from Braganca. No participant characteristics were provided.	Data obtained from the included prisons and the Department of Criminal Identification in Sao Paulo.	Data analysed using chi-square.	- The rate of recidivism was significantly lower among prisoners from the faith-based prison (Humaita; 16%) compared to Braganca (36%); chi-square = 9.1; df = 1; p <0.01). - The rate of recidivism for high-risk offenders was higher for Braganca (38%) ex-prisoners, compared to Humaita (12%) ex-prisoners. - The recidivism rate was also higher for low-risk offenders at Braganca (36%), compared to Humaita (21%), however this was not statistically significant. - Ex-prisoners from Humaita were charged with significantly fewer arrest charges, compared to Braganca. - Ex-prisoners from Humaita were significantly less likely to be reincarcerated than offenders from Braganca.	Yes	**Strengths** - Longitudinal design to observe recidivism data. - Clear description of the two prisons being compared. **Weaknesses** - No participant characteristics were provided. - Methods were not sufficiently described to enable repetition. - The data set used did not provide criminal history on a large number of participants, resulting in difficulties drawing conclusions about recidivism. - The researchers were unable to compare these two prisons with other prisons in Brazil which adopt a different approach.

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10. Johnson, B. R. (2004) USA **Score:** 18/20 90%	**Aims:** To conduct a follow-up study investigating whether religious programs offered by Prison Fellowship (PF) impacted in recidivism after release from prison. **Design:** Quasi-experimental design.	**Units of Faith Based Participation** - In-Prison Seminars (IPS) - Bible Studies **Recidivism** - Rearrest and reincarceration - Recidivism window covering an 8-year period post-release.	201 males who participated in at least 1 of 3 PF activities (in-prison seminars, bible studies, or life-plan seminars). Based on multi-variate matched sampling method, 201 former inmates were chosen for a non-PF matched group. Mean age at release was 31.9 (SD = 7.3). 47.3% (n = 190) black participants; 12.4% (n = 50) white participants; 39.8% (n = 160) Hispanic participants.	Sample of prisoners from four prisons in New York state in 1992. Sample was not random.	Survival curves. Proportional hazards modelling. Cox proportional hazards (PH) analysis.	- 282 former inmates had been rearrested (70.2%) after 8 years - 136 PF ppts (67.7%); 146 non-PF ppts (72.6%) - Median arrest time = 2.4 years. PF and non-PF did not differ. However, the confidence interval range was greater in PF group. **Results from survival analysis** - Median rearrest time was 17-18 months longer for ppts in high PF participation group - Difference in the probability of non-arrest is most larger at 2 and 3-year time points. - 8-year chance of non-arrest not statistically significant, however significant effect emerged when limited to 2-3 years - 27% of high participation PF group rearrested within 2 years. 46% of low participation group rearrested within 2 years.	Yes	**Strengths** - Study design appropriate for the aims. - Methods were sufficiently described. - Study design was an improvement of one completed prior by the author. Included improvements to overcome limitations. - Survival curves and proportional hazards modelling used to analyse the data. - Recidivism data covers 8 years following release from prison. - Multivariate matched sampling method used for the comparison group. **Weaknesses** - Due to the nature of the data, random selection of participants was not

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			8% Muslim, 41% Protestant, 39% Catholic.			- The difference between median time to rearrest was 15 to 26 months longer for ppts in high participation group. - 9% of high participation group was reincarcerated within 2 years. 18% of low participation group reincarcerated within 2 years. The difference remained after 3 years (14% vs. 26%). - IPS attendance fails in predicting recidivism. - Significant reduction in risk of rearrest at 2- and 3-year timepoints when attended 5 or more bible studies.		possible. - Sample was not representative of prisoners in general. - Arbitrary cut-off assigned to reflect high participation in Bible studies.
11. Morag, M., & Teman, E. (2018). Israel **Score:** 21/22 95%	**Aim:** To investigate the tools that participants felt that they gained from the Torah Rehabilitation Programme (TRP).	Semi-structured interviews.	29 men (one man had been interviewed twice). Age ranges from 22-50 years. Mean age 30 years.	Interviewees were selected based on their demographic factors.	Interviews were coded using grounded theory.	**Tools participants felt they gained from TRP:** <u>Guidance and Obligations to God:</u> - There is a higher power - There is an explanation for their life experiences, which brings a sense of calmness	N/A (not the aim of the research)	**Strengths** - Appropriate research design. - Researchers addressed the influence they may have had on participants' responses.. - Ethical issues

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	Design: Qualitative					- Everything happens for a reason <u>Miracles and Tests of Faith</u> All good things are God's miracles, whereas hardships are interpreted as God-sent ordeals or tests of faith. <u>Watchful Eye of God</u> They are being constantly observed, which prevents individuals from falling from their religious path. **Rules and framework that are acquired through TRP:** <u>Religious Restrictions and Moral Framework</u> - Religion provides a strict set of rules - TRP whilst in prison provides strict set of rules - The clear rules were carried through to release into the community and provided individuals with boundaries to contain themselves		discussed. - Clear explanation of the findings **Weaknesses** - Limited information about participant recruitment and non-responses. - Researchers acknowledge that some of their recommendations may not be realistic in the current incarceration system.

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						- Religious decision-making replaced burdens of making one's own decisions <u>Rituals and Symbols</u> Rituals and symbols supported the interviewee's process of embracing religion. <u>Non-religious Tools</u> - Interviewees spoke about the importance of distancing themselves from former friends and environment - The option of a hostel on re-entry appeared to be beneficial. The hostel provided boundaries and structure, along with general courses such as anger management and parenting skills.		
12. Mowen, T. J., Stansfield, R., & Boman, J. H. (2018). USA	**Aims:** To examine how religious support (during prison or changes across time) relates to re-entry outcomes.	**Dependent Variables** Criminal offending, drawing data from 5 questions asking the respondents if they committed a	962 males aged 18-69. Mean age = 29.47 (SD = 7.29). White 34.5%	Data collected from 14 states between 2005 and 2007 comes from SVORI dataset.	Cross-lagged dynamic peel model	- Neither religious support across time nor religious support during prison in are significantly related to offending after release. - Self-conscious ppts have significant increases in	No	**Strengths** - Appropriate research design. - Use of a large dataset. - Recommendations made in regard to future research.

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Score: 17/20 85%	**Design:** Quantitative	range of violent and non-violent crimes. **Independent Measures** Religious support. strength in religion. **Time Variant Control Measures** 3 items that capture ppts outlook on life: - Asked participants their beliefs about the future - Asked participants if they beleieved people couldn't be trusted - Asked participants if they felt self-conscious. **Time Invariant Control Measures** - Levels of offending before prison - Race	Black 53.1% Other race 12.4%	SVORI data were collected to examine the effectiveness of re-entry programmes on re-entry outcomes. Data collected from 1967 males (aged 18-69). Approximately half of the sample received SVORI programme. 962 ppts in sample – taken from sample of 1697. Data collected from respondents at 4 time points.		offending than ppts who are less self-conscious (across time). - Lagged offending is significantly related to offending post-release. - Age is negatively related to offending. - Number of prior convictions positively related to offending. - Higher offending in ppts who received treatment for emotional instability. - Individuals who were enrolled in programmes for re-entry success are had significantly lower offending. - Significantly lower levels of offending after release observed in ppts with high religious support and increases in religious support over time.		- Clear conclusions made in relation to the research aims. - Methods sufficiently described to enable replication. **Weaknesses** - Male only sample. - Self-report measures used as a DV, potential for bias. - Limitations in the type of crime included in the SVORI data, resulting in poor generalisability. - SVORI dataset is limited, i.e., it does not examine specific faith-based interventions or provides information on the nature of support ppt receives. - Difficulties with generalisability due to the data coming from only 14 states in the USA.

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		- Marital status - Age - Prior experiences with justice system		- Wave 1: data collected whilst each respondent was incarcerated. - Wave 2: 3 months post-release - Wave 3: 9 months post-release - Wave 4: 15 months post-release.				
13. Norton, K. C. (2021) USA **Score:** 21/22 95%	**Aims:** To explore how formerly incarcerated Black men in a Mid-Atlantic city in the USA described their lived experiences of faith and spirituality as an influence towards desistance, cognitive transformations, identity shifts and	The researcher developed their own semi-structured interview schedule.	14 formerly incarcerated males in the USA. All participants were Black. 21 years and over (no information provided on mean age).	Volunteer purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. Posters were placed in a local church which was housing returning citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Qualitative descriptive phenomenological analysis.	**RQ1** – The data showed that all participants experienced some form of faith or spiritual connection when they faced the decision of desistance. Participants described feeling enlightenment, dependency and fear, in relation to finding their purpose. Dependency appeared with the greatest frequency. These participants were able to sustain their desistance by their dependency on God or	N/A (not the aim of the research)	**Strengths** - Appropriate research design. - Sufficient description of the methods and analysis. - Clear description of findings. - Researcher gave consideration to their role and potential bias. **Weaknesses** - Research design results in difficulties

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	redemptive narratives. There were four research questions (RQs) about how the participants describe their lived experience of faith and spirituality as an influence toward: *RQ1:* their desistance; *RQ2:* their cognitive transformations; *RQ3:* their identity shifts; *RQ4:* their redemptive narratives. **Design:** Qualitative descriptive phenomenologica l.			**Inclusion Criteria:** – At least 21 years of age. – Self-identifying as a Black male. – Successfully re-entered society for a minimum of 3 years. – Living in the designated Mid-Atlantic US city.		a higher power as a way of life. **RQ2** – The data showed that all participants had experiences of faith or spirituality that influenced cognitive transformation. Their practice reminded them of the difference between right and wrong. **RQ3** – Shifts in identity were found in all participants. All participants felt that their life had value, and they indicated that they wanted to be better/greater than they were during their period of crime. **RQ4** – All participants experienced a faith and spirituality redemptive narrative, in which they believed their lives had changed.		with generalisability due to exploring lived experiences. - Small amount of interview questions may have limited the depth of responses. - Small sample size results in lack of generalisability.

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14. Roberts, M. R., & Stacer, M. J. (2016). USA **Score:** 13/22 59%	**Aims:** To explore how faith-based programme related to desistance. **Design:** Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews with ppts who completed faith-based re-entry programme, Churches Embracing Offenders (CEO), in Evansville, Indiana.	13 graduates. Six males; seven females. Six individuals were in their 30's, four in 40's, and three in 50's. Twelve ppts = Caucasian; 1 ppt = Africa American.	Data collected from CEO from 2001-2013. 97 ppts identified as programme completers between 2001 and 2013 were invited to interview. Due to age of some of the files, contact information was out of date. Therefore, 22 graduates were contacted, but some did not wish to participate, and others expressed interest but did not attend the interview.	Analysed using thematic groupings. Content analysis was independently performed by three people.	**Expectations of Participants** There were difference expectations from participants. For example, some thought that participation in CEO would improve their spirituality, and others thought it would make them look good for the judge). **Clients' Experiences with CEO** - Clients' time in the programme ranges from 4 months to 4 years. - Most ppts felt accepted by religious community. - Some clients had been attended faith-based programmes before but returned to prison due to recidivism. - Positive relationship with mentor was reported in all but one ppts. - Benefits of mentors include accountability, sobriety, self-esteem, amongst others.	N/A (not the aim of the research)	**Strengths** - A mixed sample of both males and females. - Data was collected to address the research question. - Data was read and analysed by multiple individuals to ensure reliability and validity. **Weaknesses** - Recruitment method leading to some potential issues with self-selection bias. - Limited discussion about considerations of ethical issues. - Lack of comparison group.

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				13 graduates were interviewed.		**Ppts Benefits from CEO** - All ppts stated life is different than before they started CEO. - Rebuilding relationships with family. - Ppts reported CEO enabled them to aid others, increased their self-esteem, made them feel like they were better people, and felt closer to God. - Other benefits reported included not doing drugs, increased involvement with the church, the ability to forgive, help with transportation and housing, legal sanctions were less severe, and giving the ppt the will to live. **Ppts Evaluation of CEO** - All said CEO helps offenders. - All said they would recommend CEO to others.		

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15. Said, I., & Davidson, K. M. (2021) USA **Score:** Qual: 14/22 (63%) Quan: 16/20 (80%)	**Aims:** To explore the processes by which religion influences behaviour in prisoners. To explore the protective impact of religion on reoffending. To explore the function of religion in overcoming barriers to re-entry. **Design:** Mixed methods longitudinal design.	**Quantitative:** DV = recidivism, measured as rearrest. IV = – Treatment engagement score – A measure of self-reported religious activity by asking ppts how often they participated in religious activity 3 months before current incarceration, and how much they participate now. **Qualitative** Researcher designed interviews.	Quantitative sample of 175 males. Rate of recidivism was 52%. Mean age was 36.85 years (SD = 11.12). 58% White (no further information provided). Qualitative sample of 51 males. Rate of recidivism was 64.71%. Mean age was 39.91 (SD = 10.05). 58.82 % White (no further information provided.	Data was collected through the Therapeutic Community Prison Inmate Network Study (TC-PINS: PI Kreager). Collected monthly data for 10 months. Participants for the qualitative study were deemed eligible based on their expected date of prison release. These individuals were approached and 88 consented to participate. 51	**Quantitative:** Analysis completed to determine how religion impacts on recidivism across four. Multivariate analysis. T-tests. Chi-square tests. Survival estimates using Kaplan-Meier estimators. Log-rank tests. Hazard model. **Qualitative:** Thematic	**Quantitative:** – Ppts who are non-religious have lower engagement in treatment and are younger on average. – Ppts in stably religious group have higher engagement in treatment on average. – Stably non-religious ppts related to increase in risk of recidivism. **Qualitative:** Interviews in-prison suggest that religion acts as an instigator of identity transformation, which is driven by (1) allowance of time for self-reflection; (2) preference for independent practise rather than group study; (3) distrust of other individuals in prison. From the re-entry interviews, the researchers identify that although religious practice seems to be important in supporting	N/A (not the aim of the research)	**Strengths** - Appropriate research design for the aims. - Clear statement of findings. - Longitudinal mixed methods design, using the same sample of participants increases quality of the data. **Weaknesses** - Qualitative data did not explore role of religious at the different time points. - Researchers relied on spontaneous discussion of religious practise during the interviews. - Researchers report that they were unable to address the differences between religiosity and spirituality. As such, they were unable to address any shifts in identification.

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				of these were interviewed at least once after prison release.	content analysis.	motivation for a life free of crime and identity transformation, it is not able to sufficiently overcome the barriers in the way of successful re-entry.		
16. Schroeder, R. D., & Frana, J. F. (2009). USA **Score:** 17/22 77%	**Aims:** To explore the ways former offenders who are undergoing change define the way that religion and spirituality have impacted desistance. **Design:** Qualitative.	Semi-structured interviews conducted to acquire information about life experiences.	11 males living in halfway house in Midwest of USA. All men reported to have spent time in prison for a variety of offences. Age ranged from 20 – 50. All ppts were White.	No details of recruitment provided.	Thematic analysis.	The most prominent theme in relation to religion and desistance was in relation to emotional coping and control. **Anger** - Most participants attributed their criminal offending to difficulties managing anger. Relief from anger was attributed to religion and spirituality, which ppts related to desistance. - Relief felt due to the promise of forgiveness of sins. **Anxiety** - The participants expressed anxiety about their life and future.	N/A (not the aim of the research)	**Strengths** - Appropriate research design for the aims. - Data analysis clearly explained. - Themes adequately described, with sufficient evidence provided. **Weaknesses** - Small, homogenous sample size, comprising of all white males living in a halfway house. Poor generalisability. - The sample were participating in a mandated Alcoholics Anonymous programme, which maintains a spiritual component. The

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						- Ppts reported feeling hope for the future through religion and spirituality. - Religion/spirituality was defined as a way of coping with anxiety. **Depression** - Religion provided a hope for a better future - Religion as accessible to all. - The men defined their involvement in religion as a time when they felt happier as people. - Religion provides sense of belonging.		participants were likely influenced by this programme.
17. Stansfield, R., & Mowen, T. J. (2019). USA **Score:** 15/20 75%	**Aims:** To examine the link between in-prison religion and recidivism. To examine how the environments that ppts return influence the relationship.	**Dependent Variable** Recidivism defined as reconviction for new offence after release from prison. **Individual Covariates** - Religious Involvement (monthly	1,326 male participants who were imprisoned for at least 1 year in Oregon State in 2004, and who were released into the community within 5 years.	The Correctional Services of the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) supplied the individual level data.	Logistic regression models. Hierarchical Generalised Linear Model (HGLM) analysis.	- Higher levels of religious involvement was related to significant decrease in the odds of recidivism within 3 years release from prison. - No significant association found with longer follow-up period. - Religious involvement in community is independent in its effect on recidivism.	Yes	**Strengths** - Appropriate research design for the aims. - Longitudinal design. - Large dataset used. - Practical implications of the findings discussed. - Authors discussed theoretical and policy implications of the findings.

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	Design: Quantitative. Longitudinal.	attendance at HSR programmes. - Controlled for participation in needs-based programmes. - Risk of recidivism using a validated risk measure (Automated Criminal Risk Score; ACRS) used by the Oregon DOC. - Prisoner conduct **County-Level Covariates** 2010 US Religion Census used to obtain country-level estimates of moral community.	Mean age = 33.26 (SD = 10.39); range = 16 – 76. Violent offence (21.1%); Drug offence (27%); Sexual offence (13.3%); Other offences (38.6%).	Data collected in 2004, follow-up at end of 2017 (all ppts had follow-up after 8 years).		The results suggest that while the HSR programmes in prison is important in reducing the risk of recidivism, the benefits may be increased when combined with access to other resources after release.	Yes	**Weaknesses** - Limited demographic information. - Researchers did not measure change in religious beliefs or participation after release from prison. - Data obtained only from Oregon, resulting in difficulties with generalisability.
18. Stansfield, R., Mowen, T. J., O'Connor, T., & Boman, J. H. (2017). USA	**Aims:** - To improve understanding of link between religious support and peer support and prosocial	**Dependent Variable** Criminal offending, drawing on SVORI data from nine measures.	Wave 1: 1,697 males across 14 US states. Approx. half of the participants were placed on	Data comes from all 4 waves of the SVORI dataset conducted between 2004-	Mixed-effects longitudinal model. Hierarchical	- Higher levels of social support predicted by higher religious involvement. - No significant found between religious support and variations in offending. Family and peer support are	No	**Strengths** - Appropriate study design. - Results explained sufficiently. - Large sample size.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
Score: 15/20 75%	family mechanisms. - To explore impact of religious support on crime. - To determine whether religious support is affected by changes in social support over time. **Design:** Quantitative	**Independent Variable** Religious support, asking participants: - If religion/ spirituality made a difference for them - If they had received assistance from spiritual or religious groups - If they found strength in religion **Time-Variant Control Variables** - Family support upon re-entry - Peer support - Marital status **Time-Invariant Control Variables** - Race - Incarceration length - Type of conviction - Risk - Age - Prior convictions	SVORI programmes. Of the 1,697 males in the original sample, 1,032 (61%) individuals were used in the analysis. No information on age. Black 51.6% White 36.2% Other race: 12.1%	2007. The SVORI project was designed to assess the effectiveness of re-entry programmes on re-entry outcomes.	generalized non-linear model (HGLM).	also unrelated to criminal offending. - Being single is related to increases in offending. - Black ppts reported significantly lower levels of offending compared to White ppts. - Risk level and prior convictions are related to increased offending across time. - Lower levels of offending related to employment.		- Recommendations for future research made, as well as practice implications. **Weaknesses** - Limited demographic information provided. - Male only sample. - Results can't be differentiated by religious beliefs or traditions. - The data did not collect information on motivation to change. - Short-term follow up period used. Long-term effects of religious support were not captured by the data.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
19. Stansfield, R., Mowen, T. J., & O'Connor, T. (2018). USA **Score:** 17/20 85%	**Aims:** - To explore whether religious or spiritual support can help former offenders desist from crime. - To explore whether the relationship is moderated by risk **Design:** Quantitative	**Dependent Variables** Self-reported criminal activity, provided by SVORI data. **Independent Variables** - Risk to Reoffend. - Religious/spiritual support, drawing from SVORI data in waves 2, 3, and 4. **Time Variant Controls** Control for marital status, employment, family support and peer support. **Time Invariant Controls** Race, length of incarceration, offence convictions, and whether ppt was a.	1,697 adult males in 14 US states. Attrition rate of approximately 35%. Final sample of 1,040. No information provided on age or ethnicity.	Data comes from four waves of SVORI dataset conducted between 2004 - 2007.	Random-effects model. Negative binomial count model.	**Religion/Spirituality and Risk** - 44.2% of high-risk prisoners reported religion played role in re-entry, compared to 51% of low-risk offenders. - 20.2% of high-risk prisoners reported that they received assistance from religion or spirituality compared to 25.3% of low-risk offenders. - 80.6% of high-risk offenders reported finding strength in religion compared to 88.8% of low-risk offenders. **Religion/Spirituality and Criminal Offending** - No significant relationship between religious support and offending. - Lower levels of offending was significantly related to employment and length of time in prison. - Being single is related to more offending.	No	**Strengths** - Appropriate study design. - Analysis method and results explained sufficiently. - Large sample size. - Policy implications discussed. - Longitudinal design. **Weaknesses** - Self-reported criminality used as a measure, potentially resulting in bias. - Limited demographic information provided. - Male only sample. - The researchers highlight that the high-risk offenders in prison are often unable to participate in activities for the general prison population, including religious or spiritual activities. - Short-term follow up period used.

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
		involved in a SVORI programme				- Black ppts reported significantly fewer incidents of offending than White ppts. - No significant relationship between religious and spiritual support and offending in the low-risk or high-risk sample.		- Results cannot be differentiated by religious beliefs or traditions.
20. Stansfield, R., O'Connor, T., & Duncan, J. (2019). USA **Score:** 15/20 75%	**Aims:** To explore whether the way a person identifies (i.e., religious & spiritual, religious only, spiritual only, or neither) impacts on recidivism. To assess the role of religious identification and behaviours in the re-entry process. **Design:** Quantitative. Longitudinal.	**Dependent Variable** Recidivism is measured by arrests made for a new offence. **Independent Variables** - Identification (i.e., religious/spiritual) - Religious history - HSR participation - Religious orientation, using Age Universal Religious Orientation Scale - Recidivism risk (using a validated risk measure, also	571 participants. 83% white (n = 471). 58% (n = 331) Christian Protestant; 14.6%(n = 83) indicated "no preference" or "don't know". No data provided on age.	Data was provided by ODOC. All inmates admitted to ODOC in 2004 were invited to complete a survey. Almost one quarter (n = 807) of people volunteered to complete the survey. To examine long-term recidivism, follow-up data	Descriptive statistics. Logistic regression. Bootstrapping.	- Higher levels of participation in HSR programmes were reported for ppts who identified as both religious & spiritual (M = 2.99, SD = 3.98), compared to religious only (M = 1.48, SD = 2.05), spiritual only (M = 1.62, SD = 2.50), and neither (M = 0.84, SD = 2.02). - Lower self-coping scores (M – 2.64, SD = 0.78) and high cooperative coping scores (M – 2.64, SD = 0.78) observed for ppts who were both religious and spiritual compared to other groups. - Highest scores of self-coping were observed in ppts who identified as	Yes	**Strengths** - Appropriate study design. - Analysis method and results explained sufficiently. - Validated risk tool used to measure recidivism risk. **Weaknesses** - Limited demographic data is suppled. - Sample is majority males and people who identify as Protestant/ Christian. - Only one measure of recidivism used. - The researchers were unable to differentiate

General Information	Study characteristics		Participant characteristics			Study results		Evaluation
Author, year, country, & quality assessment score	**Aims and design of the study**	**Measure(s) relevant to review questions; standardisation, reliability & validity/data collection**	**Participant characteristics**	**Method of recruitment and response rate where reported**	**Analysis method(s) used**	**Findings**	**Reduction in recidivism?**	**Strengths & Weaknesses**
		controlling for other variables associated with recidivism risk) - Perpetrator characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, and offence).		was collected 8 years later. Data on arrests were collected by the ODOC in 2017. 236 individuals were not included in the analysis due to not being released or only recently being released, being deported, or due to incomplete data. This left 571 for analysis.		neither religious nor spiritual (M = 3.50, SD = 1.12). - High risk ppts more likely to identify as spiritual only. Low risk ppts more likely to identify as both religious & spiritual. - Rearrest twice as likely for ppts who identified as spiritual only compared to ppts who identified as both religious and spiritual. - Lower odds of recidivism were associated with higher average HSR monthly attendance.		the exact form of social support provided by HSR programmes, and religion in particular, for individuals who identify as both religious and spiritual.

Participant Characteristics

All participants included in the studies were individuals who had committed crimes and been incarcerated in prison. A total of 64,075 participants were included across the twenty studies: 195 from Brazil, 33,512 from Israel, 506 from Pakistan, and 29,633 from the United States.

Information on gender was provided in all twenty studies, with 98.87% (n = 63,350) of the total sample being males, and 1.13% (n = 725) being females. Of the studies in the USA, 28,944 were male and 688 were female. One paper was published in Pakistan, where there was a gender mix of 470 males and 36 females. One hundred per cent of the participants of the two studies conducted in Israel, and the one in Brazil, were male.

Nine studies did not provide information on age; therefore, it is not possible to report the average age of the participants in this review. The age range in those studies that did report this participant characteristic was between 16 and 76.

Six studies failed to report the ethnicity of the participants, meaning that the racial identity of 47,940 participants is not described. Of the fourteen remaining studies, 7,118 were White, 7,659 were Black, 327 were Hispanic, and 900 participants were classed as ‘Other’. Four papers only reported on the number of White participants in their sample, leaving 131 participants in this review unclassified.

Prior religious beliefs were described in only four of the studies, and therefore this is not able to reflect the characteristics of the participants included in this review.

Study Aims

Eight studies investigated the effect of faith-based programmes and religious support on recidivism (Cannonier et al., 2021; Duncan et al., 2018; Duwe & King, 2013; Haviv et al., 2019; Johnson, 2004; Stansfield & Mowen, 2019; Stansfield et al., 2017; Stansfield et al.,

2018), with one study comparing a vocational prison to one that adopted a faith-based approach (Johnson, 2002). The study conducted by Roberts and Stacer (2016) aimed to explore how faith-based programmes impacted on the lives of the participants and their desistance process. Similarly, Norton (2021) explored the phenomenon of how Black ex-offenders in a USA state described their lived experiences of faith and spirituality as an influence towards their desistance. One study (Morag & Teman, 2018) aimed to explore what participants felt they gained from a religious programme, and another study examined changes as reported by offenders following a religious programme (Armour et al., 2005). Two studies (Bhutta et al., 2019; Stansfield et al., 2019) explored whether dimensions of religiosity and the role of religious identity relates to recidivism. One study (Mowen et al., 2018) examined how changes in religious support over time impacts on re-entry outcomes. Further studies explored the meaning of desistance for religiously motivated participants (Hallett & McCoy, 2015), the ways that former offenders undergoing change define the role of spirituality and desistance (Shroeder & Frana, 2009), and whether religiosity could predict the likelihood of stable desistance, persistence, or a pattern of unstable offending (Giordano et al., 2008). The study conducted by Said and Davidson (2021) had a number of aims, which included to explore how religion impacts on behaviour in prison and out of prison, to explore the protective effect of religion on recidivism, and to explore the impacts of religion on overcoming re-entry barriers.

Assessment Measures

In their attempt to investigate the various dimensions of religiosity and its impact on recidivism, Bhutta et al. (2019) used The Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory: Abridged (MRPI-A). The original version of the 102-item MRPI (Krauss et al., 2005) is separated into two subscales: the Islamic Worldview subscale and the Religious Personality subscale. Bhutta et al. (2019) selected items from the Religious Personality subscale that

were found to be used repeatedly in prior empirical studies on the relationship between religion and crime, to make a brief version of the MRPI. The researchers deemed this necessary due to the limited time that researchers had with participants, and due to educational deficits in the population. The abridged version consisted of fourteen items. Thirteen were scored on a 5-point scale (ranging from “not at all” (1) to “very much” (5)), and one item coded on a 3-point scale (“no” (1), “perhaps” (2), and “yes” (3)). Higher scores on this measure indicated a higher degree of religiosity.

Mowen et al. (2018) used a researcher designed survey asking participants if they had committed a range of violent and non-violent crimes. Respondents could answer yes (i.e., they had committed the crime) or no (i.e., they had not committed the crime) to each question.

Armour et al. (2005) used a nine-item survey designed by the researchers, comprising of four Likert-style questions asking about programme satisfaction. There were an additional three open-ended questions asking participants to describe what they felt they received from the programme, along with a further two open-ended questions asking respondents to describe improvements for future programmes.

To assess adult self-reported crime, Giordano et al. (2008) used a modified version of the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (Elliott et al., 1985), using only age-appropriate items. A seriousness weight was then assigned to each of the self-reported crimes, derived from the National Survey of Crime Severity (Wolfgang et al., 1985), which was then multiplied by the frequency of each behaviour. A researcher designed survey was then used to measure religiosity using two single-item indicators. One indicator was *Closeness to God*, and asked participants how close they feel to God most of the time on a scale from 1 to 4: 1 being extremely close, and 4 being not close at all. The second indicator referenced *Church*

Attendance which asked respondents how often they attended church. Scores ranged from 1 to 6, with lower scores reflecting a lower level of participation.

Six of the studies adopted the use of semi-structured interviews to collect data from their participants (Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Morag & Teman, 2018; Norton, 2021; Roberts & Stacer; Said & Davidson, 2021; Schroeder & Frana). Data for the quantitative studies were supplied through various department of corrections, including: three papers using data supplied by Oregon Department of Corrections (Duncan et al., 2018; Stansfield & Mowen, 2018; Stansfield et al., 2019); and three papers (Mowen et al., 2018; Stansfield et al., 2017; Stansfield et al., 2019) using data supplied by the Serious and Violent Offender Registry Initiative (SVORI) Project, which is a federally funded initiative designed to examine the influence of a variety of enhanced re-entry programmes on re-entry outcomes (Lattimore et al., 2010).

Nine studies used recidivism as a dependent variable. Of these, one study (Bhutta et al., 2019) defined this as a violation of conditions of a probation order, five (Cannonier et al., 2021; Haviv et al., 2015; Johnson, 2002; Johnson, 2004; Said & Davidson, 2021) as re-arrest after release from prison, and two (Stansfield & Mowen, 2019; Stansfield et al., 2019) as reconviction for a new offence after release from prison. Lastly, Duwe and King (2013) defined recidivism as re-arrest, reconviction, re-incarceration and revocation since release from prison.

Quality of the Included Studies

The quality of the quantitative studies ranged from 70% to 95% (M = 80.83%). Particular methodological weaknesses of the studies included lack of information about participant consent, participant characteristics, and limited information regarding non-responders. Methodological strengths included having an appropriate study design to support

the aims of the research, sufficient explanation of statistical measures, and having a clear discussion that was justified by the results.

The quality score of the qualitative studies ranged from 54.5% to 95% (*M* = 73.25%). The methodological weaknesses of the qualitative studies included providing limited information regarding the analysis process and how themes were derived, lack of information on any potential researcher bias, and limited consideration made in regard to ethical issues. Particular methodological strengths of the qualitative studies included the appropriateness of the research design to meet the aims of the studies, a clear statement of findings, and these findings being sufficiently discussed in relation to the original research question.

Narrative Synthesis

Narrative synthesis was used to answer each question in this review. The findings are presented below with reference to each review question. Findings will be further explored in the discussion section.

Does Involvement in Religious Programmes/Practises During Prison Have an Impact on Recidivism Rates Following Release from Prison?

Bhutta et al. (2019) measured religiosity scores in a sample of adult Pakistani probationers and found a small, but significant inverse relationships between religiosity scores and recidivism (r=-.15, p=.001), suggesting that higher levels of religiosity is related to lower odds of reoffending. Similar results were found by Giordano et al. (2008), who found a significant inverse relationship between self-reported criminal involvement and religiosity over a 12-month period. Similarly, Stansfield and Mowen (2019) found that lower odds of recidivism (within three years post-release) were associated with higher average humanist, spiritual, or religious (HSR) programme monthly attendance. However, they found that this effect became non-significant with a longer post-release follow-up period. Duwe and King

(2013) examined the outcomes of a faith-based programme, InnerChange, and found that those who entered the programme had lower rates of recidivism compared to non-participants. Additionally, they reported that recidivism rates were highest for the participants who entered the InnerChange programme, but who dropped out before completion. Cannonier et al.'s (2021) findings suggest participants that engaged in 12-months of the 'Men of Valour' faith-based programme were 38% – 40.3% less likely to recidivate than the control group. However, engagement in only 6-months of the programme increased recidivism rates compared to the control group, with participants of the programme being 22.3 – 28% more likely to recidivate. Duncan et al. (2018) examined the effects of female prisoner engagement in HSR programmes on recidivism. They found a moderate association between the average monthly HSR attendance and lower recidivism, and for the 20% of women who engaged in four or more hours of HSR attendance per month, the likelihood of recidivism was significantly lower than who attended less than one hour per month. The researchers also controlled for the total number of other programmes attended by the participants in the sample, and the level of significance remained. This suggests that engagement with HSR programmes could be utilised alongside other prison rehabilitation programmes to further reduce recidivism rates.

Johnson (2004) conducted a study investigating whether religious programmes offered by the Prison Fellowship (PF) impacted on recidivism after release from prison. Of their sample of 402 offenders (201 of whom engaged in a PF programme, and 201 non-PF participants used as a matched sample), it was found that probability of non-arrest was not significantly different between the two groups after 8 years. However, a significant effect emerged when limited to 2-3 years. When comparing individuals who had high-participation to those with low-participation, it was found that the difference between median time to re-arrest was 15-26 months longer for those who were in the high-participation group.

Furthermore, 27% of the high participation group were rearrested within 2 years, as opposed to 46% of the low participation group. Similar findings were observed by Stansfield and Mowen (2019), who found that despite higher levels of religious involvement being associated with a significant reduction in the probability of recidivism within 3 years after release from prison, this effect was not observed with a longer follow-up period.

Haviv et al. (2019) investigated the effectiveness of religiously oriented rehabilitation programmes delivered by the Israel Prison Service, comparing two programmes: The Torah Study Programme (TSP) and the Torah Rehabilitation Programme (TRP). The TSP comprised of engagement in religious classes, whereas the TRP encourages a religious community-oriented life, where participants engage in higher intensity practices. Participants in the TRP are expected to commit to embracing and maintaining a fully religious lifestyle, and are required to participate in Torah learning groups, occupational integration, social therapy, and practical religious-related skills, such as seeking employment, scribal skills, and constructing religious articles. The researchers compared the outcomes from the two programmes, along with a comparison group of non-participants. A significant effect was found between participation and recidivism, indicating that the rate of re-arrest was significantly lower for group members compared to non-participants. However, this effect was only found when comparing non-participants to individuals who had moved from the TSP to the TRP, indicating that the effect was found only in individuals who adopt higher intensity practices. The researchers also compared the two programmes and found that the participants who engaged in the higher intensity TRP programme were significantly less likely to be rearrested.

Another comparison study was conducted by Johnson (2002), who compared a faith-based prison and a vocational prison in Brazil to determine which is most likely to reduce recidivism. The faith-based prison - Humaita - adopted an entirely faith-based approach to all aspects of prison programming, administration, and security. It was compared to Braganca, a

prison which adopted a vocational approach, where local companies contract with the prison for prison labour. Findings from Johnson's (2002) analysis suggest that recidivism rates were significantly lower among prisoners from Humaita (16%) compared to Braganca (36%) ($p < 0.01$). Johnson (2002) also controlled for the severity of offence. The rate of recidivism for high-risk offenders was lower for Humaita (12%) compared to Braganca (36%) ex-prisoners. Ex-prisoners from Humaita were charged with significantly fewer arrest charges and were significantly less likely to be reincarcerated than Braganca ex-prisoners.

Lastly, Stansfield et al. (2017) analysed data from the SVORI dataset of 1,627 males in the USA, collected between 2004 and 2007. They reported that in their study, religious support was not significantly related to criminal offending. However, they found that religious and spiritual support was related to a lower probability of substance use, as well as increased levels of employment. Similarly, Stansfield et al. (2018) used the same dataset to assess whether religious and spiritual support impacted on desistance outcomes. They found no significant relationship between religious support and criminal offending overall. Stansfield et al. (2018) also attempted to determine if the relationship between religious/spiritual support and desistance from crime was moderated by risk. They found that the prosocial effects that were found to be linked to religious/spiritual support were mostly limited to lower risk individuals.

What Specific Factors/Elements of Religious Programmes or Religiosity are related to Desistance from Crime?

Bhutta et al. (2019) examined whether various dimensions of religiosity (e.g., moral values, religious practises, and fundamental beliefs) are associated with recidivism in a sample of adult Pakistani probationers. They found that the probability of reoffending was reduced when associated with an increase in scores of two religiosity factors: religious

practices and religious-moral values. Other factors (e.g., importance of religion and rejection of non-believers) were not found to be related to reoffending.

Researchers investigating the impact that a faith-based correctional programme (InnerChange) had on recidivism, found that those who engaged and who met with their mentor in the community following release had lower rates of recidivism compared to those who did not meet with a mentor (Duwe & King, 2013). It was also found that InnerChange was more effective for drug offenders, inmates who identified as Christian, and offenders with more prior convictions.

Mowen et al. (2018) used the SVORI dataset, as explored in Stansfield et al.'s (2018) and Stansfield et al.'s (2019) studies to examine whether levels of religious support over time relates to re-entry outcomes. They found that neither changes in religious support across time, nor during incarceration are significantly associated with recidivism after release from prison. However, their findings suggest that individuals who have already high levels of baseline religious support, which continues across time, is related to significantly lower levels of offending post-release from prison. Said and Davidson's (2021) findings contribute further to our understanding of religious identity and recidivism. They found, in their sample of individuals who are stably religious or who increase their religious activity during incarceration, that there is evidence of transformations in identity as the mechanism for religion and its relationship to recidivism. Said and Davidson (2021) report that the only group that is related to an increase in the risk of recidivism is the stably non-religious group.

Despite the significant inverse relationship found by Giordano et al. (2008) described above, the researchers also investigated whether religiosity could predict the likelihood of stable desistance from crime, persistence, or a pattern of unstable offending. They found that neither index of religiosity that they measured (perceived closeness to God and church

attendance) were associated with increased odds of being in the stable desister category. They found that the positive effects of spirituality may be limited due to an individual's social networks and disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Stansfield et al. (2019) aimed to assess whether there are differences in recidivism depending on a person's religious identification (i.e., religious and spiritual, religious only and spiritual only, or neither). They found that higher risk individuals were more likely to identify as spiritual only, and lower risk individuals were more likely to identify as both religious and spiritual. Additionally, compared to individuals who identified as both religious and spiritual, those who identified as spiritual only were more than twice as likely to be rearrested.

What Impact do Offenders Believe Has Been Made on Their Lives as a Result of Their Religious Involvement?

Seven studies within this review reported on the impact that individuals believed religious and spiritual support had on their lives. Roberts and Stacer (2016) aimed to explore how participants felt that the faith-based programme – Churches Embracing Offenders (CEO) - impacted on their life after release from prison. All thirteen participants reported that their life was different after completion of the programme and that they were able to work on rebuilding their relationships with family. Three participants said that CEO allowed them to help others, two participants reported that it increased their self-esteem, two reported that they felt they were better people, and two expressed that they felt closer to God. Other benefits they reported included abstaining from substances, increased involvement in the Church, the ability to forgive, less severe legal sanctions, help with housing, and giving the participants the will to live.

Norton (2021) interviewed formerly incarcerated Black men to explore their lived experiences of faith and spirituality as an influence on their desistance from crime, cognitive transformations, identity shifts, and redemptive narratives. The findings suggested that all participants experienced some form of spiritual connection, or connection to faith, when they were faced with the decision as to whether or not to desist from crime. Participants described their dependency on God as a way of life which helped them to sustain their desistance. All participants experienced cognitive transformation (i.e., it reminded them of the difference between right and wrong) as a result of their faith or spirituality. They all also reported that their lives had value, greater to that of when they were committing crimes. Finally, all participants also reported that their lives had changed, suggesting a faith and spirituality redemptive narrative.

Armour et al. (2005) asked participants to discuss what they felt they received from a faith-based programme - Bridges to Life (BTL). Themes were derived from the interview, one of which was ‘Impact’, whereby participants had reported an increased awareness about the ripple effect of crime on other people. Another theme was ‘Caring’, where participants described feeling cared for by the volunteers in the programme and feeling a sense of belonging and self-worth. ‘Self-knowledge’ referred to developing a sense of self-realisation and self-accountability, and ‘Transformation’ referred to the quality of change experienced by the offender participants and experiencing a “spiritual awakening”.

A similar approach was taken by Morag and Teman (2018), whereby participants were asked what tools they felt they gained from completing the TRP described above. It was reported that participants felt that the programme provided them with ‘Guidance from Above and Obligations to God’. This was described as participants believing there is a higher power and an explanation for their life experiences, which provides a sense of calm and a belief that everything happens for a reason. Additionally, participants felt that the programme provided

them with the belief of 'Miracles and Tests of Faith', where there is an understanding that all good things are God's miracles, and all hardships are God-sent ordeals or tests of faith. Finally, participants had a sense of the 'Watchful Eye of God' and believed that there is an entity that is observing individuals constantly, which prevents them from falling from their religious path. Participants also described religion as providing them with a set of strict rules to live by, and religious decision-making replacing the burden of making one's own decisions.

Schroeder and Frana (2009) investigated the ways in which former offenders defined the role of spirituality and religion in their desistance process. The most prominent theme revealed was that participants felt they had improved skills in emotional coping and control, which was seen as having a key role in desisting from crime and substance misuse. Participants reported that they were able to depend on their religion/spirituality, and it provided a sense of belonging for individuals who were lacking interpersonal connections.

Hallett and McCoy (2015) took a similar approach to Shroeder and Franer (2009) and explored the meanings of desistance for religiously motivated desisters. They then contrasted these meanings with accounts of three theories of desistance: *Cognitive Transformation Theory, Identity Theory,* and *Making Good.* In terms of *Cognitive Transformation Theory*, 56% of the narratives were rated as having all four elements of the theory present: openness to change; exposure to hooks; envisions replacement self; and new view of deviant behaviour. Regarding *Identity Theory*, participants felt that it was important to break ties with past associates, whilst building new bonds to church members. However, in contrast to the *Identity Theory*, the 'feared self' identity had become a fully realised aspect of the participants' lives, and participants embraced this as a turning point and realisation with their "new self". Finally, in relation to the theory of *Making Good*, although through not engaging in further criminal offending, and therefore achieving 'making good', they continued to

describe themselves as “sinners”. They saw repentance and acknowledgement of their sinful nature as their best hope for desistance and they relied heavily on social support and personal agency to support them through this change.

Said and Davidson’s (2021) findings suggest that for those individuals who were in prison, religion acted as a driver for identity transformation. They also identified that for individuals who had re-entered the community from prison, religious practices were insufficient to overcome barriers to successful re-entry. Indeed, participants reflected that they were experiencing high levels of despair at their difficulty in meeting their re-entry goals, and that these struggles resulted in lower levels of religious practice.

Discussion

The aims of this review were to investigate whether involvement in religious programmes/practices during prison has an impact on recidivism rates, whether there are certain factors or elements regarding these programmes or the individuals' religiosity which are associated with desistance from crime, and to explore what impact offenders believe religion, faith or spirituality has made on their life. The findings in relation to each of these aims will be discussed below.

Following screening and quality assessing the available papers, twenty studies were included in this review. Twelve studies adopted a quantitative design, six adopted a qualitative approach, and two applied a mixed methods design.

In relation to the first aim of this review (i.e., to investigate whether involvement in religious programmes/practices during prison have an impact on recidivism rates following release from prison), the findings from seven studies suggest that involvement in religious activities, including faith-based programmes, can reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Bhutta et al., 2019; Cannonier et al., 2021; Duncan et al., 2018; Duwe & King, 2013; Giordano et al., 2008; Haviv et al., 2019; Johnson, 2002) in samples from the United States, as well as from Pakistan and Brazil. This is similar to the findings of Baier and Wright's (2001) systematic literature review of 60 papers, in which a significant, moderate effect size was observed. Unfortunately, the effect size was not reported in a number of the papers in the current review, and due to the small sample size, and lack of follow-up data, it is not possible to report on the effect.

The findings in this review also suggest that hours of attendance and intensity of the programme impacted on the likelihood of recidivism. For example, Duncan et al. (2018) found that the more hours of attendance in HSR programmes decreased the risk of

recidivism, and that this significance was maintained even when controlling for other programmes. Similarly, Haviv et al.'s (2019) findings suggest that the higher intensity of the programme, the lower likelihood of recidivism for individuals who participated in a structured religious programme. These findings suggest that for individuals to benefit from the reductions in recidivism risk, they must make a commitment to their religious or spiritual practices.

Despite these findings, some studies found the effect to be time limited. Stansfield and Mowen (2019), for example, found that a significant effect was observed within 3 years, but that this effect was not sustained after a longer follow-up period. Johnson (2004) also reached this conclusion in an 8-year follow-up study of individuals who had completed a faith-based programme. It was found that no significant difference was observed between participants who engaged in the programme, compared to non-participants after eight years. Johnson (2004) however, did find that there was a significant effect when limited to 2-3 year. The authors provided no theories for why this effect was observed. However, it is possible that a return to one's lifestyle away from their religious group or programme brings with it a return of temptation (Johnson et al., 2000a). As such, if the individual does not continue to access their religious group on release from prison, it is possible that the benefits they received from accessing the programme are limited. Another explanation of this may be simply that religious involvement has limited impact on recidivism rates, with research demonstrating that an estimated 68% of released prisoners are arrested within three years following release (Alper et al., 2018). Johnson (2004) however found that, similar to Duncan et al.'s (2018) study, the time of re-arrest for the individuals in the sample that had higher participation in the programme was longer compared to low participation individuals. Only 27% of the individuals in the high programme participation group were rearrested within 2 years compared to 46% of those in the low participation group. This suggests that and

individuals' commitment to their religious group or programme may impact on outcomes. However, these studies did not control for participation in other interventions, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of time and the interaction with other programmes attended.

However, there remains two papers in this review concluding that faith-based programmes and religious involvement does not influence recidivism (Stansfield et al., 2017; Stansfield et al., 2018). In their explanation of their findings, Stansfield et al. (2018) report that the non-relationship may be due to the fact that the aim of the work that religious leaders and volunteers does not specifically target crime prevention. It is relevant to note that Stansfield et al. (2017) and Stansfield et al. (2018) had a quality score of 75% and 85% respectively, suggesting that the studies were of good quality. However, both of these studies utilised the same dataset (SVORI) for their results, which may account for the fact that they reached the same conclusion. However, findings from Mowen et al. (2018), who utilised the same dataset and had a quality score of 85%, found that significantly lower levels of reoffending were present in the participants, but only when high levels of baseline religious support were coupled with increases in this support across time. This highlights the importance of continued support, including mentorship. Indeed, research has found that individuals who receive mentorship on re-entering from prison have significantly lower recidivism than those who did not (Heaney, 2013; O'Dwyer, 2019; Sells et al., 2020). An explanation of this may be found in Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, in which the bonds that individuals make (in this case to their religious group) means they are more likely to conform to the norms of the group in order to reduce the risk of losing these bonds. As the longitudinal findings suggest, faith-based programmes may not have a direct impact on recidivism rates, and instead it may be the ongoing support from the social group that has a deterrent effect.

The next aim of the review was to identify the specific factors/elements of religious programmes or religiosity that are related to desistance from crime. The findings of the review suggest that the way an individual identifies may impact on the outcome post-release. Stansfield et al. (2019) investigated the difference between identifying as religious or spiritual (or both/neither) and arrest rates and found that individuals who identified as *both* religious and spiritual, as opposed to solely spiritual were less likely to be rearrested. The authors hypothesised that this effect may be present due to the re-entry support that is provided through religious programmes, which may not be accessed by spiritual only individuals. For instance, faith-based re-entry programmes are able to provide services to former offenders to target needs such as finding employment, income, and substance use (Mears, 2006), which are considered risk factors for recidivism (Yukhnenko et al., 2020). However, the findings from Stanfield et al.'s (2019) paper were somewhat contradictory, as the researchers also found that identifying as *neither* religious nor spiritual did not result in a higher likelihood of recidivism compared to the other groups. In relation to this, Giordano et al. (2008) found that neither of their two indices of religiosity (perceived closeness to God and church attendance) were associated with an increased likelihood of being a stable desister of crime. Conversely, the findings from Bhutta et al. (2019) suggest that the religious factors of religious practice and religious/moral values, were associated with a reduced probability of reoffending. However, no other factors in Bhutta et al.'s (2019) study were related. This raises the question regarding the way in which religiosity is defined and measured in the literature; there is need for further clarity around this (Adamczyk et al., 2017).

Giordano et al. (2008) stated that the positive effects of religion might be limited by an individual's environment, including poor social networks and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This supports a large literature base which has found the importance of social support and occupational support on individuals who have been involved in the

criminal justice system (e.g., Konkel, 2020; Padfield & Maruna, 2006; Yukhnenko et al., 2020). This may be controlled for, and measures could be taken to ensure that positive social networks are introduced to offenders re-entering society. This could provide additional positive outcomes, with Duwe & King (2013) finding that having a mentor in the community post-release resulted in lower rates of recidivism. As previously stated, this supports Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, in that the attachments that the individuals make to their mentor may deter them from committing crimes, i.e., they do not want to risk losing the valuable bond.

The third and final aim of the review was to explore what impact offenders believe has been made on their lives as a result of their religious involvement. One of the main findings is in relation to individuals having an increase in self-worth, self-esteem, and hope for the future (Armour et al., 2005; Roberts & Stacer, 2016; Schroeder & Frana, 2009). While self-esteem is considered a non-criminogenic factor according to the Risk Need Responsivity Model (Andrews et al., 1990), research has found self-esteem to be related to a range of offending behaviours. For instance, Thapa et al. (2021) found that high levels of self-esteem increased the risk of reoffending in females, whereas Ghasimbaklo et al. (2014) found that increased offending was observed when participants had low self-esteem. Furthermore, Martin and Sterman (2010) found that individuals who had lower levels of hope tend to be at higher risk of recidivism. Participants included in this review also reported having better emotional coping skills, which have been linked to improvements in mental health (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2014), as well as decreased rates of recidivism (LaCourse et al., 2019). The participants in Schroeder and Frana's (2009) study reported that religious involvement gave them a relief from anger which they believed helped them to desist from crime. Indeed, anger has been found to be associated with the use of maladaptive coping strategies, such as crime (Broidy, 2001), and has been identified as a predictor of violence and antisocial

behaviour (Agnew, 2001; Farzan-Kashani & Murphey, 2017; Li et al., 2019). Better relationships with people, and an increase in positive social networks also appeared to be a benefit of engaging in religious activities, along with providing a sense of belonging where individuals may have had interpersonal difficulties. Li et al. (2019) found that individuals who had more difficulties with forming long-term attachments to others were more likely to engage in antisocial behaviours, and Domínguez and Montolio (2021) found that crime rates reduced when community ties were strengthened. Additionally, the forgiveness of sins promised through religion appeared to be a theme in this review (Morag & Teman, 2018; Schroeder & Frana, 2009). Maruna et al. (2006) suggested that a belief in God provides a framework for forgiveness, which allows individuals to feel that they have a sense of control over their future. Indeed, this is reflected in Norton's (2021) study, in which all participants reported shifts in identity and redemptive narratives as a result of their religious involvement.

Overall, the findings suggest that involvement in humanistic, spiritual, and religious activities or beliefs can reduce levels of reoffending on release from prison. However, for the studies that explored long-term impact, this effect appeared to be time limited and is dependent on the continuation of re-entry support. The qualitative findings also provide some support for the theories discussed earlier in this review, including the Social Control Theory, and the Rational Choice Theory. Participants spoke about feeling cared for by the volunteers of the programme (Armour et al., 2005) and that it provided individuals with a sense of belonging for those who lacked interpersonal connections (Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Schroeder & Frana, 2009). They reported feeling comfort at having religious rules to live by (Morag & Teman, 2018) and being able to make prosocial choices. These outcomes are possible protective factors against feelings of shame and embarrassment as a result of incarceration, which are linked to higher rates of recidivism (Hosser et al., 2008). The introduction of prosocial support networks and communities may become too costly for some

to lose through engaging in further criminal activity. Indeed, Grasmick's (1991) Rational Choice Theory hypothesises that shame and embarrassment likely act as motivation to desist from crime for religious individuals, as crime may result in losing the respect of valued others and their community.

Methodological Limitations of Included Studies

Although the findings are promising, there are limitations to the methodologies adopted by the studies included in this review resulting in difficulties drawing conclusions from the findings. One such limitation is the disproportion between male and female participants, with males making up 98.87% of the sample in this review. This is despite the findings from O'Connor and Duncan (2011) that suggest women in prison were more likely to attend HSR programmes and activities compared to males. Further research is needed to explore any gender differences in religious motivation and re-entry outcomes.

Another methodological limitation in this review is the lack of control for motivation throughout the studies (Mears et al., 2006). Faith-based programmes and religious involvement are attended voluntarily (Mowen et al., 2018). All prisoners are offered programmes or support through their chaplaincy (Todd & Tipton, 2011); however, this is not something that is mandatory. Therefore, it is possible that the individuals who choose to attend these groups and to access religious support are already making prosocial choices and are motivated to change. Self-selection bias may be occurring, wherein the participants of the faith-based programmes have already made a conscious decision to abstain from committing further crimes or may have greater levels of motivation, which may contribute to a reduction in recidivism (Maruna & Farrall, 2004). They may also be more likely to integrate well into the community after release as they have already identified a religious group that they can belong to, thus distancing themselves from a potential criminogenic risk factor; anti-social associates (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Similarly, drawing conclusions from these findings may also be problematic due to the lack of control for the effects of other programmes offered in prisons. It is likely that whilst serving a prison sentence, individuals will have engaged in other programmes which also aim to reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Duncan et al., 2018). The studies that compared the sample of offenders who engaged in HSR involvement with non-participants, failed to control for any other groups or programmes that these "non-participants" engaged in. Only one study in this review controlled for other programmes (Duncan et al., 2018). It was found that faith-based programmes continued to be effective when participation in other programmes was controlled for. However, this study used a female only sample, and therefore it is unclear if these findings can be generalised. Despite the possibility that a reduction in recidivism is observed following engagement in a religious programme or practice, this may be confounded by engagement in other offence related programmes. Studies in this review report other positive effects of faith-based programmes. For example, being able to rebuild family relationships, increase self-esteem, abstaining from substances, having help with housing (Roberts & Stacer, 2016), feeling cared for, achieving a sense of belonging, self-realisation, and self-accountability (Armour et al., 2005), amongst others. This suggests that religious programmes or practices may result in outcomes that are not targeted by other offending programmes, such as supporting individuals with re-entry into the community, including identifying with a prosocial network once released from prison. Therefore, recidivism may not be the sole means of assessing effectiveness of faith-based programmes, and further research is needed in order to understand how religion impacts on other factors associated with desistance from crime.

There is also the problem of measuring recidivism across the studies in this review, and not only does the definition of recidivism differ, but the timescales for outcomes also differ. This is potentially problematic when making assumptions about the effectiveness of

programmes, because as Johnson (2004) found, religion did significantly reduce recidivism rates, but only when limited to 3 years. Following this time, the effectiveness reduced, and therefore it cannot be concluded that the impact of the programme was long lasting. The length of time of these effects is interesting to consider and is worth further exploration. It would be beneficial to understand more about why the effect potentially weakens, and to consider risk factors and protective factors which impact on an individual.

Further exploration may also be needed into prior religious belief and involvement and how this impacts the religion crime relationship. Only a small sample of the studies included in this review collected information on participants' previous involvement in religion, however little was done with this information to examine whether this is a potential protective factor. It may be possible that re-entry outcomes are better for individuals who 'find God' during their incarceration, compared to individuals who were already engaged in a religious lifestyle. As is demonstrated in the findings by Haviv et al. (2019), individuals who transition from low level religious involvement to high intensity involvement were less likely to be rearrested. It is possible that this increase in a religiously oriented lifestyle could have positive effects on outcomes. However, it could be possible that the drastic change in lifestyle may account for many of the benefits found from this programme, rather than the participants' relationships with a higher power. Additionally, the members of the higher intensity programme were also required to attend other programmes, such as social therapy, occupational integration, and practical support which may have impacted on the results of the study.

Strengths and Limitations of the Current Review

When considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this review, questions were raised about the appropriateness of including participants who have engaged in sexual offences in the literature search. There are a number of papers published looking at the effects

of religion on individuals who sexually offend, and these findings may have contributed to developing our understanding of faith-based programmes and religious involvement on recidivism. However, data on recidivism for sexual offenders may not provide a complete picture, due to many sexual offences never being reported to the authorities (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Therefore, in order to focus the review and meet the aims, a decision was made to exclude individuals who have engaged in sexual offending from the review.

Similarly, when considering the age group of participants, adults were chosen as the target population. This is due to recidivism and reoffending being different in the adult population compared to children and adolescents and the differing interventions available to each group. Additionally, a large proportion of research investigating the link between crime and religion is conducted with adolescents (Johnson et al., 2001), and reviews have already been completed in this area (e.g., Baier & Wright, 2001). Therefore, in order to provide a clear understanding of the religion and crime link in an adult population, individuals under the age of sixteen were excluded from the review.

Papers that were not published in the English language were excluded from this review. This was due to the time that it would have taken to translate the papers and the potential for inaccuracy. However, this may have resulted in papers that would have contributed well to the review being missed. It is also unfortunate as the papers included in this review focussed heavily on Westernised prison services and religious programmes. It is possible that papers published in a non-English language may have presented findings on a non-Western population, which would have helped to inform the literature in this area. However, the over-representation of studies in the USA is potentially because of their reliance on faith-based practices (The Pew Forum, 2008).

Due to the vast amount of research published in this area, a strict inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied in order to filter down the appropriate papers. Whilst this was deemed appropriate, a risk of having such strict criteria is that some studies that could have added value to the review may have been excluded. However, equally, the strict criteria ensured that the papers selected were useful in answering the review aims.

Finally, a narrative synthesis was chosen as the method of synthesising and analysing the data for this systematic review, due to the range of methodologies and analyses in the included papers. However, the use of narrative syntheses can introduce bias, due to reviewers presenting their own explanation of the findings, which may be open to interpretation (Campbell et al., 2018).

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Following this review, recommendations for practice can be made. One of the key points to take away from this review is that, although the included studies suggest there is a moderate relationship between religion and crime, there is also an indication that this may be time-limited, wherein the effects of programmes delivered in prisons decrease over time. The findings also suggest that any positive effect is lessened by poor re-entry support and poor interpersonal relationships. Therefore, providing the individual with a mentor on release from prison, or supporting ex-offenders to identify religious or other prosocial communities, could provide the individual with the opportunity for a more successful re-entry into the community and lower rates of reoffending. Additionally, the findings in this review suggest that higher levels of engagement and intensity produce greater outcomes. Therefore, in practice, encouragement could be given to willing programme participants to engage more intensely in religious practice and take on lifestyle changes to support this.

Some areas for further research have been highlighted throughout this discussion (i.e., prior religious involvement, and gender differences in motivation and re-entry outcomes). However, there remains a lot of work to do in the religion and crime literature to improve our understanding. Adamczyk et al.'s (2017) review highlighted the importance of improving methodological strength in this research area, and it appears that there continues to be room for improvement. However, there is a growing amount of literature examining the relationship, and the findings are promising.

Conclusion

This review identified a range of studies exploring the relationship between religion and crime. The findings from the review suggest that there is a significant low to moderate inverse relationship between religion and crime, with higher levels of engagement producing a decrease in recidivism. However, the findings also suggest that this effect is potentially time limited. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that there are additional benefits to engagement in religious programmes or religious activities, including increases in social capital, such as greater feelings of social inclusion, support with housing and employment, greater ability to cope with emotional experiences, having a set of religious rules to follow, and the belief in a higher power. However, there are difficulties with generalisability due to the included studies being predominantly focused on Western cultures, and over-represented by male participants.

Further research is required to understand more about the apparent time limit to the positive effects of religious programmes, and further work should be undertaken to clarify the definitions and measurements of religiosity and recidivism in this area of literature.

CHAPTER 3

EXPLORING LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BECOMING A CHRISTIAN: A STUDY OF FORMERLY IMPRISONED MEN IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Abstract

The current study aims to contribute to the existing literature of religious conversion and desistance from crime by exploring the lived experiences and views of former perpetrators of crime who converted to Christianity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven men residing in the United Kingdom who have previously engaged in offending behaviours. Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, four superordinate themes were identified relating to: 'The Evolution of Faith'; 'Divine Intervention'; 'It's Not Always That Simple'; and 'What's Changed for Me?' The findings are discussed in relation to the existing literature in religious conversion and desistance. Recommendations are made with respect to further research and practice.

Introduction

There have been some positive findings for the relationship between participating in religious programmes or practices and crime desistance, as concluded in Chapter 2. However, as identified in Adamczyk et al.'s (2017) systematic review of the literature, the matter of religious conversion is one that is overlooked in the desistance literature and is a concept that requires further understanding. As the research reported in this chapter is concerned with the individuals who converted to Christianity, the focus of this introduction is to provide an overview of the current literature on the process of converting to Christianity and the role of religious conversion in individuals with criminal histories. For a broader overview of the current literature on religious conversion, including theories of religion and the role that religion plays in rehabilitation, please see Chapter 1.

Converting to Christianity

Religious conversion can be defined as "substantial changes in attitudes, thoughts, and self-understandings" as a result of new, or refreshed, religious beliefs (Maruna et al., 2006 p. 162), and psychologists have been attempting to explore the phenomenon for decades (Tumanggor, 2016). While conversion can be understood in terms of the definition above, Rambo (1993) suggested that there are five different categories of conversion: (1) intensification, in which a person's interest and participation in their existing religious beliefs are revitalised; (2) affiliation, when an individual who has no religious beliefs becomes involved with a particular religious group; (3) apostasy, when one becomes atheist after being involved in a religious group or movement; (4) institutional transition, in which the person moves from one community of faith within a major religious tradition; and (5) tradition transition, when an individual moves from one major religious community to another.

The conversion process is complex, and while different theorists propose alternative ideas, the spiritual transformation that takes place in the conversion experience for many Christians is considered to be a process, rather than one single event (Foubert et al., 2012; Hood et al., 2018; Zinnbaur & Pargament, 1998). According to Rambo's (1993) model of religious conversion, there are seven stages involved in the process which are likely to vary in intensity and duration for each individual, with phases that overlap and recur (Kahn & Greene, 2004). The first stage in the process according to Rambo (1993) is 'Context', which is at the core of the entire conversion process, referring to both the macrocontext (i.e., society or religious organisations) and the microcontext (i.e., family, or religious community) which can either facilitate or impede conversion. In the case of individuals who have offended, a person's imprisonment results in a loss of liberty, autonomy, and access to their pleasures in life, as well as potentially resulting in feelings of guilt and shame (Jang & Johnson, 2020). It is also likely to result in the individual being stigmatised and marginalised by society (Moore et al., 2016), which may provide the context behind their religious conversion (i.e., seeking to make a new meaning in life; Jang & Johnson, 2020).

Rambo (1993) went on to discuss the 'Crisis' stage of religious conversion, and explained that some form of crisis (i.e., religious, psychological, or political) often precedes conversion. This is also suggested in the MMM (Park, 2010) as discussed in Chapter 1, wherein conversion occurs following emotional distress caused by an event which conflicts with one's global meaning. Rambo (1993) argued that there are two types of crises that are important in the conversion process. One type of crises are the events or circumstances that lead one to question their fundamental orientation to life, such as near-death experiences, or mystical experiences (i.e., divine intervention) triggered by a highly stressful event (Rambo, 1993), such as one's imprisonment (Wilkinson et al., 2021). Another type of crises are the smaller, milder events which act as a trigger, and may seem insignificant to some. For

example, Moore et al. (2021) found that experiences of being moved to another cell, or being insulted by someone in prison may result in the individual experiencing stress, loneliness, and suicidality.

Exline and Rose (2013) also suggest that a crisis may present itself as a 'religious or spiritual struggle', and they propose that there are four categories of such. The first struggle is the 'challenge of suffering', in which the individual questions whether God is to blame for harm. In a study conducted by Exline et al. (2011), it was found that people often became angry towards God when they see God as being responsible for causing severe harm**.** In a systematic review by Leo et al. (2021) exploring the ways in which trauma impacts religious beliefs, it was found that while some individuals abandoned their religious beliefs following a traumatic experience, others relied on their beliefs to make sense of the experience. A study conducted by Knapik et al. (2008) exploring how survivors of sexual violence use spirituality to recover, found that some of the participants reported changes in the course of their life due to divine intervention; of being rescued or saved from the outcomes of sexual violence. Many participants attributed their spiritual beliefs to their experiences of sexual violence.

Another type of religious struggle is one's difficulty with forgiving themselves for their sins (Exline & Rose, 2013). According to Christian scripture, self-forgiveness is an important part of allowing oneself to benefit from the divine forgiveness from God (Worthington et al., 2019) and the difficulty one has in self-forgiveness results in a potential barrier between themselves and the divine. The third struggle according to Exline and Rose (2013) is when an individual is concerned that they or others are being affected by evil, powerful forces, such as the devil. Finally, Exline and Rose (2013) suggest that the religious community can also present a challenge, particularly when there are interpersonal conflicts within the group, such as when members act against the beliefs and practices that are accepted within the religious group (Pargament et al., 2005).

The next stage in the conversion process according to Rambo (1993) is ‘Quest’. Rambo (1993) explained that this stage in the process begins with the assumption that people seek meaning and purpose in life, as also highlighted in the MMM (Park, 2010). Under crises, people seek to make sense of the event or their life, seek new emotional experiences in connection to God, or solve a problem that has been brought to life because of the crisis. Quest is the process of doing this; of seeking “more” to replace the beliefs that no longer seem adequate (Kahn & Greene, 2004). The person-religion fit model suggests that individuals who have certain attitudes, personal characteristics, and personality may be attracted to religious institutions that can meet these needs (Hui et al., 2017). As such, an individual who has been involved in the criminal justice system may be seeking to develop virtues that are associated with religion, such as accountability and self-control (Jang & Johnson, 2022). Rambo (1993) also notes that the journey to find “more” may also be in the form of seeking new ways of coping with life’s problems, for example, using prayer to cope with difficult emotions or experiences (Bade & Cook, 2008; Szałachowski & Tuszyńska-Bogucka, 2021). Religion has also been found to be effective in supporting changes in maladaptive coping styles, such as substance misuse (Grim & Grim, 2019), violent behaviours (Baier, 2014) and violent attitudes (Hager & Sharmer, 2023). Further, Rambo (1993) suggests that Quest can also refer to finding new emotional experiences with God or with the religious group (Kahn & Greene, 2004).

‘Encounter’ refers to the dynamic interaction between the converter and a religious advocate or missionary (Rambo, 1993). The characteristics of the religious advocate contribute to the converter’s experiences, and at this stage, the potential converter is considering the benefits of a new meaning system and the role that this will play in their lives (Kahn & Greene, 2004). For many who have been in the criminal justice system, the religious advocate may take the form of a prison chaplain, or a volunteer within a faith-based

rehabilitation centre. Often, this person may have had similar experiences to the individual who has offended, and this shared experience may support someone's conversion.

The next stage, 'Interaction', is when the potential converter either chooses to continue to be more involved with the new religious group, or the advocate makes attempts to extend the encounter to continue to persuade the converter (Rambo, 1993). A crucial element of the Interaction phase of conversion is encapsulation. Encapsulation is the process by which an environment is created by the religious group in order to control communication and social interaction to allow the potential converter to experience new religious ideas free of other contradictory influences. For an individual who has been involved with the criminal justice system, their new religious group may seek to prevent them from accessing their previous lifestyle surrounded by temptations by encouraging them to attend church meetings and other faith-based activities (Johnson et al., 2000b). Following a sometimes-intensive interaction period, the potential converter then makes the choice to commit.

'Commitment' includes the conclusion of the decision-making process, where the individual has chosen to affiliate with the new religion (Rambo, 1993). This stage is often commemorated with a public demonstration of that choice (e.g., a Christian may be baptised) to further solidify their commitment in a physical manner, rather than a purely cognitive one. Baptism is an ancient practice in Christianity, symbolising the beginning of the conversion experience, rather than the conclusion of it (Collins, 1989).

The final stage of the conversion process suggested by Rambo (1993) is the 'Consequences' phase. During this phase, the converter is evaluating the role of their new religious beliefs in their life; this may be a gradual process which can take years.

Wilkinson et al. (2021) suggested that European prisons are religiously intense environments, where exploration and change of one's religion occurs to an unusual degree.

They argue that being a born-again Christian amongst individuals who have engaged in offending behaviour is a common occurrence. Being 'born again' is a phrase used by many Protestants to explain their conversion from spiritual death to spiritual life (Ortiz, 2023). Maruna (2006) suggests that self-identity is often in question in an environment such as prison, where an individual is removed from their home environment, their personal belongings are taken away, and there is often a de-personalisation that occurs when people are referred to by identification numbers or their surname. This can be considered in terms of Rambo's (1993) 'Crisis' stage of the model of conversion. Being a born-again Christian offers one a membership into a well-established community that welcomes new converts (Maruna et al., 2006). In Maruna et al.'s (2006) study of 75 prisoners who identify as converters, almost all of the interviewees viewed their imprisonment as a gift or an opportunity, rather than a personal crisis. It was suggested that by their reappraisal of imprisonment as being the "will of God" they were able to find meaning in a situation where their meaning making was put into question. Maruna (2001) suggested that 'redemption scripts' are the self-narratives that many ex-prisoners use to cope with the shame and stigma of imprisonment. In essence, the ex-prisoner tries to find meaning in their experiences of imprisonment as a result of crime. For some, this gives them a desire to put their experiences to use by devoting their future to helping others. Maruna et al. (2006) suggested that the religious self-narrative can also be considered in this context.

Religious Conversion and Rehabilitation

Research into offender rehabilitation tends to focus on investigating *what work*s when supporting individuals to desist from crime (Bhutta et al., 2019). According to the Good Lives Model (GLM) developed by Ward and Stewart (2003) all humans have similar basic needs and aspirations and are seeking primary goods in life. Primary goods are experiences, achievements and states of mind that provide meaning in a person's life. The GLM assumes

that all humans are actively goal setting and seeking ways of meeting their goals to improve well-being (Ward & Brown, 2004). It is hypothesised that people who offend are simply attempting to achieve their primary goods, however, are doing so in a way that is not socially acceptable. It is suggested that this is because they often lack the necessary adaptive skills to enable them to achieve their 'goods' in a prosocial way. McMurran and Ward (2004) propose that interventions should provide encouragement and the skills needed to live a prosocial life. One way of achieving primary goods is the participation in religious and spiritual groups and practice (Chu et al., 2014; Ward & Steward, 2003). Research suggests that participation in religious practices promotes health and wellbeing and conversely, a lack of participation is associated with lack of purpose, lack of meaning, social isolation, and inability to cope with various life stressors (Johnson & Jang, 2023).

As discussed here, as well as in Chapter 1, religious conversion can have a positive effect on desistance from crime. It is important to consider why this is. According to Zell and Baumeister (2013), religion can facilitate self-control. Impaired or low self-control is associated with dishonesty (Mead et al., 2009), aggressive behaviour (DeWall et al., 2011; Sofia & Cruz, 2015), and unrestrained sexual behaviour (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2007). Indeed, the self-control theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) states that criminal behaviour is a result of a lack of self-control. McCullough and Willoughby (2009) found that religion is associated with self-control and individuals who are members of a religious group have children who are more self-controlled. Zell and Baumeister (2013) suggest that religion can facilitate self-control in a number of ways. Firstly, they argue that religion provides clear guidance about right and wrong. For example, the Ten Commandments provide direct commands about how people should act, and Jesus is used as an example of moral excellence (Longman, 1998). For some people, this may relieve the energy that it takes to make one's own choices, by deferring to the moral rulings of their religion (Zell & Baumeister, 2013).

The belief that God wants you to behave in certain ways can be motivating for many religious converts (Emmons, 1999), and this may especially be the case for individuals who have engaged in criminal conduct, where the skill of moral reasoning is worse compared to non-offenders (Spenser et al., 2022). Many people associate moral behaviour with outcomes after death. For example, immoral behaviour is often related to an afterlife in 'Hell', whereas moral behaviour is associated with 'Heaven' and salvation (Almond, 1994). Paternoster and Bushway's (2008) identity theory hypothesised that people are motivated to desist when they consider their desire for the future (and their positive possible self), and their anxiety over what they fear they will become. While religion and faith are not addressed within this theory, people of faith may consider the consequences in the afterlife, which may prompt their desire to change (DiPietro & Dickinson, 2021).

Religion also allows people to monitor their own behaviour (i.e., through self-examination or confession), with some religions also suggesting that God monitors their behaviour. The environment, and the people one surrounds themselves with can act as tempting stimuli. In the case of people who have offended, despite wanting to make positive changes to their lives, being in the environment which once encouraged offending behaviour, or being around individuals who have antisocial attitudes, may act as tempting stimuli (Wooditch et al., 2014). This is potentially problematic for individuals who are re-entering the community following imprisonment, where going back to their criminal lifestyle, or their old ways of coping, is the only option available to them (Padfield & Maruna, 2006). Religious groups are thought to reduce this occurrence, as people can surround themselves with those who share a similar moral standard and who have high levels of self-control. Another way in which self-control is encouraged by religion is by re-education on motivations (Zell & Baumeister, 2013). For example, Christianity teaches that engaging in sin will not produce the positive outcome that the individual is seeking. Religion also provides

other options or distractions for people with a criminal past. For instance, someone who would once spend time with antisocial friends on a weekend and offend, may prefer to go to a religious meeting after religious conversion.

Some religious beliefs can also act as a protective factor during periods of misfortune or suffering (Zell & Baumeister, 2013). In the case of Christianity, many believers consider God to be benevolent, and view life difficulties and past traumas as having some purpose sent from God (Warren, 2002). Many formerly incarcerated individuals, for example, who in addition to possible traumas in prison, experience disproportionately high levels of adverse childhood experiences (Baglivio et al., 2015; Hilder et al., 2021, Reavis et al., 2013), cope with their experiences with the understanding that they have been saved by God. Similarly, formerly imprisoned individuals experience being saved from their sins (Sundt et al., 2002), and view their past as experiences from God that can be used to help others. In the literature, this is often referred to as being a "wounded healer": someone who acts as a role model or a helper to people who are exhibiting their past patterns or behaviours (LeBel, 2007). This role is beneficial to both the helper and the recipient (LeBel, 2007).

Research has found that those who are imprisoned or re-entering the community often report preferring mentoring from people who have experienced the prison system and who are now considered to be succeeding in conventional society (Richie, 2001). Using one's experiences to help others who are in need is considered a way to reconcile for their past crimes and has also been associated with psychological wellbeing, life satisfaction, prosocial attitudes and beliefs, and the possession of active coping strategies (LeBel et al., 2015). This is similar to the coping strategy of deferring control to God, wherein one allows God to take control of one's life (McLaughlin, 2013). The belief that God is responsible for the path that He wants you to take is considered by many to be a positive coping strategy (e.g., Shaw et al., 2007) and promotes a sense of security and resilience (Lewinson et al., 2015) (for more

information on positive and negative religious coping, refer to Chapter 4). This is not always the case as some individuals who offend sexually (e.g., clergy) use their religion to justify their actions (Saradijan & Nubos, 2003) and, for some, knowledge regarding forgiveness was reported to encourage offending (Topalli et al., 2013). However, a study by Anderson et al. (2023) found that men who had engaged in a religious programme in prison demonstrated more responsibility taking than those who did not engage in the programme, and they viewed themselves as accountable to God or a higher power.

As such, although involvement in a religious group or in religious practices can have a deterrent effect on crime, the relationship between crime and religious conversion is a complex matter that requires further exploration. Research has been conducted exploring the role of religion in the reintegration of those convicted of sexual offences (e.g., Kewley, 2015), which found that the participants developed a sense of hope and optimism for the future, following feeling forgiven by God. Kewley (2015) also found that participants received comfort and a sense of belonging through prayer and meditation, as well as being able to cope with negative emotions associated with imprisonment. However, to date, no research to the author's knowledge has explored the experiences of those incarcerated for crimes of a non-sexual nature.

Research Questions

The project aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the lived experiences and views of former perpetrators of crime who converted to Christianity utilising a qualitative design. The overarching aim is to gain insights into their experiences of becoming a Christian and to explore how they feel this has influenced their life, behaviour, and attitudes. It is hoped that this research will assist in the understanding of how participation in the Christian faith impacts on the lives of individuals who have committed

crimes. Such insight may be useful for practitioners/clinicians who work with offenders who express interest in Christianity.

Methodology

Ethical Approval

The study was granted ethical approval by the University of Birmingham Ethics Panel (Ethics reference number: ERN_20-0891) in October 2020 and met the standards of the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (The British Psychological Society, 2021). Data collection was suspended pending the submission of a Covid-19 Risk Assessment. This was submitted to the University of Birmingham risk management committee at the end of May 2021 and was approved in June 2021.

Design

A qualitative design was adopted for this study, with the purpose of developing an in-depth understanding (Grossoehme, 2014) of former offenders' lived experiences of conversion to Christianity. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 1999) was considered a suitable approach for this purpose, due to the study's aim of exploring how the individuals make sense of their experiences of converting to Christianity. IPA was considered advantageous over other qualitative approaches, as it allows the researcher the opportunity to discover phenomena from how their participants interpret and attribute meaning to their experiences (Frechette et al., 2020).

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Due to IPA being an idiographic approach, interested in exploring the lived experiences of individuals, it is recommended that the sample size be relatively small (Smith et al., 2009). Although there is no right sample size, Smith et al. (2022) recommend that between six to ten participants would be an appropriate sample size for doctoral research. However, this decision should be made after considering the level of analysis that the researcher deems appropriate for their research question (Smith & Eatough, 2007). This

project aimed to recruit a maximum of eight participants to ensure that each participant's experiences have been sufficiently interpreted.

IPA studies should recruit participants from a homogenous sample (Alase, 2017), and therefore a range of inclusion and exclusion criteria were created for participant selection. Table 4 provides an overview of these criteria.

Males aged 18 and over were included in the study, who were fluent in English to ensure that they were able to communicate freely. There was also a requirement that all participants should be a member of a Christian church, as well as having been previously convicted of an offence and served a sentence (either in prison or in the community). The type of offending was broad (i.e., to include violence offences, substance related offences, theft etc.), however individuals convicted of sex offences were excluded from this research due to the potential differences in personality characteristics, offence types and recidivism rates between sex offenders and other offenders (Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2000; Przybylski, 2015).

Table 4

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	**Inclusion**	**Exclusion**
Age	18+ years	<18 years
Gender	Male	Female
Language fluency	English	Non-English
Religion	Member of a Christian church	Non-religious. Member of non-Christian religious organisation

Offence Type	General offences (receiving conviction and sentence)	Sexual offences

Females were excluded from participation in this research. This was due to the differences in patterns of offending, offence types, and personal characteristics between genders (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). Additionally, only members of the Christian faith were included in this research due to differences in beliefs amongst other religions and therefore potential differences in experiences in conversion.

Recruitment

One participant was recruited from a Pentecostal church in Wales in the United Kingdom. The Pastor of the church was emailed who recommended the research to a member of his church, and posters were also placed around the church. Due to Covid-19 restrictions which came in place shortly afterwards, members were no longer able to attend church. The Pastor agreed to post the advertisement poster (Appendix I) to the church's Facebook page, however recruitment attempts were unsuccessful. Therefore, the remainder of the participants were recruited from a faith-based rehabilitation service in the West Midlands, United Kingdom. This organisation was chosen due to their commitment to supporting people leaving prison, providing support with detox/recovery, housing, training, and work opportunities. They run one and two-year intensive programmes for men, taking a faith-based approach to their teachings. The owner of the organisation was approached by email, and they agreed to display the advertisement poster in their service. A written information sheet (Appendix J) was then provided via e-mail to those who expressed interest, to inform potential participants of the project. The poster and information sheet both included the contact details of the researcher (i.e., university e-mail address).

The Sample

The sample recruited for this study consisted of seven adult males who had offending histories and were involved in some form of faith-based practice at the time of the interview. Pseudonyms have been used to protect anonymity. Background information of the participants can be found in Table 5. Please note that this information is purposely broad to avoid participant identification.

Table 5

Description of Sample

Participant	Description
Oliver	Oliver (aged 25-34) had an offending history including actual bodily harm, witness intimidation and possession of drugs. Prior to going to prison, Oliver was also involved in a gang. On leaving prison, Oliver returned to drug use until a friend invited him to church, where Oliver reports he overcame his addiction.
Liam	Liam (aged 25-34) had an offending history including, shoplifting, assault, theft, and possession of Class A drugs. Liam has a history of drug use and attended the faith-based organisation in the hopes of abstaining from illicit substances. Although he had a prior belief in God, his faith intensified through his involvement in the organisation.
Harry	Harry (aged 35-44) had an offending history including burglary, theft, and drug dealing. He has attended faith-based organisations before with the hopes of detoxing from drug use and felt that his faith in God developed whilst there. Harry arrived at the current faith-based organisation following a “slip-up” with drugs.
Jack	Jack (aged 45-54) had an offending history including possession of drugs, burglary, and theft. He spent the longest time in prison of all participants. Jack has a history of substance abuse, and a history of suicide attempts following the death of his partner. He entered the faith-based rehabilitation service after he found God in prison.

Thomas	Thomas (aged 25-34) had with an offending history including selling drugs and assault. He has entered faith-based rehabilitation services in the past and felt they were successful in supporting his drug detox.
Edward	Edward (aged 45-54) had an offending history including assault, theft, burglar, and criminal damage. He has a history of substance abuse and entered the faith-based organisation in hopes of abstaining from drugs.
Dylan	Dylan (aged 45-54) had an offending history of armed robbery, burglary, shoplifting and car theft. He has a history of drug use, and has entered faith-based rehabilitations in the past to detox from drugs.

Procedure

Due to government restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of the data collection period, the first interview was facilitated via video call. As restrictions eased, and following approval from the University of Birmingham Ethics Panel after the Covid-19 Risk Assessment submission, data could then be collected in person. Interviews took place at the faith-based rehabilitation's main hub, in a private room. Prior to taking part in the interview, participants were asked to read the consent form (see Appendix K) and sign it to confirm that they would like to participate in the interview. All participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions that they had regarding the study prior to the start of the interview. Interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone, and recordings were then stored on an encrypted USB and deleted once transcription had taken place. All data were transferred to the Research Data Store, a University of Birmingham secure folder. Any identifiable information has not been included in this report and pseudonyms have been used to ensure anonymity.

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews. This type of interview was chosen as it allows the participants to provide an account of their experiences without being overly guided by the interviewer (Smith et al., 2009). An interview schedule was developed which

consisted of open-ended questions used to explore how the participants had come to the Christian faith and what their beliefs mean to them. For example, participants were asked, 'Can you tell me how you have come to the Christian faith?' They were asked questions regarding how they felt they have changed as a person, and what they see for their future (see Appendix L for the interview schedule). Prompts such as 'can you tell me more about that' were used to draw more detailed information from a participant when they were required. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they would like to add anything to the interview that may have been relevant to include, that they felt was not covered by the interview schedule. Following the interview, participants were given a debrief sheet (Appendix M) and were asked whether they would like to opt in to receive their transcribed interview prior to analysis. This opportunity was provided so that the participants were able to make any comments on the transcription or clarify parts of the interview that they feel were not captured correctly. Only one participant opted in for this, following which they did not make any comments or suggest any changes to the transcript. Following the interviews, the researcher made a record of initial thoughts to contribute to the later stages of data analysis.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is understood as "an attentiveness to the influence of the researcher on the research process" (Engward & Goldspink, 2020, p. 41). Qualitative researchers have the responsibility of interpreting and making sense of people's experiences, in order to develop an understanding of humans which should support in making change (Shaw, 2010). Throughout the process, the researcher kept a reflexive journal which documented decision-making and reflections at each stage of the research process. Reflections were made following each interview, noting down initial thoughts on themes relevant to the research question. Notes were made about the participants' engagement with the interview and any

non-verbal information that was deemed important, such as displays of emotion. More information about reflexivity and a reflexive statement can be found in Appendix N.

Data Analysis

The data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysis followed the principles of IPA (Smith et al., 1999). IPA is a phenomenological research approach that is interested in examining how people make sense of their life experiences (Smith et al., 2022). It allows the participant to narrate their own experiences, without the heavy influence of the researcher (Alase, 2017). However, the researcher's role in this process is also an important principle of IPA, as they try to make sense of how the participant makes sense of their lived experience (Alase, 2017); known as a double hermeneutic approach (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, unlike other research approaches that attempt to generalise findings to a wide population, IPA is idiographic, meaning that it is interested in understanding how particular events have impacted on particular people (Smith et al., 2009).

The process of IPA begins by becoming familiar with the data. This was achieved by reading each transcript several times. This not only allows the researcher to increase familiarity with the data but allows them to begin to understand ways in which the participant explains and thinks about their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The next stage involved making exploratory notes of the transcript, noting anything of interest within the data, and this will have a clear phenomenological focus (Smith et al., 2022). An excerpt of an annotated transcript can be found in Appendix O. Interpretive noting also takes place at this stage, whereby the researcher makes interpretations of how the participant makes sense of their experience. This may include making observations on the language that the participant uses to make sense of their objects of concern (Smith et al., 2022).

The next stage in the IPA process is to construct experiential statements, in which the researcher uses their exploratory notes and provides a summary of the interpretation which has occurred within the pieces of transcript (Smith et al., 2022). Once this stage has been completed, the researcher then searches for connections across the experiential statements and clusters the data into themes and subthemes for each individual to develop Personal Experiential Themes (PETS; Smith et al., 2022). An example of a participant's PETS can be found in Appendix P. This allows the important aspects of the participant's account to be identified (Smith et al., 2009). Once this process was completed for all transcripts, the researcher then developed Group Experiential Themes (GETS; Smith et al., 2022), in which patterns across the whole dataset were identified.

Results

Following the data analysis, four superordinate themes emerged. These were: 'The Evolution of Faith'; 'Divine Intervention'; '"It's Not Always That Simple"'; and 'What's Changed for Me?' Within three of the superordinate themes, there were a number of subordinate themes (see Table 6). Whilst all themes are around the participants' experiences of becoming a Christian and living their lives as Christians, the four themes firstly speak of participants' experiences of life prior to becoming a Christian and the process or event that led to them becoming a Christian (i.e., conversion). Participants then went on to speak about how God has intervened in their lives in terms of there being a plan for them and the potential security and assurance that brings and speak of being 'saved' (Theme 2). Participants also spoke of the complexity of their faith in terms of it not being easy to leave their former ways behind (Theme 3). They then went on to speak of the ways in which they had changed (Theme 4).

Table 6

Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Superordinate Theme	**Subordinate Theme**
The Evolution of Faith	"I'll Go Back to Where Things Went Wrong"
	The Conversion Experience
Divine Intervention	God's Plan
	Saved by the Hand of God
"It's Not Always That Simple"	
What's Changed for Me?	Personal Achievements
	Changes in Outlook
	Sobriety

1. Evolution of faith

The first superordinate theme refers to the way in which the participants' belief in God has developed and includes some of the factors which supported the development of their faith. The theme consists of two subordinate themes: '"I'll Go Back to Where Things Went Wrong"' and 'The Conversion Experience'.

1.1 "I'll Go Back to Where Things Went Wrong"

A notable feature in the participants' narratives was the reflection on their life prior to finding faith, which for most, was characterised by hardship, including offending histories, drug use and adverse experiences. This was an important element of the story for most participants, as while it was not explicitly about their faith, they later compared this part of their journey to their life since accepting God.

Edward began telling the story of finding his faith by saying, "I'll go back to where things went wrong for me" (Edward; line 3). He spoke about being placed in care at a young age, where he experienced physical and sexual abuse, both in foster care and later in a children's home.

> "Um but I was, yeah, I was damaged, severely damaged. Um I couldn't trust anyone. It took me – the way I was starting school, it was drinking, taking drugs umm, and that carried on for twenty-five, twenty-six years. Um you know, again, I found it hard to trust anyone. I didn't want to get close to anyone." (Edward; lines 23-28)

Edward described himself as "severely damaged" and his way of coping with this as a young person was to use substances, which continued for an extensive period of his life. The tone in which he spoke about this part of his life was done with an element of bluntness, but his story is one which evokes a sense of empathy, and one not only imagines a child suffering abuse, but a man who felt severely damaged and alone. His story was similar to other

participants (including Harry and Dylan), who also described a childhood characterised by trauma, and drug use as an adult. Like Edward, Harry also spoke of being in care, though he did not allude to any experiences of abuse or the reasons behind him being placed in care as a child. However, his choice to include this in his narrative suggests the significance of it. In Dylan's narrative, he started by sharing that he was from a family which he described as "dysfunctional" and experiencing "chaos" in the hometown that he grew up in.

> "I'm from a dysfunctional family. My mother had mental health problems and alcoholic. They'd just shut the mines and it bought chaos on [names town], really". (Dylan; lines 10-12)

He spoke about "really experimenting with drugs" (Dylan; line 18) at the age of sixteen or seventeen, which continued for a large part of his life. The choice of words he uses to describe his family and hometown gives one a sense of disorder and insecurity, which possibly reflected how Dylan felt in the environment.

Oliver didn't speak about his childhood but spoke about feeling that life prior to entering prison was a "mess" but was a life which he felt drawn to.

> "Before I went to prison, I knew my life was a mess and I knew I needed help, and I tried so many times to give up, to walk away from it. But I was like, I dunno, the adrenaline of it, the excitement of it, the addiction. I was trapped in my life really" (Oliver; lines 151 – 155)

It is of note that he spoke of the excitement and adrenaline of it, indicating that he received some pleasure or enjoyment out of it. However, he then acknowledged that he felt trapped, possibly due to feeling in danger as he had spoken about earlier: "your life being in danger is something you get used to a little bit" (Oliver; line 143).

1.2 The Conversion Experience

The conversion experience was an integral part of the participants' stories. It refers to how the participants found their faith, and how they accepted God into their lives. Some of the participants spoke about believing in God from a young age but spoke of their lifestyle not involving God despite having some kind of belief. They spoke of developing more firmly held beliefs later in life. Other participants, however, spoke about their first conversion experience happening as an adult. The term 'experience' in this sub-theme does not necessarily relate to one specific incident; the term is also used to refer to the process that the narratives portray which, in some cases, involves a chain of experiences.

Liam shared that he "always had a strong belief since [he] was younger" (Liam; line 4). He stated that he got confirmed at eighteen, at which point he began experimenting with drugs. Liam indicated that "some stuff happened" in life (Liam; line 79) which changed his beliefs. He stated that his beliefs were again changed when he went to a faith-based rehabilitation. While there, Liam took the "baptism of faith" (Liam; line 90), indicating that his belief in Christianity was no longer in question and he made the commitment to live by his faith. Jack's story was similar to Liam's. He explained that he was brought up in a Christian household and attended Sunday school.

> "Before I got saved? Yeah, I always knew, yeah, do you know what I mean? … I was brought up a Christian and always go Sunday school, and all of that … I was always brought up that way". (Jack; lines 127-129)

Jack referred to his conversion experience as being "saved" which is a sentiment expressed by a number of other participants (see Theme 2.2), and one which indicates that although he "always knew", his beliefs weren't such that he felt "saved" by God. This perhaps indicates that he held a more surface level belief system when he was younger which

then developed through age and life experiences to this deeper-rooted faith, involving the spirit, in order to understand God more fully. It was following the death of his girlfriend that his beliefs developed.

> "When [names person] died, for me, I don't – it was – I was so angry … that was the day He saved me. Did I think I was saved then? No, it was only when I got to understand how God works" (Jack; lines 140-142)

Jack's pain comes through in his narrative; his struggles to form a coherent sentence suggests some sense-making and processing within this reflection, and there was a sense of sadness in his speech. It is interesting that he did not feel like he had been saved at that time, but in hindsight, in that hard time when he was experiencing complex emotions, he was saved.

Thomas also grew up believing in God, but he had little knowledge or interest in Christianity. He spoke about his interest in Christianity being sparked later in life when he was trying to abstain from drug use, and after he heard someone speak about their own experiences of Christianity.

> "I heard a guy's story and it's basically; I believed what he was saying, about how God went and saved his life and after he told his testimony, I went to the back room and prayed. And then just, I decided to pursue it. And that was that." (Thomas; lines 19-22) … And at this point, I was desperate for change. So, I was willing to try anything. Whether it was Christianity or something else. At that time, I was desperate you know what I mean?" (Thomas; lines 30-32)

His repetition of being "desperate" suggests that his acceptance and practice of Christianity was somewhat of a last resort to finding a solution to life's problems. Thomas' conversion to Christianity seems different to the rest of the participants in that he was unsure

of whether or not God could help him, but he prayed regardless and felt that this communication with God, or perhaps step of faith, meant his life changed for the better. Thomas prayed in hopes of a better life and being "willing to try anything" suggests that he had only a limited belief prior to making this step.

Dylan similarly had exposure to Christianity in his youth and described having received messages of God's love throughout his life. He described how "two little old ladies" (Dylan; line 15) repeatedly told him that Jesus loved him as he was growing up. These messages of love were persistent and while he did not discuss his religious beliefs during this part of his life, his attendance at places where he received these messages suggests some form of religious practice. Later in the interview, Dylan spoke again about these messages of love, indicating the importance of them in his journey.

> "'Cause they would tell me like as a young boy, Jesus would love me. And I'd never heard a word of love. And part of me would be like 'you are nuts' in my mind, but my heart was drawn to it. So, I think God's been on my case for years, and drawing me in" (Dylan; lines 77-80)

His admission that he had never heard a word of love suggests that feeling love from God was the first time he had felt worthy of it. Dylan's choice of words, "my heart was drawn to it" suggests that his heart was perhaps at war with his head. His narrative is that he tried to deny God's love, or draw away from it, but felt some form of compulsion – controlled by his heart – to explore it further.

As stated earlier, having a prior belief in God was not shared by all of the participants interviewed. For some, their conversion experience happened later in life. For Harry, this happened after he went to a Christian based rehabilitation.

> "But I only went in there and thought I'd do two month and then that's it. Get myself clean. Ended up staying for two year. Um, and I just found all there, I found God there, you know and it just, it just changed my life." (Harry; lines 9-13)

Harry doesn't explain why he remained in rehabilitation for two years, but it may be linked to his experience of finding God there. Harry had no prior thoughts about Christianity and spoke about his history of violence, "Christianity wouldn't have even crossed my mind" (Harry; line 25). This suggests that Harry would have been unlikely to seek out Christianity independently, and his faith was sparked by his placement in a faith-based rehabilitation. He spoke about the experience having an impact on his drug use and antisocial behaviour. This sentiment was also shared by a number of the interviewees, and further information about the effects assigned to Christianity can be found in Theme 4.

Similar to Harry, Oliver spoke about having no prior knowledge of Christianity and having spared little thought for God in his life prior to his conversion.

> "I had no God framework, it wasn't anything that was on my radar, if anything I was the God of my own existence, you know what I mean?" (Oliver; lines 63-65).

He spoke about being the God of his own existence, suggesting a belief that he was the person in control of his own life, and the person of most importance. He asked himself why God would want to help him. "I thought how the hell's that gonna help me in here? I thought why, why would God – if He even exists, want anything to do with me?" (Oliver; lines 72-74), further expressing scepticism of God's existence and power. Oliver went on to explain how his interest or belief was sparked when he signed his name up to attend chapel in prison, following the suggestion from another inmate. Oliver spoke about feeling that the suggestion made by the man "triggered" something. He spoke about a feeling of excitement when he approached the sign-up sheet.

> "So, I looked at what this thing was, and I realised what it was, and I thought nah, I'm not interested. And I went to walk away, and as I walked away, I felt like this urge come over me, like this, this pull, this tug, just this desire, to just, I mean, what is this what is God, is He even real, is that a possibility? And you know, I thought I was arguing with myself at the time … And I signed my name up to that chapel sheet, and for the first time in my life, I felt this massive sense of peace." (Oliver; lines 86-94)

Oliver's description of feeling an "urge", "pull", and "tug" evokes an image of some form of physical sensation, as though he was being physically drawn in and he could not have walked away even if he wanted to. It also draws parallels to his description of his previous lifestyle as being exciting, and perhaps Oliver began to experience a similar draw to the prospect of trying something new and different to his routine in prison. He speaks of a "massive sense of peace" despite not knowing anything about the Bible. Similar to Thomas, Oliver was unsure before he did sign up and did not necessarily expect anything to come of it. However, he felt this immediate wave of emotion.

> "It was weird, I'd not – I'd never heard anyone talk about the Bible, I hadn't read any of it, no one told me any of the gospel or any of the Christian stuff that we talk about, but just at that moment I felt at peace. And I, and I knew that there was something more than just myself, and I felt as if actually I'm gonna find a way out." (Oliver; lines 94-98)

The certainty in which he says "I knew that there was something more than just myself" demonstrates the conviction of his belief at that time. At this point, Oliver will not have had a full understanding of God or Christianity, but he seemed sure that there was something more. It is interesting that he states he felt that he was "gonna find a way out". While he does not say what he is trying to find a way out of, from his explanation of his life

prior to his faith (see Theme 1.1) it could be inferred that he may have been hopeful of finding a way out of his current circumstances or lifestyle and felt that becoming a Christian would achieve this.

Edward's journey to finding God was slower paced than that of Oliver. Edward did not have a belief in God prior to finding Him later in life. As discussed in Theme 1.1, Edward's life was characterised by traumatic experiences and drug use. He explained that he overdosed a number of times after being released from prison, before he went to rehabilitation, and it was while there that Edward began considering that God kept him alive for a reason. His questions about his existence seem to be the instigator to his exploration of Christianity. Edward spoke about his realisation of God having a purpose for him, suggesting perhaps that he concluded that God felt his life was worthwhile, and he should, therefore, be following the plan that God has for his life. More depth about participants' experiences of God's plan can be found in 2.1. The rehabilitation centre that he entered was not faith-based, however Edward decided to do an online faith-based course following questioning why he was "still here". He explored the concept of forgiveness and spoke about feeling that "something really stuck with me." (Edward; line 78). While at this point Edward was exploring his faith, he admitted to having some doubts. Despite these doubts, Edward continued to have his faith. He alluded to things happening to him which have strengthened his beliefs, which he considered to be the most important thing to him at present. Edward appears to place great importance on his faith and suggests that his conversion is still in progress.

2. Divine intervention

The second superordinate theme refers to the perceived role that God has played in the lives of the participants. It includes two subordinate themes; 'God's Plan' and 'Saved by the Hand of God'.

2.1 God's Plan

Some Christians believe that God has a plan for one's life, and that He guides them on their journey to fulfil his plan (McLaughlin et al., 2013). The assertion is that everything that happens in a person's life is all part of a universal plan for that person. For many of the participants in this study, they were willing to allow God to guide them in their life and were happy to accept whatever came their way. For example, Jack was given a chapel orderly job whilst in prison, despite not having a good record.

> "I ended up – I didn't ask for the job, it just come under my door one day, I start work in the morning. And I believe, I believe, and my fellow people who believe in God, believe that it was God. You have to have been doing alright, and I got the chapel orderly job. And um, I had a terrible record." (Jack; lines 70-76)

Jack speaks about it with almost disbelief as though he did not deserve the job. He believes that God put the opportunity in his way and validates his assumption by sharing that other people believe the same. He does not feel he would have been offered the job if it was not part of God's plan (as evidenced for him by the fact that his track record would mean he would not have been offered the job). He accepts the position perhaps, in part, due to his belief that God gave it to him. This excerpt is part of Jack's wider narrative of his belief that God has plans for his life and that He can make positive things happen for him which would not otherwise happen.

For some participants, not only did they believe that God was intervening in their lives, but linked to this, they also believed that God had a plan or a purpose for their lives, and that He would use their experiences to help others. Edward shared his thoughts on this.

> "So, I'd overdosed before that about twice, you know, over the years. And it was when I was in the rehab place that I was like, wow you know, how am I still here?

> And I came to questioning that, and I realised that – and I had the taste of it, you know, Gods got a purpose for me, you know. I was starting to work with young people, um who were going down the line of criminal justice." (Edward; lines 150-156)

Edward speaks about questioning his survival and seems to find an answer; that God has a purpose for him – to help young people. It could be inferred that the knowledge that God had a purpose for his life made him realise that his life had worth, and that his past experiences – although negative – could ultimately benefit others. Again, like Jack, Edward does not seem to question the purpose, at least not in his explanation of it, but accepts his role within God's plan.

Dylan also expressed his belief that his past experiences could be used to benefit others.

> "And the beautiful thing is, all them things that I went through can now all be used to helping and serving others". (Dylan; lines 178-179)

Dylan sees the beauty in his past experiences being helpful for others, and it is interesting that he uses this word to describe something which he previously spoke about being a "mess" (Dylan; line 145). Dylan's narrative is of his belief in God's plan reversing the way he sees his past – from being something very negative, to being something highly positive in terms of being able to use those experiences to help others.

Jack spoke of something similar and explained that God "flips" experiences, resulting in positive outcomes.

> "So, that's what He does, God, he flips it. It's like all them years, them twenty-seven years of crime, and in and out of jail, trying to get off drugs. He flips it, God, He uses

> that, that experience, He's using that in me in my spirit. To help others." (Jack; lines 99-104).

For Jack, there seems to be a sense of acceptance that his difficult past had a purpose. In line with the narrative of the hard times being necessary for the positive outcome, neither he nor Dylan express any negative feelings towards God for their past hard times. Jack reports only that God is now using his experiences to help others. There seems to be a narrative of thanking God for allowing something positive to come from what he considers negative.

Another way in which the participants spoke about God having a plan for them was their acceptance to allow their futures to be guided by God, without question. Edward expressed this by saying:

> "I honestly don't know what my future holds to be honest as well, you know. For me it's in God's hands, you know." (Edward; lines 352-353)

Edward doesn't seem to have many of his own plans for his future. He does not speak about what he wants or desires and there may be some reluctance to wish for things that he feels he has no control over, or reluctance as, first and foremost, his wish is to fulfil God's plan for his life. He goes on to say, "those things are being taken care of, you know yeah, it's all in God's hands. Yeah, as long as I keep putting my trust and faith in Him, good things are to come" (Edward; lines 377-379). His narrative is that if he puts his faith in God, there will be positive things in his future and there seems to be a confidence about this statement. He doesn't merely hope for a good future, he knows that he will have one. However, Edward's narrative suggests that there seems to be a caveat to having a good future; he must keep putting his trust and faith in God. It is possible that Edward believes that if his faith falters, his future may not be as bright as anticipated. It is unclear whether he has complete belief in

himself that he will be able to stick to God's plan. The fact that he mentions this shows that it is something he has in his mind. It could be inferred that there is perhaps some uncertainty for him around whether he will be able to keep putting his trust in God.

Jack also speaks about his future plans in terms of following whatever God's path is for him. Within this, the part of his future that is within his control is to follow God's path and to be a good person; aside from this, he does not have a plan for his life.

> "My beliefs, uh, that to follow God, to, to- t- t- to follow His path what He's got to offer me, to just, just, just to – I don't plan … To, to be a good person, to, to try and help people, and yeah, and just get through today" (Jack; lines 160-165)

There is a sense of uncertainty in his tone as he tries to explain his beliefs in this quote; this could be a reflection of a perceived difficulty in communicating something which a non-Christian may find it difficult to comprehend, or perhaps this is something he is unsure of or has not spoken about before. It is evident that Edward and Jack do not have concrete plans for their respective futures. However, they both express certainty around God having a plan for their lives which, presumably, would apply to the near future (i.e., in the rehabilitation centre) and the rest of their lives. There is perhaps a sense of the unknown for their lives when they leave the centre which may lead to the belief of God having a plan giving a sense of security and reassurance in the face of uncertainty.

2.2 Saved by the Hand of God

Many of the participants spoke about feeling that they had been *saved* by God. The term 'being saved' is used in the Christian faith within the concept of salvation, i.e., being saved from the consequences of sinning (i.e., going to hell). However, participants in this study used the term in various ways. For some, this was explained in terms of God saving them from their sins and turning their lives around. For others, they spoke about God

intervening in situations throughout their lives in order to save them from potential danger or from choosing a path that did not align with their faith.

Jack stated, **"**I know now that I got saved on October er, the sixth" (Jack; line 39). He went on to explain that he woke up on this day to find that his girlfriend had passed away from an accidental drug overdose.

> "And that was the first time – I didn't know what I was doing – I didn't, didn't know, I didn't understand God. I didn't understand who He was then. But that was the first time, that I got on my knees, and I screamed out to Him. And just, just in anger, in pain, why have you done – w – w-w what, and all that. And I didn't, but I know now that that was when He heard me. He come to me." (Jack; lines 44-52)

While Jack's journey to accepting God into his life continued for a number of months following this, Jack reflects that this was the turning point for him. He screamed out to God without understanding "who He was", which suggests that he cried out in pain and desperation, and as he said "anger". It is interesting that Jack questioned why God would do this, and then later accept God into his life. Jack answered this later when he spoke about God giving the ability to make a choice. He reflected that his girlfriend had the choice and had free will to act in the way that she did, and once he learned that he said,

> "And I dropped my anger. And when I got an understanding of free choice and free will, that's why He's so good, because it's up to us what we do" (Jack; lines 146-148).

Edward shared his own experiences of God intervening to save him. He spoke about referring himself to a faith-based rehabilitation and being placed on a waiting list which he feels God intervened in so that he got a place more quickly than he would have without God's intervention. Edward was aware that it could have been viewed as a coincidence, but

he is clearly of the belief that this occurrence and other instances of what looked like coincidences were actually God intervening to put him in a place that he needs to be in.

Similarly, Oliver made reference to things that happened which could be viewed as coincidences but that it is his belief that it was God intervening to save him from potential danger, such as going back to prison.

> "I don't, again when you're in prison there are these circumstances that happen, these coincidences as it were, well the gang I was caught up, the gang I was involved with, were caught in a 1.3-million-pound drug bust. They were caught at 8pm at night, and I had to be in at 7pm. It's just a coincidence but they were removed off the streets, you know what I mean?" (Oliver; lines 199-204)

He speaks about it as being a coincidence, but later suggests that,

> "God was taking care of stuff. Like, I'm not saying God manipulated things, but it's just, it felt like I was isolated, and whether it was the right time that I come into contact with God or not. But the more I began to read the book and the more I began to pray, the more real it became" (Oliver; lines 214-218).

There seems to be a sense of awe about these 'coincidences' and while Oliver does not feel that God manipulated things, he partly contradicts this by his belief that "God was taking care of stuff". This contradiction is perhaps concurrent with the complexity around the theological issue of determinism and the extent to which God intervenes in people's lives – an issue which is not within the remit of this thesis to discuss but one which could account for the contradiction.

Oliver further spoke about the way in which he thinks that God has saved him and hypothesised what life would have been like had he not found his faith. He started by saying, "Um, I know, that if it wasn't for God, I'd be dead now. That's the life I was involved in"

(Oliver; lines 276-277). There is certainty in his speech that his life would not have continued without God in his life. He added to this later in the interview.

> "And I know that if I hadn't have met God … Who knows, I might have either been dead or so riddled with drug addiction, I wouldn't even know who I am right now. Um, and like I said, I tried to sort my life out and I couldn't do it. And I know that without God, I'd be dead now, without my faith, 100%." (Oliver; lines 289-295)

Again, Oliver expresses certainty that he would be dead had God not entered his life. He does not seem to have the belief in himself that he would have been able to overcome the addiction or prevent himself from taking the next steps within his addiction, and it shows the great importance that he places on God for saving his life.

3. "It's Not Always That Simple"

Although the struggles that participants expressed in living as a Christian are linked to narratives in other themes, the narratives presented by participants were such that it was felt necessary for these to be presented in a separate theme. As would perhaps be expected of the participants given that they all had criminal pasts, the struggles they faced in terms of becoming a Christian and living as a Christian were spoken of by all participants. Despite the participants speaking of the positive impact of their faith, they also identified that coming to their faith had not been a straightforward process, with struggles along their journey.

For some, difficulties occurred once they were no longer in a protected environment, such as in rehabilitation and prison, where they were able to practise their faith under restrictions or with other supporters around them. Jack, for example, spoke about being saved whilst in prison, but expressing that the world outside of prison is different.

> "It's like I was saved in jail, and I worked in that chapel for, for over two year, but when I come here, it's totally different in the world." (Jack; lines 115-116)

The world being "totally different" could be in reference to the freedom and choice that is available to someone who has been in prison for any length of time, and the difficulties adapting to this. But it could also be in reference to the challenges that are presented to someone who, before entering prison, lived a different lifestyle to the one that they wish to live going forward. For Oliver, he expressed some difficulties in balancing the life that he wanted to live (i.e., living by his faith) and the life that he knew, and what was available to him once released from prison.

> "And whilst I was in prison, I was constantly like God's gonna help me and it's gonna be amazing, and I had this Bible, and trying to work out what prayers are even about at the time was a bit crazy if I'm honest. And so, from that moment on, there was like this, these months went by, whereby it was like I was living in two worlds. I was kind of going out, occasionally going to parties, or to raves, taking drugs, and eventually the tag came off. And I didn't get into any serious trouble, but I was in that, in that environment. I was around those people, and then I'd come home, and I'd read my Bible and I'd pray." (Oliver; lines 176-184)

Oliver speaks about living in "two worlds" and seems to be referencing his party-going, drug-taking life, and the bible-reading, worshipping life. He speaks about this time in his life as though this was out of his control, or as though the control that he did have, he was unable to access it. There seems to be some attempt to take some control back, as he would still practise elements of his faith, however as he says, despite being saved, "it's not always that simple" (Oliver; line 164).

Edward was able to come off of drugs and continued to practise his faith and live the life that he wanted to live, however he reports becoming "complacent".

> "I got clean of the drugs, I was you know, throwing myself into Christianity, and I was living the life. But I got complacent as well. I forgot where I'd been, where I come from. And I found myself slipping into alcohol" (Edward; lines 81-86)

Forgetting where he had been and where he came from suggests that he likely did not give much thought to his past issues with substances. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as Edward forgetting the struggles he'd been through and that perhaps God wanted to remind Edward of his strengths.

A similar experience was had by Thomas, and although he continued to attend Church, and go through the process of worship, he found it more difficult to continue to believe in his religion.

> "I was back out for a few months. And I relapsed and um I just kind of stopped believing all that stuff basically. Cause its like, it's easy to believe when you're in these places, because you hear about it a lot, and you're not really mixing with outside circles." (Thomas; lines 85-90)

Thomas' comment of "it's easy to believe when you're in these places" indicates that he has experienced the effect from faith-based rehabilitations being limited, and that being left to try to continue independently, with no guidance, may not work for some people. Sharing a similar sentiment, Oliver expressed, "you're like grasping, trying to change really. Um, and all of this trying to change, none of it, there was, there was something missing if that makes sense?"(Oliver; lines 223-225). It is unclear what he felt was missing and what he needed in order to feel more successful in the changes he wanted to make. Dylan also explained that coming out of rehabilitation was a difficult time.

> "It was difficult 'cause I'd come through Christian rehab at that time and pretty much, it was like the blind leading the blind. I had friends who'd come through the programme with me but we was all in the same mess." (Dylan; lines 142-145)

Without the guidance from the rehabilitation centre, there seems to be a sense of feeling lost or being uncertain about the next steps in their journey. Although Dylan tried to rely on the people around him who have had similar experiences, each person seemed to struggle to some extent. It comes back to Oliver's statement of struggling to make change and as he later stated, "Life's not a bed of roses, whether you're Christian or not, whether you believe in God or not, like life's tough, and it's hard and it's messy, isn't it?" (Oliver; lines 355-357).

Liam also seemed to experience life after finding faith to be difficult. He shared his thoughts about coping when times were tough.

> "Still wake up – not every morning – but I still wake up when the times are getting hard, when you have a bollocking, or you feel like you can't be arsed, you just feel like going and using – just go out and use, don't ya?" (Liam; lines 191-194)

His statement suggests that for Liam, when there are internal or external negative forces, he turns to his past ways of thinking. His use of 'don't ya?' implies that Liam considered this understandable. Jack also voiced his questions of "is this all there is?"

> **"**Don't get me wrong, some days, I don't – it's not the same as before, but I still get my sinking feeling … I feel like 'flippin heck is this all there is? I'm sick of this'" (Jack; lines 177-181)

This question, and his statement of being "sick of this" suggests that at times, his faith may be in question, and he may wish for more. But believing in God is a choice, and as Jack

says, he has needed patience and tolerance to be able to cope with the feelings that would have previously found difficult to cope with.

Despite Thomas' earlier admission that he stopped believing in God following a relapse, since he has come back to his faith, he reported "I just need to choose, and choose to believe it, cos it's not an easy thing to believe." (Thomas; lines 126-127). Thomas continues to voice some questions of his faith, and it is likely that the choice to believe is more difficult at some times than others.

> "Some stuff in the Bible, I struggle with. Like, some stuff I find hard to believe and that. But there's like good morals in it and it's like guidance and stuff like that. So, if I'm ever struggling, I'll just kinda look at the good teaching in it. And the stuff like that, it's not doing me any harm, so I just try to look at it that way." (Thomas; lines 97-101)

From Thomas' statement, that there is a sense of ambiguity to his faith, as though he second guesses what he believes. "It's not doing me any harm" implies that it is not doing him any harm and is something which he tries to incorporate into his life in order to receive a desired outcome.

In contrast to difficulties in believing, Dylan shared his experience of his faith becoming all-consuming. He spoke about coming out of rehabilitation and living under strict rules whereby he was unable to watch Soaps on the television or go out with friends. Dylan's life was taken up by worship, prayer, and volunteering, and he spent limited time focusing on other important things in his life, such as his marriage.

> "Well, I went from being an addict, and I swung right over here in my faith, with no middle ground." (Dylan; lines 313-314)

Dylan shared that this imbalance in his life caused issues in many areas of his life, such as his housing, marriage and employment. He explained that at this point, he needed to return to rehabilitation.

> **“**And I knew what I had done before I could do it again, but in a completely different way. I just had to believe in it. There was nothing else to believe in, I’d lost it all [tearful]. There was nothing, no other door that was open to me, the only thing left was just dying or getting locked up, or I don’t know, just living every day in misery” (Dylan; lines 197-203)

It is interesting that Dylan chose to re-enter a faith-based rehabilitation considering he acknowledged that there was a problem with his ability to balance his faith with other important things in his life. Perhaps it was due to the success he originally felt following going through rehabilitation, or perhaps it was the hope that this time would be different. It is clear that Dylan’s faith means a lot to him, and that he places great importance on his belief in God, and perhaps this confidence he has in God allowed him to take the chance this time.

It is clear that all participants had faced challenges and struggles with their beliefs and had, at times, gone back to their old ways. They were open about these struggles and do not claim they are confident they would not go back to their old ways, but they all speak of coming back to God for support.

4. What’s Changed for Me?

The fourth superordinate theme refers to the reflections that the participants had about their life since finding faith, and how their lives have changed as a result of this. The theme consists of three subordinate themes: ‘Personal Achievements’; ‘Changes in Outlook’; and ‘Sobriety’.

4.1 Personal Achievements

Part of understanding how finding faith has impacted on the lives of the participants includes the narratives of how they believe their life has been changed. Many of the participants spoke about some of the personal achievements that they believe have occurred as a result of their faith. Oliver, for example, has experienced many life changes since his conversion.

> "Since coming out of prison, um I'm married now … been to university, got a degree, got a first-class honours as well, which I was well happy with. Um, I'm a trainee Church Minister now as well, so yeah … I'll be a Reverend basically." (Oliver; lines 324-329)

In his narrative, Oliver did not directly link his achievements to his faith in God, nor did he overtly thank God for everything he now has in life. However, this being his answer in response to being asked about life since his conversion, suggests that he likely attributes such life changes to God, or that, at least, God was involved in his life journey. Having such relationships, educational, and career aspirations may, in turn, have supported Oliver's desistance from crime as hypothesised by the GLM (Ward & Stewart, 2003). Oliver speaks of his achievements with a sense of pride, and this was also present in Dylan's telling of his journey.

> "Opportunities for full time employment in the probation service. Um, all this now involving – I could come up with – so even in all the madness, for somebody who has been written off by society, probation, prison service, to police, and sad as it sounds, family, I haven't done too bad, like" (Dylan; lines 375-378)

Dylan explains that since finding his faith, more opportunities have been open to him. He speaks about this as though he is proving others wrong, and despite the lack of support

from people around him, he has been able to achieve something. Similar to the way that Oliver tells his story, Dylan does not directly link these changes to his faith in God, but he speaks about these changes in a positive light since finding his faith.

Thomas also spoke about his personal achievements, which he directly associated with his faith and his sobriety.

> "Well, I achieved more in that three year I've been sober, and I believed in this stuff than I did the twenty years of madness that I had." (Thomas; lines 138-139)

Thomas believed that he was able to achieve something while he was practicing his faith and while he was sober. It is possible that Thomas has now attempted to come back to his faith in order to try to achieve something positive again.

4.2 Changes in Outlook

Alongside the personal achievements that the participants spoke about, there were also a number of changes in outlook since coming to their faith, such as changes in outlook on the self and the world around them, pointing to Paternoster and Bushway's Identity Theory (2008).

Harry reported feeling that his temperament had changed and that he no longer felt like a "violent person" (Harry; line 117), and his previous interests of going to riots do not interest him. He spoke about feeling that he has calmed down.

> **"**I feel like I've calmed down a lot. Um, I've got a lot more understanding for other people, uh the way they're feeling, the way they are. Um, just normal, just normal things in life really, do you know what I mean? I appreciate more, do you know what I mean?" (Harry; lines 89-92)

Harry identifies that his increase in understanding and tolerance for others has occurred since finding his faith, which is potentially as a result of the Christian teachings of accepting others. Interestingly, Harry considers these things to be "normal" and something that he would not have done in his past when he was a "violent person". Further, Harry speaks of being able to appreciate more, which possibly refers to being able to recognise the worth in different aspects of this life and being grateful for them.

Some participants also spoke about a change in their thinking style, including the way that they were able to overcome the difficulties in their past. Jack said:

> **"**It's a transformation, that's what God does. He transforms your thinking. Because we couldn't move forward on our old thinking. Our old thinking was stuck there, we're stuck … my past is dead, and I'm born again. I'm a new person, and that's what we've got to believe. Because if we dwell on the past, and, and what's happened and our mistakes and all that, you can't move forward." (Jack; lines 199-208)

His statement of "old thinking" is possibly in reference to the way that he used to see the world (i.e., with some level of anger) as well as the way he used to cope with the world (i.e., drug use, antisocial behaviour). Jack's statement of being "born again" is likely in reference to being a born-again Christian, and his past being dead suggests that he is putting his past life behind him, never to return. Further, by Jack saying that "we've got to believe" gives a sense that there is no choice for him whether he believes or not as the consequences of not believing are staying in the past. He refers to bad things he has done in the past and suggests that thinking about these would be a barrier to moving forward with positive aspects of his life.

Another way in which the participants indicated that they had changed is in the way in which they cope with their emotions and past traumas. Jack explained that he felt better able

to tolerate how he was feeling and has developed the ability to speak to others about how he was feeling.

> "I used to keep a lot, a lot of things in and that'd drive me to where my head would go, and I'd end up doing something mad just to take what was going on with my emotions … But now I know that it's alright, it's alright [laughs] and that's the thing … I've had a good cry with men" (Jack; lines 262-268)

While God or the Bible may not have directly taught him how to cope with his feelings, it is possible that through his community at the faith-based rehabilitation centre, he has been able to form connections to people he considers safe, trustworthy, and with whom he has a deep connection to. He expresses that he can now perhaps process his emotions in a rational way and recognises that having emotional responses is "alright".

Edward spoke about being able to cope with his past trauma and the feelings associated with this through prayer. Edward shared that he was encouraged to partake in a Health Prayer and a Listening Prayer, in which he wrote down his thoughts and feelings on a piece of paper, "read it out, hand it over to Jesus, nail it to the cross and ask him to take that away" (Edward; lines 311-313). Edward reported that he felt at peace once he had done this.

> "And it's hard to explain unless you, you've had that feeling. I don't feel like my, like I'm wrapped up in chains now. Yeah, it's just that peace and healing um, yeah everything's coming along with it" (Edward; lines 325-327)

He spoke about being wrapped up in chains before giving his pain over to Jesus, which gives the sense that he felt trapped and confined. It is perhaps interesting that he used the analogy of being wrapped up in chains as this could parallel with the consequences of committing a crime (i.e., being imprisoned). There is a sense that the healing and peace are at

the core of the changes in him. Also, using the word ‘healing’ may imply that he felt like he was damaged or hurt by his old life.

4.3 Sobriety

For many of the participants interviewed, their life prior to faith was characterised by drug and/or alcohol addiction. While their journey to sobriety for most was not straight-forward, most participants assigned their faith to the success of their abstinence.

Thomas spoke of trying a number of methods to abstain from drugs, none of which had long-term effects.

> **“**I’d tried a lot of stuff, basically and it was only when I’ve actually tried this way through faith that I managed to stay sober, and not just that, like my quality of life started getting better.” (Thomas; lines 37-39)

Thomas does not indicate why he believes the changes have been longer-term than other methods, but he does not seem to question it. Thomas appears to accept the sobriety, as well as the other effects without hesitation. This sense of acceptance was also shared by Edward.

> **“**Um, addiction wise, I mean, uh since I’ve done this healing prayer and stuff like this, it’s not been an issue. You know, I just feel that that’s been taken away.” (Edward; lines 363-365)

Edward’s report of his addiction being taken away was similar to his earlier admission that he felt the effect of his trauma had been taken by God too. The “healing prayer” was the catalyst to this change, and despite his reports of having “tough days”, he feels better able to cope with the challenges he faces.

> **“**You know, I’ve had some tough days here where you know I’m struggling a bit, but not once have I thought about drink or using drugs. You know, I’ll pray on it, or I’ll go for a walk, or I’ll go to the local Church and talk to someone about it.” (Edward; lines 368-371)

From Edward’s account, it appears that he had developed other strategies involving his faith in order to cope with his difficulties and that, as a result, he does not have urges and cravings. Edward appears to have found balance within his life, and adopted methods that are working for him, and his belief in the healing prayer seems to be strengthening his faith in his abilities to cope.

For Oliver, hearing about Jesus, and feeling the love and acceptance of those around him were the catalysts to sobriety.

> **“**And now, I mean, I’m in Church, and there’s just the presence of God there, there just this love and this acceptance, and I’m hearing about Jesus and that was it for me, it broke the addiction, really. And after that, there was, there was no more drugs for me, really. ” (Oliver; lines 263-268)

Oliver’s experiences in Church are what he believes to have been the catalyst to the change in his thoughts and behaviours in relation to his addiction. His phrasing perhaps expresses that the presence of God, love and acceptance were vast enough to break the addiction; as though the hold the addiction had on him was removed.

While the participants did not speak directly about the relationship between their sobriety and desistance from crime, research suggests that abstaining from drugs and alcohol reduce the risk of offending (Morash, 2009; Skjærvø et al., 2021).

Discussion

The broad aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences and views of former perpetrators of crime who converted to Christianity. More specifically, the purpose was to gain insight into their experiences of becoming a Christian and to explore how they feel this has influenced them. The analysis of the seven interviews using IPA yielded four superordinate themes, with three of those containing subordinate themes. All themes centred on the participants' lived experiences of becoming a Christian and living as a Christian. This emerged through the participants' discussion of their lives prior to finding their faith, the process of conversion, and their experiences of being 'saved' or guided by God. The narratives also centred on the complexity of their faith and some of the struggles that emerged during and after their journey to finding faith, but they also spoke of some of the ways they think their life has changed since welcoming God into their lives. The superordinate themes will be discussed in turn to provide an account of the findings in relation to existing literature.

The participants' journey to finding faith was explored in the first superordinate theme 'The Evolution of Faith'. Although the participants were not explicitly asked to share details of what their life was like before finding God, many of them began their narrative with an explanation of such. This was captured in the subtheme 'I'll Go Back to Where Things Went Wrong'. Most participants spoke about a past characterised by trauma and hardship, including adverse childhood experiences. This is observed throughout the criminology literature, with individuals who have been involved in offending having disproportionately high levels of adverse childhood experiences (Baglivio et al., 2015; Hilder et al., 2021, Reavis et al., 2013). The participants also explained that they were involved with drugs and criminal activity, with all participants spending time in prison. It is unclear whether the participants believed that this behaviour was as a result of their past experiences, but the

literature suggests that individuals who have been involved in the criminal justice system have maladaptive coping skills, tending to adopt avoidance-oriented (Phillips & Lindsay, 2011) and emotion-oriented coping styles (LaCourse et al., 2019).

It also points to the GLM, which postulates that perpetrators of crime may not have the necessary skills or opportunities to achieve their primary goods. This subtheme reflects the 'Crisis' stage of Rambo's (1993) model of conversion and the MMM (Park, 2010), in that for many of the participants, their lifestyles, or the emotional distress caused by these events, likely resulted in them seeking something else in life. For instance, Oliver stated that he was drawn to his lifestyle of crime and drugs, and this was where he was able to find meaning in his life. However, this stopped providing him with the same level of enjoyment when he was in prison. It was likely at this time that he was seeking 'more'.

The other subtheme within this superordinate theme was 'The Conversion Experience'; this was an integral part of the narratives. Rambo (1993) identified five different types of conversion, three of which are observed throughout the interviews: (1) intensification; (2) apostasy; and (3) affiliation. There were no examples in this sample of institutional transition (i.e., when a person moves from one community of faith within a major religious tradition) or tradition transition (i.e., when an individual moves from one major religious community to another), however this is possibly due to the sample size.

Intensification, in which a person's interest and participation in their existing religious beliefs are revitalised, was one conversion experience reflected in the narratives. Some participants reported being a member of the Christian faith as children but increasing in their participation within their faith later in life. For many, this was following their experiences of being in prison, and likely utilising their religion to explore the meaning of their experiences.

There is also evidence of these participants relying on their religion to cope with their experiences, more information about which can be found in Chapter 4.

Interestingly, some of the participants lost their faith and left their religious organisation following a negative experience (i.e., Apostasy conversion). For instance, following the death of Liam's nephew, his belief in Jesus waned. Liam felt anger towards God, and this sentiment was shared by Jack, who blamed God for the death of his girlfriend. Although Jack did not know God at the time, he questioned why God, if indeed there was a God, would do this. This reflects the literature on the anger felt towards God when there are violations in global meaning (Exline et al., 2011). Both participants since found their faith again following exploring Christianity in a faith-based rehabilitation, and it is noteworthy that since Jack's conversion to Christianity, his outlook on the death of his girlfriend has altered, and he no longer blames God. Instead, he believes that the incident saved him. This has potential links to Knapik et al.'s (2008) study of survivors of sexual abuse, wherein the belief that there was a strong spiritual connection, and the strength they received from this, allowed them to attribute spiritual meaning to the violence. Another example of Apostasy conversion was seen in Thomas' narrative, wherein he spoke on his active search for change in his life, and praying to God in the desperate hope that something would come from it, despite taking a more passive role in his religious practices before.

Another clear example of a participant seeking answers was Edward, whose conversion experience began with searching for answers to why he was kept alive after experiencing a number of drug overdoses. It was at this stage, of seeking meaning, that he turned to Christianity to explore this (i.e., Affiliation conversion). He explained that through his exploration, his faith was in question for some time, but this strengthened as he began to identify that God had a plan for him. Though he came to this realisation, Edward was clear that he was early on in his journey with Christianity. His experiences of moving through the

stages of conversion are considered expected, according to Rambo (1993), who suggested that conversion is an ongoing process, where individuals may go back and forth between the seven phases.

Other participants also experienced an Affiliation conversion (i.e., having no prior religious belief, but later becoming involved with Christianity). For one participant, this occurred following a spiritual experience (i.e., feeling God's presence), which was described as a physical sensation (e.g., urge, tug, pull). This acted as a catalyst to their conversion, with God being the instigator to change, and reflects the 'born-again', passive experience.

The role of others was also a prominent experience for many of the participants, reflecting Rambo's (1993) theory that a religious advocate is important in the conversion process. Indeed, the faith-based rehabilitation organisation, from where six of the participants were recruited, was praised for the role that it played in strengthening their faith and being the instigator to some of their conversion experiences.

The second superordinate theme of 'Divine Intervention' reflected the participants' experiences of God and the way that they believe God has played a role in their lives. Divine intervention refers to the belief that one's experiences are influenced by supernatural forces (Degelman & Lynn, 1995). Some participants believed that God was intervening in their lives to make improvements or to send them down the right path. For example, Jack was given the chapel orderly job despite not feeling like he deserved it. He attributed this to God intervening, which is something that is evident within the literature (e.g., Beitman, 2011). Some participants also felt that God had a plan or a purpose for their lives, and that their experiences can be used to help others. Researchers have recognised this as a coping strategy among individuals who have previously been incarcerated; becoming a "wounded healer" (Maruna, 2001). Other participants spoke about their complete trust in God and accepting

whatever plans He has for them, despite this being unknown. This is a form of religious coping and likely to provide the individual with a sense of security (McLaughlin et al., 2013).

Another subordinate theme within this superordinate theme was ‘Saved by the Hand of God’ in which participants described a feeling of being saved in a number of ways. Some explained that God saved them from their sins, and they turned their lives around. Other participants spoke about being saved from potential danger, or from taking risks that did not align with their faith. Jack’s journey in this regard is interesting. He reflected that he felt anger toward God after the death of his girlfriend, and questioned why God would do such a thing, despite not having much awareness or knowledge of God at the time. It was only following his exploration of God that he perceived this pivotal experience as his salvation. Some of the experiences within this theme could be considered, by some, coincidences, but the participants attributed them to God’s intervention.

Within this subordinate theme, some participants also made hypotheses about what their life may have been like had they not been saved by God. For example, Oliver predicted that he would have been dead, or may have lost himself to drugs. This reiterated the importance that he placed on God’s salvation, and suggests that he likely perceives his faith as being the main instigator to changes in his life. However, Oliver and other participants explained how their faith was not straightforward, and this leads to the next superordinate theme of ‘It’s Not Always That Simple’.

The third superordinate theme reflects the participants’ struggles along their journey, and demonstrates how the conversion process can be long, with regular back and forth between the conversion stages. Some struggles within this theme referred to the difficulty of living by one’s new faith, and the conflict between one’s beliefs and the lifestyle that was familiar to them. Similarly, some participants also reflected that there are ongoing struggles

with maintaining their new faith-oriented life, and the temptation of going back to old ways of coping with struggles.

Other struggles referred to difficulties with accepting their faith. For example, Thomas expressed that this faith faltered when he was away from the faith-based rehabilitation where his faith was strengthened. He indicated that Christianity became less believable when he was not surrounded by others who shared his faith. This points to the importance of Encapsulation (Rambo, 1993) in the conversion process, wherein the potential converter is encouraged to remain in the religious environment, free of external, contradictory influences. Thomas also said that now, since coming back to his faith, he still considers some things hard to believe, but he does not seem to consider it important to believe all aspects of his religious organisation to benefit from it.

The fourth and final superordinate theme, and another key element of the narratives, was the way in which the participants believed their lives had been changed since finding their faith. Many spoke about their 'Personal Achievements', such as improvements in employment and interpersonal relationships, which is supported within the literature (e.g., Baier, 2014; Grim & Grim, 2019; Szałachowski & Tuszyńska-Bogucka, 2021). For some participants, they spoke about the help that they received in these aspects of life from the faith-based rehabilitations they entered following prison. This highlights the importance of such services in supporting successful re-entry to the community (Mears, 2007) and the social capital that religious groups can provide.

'Changes in Outlook' was another subordinate theme, which referred to the participants' experiences of changing the way that they see themselves and the world since coming to their faith. Some spoke about the desire to live a "calm" life in comparison to their past, which was, as established, characterised by hardship and crime. This supports the

GLM's (Ward & Stewart, 2003) assumption that all humans have similar basic needs, and that perhaps, for these participants, they have learned new ways to achieving these. Some also spoke about new ways of being able to cope with their emotions and past trauma. They felt their faith community has given them the freedom and the ability to speak to others about how they are feeling, and for those in the faith-based rehabilitation, this was through the support of a wounded healer.

The final subordinate theme was 'Sobriety', which most participants reflected on in their narratives. Many participants attributed their sobriety to their faith. For example, Thomas expressed that he had attempted many methods of being drug-free, but only found long-term success when he was living by his faith. Unfortunately, when he lost his faith, Thomas also returned to drugs. However, he still maintains that this was the most successful attempt he made and was again making the same attempts to be sober through his belief in God. Similarly, Edward said that prayer helped to take away his drug addiction, and Oliver explained that being accepted by the community at Church took away his addiction. Grim and Grim's (2019) paper suggests that a belief in a Higher Power supports people to stay sober and stated that a reduction in the general public's religious affiliation causes concern for physical health.

Implications for Practice

It is hoped that this research will assist in the understanding of how participation in the Christian faith impacts on the lives of individuals who have committed crimes. Such insight may be useful for practitioners/clinicians who work with offenders who express interest in Christianity. For example, by understanding more about the experiences and the process of converting to Christianity, and the meaning that the participants place on this, it is possible that staff who work with prisoners may feel better equipped to provide

encouragement and support to those individuals who are interested in converting to Christianity whilst in prison.

Findings may also be able to contribute to changes being made to the Chaplaincy service offered in prison. According to the National Offender Management Service (2016) the current process of practicing faith in prison requires the individual to register their faith whilst in custody. Should an individual choose to change their faith during their sentence, they should write to the Chaplain who will then provide confirmation in writing. Until this stage has taken place, the individual will not be able to practice a new religion. This does not, perhaps, allow for individuals to learn more about different religions and make an informed decision about which one is meaningful for them.

Suggestions for Further Research

Current suggestions for further research include discovering more about conversion to other faith organisations, including those organisations that have more stringent rules and practices.

It would also be interesting to investigate the factors that are associated with those individuals who choose to convert to a religion following engagement in offending. As discussed in the literature review, this topic is relatively under-researched.

Another area for further exploration is in relation to the encapsulation phase of conversion, particularly for individuals who are re-entering the community following prison. There is currently a paucity of literature on the process of leaving the structure and the security of the religious environment (e.g., prison chaplaincy or faith-based rehabilitation) and the impact that this has on one's religious beliefs and practices. Based on the current literature, this, as well as the potentially risky environment that one returns to following

imprisonment, is likely to cause issues for re-entry. Therefore, it would be interesting to know more about the results of ending the encapsulation process alongside achieving freedom.

Strengths and Limitations

The use of IPA is considered to be a strength of this study. IPA allows us to develop a deeper understanding of the meaning that people place on their experiences (Smith et al., 2022). By using IPA to investigate the conversion experiences of individuals who have offending histories in the UK, we are able to understand more about the process of conversion in a marginalised group and to further the literature in a process that is not fully understood (Larkin et al., 2006).

A further strength of the current study is the sample size, which falls within the recommended six to ten sample size for doctoral projects (Smith et al., 2022). This allows for thorough analysis of the data, while providing a broad range of experiences to explore. However, there were some difficulties with homogeneity in this sample. With IPA, a homogenous sample is recommended in order to explore psychological similarities and differences within a sample who share important variables (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Unfortunately, due to difficulties with recruitment from the original identified religious organisation, other services were approached for data collection. This resulted in differences in geographic regions (i.e., England and Wales), which possibly hinders the homogeneity of the sample.

A further possible weakness is that the researcher's own religious beliefs did not align with those of the participants. This may have created potential difficulties in understanding and interpreting the concepts discussed, and the language used by the participants. However, to address this, attempts were made by the researcher to educate themselves on religious concepts by reading literature, having contact with a Reverend, and discussions with her

academic supervisor. In addition, IPA principles were used throughout to interpret the meaning that the participants placed on their experiences. Furthermore, the researcher was reflective throughout and made efforts to ensure that preconceptions did not influence the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insight regarding conversion experiences and the impact of a Christian faith for individuals with a criminal history. The study has hopefully provided these individuals with a voice to express how they feel their faith has led to positive change in their lives whilst also providing candid reports of negative experiences they have had in their pasts and struggles that they still face in life and with their faith. Whilst it is recognised that not all those with a criminal history would feel changed as a result of exploring religion, the experiences as voiced by the individuals in this study are positive in terms of the impact it has had on them. It is hoped that these participants will go on to achieve their newly formed hopes and that, if they wish, they will be able to support others with similar past life experiences.

CHAPTER 4

CRITIQUE OF A PSYCHOMETRIC MEASURE:

THE BRIEF RELIGIOUS COPING SCALE (BRIEF RCOPE)

Abstract

Many people turn to religion to cope with difficult life events (Rambo, 1993). In order to identify the religious coping methods that people utilise when dealing with life stressors, Pargament (1997) developed Religious Coping Scale (RCOPE). An abbreviated version was developed later by Pargament et al. (1998) to be used in research and practice. The Brief RCOPE has been found to be a reliable and valid measure, however much of the research looking into the psychometric properties of this measure has been conducted in the United States. The aim of this critique was to evaluate the reliability and validity of the Brief RCOPE (Pargament et al., 1998) as applied to cultures and populations outside of the United States. Overall, reliability has been demonstrated across a number of countries, and in a variety of different religions. The measure has also demonstrated good convergent, construct and concurrent validity in diverse cultures. The findings from this critique suggest that the Brief RCOPE can be used in a range of diverse religions and cultures. Recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Introduction

According to the coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) people deal with life stressors in proactive ways, searching for meaning and significance in their lives, and working towards goals in order to overcome difficulties. One method that is employed by many people is to turn to their religion when dealing with difficult life circumstances (Rambo, 1993), and ongoing research has found significant links between religion and mental health (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2014). A secure attachment to God has been found to be associated with better abilities to cope with distress (Bradshaw et al., 2010), and Ellison et al. (2014) report that people who demonstrate higher levels of religious commitment receive greater mental health benefits. Furthermore, Koenig et al. (2015) found that religious interventions appear to be more effective in relieving distress in those who are more highly religious. These findings have been replicated across diverse religions, including Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2014).

In terms of desistance from crime, religion and spirituality have been shown to support with psychological and emotional comfort. Schroeder and Frana's (2009) qualitative study found that men undergoing behavioural change had experiences of love, tolerance, peace, and an alleviation of feelings of anger due to their religion and spirituality. Giordano et al. (2007) explored emotion and crime over the life course. They found that decreases in criminal behaviour were associated with declines in negative emotions connected to crime, and an increased skill in emotion management. This was further emphasised by Giordano and colleagues (2008) who reported that for people who have engaged in criminal behaviours, whose lives are generally characterised by negative emotionality, religion and spirituality is often used as a resource for emotional coping.

Earlier research on religious coping has focused on the role of religion by measuring the strength of religious beliefs or the frequency of church attendance in relation to levels of

distress (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). However, this is perceived as an oversimplification of the construct of religion and how people use it to cope with stressful life events (Pargament et al., 1998). Furthermore, as discussed in the results of Chapter 3, many of the participants developed new ways of coping by relying on their religion. To develop our understanding of the role of religion as a coping strategy, it is important to assess *how* an individual uses religion to understand and to deal with stressors (Pargament et al., 2000; Pargament et al., 2013).

A criticism of previous approaches of measuring religious coping is that it did not achieve an in-depth understanding of the ways that religiosity and prayer are used as a means of coping. By simply measuring how often someone prays, for example, we miss out on understanding why they pray, and the function of the prayer (Pargament et al., 2011). This understanding may help further develop our knowledge of the reasons individuals who have engaged in offending behaviour turn to religion, and the new ways of coping that they develop through their religion.

Furthering our understanding of religious coping was the basis for Pargament's (1997) work to develop a measure of religious coping; attempting to provide a theoretical framework from which to understand religious issues and to incorporate them into assessment and intervention (Pargament et al., 2000).

Theory of Religious Coping

Pargament (1997) defined religious coping as "efforts to understand and deal with life stressors in ways related to the sacred" (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 52). In his theory of religious coping, he made a number of assumptions about how religion is used to understand and deal with negative life events (Pargament & Raiya, 2007): (1) Religious coping is multi-functional, including searching for meaning, intimacy with others, comfort, control, and life

transformation; (2) Religious coping involves individuals employing emotions, relationships, cognition and behaviour; (3) Religious coping changes over time and situation, in that ways in which people use religion to cope can vary depending on the context of the life event; (4) Religious coping differs from other coping strategies as it involves the addition of the 'sacred'; (5) Religious coping can include both adaptive and maladaptive strategies (Mohammadzadeh & Najafi, 2016).

Pargament's (1997) theory of religious coping was used to guide the development of a measure of religious coping, called the Religious Coping Scale (RCOPE), with the aim to identify the religious coping methods that people employ when dealing with major life stressors. It has since been adapted to offer a shorter version for use in clinical and research settings. The review will begin by providing a brief overview of the RCOPE measure on which the Brief RCOPE was based, before providing an overview of the Brief RCOPE and exploring its reliability and validity in relation to its use with different cultures and populations outside of the United States.

Overview of the Religious Coping Scale (RCOPE)

When developing items for the RCOPE, Pargament (1997) used existing religious coping scales and empirical studies to help in this task. Previous clinical experience was also drawn upon, as well as interviews with people who were relying on their religiosity to cope with a variety of major life stressors. Twenty-one subscales were identified with approximately 8 items of specific religious coping strategies per subscale, which encompass emotion-focused and problem-focused approaches; passive, active, and interactive strategies; and spiritual, interpersonal, behavioural, and cognitive domains (Pargament et al., 2013). Ten raters (psychology graduates) were then asked to sort scale items into suitable subscales, and those that were not reliably categorised by 80% of the raters were then discarded. The

remaining items displayed almost 100% agreement in classification among the raters. This resulted in the final version of the RCOPE consisting of 105 items: 5 items for each of the 21 subscales.

The final RCOPE is considered to be a multi-functional instrument which reflects the five religious functions as defined by Pargament (1997) in his theory of religious coping (i.e., meaning, intimacy, control, comfort, and life transformation; Pargament et al., 2000). It also reflects the search for spirituality (Pargament et al., 2011). The RCOPE is also considered to be multi-modal, in that items on the scale were selected to represent how people employ their religious coping methods emotionally, relationally, behavioural, and cognitively (Pargament et al., 2000). It is also multi-valent in nature, with the understanding that coping strategies can be adaptive or maladaptive in dealing with stressful situations (Pargament et al., 2000). As such, items on the RCOPE were selected to reflect both positive and negative religious coping methods. The RCOPE has been found to be a good predictive tool for psychological and physical adjustment to life stressors, compared to other measures of religiosity (Pargament et al., 2011).

Overview of the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE)

While the 105-item RCOPE is considered to be psychometrically valuable, the extensive length means that it cannot be easily used in a clinical setting, where individuals utilising the service will likely be completing a full battery of psychometric assessments (Fairfax, 2017). This has meant that the RCOPE has not been used extensively and findings related to the tool's effectiveness are limited (Pargament et al., 2011). The Brief RCOPE is a shorter version of the RCOPE, developed by Pargament et al. (1998) and was created in order to address this limitation. It is the most widely used measure of religious coping and has the potential to be used in clinical and research settings (Mohammadzadeh & Najafi, 2016).

The development of the Brief RCOPE began at the same time as the full 105-item version, with an abbreviated 21-item scale being tested with a sample of participants who lived near Oklahoma City, following a bomb explosion in 1995. Within the 21-item scale, an exploratory factor analysis revealed two factors which accounted for approximately 33% of the variance; positive and negative coping (Pargament et al., 2011). The authors then began development on an even shorter 14-item version of the RCOPE, due to the promising findings.

Based on the two factors identified from the factor analysis, positive and negative religious coping scales (PRC and NRC respectively) were developed using a selection of items from each subset of the RCOPE. The selected items were those that demonstrated large factor loading, and those which contributed to a representation of a variety of coping methods (Pargament et al., 2011). The final version of the Brief RCOPE was therefore divided into two subscales; PRC and NRC methods, each consisting of seven items (Pargament et al., 2011). Table 7, taken from Pargament et al.'s (2011) paper (p. 57), provides an overview of the items in the two scales.

Table 7

The Brief RCOPE: Positive and Negative Coping Subscale Items

Item No.	***Positive Religious Coping Subscale Items***
1.	Looked for a stronger connection with God
2.	Sought God's love and care
3.	Sought help from God in letting go of my anger
4.	Tried to put my plans into action together with God
5.	Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation
6.	Asked for forgiveness for my sins

7.	Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems
	Negative Religious Coping Subscale Items
8.	Wondered whether God had abandoned me
9.	Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion
10.	Wondered what I did for God to punish me
11.	Questioned God's love for me
12.	Wondered whether my church had abandoned me
13.	Decided the devil made this happen
14.	Questioned the power of God

Positive religious coping (PRC) strategies include holding a belief in a loving God and believing that difficult situations are opportunities for growth which are sent by God (O'Brien et al., 2019). Individuals who adopt PRC strategies tend to possess a deep sense of spiritual connection with others, have a belief that there is meaning to be found in life, and adopt a compassionate view of the world (Pargament et al., 1998). PRC strategies have been found to predict increases in positive affect and self-esteem and decreases in depressive symptoms in a sample of 937 African Americans (Park et al., 2018). They have also been found to improve the quality of life of patients with advanced cancer (Tarakeshwar et al., 2006), as well as resulting in a greater sense of meaning in life and less loneliness for adults in Turkey during the Coronavirus crisis (Yıldırım et al., 2021).

NRC strategies refer to difficulties in one's relationship with God and perceiving negative life events as punishment from God (Pargament et al., 2013). Individuals who adopt NRC strategies tend to experience spiritual tension, instability with others, demonic reappraisals and a fragile view of the universe (Voytenko et al., 2023). This style of coping is assumed to be defined by self-directed religious coping, reappraisals of God's powers,

punitive religious reappraisals, and interpersonal religious disconnect (Pargament et al., 1998). In the literature, NRC strategies are often referred to as religious struggles, reflecting the struggle in the relationship with God, oneself and with other people (O' Brien et al., 2018). NRC has been found to predict worse overall mental health and life satisfaction in women with breast cancer (Hebert et al., 2009); greater anxiety, worry, and depression on older minority adults (O'Brien et al., 2019); and greater levels of depression and anxiety in Alzheimer caregivers (Gonyea & O'Donnell, 2021). Despite these findings, Pargament (2011) recognised that PRC methods may not always be adaptive, and that NRC methods may not always be maladaptive.

In general, it has been found that people tend to use PRC rather than NRC when dealing with life stressors (Ahles et al., 2016; Hebert et al., 2009; Pargament et al., 1998). A meta-analysis conducted by Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) found that PRC strategies are significantly associated with positive outcomes to stress and fewer experiences of distress, anxiety, and depression. Their findings also suggest that individuals who adopt NRC strategies experienced more distress, anxiety, and depression. NRC has also been found to predict an increase in posttraumatic symptoms after stressful events in Chilean adults (García et al., 2017) and in individuals who experienced Hurricane Katrina (Henslee et al., 2015). These findings suggest that individuals who demonstrate negative religious coping styles may benefit from receiving help to deal with coping with a crisis (Pargament, 1998).

During development, the psychometric properties of the Brief RCOPE were considered, and the internal consistency in the sample of Oklahoma City residents dealing with the aftermath of a bomb explosion was considered high, with Cronbach's coefficient alpha estimates of .90 for the PRC scale and .81 for the NRC scale (Pargament et al., 1998). Following this, the Brief RCOPE scales were used with a hospital sample. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was estimated at .87 for the PRC scale, and .69 for the NRC scale, finding

them to be internally consistent (Pargament et al., 1998). It was also found that following dealing with a stressor, PRC methods were linked to participants experiencing fewer psychosomatic symptoms and greater spiritual growth. Conversely, poorer quality of life, psychological distress and symptoms, and greater callousness toward other people were correlated with using NRC methods (Pargament et al., 2011).

Administration of the Brief RCOPE

Users of the 14-item measure are prompted to score each item on a 4-point Likert scale with response options from 0 “not at all” to 3 “a great deal” (Pargament et al., 1998). Higher scores on each subscale indicates greater religious coping of that type (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020). While there is no published manual, guidance provided by Pargament et al. (2011) state that the RCOPE can be adapted to specify different life stressors or to measure coping of general life events. It is also suggested that while the original measure uses the term “God” due to its theistic nature, this can also be changed to meet the needs of the individual completing the measure. For example, “God” could be replaced with “Allah” or “higher power” etc. to account for other religions.

A psychometric critique of the Brief RCOPE was conducted in 2011 by Pargament et al. which concluded that the measure is reliable and valid (i.e., that it has the ability to consistently reproduce results and that it measures what it is proposed to do; de Souza et al., 2017), with both the PRC scale and the NRC scale demonstrating good internal consistency across a range of samples. Further research has also found good internal consistency for the two scales, including in a sample of Black Americans living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (Lassiter & Poteat, 2020); in undergraduate students misusing prescription stimulants (Gallucci et al., 2018); and in a sample of young adults who have experienced parental divorce (Milam & Schmidt, 2018). While these are positive findings, these, and the

psychometric properties as reported in Pargament et al.'s (2011) review, were focused mainly on Christians in the United States. Additionally, the RCOPE has been criticised for relying on Christian ideas and core values (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2014), and it is recommended that further research should be undertaken to examine the reliability and validity of the Brief RCOPE in non-Christian faiths and in other regions of the world. While religious coping appears to be a universal phenomenon, the particular methods of expression vary between religions (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2014). For example, in times of stress, Buddhists may practice mindfulness and compassion (Phillips et al., 2012), Muslims may read the Quran to find comfort, and Jews may wait for the Sabbath (Rosmarin et al., 2009). It should be noted that the role of religious coping in people who have committed offences is overlooked in the literature, with only one paper to the authors knowledge being published investigating religious coping in this population. As such, it is not possible to review the psychometric properties of the Brief RCOPE in this population for the purpose of this critique.

Therefore, the aim of this critique will be to evaluate the reliability and validity of the Brief RCOPE as applied to cultures and populations outside of the United States. It is recognised that amongst different populations, there will be a mix of religions, including Christianity.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the replicability of a test. It is the extent to which a measure is likely to consistently produce similar findings every time it is used (Coaley, 2014). A test with high reliability suggests low error, and conversely a test with low reliability means larger amounts of error (Coaley, 2014). Two types of reliability are considered here: internal reliability, and test-retest reliability.

Internal Reliability

Internal reliability is concerned with whether each item on the scale is measuring the same concept (Henson, 2001). Cronbach's alpha is the most widely used measure of reliability and is used to measure the internal consistency of a scale. It is expressed as a number between 0 and 1, with acceptable values ranging from 0.70 to 0.95 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

With the focus of this review being countries and cultures outside of the United States, Voytenko et al. (2023) used the Brief RCOPE with a sample from four non-Western countries (Columbia, Indonesia, Ukraine, and South Africa) to examine religious coping following interpersonal hurts. Cronbach's alpha was ≥ 0.85, suggesting good internal reliability. It was also found that PRC and NRC scales associated positively with one another in each country, with the effect size ranging from negligible (r = .07) to large (r = .56). Furthermore, Yirdong et al. (2023) reported Cronbach's alphas of α = .92 and α = .82 for positive and negative religious coping respectively, in their sample of individuals living with HIV in Ghana.

The Brief RCOPE's internal reliability has further been demonstrated in a range of religions, including Islam (PRC α = .89; NRC α = .79) (Abu-Raiya & Sulleiman, 2020); Roman Catholicism (PRC scale only α = .87; Wnuk, 2021); and Hinduism (α = .89) (Grover & Dua, 2019).

Translated versions of the Brief RCOPE have also been investigated for their psychometric properties. For example, internal reliability has been demonstrated in Rezaeipandari et al.'s (2021) study investigating the reliability and validity of the Brief RCOPE among Persian-speaking older adults suffering from multiple chronic diseases. The researchers for this study translated the Brief RCOPE into Persian. The religious denominations represented in this sample include Muslim and Zoroastrian, investigating the

PRC and NRC separately**.** Cronbach's alpha was estimated for the whole sample and considered to be in the acceptable range (PRC α = .74; NRC α = .80). Acceptable alpha estimates were also present in the Muslim subgroup (*n* = 200; PRC α = .86; NRC α = .79) and Zoroastrian subgroup (*n* = 200; PRC α = .80; NRC α = .73). Similar findings were further demonstrated in Mohammadzadeh and Najadi's (2016) sample of 339 university students with undefined religious beliefs, using a Persian translated version of the Brief RCOPE. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was obtained equal to .79 and .71 for positive and negative religious coping respectively.

Further findings of robust internal reliability have been demonstrated in other Brief RCOPE translations, including in Greek for people with and without long-term conditions (PRC α = 0.91 - 0.96; NRC α = 0.77 – 0.92; Paika et al., 2017), in Arabic for secondary school students in Iraq (α = .70; PRC α = .86; NRC α = .82; Al-Hadethe et al., 2016), Portuguese for the Brazilian general public (PRC α = .88; NRC α = .84; Esperandio et al., 2018) and Spanish for Mexican Americans with diabetes (PRC α = .85; NRC α = .86; Martinez & Sousa, 2011).

Test-Retest Reliability

Test-retest reliability measures the stability of the measure from the same person across two or more time points (Polit, 2014). This assesses the amount of error due to random fluctuations over time (Coaley, 2014). There is some discrepancy in the literature regarding what is considered to be an acceptable test-retest reliability coefficient, but Polit (2014) suggests that scale developers should aim to achieve test-retest reliability coefficients that exceed .80.

In Rezaeipandari et al.'s (2021) study investigating the psychometric properties of the Brief RCOPE in Persian-speaking older adults, an intraclass correlation coefficient was

calculated to test the reliability over a 2-week time period. Consistency was demonstrated for the PRC (0.89) and the NRC (0.91) subscales. Consistency was also demonstrated across a four-week time period in a sample of Iranian university students (Mohammadzadeh & Najafi, 2016). The test-retest coefficient was obtained for the total scale (.90), PRC (.93) and NRC (.88) ($p < .001$).

While there is some available data for the test-retest reliability, this is limited. However, it is likely that coping methods, and indeed stressors, will change over time. Therefore, due to the items measured by the Brief RCOPE being changeable in nature, this type of reliability may not be regularly measured by researchers, due to the expected change in contexts and utility of strategies (Polit, 2014).

Validity

Broadly speaking, validity refers to a test's ability to measure what it intends to (Hughes, 2018). Pargament et al.'s (2011) psychometric review demonstrated good validity; however, test validity is improved by ensuring the results of a test apply across a range of populations (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011). Therefore, the author will now provide an overview of the validity of the Brief RCOPE across a range of populations.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity refers to "the degree to which scores on a studied instrument are related to measures of other constructs that can be expected on theoretical grounds to be close to the one tapped into by this instrument" (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011, p. 207). A common method of determining convergent validity is through the average variance extracted (AVE) method, recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). AVE is used to measure the amount of variance that is captured by the construct in relation to the amount of variance due to measurement error (dos Santos & Cirillo, 2021). For a measure to establish convergent

validity, the AVE should be equal to or greater than .50 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). This indicates that at least 50% of the construct's variance is because of its indicators (Pagán-Torres et al., 2021).

In their validation of the Brief-COPE on Iranian university students, Mohammadzadeh and Najafi (2016) report that convergent validity coefficients were obtained for the PRC subscale (.85) and the NRC subscale (.83). A further attempt to seek validation was conducted by Esperandio et al. (2018) for the Brazilian Brief RCOPE. The researchers used AVE to assess convergent validity; both the PRC and NRC subscales showed an AVE of 0.5, suggesting convergent validity.

Pagán-Torres et al. (2021) also examined the convergent validity of the Brief RCOPE in their sample of Puerto Rican adults. In addition to this, the researchers measured discriminant validity (i.e., the extent to which measures intended to measure distinct constructs do so; Rönkkö & Cho, 2022) by comparing the AVE values for both factors to the average shared variance (ASV) and the maximum shared variance (MSV). For discriminant validity to be determined, the AVE of each factor should be higher than these two measures of variance. The findings here suggest that both the PRC (.69) and NRC (.51) factors were higher than the values of the ASV (PRC = .03; NRC - .03) and MSV (PRC = .03; NRC - .03), suggesting discriminant, as well as convergent validity.

Construct Validity

Construct validity concerns the degree to which items on an assessment measure what it is intended to (Stone, 2019).

Abu-Raiya et al. (2020) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to test whether data collected from their sample of 486 Israeli Jews and Muslims fit the two-factor structure of the Brief RCOPE. The model showed a poor fit to the data; therefore, the researchers performed

an exploratory factor analysis on the Brief RCOPE's 14 items. This yielded two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 63% of the variance. On both factors, the item 'Questioned God's power' had factor loadings of less than .40 and was therefore eliminated from further analyses. Similar findings for this item have been demonstrated across the literature in different populations, e.g., in Jews & Muslims (Rezaeipandari et al., 2021), in the Czech Republic (Janu et al., 2019), and across four non-Western countries (Voytenko et al., 2023). It is hypothesised that this may be the case because the meaning of the item may not translate implicitly across cultures. Alternatively, it is hypothesised that in some religions and contexts, questionings God's power may be more prohibited than in others (Voytenko et al., 2023). Additionally, it is possible that while people may experience their own struggles with their relationship with God, they may not question the nature of God (Janu et al., 2019).

Factor 1's seven items were examined and were found to be linked to the construct originally labelled PRC (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020). Furthermore, all of the items linked to Factor 2 were conceptually linked to the construct originally labelled NRC. This demonstrates good construct validity, and similar findings were present when an exploratory factor analysis was performed for Jews and Muslims separately (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020). Further support for construct validity can be found in Voytenko et al.'s (2023) study of four non-Western countries, whereby the two factors were retained.

Concurrent Validity

Concurrent validity refers to "the strength of relationship between test scores and criterion measurements made at the time of test administration or shortly thereafter" (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011, p. 187). Pearson correlation is often used for a measure of concurrent validity. Values of .35 or less are considered weak or low correlations; values between .36 and .67 are considered to be moderate correlations; high correlations are those that have

values between .68 and .89; and values above .90 are considered very high correlations (Taylor, 1990). In Pargament et al.'s (2011) psychometric critique, the Brief RCOPE demonstrated good concurrent validity.

In Mohammadzadeh and Najafi's (2016) study, concurrent validity referred to how well the Brief RCOPE compared to other psychometric assessments measuring religious coping. They compared the Brief RCOPE, as applied to Iranian university students, to the Islamic Coping Strategies Scale in Stressful Conditions (Ehteshamzadeh, 2009). The results demonstrate that the PRC and NRC scales correlate highly with the Islamic Coping Strategies Scale in Stressful Conditions (PRC = .85; NRC = .83; $p < .001$), suggesting concurrent validity. Similarly, García et al. (2021) compared the Brief RCOPE to the religiosity subscale of Carver's Brief-COPE (1997) in their sample of 442 Chilean adults. The PRC and NRC subscales show positive and significant correlations with the religiosity subscale of the Brief-COPE.

Further support for the concurrent validity of the Brief RCOPE has been demonstrated in a sample of 320 Puerto Rican adults, with the assumption that PRC is mostly associated with measures of positive psychological constructs, and NRC related to signs of poorer mental health (Pargament et al., 2011). Pearson correlation coefficients were conducted on the PRC and NRC subscales. The PRC subscale was correlated with ratings in areas such as participation in private religious practices ($r = .568$, $p < .001$), participation in religious practices ($r = .569$, $p < .001$), and importance of religion ($r = .681$, $p < .001$). The NRC subscale did not correlate with these variables (Pagán-Torres et al., 2021). Similar findings and support for concurrent validity of the Brief RCOPE was reported in Paika et al.'s (2017) study examining the psychometric properties of the Greek-Orthodox version of the Brief RCOPE. They report that NRC was strongly related to poorer mental health and greater depressive symptoms, as reported in other studies (Pargament et al., 2011).

Appropriate Norms

A normative population is required for a tool to be considered useful (Lenhard et al., 2019). The norm allows the score to be interpreted at a group or an individual level, without which the score would be meaningless (Peña et al., 2006).

Pargament et al. (2011) report that mean scores for PRC and NRC can range from 7 (minimum) to 28 (maximum) when a four-point (1-to-4) Likert style scale is used. In their review of studies, mean scores ranged from 17 to 21 for PRC, suggesting that respondents tend to favour "somewhat" or "a great deal" answers on the scale. The mean scores for the NRC subscale ranged from 8 to 14, suggesting that respondents tend to favour "not at all" or "somewhat" for the NRC items. As stated earlier, Pargament et al.'s (2011) review was conducted mainly on Christians in the United States. There is currently no available normative data available for the Brief RCOPE in non-Western cultures.

Conclusion

The Brief RCOPE remains the most widely used measure of religious coping and has the potential to be used across different religions, cultures, and in relation to a variety of different life stressors. Overall, reliability has been demonstrated across a number of countries, and in a variety of different religions. The measure has also demonstrated good convergent, construct and concurrent validity in diverse cultures. The translated versions of the Brief-RCOPE have demonstrated similar results to those obtained for the original measure, suggesting that these tools can be used to assess religious coping in people exposed to stressful events in these cultures (García et al., 2021). Unfortunately, normative data for a non-Western population has not been specified, resulting in difficulties comparing individual scores to the wider population.

Pargament et al. (1998) suggest that the Brief RCOPE has practical applicability for mental health, religious, or health professionals for informing assessment and intervention. They report that religiously oriented interventions to support people to cope with major life stress could be based on the positive patterns of religious coping. Furthermore, individuals who demonstrate negative religious coping styles may benefit from help to deal with coping with a crisis (Pargament, 1998). Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) reason that it is important to explore an individual's religion coping strategies, as it allows practitioners to determine whether religion serves as an adaptive or a maladaptive method of coping and may help practitioners identify potential warning signs that there may be issues related to an individual's religious coping. The findings from this critique suggest that the Brief RCOPE can also be used in a range of diverse religions and cultures.

However, the majority of studies investigating the psychometric properties of a translated version of the Brief RCOPE found issues with item 14 ("Questioned the power of God") and as a result were required to remove it from their analysis. Pagán-Torres et al. (2021) report that had they not removed it from their investigation, the alpha coefficient would be reduced, and it would lose its convergent reliability. Therefore, users of the original Brief RCOPE with diverse populations should be mindful of the implications of including item 14 in their assessment battery.

While the findings discussed in this critique suggest good reliability and validity, it is possible that this is due to publication bias (i.e., the 'file drawer' problem) (Pargament et al., 2011). This is when studies which do not find significant results do not get published (Hopewell et al., 2009). Therefore, it may be that other diverse religions and cultures have found contradictory findings in relation to reliability and validity of the Brief RCOPE. Additionally, this critique was conducted on measures published only in the English language, possibly limiting the diversity of the findings (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2014).

However, positively it seems that there has been great effort to find reliable and valid psychometric measures to assess religious coping in diverse populations. One area that appears to be overlooked in the literature is the role of religious coping in people who have committed offences, particularly how people use religious coping in prison or once released. A study conducted by Talik and Skowroński (2018) administered the full version of the RCOPE with prisoners in Poland, along with a measure of quality of life. They found that inmates with a high sense of quality of life more often chose PRC strategies, compared to individuals with a low sense of quality of life, who more often chose NRC strategies. Further exploration is needed to understand more about the role of religious coping in the forensic population, and the reliability and validity of the Brief RCOPE should be explored. It would be of further interest to explore the role religious coping plays in desistance from crime, where there is a current lack of literature available.

The findings of this critique suggest that the Brief RCOPE is suitable to be used with a range of populations and religions. However, more research is needed to look at the use of the measure with other sub-populations such as those who have been within the criminal justice system and are likely to have had different life experiences and cognitions to those from a non-offending population.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Broadly speaking, this thesis aimed to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between religion and desistance from crime. To achieve this aim, Chapter 2 provided a systematic literature review of studies investigating whether involvement in religious programmes or practices impacts on recidivism rates, or on other factors which are associated with crime. Chapter 3 then provided a study exploring the lived experiences of individuals with offending histories who had converted to Christianity, in order to gain insight into the role that religious beliefs play in their lives. Lastly, in order to understand the assessment of positive and negative religious coping methods that people employ to cope with life stressors in a variety of populations, a critical evaluation of the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief-RCOPE; Pargament et al., 1998) was completed and was presented in Chapter 4.

The main findings of these chapters will be summarised in this chapter. This chapter will also note some key strengths and limitations of the thesis, provide some implications for practice, and make recommendations for further research.

Main Findings

Chapter 2: Systematic Literature Review

Twenty-two studies were included in the mixed methods systematic review of the literature. The review aimed to investigate whether involvement in religious programmes/practices whilst in prison has an impact on recidivism rates; whether there are certain factors or elements regarding these programmes or the individuals' religiosity which are associated with desistance from crime; and what impact offenders believe religion, faith or spirituality has had on their life. Seven studies concluded that participation in religious programmes or practices whilst in prison significantly reduced the risk of recidivism. The review found that the greater the intensity of the programme or practice that was undertaken, as well as the hours of attendance, the greater the impact on the likelihood of recidivism.

However, there were some conflicting findings in the review in regard to the religious factors that predict reduced reoffending. One study which employed a longitudinal approach found that the impact of programmes on recidivism was not sustained (Stansfield & Mowen, 2019), and similarly Johnson (2004) found that a significant effect was limited to 2-3 years. Furthermore, two studies using the SVORI dataset, which accounted for 2,072 participants, found there to be no relationship between religion and recidivism.

Other conflicting findings included Giordano et al. (2008) who found that neither perceived closeness to God nor church attendance predicted stable desistance, whereas Bhutta et al. (2019) found that religious/moral values and religious practice did predict this. However, the researchers in both of these papers used different measures of religiosity, and therefore conclusions cannot be drawn in regard to the religiosity factors that predict recidivism.

The participants in this review who engaged with religious programmes reported improvements in emotional coping, increased self-esteem, and increases in self-worth. Other themes reported were an increase in feelings of hope for the future, as well as a relief from feelings of anger. The literature base lends support for these factors impacting on reoffending rates, and it is recommended that these factors are considered when researching this phenomenon.

Overall, the findings suggest that involvement in religious activities or beliefs can reduce levels of reoffending on release from prison. However, for the studies that explored long-term impact, this effect appeared to be time limited and is dependent on the continuation of re-entry support. The review also provided support for Hirschi's Social Control Theory (1969) and Grasmick's Rational Choice Theory (1991). The importance of ongoing social

support and/or mentoring whilst in the community is clear within this review. Giordano et al. (2008) suggested that the effects of religion on reoffending may be limited to an individual's social network and their community, and Duwe and King (2013) found that being mentored in the community following release from prison resulted in lower rates of recidivism. Schroeder and Frana (2009) also found that following participation in religious activities, participants reported an increased social network and a sense of belonging.

However, the papers within this review possessed some methodological weaknesses, meaning that the findings should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, the over-representation of males within this review results in difficulties in generalisability. As such, it is recommended that further research is conducted to understand the relationship between religion and desistance from crime in a female prison population.

Chapter 3: Empirical Research Study

The role of religious conversion is one that is overlooked in the desistance literature (Adamczyk et al., 2017) and requires further exploration. Chapter 3 presented an empirical study which explores the lived experiences of converting to Christianity in men who have formerly offended. Semi-structured interviews were adopted in this qualitative study to gather data from seven men who have previously been in prison.

The data were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 1999), with four superordinate themes emerging: 'The Evolution of Faith'; 'Divine Intervention'; '"It's Not Always That Simple"'; and 'What's Changed for Me?' Within three of the superordinate themes, there were a number of subordinate themes. All of the themes centred around the participants' lived experiences of becoming a Christian and living as a Christian, which included their discussion of their lives prior to finding faith, the process of conversion, and their experiences of being guided by God. The narratives also centred around

some of the religious struggles they encountered, as well as an exploration of the way that they think their life has changed since converting to Christianity.

Most participants spoke about a past characterised by trauma and hardship which led to the subordinate theme of 'I'll Go Back to Where Things Went Wrong', before they spoke about their conversion experience. There were a range of conversion experiences amongst the participants, with three of Rambo's (1993) five types of conversion being evident: intensification, apostasy, and affiliation. These discussions evidenced that the conversion process is often not linear, and there are many variables that can interfere with one's conversion experience. For some participants, certain circumstances in life (e.g., the death of a loved one) made them feel anger toward God, before later accepting Him. For one participant, they were able to consider their experiences in a different light and explained that the incident 'saved' him.

The superordinate theme of 'Divine Intervention' reflected the participants' experiences of God and the role that they believe God has played in their lives, such as sending them on a path toward better things or helping them to use their life experiences to help others. Being 'Saved by the Hand of God' was a subordinate theme in which participants spoke of their beliefs that God intervened in their lives in some way to save them, and some participants made hypotheses about what their lives may have been like without God's intervention. However, many participants spoke about their conversion experience being non-linear due to some of the religious struggles that were present along their journey. Some struggles referred to the difficulties of living by one's new faith such as the temptations of going back to old ways of living. Other participants spoke of their struggles of accepting their faith, particularly when they were not around the people who shared their faith.

Many participants spoke about improvements to their employment and interpersonal relationships, and others spoke about the importance of the re-entry services they received from faith-based organisations. Included in this was the support many of the participants received by faith-based rehabilitation services in abstaining from drugs. In the subordinate theme of 'Sobriety' participants also spoke of their addictions being taken away by God, and how their successes with sobriety were made easier by their faith in God. Within the superordinate theme of 'What's Changed for Me?' participants also spoke about the way they feel their outlook on life has changed since accepting God. They discussed a desire to live a 'calm' life, and reported that they feel able to reach out to others within their faith community if they needed support.

The themes within this study lend weight to Rambo's (1993) theory of religious conversion and support in our understanding of the conversion process. The findings highlight the nuances within the process of conversion and some of the struggles experienced by men who have previously been in prison who develop a faith in God.

Chapter 4: Critique of a Psychometric Measure

The Brief RCOPE (Pargament et al., 1998) was examined for potential relevance to understanding how people use religion to cope with life stressors. Due to the lack of empirical research conducted on religious coping in the prison population, the Brief RCOPE was reviewed for its psychometric properties for use in non-Western cultures in order to contribute to the literature base, which has been conducted on mainly Christians in the United States. Findings from this review suggest that the Brief RCOPE is a reliable measure, which has been demonstrated across a number of countries and religions. The measure has demonstrated good convergent, construct, and concurrent validity in diverse cultures. However, where translated versions were used, the majority of studies found issues with one

item (“Questioned the power of God”) and were required to remove it from their analysis in order to maintain the reliability of the measure.

Strengths and Limitations of the Thesis

A detailed summary of limitations of Chapters 2 and 3 are presented within the chapters, however, key limitations of the thesis will be discussed here. Firstly, due to the vast amount of research published in the area of interest for the systematic literature review, a strict inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied in order to filter the articles to ensure appropriate papers were included. Whilst careful deliberation was taken to make this decision, a risk of having such strict criteria is that some studies that could have added value to the review may have been excluded. For instance, studies published in a non-English language will likely have contributed to the literature and supported the knowledge of other religious programmes or practices in non-English speaking cultures. Furthermore, unfortunately, there were no papers in this review published in the United Kingdom, and as such, there remain difficulties with understanding the practical implications for use in UK prisons.

Regarding Chapter 3, a potential weakness is the researcher’s own religious beliefs, which did not align with those of the participants. A lack of pre-existing knowledge of Christianity may have had an impact on the interpretation of results. Lastly, as for all qualitative research, it is not possible to generalise from the results. However, the findings provide important insights which would not be possible to obtain through quantitative means.

However, overall, this thesis has made an important contribution to the literature on the role of religion in desistance from crime. It has provided a review of the literature examining the impact of religious practices and programmes undertaken in prison on recidivism. Further contributions have been made by the empirical study which explored the

lived experiences of men who converted to Christianity who had formerly offended. This study has provided valuable insights and identified that religious conversion is a personal experience; one which can involve a range of pathways and personal challenges. However, all men in the study reported experiencing a range of positive life events since their acceptance of God.

The use of IPA is considered to be a strength of this study, as it allows the development of a deeper understanding of the meaning that people place on their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). By using IPA to investigate the conversion experiences of individuals who have offending histories in the UK, we are able to understand more about the process of conversion in a marginalised group.

Implications for Practice

The following section provides some recommendations for practice based on the findings from Chapters 2, 3 and 4:

Service Provision

- The results of the empirical study suggest that conversion to Christianity played an important part in the lives of the participants and had a significant impact on their thoughts and behaviour. As such, it is suggested that prison and probation services promote the opportunities of engaging with religious programmes once people return from prison. Those individuals who wish to go down this route should be signposted to Chaplaincy and other Christian based organisations.
- Links should continue to be made between religious organisations and prison and probation services.
- The intensity and amount of time that prisoners can engage with the programme should potentially be increased if desired by prisoners. The findings of the systematic

literature review suggested that higher intensity and time of engagement in religious practices or programmes in prison result in a decreased likelihood of recidivism. Therefore, in practice, encouragement could be given to willing programme participants to engage with the programme for more hours, and programmes could benefit from perhaps offering more support and time for prisoners. However, it is not possible to know the direction of causality for the study on which this recommendation is based, so more research is required.

Policy

- Funders should aim to resource faith-based community groups and organisations so that they can work directly with prison and probation services.
- Programmes should be available for all different types of religion which may increase the likelihood of individuals engaging with a programme and ensure inclusivity. Service providers and commissioners should work at ensuring that the diverse needs within the prison and probation services are met by offering faith-based programmes across a range of religions.
- Due to the findings reported in Chapter 2 that the effects on desistance were not significant after 3 years, efforts could be made to ensure former offenders still have access to religious support when they are released from prison, and that probation services assist in finding individuals relevant religious communities if they express a wish to be involved in one. As such, it is recommended that commissioners consider building local community faith-based resources to continue the support for people beyond their prison or community sentence to help maintain desistance efforts.

Practitioners

- Organisations should ensure that staff, regardless of their own belief systems, are supportive of any individuals who wish to find out more about a particular religion/s.
- In the empirical study many participants spoke of how they had benefited from speaking to others who had similar backgrounds as them, and of how they were currently using (or wished to use in the future) their own experiences to help others. This peer mentoring approach could be beneficial to use in prisons for Christianity and other religions potentially. In addition, it is suggested that individuals with their own lived experience of conversion and desisting from crime are involved in discussions about how the criminal justice system can improve religious support and intervention; potentially providing input as Experts by Experience on this topic.
- The critique would suggest that the Brief RCOPE is suitable to use when exploring religious coping in a range of diverse religions and cultures, however, when using it for practice and research it is suggested that issues with the measure are recognised, and other methods of measurement be used in conjunction.
- The Brief RCOPE could be used in conjunction with other measures/methods to evaluate the effectiveness of faith-based interventions to understand more about alternative outcomes of attendance at the programmes.

Directions for Future Research

The literature base on religion and crime is vast, however the role of religious conversion is one that has been overlooked for some time (Adamczyk et al., 2017). More research should be conducted in this area to understand the process for those involved in the criminal justice system. One area that should be explored further, due to the particular relevance to those in the criminal justice system, is in relation to the encapsulation phase of conversion. For instance, investigating the process of leaving the potential structure and security of the religious programme or faith-based organisation, and the impact that this may

have on one's religious beliefs and practices. It would also be beneficial to explore whether the withdrawal from these services impacts on re-entry outcomes.

More longitudinal studies are also required to explore the impact of religious programmes and practices on recidivism. For this to reliably inform the literature base, it seems necessary that an agreed upon definition of recidivism is used, as well as an agreed upon definition of religiosity.

Motivation may impact on the likelihood that an individual will engage with other programmes whilst in prison and seek out prosocial peers when in the community. As such, further research should look at the direction of the relationship between religious beliefs and factors such as motivation to change.

Further research is required to understand more about the role of religion in females who have formerly offended to further our knowledge of the support that could be offered. Difference in religious participation (O'Connor & Duncan, 2011) and differences in recidivism rates (Ministry of Justice, 2021) of females compared to men mean that this would be an interesting area to explore.

It is also recommended that further research be conducted to explore the role of religious coping in the prison population. As reported in Chapter 4, the Brief RCOPE has been used to measure religious coping in a number of populations, but the prison population has been overlooked. To this author's knowledge, the only paper published on this was by Talik and Skowroński (2017) who compared religious coping styles to quality of life. It would be of interest to explore the role of positive and negative religious coping and the impact that this may have on recidivism rates.

Finally, the role of religion in the prison service and probation in the United Kingdom also requires further exploration. The majority of the papers reviewed in Chapter 2 were

published in the United States, which limits our understanding of making changes to policy and practice in prisons in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

This thesis has achieved its aim of contributing to the understanding of the relationship between religion and desistance from crime. It has done this by providing a systematic review of the literature investigating whether engagement in religious practices or programmes whilst in prison impacts on recidivism rates post-release. Further, the empirical study contributed to the understanding of the role that religious beliefs play in men with criminal backgrounds by exploring the lived experiences of individuals with offending histories who have converted to Christianity.

In looking at the topic of religion in crime, it is of note that it is necessary to consider the broader social context in which both religion and crime occur. As such, this thesis has drawn on a range of theories when looking at this area. This includes the desistance literature, such as the Good Lives Model (Ward & Stewart, 2003), as well as psychological theories (e.g., Rational Choice Theory, Grasmick, 1991; Social Control Theory, Hirschi, 1969), and theological literature (e.g., Rambo, 1993; Grim & Grim, 2019).

It is hoped that the highlighted implications for practice will be considered in order to support men in the criminal justice system who express an interest in religion; such support could play a pivotal role in them achieving their prosocial goals and subsequently providing support and mentorship to others.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Search Syntax and Results of Database Searches

ProQuest Social Science Premium Collection (1914 – current)

(Includes: Criminology Collection (1975 - current) (Criminal Justice Database (1981 - current); National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) Abstracts Database (1975 - current)); Education Collection (1966 - current) (Education Database (1988 - current); ERIC (1966 - current)); International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) (1951 - current); Library & Information Science Collection (1969 - current) (Library & Information Science Abstracts (LISA) (1969 - current); Library Science Database (1970 - current)); Linguistics Collection (1973 - current) (Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA) (1973 - current); Linguistics Database); Politics Collection (1914 - current) (PAIS Index (1914 - current); Policy File Index (1990 - current); Political Science Database (1985 - current); Worldwide Political Science Abstracts (1975 - current)); Social Science Database; Sociology Collection (1952 - current) (Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA) (1987 - current); Sociological Abstracts (1952 - current) (Social Services Abstracts (1979 - current); Sociological Abstracts (1952 - current)); Sociology Database (1985 - current)).

The following search strategy was used:

(Religio* OR religio* NEAR/2 practice* OR spiritual* OR faith OR faith NEAR/2 intervention*) AND ((Crim*) OR ("criminal activity") OR (offen*) OR (prison*) OR (anti-social*) OR (probation*) OR (forensic*) OR (perpetrat*) OR (violen*)) AND ((Desist*) OR (rehab*) OR (recover*) OR (recidivis*) OR (reoffend*))

Results from search before limits applied: **1,417**

The following limits were applied:
Entered date: 1998-01-01 - 2023-02-13;
Document type: Feature; Article; Report; Undefined;
Language: English;
Source type: Scholarly Journals;
Peer reviewed: Peer reviewed
Exclude:
Document type: Review; Commentary; Case Study; General Information; Literature Review; Bibliography; Editorial; News;
Source type: Magazines; Books; Conference Papers & Proceedings;

Results from search after limits applied: **512**

ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global

The following search strategy was used:

(Religio* OR religio* NEAR/2 practice* OR spiritual* OR faith OR faith NEAR/2 intervention*) AND ((Crim*) OR ("criminal activity") OR (offen*) OR (prison*) OR (anti-

social*) OR (probation*) OR (forensic*) OR (perpetrat*) OR (violen*)) AND ((Desist*) OR (rehab*) OR (recover*) OR (recidivis*) OR (reoffend*))

Doctoral Dissertations only.

Results from search before limits applied: **1,417**

The following limits were applied:
Entered date: 1998-01-01 - 2023-02-13;
Language: English

Results from search after limits applied: **360**

Web of Science Core Collection

The following search strategy was used:

(Religio* OR religio* NEAR/2 practice* OR spiritual* OR faith OR faith NEAR/2 intervention*) AND ((Crim*) OR ("criminal activity") OR (offen*) OR (prison*) OR (anti-social*) OR (probation*) OR (forensic*) OR (perpetrat*) OR (violen*)) AND ((Desist*) OR (rehab*) OR (recover*) OR (recidivis*) OR (reoffend*))
Results from search before limits applied: **806**

The following limits were applied:
Entered date: 1998-2023
Language: English
Document Type: Article

Results from search after limits applied: **660**

Ovid PsycInfo (1967 to July Week 1 2023)

The following search strategy was used:

(Religio* or (religio* adj2 practice*) or spiritual* or faith or (faith adj2 intervention*)) AND (Crim* or criminal activity or offen* or prison* or anti-social* or probation* or forensic* or perpetrat* or violen*) AND (Desist* or rehab* or recover* or recidivis* or reoffend*)

Results from search before limits applied: **732**

The following limits were applied:
Entered date: 1998-2023
Language: English
Document Type: Peer-reviewed journal or dissertation abstract
Population: Adulthood (18+ years)

Results from search after limits applied: **278**

EThOS (e-theses online service)

The following search strategy was used:

Religion OR faith OR spiritual AND crime OR violence AND reoffend

Results from search: **0**

Appendix B – Selection and Screening Tool

Reference:		
	Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
Sample	☐ Prisoners/ ex-offenders/ people involved in the criminal justice system/ individuals on probation/ individuals in secure services	☐ Substance users (not crime related) ☐ Individuals involved in terrorist related crimes ☐ Sexual offences ☐ Children or adolescents
Phenomenon of Interest	☐ Religion OR ☐ Spirituality OR ☐ Faith ☐ Crime ☐ Desistance	☐ Crime committed as a direct result of religious practices
Design	☐ Qualitative: Interviews; survey; questionnaires; focus groups OR ☐ Quantitative: Psychometric test or questionnaire to assess religion/spirituality and crime	☐ Non empirical data collection method used
Evaluation	☐ Qualitative: themes; views; experiences; attitudes; opinions ☐ Quantitative: outcome measures from psychometric test or questionnaire	☐ Non-empirical data analysis method used
Research Type	☐ Qualitative ☐ Quantitative ☐ Mixed methods	☐ Narrative reviews; book chapters; editorials; commentaries; case studies; expert opinion papers; systematic or literature reviews and any secondary studies
Publication Type	☐ Published peer-reviewed ☐ Doctoral theses ☐ Government document	☐ Unpublished below doctorate level dissertation and theses ☐ Published un-reviewed
Language	☐ English	☐ Any other language
Date Range	☐ 1998 – 13/02/2023	☐ 1997 and prior
Decision	☐ Accept for quality appraisal	☐ Reject

Appendix C – References Excluded Following the Application of the Selection and Screening Tool

Reference	How the citation was identified	Reason for exclusion
1. Adorjan, M., & Chui, W. H. (2012). Making sense of going straight: Personal accounts of male ex-prisoners in Hong Kong. *British Journal of Criminology, 52*(3), 577-590. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azr093	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
2. Amitay, G., Hawan-Kamel, D., & Ronel, N. (2021). Sufi non-doing offender rehabilitation: Positive and peacemaking criminology in practice. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 65*(8), 916-936. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/0306624X21990782	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
3. Anaraki, N. R. (2022). Islam in Iranian prisons: Practicing religious rituals behind bars. *Religions, 13*(10), Article 905. https://doi.org/ 10.3390/rel13100905	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
4. Anderson, M. L., Burtt, J. J., Jang, S. J., Booyens, K., Johnson, B. R., & Joseph, M. (2023). Religion and responsibility-taking among offenders in Columbia and South Africa: A qualitative assessment of a faith-based program in prison. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 67*(1), 66-88. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/0306624X221102795	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
5. Bell, K., Winder, B., & Blagden, N. (2018). 'Better as a Buddhist': An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the reflections on the religious beliefs of Buddhist men serving a prison sentence for a sexual offence.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Sample' – sample of sex offenders.

Religions, 9(4), Article 101. https://doi.org/10.3390/REL9040101		
6. Ben Yair, Y. (2021). Spiritual Jewish criminology: The basic premises and the pyramid. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 65*(15), 1586-1606. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X20944693	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
7. Bosi, A. C. (2021). *Religious-based programming and reentry success: An examination of spirituality and its effects on post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism*. [Unpublished dissertation]. Mississippi State University.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit includes criteria for 'Publication Type' – Masters level dissertation.
8. Camp, S.D., Klein-Safran, J., Kwan, O. K., Daggett, D. M., & Joseph, J. (2006). An exploration into participation in a faith-based program. *Criminology and Public Policy 5*(3), 529–550. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2006.00387.x	Manual search of reference list	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
9. Christian, J. (2022). *What role does the black church play in reducing recidivism among black males?* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Duke University.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Design' – A non-empirical methodology used.
10. Deuchar, R. (2020). 'I get more in contact with my soul': Gang disengagement, desistance and the role of spirituality. *Youth Justice, 20*(1-2), 113-127. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473225419889195	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – Focus on yoga/spirituality, rather than religious beliefs
11. DeVaughn-Goodwin, A. B. (2022). *Restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women.* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Walden University.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
12. DiPietro, S. M., & Dickinson, T. (2021). "God is real": Narratives of religiously	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Design' –

motivated desistance. *Criminology, 59*(4)*,* 645-670. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12284		A non-empirical methodology used.
13. Ericson, N. (2001). Public/private ventures' evaluation of faith-based programs. OJJDP Fact Sheet. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.*	Manual search of reference list	Did not fit inclusion type for 'Research Type'.
14. Feasey, S., & Williams, P. (2009). *An evaluation of the prison fellowship Sycamore Tree Programme: Based on a statistical analysis of crime pics II data*. Sheffield, UK: Hallam Centre for Community Justice.	Manual search of reference list	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
15. Gerace, A. & Day, A. (2010). Criminal rehabilitation: The impact of religious programming. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 29*(4), 317-325.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate desistance/recidivism.
16. Glorney, E., Raymont, S., Lawson, A., & Allen, J. (2019). Religion, spirituality and personal recovery among forensic patients. *Journal of Forensic Practice, 21*(3), 190-200. https://doi.org/10.1108/JFP-05-2019-0021	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – research focused on mental health recovery.
17. Guo, S. (2021). Developmental patterns of religiosity in relation to criminal trajectories among serious offenders moving from adolescence to young adult. *Crime & Delinquency, 67*(10), 1614-1644. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128720962454	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Sample' – sample included adolescents.
18. Heaton, P. (2006). Does religion really reduce crime? *The Journal of Law and Economics, 49*(1), 147-172. https://doi.org/10.1086/501087	Manual search of reference list	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Sample' – did not use a sample of prisoners/ex-offenders etc.
19. Hlavka, H., Wheelock, D., & Jones, R. (2015). Exoffender accounts of successful reentry from prison. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 54*(6), 406-428.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – research not

https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2015.1057630		focusing primarily on religion/faith etc.
20. Jang, S. J., & Johnson, B. R. (2022). Religion and rehabilitation as moral reform: Conceptualization and preliminary evidence. *American Journal of Criminal Justice,* 1-27. https://doi.org/ 10.1007/s12103-022-09707-3	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
21. Jang, S. J., Johnson, B. R., Anderson, M. L., & Booyens, K. (2022). Religion and rehabilitation in Colombian and South African prisons: A human flourishing approach. *International Criminal Justice Review, 33*(3), 225-252. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/10575677221123249	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
22. Jang, S. J., Johnson, B. R., Hays, J., Hallett, M., & Duwe, G. (2018). Religion and Misconduct in "Angola" Prison: Conversion, Congregational Participation, Religiosity, and Self-Identities. *Justice Quarterly, 35*(3), 412-442. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2017.1309057	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate desistance/recidivism.
23. Jang, S. J., Johnson, B. R., Hays, J., Hallett, M., & Duwe, G. (2020). Prisoners helping prisoners change: A study of inmate field ministers within Texas prisons. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 64*(5), 470-497. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/0306624X19872966	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
24. Jodi, K. H. M., Mohamad, M. A., & Mohamad, M. T. (2015). The effectiveness of religious programmes: Analysis of spirituality programme in prison among Muslim female inmates. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun, 10*(2), 51-60.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate desistance/recidivism.
25. Johnson, B. R. (2008). The Faith Factor and Prisoner Reentry. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion, 4*.	Search of electronic databases	Did not meet inclusion criteria for 'Research Type' – reference is a commentary.

26. Kim, S., Choi, M., Woo, Y., & Jang, S. J. (2021). Religion and misconduct among prison inmates in South Korea. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 67*(9), *952-975*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X211058954	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
27. Kitzmiller, S. (2021). *An exploration of factors related to recidivism rates among mentally ill parolees.* [Unpublished dissertation]. East Tennessee State University.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit includes criteria for 'Publication Type' – Masters level dissertation.
28. Lee, S. Z., & McCrie, R. D. (2022). Faith and Fortitude: 10-year assessment of recidivism at a new church-based prison in South-Korea. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 67*(12), 1163-1192. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X221086552	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Design' – A non-empirical methodology used.
29. Mears, D. P., Roman, C. G., Wolff, A., & Buck, J. (2006). Faith-based efforts to improve prisoner reentry: Assessing the logic and evidence. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 34*(4), 351-367. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2006.05.002	Search of electronic databases	Did not meet inclusion criteria for 'Research Type' – reference is a commentary.
30. O'Connor, T. P., & Duncan, J. B. (2011). The sociology of humanist, spiritual, and religious practice in prison: Supporting responsivity and desistance from crime. *Religions, 2*(4), 590-610. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel2040590	Search of electronic databases	Did not meet inclusion criteria for 'Research Type' – reference is a commentary.
31. O'Connor, T. P., & Perreyclear, M. (2002). Prison religion in action and its influence on offender rehabilitation. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 35*(3-4), 11-33. https://doi.org/10.1300/J076v35n03_02	Manual search of reference list	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
32. Peterson, D. L. (2022). *Reducing prisoner recidivism: The nexus between church, community, and returning citizens.* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Virginia Union University.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Design' – A non-empirical methodology used.

33. Robinson-Edwards, S., & Pinkney, C. (2018). Black men, religiosity and desistance: exploring Islam, desistance and identity. *Safer Communities, 17*(1), 47-67. https://doi.org/10.1108/SC-04-2017-0013	Search of electronic databases	Did not meet inclusion criteria for 'Research Type' – reference is a case study
34. Roman, C. G., Wolff, A., Correa, V. & Buck, J. (2007). Assessing intermediate outcomes of a faith-based residential prisoner reentry program. *Research on Social Work Practice. 17*(2), 199–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731506295860	Manual search of reference list	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
35. Sumter, M. P. (2006). Faith-based prison programs. *Criminology Public Policy, 5*(3), 523–528. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2006.00399.x	Manual search of reference list	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Research Type' – Editorial.
36. Thomas, D. D. (2021). *Examining the effectiveness of religious services programs on prisoner reentry.* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Northcentral University.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Research Type' – case study.
37. Thomas, J., & Zaitzow, B. H. (2006). Conning or conversion? The role of religion in prison coping. *Prison Journal, 86*(2), 242-259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885506287952	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate desistance/recidivism.
38. van Herpen, M., & Kruizinga, R. (2022). Mea Culpa: A qualitative interview study of the role of guilt and forgiveness with non-religious and multireligious inmates. *Religions, 13*(2), 145-157. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020145	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
39. Volokh, A. (2011). Do faith-based prisons work? *Alabama Law Review, 63*(1), 43–95.	Manual search of reference list	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Research Type' – Narrative review.
40. Whiteley, K. M., & Polson, E. C. (2019). Streams in the desert: exploring religion and spirituality among incarcerated women with lengthy sentences. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health, 23*(1), 62-76.	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not

https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2019.1647816		investigate desistance/recidivism.
41. Wilkinson, M., Irfan, L., Quaraishi, M., & Purdie, M. S. (2021). Prison as a site of intense religious change: The example of conversion to Islam. *Religions, 12*(3)*,* Article 162. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030162	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.
42. Williams, K. B. (2021). A study of the prison culture of the New York State Department of Corrections with respect to discipleship goals and the Peoples Baptist Church in Brownsville, Brooklyn. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation].	Search of electronic databases	Did not fit inclusion criteria for 'Phenomenon of Interest' – did not investigate the effects of religion on desistance.

Appendix D – Quality Appraisal Tool for Qualitative Studies

Quality Appraisal Tool for Qualitative Studies

Reference:

Screening Questions

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? *Consider: what is the goal of the research and why is it important?*	☐ Yes	☐ No
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? *Consider: if the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants*	☐ Yes	☐ No
3. Is it worth continuing?	☐ Yes	☐ No

Detailed questions to assess bias

Questions	Score			Can't Tell (CT)	Comments
	Yes (2)	Partial (1)	No (0)		
Appropriate research design					
1. Was the research design appropriate to the aims of the research? *Consider: if the researcher has justified the research design*					
Sampling					
2. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? *Consider: if the researcher has explained how the participants were selected; why the participants selected were the most appropriate; if there is any discussion around recruitment e.g., why some chose not to take part*					

Data collection					
3. Were the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? *Consider: if the setting for data collection was justified; if it is clear how data were collected; if the researcher has justified the methods chosen and if they are explicit, e.g. if using interviews is there any information on how these were conducted; if the form of data is clear; if the researcher has discussed saturation of data*					
Reflexivity (research partnership relations/recognition of researcher bias)					
4. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? *Consider: if the researcher critically examined their own roles, potential bias, and influence during: formulation of research questions; data collection, including sample recruitment, and choice of location; how the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design*					
Ethical issues					
5. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? *Consider: if there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained; if the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study, e.g. informed consent, confidentiality, and how they handled the effects of the study on participants during and after the study*					

Data Analysis					
6. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? *Consider: if there is an in-depth description of the analysis process; is it clear how themes/ categories were arrived at; whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process; to what extent contradictory data were taken into account*					
7. Are there sufficient data to support themes?					
8. Did the researcher critically examine their own role, potential bias, and influence during the analysis and selection of the data for presentation?					
Findings					
9. Is there a clear statement of findings? *Consider: if the findings are explicit; if there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments; if the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings e.g., triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst*					
10. Are the findings discussed in relation to the original research questions?					
Value of the research					
11. How valuable is the research? *Consider: if the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding, e.g. current policy or practice; if they identify new areas where research is necessary; if the researchers*					

have discussed whether, or how, the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used					

Quality score: /22 Number of 'Can't Tell' items:

Percentage:

Appendix E – Quality Appraisal Tool for Quantitative Studies

	Question	Yes	No	Don't know
Introduction				
1	Were the aims/objectives of the study clear?			
Methods				
2	Was the study design appropriate for the stated aim(s)?			
3	Was the sample size justified?			
4	Was the target/reference population clearly defined? (Is it clear who the research was about?)			
5	Was the sample frame taken from an appropriate population base so that it closely represented the target/reference population under investigation?			
6	Was the selection process likely to select subjects/participants that were representative of the target/reference population under investigation?			
7	Were measures undertaken to address and categorise non-responders?			
8	Were the risk factor and outcome variables measured appropriate to the aims of the study?			
9	Were the risk factor and outcome variables measured correctly using instruments/measurements that had been trialled, piloted or published previously?			
10	Is it clear what was used to determine statistical significance and/or precision estimates? (e.g., p-values, confidence intervals)			
11	Were the methods (including statistical methods) sufficiently described to enable them to be repeated?			
Results				
12	Were the basic data adequately described?			
13*	Does the response rate raise concerns about non-response bias?			
14	If appropriate, was information about non-responders described?			
15	Were the results internally consistent?			
16	Were the results presented for all the analyses described in the methods?			
Discussion				
17	Were the authors' discussions and conclusions justified by the results?			
18	Were the limitations of the study discussed?			
Other				
19*	Were there any funding sources or conflicts of interest that may affect the authors' interpretation of the results?			
20	Was ethical approval or consent of participants attained?			

Source: Downes, M. J., Brennan, M. L., Williams, H. C., & Dean, R. S. (2016). Development of a critical appraisal tool to assess the quality of cross-sectional studies (AXIS). BMJ Open, 6(12), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-011458

Total number of 'Yes' =
Total number of 'No' =
Total number of 'Don't know' =
* 'No' is a positive response for this question and so is included in the 'Yes' count

Article	Quality Assessment Criteria											Total Score	Quality Score
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
Armour et al. (2005)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	P	Y	N	P	Y	Y	13	59%
Giordano et al. (2008)	Y	Y	Y	P	N	P	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	16	75%
Hallett & McCoy (2015)	Y	Y	Y	P	P	P	P	N	P	Y	P	12	54.5%
Mowen et al. (018)	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	21	95%
Norton (2021)	Y	Y	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	21	95%
Roberts & Stacer (2016)	Y	P	Y	N	P	P	P	CT	Y	Y	P	13	59%
Said & Davidson (2021)	Y	Y	P	N	N	P	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	14	63%
Schroeder & Frana (2009)	Y	P	Y	P	P	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	17	77%

Notes: 1) Was the research design appropriate to the aims of the research? 2) Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? 3) Were the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? 4) Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? 5) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? 6) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? 7) Are there sufficient data to support the themes? 8) Did the researcher critically examine their own role and potential bias and influence during the analysis and selection of the data for presentation? 9) Is there a clear statement of findings? 10) Are the findings discussed in relation the research questions? 11) How valuable is the research?

Y = Yes, P = Partial, N = No, CT = Can’t Tell

Maximum score is 22

Article	Quality Assessment Criteria																				Total Score	Quality Score
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13*	14	15	16	17	18	19*	20		
Bhutta et al. (2019)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	Y	17	85%
Cannonier et al. (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	DK	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	DK	15	75%
Duncan et al. (2018)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	DK	16	80%
(Duwe & King, (2012)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	DK	17	85%
Giordano et al. (2008)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	DK	18	90%
Haviv et al. (2020)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	19	95%
Johnson (2002)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	DK	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	DK	14	70%

Notes: 1) Were the aims/objectives of the study clear? 2) Was the study design appropriate for the stated aim(s)? 3) Was the sample size justified? 4) Was the target/reference population clearly defined? 5) Was the sample frame taken from an appropriate population base so that it closely represented the target/reference population under investigation? 6) Was the selection process likely to select subjects/participants that were representative of the target/reference population under investigation? 7) Were measures undertaken to address and categorise non-responders? 8) Were the risk factor and outcome variables measured appropriate to the aims of the study? 9) Were the risk factor and outcome variables measured correctly using instruments/measurements that had been trialled, piloted or published previously? 10) Is it clear what was used to determine statistical significance and/or precision estimates? (e.g., p-values, confidence intervals) 11) Were the methods (using statistical methods) sufficiently described to enable them to be repeated? 12) Were the basic data adequately described? 13)* Does the response rate raise concerns about non-response bias? 14) If appropriate, was information about non-responders described? 15) Were the results internally consistent? 16) Were the results presented for all the analyses described in the methods? 17) Were the authors' discussions and conclusions justified by the results? 18) Were the limitations of the study discussed? 19)* Were there any funding sources or conflicts of interest that may affect the authors' interpretation of the results? 20) Was ethical approval or consent of participants attained?

Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don't know
*Reverse Score
Maximum score is 20

Article	Quality Assessment Criteria																				Total Score	Quality Score
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13 *	14	15	16	17	18	19 *	20		
Johnson (2004)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	DK	18	90%
Mowen et al. (2018)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	DK	17	85%
Said & Davidson (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	DK	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	16	80%
Stansfield & Mowen (2019)	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	DK	15	75%
Stansfield et al. (2017)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	DK	15	75%
Stansfield et al. (2018)	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	DK	17	85%
Stansfield et al. (2019)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	DK	15	75%

Notes: 1) Were the aims/objectives of the study clear? 2) Was the study design appropriate for the stated aim(s)? 3) Was the sample size justified? 4) Was the target/reference population clearly defined? 5) Was the sample frame taken from an appropriate population base so that it closely represented the target/reference population under investigation? 6) Was the selection process likely to select subjects/participants that were representative of the target/reference population under investigation? 7) Were measures undertaken to address and categorise non-responders? 8) Were the risk factor and outcome variables measured appropriate to the aims of the study? 9) Were the risk factor and outcome variables measured correctly using instruments/measurements that had been trialled, piloted or published previously? 10) Is it clear what was used to determine statistical significance and/or precision estimates? (e.g., p-values, confidence intervals) 11) Were the methods (using statistical methods) sufficiently described to enable them to be repeated? 12) Were the basic data adequately described? 13)* Does the response rate raise concerns about non-response bias? 14) If appropriate, was information about non-responders described? 15) Were the results internally consistent? 16) Were the results presented for all the analyses described in the methods? 17) Were the authors' discussions and conclusions justified by the results? 18) Were the limitations of the study discussed? 19)* Were there any funding sources or conflicts of interest that may affect the authors' interpretation of the results? 20) Was ethical approval or consent of participants attained?

Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don't know
*Reverse Score
Maximum score is 20

Appendix H – Data Extraction Form

General Information	
Title of study	
Author(s)	
Year of publication	
Country of study	
Journal	
Study Characteristics	
Design/type of study and study aims	
Measure(s) relevant to the review questions/data collection method(s)	
Standardisation, validity and reliability of measure(s)	
Participant Characteristics	
Offender population?	
Sample size and gender mix	
Age range, mean and standard deviation	
Ethnicity	
Method of recruitment	
Engagement in faith-based programmes?	
Study results (in relation to the review questions)	
Analysis method(s) used	
Findings and significance **(quantitative)**	

Themes / key concepts relevant to the review questions **(qualitative)**		
Conclusions		
Evaluation		
Strengths		
Weaknesses		
Quality Assessment		
Quality assessment score **(quantitative)** (out of 20)		
Quality assessment score **(qualitative)** (out of 22)		
Reviewed by second rater?	☐ Yes ☐ Agreed?	☐ No

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Appendix I – Research Advertisement Poster

RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Study title: Exploring experiences of becoming a Christian: A study of former offenders in the UK.

The study is aiming to explore the experiences, views, and beliefs of former offenders regarding becoming a Christian.

If you would like to take part, you can contact the researcher (Nikki) to get more information and arrange a time to meet. The chat/interview will last about 90 minutes. The interview may be conducted face-to-face or virtually, due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The findings of the study will be written up and included in a thesis submitted for a doctorate degree at the University of Birmingham.

To take part you must:

- Be 18 years or older
- Be male
- Be a Christian
- Be fluent in the English language
- Have been convicted of a non-sexual related crime in the past and served a prison or community sentence.

If you are interested, please contact the researcher for more information:

Nikki Saunders

Email: [redacted]

As a thank you for taking part, you will receive a £20 Amazon Voucher.

Appendix J – Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Participant Information Sheet

Study title: Exploring experiences of becoming a Christian: A study of former offenders in the UK.

Invitation

You are invited to participate in the study titled above. The purpose of this information sheet is to make sure you have a good understanding of the study and your role in it before giving your consent to participate. It is advised that you read over this information sheet fully. If you have further questions or queries you can contact the researcher or the researcher's supervisor. Contact details are at the end of this information sheet.

What is the purpose and background to this study?

The aim of the study is to explore the experiences, views, and beliefs of former offenders regarding becoming a Christian. The researcher is interested in your journey with Christianity and the role that this plays in your life.

This study is being undertaken as part of Nicola Saunders' Forensic Psychology Doctorate programme of study.

Why have I been asked to take part?

This study is interested in interviewing adult male participants about their experiences of becoming a Christian. You have been asked to take part as you have indicated that you are an ex-offender in the UK willing to be interviewed about your experiences with Christianity.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in one chat/interview with the researcher about your experiences of Christianity and crime. Depending on the current Covid-19 restrictions, the interview may either take

place virtually (e.g., over the phone or video chat), or in person. In the event that it is possible to meet face-to-face, the interview will be held at the Victory Church and will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you.

The interview should take around 90 minutes, but the researcher will be guided by you, so the interview may be longer or shorter depending on what you would like to say.

Prior to the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm that you agree to take part in the study. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded using a Dictaphone. This is only so the researcher can accurately capture everything you have said.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part. You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. Your Pastor will be informed of your choice by the researcher, but this is only to enable arrangements for the interview.

If you do decide to take part, you are free to change your mind and stop participating in the study at any time. You are under no obligation to participate in this research and can change your mind up to 14 days following the interview.

If you do change your mind, you do not need to give a reason why. You should let the researcher know within 14 days of the interview taking place that you would like to withdraw your information from the study. The researcher will ensure that any information you have provided will not be used in the study. Your audio-recording will be deleted, and all paper information will be shredded. There will be no negative consequences for you if you change your mind.

What are the benefits of my taking part?

There are no direct personal benefits to your engaging in this activity. However, you may gain more understanding and insight about yourself, your faith and your offending behaviour. It could be viewed as an opportunity to reflect on your experiences and beliefs.

Your engagement in this study will assist in the development and understanding of how Christianity assists offenders to desist from offending. There is currently limited literature on how religion impacts on offending, and your participation in this study would contribute to our understanding of this.

We expect that the results of the project will be really useful in providing academics and those who work with offenders with an insight into how becoming a Christian can impact on a person's life. As such, there may be potential benefits to other offenders.

What are the disadvantages or risks of my taking part?

There may be some questions that you find difficult to answer. You don't have to answer questions in the interview that you feel uncomfortable with. You will be debriefed at the end of the interview by the researcher and will have the opportunity to ask any questions.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Your details will be taken by the researcher only gaining consent. Your name will never be revealed in any report about this study. Quotes from the interview may be used in the write up of the project but no information by which you could be identified would be included.

The only person (other than the researcher) who will have access to the anonymised interview transcripts will be the academic supervisor (Zoe Stephenson) for the purposes of data analysis.

A coding system will be used to identify an individual to a transcript. You will be given participant number so that your name is not used. The researcher will have a list of participant names with their number written next to it which will be stored securely. All other information (written and audio) will only have your number on it. Once notes are transcribed and participants are satisfied with the accuracy of the notes, audio files will be deleted.

Interviews will be audio recorded for ease and accuracy. Following all interviews copies of transcripts will be written up by the researcher and a copy sent to the participant to read over and give further

consent for the use of the material. Arrangements about where and who this will be sent to will be agreed by yourself and the principal researcher at the interview. Participants can request the removal of data or withdraw from up 14 days after receiving a copy of their interview transcription. This is because after this point data will have been analysed.

There are some limits to full confidentiality. You will have the opportunity to talk about your offending history and your current experiences if you feel comfortable doing so; if you report a previously unknown crime or disclose that you intend to hurt yourself or others, this will have to be reported to the appropriate authorities.

How will the data be stored?

Data (participant numbers, audio recordings and transcripts) will be stored in Research Data Store, which is the University of Birmingham's highly secure, encrypted data storage system. The folder is password protected and only accessible to the student and supervisor. The audio recording will be deleted from the Dictaphone as soon as it has been transferred to Research Data Store. Following transcription, the recordings will also be deleted from Research Data Store.

Consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet on University of Birmingham premises in a locked office.

In line with the University of Birmingham's policy, the information you provide will be securely stored for 10 years. After this time, it will be destroyed by shredding and deleting.

What happens when the research stops?

A report will be written which identifies the common themes reported by the interviewees. This report will be included in a thesis that the researcher is submitting for assessment for a doctorate degree at the University of Birmingham. It is also hoped that the project will be published in an academic journal. No information by which you could be identified would be included in any write-up.

Who is funding the research programme?

The research is self-funded by the researcher as part of her Forensic Psychology Doctorate programme.

Who will review and approve the study?

The researcher is supervised by the supervisor listed below at the University of Birmingham, she will provide guidance and support to the researcher.

If you would like to take part, can I request that you please contact me on e-mail address below by [insert deadline].

Thank you

Nikki Saunders

Researcher contact details:	**Supervisor contact details:**
Nikki Saunders Email: [redacted]	Dr Zoe Stephenson Lecturer in Forensic Psychology University of Birmingham Tel: [redacted] Email: [redacted]

Appendix K – Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Title of the project: Exploring experiences of becoming a Christian: A study of former offenders in the UK

I confirm that (please tick):

☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the 'Participant Information Sheet' for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask any questions and these questions have been answered satisfactorily.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time up to 14 days after signing this form, without giving a reason.

☐ My interview will be audio-recorded so the researcher has an accurate record of what I say. I understand that only the researcher and possibly her supervisor, Dr Zoe Stephenson, will hear the recording.

☐ I understand that my interview will be transcribed and only the researcher and her supervisor will have sight of the anonymised transcript.

☐ I understand that my audio-recording and transcribed interview will be given a number so that my name is not used. Only the researcher will be able to work out which interview is mine by looking at their list of participant names that map against the number. Without this list, it will not be possible for anyone else to identify my interview. This list will be held electronically in a secure system.

- ☐ The storage and destroying of paper records and the audio-recording have been explained to me as detailed in the 'Participant Information Sheet'.

- ☐ I understand that what is discussed during interview will be included as part of a research report being submitted to the University of Birmingham as part of the researcher's doctorate degree and also possibly as a published journal article.

- ☐ I understand that my name will not be included in any reports or publications about the study and any quotations used will not identify me personally.

- ☐ I agree to take part in the above study.

- ☐ I understand that any data I provide will not be shared with any third-party organisation.

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix L – Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Procedure

1) Introductions
2) Ensure that the participant understands the aims of the study and what they are required to do
3) Ensure that the informed consent procedure is completed
4) Inform the participant about the interview procedure
    a. How long the interview will take
    b. The interview will be audio recorded
    c. The participant can let the interviewer know if they would like to take a comfort break
    d. Remind the participant that they are able to end the interview at any time
5) Ask the participant if they have any questions before the interview starts

Interview Questions

Prompt questions to be used to gather further information. For example:

- *What? When? Where? Why? How?*
- *Can you tell me more about that?*
- *What was that like for you?*

1) Can you tell me how you have come to the Christian faith? *[Prompts – How long have you been a member of this faith? How were you introduced to Christianity?]*

2) What do your beliefs mean to you?

3) How do you feel you have changed as a person?

4) What do you see for your future? *[Prompts: any hopes or fears?]*

End of Interview

"Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview that we have not covered in the questions, that you think would be relevant to the interview?"

1) Thank the participant for their time and for contributing to the research
2) Provide information on when the finished report is expected to be completed
3) Give the participant the debrief sheet
4) Remind the participant of the date they will be able to withdraw by
5) Ask if the participants have any questions

Appendix M – Participant Debrief Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Participant Debrief Sheet

Study title: Exploring experiences of becoming a Christian: A study of former offenders in the UK

Thank you for taking part in an interview with me for the above study. Your contributions are greatly valued and will help widen the understanding of the role that Christianity plays in the life of ex-offenders.

Following this interview, the audio recordings will be written up and the researcher will send you a copy of the interview transcript for you to read. Once you have read the transcript, please contact the researcher to let them know if you are happy for the transcript to be used in the research. Alternatively, the researcher will contact you within 14 days of sending the interview transcript to see if you are happy for the transcript to be used in the research. Please let the researcher know if you would not like to read the interview transcript.

The information gathered from the interviews will be analysed and themes will be identified in relation to the above areas of interest. The findings will be presented in a report for the researcher's doctorate degree.

If you would like to withdraw your interview from the study, please let the researcher know by using the contact information at the bottom of this sheet, within 14 days of receiving your interview transcript. If you choose not to receive the transcript and would like to withdraw, please do so within 14 days after the interview takes place. If you choose to withdraw your interview from the study, there will be no negative consequences at all, and you will not be asked to give back the £20 gift card.

If you have any concerns that the researcher has been unable to address, you can contact her supervisor using the contact details below. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please contact the researcher.

Should this interview have raised any difficult issues for you, you can discuss this with the researcher now or speak to your Pastor. Please also be aware of other support services who may be able to help if you feel distressed:

- **Samaritans**. You can call 116 123 (free from any phone), or email jo@samaritans.org 24 hours a day.
- **C.A.L.L.** If you live in Wales, you can call the Community Advice and Listening Line (C.A.L.L.) on 0800 132 737 (open 24/7) or you can text 'help' followed by a question to 81066.
- **Your local GP**

Thank you once again for taking the time to participate in this study. Your contributions are very much appreciated.

Researcher contact details:	**Supervisor contact details:**
Nikki Saunders	Dr Zoe Stephenson
Email: [redacted]	Lecturer in Forensic Psychology
	University of Birmingham
	Tel: [redacted]
	Email: [redacted]

Appendix N – Reflexivity Information and Researcher Reflective Statement

Reflexivity is understood as "an attentiveness to the influence of the researcher on the research process" (Engward & Goldspink, 2020, p. 41). Qualitative researchers have the responsibility of interpreting and making sense of people's experiences, in order to develop an understanding of humans which should support in making change (Shaw, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to reflect on their own lived experiences and how they may play a role in the data gathering and analysis (Shaw, 2010). Reflexivity is a process completed by the researcher of evaluating their own attitudes, cognitions, and reactions to understand their own role in relation to others (Holloway & Biley, 2011). The quality and credibility of research is dependent on the researcher's ability of be reflexive (Clancey, 2013).

The researcher's identification as a white British female without a criminal history, and without a defined religious orientation, will have some impact on the interpretation of the data. In order to be mindful of this, a reflexive journal was used during each stage of data collection and analysis (Clancey, 2013), to consider the way that the researcher interprets the experiences of the participants. Additionally, the researcher's supervisor has been involved at each stage during monthly supervision to discuss any assumptions made. The researcher has adopted an interpretivist position, in which the researcher assumes reality to be subjective, created only through social constructions (Walsham, 2006).

Reflexive Statement

Alongside my role as the primary researcher in this study, I am also a trainee forensic psychologist enrolled on the Forensic Psychology Doctorate, working in secure inpatient psychiatric hospitals. My primary interest in exploring the role of religion in desistance from crime began when working in such settings, where I worked with a gentleman with a forensic

background who wished to explore Christianity. My experience of discussing the case with a multi-disciplinary team prompted me to want to know more about the topic. I was mindful of how this experience may have influenced my interview questions and my interpretation of the data.

During my seven years of working in secure inpatient settings, I have worked with a range of populations who have presented with different levels of complex issues. I have developed my therapeutic style, including learning the skills of active listening and rapport building. During the interviews for this research, it was necessary for me to develop rapport with the participants in a short space of time before asking them to share their stories with me. This differed from my experience in inpatient settings, where I ordinarily have more time to build rapport with service users. I was mindful of this during the recruitment process and aimed to build some rapport with participants prior to the interview by contacting them to provide more information over the telephone.

I was also particularly mindful of my own religious beliefs (i.e., atheist) and how this may impact on the interview process and the data analysis. When planning the interviews, I considered whether my own beliefs should be disclosed to the participants prior to, or after, their involvement. I considered whether their knowledge of my beliefs prior to the interview would impact on their narratives or would in some way impact on their willingness to disclose their own experiences to me. I also considered whether my interest in the research topic, coupled with their not knowing my own position, may lead them to assume that I share their faith, and again impact on their narratives. I thought about whether the participants would explain things in more depth if they knew I was non-Christian, and whether this may be helpful, or if they may hold back on some elements that they may find difficult to explain. I decided to be guided by the participant. All participants were offered the opportunity to ask questions before and after the interviews, and I responded honestly when the question of my

own faith was raised. This happened only during two interviews. Oliver asked me about my own beliefs following his interview, whereas Dylan paused part-way during his interview to ask me the question. Following my disclosure to Dylan about my own beliefs, he commented that he assumed I was Christian as I have "God written all over [me]". I considered this to be a compliment and felt that it was meant as such. For each participant, I spent time reflecting on how the disclosure of my beliefs may have impacted on the interview.

I also reflected on how my limited personal experience and knowledge of the Christian faith affected my interpretation of the experiences shared by the participants. I made efforts to educate myself on Christianity and used supervision to reflect on my assumptions and biases. I considered the sensitivity of the topic of religion, and I was aware of the impact that my interpretations may have on the participants and others of the Christian faith. When writing my research report, I was mindful of the phrasing used to explain my interpretations and tried to do so with sensitivity.

When developing the semi-structured interview questions, I was mindful of not allowing my biases to influence the direction of the interview. I did this by keeping the questions broad and using prompts to receive further information from the participants. Whilst conducting the interviews, I was mindful of my own presentation, such as making sure that I was actively listening and asking relevant follow-up questions. I was also conscious of my responses to the participants during the interview, ensuring that I did not influence their responses by sharing my own views or feelings on the subject.

My experience during each interview differed, with each participant bringing something different to the process. For instance, Oliver and Dylan required very few prompts during the telling of their story. They talked openly about their experiences and Dylan, in particular, demonstrated a range of emotional responses throughout, and appeared to allow

himself to show a level of vulnerability. This differed to the interview conducted with Harry, where I was required to ask more prompt questions to explore the phenomenon in further depth. During some interviews I was concerned with the short length of time that lapsed, and I found myself worried that the data may not have the richness that is needed for IPA. This led me to ask more follow-up prompt questions than in other interviews, and it was important for me to be aware of this during my analysis.

I also reflected on my position as a female who does not have a criminal history, or the experience of re-entering the community following prison. Further, all interviewees spoke about the role that drugs played in their journeys. Therefore, I reflected on my own experiences as someone who does not have a history of drug-use or addiction and the ways that this may again impact on the interpretation of the narratives.

I approached this research with genuine curiosity and have an active interest in the topic. I believe that this allowed me to manage my own personal biases and helped me to interpret the results without trying to fit them with my own prior assumptions.

Appendix O – Example of an Annotated Transcript; Interview for Oliver

Emergent Themes	Interview Extract	Initial Noting
	The, the partner who I was with before I went to prison, you know, she's the mother of my child, and thankfully I get to be a father to my little boy now. And I never could have done that before. You know, the first time that I saw him walk, I was in prison. Like, you know what I mean, like that's the scumbag that I was. And now, I don't miss anything, you know what I mean, he's my little boy and I see him all the time. But um, she was sleeping with my best friend whilst I was in prison. She was, so like I found myself isolated with all these bad influences, all these bad circumstances, it was almost like, and I say it, God was taking care of stuff. Like, I'm not saying God manipulated things, but it's just, it felt like I was isolated, and whether it was the right time that I come into contact with God or not. But the more I began to read the book and the more I began to pray, the	Has a child – couldn't be a father in prison, but can be now. Couldn't have done it before. "scumbag". Negative opinion of past self. Doesn't miss out on his son's life now. No longer a scumbag? Isolated/ bad influences/ circumstances. "And I say it" – confirming his belief. God was taking care/manipulating. Removing the things that were leading him down the wrong path. "The right time" – needed God to take control at the time.
Is able to be the father he wants because of God's presence.		
God took over this life at a time that he needed it the most.		
Ongoing conflicts between his desires & his lifestyle.		

Seeking to make changes but unsure how.	more real it became. Uh, it was, it was crazy how it happened, and you know, I started taking up boxing, I thought I would go back to my childhood boxing club, cause I did boxing when I was a kid. Um, and I tried to box for a little while, and I lost the first three fights, you know I didn't have any discipline, you know, I went out partying, coming home, reading my Bible, and praying, going to boxing – you know it was just weird, like, you're like grasping, trying to change really. Um, and all of this trying to change, none of it, there was, there was something missing if that makes sense?	More time spent with God the more "real" it felt. "Crazy how it happened" – his journey with God? Went to boxing club. Returned to childhood boxing club. Place of safety/ security? Felt happy there? Didn't have the discipline required – continued partying. Cycle again of partying, Bible, pray, Box. Conflicts between desires. Weird. "Grasping" – desperation to change. Trying to change was important, but didn't know how/couldn't change. What was missing? Needed something to change.

Appendix P – List of Themes which Emerged for Interview for Oliver

Themes	Line	Quotes
1. EVOLUTION OF FAITH		
1.1 No prior God framework		
No previous understanding of God (no God framework)	L64	"It wasn't anything on my radar, if anything, I was the God of my own existence"
	L94	"I'd never heard anyone talk about the Bible, I hadn't read any of it, no one told me any of the gospel"
	L73	"I thought why, why would God – if He event exists, want anything to do with me?"
1.2 Feeling God's presence		
Encountering God and feeling His presence at the start of his journey ignited curiosity	L80	"I recognise this thing on the wall, and I didn't really pay too much attention to it, but I felt excited as I walked towards it"
	L88	"as I walked away, I felt this urge come over me, like this pull, this tug, just this desire, to just, I mean, what is this? What is God? Is He even real, is that a possibility? And you know, I thought I was arguing with myself at the time"
	L93	"I signed my name up to that chapel sheet, and for the first time in my life, I felt this massive sense of peace"
	L97	"And I knew that there was something more than just myself, and I felt as if I'm actually gonna find a way out"
	L104	"I know now that I encountered something, it was just that moment of signing my name up"
	L245	"I knew God was real, I'd experienced Him"
	L263	"I'm in Church, and there's just the presence of God there, there is this love and this acceptance"
Ongoing encounters of God solidifying his faith	L337	"I'm up there and I'm preaching, it's the word of God and I'm encouraging people to step out in faith, you just, you know He's there like, and you know

		He's with you, and it's a beautiful feeling, it is"
	L387	"but experiences of God, they're constant, you know what I mean? And when you encounter it from afresh, it blows your mind, it really does"
	L414	"And I just felt cold, and I just thought like I don't care, I'm not interested, like you know what I mean. I've had enough, I don't care God, this is too hard, it's too stressful, and I remember just being like I've had enough kind of thing. And as I'm standing there feeling quite cold, I just felt – the presence of God, just soft. Like it was just a warmth, it's like a – it's hard to explain it, when He comes, it's hard to explain
	L422	… And at the moment I said God is that you, it was like waves of love just crashed on me, just complete reassurance, and peace. Stronger than I felt in prison that time. Like God was there, like. I remember I just fell on my knees and cried like a little baby in this room"
1.3 Experiencing God's love		
Experience of peace and hope that there was more than the self	L97	"I knew that there was something more than just myself, and I felt as if actually I'm gonna find a way out"
	L199	"the more I began to read the book, the more hope happened"
Feelings of love and acceptance helped overcome his addiction	L258	"then I come and prayed the prayer as it were, and after that the drugs just fell away"
	L263	"I'm in Church, and there's just the presence of God there, there's just this love and this acceptance, and I'm hearing about Jesus and that was it for me, it broke the addiction, really"
God genuinely cares what happens to him	L378	"To recognise that actually when things are tough, He's still there, unlike the gangs I was selling drugs for, that abandoned me the first moment I went to prison"
	L383	"But when you're in Church, they, they genuinely care. And with God, he genuinely gives a damn"

1.4 Influence of others in his journey to finding God		
The introduction to God was the trigger to his journey	L61	"this guy came up to me… and he said to me look mate, I think you need God"
	L74	"I kind of ignored the guy really, but then, I don't know if it triggered really, or what it was, but kind of a couple of days later, I'm walking down the corridor, and there's a sign-up sheet on the wall for Chapel"
	L107	"I remember going back to my cell and that other prisoner ended up giving me a Bible for the first time and I started just reading books about how God can change people's lives and how He can help them out of the situation they're in really. And, and so yeah things kind of went from there, really"
Influence of another person in sharing their experience of God	L234 L236	"she rung me up and said, look Jesus has changed my life… she spoke differently, like she – the things she was talking about were different from the woman that I knew before"
People at church treated him in a way that he had not been treated before – with love and acceptance	L248	"They behaved differently, the welcomed – you know I was a mess, and they could tell I was a mess, but they welcomed me in, and they just loved me"
2. CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH ADVERSITY		
2.1 Facing challenges to recognise strengths		
God forcing him to face challenges so that he recognises his own strengths	L377	"God sent me there to work through a deeper set of healing"
	L385	"I think I had to go there for that fear of failure to be worked out"
2.2 God allows failure		
God providing a second chance at life and hope for a better future	L252	"there is a second change – it's not all over, there is hope"
	L347	"for those that get it, the lights come on. For them, that's – it's life giving … to find out that actually their life does

		matter, that actually while you might have been a scumbag and you might have made a mess of your life, there is a second chance – it's not all over, there is hope"
Doesn't fear punishment and rejection from God; failure is okay	L379	"when things are tough, He's still there"
	L426	"from my experience… when you fail you're gonna get a kicking… you've got to be looking over your back, looking out the window… but with God, it's not like that"
	L429	"I failed and I felt like I was making a mess, and I – I think he allowed it to happen to let me know he was still there"
2.3 Divine intervention		
God intervened to keep him safe	L200	"you come towards a situation where you think here comes the kicking and like an alarm would go off or like a security guard would turn up, and like it was just pure coincidence, but like you're there at the time thinking, is God, is God, you know what's going on, like what is happening to me?"
	L213	"again, when you're in prison there are these circumstances that happen, these coincidences as it were, well that gang I was caught up, the gang I was involved with, were caught in a 1.3-million-poind drug bust. They were caught at 8pm at night, and I had to be in at 7pm"
	L214	"I found myself isolated with all these bad influences, all these bad circumstances, it was almost like, and I say it, God was taking care of stuff"
	L190	"I'm not saying God manipulated things, but it's just, it felt like I was isolated, and whether it was the right time that I come into contact with God or not. But the more I began to read the Book, and the more I began to pray, the more real it became"
	L197	"I ended up getting into a fight and my jaw gets broken… and I can't drink anything that doesn't go through a straw for six weeks, and then I'm there reading my Bible and praying"

3. THE LIFECHANGING EFFECTS OF GOD		
3.1 Life prior to faith being characterised by struggles		
Prison environment brought about a range of challenges	L35	"Things got quite messy up there quite quick"
	L53	"it wasn't that I was looking for trouble, it's just that's who I was"
	L55	"they put a price on my head"
	L58	"I reckon my life's in danger"
Life spent believing he was in danger from other people	L127	"coming from the world that I was in, you're used to that"
	L137	"there's been times when I've gone outside of my house with a firearm, um, and with the intention to kill, thankfully I've never done that"
	L143	"your life being in danger is something you get used to a little bit"
Hard to walk away from previous lifestyle	L151	"Before I went to prison, I knew my life was a mess and I knew I needed help, and I tried so many times to give up, to walk away from it. But I was like, I dunno, the adrenaline of it, the excitement of it, the addiction"
	L154	"I was trapped in my life really and I kind of consigned myself to that really"
	L155	"when I was in the middle of it, the thick of it, I enjoyed it"
	L157	"the thing that you love is the thing that kills you"
	L277	"I wasn't content with just dealing, I had to be the extreme"
3.2 Practical changes in life		
Practical changes	L324	"I'm married now… she loves me to bits"
	L235	"been to university, got a degree, got a first-class honours as well"
	L207	"thankfully I get to be the father to my little boy now. And I could never have
	L210	done that before … And now, I don't miss anything"
	L296	"I've been asked to preach at a Church this Sunday"

	L328	"I'm a trainee Church Minister now as well, so yeah… I finish next year and I'll be a Reverend basically. So, part of that now I work in a youth group, so trying to do everything I can to stop the next generation making a mess of their lives"
	L334	"the best thing is preaching, I love that"
3.3 What if…		
God prevented him from losing himself to a dangerous life/death	L289	"I know that if I hadn't met God, I'd have come out of prison and gone straight back to it. Like I said, I'd been smoking crack and heroin before I went to prison – I'd never injected, but that's the next step isn't it? Who knows, I might have either been dead or so riddled with drug addiction, I wouldn't even know who I am right now"
	L294	"And I know that without God, I'd be dead now, without my faith, 100%"
4. CONFLICT BETWEEN OLD LIFE AND NEW LIFE		
4.1 Balancing opposing lifestyles		
Difficulties striking the balance between his lifestyle and his faith	L162	"I have to share this story sometimes in Church, and everyone's like of you met God and that's it – hallelujah you're saved, and it's not always that simple"
	L176	"Whilst I was in prison, I was constantly like God's gonna help me and it's gonna be amazing, and I had this Bible, and trying to work out what prayers are even about"
	L183	"I was around those people, and then I'd come home, and I'd read my Bible and pray"
	L170	"the guy comes round, fits the tag to my ankle and puts the box in, and then I get a knock at the door, and it's my mate come to see, to see if I'm alright. And so, I have to be in at 7 o'clock at night. So I, what I was doing, was, he comes in and I'd be sniffing a line of coke with him"

	L186	"I'd go out and I'd get into trouble and then come home and read my Bible and pray"
	L224	"you're like grasping, trying to change really… and all of this trying to change, none of it, there was, there was something missing"
Didn't have the tools available to make the changes he desired	L223	"you're like grasping, trying to change, really. Um, and all of this trying to change, none of it, there was, there was something missing"
	L244	"I was still, I was messed up, you know what I mean? I had this Bible and I knew God was real, I'd experienced Him, I knew He was there. But something was missing"
	L294	"I tried to sort my life out and I couldn't do it"
4.2 Ongoing struggles		
Worries about the possibility of going back to his previous lifestyle / undoing all his hard work	L361	"the fear is making a mess of it"
	L375	"And I remember feeling the fear of like I hope I don't go back to the – you know what I mean?
Reality that God/faith does not take away the challenges in life	L355	"Life's not a bed of roses, whether you're Christian or not, whether you believe in God or not, like life's tough, and it's hard and it's messy"
Struggles to accept admiration for his journey when he considers the victims along the way	L369	"I'm not used to people looking at me – you know, I tore my family to pieces. Destroyed my life and lives of those around me"
	L373	"It's not stardom, but it, it feels like it"