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Perspectives on Why Individuals Continue to Engage in Violent Crime in Memphis-Shelby County

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Earlier this year, Shelby County Sheriff Floyd Bonner approached me about the need to know more about what drives some individuals to engage in persistent violent behavior. The outgrowth of that discussion was a grant from the Shelby County Sheriff's Office to the University of Memphis to conduct research to help determine what the drivers are behind persistent violent offenders and what might be done to decrease violent crime in the future, based on those offenders' experiences.

Researchers at the University of Memphis explored the effect of a fatalistic attitude on violent behaviors, and whether anticipating an early death due to engaging in a life of crime resulted in continuing to engage in that behavior. This was done through both a survey of some 300 felony inmates and reviewing literature on previous studies.

Through the same survey, the researchers explored how fatalistic attitudes compared to other factors such as gang affiliation, neighborhood risks, and parental incarceration had an impact.

Finally, an in-depth interview was conducted with 30 felony inmates, who were asked why individuals engage in violent behavior and, in their own opinions, ways to address it.

Thanks to Max Helms for taking the lead in conducting the survey and to Austin Wyatt for tabulating survey results and helping with the literature review. I thank Dr. Jerry Watson of the School of Social Work for conducting the in-person interviews with felony inmates. Finally, I give a special thanks to Dr. Laura Iesue with the Public Safety Institute for taking the lead in this research project and pulling it together in this final report.

Sincerely,

William L. Gibbons
Executive Director

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Introduction

Criminal justice agencies commonly use strategies to reduce offending that focus on deterrence, or the threat of an increase in the swiftness, severity and certainty of punishment for various crimes (Braga & Weisburd, 2012; Chalfin & McCrary, 2017). Often these strategies actively involve not only law enforcement but also motivate private sector organizations and community mobilization to actively encourage individuals to desist criminal behavior (Abt, 2019; Braga & Weisburd, 2012). While deterrent-based strategies have been shown to be effective for most individuals, they can fail for others if those individuals do not fear the consequences, or when the rewards for continuing in a life of crime outweigh the risks of punishment (Braga & Weisburd, 2012).

One strong explanation as to why some individuals may continuously engage in crime, particularly violent and/or gang-based crimes regardless of the risks, is that individuals expect an early death or perceive that their lives will be cut short (also referred to as fatalism or future discounting). In other words, those individuals do not envision a future for themselves and thus are more likely to discount long-term consequences, take on a 'here and now' or 'live fast and die young' mentality, and ultimately engage in criminal behavior (Anderson, 1999; Bolland et al., 2005; Duke et al., 2009, 2011; Piquero, 2016; Swisher & Warner, 2013; Tillyer, 2015). Social science research has routinely demonstrated that an individual's expectation of an early death and/or fatalistic attitudes is a strong correlate of criminal behavior, particularly violent behavior and gang-related activities among individuals who reside in inner-city 'war zones' (Rotter, 1966; Twenge et al., 2004). As the threat of punishment may not work for all individuals, particularly some individuals who routinely engage in violent crime, more work is needed to understand why deterrent strategies may not work for this small group of individuals. As violent crime remains an ongoing issue,

even while police agencies, private sector organizations, and communities ramp up their deterrence efforts, particularly in the Memphis-Shelby County area, this project aims to go to the next step to better understand persistent, violent offending by considering the following:

First, we explore the correlating and mediating effects between offending behaviors and fatalistic attitudes compared to other determinants of offending behavior-parental incarceration, community factors, gang-affiliation, and many others. Recognizing that efforts to deter offending by increasing the cost of engaging in crime (i.e. more severe penalties such as incarceration) are likely to have little impact on individuals who have little hope for the future and hold fatalistic attitudes (Anderson, 1999; Hill et al., 1997), it is important to consider how such fatalistic attitudes may impact our own approaches to combating violent crime in Memphis-Shelby County. This approach, while exploratory, can provide some early insights into how fatalistic attitudes, compared to other factors associated with fatalism, may be interacting with one another to result in criminal behavior. Accordingly, we can get some better insights on how crime might be deterred more effectively based on these results.

Finally, we provide a more in-depth qualitative assessment of offenders by asking them why individuals engage in violent behavior and how violent crime may be reduced in Memphis-Shelby County based on their experiences and perceptions. This work is important because, while we often rely on crime data to assess the effectiveness of crime prevention, we do not routinely engage offenders to understand their perspectives on crime and crime control in the Memphis community. Research that explores criminal behavior, violence, and how it affects the lives of individuals who have lived the experience can contribute to designing better prevention program components to match the communities and individuals which they serve. In the long run, it can help modify negative behavioral outcomes.

Literature Review

It is well documented that offending behavior, particularly violent offending behavior, carries long-term risks and consequences for offenders. This includes, but is not limited to, a reduction in average life expectancy, especially if engaged in gun-related violence, poor health and diminished life expectancy, incarceration and many others (Brezina et al., 2008; Hagan, 1991, 1997; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1997b, 1997a). Criminological work has taken this line of research a step further to highlight how this unique group of persistent offenders continues to engage in a life of crime due to a sense of 'hopelessness' or 'fatalism' (Anderson, 1999; Brezina et al., 2008; Garbarino, 1992; Hoffman, 2004; Jacobs et al., 2000; McCarthy & Hagan, 2005; Topalli, 2005). Fatalism as a life perspective assumes the position that the life of a human being and the destiny of that human is predetermined, and the individual is unable to create any significant change to the outcome regardless of that individual's decisions and actions (Navarro et al., 2018; Solomon, 2003). Thus, individuals often adopt a 'here and now' attitude in which they believe they have no future, have little to lose, and thus may continue engaging in risky activities such as criminal activities (Brezina et al., 2008; Piquero, 2016).

Systemic data on this topic includes both quantitative and qualitative studies examining the relationship between future life uncertainty and criminal behavior. These studies generally support that anticipated early death, a measure for fatalism, is associated with crime and violence. For example, at an early age, individuals adopt pessimistic mindsets that predispose them to the internalization of negative outlooks on the world, themselves, and prospects for the future (Haynie et al., 2014; Jamieson & Romer, 2008). For the adolescent, this negative and hopeless mentality increases the likelihood of developing a fatalistic attitude (Jamieson & Romer, 2008). Research shows that fatalism is positively associated with youth participation in risk behavior (Haynie et al., 2014; Navarro et al., 2018; Swisher & Warner, 2013; Warner & Swisher, 2015; Wolff et al., 2020). Work by Brezina and colleagues (2008) utilized multimethod approaches to analyze anticipated early death (fatalism) and crime and found that there is a positive relationship between fatalistic attitudes and the engagement of

criminal activities. Work by Piquero (2016) which utilized longitudinal data found that factors such as gender, race or ethnicity, and adverse neighborhoods impact perceptions of fatalism, with fatalism determining trajectories of offending, perceptions of risk and rewards, and general impulse control.

Other works have found that potential determinants such as age, sex, race, past vicarious and direct victimization experiences, employment opportunities and other neighborhood factors can also impact fatalistic attitudes (Anderson, 1999; Brezina et al., 2008; Duke et al., 2011; Jamieson & Romer, 2008; Moffitt, 1993; Piquero, 2016; Sampson & Laub, 1997b; Swisher & Warner, 2013; Warner & Swisher, 2015). This includes, but is not limited to, factors such as past or current gang involvement, perceptions of safety in one's neighborhood, families receiving public assistance, and poor academic performance, including having a poor GPA or opinion of grades or school success.

Study Context

In summary, extensive qualitative and quantitative research has indicated that fatalistic attitudes may drive offending behaviors, and that such fatalistic attitudes can be commonly attributed to individual, familial and community-based factors. Indeed, it is a useful framework to understand violent crime in multiple contexts. Violent crime remains an ongoing issue in Memphis-Shelby County, with police agencies, private sector organizations, and communities ramping up their deterrence efforts to address the crime. Indeed, under the Safe Community Action Plan (https://memphiscrime.org), several steps seek to not only reduce violent crime with the use of law enforcement but also focus on the strengthening of intervention efforts for violent and other juvenile delinquent behaviors.

In line with these goals, this exploratory study asks the following: How might someone's past criminal behavior be correlated with fatalistic attitudes both before and after they are released from prison? How are other individual, familial and neighborhood-based perceptions impacting this relationship between criminal behavior and fatalistic attitudes? Finally, by providing a more in-depth qualitative

assessment of offenders, we can ask their perspectives on why individuals engage in violent behavior and how violent crime be reduced.

Methods

Participants

To best assess how fatalistic attitudes result in criminal offending and what can be done to deter crime in the future in the Memphis-Shelby County area, a convenience sample of state inmates (N=330) housed at the Shelby County Correctional Center facility was recruited to participate in a paper and pen survey (N=300) and to be involved in semi-structured qualitative interviews (N=30). Male felony inmates who were 18 years of age or older and were residents of the Memphis-Shelby County area were eligible to participate in the survey, interview, or both.

Procedures[1]

A mixed-method analysis was utilized in this study. The survey results collected are utilized to ask inmates about their perceptions of fatalism, past victimization experiences, neighborhoods, and other factors that correlate with fatalistic attitudes. Utilizing the interviews, we asked inmates more detail about their perceptions and experiences in Memphis-Shelby County, what they feel drives acts of violence, and their thoughts on how crime can be prevented. Specifically, we were interested in understanding what factors contributed to violent behavior as well as what resources they believed would prevent them from engaging in criminal behavior after their release. We also asked their perspectives on current initiatives being utilized in Memphis-Shelby County to decrease violent crime, including what they thought was not working well, what was promising, and what they believed should be done to decrease violent crime in the future.

Mixed method designs have numerous advantages than simply conducting a

[1] A more detailed explanation of the recruitment process, interview and survey questions utilized, data analysis and coding techniques of the qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis are available by request.

quantitative or qualitative study, especially when sample sizes are limited (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Further, such approaches are flexible and adaptable to research designs, allowing researchers to gain more information than just quantitative or qualitative research alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). These types of studies allow participants to fully reflect their point of views and generally 'give a voice' to the participants to ensure that findings are grounded in their full experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Variables

The primary variable of interest in the first part of this study included a scale of 'fatalistic attitudes' with the following three survey questions: *By the time you reach the age of 35, how likely is it that the following might happen to you?: "I will have likely been shot with a gun; I will have been stabbed with a knife; I will no longer be alive."* Respondents could answer whether each event was 'very likely' to happen to them (3), 'somewhat likely' (2), 'not too likely' (1), 'very unlikely' (0), or that the question was not applicable because they were over the age of 35. These three questions were combined into a fatalism scale (Cronbach's alpha 0.87 mean unstandardized) with scores closer to 0 indicating that they were very unlikely to agree that the following three categories could happen to them and higher scores indicating higher fatalistic attitudes, or that these events could happen to them.

We also included a measure for crime type, which was left intentionally broad to account for multiple types of violent crime, including the traditional crimes associated with violence - murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault. As a result, we considered individuals who received at least a felony conviction resulting in one or more years of incarceration in one or more categories to be considered 'violent.' We asked individuals to answer the following question. : *Are you currently being held in this facility for any of the following (Circle All that Apply): 'a violent offense, such as physical or sexual assault, rape, robbery, manslaughter, attempted murder, or murder?'* (3); *' a drug offense, such as possessing, selling or manufacturing drugs?'* (1); *'a property offense, such as burglary, larceny, auto theft, bad checks, or forgery?'* (2); *'any other offense?'* (0).

Then, finally, if individuals circled multiple offense types, we created a category for 'multiple offenses' (4).

Finally, we included several independent variables which have been strongly correlated with fatalistic attitudes in the past. These included questions about gang involvement (*Do you consider yourself to be part of a gang?*); perceptions of neighborhood risk (*In general, how worried were you that someone would stop you in the street, threaten you, hit you or hurt you in your neighborhood?)*; whether an individual perceived gangs, drugs or shootings to be a serious problem in his neighborhood (*Please tell me which of the following situations is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not so serious, not serious or not a problem in your old neighborhood: gangs or crime syndicates; drug traffic or the sale of illegal drugs; shootings)*; whether prior to incarceration they found schoolwork to be important to them (*Thinking about your time at the last school you attended, how important would you say schoolwork was to you?)*; whether, when growing up, their family received food stamps or other assistance (*Growing up, did anyone in your home receive welfare, food stamps or other forms of government assistance?)*; and whether one or both parents or guardians were incarcerated while growing up *(Was one or both of your parents or guardians ever incarcerated while you were growing up?).* Past victimization experiences outside of school (*How often have the following things happened to you while off school property: Been shot at, been stabbed with a knife or other weapon?)* were included, as were factors such as one's age (*How old are you?).*

Ethical Considerations

As this research uses in-depth interviews of participants, it is imperative to consider the roles and relationships of both the researchers and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Accordingly, multiple steps were taken to minimize researcher bias while also striving to protect the confidentiality and overall mental health of those who participated in the interview.

First, as individuals who are incarcerated have been identified as a protected population, this research was designed in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (2005) from the Department of Health and Human Services, Title 45, Public Welfare, Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects, Subpart C. Accordingly, before any surveys and interviews could be collected, this project had to undergo a full review and approval from the University of Memphis's Institutional Review Board. In terms of the interview and survey design, all questions that were asked were open-ended, allowing participants to describe their experience in their own words. Further, no names or other identifying information that could incriminate individuals were collected.

Second, to prevent prison staff bias in recruiting, the role prison staff helped in facilitating participation was minimized. Prison staff notified the inmates that a specific study was being conducted. However, it was up to the researchers to provide more detail about the study and inform the inmates that they would not be adversely affected by their decision to participate or not participate. To minimize coercion, the voluntary nature of the study was repeated on several occasions during recruitment.

Third, during the survey process as well as interviews, prison staff members were asked to wait outside the room so to provide some privacy to the inmates during the data collection process and to decrease any chances of coercion in responses. During the survey process, approximately 40 individuals at a time met with the researcher where they were read the consent form and read each question on the survey. During the interviews, each participant met with the primary researcher one-on-one in a private setting offered by the facility. The survey collection process lasted between 30 minutes to an hour for each round of data collection, whereas the interviews lasted anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the length of the participants' responses.

Finally, all participants were provided the option to talk with mental health counselors available. Prior to our arrival, the facility made the counselors aware of our arrival, the research, and that inmates may need to meet with them following the survey and interviews.

Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics

Before the discussing the findings of fatalistic attitudes, it is important to briefly describe our sample, which is summarized in Table 1. On average, among our fatalism scale, that is individuals who signified that they believed they were likely to be shot with a gun, stabbed with a knife or no longer be alive, individuals on average believed they were not too likely to experience those outcomes, meaning, overall, fatalistic attitudes around our sample group were low. Approximately 31 percent in our sample committed a violent crime, such as physical or sexual assault, rape, robbery, manslaughter, attempted murder or murder; 24 percent had committed some form of serious property crime including burglary, larceny, auto theft, bad checks, or forgery; 21 percent committed a drug-related crime; 17 percent committed some other offense; and only 6 percent of our sample committed multiple offenses.

Table 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SAMPLE

Variable	NUMBER*	MEAN/%**	SD***	MIN.	MAX.
Fatalism Scale	172	1.02	1.03	0	3
Crime Type					
Other	287	0.17	0.37	0	1
Drug	287	0.21	0.41	0	1
Property	287	0.24	0.43	0	1
Violent	287	0.31	0.47	0	1
Multiple	287	0.06	0.24	0	1
Gang Involved	294	0.21	0.41	0	1
Neighborhood Factors					
Neighborhood Risk	296	1.07	1.07	0	3
Neighborhood Gangs	287	2.66	1.37	0	4
Drugs	287	2.72	1.32	0	4
Shootings	287	2.70	1.38	0	4
Educational Importance					
School Work	295	2.60	1.45	0	4
Family Factors					
Public assistance	297	0.67	0.47	0	1
Parental incarceration	295	0.50	0.64	0	2
Past Victimization					
Shot at	286	1.01	1.08	0	3
Stabbed	290	0.41	0.84	0	3
Demographics					
Age	295	36.01	10.08	19	66

*The number responding. The fatalism number is lower than others because only those under 35 responded.

**Either the mean on a scale or a percentage, depending on the question

***Standard deviation

Approximately 21 percent of our sample acknowledged being involved in a gang. In terms of neighborhood perceptions, most were not very worried that someone would stop them in the street, threaten them, hit them or hurt them in the neighborhood. However, most perceived gangs or crime syndicates, drug trafficking or sales, and/or shootings in the neighborhood to be somewhat of a serious problem. Across this group, schoolwork was also, on average, seen as somewhat important. More were likely to receive food stamps or some other assistance growing up than to not have received assistance, and about half our sample had one or more family members or guardians previously incarcerated. In terms of victimization experiences, on average, most had been shot at least once outside of school. However, most had never been stabbed outside of school.

Violent Offending and Fatalistic Attitudes

Does Fatalism Correlate with Different Offending Types?

Next, pairwise correlations in Table 2 (at the end of this report) allow us to consider whether fatalism correlates with our different crime categories – violent, property, drug, other or multiple.

Based on the correlation, only drug offenses were significantly associated with fatalistic attitudes ($b=-0.11$, $p<0.10$). Individuals were less likely to have a fatalistic attitude if they engaged in drug-based violent offenses. No other offense was statistically associated with fatalistic attitudes. While there did not appear to be a direct correlation between violent offenses and fatalistic attitudes, there were several neighborhood, school, familial, past victimization and demographic characteristics that were significantly associated with fatalistic attitudes among individuals. Perceptions of neighborhood risk ($b=0.26$, $p<0.01$), presence of gangs ($b=0.18$, $p<0.05$) and drugs ($b=0.16$, $p<0.05$) in neighborhoods were all significantly and positively associated with fatalistic attitudes among individuals. Perceiving schoolwork as important was associated with a decrease in fatalistic attitudes ($b=-0.30$, $p<0.01$), signifying that as individuals felt that school was more important they were less likely to have a fatalistic attitude. Finally, factors such as a history of parental incarceration ($b=0.12$, $p<0.01$), past experiences being shot ($b=0.17$, $p<0.01$), or stabbed outside of

school (b=0.18, p<0.05), and one's age (b=0.18, p<0.01) were all associated with an increase in fatalistic attitudes.

Mediating Effects

To assess whether some of these additional factors contributed to fatalistic attitudes, particularly based on crime type, we also ran several mediation tests between variables linking these individual and neighborhood factors to the crime type, then to fatalistic attitudes. This approach provides a better picture into the direct and indirect effects individual and neighborhood factors can have on both fatalistic attitudes but also whether these factors are contributed to specific crime types. Results of these direct and indirect relationships are available in Tables 3a through 3e, with each table specifying a specific crime category.

Figure 1:

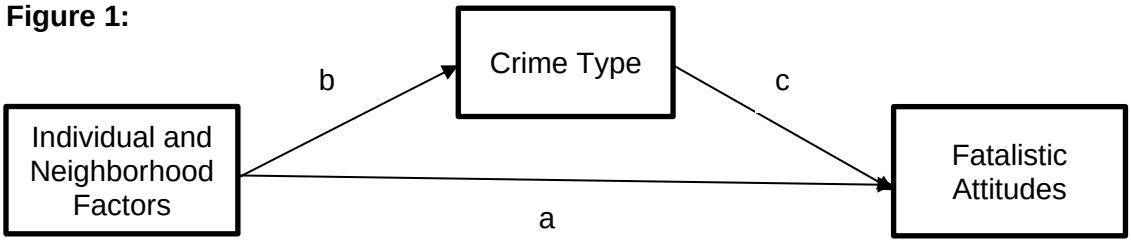

Table 3a focuses on the category of those incarcerated for a violent crime. We see that a violent crime background does not significantly impact fatalistic attitudes. Nor do factors such as gang involvement. However, as reflected in the fatalism column in Table 3a, we do see a direct connection between specific neighborhood factors, namely perceptions of risk (b=0.15, p<0.10) being associated with an increase in fatalistic attitudes. This means that as one's perceptions of risk or when they are worried that someone will stop them in the streets, threaten to hurt them or otherwise, they are more likely to have a higher sense of fatalistic attitude. Factors such as perceived importance of schoolwork decreased fatalistic attitudes (b=-0.18, p<0.01), meaning as individuals perceived school to be more important, they were less likely to have a fatalistic outlook. None of our other variables had a significant impact on fatalistic attitudes. Moving to the next column linking individual and

neighborhood factors to violent crime, only previously being stabbed was a significant predictor of being associated with a violent crime (b=0.09, p<0.10).

Table 3b focuses on the category of those incarcerated for drug-related offenses. Like our results in Table 3a, crime type was not significantly associated with fatalistic attitudes. However, individual factors such as perceptions of neighborhood risk were directly associated with an increase in fatalistic attitudes (b=0.15, p<0.10) and importance of school was associated with a decrease in fatalistic attitudes (b=-0.18, p<0.01). Past parental incarceration was also a direct contributor to fatalistic attitudes for those who were incarcerated for drug-related crimes (b=0.20, p<0.10). Focusing on the links between individual-level factors and crime-type, past parental incarceration was also a significant contributor to being incarcerated for drug-related crimes (b=0.12, p<0.05), whereas previously being stabbed was associated with a decrease in being involved in drug-related crimes (b=-0.08, p<0.05).

Table 3a:Direct and Indirect Effects of Individual Factors on Crime Type and Fatalism (Violent Crime)

	Fatalism	***Violent***	***Crime to Fatalism***
Crime Type			
Violent	--	--	0.08(0.15)
Drug	--	--	--
Property	--	--	--
Any Other	--	--	--
Multiple	--	--	--
Gang Involved	-0.11(0.18)	0.03(0.09)	**--**
Neighborhood Factors			
Neighborhood Risk	0.15(0.08)^{t}	-0.00(0.04)	--
Neighborhood Gangs	0.04(0.10)	-0.03(0.05)	--
Drugs	-0.00(0.10)	0.05(0.05)	--
Shootings	-0.02(0.09)	0.02(0.06)	--
Educational Importance			
School Work	-0.18(0.06)**	0.01(0.03)	--
Family Factors			
Public assistance	0.12(0.17)	-0.02(0.08)	--
Parental Incarceration	0.18(0.12)	-0.04(0.06)	--
Past Victimization			
Shot at	0.10(0.08)	-0.06(0.04)	--
Stabbed	0.11(0.09)	0.09(0.05)^{t}	--
Demographics			
Age	0.01(0.01)	-0.00(0.00)	--

Number: 156

^{t}p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001; *results reported in robust standard errors*

Table 3c focuses on those incarcerated for property crimes, where once again we do not see a direct significant relationship between crime type and fatalistic attitudes. However, we see the same relationship between neighborhood risk ($b=0.14$, $p<0.10$), and school importance ($b=-0.17$, $p<0.05$). None of these individual factors were associated with a particular crime type. Similar patterns for neighborhood risk and school were also seen for any other crimes (Table 3d). Once again, there were no direct, significant relationships between crime type and fatalistic attitudes. However, turning first to Table 3d, risk of shootings in the neighborhood ($b=0.07$, $p<0.10$) was significantly associated with other crime types, and age was negatively associated with other crime types ($b=-0.00$, $p<0.10$). Table 3e contains the information on those incarcerated for multiple crime types, with no direct link between crime type and fatalistic attitudes. However, once again neighborhood risk ($b=0.15$, $p<0.10$) and schoolwork ($b=-0.18$, $p<0.05$) were associated with fatalistic attitudes. Our qualitative analyses in the next section will explore these factors in more detail and what interviewed inmates feel are keys to violence and ways to address it.

Table 3b: Direct and Indirect Effects of Individual Factors on Crime Type and Fatalism (Drug Crime)

	Fatalism	***Drug***	***Crime to Fatalism***
Crime Type			
Violent	--	--	
Drug	--	--	-0.24(0.19)
Property	--	--	
Any Other	--	--	
Multiple	--	--	
Gang Involved	-0.08(0.18)	0.09(0.08)	
Neighborhood Factors			
Neighborhood Risk	0.15(0.08)^{t}	-0.00(0.03)	
Neighborhood Gangs	0.04(0.09)	0.02(0.03)	
Drugs	0.00(0.10)	-0.00(0.04)	
Shootings	-0.04(0.09)	-0.06(0.04)	
Educational Importance			
School Work	-0.18(0.06)**	0.00(0.02)	
Family Factors			
Public assistance	0.11(0.17)	-0.05(0.07)	
Parental Incarceration	0.20(0.12)^{t}	0.12(0.05)*	
Past Victimization			
Shot at	0.11(0.08)	0.06(0.03)^{t}	
Stabbed	0.10(0.09)	-0.08(0.04)*	
Demographics			
Age	0.01(0.01)	0.00(0.00)	

Number: 156

^{t}p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001; *results reported in robust standard errors*

Table 3c: Direct and Indirect Effects of Individual Factors on Crime Type and Fatalism (Property Crime)

	Fatalism	***Property***	***Crime to Fatalism***
Crime Type			
Violent	--	--	--
Drug	--	--	--
Property			0.17(0.19)
Any Other	--	--	--
Multiple	--	--	--
Gang Involved	-0.09(0.18)	-0.11(0.08)	
Neighborhood Factors			
Neighborhood Risk	0.14(0.08)^{t}	0.040.04)	
Neighborhood Gangs	0.03(0.09)	0.05(0.03)	
Drugs	0.01(0.10)	-0.03(0.04)	
Shootings	-0.02(0.09)	-0.02(0.04)	
Educational Importance			
School Work	-0.17(0.06)**	-0.02(0.02)	
Family Factors			
Public assistance	0.12(0.16)	-0.01(0.08)	
Parental Incarceration	0.19(0.12)	-0.07(0.06)	
Past Victimization			
Shot at	0.10(0.08)	0.02(0.03)	
Stabbed	0.11(0.09)	-0.00(0.04)	
Demographics			
Age	0.01(0.010)	0.00(0.00)	

Number: 156

^{t}p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001; *results reported in robust standard errors*

Table 3d: Direct and Indirect Effects of Individual Factors on Crime Type and Fatalism (Any Other)

	Fatalism	***Any Other***	***Crime to Fatalism***
Crime Type			
Violent	--	--	
Drug	--	--	
Property	--	--	
Any Other			-0.22(0.21)
Multiple	--	--	
Gang Involved	-0.01(0.18)	-0.04(0.08)	
Neighborhood Factors			
Neighborhood Risk	0.14(0.08)^{t}	-0.03(0.03)	
Neighborhood Gangs	0.03(0.09)	-0.04(0.04)	
Drugs	0.00(0.10)	-0.01(0.04)	
Shootings	-0.01(0.09)	0.07(0.04)^{t}	
Educational Importance			
School Work	-0.18(0.06)**	0.00(0.02)	
Family Factors			
Public assistance	0.13(0.17)	0.05(0.05)	
Parental Incarceration	0.18(0.12)	0.00(0.05)	
Past Victimization			
Shot at	0.18(0.12)	-0.04(0.03)	
Stabbed	0.12(0.09)	0.02(0.04)	
Demographics			
Age	0.01(0.010)	-0.00(0.00)^{t}	

N= 156

^{t}p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001; *results reported in robust standard errors*

Table 3e: Direct and Indirect Effects of Individual Factors on Crime Type and Fatalism (Multiple)

	Fatalism	*Multiple*	*Crime to Fatalism*
Crime Type			
Violent	--	--	
Drug	--	--	
Property	--	--	
Any Other	--	--	
Multiple	--	--	0.16(0.33)
Gang Involved	-0.11(0.18)	0.02(0.06)	
Neighborhood Factors			
Neighborhood Risk	0.15(0.08)^{t}	0.02(0.06)	
Neighborhood Gangs	0.04(0.10)	0.01(0.03)	
Drugs	0.00(0.10)	-0.00(0.04)	
Shootings	-0.02(0.09)	-0.01(0.02)	
Educational Importance			
School Work	-0.18(0.06)**	-0.00(0.01)	
Family Factors			
Public assistance	0.12(0.17)	0.02(0.04)	
Parental Incarceration	0.18(0.12)	-0.01(0.03)	
Past Victimization			
Shot at	0.10(0.08)	0.02(0.03)	
Stabbed	0.12(0.09)	-0.02(0.02)	
Demographics			
Age	0.01(0.01)	0.00(0.	

N= 156

^{t}p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001; *results reported in robust standard errors*

Approaches to Decreasing Violent Crime

To understand approaches to decreasing violent behavior in Memphis-Shelby County, we interviewed inmates about what they perceived to be the drivers of violence. We asked them what they believed the criminal justice system in Memphis-Shelby County was doing incorrectly to combat violent crime, what they believed was going well in Memphis-Shelby County's approach, and what other methods they thought the community could utilize to reduce violent crime. We then followed up by asking individuals what they believed would have prevented them from entering a life of crime and accordingly what could prevent them from engaging in violent crime to better understand not only the role law enforcement can play to reduce violent crime, but what other parts of the community may contribute in the efforts to decrease violence.

Focus on the Younger Generation: Education, After- School Activities and Mentorship.

Inmates who were interviewed acknowledged the importance of positive behavioral influences at an early age. Overwhelmingly, respondents believed that they needed help with education and mentoring to avoid entering a life of crime. They believed that working with the younger generation even before they engaged in illegal activities would work to stop the cycle of intergenerational incarceration but would also provide educational opportunities and the ability to engage in activities that are alternatives to delinquency. This includes, but is not limited to, establishing local basketball and other sports tournaments, providing incentives for people to engage in careers in law enforcement or the military, as well as other forms of training. Simply reinvesting in schools and incentives for better education and teacher attainment in inner city schools were seen as a crucial part of addressing violent crime in Memphis-Shelby County.

> *"The focus needs to be on the younger generation…we need to help by giving them something to do because a lot of young people have nothing to do and nothing to look forward to. That's why they become involved in gangs."*

> *"We need to invest in the younger generation through education and other activities. You can't arrest your way out of it [violent crime]. You'll only*

compound the problem. We need to try to inject positivity and opportunities into them to alleviate a lot of the issues that we have."

Mentorship, whether through the schools or after-school activities was also seen as crucial for decreasing violent crime. This included working with organizations such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters or through one-on-one peer mentorship that provided a safe space for individuals to escape dangerous or criminogenic environments, even temporarily, or for mentors to educate individuals on the consequences of engaging in crime.

"I wish I had [in my life] people this positive and productive people that had some meaning out here in the in the history of Memphis, TN… like black activists, mentors, people that have things going positive and productive in their lives that can prevent me from going left field and going right in life."

"[A mentor] can tell you this is the opportunity we have for you if you choose to make the right choices and decisions. But if you choose to make the wrong choices and decision and commit violent acts, this is what you will be facing beforehand….I feel like as a young 15-year-old kid, somebody gave me a gun saying 'hey that dude over there got 1000 dollars, you can take that from him. But if I had somebody like you know if you choose to do that, you will be facing 10, mandatory 10 years, at 100% or twenty years at 100% or 30 years, depending on how violent the crime gets my [life might have been different]."

Get Rid of the Bullets, Be More Involved in the Community.

Respondents also recognized the problem of gun violence in Memphis-Shelby County and how this has been exacerbated by the ease of getting guns, including the lifting of restrictions in gun laws in the state. They actually expressed support for both the Shelby County Sheriff's Office and Memphis Police Department in their approaches to dealing with gun crime and targeting the worst offenders in the community. However, they also expressed that they were upset about what they perceived as police targeting of more low-level offenses. They believed that this increased targeting is only compounding the problem of violent crime in lower-income communities as one individual stated:

"Anybody that commits a crime in and of itself, especially violent crime should be arrested for making a choice. But I think overall, having an approach to where we can lock our way up out of the situation only compounds the problem. We are leaving those, the second generation, out there with no leadership, with no type of direction, and no opportunities."

In addition to focusing on being tough on crime, individuals believed that more opportunities for interaction with law enforcement were needed in the community. Specifically, they believed that if police would come into the neighborhoods, could be more involved in community service, or if law enforcement representatives could be seen giving something back to the community, crime could be reduced. Block parties and "stop the violence" events were viewed positively as one method for addressing crime. However, they also believed that those who were working to address the crime problem needed to do more than just 'talk' about the problem.

"Go to it [the communities] and really sit in there and help folks. See how they are living. Don't just get on TV and talk about the community and talk about where these crimes and stuff happened. Go help the people."

Mental Health Access Is Critical.

Mental or behavioral health access, for both individuals within the community but also for those who were to be released from prison, was incredibly important, along with related drug addiction problems. Many believed that a key contributor to violent behavior in Memphis is due to mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, lack of self-control, and anger issues, and was also due to youth being raised by family members who also suffered from mental health issues.

Respondents believed that not only did law enforcement need to be better versed in handling mental health concerns, but social workers needed to be more involved with police

to address mental health. Further, more resources needed to be invested into mental health facilities, resources, and general access in communities to address crises before they resulted in violence.

> *"I wish I had more support to get counseling and to figure out the root of my issues before I tried to let alcohol and drugs be the band aid for everything, because that only put fuel onto the flame."*

Access to resources also included other alternatives such as alcoholics anonymous, sober living situations, or simply just access to speak to someone when they were feeling suicidal or homicidal or if they themselves were a victim.

Pre and Post-Release Support Can Stop Crime.

Finally, individuals believed that access to resources pre and post-release could prevent recidivism and overall contribute to a decrease in violent behavior. Such resources and approaches included helping individuals with housing, including second chance program housing and providing a safe living arrangement while they looked for steady employment. They also believed additional educational opportunities and training either immediately upon their release, or as part of wrap-around services prior to release, could help provide them better opportunities in the future. Accordingly, such services could also help with better access to jobs or employment that provided a livable wage and better financial security for oneself and family.

Discussion and Conclusions

Violent crime remains an ongoing issue in the Memphis community, with police agencies, private sector organizations, and neighborhoods focusing their efforts to deter violent crime. While the Memphis community's approaches to decreasing violent crime remain promising, there has been inadequate focus on asking offenders what factors drive violence and what they think might prevent persistent, violent offenders from continuously engaging in violent crime even after incarceration. Up until recently, nobody has asked those who are committing the violence about what causes violent behavior and what can be done to prevent crime in

the future, including what resulted in persistent offending up until their incarceration. One strong explanation as to why individuals may continuously engage in crime, particularly violent and/or gang-based crimes regardless of the risks, is that individuals expect an early death or perceive that their lives will be cut short (also referred to as fatalism or future discounting), with research previously demonstrating that an individual's expectation of an early death and/or fatalistic attitudes is a strong correlate of criminal behavior, particularly violent behavior and gang-related activities among individuals who reside in inner-city 'war zones' (Rotter, 1966; Twenge et al., 2004). Using fatalism as a framework to understand persistent violent offending, this exploratory study sought to (1) explore the correlation of mediating on intervening effects on offending behaviors and fatalistic attitudes; (2) look at the impact of other determinants of criminal behavior - parental incarceration, community factors, gang-affiliation, and many others; and (3) provide a more in-depth qualitative assessment of offenders by asking them what drives violence and how violent crime may be reduced in Memphis-Shelby County based on their experiences and perceptions. This approach, while exploratory, can provide some early insights into how fatalistic attitudes, compared to other factors associated with fatalism, may be interacting with one another to result in criminal behavior. Accordingly, we can get some better insights on how crime might be deterred more effectively based on these results. This work is also important because while we often rely on crime data to assess the effectiveness of crime prevention, we do not routinely engage offenders to understand their perspectives on crime and crime control in the Memphis community.

The results of this study, through focusing both on the quantitative and qualitative aspects, showed some interesting connections between fatalistic attitudes; neighborhood, individual, and familial characteristics; and criminal behavior. However, before summarizing the findings, there are several limitations that need to be considered. As this study was exploratory in nature, more research is needed to make causal claims on fatalistic attitudes and criminal behaviors, though we can glean a lot from the responses of those who were interviewed. For instance, research that focuses on fatalistic attitudes and crime is usually conducted among individuals who have *not* been incarcerated but are still engaging in criminal behaviors. As our sample comes from individuals who are already incarcerated, it is hard to make causal claims linking deviance and fatalistic attitudes, though our research question about fatalism

based on perceived risk does consider one's *future likelihood* of being shot, stabbed, or alive by the time they reach the age of 35. To make more causal claims linking fatalism, crime and even our individual, neighborhood and familial factors, more long-term longitudinal studies need to be conducted to get at the root causes of crime. Nevertheless, triangulating our quantitative results with the qualitative analyses on what drives criminal behavior and what can be done to stop crime in the future illustrates the relative *lack* of importance of fatalistic attitudes across this group of incarcerated individuals, and instead links the *importance* of factors such as school involvement, neighborhood environment and even access to mental health and drug addiction resources.

Turning to the quantitative research, this study found that while there might not be a direct link between the types of crime committed and fatalistic attitudes, past perceptions of neighborhood risk and even the importance of schooling are direct contributors to fatalistic attitudes, with neighborhood risk factors increasing the level of fatalism and recognizing the importance of school reducing the level of fatalism.

Differentiating between crime types illustrates how other factors may also impact crime in the Memphis community. Looking at other determinants or predictors of criminal behavior, past victimization experiences such as being shot or stabbed were associated with both violent and drug-related criminal behavior. And, unlike our other crime categories, being associated with a drug-related crime is also impacted by other factors such as parental incarceration. (The importance of parental incarceration and past victimization on drug-related offenses needs to be explored.)

These quantitative results are corroborated by our qualitative interviews which stressed the importance of schools, school-related activities and mentoring; neighborhood involvement and investment; and issues related to mental health and drug addiction. Lack of access to resources to help with drug addiction and mental health counseling were seen as drivers of criminal conduct. And the realization of easy access to guns may impact the perceived level of neighborhood risk.

In summary, while fatalistic attitudes may not be the standing factor associated with crime, in particular, violence there is a necessity to consider how outside factors such as

neighborhoods, schools and mentoring, easy access to guns, and mental health impact the issues of violence in the community. Accordingly, to address violent crime in the future, effective law enforcement and prosecution is important, especially when it comes to gun crime, but we suggest a more rounded approach that also focuses on stronger neighborhoods, schools and mentoring, and mental health be included.

Table 2: PAIRWISE CORRELATIONS

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
(1) Fatalism Scale	1.00																
(2) Any Other Crime	-0.03	1.00															
(3) Drug Crime	-0.11*	-0.23***	1.00														
(4) Property Crime	0.11	-0.25***	-0.29***	1.00													
(5) Violent Crime	0.01	-0.30***	-0.35***	-0.38***	1.00												
(6) Multiple Crimes	0.04	-0.12**	-0.13**	-0.15**	-0.17***	1.00											
(7) Gang Involved	0.04	-0.01	0.05	-0.05	0.00	0.01	1.00										
(8) Neighborhood Risk	0.26**	-0.06	-0.13**	0.15***	0.02	-0.00	0.05	1.00									
(9) Neighborhood Gangs	0.18**	-0.08	-0.05	0.10*	0.01	0.01	0.15**	0.42***	1.00								
(10) Drugs	0.16**	-0.01	-0.06	0.07	0.02	-0.04	0.18***	0.36***	0.78***	1.00							
(11) Shootings	0.11	-0.00	-0.13**	0.07	0.06	-0.01	0.22***	0.47***	0.79***	0.78***	1.00						
(12) School Work	-0.30**	-0.03	-0.02	-0.06	0.12**	-0.04	0.01	-0.01	-0.05	-0.10*	-0.02	1.00					
(13) Food Insecurity	0.10	0.01	-0.03	0.06	-0.02	-0.04	0.11*	0.14**	0.23***	0.24***	0.25***	-0.00	1.00				
(14) Parental Incarceration	0.12**	0.01	0.00	0.00	-0.04	0.04	0.14**	0.11*	0.18***	0.16***	0.14**	-0.02	0.15***	1.00			
(15) Shot At	0.17**	-0.09	0.06	0.06	-0.05	0.03	0.20***	0.14**	0.19***	0.10*	0.21***	-0.14**	0.01	0.05	1.00		
(16) Stabbed	0.18**	-0.02	-0.06	0.10*	0.00	-0.04	0.10*	0.15***	0.12**	0.08	0.11*	-0.10*	0.06	0.11*	0.39***	1.00	
(17) Age	0.18**	0.04	0.00	0.09	-0.09	-0.06	-0.21***	0.08	-0.08	-0.05	-0.12**	0.03	-0.01	-0.21***	-0.21***	-0.03	1.00

**** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

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