

THE MARTIAL ARTS PROJECT: EXPLORING THE USE OF THE MARTIAL ARTS  
AS AN INTERVENTION FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS WITH SUBSTANCE  
INFLUENCED VIOLENT OFFENCES

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Meliton Castillo Sysing, candidate for the degree of Master of Social Work in Social Work, has presented a thesis titled, ***The Martial Arts Project: Exploring the Use of the Martial Arts as an Intervention for Young Offenders with Substance Influenced Violent Offences***, in an oral examination held on August 29, 2016. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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## **Abstract**

Youth-committed violent offences comprise a large percentage of overall violent offences in Canada that include violent non-fatal and fatal offences, costing its citizens 7.95 billion dollars annually. Many of these offences have also occurred while under the influence of a psychoactive drug. Youth crime in general has decreased nationally in the past ten years. However, youth crime rates continue to remain high in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, doubling the national average. Traditional therapies, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and multi-systemic therapy, have been used to address substance use and violent behaviors in young offenders and have shown success. This study explores the question of the effectiveness of alternative methods of intervention, such as the martial arts, for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences. Unfortunately, there is the idea among society and organizations that work with this population that exposing violent young offenders to the martial arts will create more violent and aggressive offenders. This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lives of adult martial artists (n = 5) who attribute managing or overcoming their addictions and violent and aggressive behaviors to their participation in the martial arts. The study also explores the experiences of service providers (n = 17) who work with the young offender population and identifies their perceptions on the use of the martial arts as an intervention. Results revealed that service providers find this population challenging and frustrating to work with due to their lack of motivation to change, as they are surrounded by a negative environment and lack of pro-social support in the community. The service providers felt that the martial arts would be a beneficial intervention. The findings of the present study provided a much clearer description of the mechanisms

within martial arts that contributed to behavior change, such as supportive pro-social instructor and peers, giving them a sense of direction in life, learning how to cope with their emotions, and learning life lessons through training, such as perseverance and hard work, where other studies were unable to find the evidence.

To the martial arts participants who shared their life stories with a stranger so that others  
can have the opportunity to change their lives as they did

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Reports have estimated that crime results in an 85 billion dollar annual cost to Canadian victims and to the tax payers for denouncing, preventing, and punishing criminal acts (Easton, Furness, & Brantinghamam, 2014). Property crimes comprise the majority of crimes, but violent non-fatal offences, such as assault, robbery and sexual assault, are estimated to cost 5.85 billion dollars, while fatal crimes, such as homicide, is estimated to cost 2.2 billion dollars annually (Leung, 2004).

This being said, crime in Canada has been declining in the past ten years. The Canadian Center for Justice Statistics has reported that both the number of police-reported crimes and the Crime Severity Index (CSI), which measures the volume and severity of police-reported crime in Canada, decreased three percent from 2013-2014 (Boyce, 2015). In 2014, the overall rate of violent crime, such as robbery and assaults as measured by the CSI, declined five percent (Boyce, 2015). Even though there has been a decrease in the CSI and police-reported crimes nationwide, crime within the province of Saskatchewan continues to remain the exception with above national averages (Boyce, 2015).

Saskatchewan continued to have the highest provincial rates of police-reported crimes and CSI in 2013 and remained consistent in 2014, with the exception of the Yukon (Boyce, 2015). While the province's violent CSI declined 10% in 2013, Saskatchewan still had the highest provincial violent crime rate in Canada (Boyce, 2015). Saskatchewan's rate of major assault declined nine percent in 2013, but the rate was 2.4 times higher than the national rate, while the robbery rate was 18% higher (*Police-*

*reported crime statistics in Canada, 2014*). Saskatchewan's homicide rate was also 1.9 times higher than the national average (*Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2014*).

Youth crime consists of a large percentage of the overall number. Despite similar decreases, youth CSI rates in Saskatchewan continued to remain high, second only to Manitoba (*Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2014*). Overall, the Saskatchewan youth violent crime rate was nearly double the national rate (2588 to 1405) in 2013 (*Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2014*).

It has been reported that more than half of offenders have been under the influence of a psychoactive substance when they committed their most serious offence, with the majority of alcohol related offences being violent (Pernanen, Cousineu, Brochu, & Sun, 2002). It has been identified that up to 56% of male young offenders and 40% of young female offenders have tested positive for illegal substances with a large percentage of them (25% - 67%), across studies and justice system settings, being diagnosed with substance use disorder (SUD) (Chassin, Knight, Vargas-Chanes, Losoya, & Naranjo, 2009; Chassin, 2013). The term SUD refers to a diagnosis of substance abuse or substance dependence, while the term substance use is defined as consuming alcohol or any illicit psychoactive substance or improper use of any prescribed or over the counter medication (McHugh, Hearon, & Otto, 2010). It is estimated that over 60% of youths involved with the juvenile justice system need treatment for substance abuse problems and if left untreated, substance-using adolescents often show increased substance use and criminal activity over time (Henderson et al., 2007). The pharmacological effects of substance use may impair judgment and decision making, therefore increasing the potential to participate in illegal behavior and engage in violent and aggressive criminal

behavior while under the influence (Chassin et al., 2009; Vaughn, Freedenthal, Jenson, & Howard, 2007).

The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) is the most recent law that governs Canada's youth justice system and came into effect in 2003 (Department of Justice of Canada, 2013). Youth justice legislation has been present in Canadian law since the initial act, the Juvenile Delinquents Act (JDA) (1908-1984), to account for the differences between adult and young offenders. As youth needs are different than those of adults, as they are not simply "miniature adults," their developmental differences must be taken into consideration (Brogan, Haney-Caron, NeMoyer, & DeMatteo, 2015; Department of Justice of Canada, 2013). One of the main differences is that youth lack the maturity of adults, therefore, measures of accountability have to be congruent with a youth's level of maturity (Department of Justice of Canada, 2013). The YCJA also includes the "Declaration of Principle," which is the policy framework of the legislation (Department of Justice of Canada, 2013). The Declaration states that:

"The youth justice system is intended to protect the public by (i) holding young persons accountable through measures that are proportionate to the seriousness of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the young person (ii) promoting the rehabilitation and reintegration of young persons, and (iii) supporting crime prevention by referring young persons to programs or agencies in the community to address the circumstances underlying their offending behavior" (Department of Justice of Canada, 2013, p. 2).

The goal of changing the legislation was to create a fairer and more effective youth justice system with greater emphasis on adhering to the rights of the child, the

differences between adult and young offender systems, and reintegration and rehabilitation. Case management, therapy, and interventions for young offenders are intended to address the complex needs of this population and assist in reintegration and rehabilitation. These needs include systemic issues, such as access to resources, and personal issues, such mental health and SUDs. Studies of young offenders have identified co-morbidity of SUD and other mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (Vaughn et al., 2007) and Conduct Disorder (Conner & Lochman, 2010; Guebert & Olver, 2014).

## **1.2. Rationale and Research Question**

Traditional therapeutic interventions, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), contingency management, multidimensional family therapy (MFT), multi-systemic therapy (MST), residential treatment, and 12 step-programs have shown some positive results in reducing substance use among adolescents and young offenders (Chassin et al., 2009; Read & Brown, 2003). However, at-risk youth who display aggressive behaviors tend to be reluctant to engage in traditional talk therapy (Burt & Butler, 2011; Twemlow & Sacco, 1998; Whyte, 2001). This makes it difficult to engage clients in more traditional therapeutic modalities and therapy and many young offenders often return to substance use and criminal behavior upon release to the community from secure settings (Young, Dembo, & Henderson, 2007). Even though a number of the therapeutic interventions identified above have shown positive results, there does not appear to be one theoretical model that has been accepted and consistently proven to be the most effective approach to addressing substance use and recidivism among young offenders (Brogan et al., 2015; Chassin et al., 2009).

A study conducted by Luong and Wormith (2011) in Saskatchewan found a 62.5% recidivism rate among young offenders. Due to the high probability of recidivism, there is a need for innovative, alternative methods of intervention to be explored to accompany and further advance traditional psychotherapies (Young et al., 2007), such as addressing a young offender's recreation and leisure time. Recreation and leisure has been identified as one of the eight criminogenic needs in the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model, which has been extensively reviewed in offender literature and is the primarily used framework for offender assessment, rehabilitation, and intervention delivery (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2011; Brogan et al., 2015; Luong & Wormith, 2011; Nee, Ellis, Morris, & Wilson, 2012; Ogloff & Davis, 2004). The RNR model identifies eight criminogenic needs that have been divided into eight domains: procriminal attitudes, antisocial personality, procriminal associates, history of antisocial behavior, substance abuse, circumstances pertaining to family/marital, school/work, and leisure/recreation domains (Brogan et al., 2015). In a study conducted by Luong and Wormith (2015), they discovered that 63% of their sample of youth were identified through the Level of Service Inventory – Saskatchewan (LSI-SK), a tool that systematically assesses general risk level and adheres to the RNR model, as having problems with recreation/leisure and substance use, which is more frequent than any other risk need (Andrews et al., 2011).

Addressing the area of leisure and recreation can arguably influence change in other criminogenic areas, such as procriminal attitude/orientation and lack of prosocial peers (Luong & Wormith, 2011). This can possibly be achieved through participating in a number of recreational activities, such as the martial arts, which has been asserted to be

an experience that will “engage young people who are at clear risk for delinquent acts or impulsive violence, and even start them on positive life paths” (Zivin et al., 2001, p. 444). Involvement in the martial arts may help fill one’s leisure time and support the change process as an adjunctive intervention to more traditional treatment approaches (Woodward, 2009). Thus, the research question guiding this study is could the martial arts be an effective intervention for young offenders with substance related violent offences?

### **1.3. The Martial Arts**

The martial arts have been practiced for thousands of years and are defined as offensive and defensive combat systems that may involve unarmed training and/or practice with weapons (Woodward, 2009). The term “martial arts” is broadly applied to stylistically different disciplines with some that emphasize striking with ones’ feet and fists (Karate, Tae kwon Do), and grappling and wrestling maneuvers, joint locks, and throwing techniques (Judo, Jiu Jitsu) (Woodward, 2009). Eastern martial arts have been adapted and modified to the cultural, political and social context, and are being practiced with healthy lifestyles being a priority in many industrialized, “developed” countries by millions of people (Jennings, 2014).

The practice of the martial arts can be categorized into traditional martial arts and modern martial arts. Traditional martial arts, such as Karate and Kung Fu, were originally forms of self-cultivation practices derived from religious disciplines, which are intended to enhance the mind-body relationship (unity) and personality and character (Jennings, 2014). Nosanchuck (1981) outlined the criteria for traditional martial arts as having an emphasis on opponentless rehearsal of moves (the kata), no heavy contact



during sparring, respect given to the instructor (sensei), the uniform (gi) used, the class (dojo) including other students, and the importance of meditation and philosophy. The aim of traditional martial arts is to develop a centered and calm mind that is applied in all areas of life, which is the opposite of a mind set for aggression, whether impulsive or not (Zivin et al., 2001).

Physical training involved in the martial arts is connected to improved psychological health, including improved anger management, sense of well-being, and decreased depression (Wang, Wang, Wang, Li, & Zhou, 2014; Woodward, 2009). Along with maintaining physical health, which includes abstaining from alcohol and tobacco and moderating ones' eating habits, traditional martial arts practice also incorporates elements of meditation, breath control, and teaching of social values within an environment of discipline, self-respect, and courtesy to others (Draxler, Ostermann, & Honekamp, 2011; Woodward, 2009). These practices are to improve personal psychological health, self-esteem, mind-body coordination and learning how to respect creation, and treating your fellow man right and peacefully (Draxler et al., 2011; Woodward, 2009).

Modern martial arts have origins in traditional martial arts, but do not emphasize a focus on meditation and self-improvement, but competition. These include boxing, wrestling, and mixed martial arts (MMA). MMA are modern styles that blend the techniques from traditional martial arts and are typically combat arts that have been modified for sport, self-defense, and recreation (Woodward, 2009). MMA and the Ultimate Fighting Championships (UFC) promotion in the media has increased its exposure to the public and has become one of the fastest growing sports in terms of

popularity and participation (Hishinuma, Umemoto, Nguyen, Chang, & Bautista, 2012). MMA's mix of competition and violence has become popularized amongst the 18-35 year old demographic (Hishinuma et al., 2012). MMA advocates claim that practicing MMA can also have positive effects on physical health, physical and mental discipline, decrease depression and anxiety through exercise, give a sense of belonging, and improve individual positive moral character (Hishinuma et al., 2012).

There have also been a number of accounts from professional mixed martial arts fighters in the media that attribute their sobriety and avoidance of anti-social behavior to engaging in a martial arts program. One fighter in the media, who is also a participant in this study, stated:

“...it didn't just change my life, it became my life, and you know it supports my family and it has gotten me a house and decent cars, you know what I mean?...it's literally done every single thing for me; like it defines me now. Like, it is, that is what I am now. I owe everything I have to the martial arts.”

Even though there have been numerous claims such as these, there does not appear to be any empirical data supporting these accounts, despite a number of drug rehabilitation programs in North America already incorporating martial arts practices. The martial arts claim to be able to provide a number of improvements to the self and can address the leisure/recreation criminogenic area of risk to reoffend.

#### **1.4. Setting the Context**

I am currently employed as a Forensic Substance Management Worker and provide therapy to young offenders with substance related criminal offences. In my nine years working in the field of forensic social work, I have not experienced a high success

rate through using traditional therapy in the form of CBT, motivational interviewing, psycho-education, etc., as the majority of the young offenders I work with continue to relapse and return to commit substance influenced criminal offences. This caused me to realize the multitude of complex internal (i.e. mental health) and external (i.e. systemic) needs this population suffers from. It also suggests to me that new methods of intervention should be explored with one potential option being the use of the martial arts. However, within my own professional experience as a social worker, I have encountered resistance among government services providers and martial arts organizations to implement the martial arts as a therapeutic intervention, as a common perception is that teaching young offenders the martial arts will enhance their fighting skills, causing them to become better fighters on the street and more dangerous to society (Nosanchuk & Macneil, 1989; Twemlow & Sacco, 1998). With the lack of empirical data supporting this theory, it has been difficult for community organizations to support youth interested in pursuing martial arts as an intervention.

The majority of the clients who want to pursue martial arts express interest in modern martial arts, such as boxing, kickboxing, and MMA, and not traditional martial arts, such as Karate and Tae Kwon Do, as they are perceived as “boring.” However, from my own experiences, the traditional martial arts are often viewed as a more acceptable recreational activity compared to MMA, which is viewed as being more violent.

The motivation to pursue this area of research is based on my frustrations working as a social worker in the field of forensics and encountering resistance when advocating for my clients who are interested in pursuing the martial arts. I am concerned that the

stigma that continues to surround the young offender population may be limiting potential opportunities which may support positive change pathways for my clients.

### **1.5. Purpose of the Study**

By addressing the research question the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to understand the potentially positive effects traditional or non-traditional martial arts may have on those with substance use and aggressive behavior issues and to explore the experiences of community service providers that work with young offenders to gain an understanding of what they feel this population needs to overcome these issues. Further examination of current literature reveals that there is no empirical data on the use of the martial arts and its effects on reducing substance use and affecting recidivism rates for justice-involved youth. So, I am not aware of any existing research that would substantiate a positive correlation between young offenders practicing the martial arts and an increase in criminal behavior. Based on a transformative learning theory and critical theory, the goal is to create awareness and educate those who directly work with this population and empower the youth who would like to participate in the martial arts in order to provide the best services and opportunities for youth.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This literature review will begin by reviewing the most common themes in the literature on the relationship between substance use and violent offending behavior among young offenders, as well as causes and theoretical frameworks that attempt to explain the connection between the two phenomena. It will also review the best practice literature in regards to interventions and therapies for young offenders with substance influenced violent behaviors. An examination of the literature on recreation and leisure will be highlighted, as this has been identified as a criminogenic risk factor and relates most directly to the current focus of this study – the martial arts. As such, this review will then examine the research on the martial arts as an intervention for substance use and violent offending and offending behavior in general, as well as the martial arts' individual mechanisms, such as physical activity and spirituality, and their effects on substance use.

### **2.1. Substance Use and Criminal Behavior**

There have been a number of studies that examine the relationship between substance use and criminal behavior. Many of the studies identify a positive correlation between the two, in that offenders who use substances or have an SUD are at higher risk to reoffend (Barnes, Welte, & H., 2002; Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001; Fazel, Bains, & Doll, 2006; Guebert & Olver, 2014; Sullivan & Hamilton, 2007; van der Put, Creemers, & Hoeve, 2014). The number is high among adult offenders, as a study conducted by Fazel, Bains, and Doll (2006) reviewed thirteen studies with a sample of 7563 adult prisoners and estimated a prevalence of alcohol abuse and dependence in male prisoners ranging from 18 - 30% and 10 - 24% in females. The prevalence estimates of illegal drug abuse and dependence varied from 10 - 48% in male prisoners and 30 – 60% in females (Fazel et al., 2006). However, several studies also identified a positive relationship

between substance use and criminal behavior among young offenders (Greaves, Best, Day, & Foster, 2009; Sullivan & Hamilton, 2007; Young et al., 2007).

The relationship between mental health, substance use and criminal behavior is also prevalent among the literature (Guebert & Olver, 2014). A longitudinal study conducted by Sullivan and Hamilton (2007) followed serious young offenders for seven years after their release from custody; it proposes that young offenders with a dual diagnosis of a disruptive behavior disorder, such as conduct disorder, and a SUD was found to be a predictor of recidivism. A study conducted in Saskatchewan by Guebert and Olver (2014) discovered that dual diagnosis was the most frequently diagnosed mental concern among young offenders, as over 65% of the youth in their sample (n = 186) presented with two or more diagnoses. However, despite being at a higher risk to commit crimes when using substances, such as alcohol and other illegal drugs, the relationship is not an absolute. Criminal behavior is reported to occur independent of substance use and vice versa (Sullivan & Hamilton, 2007), indicating that SUD is not responsible for all criminal behavior, nor is it the only pathway to criminal activity (Greaves et al., 2009). It is important to address the multiple aspects of a young offenders pro-criminal lifestyle when providing interventions (Sullivan & Hamilton, 2007).

## **2.2. Substance Use and Violent Behavior Among Young Offenders**

The relationship between substance use, both alcohol and illegal drugs, and violent and aggressive behavior appears to be complex. There are a large number of studies that explore the connection between the two phenomena, which identify a positive correlation between the two (Chassin et al., 2009; Henderson et al., 2007) . However, the nature of this relationship and what causes this phenomenon to occur is complex and

involves a combination of individual, environmental, physiological, and situational factors.

Surprisingly, there do not appear to be many research studies that have specifically focused on young offenders with substance influenced violent offences. Comparatively, there appear to be more adult offender studies on this relationship (Chermack & Blow, 2002; Kraanen, Scholing, & Emmelkamp, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2015). For instance, an adult offender study conducted by Sutherland et al., (2015) discovered that 70.30% of a sample of adult offenders who have committed a violent offence in the past month (n = 30) were under the influence of a substance during their last violent offence. Among young offender literature, what has been more prevalent are studies that only identify a relationship between substances and violent offending, as they have found that those who have committed violent offences also having a history of substance use behaviors or SUD (Delisi, Vaughn, Salas-Wright, & Jennings, 2015; Forsyth, Khan, & Mckinlay, 2011; Xue, Zimmerman, & Cunningham, 2009). However, two studies conducted found that young offenders perceive their substance use to be an influential factor in their offending behavior. A study conducted by Forsyth et al. (2015) discovered that 57% of participants “blame” alcohol as the reason why they offended compared to 30% of drug users. Lennings et al. (2003) also discovered that 65 of their 290 sample of violent offenders (mean age = 16.5) claimed that alcohol and or other substances caused them to become violent.

What appears to be clear when examining the literature is that there is more consistent relationship between alcohol and violent behavior compared to other drugs and violent behavior. This may be due to the fact that alcohol related violent offences are the

most common among youth violent offences (Chassin et al., 2009). Among young offenders, a number of studies have identified that alcohol is consistently and significantly associated with violent behavior (Delisi et al., 2015; Forsyth et al., 2011; Lennings, Copeland, & Howard, 2003; Roe-Sepowitz, 2009; Stoddard et al., 2015). Alcohol has also been found to be connected to violent behavior with adolescents in general (Seffrin & Domahidi, 2014; Stoddard et al., 2014; Swahn & Donovan, 2006; Swahn, Simon, Hammig, & Guerrero, 2004; White, Loeber, Loeber, & Farrington, 1999) and adults (Chermack & Blow, 2002; Fernandez-Montalvo, Lopez-Goni, & Arteaga, 2012; Friedman, Glassman, & Terras, 2008).

Among the literature on the connection between adolescent alcohol use and violence, a number of studies identified that the frequency and volume of alcohol use was connected to violent behavior (Swahn & Donovan, 2004, 2005, 2006; Swahn et al., 2004; White et al., 1999). This was the same for both male and female adolescents (Swahn & Donovan, 2006; Xue et al., 2009). However, adolescent females are less likely than males to be involved in substance use influenced criminal behavior (Barnes et al., 2002; Swahn & Donovan, 2005). Another gender difference found was that male juvenile homicide offenders reported higher rates of substance use than their female counterparts but the females had more serious substance abuse problems (Roe-Sepowitz, 2009).

### **2.2.1. Causes and Predictors of Substance Influenced Violent Behavior**

One of the main theoretical frameworks that has been created to help explain the complex relationship between substance use and violent behavior is Goldstein's Tripartite Framework (Goldstein, 1985). Goldstein's (1985) framework has been used as a guideline in a number of adolescent and adult studies (Lennings, Kenny, & Nelson, 2006;



Parker & Auerhahn, 1998; Xue et al., 2009). The Tripartite Framework consist of three explanations, the first being the Psychopharmacological model. The Psychopharmacological model suggests that some individuals may become excitable, irrational and may exhibit violent behavior due to short or long term consumption of a specific substance. The psychopharmacological model also identifies that substances may lead to a person acting out violently or may cause a person to act out leading to a person's violent victimization. A study conducted by Lennings, Copeland, and Howard (2003) examined a sample of young offenders with violent offences. The study found a high frequency of alcohol related violent offences. The authors concluded that there is a strong pharmacological effect between alcohol and violence among the youth that perceived that their alcohol use contributed to their violent offences.

The second model is the Economic Compulsive Model (Goldstein, 1985). This model suggests that violence is the result of the substance user's involvement in economically oriented violent crime, such as robbery, in order to support their substance use. In a study conducted by Greaves, Best, Day, and Foster (2009) they found that 50% of their sample confirmed that their arrest in the past 30 days was due to committing crimes in order to financially support their substance use behavior.

The third model is the System Violence Model (Goldstein, 1985). This model suggests that violence is naturally intrinsic to involvement with illegal substance use and distribution. Goldstein outlines that this can occur through disputes between rival drug dealers, assaults and homicides within the hierarchies of a gang, robberies of drug dealers, etc. Goldstein's third model is supported by a study conducted by Friedman et al. (2008). This study found that marijuana use, which one would perceive to have violence

decreasing effects (Ostrowsky, 2011; Stoddard et al., 2015), was connected to violent offences, such as attempted homicide, reckless endangerment, and weapon offences, even compared to alcohol use. This has also been identified in the study conducted by Seffrin and Domahidi (2014) that examined drug dealing, independent of drug using, and violence. They discovered that drug dealing increases violence to a level that drug use alone is not likely to achieve. They state that “the real problem with mood-altering substances is that they are illegal, which incentivizes violence by forcing markets underground, where they are beyond the protection of law and open to exploitation” (Seffrin & Domahidi, 2014, p. 407).

Goldstein’s Tripartite Framework appears to be a frequently examined framework when attempting to understand the complex relationship between substance use and criminal behavior. The study will now explore existing literature on interventions for young offenders with substance influenced violent behaviors.

### **2.3. Rehabilitation Models and Interventions for Substance Influenced Violent Offences**

When discussing effective offender rehabilitation models, the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model developed by Andrews and Bonta (1990) has been extensively reviewed in the offender literature, which has shown that adherence to the model is associated with a reduction in recidivism rates (Andrews et al., 1990; Koehler, Losel, Akoensi, & Humphreys, 2013). The RNR model outlines three general principles to effective offender rehabilitation:

- 1) Risk principle (match level of program intensity to offender risk level; intensive levels of treatment for higher risk offenders and minimal intervention for low-risk offenders).

- 2) Need principle (target criminogenic needs or those offender needs that are functionally related to criminal behavior).
- 3) Responsivity principle (match the style and mode of intervention to the offender's learning style and abilities) (Andrews et al., 2011, p. 735).

The RNR principles state that:

...interventions should target criminogenic needs (i.e., factors that, when reduced, are associated with reductions in recidivism: need principle) of higher risk offenders (those offenders who have a high probability of recidivism according to a validated assessment process: risk principle) and that these interventions should match the learning style, motivation, aptitude, and abilities of the offender (responsivity principle) (Andrews & Bonta, 2006, as cited in Luong & Wormith, 2011, p .1178).

As noted earlier, the RNR model's "Need Principle" is divided into the central eight domains of risk. The "big four" elements of criminality are procriminal attitudes, antisocial personality, procriminal associates, and history of antisocial behavior; these strongly predict criminal recidivism. The "moderate four" risk factors are substance abuse and circumstances pertaining to family/marital, school/work, and leisure/recreation domains, as they have additional, but weaker, predictability validity for recidivism (Grieger & Hosser, 2014; Nee et al., 2012).

Literature reveals that interventions that incorporate the RNR principles have shown reductions in recidivism among young and adult offenders (Andrews et al., 1990; Luong & Wormith, 2011). Adherence to the need principle delivery of interventions have shown a 37.9% reduction in likelihood of recidivism for high risk offenders, while the

absence of interventions to address risk needs can lead to an 81.7% increase in likelihood to reoffend (Luong & Wormith, 2011). Even though the “big four” have shown more predictability for recidivism, a study by Grieger and Hosser (2013) have identified that out of the risk factors, school was the most predictive factor across all eight risk factors, followed by antisocial cognition, antisocial associates, substance abuse, and leisure/recreation. However, this study only interviewed young offenders who were incarcerated for the first time (Grieger & Hosser, 2014).

Although there are a number of studies that examine the effects of substance use treatment within the offender population, there do not appear to be many that focus on treatment that addresses both substance use or SUD and its influence on criminal behavior, specifically violent offences. However, studies have shown substance abuse treatment for young offenders to be effective in reducing substance use and in turn criminal behavior when compared to young offenders who do not receive treatment (Chassin et al., 2009; Sullivan & Hamilton, 2007). An American national survey of juvenile institutional and community correctional facilities identified that 44.6% of facilities incorporate substance management group treatment 1 - 4 hours a week (Young et al., 2007). A longitudinal study conducted by Chassin et al. (2009) found short-term and long-term reduction in substance use among a sample of serious young offenders (n = 429) who participated in substance use treatment. However, this study, and the general literature on the topic, do not specifically explore the relationship between violent offences in particular and substance use.

Although treatment has been shown to be effective in reducing substance use, initially engaging young offenders in addressing their substance use issues has proven to

be difficult. A literature review conducted by Tripodi and Bender (2011) reviewed quasi-experimental and experimental studies targeting alcohol and marijuana treatment outcome for youth involved in the justice system. They concluded that substance use behavior change is more difficult among the young offender population compared to non-offending adolescents. This may be due to the inherent challenges working with adjudicated youth, which include difficulty engaging youth in treatment, involuntary clients mandated to participate in treatment by other authority figures, and a number of individual, familial, and social risk factors among youth involved in the youth criminal justice system (Tripodi & Bender, 2011). The difficulty in engaging these youths in treatment is that many of them do not acknowledge that they have a problem with their substance use behavior. Lennings et al. (2006) found amongst a sample of 276 young offenders who committed an offence while intoxicated, only 22 (8%) of them thought that substance use treatment might be necessary. Out of those who sought treatment, fewer than half completed it (Lennings et al., 2006). Motivation to change and a sincere desire to “get out of the life” has been found to be one of the most important factors in an offender’s ability to overcome the difficulties that may jeopardize their detoxification and rehabilitation and overall reduce recidivism (Gideon, 2010).

When a youth is prepared to address their substance use issues, there are a number of therapeutic interventions within the literature that have shown to be effective for the young offender population. There does not appear to be one singular theoretical model that has been proven to be the most effective in addressing a young offenders risk for offending behavior and recidivism in general (Brogan et al., 2015), but interventions, such as Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) have

demonstrated success in reducing substance use in young offenders (Bahr, Masters, & Taylor, 2012; Tripodi & Bender, 2011). Tripodi and Bender (2011) found that individual-based treatments have proven to be less effective among the young offender population compared to non-offending populations, while outcomes for family-based approaches are more comparable between young offenders and non-offending adolescents.

MST has been extensively reviewed in a number of studies regarding its effect on offending behavior among young offenders (Henggeler, Clingempeel, Brondino, & Pickrel, 2002; van der Stouwe, Asscher, Stams, Dekovic, & van der Laan, 2014). MST is an “intensive family and community based treatment program that focuses on addressing all environmental systems that impact chronic and violent juvenile offenders – their homes and families, schools and teachers, neighbourhoods and friends” (“Multisystemic therapy for juveniles,” n.d.). MST focuses on improving family functioning as it theorizes that improvements in family functioning results in improvements in peer relationships, school functioning and participation in the community (*MST theory of change*, Henggeler as cited in van der Stouwe, Asscher, Stams, Dekovic, & van der Laan, 2014). In MST, therapists visit the youth and their families in their home and community to reduce drop out rates, to provide treatment exactly where and when it is needed, and to increase generalizability of new skills (van der Stouwe et al., 2014). The therapist uses treatment strategies derived from strategic family therapy, structural family therapy, behavioral parent training and cognitive behavioral therapy and are available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (van der Stouwe et al., 2014).

A meta-analysis conducted by van der Stouwe et al. (2014) examined all reports that address the effectiveness of MST from 1985 to 2012 (k = 22 studies) consisting of

4066 youths. The meta-analysis found small but significant treatment effects on the primary outcome of delinquency and on the secondary outcomes of psychopathology, substance use, family factors, out-of-home placement and peer factors. Studies with large post-treatment effects on parenting and not on family functioning showed moderating effects on delinquency, which indicates that short-term better parenting skills prevent long-term delinquency and recidivism (van der Stouwe et al., 2014). The meta-analysis also found that MST seems most effective with adolescents under the age of 15. This finding is similar to that found in a study conducted by Henggelger, Clingempeel, Brondino and Pickrel (2002).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the most extensively researched forms of psychotherapy and has been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism among youth and adult offender populations (Koehler et al., 2013; Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005; Pearson, Lipton, Cleland, & Yee, 2002; Roberts-Lewis, Parker, Welch, Wall, & Wiggins, 2009; Wilson, Bouffard, & Mackenzie, 2005). In Canada, the Department of Justice supports the use of a Behavioral or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy framework as their primary method of intervention for delivering substance abuse treatment to young offenders (Dowden, 2003). CBT treatments include “attention to cognitive and emotional processes that function between the stimuli received and the overt behaviors enacted” (Pearson et al., 2002, p. 480). Studies have shown that youth with anti-social behavior problems have impaired social-cognitive skills causing them to make errors when interpreting social cues as well as having stronger expectations that aggressive behavior will lead to positive outcomes (McCart, Priester, Davies, & Azen, 2006). The use of CBT addresses these social problem-solving skill deficiencies by teaching youth to be more

aware of social cues, to learn multiple interpretations for others' behaviors, and to learn non-violent problem-solving strategies (McCart et al., 2006).

A meta-analysis of 71 published outcome studies reviewing the effects of CBT for aggressive behavior problems in youth was conducted by McCart (2006). The analysis found that CBT is an effective intervention for treating aggressive behavior problems among youth and that the benefits can be maintained over time. They also discovered that CBT is more effective among youth above the age of 12, which is the age that a youth can be charged, due to their developmental level, as they have more abstract cognitive skills that are emphasized in CBT interventions (McCart et al., 2006). This contradicts the findings of a meta-analysis conducted by Özabacı (2006) that found that CBT is only somewhat effective in treating violence problems in youths. The study also indicated that treatments that teach actual behaviors are more effective than treatments that attempt to modify internal constructs related to target behaviors (Özabacı, 2011).

Among substance use literature, there do not appear to be any studies that focus on the effects of CBT on substance use influenced violent offences. However, the use of CBT to address substance use and SUD's have been extensively researched (Macgill & Ray, 2009). It has been suggested that CBT interventions, such as Motivational Interviewing (MI) and Contingency Management (CM) can help patients identify intrapersonal and interpersonal triggers for relapse and include coping-skills training, drug-refusal skills training, functional analysis of substance use, and increasing activities not related to use (Macgill & Ray, 2009; McHugh et al., 2010). A meta-analysis conducted by Macgill and Ray (2009) that examined 53 controlled trials of CBT for adults diagnosed with alcohol or illicit drug use disorder found a small but statistically



significant effect over the non-treatment groups. Another meta-analysis that focused on the efficacy of CBT and drug abuse and dependence conducted by Dutra et al. (2008) reviewed 34 randomized control trials (n = 2340) and found an overall effect size in the moderate range. The analysis identified larger effect size for marijuana, followed by cocaine, opioids, and the smallest effect size for polysubstance dependence. The study also found that the combination of CM and CBT resulted in the highest effect size. However, the use of CM in treatment can be difficult for treatment providers as they use monetary incentives and frequent drug testing (Dutra et al., 2008; McHugh et al., 2010). It was also found that treatment effects of CBT diminished over time, with lower effects occurring at the 6 to 9 month follow-up and diminished effects again at 12 months (Macgill & Ray, 2009).

Interventions for young offenders with SUD need to be catered to their specific needs compared to non-adjudicated youth. Similarly, young offenders who identify as having a SUD need to have specific treatment compared to young offenders who do not use substances (van der Put et al., 2014). The results from a study conducted by van der Put et al. (2014) recommend that “interventions aimed at reducing criminal recidivism by addressing risk and/or protective factors may be less effective in juvenile offenders with substance use problems” (p. 271). The study also recommends that due to the nature of SUDs as a chronic disorder, treatment of young offenders with substance use problems should include after care and long-term management (van der Put et al., 2014).

Sullivan and Hamilton (2007) note that the issues among substance using offenders can be quite diverse and should not be forced into a simple framework. Therapeutic approaches and interventions that address various needs have been found to

be more effective in reducing recidivism among youth than attempts to control their behavior (Bahr et al., 2012; Brogan et al., 2015). Early intervention for young offenders who screen with substance related first time offences is recommended and substance use should not be treated separately from the other criminogenic needs due to its strong relationship with the other risk areas, such as associations with antisocial peers and lack of involvement in prosocial activities (Guebert & Olver, 2014; Hunter, Miles, Pedersen, Ewing, & D'Amico, 2014).

#### **2.4. Recreation and Leisure and Delinquency**

Using one's leisure time ineffectively and not being involved in pro-social recreational activity has been connected to substance use and criminal behavior among young offenders (Guebert & Olver, 2014). Leisure is defined as a "specific area of human experience with its own benefits, including choice, creativity, satisfaction, enjoyment leading to increased pleasure and happiness. It embraces comprehensive forms of expression of activity whose elements are as often physical in nature as well as intellectual, social, artistic and spiritual" (Ruskin et al., 2001, p. 203). Caldwell and Smith (2006) outline that research related to leisure and criminal behavior among adolescents can be summarized by four perspectives:

- 1) Filled time perspective: Time filled with pro-social activities cannot be filled with deviant activities.
- 2) Association with deviant peer's perspective: Certain activities are more likely to instigate deviant behavior or association with a deviant sub-culture.

- 3) Activity structure perspective: Time spent in informal and/or unsupervised activities is likely to produce deviance, while time spent in supervised activities protects against it.
- 4) Person-environment interaction perspective: Self-control and attachment to conventional norms and activities protect against deviant behavior.

Engaging in leisure activities is inherently interesting, self-determining and goal-oriented, and may protect against deviant behavior (Caldwell & Smith, 2006). Ruskin et al. (2001) states that through pursuing pro-social leisure activities one can achieve:

...personal rewards, such as personal enrichment (cherished experiences), self-fulfillment (developing skills, abilities, knowledge), self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge already developed), self-image (known to others as a particular kind of serious leisure participant), self-gratification (combination of superficial enjoyment and deep satisfaction), recreation (regeneration) of oneself through serious leisure after a day's work as well as social rewards, such as social attraction (associating with other serious leisure participants, with clients as volunteers, participating in the social world of the activity), contribution to the maintenance and development of the group (including senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic in making the contribution), group accomplishment (group effort in accomplishing a serious leisure project senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic).

Differences between the type of recreational activity, such as structured compared to unstructured, has shown to possibly effect delinquent behavior (Caldwell & Smith, 2006; Roman, Stodolska, Yahner, & Shinew, 2013). A study conducted by Roman et al.

(2013) among elementary-aged school children found that youth involved in unstructured physical activity are more likely to be involved in delinquent behaviors, such as stealing, graffiti, and property damage. The importance of organized recreational activities with parental or other adult supervision and guidance may relate to more positive outcomes compared to unstructured recreational activities (Caldwell & Smith, 2006; Roman et al., 2013). Roman et al. (2013) suggest that further research comparing the effects of unstructured versus structured physical activity is needed.

## **2.5. Martial Arts and Young Offenders**

In the literature review, there was no empirical data on the use of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences. There was, however, a sizable amount of material on the martial arts and aggressive behavior. Since the martial arts contain components of physical exercise and spirituality, studies on their individual effects on SUD's and aggressiveness was also gathered.

### **2.5.1. Martial Arts and Aggression**

Despite the lack of empirical data on the use of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders with substance related violent offences, there are some studies that examined the effects the martial arts have on reducing aggression among general adolescents (Delva-Tauiiili, 1995; Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Lamarre & Nosanchuk, 1999), high risk youth (Theeboom, De Knop, & Wylleman, 2008; Trulson, 1986; Zivin et al., 2001), adults (Daniels & Thornton, 1992), and children (Reynes & Lorant, 2002; Skelton, Glynn, & Berta, 1991). Among these, only one study identified the use of illegal substances as an area of measure for juvenile delinquents (Trulson, 1986). A meta-analysis of 12 studies examined the relationship between martial arts participation and externalizing behaviors, such as aggression, anger, hostility, conduct problems and

antisocial behavior (Gubbels, van der Stouwe, Spruit, Stams, 2015). The study concluded that martial arts participation was not related to externalizing behaviors. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Reynes and Lorant (2002) which found that participation in Judo for one year resulted in no significant difference in levels of aggression between the experimental group and the control group. However, their study focused on young children (age 8). A study by Tauiiil (1995) also used children ages 9-12 in his study and found no decrease in aggressiveness when incorporating Aikido lessons. However, his study was brief (two and a half weeks) and contained methodological flaws (i.e., non-randomized sample, no control group) (Delva-Tauiiili, 1995).

The meta-analysis conducted by Gubbels et al. (2015) also discovered that martial artists showed more externalizing behaviors compared to individual sport athletes, but there was no difference compared to team sport-or non-athletes. A study conducted by Endresen and Olweus (2005) also found a positive connection between violence and participation in modern martial arts, such as boxing and wrestling, and traditional martial arts. The study identified that boxing has a strong connection to violence compared to wrestling and traditional martial arts (Endresen & Olweus, 2005). These results contradict the findings of individual studies that examined the relationship between the martial arts and aggressive behavior, which showed that the majority of participants that practiced the martial arts had reduced aggressive behavior and fantasies (Lamarre & Nosanchuk, 1999; Nosanchuk & Macneil, 1989; Zivin et al., 2001) and juvenile delinquency (Trulson, 1986). However, these studies are quite dated.

One of the major themes within the studies is the comparison between traditional martial arts and non-traditional martial arts or modern martial arts (Delva-Tauiiili, 1995; Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Lamarre & Nosanchuk, 1999; Nosanchuk & Macneil, 1989; Reynes & Lorant, 2002; Trulson, 1986). The traditional martial arts incorporate the physical training and skills, but also the philosophy of self-defense, non-violence, and meditation. Non-traditional martial arts, or modern martial arts, only focuses on the physical techniques (Nosanchuk, 1981). Research has found increased aggressiveness scores from students training at modern martial arts dojos compared to those students at traditional martial arts dojos (Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Nosanchuk & Macneil, 1989; Nosanchuk, 1981), as well as elevated levels of violent behavior and nonviolent antisocial behavior outside sports (Strayhorn & Strayhorn, 2009). Length of training in traditional martial arts also played a large part in the success rate of the intervention. It was discovered among children, youth, and adult samples that the longer one trained in a traditional martial art the more likely their aggressiveness will continue to decrease (Daniels & Thornton, 1992; Delva-Tauiiili, 1995; Nosanchuk & Macneil, 1989; Nosanchuk, 1981; Reynes & Lorant, 2002; Skelton et al., 1991).

Within the literature, there are common themes of the importance of instruction and healthy pro-social modeling that martial arts organizations can provide for aggressive youth (Burt & Butler, 2011; Theeboom et al., 2008; Zivin et al., 2001), compared to combat sports, such as boxing and wrestling, where aggressive behaviors and attitudes are reinforced by coaches and peers (Burt & Butler, 2011; Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Trulson, 1986; Twemlow & Sacco, 1998).

It was also found that the physical conditioning involved in training helps utilize excess energy (Trulson, 1986) and has been shown to increase positive mood (Brown et al., 2009; Daniels & Thornton, 1992; Read & Brown, 2003; Weinstock, Barry, & Petry, 2008; Williams, D J, Streat, 2004). What was considered a very important component of traditional martial arts in reducing aggressive behavior is the addition of the philosophy of the martial arts as there is an emphasis on the respect for others, humility, confidence, responsibility, non-violent aggression, honesty, perseverance, leadership, and honor (Enderesen & Olweus, 2005; Nosanchuk, 1981; Trulson, 1986; Twemlow & Sacco, 1998).

The data on martial arts and aggression are unclear, as the results are inconsistent and contradictory. Gubbels et al. (2015) also note the inconsistencies, specifically among studies that focused on juveniles. They suggest that this is possibly due to underreporting of studies with unfavorable outcomes in the martial arts and a general lack of solid, independent research on the relationship between martial arts and externalizing behaviors.

### **2.5.2. Physical Exercise and Substance Use Recovery**

Physical exercise and training is a main component of martial arts training. There is not much data in the literature on the use of physical exercise to reduce substance use influenced violent and aggressive behavior. However, there are a number of studies on the use of physical exercise as an intervention for SUDs with the majority of the literature focusing on those suffering from alcohol dependence (Kedzor et al., 2008; Read & Brown, 2003; Brown et al., 2009).

Physical activity is defined as any activity that “involves the expenditure of caloric energy” (Read & Brown, 2003, p. 49). A meta-analysis conducted by Wang, Wang, Wang, Li, and Zhou (2014) found that chronic physical exercise can increase abstinence rates in illicit drug abusers. This finding is also supported by other studies that have shown the use of exercise assisted in decreasing cravings and an overall reduction in alcohol consumption (Read & Brown, 2003; Weinstock, Barry & Petry, 2008; Kendzor, Dubbert, Olivier, Businelle, & Grothe, 2008).

A number of studies identified the psychological health benefits from physical exercise, such as in areas of anxiety, depression, positive mood increase, and self-concept (Read et al., 2001; Roessler, 2010; Wang et al., 2014; Weinstock et al., 2008; Williams, D J, Streat, 2004). SUDs commonly co-occur with major depression (Read & Brown, 2003; Weinstock, Barry & Petry, 2008). Read et. al. (2001) found that both aerobic and strength training exercise programs during alcohol treatment have resulted in decreased depressive and anxiety symptoms. Wang et al. (2014) discovered that mind-body exercises, such as Tai Chi Quan, a traditional martial art, induces similar beneficial effects to aerobic exercises on abstinence rate, withdrawal symptoms, anxiety, and depression in those with a SUD.

### **2.5.3. Spirituality and Substance Use Disorder**

Another important component of traditional martial arts is its focus on spirituality and meditation. Spirituality is a moral framework to give one meaning to one’s life, promoting feelings of being cared for, valued, safe, hopeful, lovable and loved, and may or may not include a belief in God (Carter, 1998; Kissman & Maurer, 2002). Spirituality has been a component of the Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) 12 step program and is



incorporated into 90% of in-patient treatment facilities in the United States (Priester et al., 2009).

There are a number of studies exploring the relationship between spirituality and SUD recovery that have found growth in the past ten years (Selvam, 2015). These studies have discovered an inverse relationship, with involvement in spiritual practices, such as meditation and prayer, leading to a higher probability of recovery for people with SUD's, as they had fewer relapses (Carter, 1998; Kissman & Maurer, 2002; Niederman, 2008). A bibliography on the literature on spirituality and addictions was created, reviewing 1353 studies, also found a consistent inverse relationship (Geppert, Bogenschutz, & Miller, 2007). Despite the consistency, Geppert et al. (2007) indicate that continued research is necessary, as few studies have explored the mechanisms as to why this relationship exists.

## **2.6. Summary**

The literature review identified that there is a relationship between substance use and criminal behavior through Goldstein's Tripartite Model. The review also identified that there are a number of established interventions for young offenders with substance use connected violent offences. The review revealed that there are a number of gaps and inconsistencies within the research regarding the relationship between the martial arts and aggressive behaviors. The biggest gap is that there is no empirical data on specifically the topic of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders with substance influenced violent behaviors besides anecdotal accounts from the media. The research that is available is minimal, outdated, and lacks a control group (Nosanchuk, 1981; Trulson, 1986; Twemlow & Sacco, 1998). However, the lack of consistent data does not mean that the martial arts may not have the potential to positively affect young offenders with

substance use and violent behavior. The physical and spiritual components of the martial arts have shown to be effective when used among those with SUDs. There are also anecdotal reports from martial artists in the media who attribute their changes to martial arts training. Overall, this literature concludes that further research is needed in this area.

The next chapter will give an overview of the methodology of the study, transcendental phenomenology, and the methods used to explore and answer the research question. It will provide further detail on the theoretical frameworks, transformative learning and critical theory, that provide the theoretical lenses in this study.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1. Personal Experience with the Martial Arts**

“Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). Through the process of epoche, the researcher works at gaining an understanding of the phenomenon by seeing things as they appear and bracketing their pre-conceived notions and judgments of the phenomenon. I have experienced the martial arts first hand, as I joined Tae Kwon Do at the age of 11 and obtained a black belt at the age of 17 and also recreationally participate in kickboxing and Jiu Jitsu Classes. However, I have never experienced issues with a SUD, violent behavior, or criminal behavior, so I do not have experience with the phenomenon of changing one’s SUD and violent criminal behavior through the use of the martial arts. I have enjoyed the martial arts and combat sports from a young age, as my father practiced boxing as a youth and was a fan, and my older brother was also involved in traditional martial arts. The Tae Kwon Do club in which I participated was very structured and orderly, yet fun and engaging enough for an 11-17-year-old youth to want to continue participation.

There were a number of rules established within the martial art that instilled learning respect for your peers and opponents. One way this was done was through bowing. When one entered the dojang (classroom), you would have to bow twice to both flags. One was also required to bow before acknowledging a black belt as a show of respect. At the beginning of every class we would have to recite the clubs creed and recite the five domains by which we are supposed to live our lives by. Testing and competition were also a part of the program. In order to move up in rank (belts) we had to

demonstrate our skill and knowledge of Tae Kwon Do. We were also encouraged to compete in tournaments. However, I did not compete much as I was never a very skilled martial artist. For me, it was a great way to learn new skills and how to defend myself, stay physically active, and make friends and have fun in a social environment. I quit practicing Tae Kwon Do at the age of 18, as I lost interest and felt I did not have time to practice since I was entering university and working. To this day I am still very interested in the martial arts and modern adaptations of the martial arts (MMA) and have returned to practicing at an MMA gym on a casual basis.

I personally feel that the martial arts can be an effective intervention for young offenders with substance use issues and issues of aggression and violence and the youth who are interested should have the opportunity to pursue it.

### **3.2. Methodology and Methods**

It is important to distinguish the difference between a methodology and methods before proceeding, as there is a clear distinction between the two. Methodology is considered to be the over-arching belief that includes ontology (the study of being or the study of reality), epistemology (the study of knowledge and how one constructs their social reality), and axiology (the study of values) that guides your research, data collection and analysis (Rothe, 2000).

Methods is a systematic, orderly, and disciplined way of accomplishing something through the use of procedures, techniques, and steps (Moustakas, 1994). Mousakas (1994) also outlines that “every method in human science research is open ended. There are no definitive or exclusive requirements. Each research project holds its own integrity and establishes its own methods and procedures to facilitate the flow of the investigation and the collection of data” (p. 104). A method is a “systematic way of

accomplishing something orderly and disciplined with care and rigor. Procedure or techniques make up a method, provide a direction and steps to be followed and move a study into action” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104).

Due to the lack of empirical data, it is difficult to understand how the phenomenon of changing one’s substance use and aggressive behaviors through the practice of the martial arts would occur. This lack of understanding affects the ability for service providers and programs to support the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders as the stigma continues to overshadow any perceived benefits. The indistinguishable qualities of the phenomena, changing one’s substance use and criminal behavior within the context of the martial arts, are unknown. Therefore, it is imperative to choose the appropriate research design to gain the understanding of service providers and martial artists. This chapter will outline the rationale for choosing a qualitative research method and a transcendental phenomenological approach to the research topic.

### **3.2.1. Rationale for Qualitative Research**

The decision to pursue a qualitative study compared to a quantitative study is based on the purpose of the study, which is to understand the attitudes of service providers towards the use of the martial arts and to understand whether the martial arts helped reduce or manage substance use and criminal behavior in some participants. The use of qualitative methods assists to:

...explore and understand people’s beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors and interactions through the use of methods such as interviews or focus groups, and thus usually generate non-numerical data from a small sample of participants for which statistical analysis is not normally appropriate (Gray & Payne, 2014, p. 84).

A qualitative research approach seemed to be the appropriate method to explain people's beliefs. Qualitative research methods include:

... a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices change the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

Comparatively, quantitative methodologies are interested in “collecting objectively measured data and counting/ quantifying the effect of one or more variables of interest” (Gray & Payne, 2014, p. 84). Through a quantitative (positivist) research approach, a phenomena is explained through the collection of numerical data that is analyzed using mathematically-based methods that provide statistical data generalized from a sample of a population to help predict future outcomes (Rothe, 2000).

Moving from a quantitative approach to a qualitative one, another purpose of qualitative research study is to explore a problem or issue (Creswell, 2013). The problems that need to be explored are the unsupportive attitudes of government service providers toward the use of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders with substance influenced criminal behavior. Even though there have been positive accounts of the intervention, there is still a strong bias against the martial arts among this population. The “phenomena of change” for the martial arts participants who attribute the

martial arts to their change in behaviors is what is the unknown and needs further investigation.

Using a qualitative research method is not only to understand a phenomenon, but to achieve change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Qualitative research is used to understand the dimensions of a problem: the problem of reducing substance use and criminal activity in young offenders. The decision to proceed with using qualitative research is informed by the knowledge that a complex and detailed understanding of the issue around the needs of young offenders was from the perspective of the service providers that work with them. Service providers may bring a wealth of knowledge and experience from working with the population for years. Interviewing martial arts participants allows the researcher to gain their perspective. However, it also empowers and gives the participant the ability to share their story and give meaning to their own experiences (Creswell, 2013).

### **3.3. Theoretical Frameworks**

Creswell (2013) describes theoretical frameworks in qualitative research as social science theories to frame their theoretical lenses in studies. He says that philosophical assumptions are embedded within interpretive frameworks that qualitative researchers use when they are conducting a study (Creswell, 2013). When we begin to ask questions and examine phenomena, embedded within these philosophical assumptions are ontology (reality), epistemology (knowledge), axiology (value), and methodology (approach to knowing), which help guide our interpretive lenses to what is discovered within the topic (Creswell, 2013; Rothe, 2000). Empowering participants to have their voices heard in

order to create change led to the decision to use a transformative and critical theory framework to guide this qualitative study.

### **3.3.1. Transformative Learning Theory**

Among adult learning theory, transformative learning theory “transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habit of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). Mezirow argued that individuals have their own perspective on the world based on an individual’s upbringing, life experiences, culture, and education and these points of view can become so ingrained that it takes a forceful argument, or what he termed a disorienting dilemma, to change them (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015). This theoretical framework seems fitting for what this qualitative research study is attempting to accomplish, which is gaining knowledge to potentially help others change their perspectives on alternative interventions for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences. It is understanding our frames of reference that we have acquired through socialization and acculturation (Jones, 2010). Through transformative learning theory, one can become more aware of these ingrained attitudes and beliefs and change their perspective.

One of the main developers of the transformative learning theory, Jack Mezirow, identified that in order to achieve transformative learning, one must understand critical reflection, which is critically reflecting on the assumptions of others, and self-reflection, which is reflecting on the way one sees his/her own world (Jones, 2010; Mezirow, 2003). Mezirow also discusses the importance of engaging in critical-dialectical discourse,



which is “having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, ‘bracketing’ premature judgement, and seeking common ground” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 60). The data collected from this qualitative research study can possibly help change the perspective of service providers and benefit a number of youth.

A tenant of a transformative framework is that “knowledge is not neutral and it reflects the power and social relationships within society, and thus the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people to improve society (Martens, 2003, as cited in Creswell, 2013). These people may include marginalized groups such as young offenders. Transformative learning theory argues that changing one’s perspective is not enough and action is required in the sense of the enactment of the altered perspective in the social world (Jones, 2010). This fits with qualitative research, as Creswell (2013) states that “qualitative research then, should contain an action agenda from reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers’ lives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 26)

### **3.3.2. Critical Theory**

The theoretical framework that appears appropriate for this study is critical theory, which is concerned with “examining institutional and social practices with a view to resisting the imposition of oppressive and dominant norms and structures” (Salas, Sen, & Segal, 2010, p. 93). Critical theory is a guide for social action, as it requires us to critically investigate the social order and existing power structure through self-awareness in order to transform society (Salas et al., 2010). Social workers are working with the young offender population within the confines of the justice system, which can be considered an oppressive system to the growth and rehabilitation of young offenders.

The theory provides social workers with a framework to address oppressive institutions and advocate for conscious awareness practice that can lead to social change (Salas et al., 2010).

Critical theory is valuable when applied to the young offender population, as the majority of them suffer from societal constraints, such as racism and poverty. Critical theory encourages the empowerment of young offenders to see their oppression within the system so they may collectively work towards improving their place in society (Salas et al., 2010). This is an important framework, as youth are unable to access programs they feel they need, due to possible negative perceptions of them by service providers and society in general. This inhibits their ability to gain social justice and change within their own societies.

### **3.4. Phenomenology**

As noted earlier, the intention of this study is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants, both martial artists and service providers, and to gain an understanding of the phenomena of changing one's substance use and violent criminal behavior within the context of the martial arts. To explore this phenomena, there are a number of methodological approaches to research that may have been suitable in answering and exploring the phenomenon, such as narrative research and grounded theory (Creswell, 2013). However, unlike narrative research where the researcher focuses on one or two individuals, or grounded theory, which focuses on a process or an action to develop a theory, a phenomenological approach focuses on the description of a phenomenon from a number of participants to find a common meaning (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of phenomenological study is to "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76).

Phenomenology is based on the writings of philosopher and mathematician, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who described phenomenology as a ‘science of essences’ (Moran, 2000). Essence means capturing what makes something “what it is” for humans and their intentional relationships with others and the world; an essential structure to a phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). Husserl was interested in what he called “turning to the things themselves” instead of “discovering a subjective meaning, objective meaning, or predictive and explanatory theoretical explanations of human experience” (Vagle, 2014, p. 29). Husserl questioned how easily and naively we (humans within society) attribute causality and meaning to the world without looking and how it is even understood by us (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenology was understood as a radical style of philosophizing and attempt to get the meaning and essence of knowledge through the description of a phenomena, as it appears and manifests itself to the consciousness of the experiencer (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenologists want to study the lifeworld, “that is the world as it is lived, not the world as it is measured, transformed, represented, correlated, categorized, compared, and broken down” (Vagle, 2014, p. 22). Husserl theorized that phenomena are the building blocks to human sciences and the basis for all knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

The term *phenomenon* comes from the Greek word, *phaenesthai*, which means to flare up, or to show itself or to appear (Moustakas, 1994). Heidegger suggested that phenomena are introduced to us through our being, living in the world, and they are how we discover ourselves in relation to the world through our day-to-day living (Vagle, 2014). The phenomenologist is not studying the individual, but how a particular phenomenon manifest and appears in the lifeworld (Vagle, 2014).

Husserl's phenomenological approach to philosophy was a way to achieve separation from the positivists and Lockean ideas of traditional philosophical theories of the early 1900's (Moran, 2000). His work pushed the boundaries and emphasized a new approach to philosophy that was not bound by the historical traditions, dogmatism, and metaphysical premises that was found in positivism (Moran, 2000). Husserl attempted to reinvigorate philosophy by challenging the old traditions and their understanding of actions, society, phenomenon, and consciousness, which have been blinded by history and ingrained beliefs. Phenomenology sought to return philosophy to the living human subject and lived human experiences, unclouded and pure (Moran, 2000). Other philosophers, such as Brentano (1838-1917), believed that truth belonged to judgement, while for Husserl, achieving truth was "independent of any human judgement" (Moran, 2000, p. 75). Phenomenology "must pay close attention to the nature of consciousness as actually experienced, not as is pictured by common sense or by the philosophical tradition" (Moran, 2000, p. 6).

The phenomenon of changing one's substance use and violent criminal behavior through the use of the martial arts is what is of interest and due to the number of martial arts participants who have attributed their change to the martial arts, it appears fitting to explain the phenomenon through the use of a phenomenological research method.

### **3.4.1. Consciousness and Phenomenology**

There are a number of different schools of phenomenology that are born from Husserl (Dowling, 2007). Deciding on which phenomenological methodology to use is based on one's understanding of consciousness and how a phenomenon is constructed within our conscience. Consciousness is defined as the quality or state of being aware

especially of something within oneself or the state or fact of being conscious of an external object, state, or fact (“Marriam-webster dictionary,” n.d.). Early philosophers, including Descartes, Hobbs, and Locke, before phenomenology, theorized that when we are conscious we are primarily aware of ourselves or our own ideas (Vagle, 2014). From this early perspective, it assumes that our ideas and experiences are directed inwardly rather than toward the outside (Vagle, 2014).

Opposite to this perspective, phenomenology believes that consciousness is directed toward an object and that the reality of an object is then related to one’s consciousness (Creswell, 2013). Husserl explained that reality is not divided into subjects and objects, but both subjects and objects interacting as they appear in consciousness (Creswell, 2013). This was termed the “intentionality of consciousness” (Creswell, 2013). From a phenomenological perspective, “intentionality” refers to the connectedness between the subject and the object, and not the American definition of purpose or reason to do something (Vagle, 2014). Merleau-Ponty describes intentionality as “the invisible thread that connects humans to their surroundings meaningfully whether they are conscious of that connection or not” (Vagle, 2014, p. 27). The reality and understanding of the intentional relationship between subject and object is perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual, whether the object is real or not” (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl continued with the concept of intentionality, originally theorized by Brentano, and asserted that intentionality is the fundamental characteristic of “psychic phenomena” and is the basis for a descriptive transcendental philosophy of consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality refers to “consciousness, to the internal experience of

being conscious of something; thus the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). Other theorists have criticized Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and have opposing views on consciousness. One of his pupils, Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), branched from Husserl to envision hermeneutic phenomenology, which argued that phenomenology is more about manifestations than it is about essences (Vagle, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology theorizes that intentional relations are always in a constant state of interpretation and there is not necessarily an “essence” of a phenomenon, but interpretations of manifestations and appearances (Vagle, 2014). Phenomenology has branched into a number of different thoughts, either descriptive or interpretive phenomenology, but they are all based on Husserl’s understanding of consciousness beginning with intentionality.

### **3.4.2. Epoche and Bracketing**

The goal of Husserl’s phenomenology is to achieve the true essence of consciousness through description in its purest form. Husserl felt that consciousness could only be properly grasped if persistent naturalistic distortions can be removed (Moran, 2000). However, for one to arrive at these true essences requires the function of methodological reductions, such as phenomenological epoche. Phenomenological epoche, or sometimes called suspension of the natural attitude, or bracketing, are steps to gain a true essence of the phenomenon being explored (Moran, 2000). Husserl described the practice of epoche as “abstention, dislocation from, or unplugging or exclusion of the blind following and unquestioning of the reality of what we experience” (Moran, 2000, p.

147). He felt that if we do not “bracket” our natural attitude it can distort our theoretical consideration of consciousness itself (Moran, 2000).

Rothe (2000) writes that “our everyday world is a social reality comprised of cultural objects and social institutions, a world that we accept without question because we were born into it as it exists. Hence, the commonplace, common-sense, taken-for-granted features of the world in which we pass our everyday lives are the subject of research” (p. 40). It is these distortions of our natural consciousness that epoche is used to bracket; all scientific, philosophical, cultural, and everyday assumptions and judgements (Moran, 2000). Husserl wanted to “purifying consciousness” of all possible interruptions that might distort the description of consciousness (Moran, 2000). Phenomenological researchers must identify and put aside their biases and judgements in order to fully grasp the description of a phenomenon by a research subject.

### **3.3.3. Transcendental Phenomenology and the Research Topic**

Moustakas (as cited in Creswell, 2013) outlined the transcendental phenomenology process consisting of:

“...identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one’s experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. The researcher then analyzes the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes. Following that, the researcher develops a textural description of the experiences of the persons (what participants experienced), a structural description of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context), and a

combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experiences” (p. 80).

The use of transcendental or descriptive phenomenology as a research methodology was made in connection to the theoretical framework that encompasses this research study: gaining an understanding of the essence of a phenomenon. Vagle (2014) thinks that Husserl’s essence was to lead qualitative researchers to see the final outcome of their research as the identification of an essential core (Vagle, 2014, p. 29). Once this essential core is collected from a number of participants, it may be used to help educate and instill changes to embedded judgements towards the use of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders. Husserl’s idea of truly examining and understanding a phenomenon cannot exist if pre-existing biases are present that might affect the description of a phenomenon. Like phenomenological reductionism, people also need to bracket judgements and opinions in order to understand a phenomenon, such as the martial arts as an intervention for those with issues around substance use and violent behavior. The goal is to stimulate a change in attitude and move away from the naturalistic assumptions we have about the world that are deeply embedded in our everyday behavior towards objects.

### **3.5. Data Collection**

#### **3.5.1. Population and Sample**

For this phenomenological research study, I used two sampling methods, as I sampled two different populations. Sample size was based on phenomenological guidelines of between five to twenty-five participants from both populations (Polkinghorne, 1989, as cited in Creswell, 2013). The first population sampled are the martial arts participants. Participants chosen were from those who have claimed that their



participation in either traditional or modern forms of martial arts helped them manage or overcome their SUD and violent behavior. Sampling was completed by using non-random purposeful sampling, more specifically, snowball sampling. Snowball sampling can be defined as a “a technique for finding research subjects where one subject gives the researcher the name of another, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on” (Vogt, 2005: 300 as cited in Cohen & Arieli, 2011). The reason for choosing this method is the lack of knowledge about how to access this population. Once access to a participant is achieved, they may be able to create connections with others that have had similar experiences.

The second population sampled in this study are community service workers who provide services to young offenders, which includes mental health and addictions services, the Ministry of Justice, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, and non-profit organizations. This is not limited to profession or role and was open to any community organization that works with the young offender population. The sampling method used for this population is criterion sampling, as the participants studied met a predetermined criterion of importance, which is their involvement with providing services to young offenders (Patton, 1990).

### **3.5.2. Recruitment and Participants**

As noted, two sampling methods were utilized in this study: snowball and criterion sampling. Attempting to find martial artists who fit these criteria proved to be a very difficult and time consuming process. Snowball sampling has been shown to be a useful sampling method when trying to access “hard-to-reach” populations. “Hard-to-reach” populations can be defined as populations with relatively low numbers, that are

difficult to identify, persons who do not want to disclose that they are members of this population (as the behavior in question is illicit), and those who do not want to be socially stigmatized, such as those with criminal histories (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). The population this study is examining fit the “hard-to-reach” definition.

Personal meetings with traditional and non-traditional martial arts clubs in Saskatoon were made. Contact was also made with local, provincial, national, and American traditional and non-traditional martial arts clubs through e-mail that included the studies introduction letter. This also proved to be relatively unsuccessful if one compared the number of e-mails sent to the number of martial arts participants who volunteered. Sending out blanket e-mails to potential respondents only attracted the attention of those who proactively share their story of change (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). All of the participants (n = 5) reported participating in a traditional martial arts program at one point in their lives. One participant is involved in traditional martial arts, two participants are primarily involved in non-traditional martial art (boxing), while two are involved in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), which is a combination of traditional and non-traditional martial arts practices.

Comparatively, recruitment for service providers using a criterion and convenience sampling method proved to be much easier. Research approval was granted by the Saskatoon Health Region, and the Saskatoon Catholic School System to conduct research with their employees. Research approval by management was not required for non-profit organizations. 17 participants (n = 17) were recruited with the majority of them being from the Saskatoon Health Region (15) and the Saskatoon Catholic School System (2).

### **3.5.3. Investigative Techniques**

Data was collected by performing one time individual interviews with the participants, which is the most commonly used method used for a phenomenological investigation (Moustakas, 1994). The questions for both the martial artists (see Appendix E) and service providers (see Appendix F) are semi-structured, which provided boundaries and parameters to the interview, but allowed the conversation to become unstructured in order to learn as much about the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). The interviews were recorded with a digital recording device and transcribed. The locations of the one-on-one interviews were flexible and took place in the community or at their location of convenience to avoid any type of power imbalance between the interviewer and interviewee. One interview with a martial arts participant occurred over the phone, one through the use of the internet server, Skype, and three were conducted in person at the participant's home, martial arts club, and office. Interviews with community service providers were conducted at their office or the writer's office.

### **3.6. Data Analysis**

There are a number of different approaches to phenomenological data analysis that are used in experiential phenomenology. This includes the works of Giorgi, whose approach focuses purely on the description of the phenomenon, and the works of Van Manen, whose approach utilizes an interpretive approach. In this study, a transcendental phenomenology method of data analysis was chosen as the most appropriate method for this study, as the study is attempting to gain an understanding of the experiences of service providers and martial arts participants. Moustakas (1994) outlines a modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of data analysis and includes detailed steps that are helpful for less experienced researchers (Moerer-urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

### 3.6.1. Phenomenological Reduction

Phenomenological reduction is the next stage in discovering the essence of a phenomenon. Phenomenological reduction describes in “textural language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also the relationship between phenomenon and self” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). The process involves a “prereflective description of things just as they appear and a reduction to what is horizontal and thematic” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91). This approach is called “Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction:” “transcendental” because it uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning; “Phenomenological” because the world is transformed into mere phenomena; and “Reduction” in that it leads us back to our own experiences of the way things are (Schmitt, 1968, p. 30 as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 91).

The steps of Phenomenological Reduction include bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering the horizons into themes, and then organizing the themes into a coherent textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Bracketing is where the “focus of the research is placed in brackets, everything else is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Horizontalizing is ensuring every statement is treated as having equal value; then statements that are irrelevant to the topic and question, as well those that are repetitive or overlapping, are deleted, leaving only the *Horizons* (the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon) (Moustakas, 1994). The next step in the phenomenological reduction is to cluster the horizons into themes and organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The next step after Phenomenological Reduction is Imaginative Variation, which is the process to reach “structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words the ‘how’ that speaks to conditions that illuminate the ‘what’ of experience. How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The final step in the phenomenological research method is the synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions gained from Phenomenological Reduction and Imaginative Variation into a statement of the universal essences of the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Zografou, 2012).

Moustakas (1994) outlined steps of analysis:

1. Obtain a full description of your own experience of the phenomenon.
2. From the transcripts:
  - a. Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
  - b. Record all relevant statements.
  - c. List each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement (meaning units of the experiences).
  - d. Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.
  - e. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience.
  - f. Reflect on your own textural description.
  - g. Construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of your experiences.

3. From the verbatim transcript of the experience of each of the other participants, complete the above steps.
4. From the individual textural-descriptions of all participants' experiences, construct a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole.

### **3.7. Ethical Considerations**

Research approval was granted from the Research Ethics Board from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina (Certificate Number 2014-127 – see Appendix A). Each participant was given an informed consent form that stated the purpose of the research study, the process, how the data will be stored, and the option to remove their data from the study if they choose to. Participants also had the option of retaining the data and receiving a copy of the completed study. All voluntary participants are adults (18 years old and above), therefore no other consent or ethical considerations were necessary to ensure consent.

### **3.8. Summary**

This chapter identified the research study's methodological approach, theoretical framework, and methods of data collection and analytical methods. The chapter then provided an overview of phenomenology, which is the methodological approach to understanding the "essence" of the experiences of the martial artist and service providers. The use of transcendental phenomenology method provided by Moustakas (1994) was also outlined and followed by ethical considerations. The next Chapter will provide an

overview of the results from the study and identify the emerging themes from the interviews with the service providers and the martial artists.

## Chapter Four: Results

The young offender population carries with them a complexity of needs related to criminal behavior, as outlined in the RNR model's Needs Principles (Andrews et al., 2011). In order to gain an understanding of the experiences of service providers working with the complexity of needs this population presents with and the personal experiences of past offenders themselves who claim to have changed their substance use and violent behavior through the use of the martial arts, interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed. The chapter will outline the themes that emerged from the interviews with the service providers and martial artists. Following the phenomenological reduction methods outlined by Moustakas (1994), meaning units or themes were extracted from the horizons or significant statements. Through this process, five themes emerged from the service provider data with two sub-themes and nine themes emerged from the martial artists representing four sub-themes. Quotations from the transcripts will be used to reinforce the discovered themes. The following chapter will also provide the essence of the experience of the phenomenon, which is a synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions of both the service providers and the martial artists. This is the final step of the phenomenological reduction process (Moustakas, 1994).

Table 1.0. Service Provider Participants – Themes

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Challenging  
Lack of Motivation to change  
- Difficult to change entrenched attitudes and behaviors  
- Lack of support  
Matching interventions to individual needs  
Alternative interventions can help build rapport and trust  
Martial arts as a positive intervention

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## **4.1. Service Providers**

This section will review the findings discovered from the analysis of the interviews from the 17 service providers who participated in this study. The themes are based from the interview questions that attempted to gain an understanding of the experiences of service providers who work with the young offender population. The questions also attempt to gain their perspectives on the use of alternative interventions, such as the martial arts, for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences. The participants interviewed come from professional backgrounds in mental health, corrections, and education and have years of experience working with young offenders.

### **4.1.1. Challenging**

A theme that resonated throughout the service provider interviews was working with the young offender population is challenging. It was explained by the participants that by the time youth enter the young offender system, there are already a number of intertwined complex issues that led them to engage in these behaviors and are reinforced by their environment. These factors influence how they engage in therapy. Three sub-themes have been identified as the main factors that contribute to the label of challenging and feelings of frustration from the service providers.

#### **4.1.1.1. Lack of Motivation to Change**

One of the most frequently identified reasons as to what made it challenging and frustrating working with the young offender population was the lack of motivation to change or even acknowledge that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. Many of the service providers explained that since young offenders are court mandated to attend treatment they attend sessions without the actual intention of wanting to address their

issues or make any changes to their current lifestyle. This causes problems, as one participant said that:

It's challenging and frustrating in that the only motivation is to not be breached, um, that they don't find anything wrong with their use other than somebody else is telling them...they're motivated by the law rather than wanting to make personal changes. Not to say that all of them are like that, but I would say probably at least 50% of them are only coming to see me to just comply with their order. Whereas maybe the community [non-adjudicated kids], might be doing it more for themselves.

A number of participants felt that a large part of their job is to sell young offenders on the service or get them to buy into the counseling piece of things and help them become motivated to change their current lifestyle. Due to the lack of motivation, many service providers reported frustrations with poor attendance numbers, which disrupts their ability to administer any type of treatment.

#### **4.1.1.2. Difficult to Change Entrenched Attitudes and Behaviors**

Participants expressed that part of the difficulty to engage this population in the change process is due to the negative environments they reside in, be it negative family, negative peers, or substance using and criminal neighborhoods. Being surrounded by drugs, violence, and criminal behavior has reinforced their pro-criminal attitudes, normalizing them. This saturation of pro-criminal attitudes makes it difficult for the youth to identify that the lives they are living are causing them problems and need to be addressed. The motivation to confront and change their behaviors, which are normalized, is pursued by the service providers. However, they expressed feelings of frustration and

exhaustion because the youth struggle seeing the benefit in changing their pro-criminal attitudes and behaviors and living a pro-social lifestyle.

As one of the service providers said:

...one of the biggest challenges is just that...they've been doing it for so long and not only have they been doing it for long but lots of times the people that raised them have been doing it for so long, so it's just really, you know, even though they're just teenagers, it's like, it's still, pretty deeply entrenched to the point where these things are just reactions now... for them changing is hard and even if they were highly motivated, which a lot of them aren't, so with the deeply entrenched patterns and low levels of motivation it's sort of like, a really not-good combination so...and I think the payoff for them are huge. Like the payoff for them are huge, like the payoff of violence and the payoff of using drugs and alcohol. Like they have consequences and sometimes those consequences are bad enough for them but not often.

Another indicated:

...a lot of them have grown up in circumstances that lead them to feel that the type of behaviors they are engaging in aren't necessarily abnormal. Um, so, the idea that they need to change can be quite, can be a barrier um, that you want to kind of, have to work around; try to motivate them to see the benefits of changing because there are often sort of a stance of they have it figured out and they just won't do this in the future without really understand the various contributing factors that may have led them to behaving that way in the first place.

#### **4.1.1.3. Lack of Support**

When discussing what service providers feel is the most important thing needed as an intervention to help change criminal behavior in young offenders the main theme that was clear is the lack of pro-social supports in their lives. This includes positive family and more one-to-one support from service providers in the community to teach and support them in learning daily life skills, such as waking up in the morning and getting to school on time. Many of the youth do not have the supports to follow through with routines and continue the cycle that was ingrained in them by their family and their environment. They felt that a strong connection to a positive adult role model, which can be in the form of a family member or even a service provider, such as a teacher, coach, etc., is needed in order to make changes in their lives. The service providers identified the gap between therapy and the youth's home life and seemed frustrated and helpless in their efforts, that there is no one in the youth's lives to assist them once they leave their offices, schools, or jails. As one of the service providers interviewed said:

...they have a YO worker or a substance management worker or something, but who is that person in the community that keeps them afloat; keeps them connected to the positive life and helps them stay in the pro-social world of things?

A number of the service providers felt they are unable to provide the one-to-one guidance these youth need when they leave their office, in-patient treatment facility, schools, or jails, due to their job descriptions. They identified a large gap in professional support for follow-up support when they return to their home environment, as it is difficult to follow up with the treatment plan when they are faced with a number of

barriers, such as the lack of motivational support, transportation, and money. One service provider shared:

More funding, more resources, more options, more counselors. Um, counsellors that can assist in a more practical and hands on way that, um, psychologists especially have a tendency to sit back and be very disconnected and, um, I sometimes wonder about how my clients are supposed to figure out the things that I am telling them to figure out on their own. Like, I can give them instructions, but actually going somewhere and doing it is a different animal. So, integrated care with the community, I would say, would be helpful.

Another participant added:

I think we need resources or people to help these kids, figure out what they need and actually physically help them get what they need. Because a lot of times we can talk about that it would be nice to go do kickboxing or swimming or whatever, but a lot of the times they don't even have transportation to get to kickboxing, swimming or whatever. Or, the money to even do it. Those are the barriers. Um, so it would be nice if you could just help them do that. Right? Like coach them, have a personal coach to help them out with that but we don't have the resources to do that...

#### **4.1.2. Matching Interventions to Individual Needs**

Service providers found that it was helpful and more beneficial using a multidisciplinary approach to treatment planning and intervention when working with a population that presents with complex needs. A number of participants already utilize this approach with their clients and try to provide matched interventions depending on the

youth's needs and treatment goals. When treatment planning and matching youth to appropriate interventions, service providers are open to and encourage alternative approaches to therapy to address the various individual issues and needs with which each youth present. Many participants indicated that not everyone is going to benefit from individual talk therapy and feel that there needs to be other alternative interventions to help engage youth in changing their current behaviors. One service provider stated:

I think that there is not really any one way that is the right way when we look at options and ideas around working with youth. I think, um, some youth do well with structure and I think other youth just don't do well with structure and some of the youth do really well with individual counselling, some youth do not like individual counseling, so, I think we really have to really listen to what our clients want and sort of try to focus our interventions and our work with our clients based on what they think is useful... trying to understand what works best for each client is really what we want to do.

Another participant said:

...I mean I don't think talk therapy is necessary for anyone to change. I think there are many different ways that people can change things. That's sort of a general statement. I mean, people in the world generally make lots of changes and do different things and solve their problems without going to talk therapy a lot of times. However, talk therapy for some people is quite important and can be very beneficial and ...so in that respect I think, yeah, it is very beneficial, but I don't think it excludes other ... interventions.

#### **4.1.3. Alternative Interventions Can Help Built Rapport and Trust**

A number of service providers felt that using alternative interventions, such as art and recreational activities, also complements talk therapies, as it can help engage a resistant client. Participants felt that alternative therapies can help engage a client in the therapeutic process. A service provider disclosed:

I think, personally, that lots of the youth in this population, they don't trust many people, so I don't think the talking methods is really, it is important, it is good to open up, but just building that relationship with hands on. So a rec therapist position, it is for sure hands on, it's the act of play through activity and getting to know each other and once they build that trust through the activity they actually open up quite honestly with what's going on and sometimes they don't realize it in the activity. So I think that's a good method for intervention with youth, but they still have to be able to talk and be honest.

#### **4.1.4. Martial Arts as a Positive Intervention**

All of the service providers disclosed that had very little knowledge or personal experience with the martial arts. What they understood of the martial arts is that it contains physical and mental training that demands discipline and promotes a positive lifestyle. When asked if they felt that that the martial arts can be an effective intervention for young offenders with substance influence violent offences, the responses were mixed. However, the majority of the service providers felt that it may be an effective intervention for this population.

A number of participants felt that it can help young offenders with emotional regulation problems that are related to their substance use and aggressive and violent

behavior. They felt that the structure and discipline involved in martial arts training can provide the parameters around what is appropriate behavior and what is not. The service providers also felt that this type of training is a positive outlet for youth who cannot delay gratification and curb their impulses on their own. One participant said:

I think it could be really positive, especially if, for a lot of the kids who have issues with anger and aggression, and being able to have that place, and especially if they have a violent history, you know, they obviously, feel that they are using their anger in a way that is violent, that for them, feels good at the time and usually gets them into trouble, but if they can channel that energy and go to that place and learn and do it that way, and have that space to do that, I think that can potentially be helpful for them.

Another service provider interviewed shared:

Well it would be a coping strategy, um, for their cravings. I would think. Um, to focus on something else rather than their substance use. Um, and be more passionate about that than using...More healthy way of dealing, coping, and putting their energy into something else.

The majority of service providers also felt that participating in the martial arts can benefit a young offender struggling with substance use and aggressive behaviors by replacing the negative behaviors with positive one. Many of the participants indicated that martial arts would be a beneficial replacement for those behaviors, but they also indicated that if the youth can connect to and become passionate about any pro-social activity, it can help reduce their substance and aggressive behavior, as it can occupy their time positively.



#### **4.1.5. Service Providers – Essence**

What was expressed throughout the data that was gathered with service providers who work with the young offender population is that of disappointment, exhaustion, and frustration due to the difficulty in engaging them in identifying issues that need to be addressed. The service providers struggle with the youth’s ingrained pro-substance using and pro-criminal attitudes that continue to be influenced by their negative environments, which include family, friends, and neighborhood. Addressing these issues can have a higher probability of success through a multidisciplinary approach that includes alternative interventions to accompany traditional “talk therapies,” that can individually cater to the needs of a youth. However, what these youth need is a pro-social role model in their lives either being from their own family or friends or through a service provider that can help transfer skills taught in treatment to their daily lives in the community.

**Table 2.0. Martial Arts Participants – Themes**

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Directionless  
Not being accepted  
Direction  
Supportive and challenging environment  
- Positive Instructor  
- Teammates  
Humbling  
Coping mechanism  
Avoiding fighting  
Lessons taught in the gym translate to life  
- Hard work and dedication  
- Building confidence  
Martial arts changed my life

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#### **4.2. Martial Artists Results**

This section will review the findings that were uncovered from the analysis of the five martial artist interviews. The themes are based on the interview questions that were

asked to gain an understanding from the martial artist's experiences of how practicing traditional or non-traditional martial arts helped them manage or overcome their substance use, violent, and criminal behavior. The themes identified not only describe the participant's experiences in the martial arts, but also their lives before they engaged in the practice. The themes identified provide context to their involvement with substance use, aggressiveness, and criminal behavior and how they decided to enter the martial arts.

The martial arts participants range from the age of 18 to 38 and come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are beginning martial artists, while the majority of them have a lifetime of experience in both traditional and modern martial arts. Two of the participants compete or aspire to compete and become a professional fighter, while one has been an established professional fighter at the top of the industry for a number of years. One participant has returned to modern martial arts training, while the other participant has been practicing for years and it has become a part of his regular lifestyle. All of the participants have struggled with substance use while four of the participants struggled with aggressive and violent behaviors. Only one participant has been charged and arrested for a violent crime while under the influence of a substance.

#### **4.2.1. Directionless**

Throughout the interviews a number of participants described their lives before the martial arts as lost and directionless, which is what led some to substance use and criminal behavior. Each participant had their own specific reasons as to why they felt this way, such as feeling overlooked, losing one's sense of self, and feeling unhappy in life.

One participant shared that some of it was due to the loss of identity when he decided to stop playing sports in high school, as his identity was tied in with his athletics.

The participant said that he "...lost all direction then because that was all that I was. All I did before that was athletics and then all of a sudden that was, I felt that was taken away from me, so I'd go find something else." The participant said that the lack of direction and frustration from being overlooked by his coaches in high school sports led to increased partying, which included alcohol use and experimenting with drugs. This pattern continued after high school as the participant said that "If I wasn't drunk or high it was because I was stuck at some shitty job that I didn't want to be in and I was probably working to make money to get drunk or high. And most of the jobs I was drunk or high too [laughs]."

Another participant shared feelings of disappointment in himself after ending up in jail. He described his high school life as being unproductive, as he spent his time making money illegally by selling drugs. The martial artist stated:

That was the word that came up in my head is 'I'm not doing anything productive'. I'm not even, not for society or not even for myself. You know 'fuck this, I'm going to do something productive at least for myself because I, I've done nothing for three years,' you know what I mean? I don't even have T4 slips to show. I've got nothing and when I got arrested I had, like, two grand on me and now it's pretty much all money that I had stashed up, like, that and then another 2 grand they took and that was all the money I've made. They pretty much took it all. And so, it was like, when I got busted it just kicked me way back to square one, which was being broke as hell, you know, no, nothing on my resume, nothing.

#### **4.2.2. Not Being Accepted**

Two participants spoke in length about not being accepted by their peers, teachers, and coaches while they were in high school. Feelings of rejection seems to resonate in the stories of these two participants and appear to represent changing points in their lives. Some participants felt that due to the lack of acceptance, it turned them off athletics, which they both felt may have led them in a more positive direction in their lives. One participant described his struggles in high school:

I was kind of a skinny...I wasn't that jock in high school you know what I mean? Those were the kids they wanted, not, I just didn't really, at that time I just didn't fit in with that crew. It just really turned me away from athletics and I was heavily, heavily involved in athletics up to that point. And then all of a sudden, like I got over looked and kind of pushed away from it, as if um, you know, not worthy to be there...

Another participant describes his struggles with teacher and coaches at his high school:

I had a lot of issues with the teacher's kind of who ran the wrestling program. I wasn't really, you know, I wasn't really liked and I didn't really like him and it was kind of just a bad thing like that, so. I never ended up doing wrestling and I always wanted to and I always felt like that got stolen from me you know? And yeah, it's like; and now that I have it, I really think that maybe if I did pursue it then maybe I could have, you know, could of stayed out of trouble, you know?

#### **4.2.3. Direction**

For a number of martial artists, joining the martial arts gave them a sense of direction in their lives, which also allowed them to set and create goals for themselves.

The goals differed for each participant, from physical fitness to fighting professionally, but overall, their participation in the martial arts appeared to give them just something to look forward to, even on a weekly basis. However, participating in weekly martial arts training allowed them to see improvement in their skills, creating personal goals for themselves. These goals motivated them to work harder and harder, which improved their self-confidence, as one participant reported: "...seeing myself, like, grow in a sport and get better at it and learn something, something to strive for. That really helped me out a lot. Something I was aiming to get better at and working at. Like a goal in sight pushing through towards it..."

Participation in the martial arts helped create goals that changed the way they approached their lives. One participant described how professional fighting grew into a passion and how that passion changed the way he approaches fighting and his substance use:

...I won a couple of fights, like I said, not training at all, never been to a gym, won, a couple of times and then finally I lost a fight and that was when I decided to get to a gym and I was actually, I think I was on cocaine when I lost that fight and I was Like 'man, I really like doing this,' won a couple before that and then I lost and I really like doing this but if I'm going to take this serious then I need to stop doing all of this and I didn't really have anything else going on for myself at the time, I was just working at a factory, so I was like, hell, I'm going to pursue this. I love this so much that it wasn't a hard thing for me [quitting drugs]. It was really simple; you know what I mean? Because I loved it that much.

#### **4.2.4. Supportive and Challenging Environment**

Many of the participants found that joining a martial arts club was a supportive environment where they felt welcomed and accepted. They described that they were accepted by both the instructor and their teammates as they were able to meet a number of positive peers who were supportive. This acceptance appeared to be a key component to changing their substance use and aggressive and violent behaviors.

##### **4.2.4.1. Positive Instructors**

One theme that was identified by a number of the martial arts participants is the role their instructor played in their recovery. The relationship with their instructors was mentioned often, as they were accepting, understanding, and encouraging, but also challenged them to improve. Having a pro-social instructor helped guide them through their journey of substance use reduction, anger management, and improving self-confidence. One participant described his relationship with his instructor:

He's like one of the greatest guys I know. He helps every single person, he's a friend to everybody I know. He brought me in with open arms and he has a real deep trust, you know, for his students and he knows how to, he's a really good judge of character. He is the type of guy that takes in, took in guys like me you know? He gave me a fair, he didn't overlook the fact that they are in trouble or they are having issues with, you know, baby situations and stuff like that, you know? Life is hectic. He doesn't care about any of that.

Another participant describes his relationship with his wrestling coach and school teacher and how she was understanding of his learning disability and encouraged him to not give up and keep working.

My first wrestling coach was very patient with me which I hadn't experienced that in other, in other sports I was playing at that time...she was the one who encouraged me to wrestle in the summer and stuff like that. And she was like ' you know you're really good at this, you should consider doing this'...But she showed me how it builds confidence, so when I was having trouble in school, my coach was also my grade 8 teacher and so she would say, I remember one time I was having a problem and she was like 'look if you can figure out how to', like I was wrestling big guys, 'like if you can figure out how to get that big guy on his ass there's no way you can't figure out this math problem'. You know so it gives me the confidence to engage in that stuff and it's like ' yeah if I can do that then why can't I do this?'

#### **4.2.4.2. Teammates**

A number of the participants expressed the importance of the role teammates played in changing their substance use and aggressive behavior. This relationship gave them a sense of belonging, as they felt as if they were accepted for the first time instead of being judged. One participant shared how the relationship did not have to be between same aged peers, as he became friends with a teammate who was much older. His relationship with the older peer became almost a mentor-mentee relationship, helping the participant not only in the gym, but also in life. One participant shared how some teammates go out of their way to help each other out:

I was training with one of the pro boxers at the gym and he was kind of like showing me some of his stuff he knows and passing on some of his experience to me. Just not that I asked, not that it's his role. He just saw me at the gym doing

something that wasn't right and he steps in to kind of help me out right? Like, everyone kind of looks after each other, so you kind of build a bigger relationship than just the relationship to your coach. And I guess it's also, you get a little bit of support from everybody, which helps out too.

The participant also explained how teammates can not only help you out at the gym, but also in life, as he connected with one of his older teammates:

There's one guy at my gym that's 44 or something like that and he's helped me out with more than just boxing right? Like, I don't really have much of a father figure. Um, and I guess that not saying that believe me this guy, he's not a father figure to me, but he's been very helpful with even just little questions that I've had and he helps me in the gym with boxing, but I I've had some decent talks with him about other stuff and he's given me a lot of advice just about life and kind of even helped me put me in my place too. We had some serious talks about school and stuff and, like I mean you don't think that a 18 and a 44-year-old would connect that easily, but you're in the gym together, 3-4 times a week right?

Some of the participants describe a friendship and comradery that develops between teammates through the rigors of training together. They said that the bond they build between each other is not only friendship, but develops into a brotherhood and a family; a group that supports and trusts each other and a group that they are accountable to. One participant reported how important his "martial family" is to him and how he would never want to let anything, like his substance use, affect them and the way they see him.



#### 4.2.5. Humbling

Many of the martial arts participants shared their experiences sparring and fighting at the club or in amateur and professional fights. One thing they expressed was how much they learned about themselves, not through winning, but through losing or getting “beaten up”. As one participant said: “...I don’t know any other way to say it, but a good ass kicking can change someone’s mind on, outlook on life real quick.” The theme of learning from one’s losses emerged from the interviews. However, it was not necessarily just about how not to lose a fight, but learning that they are not the greatest out there, which they described as a “humbling” experience. One participant said that:

Martial arts is like, especially MMA, where you get choked and beaten on a regular basis, but you know your o.k., you slap each other’s hands after and you do the same thing. It really exposes you kind of like, making it, it humbles you so much because you know that, it’s hard to explain. It’s like you know that there is something better out there, you know? And you’re not the greatest thing walking around and it gives you kind of a humbling with everything in life.

A few participants shared that it was a humbling experience when a smaller martial artist beat them. They entered the martial arts thinking that they can win, but losing to people they perceived as not as strong or as good of a fighter as they are showed them that they have a lot to learn in martial arts, but also in life, and to gain success requires a lot of dedication and work. One martial artist interviewed said:

Like you go into a ring and you have somebody that's way better than you and you look at them and you think 'oh I should be able to kick their ass'. The best boxer in a gym looks like he weighs a buck thirty and he can kill me you know

and it's really humbling when somebody handles you like that. And instead of getting angry about it which usually happens the first couple of times, you start, you can start to see their clock working you know. And they're starting to figure out 'oh I notice that he holds his elbow in like this and oh I notice that he drops his left hand when he does this. Okay I'm gonna do this now'. And so instead of just the lash out you get to analyze why you're doing that and that analytical mind frame carries forward going down the road...

#### **4.2.6. Coping Mechanism**

Another prominent theme that arose was that practicing the martial arts became a coping mechanism for their emotional and their mental health issues. Many stated that they turned to drugs and alcohol or violence to help cope with their emotional and life struggles. One participant reported suffering from physical abuse as a child, which caused him to have a lot of angry and violent outbursts. He said that alcohol was a way to help him deal with those emotions as alcohol would “numb” him from everything. Another participant shared similar reasons as to why he used marijuana, as he said that it helped him “run away” from his problems.

For the participants, the martial arts was a new way to cope with their emotions, as it was a safe way to release their emotions instead of fighting on the streets. One participant said that “one of the reasons is that I love boxing so much is because it’s a great stress reliever and it kind of lifts some weight off of your shoulders and just getting rid of all of that negative energy in your system.” Another participant stated that “for those seconds your training or those minutes or hours or, everything just disappears in

your life.” One participant shared his struggles with his emotions and how wrestling helped him:

I had a lot of violent outbursts when I was younger, like, and extreme violent outbursts, like I've tried to stab people, I ...beat people to the point where they're unrecognizable... and I was also getting picked on and I was the victim of abuse. So ...my folks, and there was some alcoholism in my family, my dad was dealing with, you know, the residential school effects and those types of things, they, I was always, I was always lashing out towards people and uh, and uh this seemed to be, wrestling was something that I could do, I was also playing hockey and all these other sports. But wrestling was something that piqued my interest because it allowed me to get that out of my system in a way that I wasn't... it was controlled and they were teaching me why I should and shouldn't do that to people...it was a chance for me to get out that physical aggression without hurting anybody.

#### **4.2.7. Avoiding Fighting**

The majority of the participants indicated that their involvement in street fighting stopped when they joined the martial arts and they have been able to avoid street fighting, despite instigation from others, since. Practicing the martial arts gave them a chance to examine why they were fighting so often. This self-examination was due to support from their instructors, who challenged their attitudes around fighting and taught them how poor emotional control affected their abilities in the ring and also in life. A number of participants reported feeling a lot calmer in stressful situations and better able to control their anger. One participant said that because he is able to stay calmer, he is more adaptable to stressful situation. A number of the martial artists stated that they gained

confidence in themselves, and if a situation were to occur where they would have to defend themselves, they have confidence in their ability to handle the situation because of their training.

One participant identified that practicing the martial arts gave him the confidence in himself to walk away from a fight and that he just doesn't care if someone insults him or tries to pick a fight with him. Some martial artists feel that to engage in a street fight is not fair to their opponent since they have training in the martial arts. One participant explains this:

If you play soccer like three or four times a week for around a year and then you go to the park and play soccer with someone who is maybe kicked the ball around once or twice in a year, right? So, obviously you are going to be not even close. It's just not going to be a comparison. Um, I basically practice that art three or four times a week so like defense and all of that kind of stuff and it, for me, if someone were to ever try to fight me or something like that it really not worth it, you know? It's just such a difference of understanding of the sport, but if someone tried to fight me it just wouldn't be fair and I think about it like that. So, I've, for this six months I've been boxing I've never had an issue with fights. I just know that there's no point in that.

Due to the inequality in skill they did not think that it was fair, but also that they did not have anything to prove. This change in attitude might have also contributed to their ability to control their emotions, such as anger, and they were able to remain calm in stressful situations.

#### **4.2.8. Lessons Learned in the Gym Translate to Life**

A theme that also came up in the analysis is that the martial arts participants learned a number of lessons while training in the martial arts that can be transferred into their daily lives. Participants said that the martial arts are not simply learning how to fight, but that there is a direct connection between martial arts practice and your life. One participant shared his perspective on how lessons learned in the martial arts caused him to analyze his regular life:

So, it's about all these, it's all these little self-tools that you're teaching the person as they go through it, that it's the philosophy behind it, right? The physical stuffs there, but people always seem to focus on the physical, but that's just a small part of it. Then it can go into the whole spiritual and that for me was what it was with boxing was 'why am I doing what I'm doing, like what's my purpose in life, why, why am I so angry all the time?' And so it helped give me a lens to look at it through and it was a safe outlet, a consensual outlet that allowed me to get to that point...

Another martial artist realized the connection at one point during his martial arts training. He said that he realized he was losing his temper in the ring and that it would affect his performance. Identifying this caused him to think how his anger affects his day-to-day life and his relationships with his wife and his family. The participant said:

...I was losing my temper in the ring sometimes and I, and I, and I know and I've seen, and I usually was pretty good about controlling my temper, but the times I did I got my ass handed to me whether somebody way worse than me or not. I started to make mistakes, you know, swing for the fences, you know, and so open

up my guard and stuff so I started to think 'if it's doing this to me in the ring, what is it doing to me in my life?' you know and so, and so then I really started talking to my, who's now my wife, and I said, and she was like 'yeah there's times when you were scary when you're angry, you never hit me, you never did anything like that but when you're angry you scare me like I avoid you' and I thought 'fuck, like I don't wanna scare my partner' and then I started talking to my brother and he's like 'yeah when you're, when you're drinking man you're fuckin a zombie' and I was like 'oh' and he was like 'yeah I just avoid you when you're drinking' so I thought 'well I don't want my brother to avoid me'. So then it started to be like 'why is, why am I letting it, like why am I letting it get control outside of the ring' you know?

#### **4.2.8.1. Hard Work and Dedication**

Another life lesson that was identified was learning the importance of hard work and dedication. Participants shared that to be in a martial arts setting or to compete in the martial arts you have to be committed to the training or else there is the risk of losing or getting hurt. Learning these skills in martial arts training transferred over to their daily life. One participant said that he would often quit and not follow through with things in his life such as school, wrestling, soccer, etc. Now he said: "I don't want to quit. I never want to quit." One participant reports that:

You have to be committed to; believe me if this didn't show me commitment I don't know what would because you can't just go once a week or so and, you know, kind of take a couple of weeks off. If you miss a couple of weeks of boxing it's, when you go back it's not easy to get back into, you know? It definitely

helped me with my commitment to different things. I've noticed that I used it as examples for, even just doing work and stuff. If I'm starting to give up in boxing I think 'oh if I give up now, then next time I try to do this, it will be even harder,' whereas if I power through it, the next time I do the exact same thing it will be easier. It only gets easier after you do it. Um, shit, if I'm doing homework I'm like 'Ok. If I give up it's going to be harder the next time I try it.' So, I mean working ethic and stuff and work ethic it's helped with life skills...

Another participant also reported how gaining success in the gym was due to hard work and dedication and that if he applied this same principle to his school work he can also achieve success in that area of his life:

I needed to be like 'yes I can beat that guy, so why can't I do this?' and 'the reason I can beat the guy is because I put 10 hours in at the gym every week. The reason I can't do this is because I'm not doing my homework' and she [coach/teacher] said 'exactly'. You know so then it; I stayed after school and she helped me with some homework so it was directly translatable to me, like I know for a fact that it helped me graduate school.

#### **4.2.8.2. Building Confidence**

A number of participants also shared how practicing the martial arts helped them gain self-confidence and overcome personal insecurities. One participant felt that he gained a feeling of empowerment since he has been training and feels that he can be someone greater than he was. One participant said that he wasn't happy but being in the martial arts gave him a platform to find some success, which improved his self-image and

confidence. Another participant reported that he also gained more self-confidence from the positive feedback his instructor and teammates gave him.

Many of the participants discussed the “grind” of training, but also the experience you gain from competing, where you’re pushing yourself to your physical and psychological limits. Pushing yourself through difficult situations, like a fight, a hard training session, or a loss are periods of growth for them. Overcoming hardships helped improve their self-confidence, even if the results were unsuccessful, as they took the experience as life lessons on how to overcome hardships in the future. One participant shared:

If you get pushed to that edge where your body quits on you and your body quits on you and somebody is still punching you in your face and you get up and turn around and throw up in the middle of the rounds. That’s where you’re exposed. You feel like you’re born again. You’re exposed to the world. I’m not the greatest thing on earth. I don’t know how to put it in words, but it’s like wow, I’ve, I’ve never thought that my body could be taken to this, this type of torture and to know that this is a very humble gym and world champs thinking about what they put themselves through? And how hard they work? You know, there’s levels and then there are levels upon levels, levels, level, and you look to that like I said you can either say fuck that and just quit or you can, you know, try to get to that.

#### **4.2.9. Martial Arts Changed My Life**

All of the martial arts participants felt that practicing the martial arts helped change their substance use, aggression and violence, and criminal behaviors. They all shared how what they have learned in the martial arts helped them not only overcome



those issues, but overall helped make them strive for more in their lives and to be better human beings. One martial artist said:

...my fighting ability is probably the least thing that has been changed, you know, in my life since I joined. The rest of my life is the most, you know, everything, the way I conduct myself and everything. That has been the real thing that, you know, I've learned. Fighting is the least. As much as it has gotten good, it's the least I've learned. Learning how to be a good human being, you know, respectful and have discipline and you know, stuff like that. That's the number one thing that I've learned. And, you know, they maybe not teach you that directly, but you're forced to learn that.

Another participant shared how training in the martial arts helped him gain insight into areas of his life that he needs to work on, overall learning how to better himself:

...I feel like martial arts has given me a totally different view on how to operate my body and my mind and my soul, you know?.. It means being, it means being the best you, you can possibly be. Like that's really what it comes down to. It's not about being better than somebody else, although sometimes that competitive edge comes in, but it truly is about being the best version of yourself you can and pushing yourself in all these ways and challenging yourself. Like martial arts more than anything, it forces you to look at your shortfalls. Like it outright forces you to look at your shortfalls whether it's in the ring or on the mat or whatever, right? Like you're gonna, you're gonna find out real quick if you're good at something or not and it, and it allows you the time, and the patience, and the

coaching to deal with those things to see how you can better yourself and it can directly translate into your life further down the road.

Another participant explains how engaging in the martial arts has given him a career, direction, and changed his substance use behavior.

...I've literally went from, you know, complete 360 from that drug addict, going to jail, to only a fighter mixed martial artists you know what I mean (Laughs)? You know very few people are going to make that much of a turn, you know what I mean? It's like going from the dark to the light. Going from apples to oranges. For what it's done for me is probably more extreme than, because it didn't just change my life, it became my life, and you know it supports my family and it has gotten me a house and decent cars, you know what I mean?...its literally done every single thing for me like it defines me now. Like, it is, that is what I am now. There's no, there's no other (*Name*) anymore that's, that's the only (*Name*) that's left. So, literally, you know, it took over my life and made me who I am.

#### **4.3. Martial Artists - Essence**

The single act of training in the martial arts did not facilitate the martial artists to change their substance use, criminal, and aggressive and violent behaviors. The martial arts training encompassed a number of mechanisms that include a positive and welcoming environment with supportive instructors and teammates that supported them, learning life lessons through losing, such as humility, perseverance, goal setting, and hard work, which improved their own self-confidence that contributed to their change but also helped them be better human beings than they were before. These mechanisms allowed the participants to fulfill the feeling of being lost and directionless and address personal issues that led to their substance use, criminal, and violent behavior.

#### **4.4. Summary**

The themes identified through the interviews with service providers express the difficulties working with the young offender population due to a variety of barriers to change, such as lack of motivation, challenges within the living environment, and the lack of support in the community through resources and pro-social modeling. In regard to providing services, the participants recommended the importance of matching interventions with individual needs, incorporating a multidisciplinary approach to treatment and support for the use of alternative interventions, as it can help build rapport with resistant youth. What was surprising was that the majority of service providers were in favor of the use of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders.

The complexities of needs for young offenders mirror the complex nature of the martial arts and the impact it can have on changing substance use and criminal and violent behavior. The martial arts do not target these problems directly. However, there are a number of mechanisms that were identified by the martial artists that translated to their daily lives, which helped them work through their issues, such as gaining direction in their lives, improving their self-confidence, gaining support and acceptance from instructors and teammates, and learning how to cope with their emotions that are connected to their substance use and violent behaviors. Next, chapter five will provide a discussion of the results of this study and compare them to existing literature on the topic of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences. The chapter will also examine the study's results on the impact on social

work practice, provide an overview of the limitations of the study, and will end with the conclusion.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This chapter will integrate the results from the interviews with the service providers and the martial artists with the existing literature in order to identify commonalities and differences between this literature and the data discovered through this phenomenological study. I will then contrast the results obtained from interviews with service providers and martial artists in regards to the use of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences and will examine both the potential benefits and challenges associated with the use of martial arts as an adjunctive intervention for this population.

### **5.1. Martial Artists**

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to answer the question: Can martial arts be an effective intervention for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences? Through interviewing martial artists and going through the phenomenological reduction process, the essence of the experiences of the service providers and the martial artists were disseminated, giving a purer understanding of the mechanisms of the phenomenon of changing one's substance use and violent offences through the practice of the martial arts.

Based on the perspectives of the five martial artists, participation in the martial arts has assisted in managing and overcoming both substance use and violent behaviors. What the results of this phenomenological qualitative study have revealed is that it is not one singular component of the martial arts that helped them change their behaviors, but a combination of components that played a role in facilitating change. Eight themes were uncovered that they perceived helped them overcome substance use and violent behaviors. Specifically, martial arts gave them direction in life, acceptance, positive

instructors and teammates, experience with losing, a coping mechanism, facilitated attitude changes, and provided lessons learned through hardships, such as perseverance and self-confidence. Similar effects of martial arts training have been claimed by martial arts clubs and suggested in some studies, such as decreasing depression and anxiety through exercise, giving a sense of belonging, and building confidence/self-esteem, (Hishinuma et al., 2012; Nosanchuk, 1981; Strayhorn & Strayhorn, 2009). However, the findings in the present study provided a much clearer description of the mechanisms of how the participants were able to achieve them, where other studies were unable to find the evidence (Strayhorn & Strayhorn, 2009; Trulson, 1986).

## **5.2. Service Providers**

The second purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences service providers had working with the young offender population and their perspectives on the use of alternative interventions, such as the martial arts with young offenders with substance influenced violent offences. Themes that were uncovered are that service providers find this population challenging to work with as they lack motivation to change, have entrenched attitudes and behaviors, and lack support. In regards to alternative interventions, service providers felt that matching interventions to their needs are important and that alternative interventions, such as recreational activities, can be an adjunct to traditional therapy and help improve rapport and trust in a therapeutic relationship. When it comes to the use of the martial arts as an intervention, the majority of service providers felt that it can be an effective intervention for this population. That the majority of service providers were in favor of the martial arts as a positive intervention for young offenders was unexpected. However, this may be due to the fact that the majority of service providers interviewed are in therapeutic and clinical roles.

The findings might have been different if interviews were able to be conducted with those working from a justice perspective.

It was not a surprise to see that service providers found engaging young offenders in the change process as “challenging,” due to personal experiences working with that population. The lack of motivation in changing their offending behavior and more specifically, substance use behavior among young offenders is supported in the literature (Gideon, 2010; Lennings et al., 2006). Service providers identified not a single factor, but a number of factors and variables that act as barriers to engaging young offenders in the change process, such as individual motivation, negative environment, and systemic barriers.

Another consistent theme that was discovered is the lack of support for the youth in the community. Many service providers identified the need for at least one positive role model for youth to connect with in the community to help them transfer the skills they learned in school, jail, or treatment, into their lives. This theme was also found in the literature, as treatment for young offenders with substance use issues should include after care and long-term management (van der Put et al., 2014).

### **5.3. Martial Arts and Violence**

Making comparisons to literature is difficult, as studies focusing specifically on martial arts as an intervention for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences are non-existent. When focusing on martial arts and young offenders, literature around this subject also does not exist. A small number of studies examine the effects of the martial arts, both traditional and non-traditional, and delinquent behaviors with adjudicated and non-adjudicated youth. However, a meta-analysis conducted by Gubbels et al. (2016) found that there is a general lack of solid, independent research on this

relationship and existing data on juveniles is inconsistent, due to possible underreporting of negative results. Overall, their study did not identify a relationship between the martial arts and externalizing behaviors suggesting that there was no difference between the level of externalizing behaviors for martial artists and athletes participating in other sports or non-athletes. However, after controlling for publication bias using a trim-and-fill-procedure, a positive relationship was found between martial arts participants and externalizing behaviors. These results contradict the results from this study, as the majority of the martial arts participants reported an inverse relationship between martial arts participation and aggressive behaviors.

There are a number of studies that suggest a difference between participating in traditional martial arts and a non-traditional one and its effects on aggressive and violent behaviors. The studies emphasize that traditional martial arts incorporate the philosophy of non-violence and meditation, while modern martial arts are more focused on competition, suggesting an increase in aggressiveness (Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Nosanchuk & Macneil, 1989). What was discovered through this phenomenological study is that the martial artists experienced a reduction in aggressive and violent behaviors despite participating in modern martial arts, such as wrestling, kickboxing, boxing, and MMA. Only one participant preferred the traditional martial arts over modern martial arts and spoke highly of martial virtues and the teachings of the martial arts. However, the martial artists had trained in traditional martial arts but the majority of them were mainly focused on non-traditional training. The participants indicated that since they have joined the martial arts they have not engaged in any illegal fighting, or “street fighting.”



Based on the findings from the martial artists, the reduction in “street fighting” was attributed to a change in their attitude around fighting, improved self-confidence, and being humbled. Two martial artists indicated that their change in attitude around fighting was mainly facilitated by their instructors, who modeled pro-social behaviors around aggression and violence (Burt & Butler, 2011; Theeboom et al., 2008; Zivin et al., 2001). One participant indicated that his boxing instructor helped him identify how his anger and aggression affected not only his ability to stay focused in a fight, but also how it affected his relationships in his day-to-day life. The relationship some of the participants had with their instructor was an important factor in changing their behaviors. The relationship helped them feel accepted, as instructors were non-judgmental and accepted them for who they are, they were also challenging, as they would challenge their negative attitudes and behaviors, and they were a positive support for martial artists, as they would give them advice, but also push and encourage them to work past the difficult times in training and in their lives. The significance of a supportive instructor and pro-social modeling in the lives of the martial arts participants was found to be congruent with the literature.

The literature made a clear distinction between the instruction from a traditional martial arts instructor and that of a modern martial arts instructors indicating that modern martial arts instruction may increase aggressive and violent behavior due to reinforcing those types of attitudes (Burt & Butler, 2011; Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Trulson, 1986; Twemlow & Sacco, 1998). However, the martial arts participants all received instruction from a modern martial arts instructor during their training and maintained their ability to overcome and reduce their substance use and violent behaviors. This finding may not be

generalizable, as results may vary depending on the instructors and their style of teaching where one might emphasize the importance of self-control and emotional regulation, while another might focus on self-defense and competition (Strayhorn & Strayhorn, 2009).

What may also have contributed to their change in attitude around fighting was improved self-confidence and humbling experiences, which developed through the hardships of training and losing. These virtues were also suggested in a number of studies (Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Nosanchuk, 1981; Trulson, 1986; Twemlow & Sacco, 1998). However, what was not apparent in the literature is how these virtues were developed and strengthened. According to the mixed martial artists interviewed for this study, going through the difficulties of physical training improved their self-confidence, as it allowed them to push themselves further than they ever had. Knowing that they can push through the difficulties of training improved their confidence. The losses helped them realize that they have a lot to learn in the martial arts, but also about themselves and were considered humbling experiences by the participants. It was unexpected that a number of participants claimed that is what helped them change. One stated that “some people just need a good ass kicking.” The idea that an “ass kicking,” a violent act, can reduce one’s violent behavior is surprising and one could assume would create the opposite effect. However, the experience of losing was linked to changes to the way they approached training, as they learned that dedication and hard work is needed in order to achieve success, that they do not know everything, and that there is always something new to learn. This was also a humbling experience. Building self-confidence and being humbled changed their perception around “street fighting” since some of the martial artists no longer perceive a

“street fight” as a fair fight, and they also have the self-confidence to walk away from a fight without feeling ashamed for walking away.

#### **5.4. Martial Arts and Substance Use**

The interviews with the participants also found that the physical component of the martial arts was used as a healthy mechanism to cope with difficult emotions, such as stress, anger, and depression. They reported that these emotions were connected to their substance using behavior, their violent behavior, and for some, acute substance use and violent behaviors. Participating in the physicality component of the martial arts helped them release some of the stress that they had, as one martial artist stated that it “lifts some weight off of your shoulders and just getting rid of all of that negative energy in your system.” The component of physical exercise as an adjunct to substance abuse treatment has been explored in the literature where Weinstock, Barry, and Petry (2008) found that those who were involved in substance management treatment and exercise had better substance use outcomes than those who didn’t. The meta-analysis conducted by Wang et al. (2014) also supported this finding, but also found that physical exercise can increase abstinence rates, reduce withdrawal symptoms, and improve struggles with mental health, such as depressive symptoms. Reducing one’s substance use can, in turn, reduce one’s violent behaviors, as it is theorized that aggressive and violent behaviors can occur while one is under the influence of a substance (Goldstein, 1985). Out of the five martial artists, only one participant reported substance influenced violent behavior (charged with an assault while intoxicated) and he has not reoffended since.

Active involvement in the martial arts was also reported to provide a direction to the participants lives, as they enjoyed the challenge of competition. One martial artists attributed changing his substance use behavior and overall lifestyle to the mechanism of

“goals,” as he enjoyed competition and overcoming challenges, or as he described them, “fears.” The goal of winning and becoming a professional fighter was a goal of three martial artists. Participating in the martial arts and receiving positive feedback from their instructors instilled the goal of fighting professionally. Having this direction or goal internally motivated them to change their lifestyle, as one participant identified one cannot compete at the highest level when one are still abusing substances. All participants were not coerced in any way to participate in the martial arts and joined voluntarily. This is important to its efficacy, as voluntary involvement in physical activity has shown to be more successful compared to individuals involved in forced exercise (Lynch, Peterson, Sanchez, Abel, & Smith, 2013). Finding the motivation to change one’s substance using behavior can be difficult among adolescents, however, the martial artists in this study are over the age of 18, which could have played a factor in their change, since self-reflection is more likely with age and maturity (Goodman, Peterson-Badali, & Henderson, 2011; Tripodi & Bender, 2011).

### **5.5. Contrasting the Findings of Service Providers and Experiences of Martial Artists**

Based on the interviews, the majority of the service providers believed that the martial arts can be an effective intervention for young offenders with substance use and aggressive and violent behavior and the complexity of needs that they present with. Their opinion is based on an elementary understanding of the martial arts, which they believed consisted of teaching skills around discipline, self-control, and respect.

One of the most significant findings from the service provider interviews is that young offenders need a pro-social role model they can connect with and is accessible in their daily lives, as the majority of the service providers interviewed do not have that

capacity in their job description. Pro-social modeling is defined as a “group of skills which include supervisors modelling pro-social values, reinforcing client’s pro-social expressions and actions and negatively reinforcing or confronting pro-criminal actions and expressions of those clients” (Trotter, 2009, p.142). Service providers identified that many of their youth come from negative environments that include family and peers involved in substance use and/or gangs and inherently do not have access to a pro-social role model, which has been found to be effective in supervising offenders (Trotter, 2009). One of the main mechanisms identified by the martial arts participants was their connection to a pro-social role model in their instructor. Participating in the martial arts can possibly fill the void of not having any pro-social adults in their lives. This was also found in the leisure and recreation literature, as studies have identified that participation in supervised, structured recreational activities relates to more positive outcomes when it comes to delinquent behaviors (Caldwell & Smith, 2006; Roman et al., 2013). However, this completely depends on the instructor and the martial artist’s relationship with them. Training in the martial arts can also provide a positive environment for the youth with positive and supportive peers, as a number of martial arts participants shared the benefits of having this experience during their training.

Another belief about the possible benefits of the martial arts for young offenders with substance influenced violent offences is that the practice can act as a positive coping mechanism and also a replacement for substance use and criminal behavior. The service providers felt that martial arts training will teach them emotional regulation, which can help reduce aggressive and violent behavior and substance use (Siegel, 2014; Wills, Pokhrel, Morehouse, & Fenster, 2011). Many also felt that engaging in pro-social activity

can act as a replacement to their antisocial behaviors. The use of martial arts as a coping mechanism for their emotions was prevalent in the experiences of the martial artists. Many of them felt that the physical aspect of the martial arts helped them channel their stress and anger in a positive and acceptable manner compared to using substances or engaging in violent behavior. The use of physical activity as an intervention for SUD's is identified in the literature, as studies have shown that participating in physical activity can decrease cravings and reduce alcohol consumption (Kedzor et al., 2008; Read & Brown, 2003; Weinstock et al., 2008).

It was identified by a number of service providers who felt that a multidisciplinary approach is needed to address the number of criminogenic areas of risk and to cater to the variabilities presented by the individual (Somedá, 2009). Collaborating with other agencies, organizations and other professions was found to be a recommendation by the participants to assist in rehabilitation (Somedá, 2009). Service providers expressed the importance of listening to the youth and matching appropriate services not only to their needs, but also to their interests. The use of an alternative method to traditional "talk therapy" was also embraced by the service providers as they felt that it is also another avenue to engage with clients who have been shown to be resistant to the traditional therapeutic and change process (Gideon, 2010).

## **5.6. The Martial Arts as an Intervention for Young Offenders**

The findings show that martial arts can be an effective intervention for those with substance use and aggressive and violent behaviors and is supported by service providers who theoretically believe that it may assist in addressing such issues among the young offender population. The mechanism underlying how participation in the martial arts can positively change substance use and violent behavior have not been identified in existing

literature on the subject. The findings obtained by the current study demonstrate how training in the martial arts may create change and possibly result in positive outcomes for young offenders who are interested in the martial arts and struggling with those issues.

When looking at the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders, it addresses one of the criminogenic risk factors that predict recidivism, which is leisure/recreation. The martial arts can be considered a recreational activity and a positive way to fill one's leisure time so they cannot engage in antisocial behavior and attaching oneself to conventional activities also protects from antisocial behaviors (Caldwell & Smith, 2006). However, results uncovered by this study speak to the potential mechanisms of the activity itself that were perceived to have led to positive changes in the lives of the martial arts participants. These results further suggest that the martial arts not only address the leisure/recreation risk factor, but its components may also be able to address other criminogenic needs outlined in RNR model, such as pro-criminal attitudes, antisocial personality, pro-criminal associates, and substance abuse. For instance, participating in the martial arts may lead to new, positive connections and relationships with pro-social peers and instructors. Meeting and connecting with new pro-social peers with a similar interest may change pro-criminal attitudes, which can lead to greater associations with new peers instead of anti-social peers. Meeting pro-social peers and having pro-social support from an instructor also helped improve the self-confidence of the participants. Practicing the martial arts allowed them to create goals for their lives giving them direction, instead of feeling lost. The physical training aspect also gave them an acceptable outlet to help them cope with feelings of stress and anger. The components of the martial arts may also play a role in managing and overcoming substance use.

Even though the majority of the service providers believed that the martial arts can be an effective intervention, there is a small group that is not as confident. It is important to identify the concerns that some service providers had of this intervention. A small number of service providers are still concerned about the risk of teaching very aggressive and violent youth combat techniques. Since there are no existing studies on the effects of the martial arts and violent young offenders, there is no evidence to refute their concerns. There is some existing literature among children and non-adjudicated adolescents that support the concerns of the service providers, as they found an increase in aggressiveness scores and violent and non-violent anti-social behaviors when participating in modern martial arts (Nosanchuk & Macneil, 1989; Nosanchuk, 1981; Strayhorn & Strayhorn, 2009). However, a meta-analysis on martial arts participation and externalizing behaviors among juveniles showed that martial arts participation was not related to externalizing behaviors (Gubbels, van der Stouwe, Spruit, & Stams, 2016).

Overall, further research is needed in this area specifically focusing on young offenders who exhibit violent behaviors. Attention to potential moderating factors (e.g., level of motivation, age) would also seem warranted. For example, when discussing the effectiveness of the martial arts, as one service provider outlined, it greatly depends on the on the level of commitment the youth makes, as a lot of time and effort is needed to practice the martial arts. Studies have shown that aggressiveness decreases the longer one is involved in traditional martial arts (Daniels & Thornton, 1992; Delva-Tauiiili, 1995; Nosanchuk, 1981). Internal motivation maybe the greatest challenge when trying to engage a young offender in the change process, regardless of the intervention or program used. Getting a youth to be motivated to make that type of commitment can be similarly



as difficult as it is to motivate a client to change their negative behavior. With all the positives that practicing in the martial arts can incorporate into a youth's life, it may always return to how motivated the client is to change. If the lack of motivation is the overarching barrier to change then this is an area that needs to be addressed. Based on the results from the service provider interviews, addressing motivation in young offenders becomes a broader systemic issue, as they reported that the difficulties surrounding motivation are related to poverty, lack of resources, and lack of positive family support and peers.

### **5.7. Implications for Social Work**

One of the defining features of social work practitioners is that we are facilitators of change, whether that change is at the individual, family, group, community, or societal level (Jones, 2010). Social workers address change at different levels and this study speaks to the dichotomy of social work practice; individual and social, micro and macro, and bridging the two together. The goal of advocating for a client's individual needs within a system that creates barriers to change is an issue I have personally encountered in practice. The purpose of this study is to understand the potential effects the martial arts may have on those with substance use and aggressive behavior issues and to explore the experiences of community service providers that work with young offenders to gain an understanding of what they feel this population needs to overcome these issues. Based on a transformative learning theory and critical theory, the ultimate goal is to create awareness and educate those who directly work with this population and empower the youth who would like to participate in the martial arts in order to provide the best services and provide the opportunity for the youth.

The purpose of this study fits directly with the Canadian Association of Social Workers (2005) code of ethics, particularly when it states that we must “uphold each person’s right to self-determination” (p. 4) and that we must “uphold the right of people to have access to resources to meet basic human needs” (p. 5). Gaining an understanding of the potential positive effects the martial arts has on young offenders can help overcome resistance from service providers to allow young offenders to pursue this pro-social activity. The code of ethics also states that social workers must “uphold the right of clients to be offered the highest quality service possible” (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005, p. 8). We must continue our education of searching for the best methods to engage and intervene with our clients. The knowledge gained from this study can help those who are actively working with this population, as they strive to more effectively support this population.

Addressing issues from a macro perspective is a necessary component to social work practice. The purpose of this study also fits with macro social work practice, as it is looking to make changes to a system. One of the core values of social work practice is the pursuit of social justice, as social workers “promote social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources, and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs” (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005, p.5). It is also a human rights violation, as all youth have the right to play and recreation. Young offenders are a marginalized group, as many of them live in poverty, and have suffered from abuses and racism. It is the goal of social workers to advocate for social policy

changes in this area, reducing barriers to resources and allowing youth access to programs that can potentially lead to change.

Social work practice is sometimes relegated to only address the micro or the macro. However, creating a bridge between the two may lead to the highest probability of success for the individual client and for future clients in need. The purpose of this study addresses both the micro and the macro as an attempt to make changes to a system in order to make changes at an individual level.

### **5.8. Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

One limitations of this study may be sample size, as only five martial arts participants participated in the study. This reaches the minimum number of participants within a phenomenological study (5-25) (Creswell, 2013). What also affects generalizability is that not all of the martial arts participants were involved in both substance use and violent behavior. Two martial arts participants had offences, but they were not violent in nature and they were not connected to their substance use behavior. A more suitable overall description of the martial arts participants is that they struggled with substances and anti-social behavior.

The study also did not control for types of martial art practiced, as the martial arts participants involved in the study were from different disciplines of martial arts, clubs, and communities and countries. This diversity of variables and lack of a control group affects the generalizability of the study. Limitations of the study include the inability to compare the effects of specific traditional martial arts, such as Karate and Judo, or traditional versus modern martial arts on substance use related violent crimes. Examining the effects that specific martial arts and their traditions and practices have on

young offenders with substance use and violent and aggressive behaviors may be interesting to study in the future.

Another limitation to this study is that it specifically looked at only young offenders with SUD and violent related offences. It would be beneficial in the future to examine the effects of the martial arts on the general young offender population, including those who have engaged in offences such as non-violent offences (i.e. break and enter, theft, mischief) and sexual offences.

It would also be valuable for future studies to get the perspective on the research question of service providers that work in correctional facilities, as many in that system would not allow young offenders to participate in any type of combat sport while they are in secure or open custody.

## **5.9. Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to respond to the research question by exploring the potentially positive effects traditional or non-traditional martial arts may have on young offenders with substance influenced violent offences. Through the use of transcendental phenomenological methods, the study was able to uncover the essence of the martial artist's experiences and identify the mechanisms of the martial arts that helped them overcome their substance use and violent behaviors. All of the martial artists attribute their change in behavior to the martial arts as it provided them with pro-social support from their instructors and teammates, helped give them direction in their lives and learn how to cope with their emotions, and overall help make them better people. The findings from the service providers gave perspective on the complex needs and adversities that affect the motivation of the young offender population to engage in treatment, which in turn, causes service providers to feel frustrated and exhausted. The

use of a multidisciplinary approach to rehabilitation, including alternative interventions such as the martial arts, are surprisingly supported by the majority of service providers. This is most likely due to understanding the multitude of needs this population presents with and that every youth is different, which may require a variety of services and interventions to address their individual needs. Overall the data collected from this qualitative study produced some positive findings in exploring the use of the martial arts as an intervention for young offenders. In particular, a significant contribution of this study is that it provides a much clearer description of the mechanisms as to how martial art contribute to the decrease in depression through exercise, give the youth a chance of belonging, and building confidence/self-esteem. In addition, it filled gaps in the literature and also established a starting point for future research on this topic. In turn, this research helps create future gains in educating policy makers and community organizations on the contribution of the martial arts in addressing substance use and violent behavior among the young offender population.

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## Appendix A: Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval



### Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

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<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</b> Melitun Castillo Sysing 338 LeValley Cove Saskatoon, SK S7T 0L1	<b>DEPARTMENT</b> Social Work	<b>REB#</b> 2014-127
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**SUPERVISOR**  
Dr. Miguel Sanchez – Social Work

**FUNDER(S)**  
Unfunded

**TITLE**  
The Martial Arts Project: Exploring the Use of the Martial Arts as Intervention for Young Offenders with Substance Related Violent Offences

<b>APPROVAL OF</b> Appendix A - Letter of Introduction (Martial Arts Participants) Appendix B - Letter of Introduction (Service Providers) Appendix C - Informed Consent (Martial Arts Participants) Appendix D - Informed Consent (Service Providers) Interview Guide (Martial Arts Participants) Interview Guidelines (Service Providers)	<b>APPROVED ON</b> September 30, 2014	<b>RENEWAL DATE</b> September 30, 2015
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Full Board Meeting   
Delegated Review

#### CERTIFICATION

The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

#### ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <http://www.uregina.ca/research/REB/main.shtml>

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Dr. Larena Hoeber, Chair  
University of Regina  
Research Ethics Board

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## **Appendix B: Letter of Introduction (Martial Arts Participants)**

“To be printed on University of Regina Letter head”

### **The Martial Arts Project: Exploring the Use of the Martial Arts as an Intervention for Young Offenders with Substance Related Violent Offences**

#### **University Masters Student Seeking Participants for a study to explore the effects of the martial arts in reducing Substance Use and violent and aggressive behavior**

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan ([research.ethics@uregina.ca](mailto:research.ethics@uregina.ca) or at 306-585-4775).

I am a master of social work graduate student at the University of Regina-Saskatoon campus. I am looking for participants who have had a history of addictions and aggressive and violent behavior and reduced or managed these issues through the participation in traditional (Karate, Tae Kwon Do, Judo, etc.) or modern (boxing, kickboxing, mixed martial arts, etc.) martial arts. Information from this study can help support the number of accounts from professional fighters who have used the martial arts to overcome a life of substance use, violence, and crime and develop new interventions to help young offenders lead a new life.

The time required for this study will be approximately one hour and will consist in an interview, which will be audio-digitally recorded and transcribed. I am flexible and able to meet at your convenience. If you decide that you are uncomfortable with the project in any way you have the option of leaving the study one month after the interview is conducted.

If you have any more questions or are willing to participate, please call me at 655-4927. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melitun Sysing (BSW)

## **Appendix C: Letter of Introduction (Service Providers)**

“To be printed on University of Regina Letter head”

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I am a master of social work graduate student at the University of Regina Saskatoon campus. I am looking for participants who have had a history of working with young offenders in the community as well as in close and open custody facilities. Issues of addiction and violent behavior are prevalent in today's society, which calls for alternative methods of intervention and treatment. Information from this study can help in developing new interventions to help young offenders lead a new life.

The time required for this study will be approximately a one hour interview, which will be audio-digitally recorded and transcribed. I am flexible and able to meet at your convenience. If you decide that you are uncomfortable with the project in any way you have the option of leaving the study one month after the interview is conducted.

If you have any more questions or are willing to participate, please call me at 655-4927. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Meliton Sysing (BSW)

## **Appendix D: Informed Consent (Martial Arts Participants)**

“To be printed on University of Regina letter head”

### **The Martial Arts Project: Exploring the Use of the Martial Arts as an Intervention for Young Offenders with Substance Related Violent Offences**

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board by email: [research.ethics@uregina.ca](mailto:research.ethics@uregina.ca) or at 306-585-4775 (out of town participants may call collect).

My name is Melitun Sysing and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina and you may contact him with any questions or concerns about the study at 306-655-4927 or e-mail at [sysing1m@uregina.ca](mailto:sysing1m@uregina.ca).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct a thesis study for the requirements of my Master of Social Work Degree. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Miguel Sanchez, who can be reached at [miguel.sanchez@uregina.ca](mailto:miguel.sanchez@uregina.ca) or 306-585-4848.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore your experiences with participating in martial arts and how it helped you overcome, reduce, or managed issues of substance use, violence, and criminal behavior. Information gathered from this study can potentially assist in future program development for young offenders who are experiencing similar issues.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have experienced the effects of incorporating the martial arts into your lives and how it has helped you overcome or manage issues of substance use, violence and criminal behavior. Participation in the study is voluntary and there are no known risks associated with it.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this qualitative research study, I will require your permission to interview you. One interview with you will be conducted, and the interview will be approximately one hour in length. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for the purposes of this study.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. However, there is a one month time period after the interview is completed to withdraw in order to ensure that the study can proceed and be completed. If you decide to withdraw from the study, your information will only be used if you give permission (verbally and written). To ensure that you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, I will verbally request permission at the beginning of the interview session.

The data that will be collected in this research will be confidential, and I will protect your identity by removing your name and any other information that would identify you from any written report of this study. If on-line based interviews are performed, they will be performed using the internet website, Skype. Confidentiality cannot be completely ensured through an internet based medium, such as Skype, therefore it is up to you if you would like to continue with the study using this method.

To ensure accuracy of the study, I will be using a digital recorder to audio-record the interview, which will be downloaded onto computer audio files for transcription purposes. The audio files will be deleted after data analysis is complete. Access to the data collected will be restricted to myself, and the faculty supervisor listed above.

The results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: directly to participants (if requested), through a dissertation, and class presentation. Data from this study will be stored in a locked file at the office of Dr. Miguel Sanchez at the faculty of social work in Regina, SK for a period of five years after which time it will be destroyed. Files will also be stored on my home computer in electronic files and they will be password protected and encrypted.

You are able to contact the researcher and/or the supervisor at the phone numbers and email addresses listed above.

By signing this document, this ensures that you understand the above conditions of participating in this study and that you have the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher. You will be provided with a copy of this consent form.

This form will need to be given to myself prior to the interview either in person, through e-mail, or by faxing it to my office at 306-655-4927. To clarify, the fax machine is used by a number of employees at my office, therefore your anonymity may be compromised.

\_\_\_\_ I have been provided with a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

## **Appendix E: Informed Consent (Service Providers)**

“To be printed on University of Regina letter head”

### **The Martial Arts Project: Exploring the Use of the Martial Arts as an Intervention for Young Offenders with Substance Related Violent Offences**

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board by email: [research.ethics@uregina.ca](mailto:research.ethics@uregina.ca) or at 306-585-4775 (out of town participants may call collect).

My name is Melitun Sysing and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina and you may contact him with any questions or concerns about the study at 306-655-4927 or e-mail at [sysing1m@uregina.ca](mailto:sysing1m@uregina.ca).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct a thesis study for the requirements of my Master of Social Work Degree. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Miguel Sanchez, who can be reached at [miguel.sanchez@uregina.ca](mailto:miguel.sanchez@uregina.ca) or 306-585-4848.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore your experiences working with young offenders. Information gathered from this study can help fill the gap in literature on this topic and can potentially assist in future program development for young offenders who are experiencing similar issues. Participation in this study is voluntary and there are no known risks associated with it.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have direct experience working with the young offender population and may have an understanding of the challenges and needs of these youth.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this qualitative research study, I will require your permission to interview you. One interview with you will be conducted, and the interview will be approximately one hour in length. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for the purposes of this study.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. However, there is a one month time period after the interview is completed to withdraw in order to ensure that the study can proceed and be completed. If you decide to withdraw from the study, your information will only be used if you give permission (verbally and written). To ensure that you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, I will verbally request permission at the beginning of the interview session.

The data that will be collected in this research will be confidential, and I will protect your identity by removing your name and any other information that would identify you from any written report of this study. If on-line based interviews are performed, they will be performed using the internet website, Skype. Confidentiality cannot be completely ensured through an internet based medium, such as Skype, therefore it is up to you if you would like to continue with the study using this method.

The data that will be collected in this research will be confidential, and I will protect your identity by removing your name and any other information that would identify you from any written report of this study. To ensure accuracy of the study, I will be using a digital recorder to audio-record the interview, which will be downloaded onto computer audio files for transcription purposes. The audio files will be deleted after data analysis is complete. Access to the data collected will be restricted to myself, and the faculty supervisor listed above.

The results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: directly to participants (if requested), through a dissertation, and class presentation. Data from this study will be kept in a locked file at the office of Dr. Miguel Sanchez at the faculty of social work in Regina, SK for a period of five years after which time it will be destroyed.

You are able to contact the researcher and/or the supervisor at the phone numbers and email addresses listed above.

By signing this document, this ensures that you understand the above conditions of participating in this study and that you have the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher. You will be provided with a copy of this consent form.

This form will need to be given to myself prior to the interview either in person, through e-mail, or by faxing it to my office at 306-655-4927. To clarify, the fax machine is used by a number of employees at my office, therefore your anonymity may be compromised.

\_\_\_ I have been provided with a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

## **Appendix F: Interview Guideline (Martial Arts Participants)**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Questions:

Introductions:

Can you introduce yourself and say what type of martial art you participated in (traditional or non-traditional).

- 1) Can you explain what attracted you to wanting to participate in a martial art?
  - Prompt: How long have you been practicing?
  
- 2) Have you been involved in substance use?
  - Prompt: What time of drugs were you involved in?
  - Prompt: If not, how do you think your participation in the martial arts has kept you from doing that?
  
- 3) What types of struggles were you having with violent and aggressive behavior and criminal activity?
  
- 4) What is it about the martial arts that helped you overcome your issues with substance use?
  
- 5) How did the martial arts help you overcome, reduce, or manage your issue with aggressive and violent behavior?

- 6) Can you explain how participating in the martial arts has affected your life overall. What does the martial arts mean to you?

Thank you for participating in this interview and research study.



## **Appendix G: Interview Guideline (Service Providers)**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Questions:

Introductions:

Can you introduce yourself and state your position, where you work, and your role in working with young offenders.

- 1) What has your personal experience been like working with young offenders?
  
- 2) What are some of the challenges when working with young offenders who have substance use and aggressive behaviors?
  
- 3) What are some of the barriers you have faced when working with this population?
  - Prompt: From a micro and macro perspective.
  
- 4) What types of interventions do you provide to confront these barriers and challenges?
  - What do you do specifically to intervene?
  
- 5) What are your thoughts on alternative methods of intervention for these youth?

- 6) What is your understanding of the martial arts?
  
- 7) What are your thoughts on the use of the martial arts as an intervention? (If they do not know what the martial arts is use definition to describe it).
  - Do you think that it may have benefits to this population?
  - Would it be effective for youth with issues, such as substance use and aggressive behaviors?
  
- 8) What do you think is needed to better assist these youths in changing their current lifestyle?

Thank you for participating in this interview and research study.